

## GOD IN A BOAT

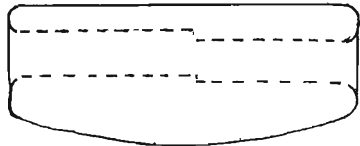
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In Mr. Culican's recent studies of motifs appearing on ancient, particularly Syro-Palestinian, seals, he has had occasion to comment on several bearing the design of a god in a boat.<sup>1</sup> One of these is the famous "Elishama<sup>c</sup> son of Gedalyahu" seal first published by Dalman, later in somewhat greater detail (and with differing conclusions) by Père Vincent, and included by Diringer in his manual of ancient Hebrew inscriptions.<sup>2</sup> Culican is inclined, against Vincent, to accept the seal as genuine on the basis of parallels with Phoenician seals.<sup>3</sup>

Favouring Culican's judgment is another seal, in the writer's collection, purchased in August, 1952, near Irbid in northern



Impression, drawing of impression, and section of seal from Irbid, Jordan.  
Scale approximately 2.7:1.



1. *AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1968), p. 56, and fig. 1; vol. 1, No. 3 (1970), pp. 31 ff. and fig. 1, b, c, d.
2. David Diringer, *Le Iscrizioni Antico-Ebraiche Palestinesi* (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1934), No. 100 and pl. XXII, 13, a, b. References are given here to the earlier literature.
3. *AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 32 f.

Jordan (see fig. 1). The close parallels in form, material and subject matter are set forth here in tabular form.<sup>4</sup>

DALMAN SEAL

IRBID SEAL

Material:

Fine compact limestone.

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Colour:

Browned by an oil bath, with traces of reddish veins; carefully polished.

Milk-chocolate brown, carefully polished.

Form:

Scaraboid, but flattened and almost round in plan. Base flat (or slightly concave); top slightly domed. Shallow hole at one end, but drilling has not been completed through the stone.

Scaraboid, but flattened and almost round in plan. Base flat and top slightly domed. Drilled through from both ends (the holes do not meet cleanly in the middle).

Dimensions:

18 x 16 x 5-7 mm.

17 x 16 x 5-7 mm.

Inscription:

On upper, slightly domed face: "Belonging to Elishama<sup>c</sup> son of Gedalyahu", within a double incised line following the outer edge of the seal.

Upper, slightly domed face well-worn. A few traces near edge of seal at one end may be remains of letters but nothing legible. There is no trace of an incised line around the outer edge of seal.

Representation

On lower, flattened face, within a double incised line following the outer edge of seal (?).

On lower, flattened face; no trace of incised line following the outer edge of seal.

A *boat*, filling approximately the lower third of field, terminating at both ends in a

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4. The details of the Dalman seal are derived from Vincent's careful study in *RB* 18 (1909), pl. I.2 (photographs of impressions of inscription and god-in-boat representation), 3 (line-drawings and sections of seal); pp. 121 ff.

bird's head (?)<sup>5</sup> (each formed by a drilled hole and two parallel strokes for beak); the whole ornamented with diagonal cross-hatching.

In the boat, facing left (in the impression), a *male figure seated on a chair*. The chair has a straight back and a low footstool in front; the side of the chair is diagonally cross-hatched.

The figure is clothed, at least between waist and knee; clothing indicated by fine diagonal cross-hatching; lower legs bare.

Left arm appears to cross body horizontally; right arm is uplifted from elbow, brandishing (according to Dalman) a lightning bolt. Head probably bearded and hair straight and stiff behind (but details not clear).<sup>6</sup> In front of and behind the enthroned figure are pedestals (?)<sup>7</sup> formed of

upturned bird's head (?) (each formed by a drilled hole and two converging vertical strokes for beak); the whole ornamented with diagonal cross-hatching.

In the boat, facing left (in the impression) a *male figure seated on a chair*. The chair has a straight back, the upright(s) terminating in a knob; a footstool is implied by the fact that the figure's feet are suspended above the base line of the chair; the side of the chair is cross-hatched but not diagonally. The figure is clothed, at least from waist to mid-thigh (a kilt?); clothing indicated by close vertical lines or (?) fine cross-hatching (not diagonal); lower legs bare.

One arm (and perhaps both) uplifted from elbow. If some object is grasped in the hands(s), its identity is not clear. Head formed by drilled hole and incised strokes to give appearance of long, straight nose and sharply jutting, pointed beard.

In front of and behind the

5. In fact, they more closely resemble animal heads such as those depicted at prow and sternpost of the boats at Tyre shown on the Balawat gates (see Pritchard, *ANEP*, No. 356), or the horse-heads which decorate the sternposts of boats on the relief from Khorsabad illustrated in *ibid.*, No. 107. See also M. E. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* (London: Collins, 1966), vol. I, p. 117, fig. 60. Culican thinks they are duck-heads, cf. *AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 3, p. 33.
6. Culican (*AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 3, p. 32) says that the figure wears "the flat pileus of the type worn in Phoenicia and Palestine during the Persian period." Vincent (*op. cit.*, p. 127) recognized, in place of the bearded head, only "une cavité munie en avant de deux sillons inégaux et pointus", which sounds very much like a general description of the head on the Irbid seal, except that on the latter the intention of the engraver is clear.
7. Dalman (followed, apparently, by Vincent) interprets these as candelabra.

three vertical, slightly converging strokes, topped by two horizontal lines (representing, probably a tripod); above the pedestal a circular object from which seven petal-like fronds (?) radiate.<sup>8</sup>

enthroned figure are *pedestals* (?) formed of two vertical and parallel strokes topped by two horizontal lines (representing, probably, a four-legged stand); above the pedestal a circular object from which nine short strokes radiate, representing rays (?).

The great number of close parallels between the two seals permit us to use both in an attempt to reach a conclusion on the identity of the seated figure represented. Even where the seals differ, an insight into the significance of the scene represented may be given which is not self-evident from either one alone.

It is probable that the difference in the representation of the prow and stern-post finials on the two seals has no great significance. Culican has given sufficient examples of divinities in boats to satisfy him that the basic inspiration is probably the Egyptian solar barque; if so, it is easiest to regard the rather schematized birds (?) as representing the Horus-hawk.<sup>9</sup> However, the parallels we have given in footnote 5 suggest that this feature may be influenced by local, Syro-Palestinian, usage, whatever the original source may be.

It is far more important to attempt to identify the objects which stand before and behind the seated figure. Dalman's proposal that they represented stylized palmette sacred trees has much to support it for similar representations are common.<sup>10</sup> Against this interpretation, however, is the fact that there are two of these objects, one before and one behind the central figure. They must

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8. Dalman (again followed, apparently, by Vincent) interprets these as palm trees, perhaps signifying the tree of life. Dalman, further, considered the seven fronds to represent the seven planets. See further, below.
  9. *AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1968), p. 57, fig. 1 is the depiction of a papyrus boat terminating in a lotus-blossom prow which is surmounted by the Horus hawk wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. It is rather curious that in the representation the boat appears to rest on a diagonally cross-hatched base which may represent water; the slender form of the boat in the other representations given by Culican (*AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 3 (1970), p. 29, fig. 1, b and c; see, also, the ivory of Mallowan, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 543, fig. 468) is remarkable and suggests that our Palestinian seal-cutters have misunderstood the distinction between boat and water and have run the two together.
  10. Cf., e.g., in Mallowan, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 145, fig. 85 (an ivory depicting a pair of kneeling figures on either side of a central sacred palmette with nine petal-like fronds, and a stalk which is so stylized that it could be taken for a pedestal—or even a candelabrum); p. 199, seal No. 24; p. 297, fig. 273.

be subordinate to that figure and not—at least not in the liturgical sense—objects of worship in themselves.

It is probably simplest, therefore, to consider the two objects as relatively minor props of the ritual. Culican's suggestion<sup>12</sup> that the objects on the Dalman seal represent "Pharaonic fans" is a good example of such an interpretation. It does not, however, fit the Irbid depiction, which has radiating strokes ("rays") rather than petal-like plumes. We are almost forced to interpret these objects as burning braziers or cressets, basically ritual apparatus to provide heat and light but—with the addition of incense—also a sweet odour. Two such objects suggest the portable metal incense-stands (tripod or four legged)<sup>13</sup> called hammân. As such they may symbolically identify the seated figure as Ba'al-hammân, "Lord of the Brazier",<sup>14</sup> first documented in the Kilamu inscription of ca. 825 B.C. and later acclaimed as the chief god of Carthage. Certainly the typical Canaanite physiognomy and his kilt (so typical of many Baal figures) would support such an identification. If so, the Irbid seal (and probably the Dalman seal) are important, though unfortunately somewhat enigmatic, pieces of evidence for the cult of this god in Syria-Palestine.

Perhaps, however, the fact that the enthroned figure and the braziers are set in a boat suggests that the figure is a related divinity, better known in Israel, the god Ba'al-shamêm,<sup>15</sup> the

12. *AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 3, p. 33.

13. E.g., Pritchard, *ANEP*, 587, 588, 608, etc. The petal-like "fronds" of the Dalman seal and the strokes of the Irbid seal could thus represent "tongues" (of flame or incense smoke) or "rays" of light. See the discussion of such pairs of incense-burners, including such monumental pairs as the Jachin and Boaz columns in front of Solomon's Temple in W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (2nd ed., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1946), pp. 144 ff., and particularly chapter V, footnotes 58 and 59; also *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London: Athlone, 1968), p. 125 and Culican *AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 80ff.

14. While this has been the usual interpretation of the god's name, Yadin has recently made a new proposal to consider the crescent with disc symbol, which appears on the Zinjirli and other monuments, as representing Ba'al-hammân; if so, Ba'al-hammân must be considered primarily a moon-god; cf. Y. Yadin, "Symbols of Deities at Zinjirli, Carthage and Hazor" in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, edited by James A. Sanders (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 199 ff.

15. Culican is apparently not prepared to choose, if choice be possible, between Ba'al-shamêm and Ba'al-hammân as the god ensconced in a boat; cf. *AJBA*, vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 31 ff. In our seal, there may well be evidence of an overlapping of function and iconography; i.e., if the enthroned figure is the "Lord of Heaven", the flanking braziers may be those which were sometimes hypostatized as a separate deity, "Lord of the Brazier".

"Lord of Heaven", who was the supreme god of Tyre and, as such, that cosmic figure who was the chief opponent of the Hebrew Yahweh during the period of the Israelite monarchy.<sup>16</sup> There must have been, particularly in the Northern Kingdom as a result of the proselytizing efforts of Jezebel and the house of Ahab, a great deal of confusion and syncretism between the two cults. Possibly, as already suggested, the Dalman seal is evidence of this, with its depiction of Ba'al-shamêm on one side and the owner's name on the other, which proclaims the greatness of Yahweh. The Irbid seal, depending on whether it was the seal of an Israelite or a Syrian, may result from the same syncretism.

No attempt has been made in this note to go beyond the interpretations suggested by Mr. Culican and other scholars who have studied the Dalman seal. The purpose has been, rather, to publish and describe another seal which provides new evidence for further discussion; the Irbid seal at least supports strongly the authenticity of the Dalman seal, so long suspect.

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16. See Otto Eissfeldt, *Kleine Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1936), vol. II, pp. 171 ff., and W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, pp. 197 ff.