

THE REPRESENTATIONS OF GOD ASH ON WINE JAR SEALS¹

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ABSTRACT

The Ancient Egyptians were surrounded by various manifestations of their many gods. This study deals with the representations of God Ash who is one of the minor deities on the jar seals. He was considered the god of the western desert including its oases which gave him dual nature and connected him with God Seth who also had a dual nature. The relation between both gods increased in the reign of king Peribsen who replaced the god Hours on the serekh and put Seth instead. In particular Ash was identified by the Ancient Egyptians as the god of the Tehenu, known as the people of the oasis as well as Lord of the Land of the Olive Tree. Consequently, it is also possible that he was worshiped in Ombos, as their original chief deity before the arrival of Seth as its major God. By the late 2nd Dynasty his importance had grown and was seen as a protector of the royal estates. He was known from the Early Dynastic period, upon wine jar seals excavated by Petrie in 1923 expedition to Saqqara. The current study aims at discussing the representations of the god Ash on wine jar seals and the potential relation to jar content. In order to achieve the aim a descriptive analytical methodology was employed.

KEYWORDS: *Ash, Jar seals, Wine.*

INTRODUCTION

Egyptian religion is the product of the creative Egyptian mind since the ancient Egyptian knew stability and began to think about what was around him. The environment in which the ancient Egyptian lived had a great

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impact on his thought and beliefs; he was trying to explain the phenomena surrounding him, a desire for benefit and a fear of the unknown.²

The representations in which Egyptian deities were depicted varied between full human, full animal form or a mix between human and animal form according to the nature of each deity.³

There were many categories of gods from them the Major and Minor gods. The latter are a group of gods mentioned many times or just one time either in the book of the Dead or in the Pyramid Texts.⁴ Ash is one of the minor gods. He was first attested on seals from the Early Dynastic period.

Seals played an important role in ancient Egypt. They were not only used as administrative securing devices for the state bureaucracy, private individual, documents, containers, places, but also as amulets during daily life and in the netherworld.⁵

WHO IS ASH

Ash was venerated as a god from Egypt's western desert including the outlying oasis and the area of Libya or (Tehenu) this gave the god dual nature as he was associated both with the desert region and at the same time with the fertile oases. He is normally depicted in fully anthropomorphic form but also may be depicted with the hawk headed form.⁶

Ash seems to be the original god of Ombos in Upper Egypt- a city south modern Qena nowadays- before the arrival of Seth. Ash was considered as its major deity hence an epithet of Ash being 'nebuty' or 'he of Nebut (Ombos).⁷

² مهران، بيومي. (1989). الحضارة المصرية القديمة الجزء الثاني الحياة الدينية، الطبعة الرابعة، دار المعرفة الجامعية، ص 327، 329، 330.

³ نور الدين، عبد الحليم. (2010). الديانة المصرية القديمة، الجزء الأول: المعبودات، الطبعة الثانية، القاهرة، ص 24- 34.

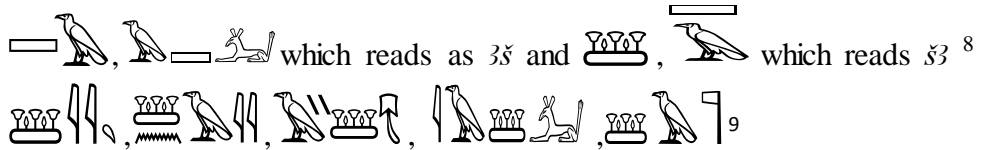
⁴ Mercer, S. A. B. (1949). *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*. London: Luzac.p183

⁵ Rankine, Heka. *The Practices of Ancient Egyptian Ritual and Magic*, p.1-196

⁶ Wilkinson, R. H. (2003). *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. New York: Thames & Hudson.p98

⁷ Hart, G. (2012). *A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*. Hoboken: Routledge. p 33

The name of the god Ash varied in shape from time to time as follows:



Scholars debate the main origin of that god. This occurred as a result of the titles which followed the name of Ash. He acquired two titles one of them Ash of Nebut (Ombos) and ¹⁰ the other was “ʒš nb thnw”

“ʒš Lord of Tehenu “. ¹¹ It was inscribed on the mortuary temple of king Sahure at Abu sir on top of Ash’s figure. ¹²

Ash first appeared in the Early Dynastic period, reign of king Peribsen, 2nd Dynasty. Ash adopted four forms:

- The full animal shape of either the Seth animal or a falcon.
- The composite shape of a head of an animal and the body of a human.
- The full human shape.
- The extraordinary shape with three heads of lion, goose and serpent.

JAR SEALS AND THE GOD ASH:

Seals are important objects known in ancient Egyptian as: *htm*
sd3yt. ¹³

⁸ سلامه، شويكار . (2002) ملاحظات على المعبود أش ومركزه في الديانة المصرية القديمة، مجله الاتحاد العام للأثريين العرب المقالة 9، المجلد 5، العدد 5 ص. 245

⁹ Leitz, C., & Goldbrunner, L. (2002). *Lexikon der Agyptischen Gotter und Gotterbezeichnungen*. Leuven: Peeters.p3.

¹⁰ السعدى، حسن . (1991). *حكام الاقاليم في مصر الفرعونية*، دار المعرفة الجامعية، ص 45 - 46.

¹¹ The Tehenu land, located on the north-western side of Egypt, it was understood from that term the Libyans, countries were named by the Egyptians after the chief product of the land. One of the important products of Tehenu is oil called Hatet Tehenu or Tehenu oil. See. Petrie.F, (1915), *Ancient Egypt.Ta Tehenu Olive Land .part III.London.p. 97*

¹² Borchardt, L. (1910). *Das Grabdenkmal des Konigs Sahu-re*. Leipzig: J.C.

Hinrich.PL.1.p74

¹³ Wb III, 350,3-12, Wb IV,379 ,17-21.

They were manufactured of a variety of materials, including wood, bone, clay, limestone, steatite, and easily produced faience.¹⁴

Seals were used by ancient Egyptians to stamp writings onto papyrus scrolls or clay tablets allowing them to quickly record the information needed again and over again without having to rewrite each hieroglyphic sign by hand.¹⁵

Seals were first used to keep dishonest servants out of food factories and storage rooms. They were utilized in tombs, palaces, houses, and temples, as well as on jars and pots storing food that would spoil if left open such as honey or wine.¹⁶

Seals can be divided according to its shape into the following groups:¹⁷

- Flat shape seals, which include hemi-cylinder and cone-shaped seals, button-shaped seals, scarab-shaped seals, plaques and other various forms. Signet rings are all included in this classification. The impression left by the impact of a hard-engraved surface on a softer material, for example clay is defined as sealing.
- Cylindrical shape seals are the most common on which Ash appeared. This is the earliest form of seals frequently used in Egypt since the Pre-Dynastic Period onwards. It is believed that this type

is treated more as a type of amulet than a working symbol or badge of rank by the first Intermediate period.¹⁸

The terms “stopper” and “sealing” are often used as synonyms, indicating the entirety of a closing device for amphorae. There is however an essential difference between both. Stoppers are plugs of stuffing materials

¹⁴ For more details about the two groups, see Newberry, *Egyptian Scarabs* p.43-95; Ward, W. A. (1970). *The Origin of Egyptian Design-Amulets ('Button seals')*. London: Egypt Exploration Society. p. 65

¹⁵ Beyer, M, Keams, M, (1946) *Ancient Egypt*, London. p. 97.

¹⁶ Nicholson, P. T., & Shaw, I. (2009). *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*. Cambridge University Press, p .291

¹⁷Newberry, P. E. (2002). *Egyptian Scarabs*. Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications.p.43; Sparavigna, A. C. (January 01, 2016). *Ancient Egyptian Seals and Scarabs*,p.9

¹⁸ Van, D. M. M. (2021). *A History of Ancient Egypt*.p.48;Bunson, M. (2019). *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. 9; A. Sparavigna, pp.16-18; D. Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in Ancient Near East*, p.179

such as straw or vine leaves that are placed inside the neck of the amphora to a depth of 7 to 8 cm.¹⁹ (Fig 1)

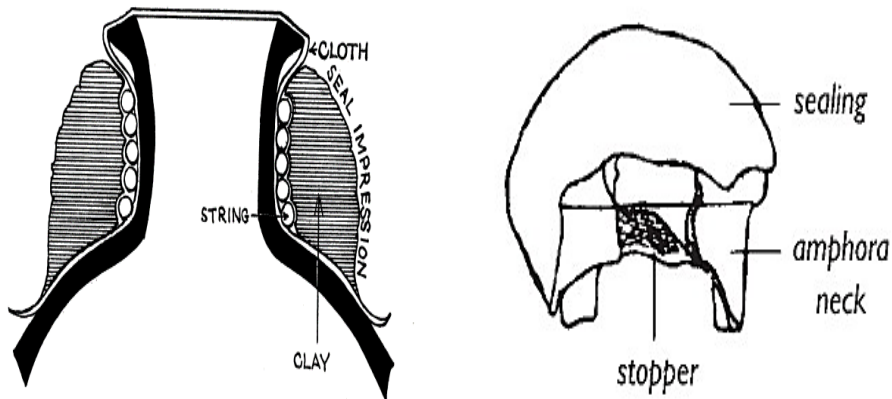


Fig 1. Sealed amphora stopper from Malkata attached to the server amphora neck (Source. Sealed Amphora Stoppers and Tradesmen in Greco-Roman Egypt, p.116)

There are two different types of state seals that Kaplony united under the phrase Horus name seals in the Early Dynastic period. The king's seal, for example, just contained the king's name and made no mention of the seal holder. The official Seal which dates back to Den's rule 1st Dynasty was from the other type.²⁰

Jar Sealing divided into two types "direct" and "indirect" jar seals. Jar seals that are put directly to the ceramic surface of the jar are known to as "direct" jar seals. Jar sealing that are placed "indirectly" usually applied on top of a textile or leather that lies on top of the jar's surface.²¹ (Fig 2)

¹⁹ Denecker, E. V. (January 01, 2007). Sealed Amphora Stoppers and Tradesmen in Greco-Roman Egypt. *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving*: Babesch, 82, 1, 115. p.115

²⁰ Kaplony, "Zur Definition," 48. Kaplony, *RAR I*, 11 n. 20: König Siegel die out in the reign of Den.

²¹ Nolan, J. S., & University of Chicago. (2010). *Mud sealings and Fourth Dynasty administration at Giza*. p86,102

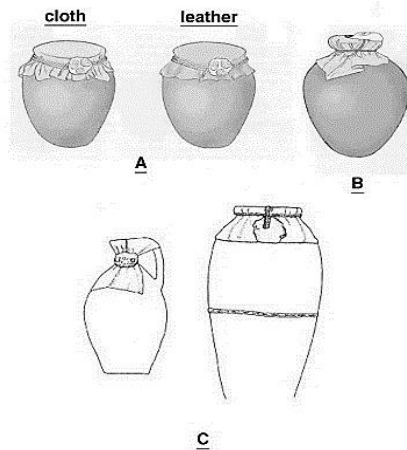
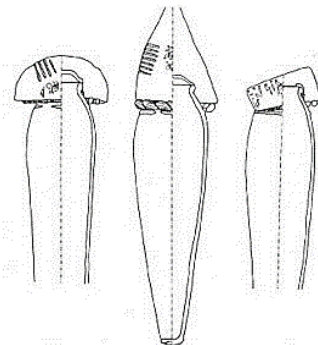


Fig.2 Samples of direct and indirect jar seals (Source. *Mud Sealings and Fourth Dynasty Administration at Giza*, p.102

Storage jar sealing and small jar sealing were the two main types of jar sealing in the Old Kingdom. Enormous storage jars can be sealed in a variety of ways, with one of four main designs for their large seals. Based on the back impressions on mud sealing from Elephantine dating from the Early Dynastic Period and the Third Dynasty, Pätznick has detailed different procedures for closing and sealing enormous storage jars.²² (Fig.3,4)

Fig.3 Types of Storage Jar Sealings (Source. *Mud sealings and Fourth Dynasty Administration at Giza*, p.107)



²² Patznick, J.-P. (2005). *Die Siegelabrollungen und Rollsiegel der Stadt Elephantine im 3. Jahrtausend v. Chr: Spurensicherung eines archaologischen Artefaktes*. Oxford: British archaeological reports. 13-14.

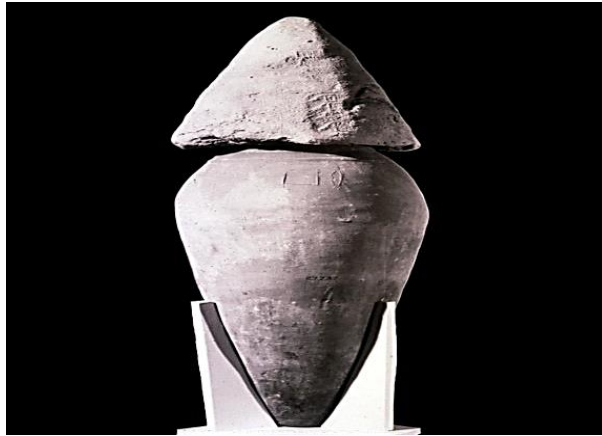


Fig.4 Wine jar. BM.No. EA27737

(Source. www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA27737)

Access8-6-2022

Because sealing was not reused once broken, the archaeological context of sealing provides a more precise indicator of date. Because both sealing and seals provide essential chronological information, the labels on jars, pots, and other things such as funerary furniture are regarded as one of the most valuable historical resources.²³

THE REPRESENTATIONS OF GOD ASH ON JAR SEALS

Among the representations of Ash which is dating to the Early Dynastic period are his appearances on jar seals adopting the form of Seth. Seth is a god with a dual nature and a desert god, and probably because of this fact and that Ash had the same attribute; both gods were linked together. This is indicated by the representations of Ash in the form of Seth²⁴. The Seth animal is very distinctive in its form but enigmatic. It has been variously identified as an antelope, ass or donkey, camel, fennec fox, feral pig,

²³ Emery, W. B. (1991). *Archaic Egypt*. London, England: Penguin. Culture and Civilization in Egypt, Five Thousand Years Ago, p. 194; for more details about labels, see Ohshiro .M," Decoding the Wooden Label of King Djer", pp.57-64; D. Wengrow, *The Archeology of Early Egypt, Social Transformations in North-East Africa,10,000 to 2650 BC*, PP.1-366.

²⁴ Velde.H. (1967). *Seth, God of Confusion*. pp.114:116

greyhound, giraffe, hare, jerboa, long muzzled mouse, okapi, oryx, and tapir.²⁵



Fig.5 Jar Seal, British Museum, No EA 35595

(Source. *Deconstructing the Iconography of Seth*. p128)

Part of a jar seal made of pale brown clay (10 cm. x10 cm.) bearing an impressed inscription of the name of king Peribsen and the figure of the god Ash represented wearing the white crown holding the *w3s* and *3nh* signs. The text before the serekh indicates the job title of the seal's owner *it(i)*. *w w3.w* the leader of ships. This seal is in a good condition although the surface of the clay is slightly worn. It dates back to the 2nd Dynasty. It was found in the tomb of Peribsen at Umm El Qaab (Abydos) length²⁶(Fig 5)

In addition to the name of Peribsen there is a name of an official of an unidentified district. This piece is on display on the British Museum (G64/dc11) donated by the Egypt's Exploration Fund 1901, registration number 1901.1012.95.²⁷

King Peribsen replaced the Horus-falcon surmounting the *Serekh* with the Seth-animal. The change may have had 'real political implications', perhaps indicating a new development in the ideology of kingship. Some

²⁵ Newberry, P. E. (1928). *The Pig and the Cult-animal of Set*. JEA. v. 14 (1928). London: Egypt Exploration Society, PP. 217-218; Velde, H. (1967). *Seth, God of Confusion: A study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion*. Leiden, p.13

²⁶ Petrie, W. M. F., Griffith, F. L., Durning-Lawrence, E., & Egypt Exploration Fund. (1901). *The Royal tombs of the Earliest Dynasties*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund., pl XXIX.p88

²⁷ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA35595

scholars have seen a connection between the change of the title and the two other aspects of king Peribsen reign: his decision to be buried in the 1st Dynasty royal cemetery at Abydos, and the fact that he is not attested by contemporary inscriptions outside Upper Egypt.²⁸

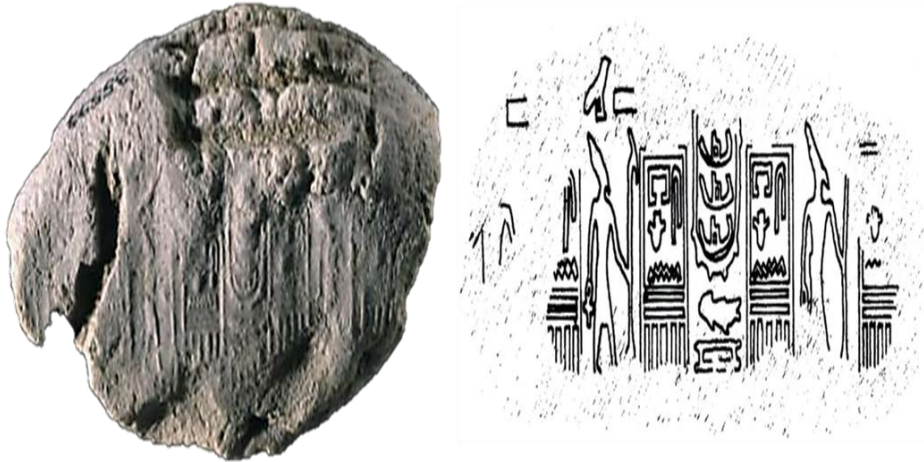


Fig.6 Jar Seal, British Museum, EA 35593

**(Source. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA35593)
Accessed 8-6-2022**

Part of a jar seal made of pale brown clay, bearing a seal impression of King Peribsen with a clear representation of the god Ash the surface of the seal is worn but otherwise in good condition. Again, Ash is represented with the human body and the Seth animal head standing in profile wearing the white crown of upper Egypt holding in his hands the *W3s* scepter and *ꜥnh* sign above his head the inscription of his name Ash, in front of him the serekh of king Peribsen and a title of an official *nd mr* of an unidentified district.²⁹(Fig.6)

The seal like the first one was found in the tomb of King Peribsen, 2nd Dynasty at Umm El Qaab (Abydos). The impression length is 11 cm. and the width is 6.50 cm. It was donated by The Egyptian Exploration Fund in 1901 under the registration number 1901.1012.93.³⁰

²⁸Wilkinson, T. A. H. (2005). *Early Dynastic Egypt*. London: Routledge.p75,76

²⁹ Petrie, W. M. F., & Griffith, F. L. (1901). *The Royal Tombs of the Earliest Dynasties, 1901: Part II*. London,p.12,53, pl. XXII,178

³⁰ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA35593

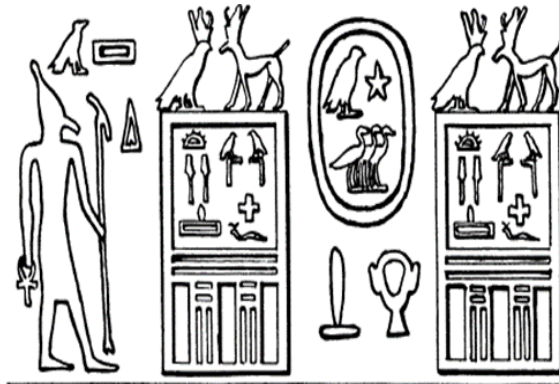


Fig.7 Jar Seals, belongs to king Khasekhmwy, Cairo Museum no. 11149-50,11173-4 (Source. *The Pig and Cult Animal of Seth*, p.221)

Wine jar seals of king Khasekhmwy 2nd dynasty represented Ash as a male figure wearing the white crown with his name inscribed above his head. In front of him the *di* sign. The serekh of king Khasekhmwy unlike that of Peribsen is topped by the falcon Horus and the Seth animal both wearing the double crown. Beside the serekh is the title of the seal owner *hr sb3 b3w* “Horus star of souls”. This is followed by another serekh of the king.³¹ (Fig 7)

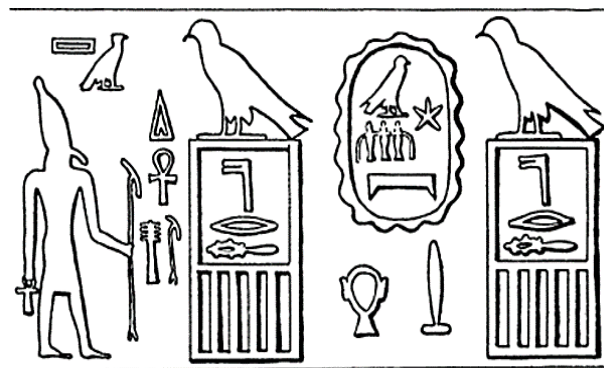


Fig.8 Seal of king Zoser

(Source. Newberry, *The Pig and Cult Animal of Seth*.p221)

The representation of Ash on jar seals continued till the 3rd Dynasty, reign of king Zoser. Ash was represented with the human body and the head of Seth wearing the white crown holding the *w3s* and *ʿnh*. In front of him the prayer of *di ʿnh w3s dd* “giving the power and stability”. Unlike those of

³¹ سلامه، شويكار . (2002) ملاحظات على المعبود أش ومركزه في الديانة المصرية القديمة، مجلة الإتحاد العام للأثريين العرب، المقالة 9، المجلد 5، العدد 5 ص250.

Peribsen and Khasekhemwy; the serekh of Zoser is topped by a falcon. The title of the seal owner is also written *dwꜥ hr ḥnty pt* "Praise Horus who is in the sky".³²(Fig.8)

The studied jar seals were used to mostly preserve wine. Wine was a common beverage in ancient Egypt it was made out of grapes and also from other fruits such as figs, pomegranates, dates. It was anciently known as *irp*.³³

Wine was a prestigious drink that was produced since the beginning of Egyptian history wine and wine drinking were important parts of daily life of well to do Egyptians. It was used as offerings. As early as the Archaic Period the archaeological contexts of wine-jars demonstrate clearly that wine was not only enjoyable by the living but also by the deceased. Wine was one of the items offered to the deities in the temple rituals. It had some benefits such as medical treatment.³⁴

Wine-making scenes cover the walls of most tombs from the Old Kingdom, at Saqqara and Giza, as well as, tombs of the Middle and New Kingdoms which add more depth and color to the production.³⁵(Fig 9)



Fig.9 Wine making scene in the Theban tomb of Nakht.TT52. New Kingdom

(Source.https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/nakht52/e_nakht_05.htm Accessed 1-7-2022)

³²Newberry, P. (1928). *The Pig and the Cult-Animal of Set*. *JEA*, 14(3/4), 211. doi: 10.2307/3854298, fig 8, p.221; Faulkner, R. O (1991). *A Concise Dictionary*, p. 194, 310.

³³ Wb.I.11

³⁴ Poo, M.-C. (1995). *Wine and Wine Offerings in the Religion of Ancient Egypt*. London, p. 29-30

³⁵ Ghalioungui, P., Darby, W. and Grivetti, L. (1977) *Food: Gift of Osiris*, Vol2, Academic Press, London, p. 556.

In the ancient Egyptian faith, vines and wine were associated with many deities such as Osiris, Renneut, Hathor, Shesmu and Ash. The latter was responsible of vineyards from the Early Dynastic period as well as Seth.³⁶ This is probably the reason that Ash appeared on the wine jar seals from the reign of king Peribsen, 2nd Dynasty till the reign of king Zoser, 3rd Dynasty in the form of Seth.

CONCLUSION

As a minor god, Ash probably did not have lots of scenes like principal gods but he had variety of forms. The most regular one was with human body and the head of Seth animal form. Ash was characterized with many qualities as he was considered the god of wine, a Western desert god, God of the Tehenu tribes and protector of the king. Holding different attributes; Ash carried many titles the most important of them was Ash master of the Tehenu Tribes.

The name of Ash had a number of variations, but all adopting the letters for his name ʒ and š. The first attested form was on wine jar seals that dates back to the Early-dynastic period.

Being one of the deities of vines and responsible for wine making; Ash was represented on wine jar seals in the form of Seth starting from the reign of Peribsen, 2nd Dynasty till the reign of Zoser, 3rd Dynasty.

Wine was one of the most important beverages and it has religious and worldly functions. Placing Ash on wine jar stoppers can indicate two probabilities; his important role as a god of wine and the importance of Ash in the form of Seth who was venerated as a counterpart of Horus, the patron of royalty.

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