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The King's Daughter and the Lyre

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# The King's Daughter and the Lyre

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AN exceptionally interesting and beautiful Hebrew seal has recently appeared.<sup>1</sup> Except for its conventional shape, every aspect of this seal is unfamiliar: its decoration, the name of its female owner, and her title. Neither do I remember having met with the exact colour of the stone among the seals known to me. It adds an attractive variant to the repertory of Hebrew seals which in recent years has been considerably enriched by new finds.

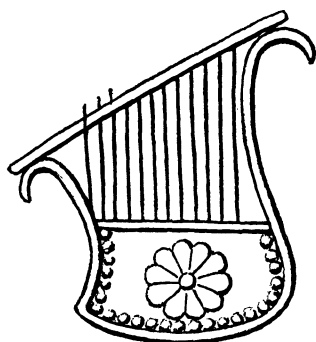


Fig. 1. The lyre.

The seal under discussion (Pl. 26:C) is a scaraboid of brown jasper with orange-coloured spots. It is perforated lengthwise and is 9.5 mm. wide, 12.5 mm. long and 6 mm. thick. It is perfectly preserved, except for a small defect in the centre. The slightly convex face of the seal has a single oval border line. Its upper part is engraved with a delicately drawn lyre 5 mm. in height. The lyre is of the well-known asymmetrical type consisting of a soundbox and two unevenly long, outcurved arms connected by an oblique crossbar or yoke to which are fastened twelve strings. The box is rounded on one side and carinated on the other. It is decorated with a line of pearls along its outer edge and with a rosette at the centre (Fig. 1). Underneath the

lyre is a two-line inscription in ancient Hebrew script divided by two parallel lines. The inscription reads:

למעדנה	<i>Belonging to Ma'adanah</i>
בת המלך	<i>the king's daughter</i>

מעדנה is an unknown name, but its etymology is clear: it derives from the root עדן, 'delight'. With the preformative mem עמן becomes מעדן, of which the plural מעדנים is attested in the biblical text. It means 'dainties, delicacies' (see מעדני-מלך, 'royal dainties' in Gen. 49:20) or 'comfort, delight' (Prov. 29:17). מעדנה of our seal is the

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<sup>1</sup> The seal is in the collection of Dr. R. Hecht of Haifa, to whom I am much indebted for permission to publish it. It is said to have been found in Jerusalem, but its exact provenance is uncertain, as is true of all seals which were not found in controlled excavations. The photograph was taken by Z. Radovan.

feminine form of מעדן and is close to עֲדָנָה, 'delight, pleasure' (Gen. 18:12). The plural מעדנות, which appears in a difficult text in Job 38:31, is variously interpreted as 'sweet, calmly, placidly'. Other feminine personal names with the element עֲדָן are: יְהוֹעָדָן (2 Kings 14:2) and חַמְיַעֲדָן, found on a seal<sup>2</sup>; compare also the masculine personal names עֲדָיִן (Neh. 10:17) and עֲדָנָה (2 Chron. 17:14).

The owner of the seal is an unknown Ma'adanah who is designated as the daughter of an unnamed king. It is the first known Hebrew seal bearing this designation and the only of its kind among known West Semitic seals. In the Bible the royal daughters are designated in various ways. Jehosheba (= Jehoshabeath) is mentioned as the 'daughter of the king' (2 Chron. 22:11) as on our seal, but elsewhere she is called 'the daughter of King Joram' (2 Kings 11:2). Athaliah is designated in full as 'the daughter of Omri King of Israel' (2 Kings 8:26), but in another text she is called simply 'the daughter of Omri' (2 Chron. 22:2). Similarly we find 'Michal, the daughter of Saul' (1 Sam. 18:20) and 'Basmath, the daughter of Solomon' (1 Kings 4:15).

On our seal the name of the king is omitted, just as on the similar seals which contain the masculine title בֶּן הַמֶּלֶךְ, 'son of the king', e.g. לְשִׁמְעֵן בֶּן הַמֶּלֶךְ, לְגִיאֲלִיָּהוּ בֶּן הַמֶּלֶךְ, לְיִרְחִמְיָאֵל בֶּן הַמֶּלֶךְ, לְיִהוֹאָחָז בֶּן הַמֶּלֶךְ. Several persons bearing this title are mentioned in the biblical text as having performed official duties; others have their names impressed on bullae or jar-handles. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that these title-bearers were officials of royal descent.<sup>3</sup>

Could this apply also to female members of the royal family? We have no information from the Bible about royal princesses performing any functions at the court. This does not, of course, exclude such a possibility. The economic texts from Mari (eighteenth century B.C.) contain lists of provisions which were supplied to the female personnel in the service of the king. These lists include the names of distinguished court ladies (without their titles) and several are called *mārat-šarrim*, 'daughter of the king' (without their personal names).<sup>4</sup>

Whether the Ma'adanah of our seal held a special position which necessitated the use of a seal remains unknown. However, the status of a royal princess was distinguished enough for her to be the owner of a private seal. The use of seals in the period of the monarchy even by non-royal women is attested by a number of seals which bear the legend 'X the daughter of Y' or 'X the wife of Y'. We may therefore regard our present seal as a private signet of the royal princess Ma'adanah. The emblem of the seal, a lyre, adds to it a personal element, and this emblem deserves more detailed discussion.

<sup>2</sup> N. Avigad: New Names on Hebrew Seals, *EI* 12 (1975), p. 66, No. 1 (Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> For a recent treatment see: N. Avigad: Baruch the Scribe and Jerahmeel the King's Son, *IEJ* 28 (1978), pp. 52–56.

<sup>4</sup> J. Bottéro: Textes économiques et administratifs, *Archives Royales de Mari*, VII, Paris, 1957, p. 100, No. 206:10; M. Birot: Textes économiques de Mari, *Revue d'Assyriologie* 50 (1956), p. 58.



Figs. 2-17. Representations of lyres.

The asymmetrical lyre has a long history.<sup>5</sup> It can be traced back to the third millennium in Sumer, where actual remains of lyres were found in the royal tombs of Ur.<sup>6</sup> In Egypt the lyre first appears on a wall painting at Beni Hassan (c. 1900 B.C.) where the instrument is held by a Semitic tribesman from Asia (Fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> The lyre was apparently not indigenous to Egypt; however, some of the finest specimens are represented in Egyptian tomb paintings of the fifteenth century B.C. depicting Egyptian musicians (Fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> On a Canaanite ivory plaque from Megiddo (twelfth century) a woman is represented striking the lyre before an enthroned king (Fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> A painting on a Philistine jug from Megiddo (eleventh century) shows a lyre-player walking between animals (Fig. 5).<sup>10</sup> From Philistia itself comes the unique terra-cotta figurine of a lyre-player found at Ashdod (eighth century, Fig. 6).<sup>11</sup> Lyre-players frequently appear as part of an orchestra. On Neo-Hittite reliefs the players hold different kinds of lyres: symmetrical and asymmetrical,<sup>12</sup> as well as one with a rounded body of the Greek type (Fig. 7).<sup>13</sup> A seventh-century Assyrian relief shows a musician playing an eight-stringed lyre with curved supports (Fig. 8).<sup>14</sup> Among Phoenician art objects an eighth-century ivory pyxis from Nimrud where one of the musicians plays the lyre is noteworthy (Fig. 9).<sup>15</sup>

The most recent discovery in this field is the *dipinto* on a pithos found at Kuntilet 'Ajrud in northern Sinai. It shows a seated figure striking a lyre of undetermined shape (Fig. 10).<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the pithos is also inscribed with Hebrew inscriptions of the ninth century. On the famous Assyrian relief from Nineveh commemorating the capture of Lachish by Sennacherib c. 700 B.C., three captive Judahites are represented as playing a lyre on their way to captivity (Fig. 11).<sup>17</sup>

Of special interest are the representations of lyre-players on engraved seals. One such seal from Nippur, apparently displaying Syrian influence, shows a seated figure

<sup>5</sup> There is an extensive bibliography on this subject. Here reference is made to the comprehensive study of C. Sachs: *The History of Musical Instruments*, New York, 1940, esp. pp. 78–79, 100–102, 106–108; and to the useful summary by Batiah Bayer: *Enc. Miqr.*, V, Jerusalem, 1968, cols. 755–782, s.v. גנינה וזמרה, esp. cols. 763–765 (Hebrew).

<sup>6</sup> J.B. Pritchard (ed.): *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*, Princeton, 1954 (hereafter *ANEP*), Figs. 191–193.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Fig. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Fig. 208.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Fig. 332.

<sup>10</sup> G. Loud: *Megiddo*, II, Chicago, 1948, Pl. 76:1.

<sup>11</sup> M. Dothan: *Ashdod II–III* ('*Atiqot* 9–10 [English Series]), Jerusalem, 1971, Fig. 62:1, Pl. LV:1.

<sup>12</sup> *ANEP*, Fig. 199.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Supplement, Fig. 797.

<sup>14</sup> *ANEP*, Fig. 202.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Supplement, Fig. 796.

<sup>16</sup> Z. Meshel: *Kuntilet 'Ajrud*, Israel Museum Catalogue No. 175, Jerusalem, 1978, p. 12; idem, *Kuntilet-'Ajrud* (Nord Sinai), *RB* 84 (1977), p. 270, Pl. XI.

<sup>17</sup> *ANEP*, Fig. 205.

playing an instrument of a simple type (Fig. 12).<sup>18</sup> Another seal comes from Ashdod and dates from the Iron Age I (Fig. 13);<sup>19</sup> on it a seated figure holds the two-stringed lyre with rounded bottom in an upright position, reminiscent of the figurine from Ashdod mentioned above. Stylistically, this seal is related to a group of eighth-seventh century seals from the Aegean region depicting lyre-players with additional persons (Fig. 14).<sup>20</sup> The symmetrical instruments with rounded soundbox and three strings held in an upright position which appear in this group belong to the Greek cultural sphere. Related to the same class are the two lyres which appear on the much later Jewish Bar-Kokhba coins of the second century A.D. (Figs. 15–16). Finally, a Byzantine representation of King David as Orpheus playing the lyre is worth mentioning (Fig. 17). It appears on the early sixth century mosaic floor of a synagogue at Gaza, and bears the name of David in Hebrew.<sup>21</sup>

In summing up our select survey of lyres, we may conclude that the basic shape of this musical instrument is common to all countries of the ancient Near East, and seems to have developed especially in the Canaanite cultural sphere. The common features of the asymmetrical lyre are the rectangular soundbox, the unequal arms and the oblique yoke. With a few exceptions it is held in a slanting position, the upper end away from the player, with the shorter support downwards. Only the Ashdod player embraces the instrument upright in his arm in the way the Greeks held their *kithara*;<sup>22</sup> this, however, is a symmetrical instrument similar to those of the Bar-Kokhba coins which are of the Greek type. The number of strings in the given examples varies considerably from three to twelve. From some illustrations it can be deduced that the strings of the lyre were plucked with a plectrum; this is also related by Flavius Josephus when describing the instruments played in the Temple.<sup>23</sup>

A comparison of our seal with the parallels quoted above reveals close similarity in the basic features: soundbox, unequal arms and oblique yoke. Our lyre differs, however, in some details, which give it a distinctive appearance: the elegantly curved arms, and especially the unusual shape of the soundbox, partly rounded and partly carinated and exceptionally decorated with a rosette. None of the known parallels has a decorated soundbox. Does this rosette have any symbolic meaning? We do not know, but it is reminiscent of the rosette device which replaced the *lamelekh* stamps on the royal

<sup>18</sup> L. Legrain: *The Culture of the Babylonians from their Seals in the Collection of the Museum*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1925, p. 311, No. 627.

<sup>19</sup> Dothan, *op. cit.* (above, n. 11), Fig. 76:1.

<sup>20</sup> These seals are fully treated by Edith Porada: A Lyre Player from Tarsus and his Relations, in S.S. Weinberg (ed.): *The Aegean and the Near East, Studies presented to Hetty Goldman*, New York, 1956, pp. 185–211.

<sup>21</sup> A. Ovadia: Excavations in the Area of the Ancient Synagogue at Gaza, *IEJ* 19 (1969), p. 195, Pl. 15:A.

<sup>22</sup> Sachs, *op. cit.* (above, n. 5), Pl. VIII:A.

<sup>23</sup> *Ant.*, VII, 306.

Judean storage jars in the late seventh century B.C. Our lyre has twelve strings; according to Flavius Josephus the lyre played in the Temple had ten strings, whereas its sister-instrument the *nebel* (harp) had twelve. It should be noted that, except for the coins, the lyre of our seal is the only one which stands by itself as a separate motif or emblem. In all the other instances cited above it is held by a musician.

The lyre is generally identified with the biblical Hebrew *kinnor*. The Greek translation of the Bible renders *kithara* or the kindred word *kinyra*. Thus, the *kinnor* was apparently a lyre of the kind that the Greeks called *kithara*. In Egypt the lyre, which is not a native instrument, is designated by the Semitic word *kinnuru*.<sup>24</sup>

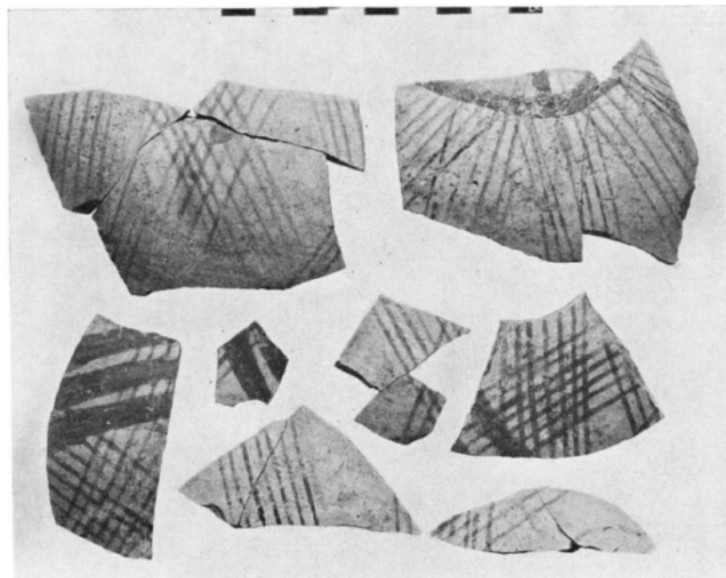
The *kinnor* was played in the Temple 'orchestra' together with the *nebel*, *ugab*, etc., but it was also in general use among the people for both sacred and secular music. The prophets and others used it for sacred purposes. We may agree with Sachs<sup>25</sup> that the lyre was the famous instrument on which King David excelled, and which for a thousand years has erroneously been called 'King David's harp'. It was a gay instrument and a symbol of joy and happiness. In the Babylonian exile the Jews abstained from playing it and suspended their *kinnorot* on the willows, saying: 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (Ps. 137:1-4).

We may assume that Princess Ma'adanah was an ardent lyre-player and therefore she chose this instrument as the emblem for her seal. In doing so she enriched the iconography of Hebrew seals with a unique and charming motif and provided us with an authentic, albeit schematic, representation of the contemporary biblical *kinnor*. Considering the source of the seal — the royal family — our lyre may be regarded as the first true Hebrew rendering of this musical instrument and perhaps closer to the *kinnor* of King David or the *kinnor* of the Temple 'orchestra' than any other known representation of this musical instrument.

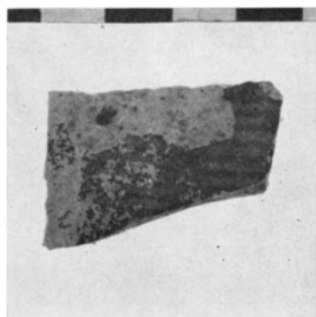
Unfortunately Princess Ma'adanah did not disclose the name of her royal father, thereby depriving us of a valuable chronological criterion. In our endeavour to date the seal we must depend solely on paleographic considerations and we cannot say more than that the script reflects the typical calligraphy of the semi-formal writing current in Judah in the seventh century. No closer dating is possible, and the father of Ma'adanah remains unknown.

<sup>24</sup> W. Helck: *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien, etc.*<sup>2</sup>, Wiesbaden, 1971, p. 523, No. 253.

<sup>25</sup> Sachs, *op. cit.* (above, n. 5), p. 106.



A: Sherds of  
jug No. V.



B: Sherd No. VII.

CYPRIOTE POTTERY OF THE MB FROM TEL MEVORAKH



C: The seal of Ma'adanah.  
Scale 4:1.



D: Section of the city-wall of  
Ascalon.