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Delbert R. Hillers

*John Hopkins University, Baltimore*

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# The Goddess with the Tambourine

## Reflections on an Object from Taanach

DELBERT R. HILLERS

*The author is professor of Near Eastern Studies at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.*

THE AUTHOR STUDIES A FIGURINE DISCOVERED AT TAANACH AND IN DOING SO provides an exercise in asking the right archaeological question and working out tentative answers.

The subject of this essay is an object found during the 1963 excavations at Taanach: a mold for making plaque figurines. Since no one could claim that the object is beautiful, or even especially important, I feel obliged to justify this choice of subject. First, I was attracted by the idea of studying an object discovered by the Concordia—American Schools of Oriental Research excavation at Taanach, in which I took part. More important, I chose to discuss this figurine mold simply because it is an object, a single concrete artifact of the sort that archaeologists find. Other essays at this symposium deal with broader subjects, which describe the relation between archaeology and theology. As a contrast, it seems worthwhile to turn from the general to the particular and to attempt to illustrate through one example the potentialities of archaeology for illuminating the Old Testament, the procedures that are followed in dealing with archaeological evidence, and also some of the problems that arise along the way. I chose an uninscribed object because in my opinion when one speaks of written evidence from the ancient past it is not archaeological evidence even if an archaeologist happens to dig up the text.

It may be helpful to provide in advance a general outline of this essay. It starts with the Taanach figurine and moves outward through three concentric circles, as though we were at first standing very close to the object and then moving back to take in a wider and wider view. The first circle is the circle of archaeology in the narrower sense. Then comes the circle of literature, in which I will examine the possibilities and problems of connecting the archaeological evidence to that from ancient literature, including the Bible. Can we connect this sort of figurine with any figure in ancient mythology or any religious conceptions of ancient polytheism? Finally we will move to take in the broadest circle, that of theology, and inquire whether our view of Old Testament religion or Old Testament theology is in any way affected by the results of our study within the other circles.

### I

The terra-cotta figurine mold (turn page. Fig. 1) was discovered in the 1963 season of excavation at Taanach, in one of the squares under the supervision of Alfred von Rohr Sauer. The figurine this mold produces is about 6½ inches tall by

1 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches wide. The thickness at its greatest is 1 inch. The head is disproportionately large; the shoulder and arms are smaller. The abdomen is elongated, while the pelvis and legs are small in proportion. Some similar figurines have been thought to represent a pregnant woman because of the distended abdomen,<sup>1</sup> but this is not indicated here by the lengthening of the abdomen, which does not protrude. It seems better to account for this disproportion as due to lack of skill on the part of the maker. The hair is upswept and covered by a headdress. Two concentric lines of hatching indicate a fillet or band securing the headcloth just above the forehead. The smooth bulge above this probably indicates a headcloth covering the upswept hair. Many of the parallel figurines, that is, other examples where the figure holds a disk, also have the head covered, though usually by a hanging veil or headscarf.<sup>2</sup> The eyebrows are strongly indicated, as is the nose. The huge eyes are almond shaped. The mouth, in contrast, is barely visible.

The figure seems naked. I say "seems" in spite of the rather obvious nudity because of the headdress and the belt around the waist. It is conceivable that it was the coroplast's intention to show a figure clad

in a diaphanous garment, like those often worn by Egyptian women in paintings. Theresa Carter, who suggested this possibility, notes as a parallel the statue of the "grande chanteuse" from Mari, which seems nude from the waist up but is only apparently so, because the artist has very lightly indicated a neckline.<sup>3</sup> In the case of the Taanach figurine, the head is so carefully covered that the contrast with a stark-naked body would be extreme, and the hypothesis that she is wearing a see-through dress, belted at the waist, is attractive though obviously speculative. The figure wears bracelets on her wrists and an anklet on each leg. The naval and vulva are marked by circular punches. Over the left breast she holds a disk, which she is supporting from below with both hands. This is decorated with an incised cross, and with a series of small punches around the edge.

The figurine mold was found in Room One of what has been called the cultic structure at Taanach, a building destroyed in the later 10th century B. C., thus roughly contemporary with King Solomon. This contained a number of objects that suggested that it may have been a storeroom connected to a sanctuary. In speaking of the figurine mold in our preliminary publication, Paul Lapp stressed that "most examples from Beth-Shan and Megiddo come from cultic contexts."<sup>4</sup> He terms Ta'annek, "Bulletin of the American Schools of this a "striking contrast" to the situation

<sup>1</sup> See James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures (ANEP)* (Princeton, 1954), Fig. 469, bottom row second from left (PAM 36.958) and Pritchard's comment, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> For an example see R. A. S. Macalister, "Twentieth Quarterly Report on the Excavation of Gezer," *Palestine Exploration Fund*, 41 (1909), 14—16; *The Excavation of Gezer* (London, 1912), II, Fig. 499, p. 414; James B. Pritchard, *Palestinian Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses Known Through Literature*, vol. 24 of the *American Oriental Series* (Philadelphia, 1943), nos. 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 169, 170, 172.

<sup>3</sup> See André Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari, Vol. III: Les temples d'Ishtar et de Ninni-zaza* (Paris, 1967), pp. 90, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Paul W. Lapp, "The 1963 Excavation at ta'annek," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (hereafter cited as *BASOR*), 173 (February 1964), 40, caption of Fig. 21.

with respect to another type of female figurine, the "Astarte of Taanach" type. It seems to me unwise to press this observation very far, and I do not know just what inference Lapp meant to draw from this distinction. We do not have large numbers of these figurines with a disk, and a good proportion of those we do have come from contexts with nothing particularly cultic about them.<sup>5</sup> I do not see why the examples from Beth-Shan and Megiddo should be thought especially significant, even though those sites are close to Taanach. None of these figurines was found set up in a shrine as an object of worship. It seems likely to me that the Taanach figurine mold was intended to produce cheap sacred objects connected with private cult, with folk religion, and that it was not directly connected to the city's public worship. This seems to be the case with other types of Palestinian figurines, and the find-spot of the Taanach figurine does not seem to offer any real evidence for thinking differently in this case. What the context does provide is a rather definite date for the figurine mold. The ashy layers covering the floor of the cultic structure yielded one of the best sealed and richest groups of artifacts found at the site, and

<sup>5</sup> For example, one specimen from Megiddo is from a grave: see G. Schumacher, *Tell el-Mutesellim*, I (Leipzig, 1908), 61 and Fig. 71; from Beth-Shan, Fig. 11, no. 4 and Fig. 112, no. 5, in Francis W. James, *The Iron Age at Beth Shan* (Philadelphia, 1966), are not from temples (possibly also Fig. 11, no. 1 should be included here, since it seems to hold a disk); for examples at Hazor in noncultic contexts, see Yigael Yadin, *Hazor II* (Jerusalem, 1960), Pl. LXXVI, nos. 12, 13, and possibly 14, cf. p. 33; at Gezer, see references in note 2 above; at Tell el-Far'ah (N), see Roland de Vaux, "Les fouilles de Tell el-Far'ah près Naplouse," *Revue biblique*, 64 (1957), Pl. XI and p. 579.

since the mold is fragile, it can hardly be much older than the pottery found with it, that is, late 10th century B. C.

We now turn from this description to state some of the archaeological questions that arise. What other objects like this are there, what is their geographical distribution, and for how long a period were they in use? Where does the type originate? What is the object that is held in the hands? Although this essay is entitled "The Goddess with the Tambourine," interpretation of the figure as a goddess and the object she holds as a tambourine is only one possibility, and a less fanciful title would have been "The Female Figure Holding a Round Object."

This type of figurine is only one of several types found in Palestine. Before taking up the closer parallels to the Taanach figurine I will mention some of the more prominent types, according to the scheme of classification begun by Pilz and modified by Pritchard.<sup>6</sup> Type I is a figure with arms extended to the sides holding stalks of lilies or serpents (Fig. 2). This is called the Qadesh, or Qudshu, type because this image occurs so labeled on Egyptian plaques. Type II is a plaque figure with the hands holding the breasts (Fig. 3). Pritchard's Type IV is the archaic, or ear-flap, type (Fig. 4). The figure is nude, the legs are pressed close together, and the ear-flaps are large and usually pierced; hair and sometimes earrings were attached to these holes. Type VI is a figure of a pregnant woman. Finally there is the pillar figurine; this is not a plaque figurine but a figure modeled

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Pilz, "Die weiblichen Gottheiten Kanaans," *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-vereins*, 47 (1924), 129—68; Pritchard, *Palestinian Figurines*.

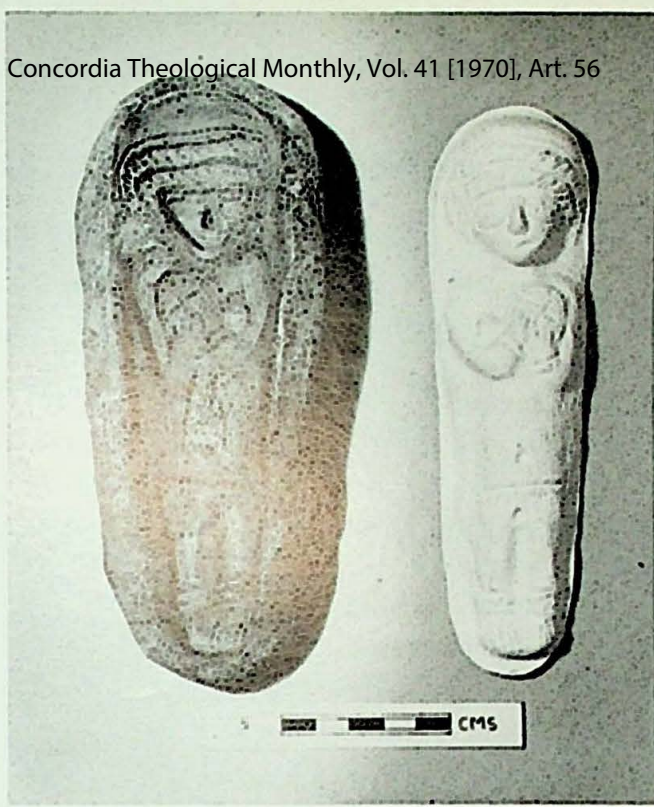


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



in the round of a nude woman with protruding breasts with the lower part of the body stylized into a cylinder. The geographical distribution of each of these types is slightly different, as is the chronological spread of each. Figurines are not found in Palestine at all during the Early Bronze period and become common only after about 1500 B.C. They remain common through Iron I and Iron II, that is, through the whole Israelite period down to the Babylonian exile, though some types went out of use before then.

Turning to the figurine carrying a round object, Pritchard's Type V, we may note first that it is one of the less common types. Out of nearly 300 figurines that Pritchard was able to gather in his catalog published in 1943, only 14 were of this sort, and although many more figurines of all kinds have turned up since then, the proportion is still probably about the same. At Taanach, for example, though we uncovered this intact mold, we found no impressions produced by it or terra-cottas of the disk-holding type, though dozens of figurine fragments were found. Specimens have turned up from sites throughout Palestine from north to south. Pritchard lists specimens from Megiddo, which has yielded the most examples, from Gezer, from Beth-Shan, and from Gerar. Since then examples have turned up at other sites; those known to me are from Taanach, from Tell el-Far'ah (N), and from Hazor.<sup>7</sup> The specimens differ in detail. The hairdo is treated in different ways. In some figures, it is not an upsweep, but a wig or hairdo hanging to the shoulders. The figure is sometimes clothed; one from Beth-Shan is

<sup>7</sup> See note 5 above for references.

wearing a fancy skirt. The figurine depicting a female holding a disk can be traced back to a Mesopotamian prototype, as is true in the case of most types of Palestinian figurines. In Mesopotamia, figurines of the type with which we are concerned occur at various sites beginning perhaps as early as the latter part of the third millennium B.C., or at latest in the first quarter of the second millennium — there is some difference on this point in the opinions of experts.<sup>8</sup>

What is the object the figure holds? Excavators describing their finds or special students of the subject have called it a tambourine, a cake or loaf, or a plate for offerings. Paul Lapp, in describing the Taanach figurine in preliminary reports, first called the object "a raised loaf, not a tambourine."<sup>9</sup> In a later report he stated that evidence he had seen more recently had convinced him that it must be a tambourine.<sup>10</sup> It seems to me that this is very likely right. In the first place, there are figurines from Mesopotamia that clearly show that the round object is being struck. Two recent students of ancient musical instruments call the disks tambourines: Joan Rimmer does so with some reserve in her recent study of instruments in the collec-

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Opificius puts all the Mesopotamian examples cited in her study in the Old Babylonian period; see *Das altbabylonische Terrakottarelief* (Berlin, 1961), pp. 54—57. This lower dating is challenged in Marie-Thérèse Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs en terre cuite de la Mésopotamie antique*, Institut Français d'archéologie de Beyrouth; Bibliothèque archéologique et historique, Tome LXXXV (Paris, 1968), p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> Lapp, "The 1963 Excavation at Ta'anek," p. 40, caption of Fig. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Paul W. Lapp, "The 1966 Excavations at Tell Ta'anek," *BASOR*, 185 (February 1967), 36.

tion of the British Museum,<sup>11</sup> and Henrike Hartmann apparently does not regard the identification as any longer problematic.<sup>12</sup> Ruth Opificius quite confidently identifies the round object as a tambourine,<sup>13</sup> and Marie-Thérèse Barrelet, while in general less positive in her interpretation of the type, reports it as the general opinion that the object is a tambourine.<sup>14</sup> In the second place, a recently discovered Palestinian figurine has led Roland de Vaux to state flatly that this must be a tambourine. The figurine from Tell Farah (N) seems quite clearly to be striking the drum she holds in her left hand (Fig. 5). Although the opinion of an earlier authority, Mrs. E. Douglas van Buren, was against identification as a drum,<sup>15</sup> her objections seem strained, and the best conclusion is that the round object is intended to represent a tambourine. I might add that it seems best to conclude that all the figurines show the same thing and to dismiss the possibility that sometimes they are holding one object and sometimes another. The reason for this is that there is a strong family resemblance between examples of this type from the Mesopotamian specimens on.

Is this a goddess, or not? The question is not at all easy to decide and is best studied in the context of all the types of

Palestinian figurines and Mesopotamian figurines. Those who have studied these most thoroughly are by no means agreed as to just what the plaques represent. H. G. May is of the opinion that all the types represent mother-goddesses of one sort or another;<sup>16</sup> Galling calls most types goddesses but not the type holding the tambourine,<sup>17</sup> which, following Pilz,<sup>18</sup> he regards as purely a human figure; Pritchard is noncommittal, leaving the question open for all types;<sup>19</sup> Albright calls some of the types goddesses but asserts that the figure that depicts a pregnant female, without insignia of any sort, is simply a human figure, an amulet intended to help pregnant mothers by sympathetic magic.<sup>20</sup> Students of the Mesopotamian forerunners of the tambourine type have been divided in their opinions: Parrot and Sarzec, for example, regard these as simply hierodules, that is in this case, cult-prostitutes;<sup>21</sup> Mrs. E. Douglas van Buren lists some of the figurines as goddesses, others simply as

16 H. G. May, *Material Remains of the Megiddo Cult (MRMC)*, in the *Oriental Institute Publications*, Vol. XXVI (Chicago, 1935), 28.

17 Kurt Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon (BR)* (Tübingen, 1937), col. 231. Cf. Hugo Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament*, 2d ed. (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927), p. 86.

18 Pilz, p. 157; Pilz, however, allows for the possibility that these figurines should be taken as goddesses.

19 Pritchard, *Palestinian Figurines*, pp. 87 to 88.

20 W. F. Albright, "Astarte Plaques and Figurines from Tell Beit Mirsim," *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud*, I (Paris, 1939), 119.

21 André Parrot, *Tello* (Paris, 1948), p. 242; cf. Ernest de Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée* (Paris, 1884—1912), p. 254.

11 Joan Rimmer, *Ancient Musical Instruments of Western Asia in the British Museum* (London, 1969), p. 23.

12 Henrike Hartmann, *Die Musik der sumerischen Kultur* (Frankfurt on the Main, 1960), p. 41.

13 Opificius, pp. 207—208.

14 Barrelet, p. 237.

15 E. Douglas van Buren, *Clay Figurines of Babylonia and Assyria*, in the *Yale Oriental Series: Researches*, Vol. XVI (New Haven, Conn., 1930), 89—90.



figurines of musicians.<sup>22</sup> I cite varying opinions in this much detail to emphasize the uncertainty that prevails, and even though I will suggest my own conclusion, its tentative character must be evident. I would note the following points as significant in trying to decide the question:

1. Some types of Palestinian figurines are intended to depict goddesses almost beyond question. This is particularly the case with the Qudshu type, the one wearing a Hathor wig and grasping lilies or serpents. Egyptian reliefs depicting this figure are labeled Qudshu, a title of a goddess known from the Ras Shamra texts, and she is depicted between other figures who represent the Canaanite deities Resheph and El. It seems hypercritical to suppose that figurines with the same iconography do not represent this goddess. Pritchard cautiously entertains the notion that such figurines may depict a courtesan or sacred harlot, dressed as Qudshu and carrying her apparatus.<sup>23</sup> That is conceivably the case, but if so it makes little difference: the human figure is personating the goddess, and the intention of the maker and of the user of the figurine would seem about the same. One may argue in much the same way about the plaque type with hands beneath her breast and about the pillar figurines of the *dea nutrix* type: the mother-goddess is often and explicitly described as divine nursemaid in ancient texts, and it seems safe to say that the figurines depict a goddess.

<sup>22</sup> Van Buren, pp. l—lii; 89—90; 240—41.

<sup>23</sup> Pritchard, *Palestinian Figurines*, p. 87; similarly van Buren, p. xlix: the terra-cottas, even when a close copy of a relief depicting a goddess, "may signify merely the worshipper identifying herself with the goddess by assuming the same attitude."

2. Some of the Mesopotamian figurines with a tambourine must depict a goddess. Mrs. E. Douglas van Buren points out that some of these figurines wear the turreted crown that is borne by a particular goddess in early Mesopotamia, and that they share other attributes as well: the heavy, rather ugly facial features and the cape of "pearls" over the shoulders in some specimens.<sup>24</sup> Henrike Hartmann refers to other clear-cut evidence for some of the Mesopotamian specimens. According to her, some later examples are depicted wearing the horned crown, which is the Babylonian artistic convention for the representation of a deity.<sup>25</sup> I have so far been unable to verify this statement, but if Hartmann is right, then it is perfectly clear that some Mesopotamian examples are meant to depict a deity.

Taken together, these two points—that some Palestinian figurines are goddesses and some Mesopotamian tambourine figurines are goddesses—do not completely settle the question for our Palestinian tambourine figurines, but in my opinion they suggest that it is justified to call her the goddess with the tambourine.<sup>26</sup> If not that, then it seems that at least this figurine shows a devotee of a goddess, a songstress or cult-prostitute in service of a shrine. Where a figurine carries no special insignia at all and is simply a nude pregnant female, it may be right to argue that the figure is merely human. In this case, however, she bears a drum, an insignia borne

<sup>24</sup> Van Buren, pp. l—lii.

<sup>25</sup> Hartmann, p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> P. J. Riis argues in a similar way that some types of Syrian figurines are best identified as goddesses; see his "The Syrian Astarte Plaques and their Western Connections," *Berytus*, 9, Fasc. 2 (1949), p. 81.

by figurines of goddesses or devotees, and something more must be intended than simply a device of sympathetic magic.

## II

We may now move from the circle of archaeology to the circle of literature and put some questions that concern linking the archaeological record with our written records for religion in this period.

First, if this is a goddess, or a least a figure connected with the cult, which goddess is depicted? In this case the answer of those who have addressed this question is practically unanimous: it is impossible to tell for sure. May's statement is typical: "It is impossible to identify any individual figurine with any particular goddess."<sup>27</sup> It seems to me worthwhile to spend some time reflecting on why this should be so. First of all, we have no direct inscriptional evidence from Taanach — to take the case of our figurine — that can inform us. The Taanach tablets do mention a goddess, Asherah, but they are 500 years older than our figurine, and it is inconceivable that Asherah was the only goddess worshiped there.

Secondly, the next closest evidence, the Old Testament itself, is decidedly meager in the information it provides about pagan goddesses. Asherah and Astarte are mentioned, but mostly in polemic passages that say almost nothing about what these figures meant or how they may have been depicted in art. If we go to a body of richer material, the Ugaritic texts, we are both aided and frustrated; there is much material, but it is geographically remote as well as remote in time (the texts are from the 14th and 13th centuries B. C.). Most important,

<sup>27</sup> May, p. 32.

the rich Ugaritic evidence warns us against facile identifications through the complicated picture it presents. There are three principal goddesses and a number of lesser ones, and the three main goddesses — Asherah, Anath, and Astarte — are not sharply distinct in character. Moreover, the offering texts and the ritual texts give a different picture from the narrative texts. Astarte, who is relatively unimportant in the extant epics, figures more prominently in the actual cult. We do know a little about the pantheon of other Canaanite cities, enough to know that it was different from the one at Ugarit.

Finally, it must be stressed that ancient art has a history of its own, separate from the history of myth and religious literature. Most of our Palestinian figurine types demonstrably originate in Mesopotamia, and if we have a type holding a drum with a history stretching back at least to the early second millennium B. C., it is not to be assumed without proof that the significance of the figure and its attributes was clearly understood in the first millennium, or that this ancient type was directly identified with any figure we know of from Syro-Palestinian texts.

This is somewhat discouraging, but it is a characteristic of some types of archaeological evidence. It is occasionally far from easy to make any direct tie-in with the epigraphic or literary record. There is an impenetrable muteness about these artifacts, and at times our most urgent questions simply have to remain unanswered.

We may, however, attempt to bridge the gap between the archaeological evidence and the written evidence in a less direct fashion. Underneath the surface diversity of ancient polytheism as it existed

at various times and places there is an extensive amount of underlying agreement. Just as it would be rash to insist on the identification of any figurine with any one goddess, unless labeled, so it would be myopic to deny that there are some persistent traits of ancient religion that are fairly constant.

One persistent feature of religion in the Ancient Near East is the worship of a goddess of love and war, the embodiment of feminine charm and of fecundity, but also of ferocity and terrible prowess in battle.<sup>28</sup> Certain traits of this goddess can be tied up with features of Palestinian figurines. We may in a given case be quite wrong about the name; we may cite a Ugaritic text speaking of Anath when, if the truth were known, the people of Taanach or Megiddo called the figurine Asherah, or Astarte, or Derceto, or something else. But we have a fair chance of being right in essentials because the goddesses are of the same general type. One assurance of this is that the ancients did approximately the same thing: recognizing the common traits of the female divinities of various

<sup>28</sup> Wolfram Herrmann, "Astarte," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientalforschung*, 15 (1969), 6—55, stresses the warlike aspects of the conception of Astarte and declares (p. 45) that we must bid farewell to the notion that she was a goddess of fertility. This is too one-sided, especially in view of the Biblical term 'aštērot šō'nekā, which clearly associates her with the fertility of flocks. Note also the plaque from the 12th century B. C. where the goddess holding a lotus and serpent is labeled Qudshu-Astarte-Anath, that is, Astarte is equipped with symbols of fertility and charm and is identified with Anath, who is undeniably a fertility goddess. For the plaque see James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1969), Fig. 830 and p. 379 and the references given there.

cities, they identified them in various ways, either through multilingual pantheons that lined up the gods of a given city with their foreign counterparts, or through blending, as in the figure of Atargatis, the Syrian goddess of Hellenistic and Roman times whose very name is a compound of Astarte and Anath.<sup>29</sup>

In the case of the nude goddess with lilies or serpents in each hand, we may not know by what name she was called by the owner of a plaque we have discovered, but we may form an approximately accurate idea of the religious values expressed. Albright offers a concise summary: "The lily and serpent are characteristically Canaanite; the former indicates the charm and grace of the bearer — in a word, her sex appeal — and the latter symbolizes her fecundity."<sup>30</sup> A Ugaritic text is quite explicit on the former point. In the epic of Keret, the hero asks for a wife, "whose beauty (*n'm*) is as the beauty of Anath; whose charm is as the charm of Astarte." The aspect of sexual prowess and fecundity is evident in a number of passages. In one broken text, for instance, Anath is represented as copulating with Baal, the chief male god, and afterward giving birth.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> On this explanation of the name, see W. F. Albright, "The Evolution of the West-Semitic Divinity 'An-Anat-Attā,'" *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* (AJSL), 41 (1925), 73—101; "Further Observations on the Name 'Anat-Attā,'" AJSL, 41 (1925), 283—85; and "Note on the Goddess 'Anat,'" AJSL, 43 (1927), 233—36.

<sup>30</sup> W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, 1953), p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> Text 132:2, line 2 in Cyrus Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome, 1965), hereafter cited as UT; it is text 11 in Andrée Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, Mission de Ras Shamra, Vol. X (Paris, 1963), hereafter CIA.

The idea expressed by the figurine of the goddess proffering her breasts has its literary manifestation. The ravenous infants born to El in the myth of Shachar and Shalim are said to "suck at the breasts of the Lady" (*st*); "Lady" is a title of the goddess Anath (or Asherah).<sup>32</sup> In another epic the son to be born to the hero Keret will "suck the milk of A[sh]erah, nurse at the breasts of the Virgin [Anat], the wet-nurse[s of the gracious gods.]"<sup>33</sup> A New Kingdom Egyptian text extends the picture even farther, in a way not too complimentary to the goddess—"I have sucked the breasts of Anath, the milk-cow."<sup>34</sup>

Thus there is a literary counterpart to the religious themes expressed in several of the figurine types, and it is in place to ask whether there is anything that can be identified with the lady with the tambourine. It seems evident from the nudity and the explicitly marked sexual characteristics of the Taanach figurine that she is supposed to have something to do with sexual charm and perhaps fertility, but the question is whether we can make out from the literature what the special significance of the tambourine is. The literature I propose to survey is first the Old Testament, then more in detail the Ugaritic literature, and third, Lucian's treatise *On the Syrian Goddess*, which if correctly ascribed to Lucian, is of the second century of the Christian era.

The Biblical Hebrew word for hand-drum, tambourine, is *tōp*. It occurs often in the description of feasting and merry-making (for example, Gen. 31:27; Is.

5:12; 24:8) but is also mentioned as having been used in the worship of God (Ps. 81:2; 149:3; 2 Sam. 6:5). It often accompanied dancing (1 Sam. 18:6; Ex. 15:20; 2 Sam. 6:5; Judg. 11:34). The band of ecstatic prophets who met Saul (1 Sam. 10:5) were carrying the *tōp*, the tambourine, along with their other instruments. None of this is very surprising, nor does it help much to decide what may be signified by the figurine with the tambourine. The survey of Biblical use does suggest possibilities, however.

Ugaritic uses the same word for drum as Hebrew. In one new text the god Haddu (if the text is correctly understood by Virolleaud), a counterpart of Baal, carries a tambourine along with other instruments. "He sings and plays on lyre and flute, on drum and cymbals."<sup>35</sup> Since our figurine is a goddess, the performance of this one-man band is of less interest than the two passages that may represent a female as using the *tp*. In the story of King Keret, the king fears that he is going to die of the illness that grips him. He commissions his son Elhau to call Keret's daughter Thatmanîtu (Thitmanet, "Octavia") "that she may weep and wail for me" (*tbkn. wtdm. ly* [?]).<sup>36</sup> When Elhau sees her, he is to tell her, according to a later line (41), "Take your *drum*<sup>37</sup> in your hand [. . .] in your right hand." The text breaks off, but in any case it seems to be

<sup>35</sup> Jean Nougayrol *et al.*, *Ugaritica V*, Mission de Ras Shamra, Vol. XVI (Paris, 1968), text 2, line 4.

<sup>36</sup> UT 125 (= CTA 16), line 30.

<sup>37</sup> Reading *tpk* as first proposed by H. L. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret: A Canaanite Epic of the Bronze Age*, BASOR Supplementary Studies Nos. 2—3 (New Haven, Conn., 1946), p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> UT 52 (= CTA 23), line 61.

<sup>33</sup> UT 128 (= CTA 15), II, 28.

<sup>34</sup> See B. Couroyer, "Trois épithètes de Ramsès II," *Orientalia*, 33 (1964), 443—60.

an explicit reference to use of the hand-drum (*tōp*) in mourning. There are some difficulties in interpreting this passage; for our purpose the most important is whether the girl is supposed to be a goddess. Most interpreters have not thought so, and I do not, but W. F. Albright identifies this Thatmanîtu as a minor goddess, interprets her name as meaning "she who belongs to the Ogdoad," and calls her a goddess of healing.<sup>38</sup> I cannot see how this arises from the text, but it indicates the very typical uncertainty that exists in interpretation of the difficult texts from Ugarit. This passage might, in summary, suggest that conceivably the tambourine marks these figurines as having to do with mourning, but this is hypothetical and is probably at variance with the common representation of the figure as nude and with the contexts in which such figurines have most often been found, which rather argue against specific connection with funerary rites.

Another Ugaritic text is perhaps more suggestive but equally difficult. RS 22.225 is a brief text of 13 lines in all, covering only one side of a broken tablet. According to one translation, offered by Virolleaud and Astour: "Anath walks and admires the drum of her brother and the grace (or pleasing voice) of her brother, who is very fair. She eats his flesh without a knife; she drinks his blood without a cup."<sup>39</sup> Astour, who has written exten-

sively on parallels between Near Eastern and classical civilization, is quick to seize on the significant points here. The orgiastic rites in honor of Bacchus involved the tearing to pieces of a live victim and the eating of the raw flesh by the frenzied devotees of the god. This is clearly attested in our text, where the sister-spouse of Baal, Anath, eats the raw flesh and drinks the blood of her mate. As Astour points out, the tambourine was the instrument especially used in the orgies connected with the worship of Bacchus and the Great Mother.<sup>40</sup> If the text is correctly understood, then, this might be significant for interpreting the figurines with the tambourine: the symbolizing of one aspect of the worship of the mother-goddess, namely, its wild, frenzied Bacchic aspect. Unfortunately, the crucial word, *tp*, is ambiguous. Others, notably Lipinski and Albright, read it here as an abstract noun \**tōpî*, meaning "beauty," so that the passage would contain no reference at all to a drum.<sup>41</sup> Even if it does stand in the text, it is not at all clear how it figures in the narrative, and it is carried by the god, not the goddess.

Finally we may consider briefly a passage in Lucian's *de dea Syria*. Lucian talks about the Syrian goddess Atargatis, and though he writes in the second century after Christ—much later than our other evidence—there is no reason to dismiss out of hand what he says, for it is now evi-

<sup>40</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London, 1968), pp. 129, 131.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Virolleaud, "Un nouvel épisode du mythe ugaritique de Baal," *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, 1960, pp. 180—86; Michael C. Astour, "Un texte d'Ugarit récemment découvert et ses rapports avec l'origine des cultes bacchiques grecs," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 164 (1963), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Lipinski, "Les conceptions et couches merveilleuses de 'Anath,'" *Syria*, 42 (1965), 49 to 50; W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, pp. 114—115. Note that *tp*, "drum," occurs in a broken context that names other musical instruments and also uses the word *n'm*, *Ugaritica V*, text 5; the passage is too fragmentary, however, to be decisive as to the meaning of *n'm*.

dent that much of what later writers like Lucian and Philo of Byblos (also second century) report of Syrian religion is based on reliable old sources. Atargatis, the goddess, is in name a blend of the older figures Astarte and Anat. Lucian reports the opinion that Atargatis is the same as the goddess known to the Greeks as Rhea (that is, Cybele): "She is drawn by lions, she holds a drum in her hand and carries a tower on her head, just as the Lydians make Rhea do."<sup>42</sup> The drum is an attribute of the goddess that identifies her as the patron of ecstatic, orgiastic rites. This is the most explicit and direct evidence available for interpretation of the figurines with a tambourine. It is not conclusive, because Lucian writes at a much later period than the time of our Palestinian figurines, to say nothing of the Mesopotamian prototypes.<sup>43</sup> In summary, then,

<sup>42</sup> Lucian, *de dea Syria*, xv. On the identification of Rhea with Cybele here, see H. A. Strong and John Garstang, *The Syrian Goddess* (London, 1913) p. 55; the iconography as described by Lucian is that of Cybele, who typically carries a tambourine, is flanked by lions, and wears a turreted crown; see A. Rapp, "Kybele," *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, ed. W. H. Roscher, Vol. II (Leipzig, 1890—97), cols. 1638—1672. Cybele of the Hellenistic world is evidently related to the goddess known in early texts as Kubaba; see W. F. Albright, "The Anatolian Goddess Kubaba," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 5 (1929), 229—31; "New Light on the History of Western Asia in the Second Millennium B. C.," *BASOR*, 78 (April 1940), 23—31, but there is no specific evidence that the Anatolian Kubaba was regarded as patroness of orgiastic worship, and there is no drum in the few known representations of the goddess, according to E. von Schuler, in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H. W. Haussig, 1. Abteilung, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1965), s. v. Kubaba.

<sup>43</sup> Opificius, p. 208, interprets the Mesopotamian figurines carrying a drum by reference to Cybele; in her opinion there are other points

the evidence from the circle of literature is inconclusive. We cannot with any confidence connect our tambourine figurine with any goddess known to us from literature, even though we have a great deal more evidence for Canaanite religion than did previous generations. The drum may point to a connection with orgiastic worship such as that which was observed in honor of Atargatis, the Syrian goddess, and Cybele in Asia Minor and the classical world, but this is far from certain.

### III

We turn now to the final circle, the circle of theology. The question is whether our Taanach figurine, or the class of objects it represents, has any bearing on our view of the history of Israel's religion. Since it has already become apparent that there are great difficulties in connecting the archaeological record with the literary, it might seem that our question is already answered—and answered negatively. Yet that is perhaps an overly pessimistic view. First of all, these figurines do help in reconstructing the religious situation during the Old Testament period. To sum up, excavators discover small female figurines from the entire Old Testament period as far as the exile at shrines and in graves, but also in houses. From their appearance it is evident that these served in a popular cult to embody and symbolize some basic human concerns for sex, fertility, and motherhood. At one end of the scale, some of the figurines may be no more than amulets to which no concept of any defined sort was attached but only the hope that they would be of help to a pregnant mother

of resemblance besides the association with the tambourine.

or a barren woman. At the other end of the scale the figurines may represent a goddess, a figure who appeared in myth and ritual. Though details in the conception of this goddess varied from place to place, we may generalize and say that she is thought of as the source of all human and divine life. She embodied feminine charm and tenderness. In some manifestations she was vitally connected with the growth of crops, often mythologically expressed through her concerns for the revival of her dead consort. She is often associated with the darker side of life also, with irrational, frenzied slaughter, and with abandonment of all sexual restraints. It is this side of her character that has often led writers to characterize so blackly Canaanite religion as Israel encountered it. Yet as a deification of the feminine the conception of such a goddess was not necessarily or always debased and vile. Long ago, in writing of Ashtoreth, S. R. Driver cited the picture of Venus given in Lucretius, *de rerum natura*, where the goddess is "Mother of Aeneas' sons, joy of men and gods (*hominumque divumque voluptas*)," of whom it can be said: "Thou alone dost guide the nature of things, and nothing without thine aid comes forth into the bright coasts of light, nor waxes glad nor lovely."<sup>44</sup> This same stress on the "glad and lovely" as connected to the goddess appears in a Babylonian hymn some 1,500 years earlier than Lucretius:

Praise the goddess, the most awesome of goddesses. . . .

Let one revere the queen of women, the greatest of the Igigi (great gods).

<sup>44</sup> *De rerum natura* i, 21—23. The translation is that of Cyril Bailey, *Titi Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (Oxford, 1947).

She is clothed with pleasure and love.  
She is laden with vitality, charm, and voluptuousness. . . .

In lips she is sweet; life is in her mouth.  
At her appearance rejoicing becomes full.

. . .

Be it slave, unattached girl, or mother, she preserves (her).

One calls on her; among women one names her name.<sup>45</sup>

She is in short the "queen of heaven" who was, as passages in Jeremiah tell us (7:18; 44:17-25), a favorite also of the women of Israel. The archaeological record helps us trace the extent of this cult in ancient Israel and helps us see the form in which the Israelites worshiped her.

Second, one may suggest that this archaeological evidence throws into relief an aspect of the nature of the God of Israel that we moderns might otherwise miss. We are by now very accustomed to the Biblical assertions about the nature of God and have so much made them our own that it is more than a little difficult to conceive of alternate possibilities. We are especially apt to lack any appreciation for what is missing from the Israelite conception of Yahweh as compared to the theology of contemporary polytheism. I refer now to the lack of any sexuality in the conception of God or to the lack of any deification of feminine aspects of reality. Nothing was more natural for the neighbors of ancient Israel than to believe in goddesses. However much the pantheon of one place differed from that of the next, one constant theme was that the forces of creation were experienced as

<sup>45</sup> The translation is by Ferris J. Stephens, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 2d ed. (Princeton, 1955), p. 383.

divided between the two sexes; another theme was that human concern with sex, fertility, and motherhood consistently found expression in the conception of one or more goddesses who embodied these things and could communicate to their worshipers these endowments. Frankfort expresses well the deepest meaning of this symbol:

In Egypt and Mesopotamia man was dominated, but also supported, by the great rhythm of nature. If in his dark moments he felt himself caught and held in the net of unfathomable decisions, his involvement in nature had, on the whole, a soothing character. He was gently carried along on the perennial cosmic tides of the seasons. The depth and intimacy of man's relationship with nature found expression in the ancient symbol of the mother-goddess.<sup>46</sup>

It is "astonishing" that this aspect is completely absent from Israel's picture of Yahweh. This has been pointed out at length by Johannes Hempel, Gerhard von Rad, and also G. Ernest Wright,<sup>47</sup> on whose lengthier treatments I have relied. It is especially significant when we recall the degree of anthropomorphism in the Old Testament. The Old Testament goes very far indeed in representing God as having human attributes. As Eichrodt

<sup>46</sup> H. and H. A. Frankfort in H. and H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Baltimore, 1949), p. 245.

<sup>47</sup> Johannes Hempel, "Die Grenzen des Anthropomorphismus Jahwes im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 16 (1939), 83—85; Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 4th ed. (Munich, 1962), pp. 40—41; G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment, Studies in Biblical Theology*, No. 2 (London, 1950), p. 23.

says, "It is not the spiritual nature of God which is the foundation of Old Testament faith. It is his personhood—a personhood which is fully alive, and a life which is fully personal, and which is involuntarily thought of in terms of the human personality."<sup>48</sup> Note, too, that for all the divergence from Canaanite religion, Yahwism nevertheless borrows many a feature from the cult of Baal and El. The names El and Baal could be applied to Yahweh, and designations such as *ādōn*, "lord," and *melek*, "king," are far from being uniquely Israelite. Such a title as "creator of heaven and earth" was originally a title of El, the Canaanite god, and "rider of the clouds," a poetic title of God in Ps. 68:4, was before that a title of the storm-god Baal. That is to say, the Israelites could to some extent use epithets and attributes of the male gods in framing their picture of Yahweh. There is a measure of continuity. But there was a very definite limit to this process, and it is perhaps most clearly visible at the point we are touching. The concerns expressed in the symbol of the mother-goddess find no echo whatever in the God of Israel; here the contrast is practically absolute.

#### Postscript

The preceding essay has been left in almost exactly the same form in which it was delivered at the Symposium on Archaeology and Theology in October 1969. While the essay could benefit from further refinement at numerous points, the writer did not wish to delay its appearance in print or to alter its character as an informal

<sup>48</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia, 1961), 211—12.



essay. Excerpts from a letter on Jan. 22, 1970, from Dr. Paul Lapp, whose untimely death on April 26 deprived Palestinian archaeology of its most distinguished young scholar, suggest modifications and further lines of inquiry:

I just finished reading your piece on the tambourine figurine. . . . Let me react to a couple points in your paper. First . . . you should refer to the flap-eared figurine type represented already in the bone piles of our EB IA tombs at Bâb edh-Dhrâ<sup>a</sup>. A photo is included in the report in *Archaeology*, 19 (1966), pp. 104—111. For a more recent discussion see *Jerusalem Through the Ages* (Jerusalem, 1968), esp. p. 23.

I tend to stick to my emphasis on a special context for the tambourine type. I think distribution at Taanach and elsewhere suggests that this was not a common fertility amulet type, but a rather uncommon type. That the Taanach mold and the Megiddo exemplar were from similar cultic groups does suggest to me that this particular type was used in some limited cultic fashion.

My recent visit in Cyprus led to an examination of some interesting evidence

there, where for instance the flap-eared type is also depicted with tambourine in LB contexts. Most delightful of all was the cult stand of musicians from the tenth century B. C., according to Moshe Dothan, found last summer at Ashdod. One is clearly beating a round object, and in this case the musicians are human, at least to me. Still, I would agree that our figurine probably represents a goddess. . . .

#### Sources of Illustrations Used

1. *Bulletin of The American Schools of Oriental Research*, 173 (February 1964), 40, Fig. 21.
2. W. F. Albright, *Mélanges syriens offerts a Monsieur René Dussaud* (Paris, 1939), p. 111, Plate A, no. 5.
3. H. G. May, *Material Remains of the Megiddo Cult*, in the *Oriental Institute Publications*, Vol. XXVI (Chicago, 1935), Pl. XXXI, no. 598.
4. Kurt Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tübingen, 1937), cols. 227—228, no. 9.
5. *Revue biblique*, 64 (1957), Pl. XI, no. 1.

Baltimore, Md.