

# **The Women in the Hebrew Epigraphy of Biblical Times**

by M. HELTZER

*(University of Haifa)*

The problem of the role of the women in Ancient societies got in the recent years the focus of the interests of many scholars. An enormous literature in this field came into being. This is to be said also concerning the Ancient Near East in general and Old Testament studies in particular. Most works are published in the Sheffield magazine *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* and in the scholarly series connected with this journal. Most of these works are influenced by feministic ideology, and time has to pass when the studies in this field shall return to strictly scientific investigations.

But from the other side, there are scholarly works trying to define the real position of the women in the Ancient Near East. Among them we have first of all to notice the recent article of M. STOL <sup>(1)</sup> devoted to the position of the woman in Mesopotamia,

---

1) M. STOL, *Woman in Mesopotamia*, JESHO, 38, 1995, pp. 123-144. The bibliography of this article consists of a selection of the most important

the paper of R. HAASE about the status of women in Hittite society (2), etc. Concerning the West-Semitic epigraphic evidence on the woman - the first study, generalizing it, belongs to M.G. AMADASI-GUZZO, analyzing all data about the woman and her position, according to the Punic inscriptions from Carthage (3). Hebrew (and Ammonite) epigraphy is more limited than in Carthage. Despite it, we will try to uncover all aspects concerning women in Ancient Israel in epigraphic sources. We must state at the beginning that the greatest bulk of information comes from seals.

1. It is a seal, dated on paleographic grounds by the IX-VIII cent. BCE. It bears only one name

*Yzbl* (4)

It is the seal of the very influential wife of *Aḥab*, king of Israel of the middle of the IX century BCE, murdered at the time of the coup of Yehu in the forties of the IX cent. BCE? First of

works in the field of the social position of the woman in ancient Western Asia, including the fundamental investigations of M. ROTH.

2) R. HAASE, *Zur Stellung der Frau im Spiegel der hethitischen Rechtssammlung*, AOF, 22, 1995, pp. 277-281.

3) M. G. AMADESI GUZZO, *Dédicaces de femmes à Carthage*, *Studia Phoenicia VI, Carthage*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 26, Leuven, 1988, pp. 143-149.

4) Here and further on we are giving the *editio princeps* but in cases where there exists a *corpus* of these seals we make it according to it. N. AVIGAD, *The Seal of Jezebel*, IEB, 14, pp. 274-276; HD No. 31.

all, her name in the biblical text is spelled as 'yzbl, but in the corresponding passages (I Reg. 16 ff) of the Book of Kings of the Septuagint her name is spelled Ιεζεβελ. So, this spelling is corresponding to the spelling on the Phoenician seal. In no place of the OT Jezebel is named by the bible "queen". She appears only as the wife of the king and the daughter of *Ethba'al* (gr. Itobalos) the king of Sidon (and Tyre). Possibly that this clear the question that she is named without a title.

But, after she was killed by the officers of Yehū. The usurper said about Jezebel (II Reg. 9, 35) "See now to this cursed woman *and bury her* for she is a king's daughter" (5) So, she is named here only as a "king's daughter".

Therefore it is possible, although very dubious, and by no means sure that this seal can be by chance the original seal of Jezebel.

And this bring us to the question of the king's daughter.

2. Till now at our disposal is only one such seal of "belonging to *Ma'adanā* the king's daughter" (*lm'dnh bt hmlk*) (6). The seal belongs paleographically to the VII cent. BCE. Today we have no doubt that it is a genuine piece, and the skepticism expressed by some scholars might be rejected (7).

---

5) *w<sup>e</sup>qibrūhā kī bat-melek hī.*

6) N. AVIGAD, *The King's Daughter and the Lyre*, IEJ, 28, 146-151.

7) The doubts in B. SASS, *The pre-exilic Hebrew Seals in Sass-Uehlinger*, p. 242. The question is to be cleared that the same lyre depicted on the *m'dnh*

We know from the OT (II Reg. 11,2) about “Yehōšebā‘, the king’s daughter”, who played a certain political role, as also daughters of King Solomon, who were the wives of his district governors (I Reg 4, 11 and 15). We do not really know, whose, of the Judean kings, daughter was Ma‘adanā, or was she a real daughter of the king, or a princess, belonging to the ruling Davidic dynasty. By all means, we can state, that having her seal, she should seal documents and act individually, and possibly independently in legal acts and cases.

But if we compare the single known till today seal of “M’dnh, the king’s daughter”, with at least 17 seals of “the king’s son” (*bn hmlk*) who could also appear as only being members of the royal family, we can say that the appearance of a princess in public life was a rare feature (8), but it could happen.

3. We have now to analyze the appearance of untitled women on seals.

3.1 First of all seals, where only the feminine name appears without any other indications

- seal, appears on another in DHL, A9 of the VII cent. BCE bearing the inscription *ln'mh/bt š'l* (cf. below).

8) A list of the “king’s sons” in G. BARKAI, *A Bulla of Ishmael, the King’s Son*, BASOR, 290/291, pp. 109-114; a presently complete list in Y. AVISHUR, M. HELTZER, *Studies on the Royal Administration in Israel at the Time of the I Temple in the Light of Epigraphic Sources*, Jerusalem, 1996 (Hebrew).

1) *lḥnh* "Belonging to Ḥannā, possibly from Lachish, dated by around 700-600 BCE (9). (We do not take into account the deals where the same name is written as *ḥn'*). It could be a hyporosticon of a male name).

2) *ls'dh* "Belonging to Sa'adā" (10).

A seal from the VII cent. BCE from Judah. It is noteworthy to say, that in the upper register of the seal appears the royal symbol and it is possible that this woman had an official position (11).

3) *l'sl'h* "Belonged to Sileāh".

A seal of the VII cent. BCE from Judah (12). So, these women could act, at least in some cases, independently.

3.2 The Judean seals, where after the name of the women followed her father's name.

1) *l'bgyl b/t 'lḥnn* "Belonging to Abigayil, daughter of Elḥanān".

Paleographically dated by the II half of the VII beginning of the VI cent. BCE (13).

9) J.R. BARLETT, *The Seal of ḥnh from the Neighborhood of Tell el-Duweir*, PEQ, 108, 1976, pp. 59-61.

10) DHL, A16; N. AVIGAD, *Two Seals of Women and Other Hebrew Seals*, EI, 20, 1989, p. 91, No. 2.

11) AVISHUR, HELTZER, *Studies on Royal Administration*, Ch. 1, pp. (in print).

12) DHL, A12.

13) N. AVIGAD, *A Group of Hebrew Seals from the Hecht Collection*, in *Festschrift R. R. Hecht*, Jerusalem 1979 (1989), No. 8.

2) *lhmy'h/bt mnḥm* "Belonging to Ḥami'ohel, daughter of Menaḥem.

Excavated in Jerusalem at a tomb of the VII cent. BCE (14).

3) *lhmy'dn/bt 'ḥmlk* "Belonging to Ḥami'adan, daughter of Aḥimelek"

Possibly from the district of Hebron, paleographically it can be dated by the VII cent. BCE (15).

4) *lyhw'dn/bt 'ryhw* "Belonging to Yehō'adan, daughter of Ūriyāhū"

The seal belongs also to the VII cent. BCE (16).

5) *ln'hbt b/t dmlyhw* "Belonging to Ne'ehebet, daughter of Domleyāhū"

The seal belongs to the VII cent. BCE (17).

6) *l'md/yhw/bt/'z/rhyw* "Belonging to 'Amūdīyāhū (18) daughter of 'Azaryāhū"

14) D. DAVIS, A. KLONER, *A Burial Cave of the Late Israelite Period on the Slopes of Mount Zion*, "Qadmoniyot", 11, pp. 16-19 (Hebrew); HD No. 34.

15) N. AVIGAD, *New Names on Hebrew Seals*, EI, 12, 1975, No. 1; HD, No. 33.

16) N. AVIGAD, *The Contribution of Hebrew Seals to an Understanding of Israelite Religion and Society*, in P.D. MILLER, P.D. HAYRAN, D.S. McBRIDE, eds., *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of F.M. Cross*, Philadelphia, 1987, pp. 195-208, fig. 13.

17) IAP, Sigilli, No. 60, M. HELTZER, M. OHANA, *The Extra Biblical Tradition of Hebrew Personal Names*, Haifa, 1978, pp. 57-58. (Hebrew)

18) On the reading of 'Amūdīyāhū, lit. "My pillar is Yāhū", cf. HELTZER - OHANA, pp. 61-62, with further references. R. DEUTSCH, M. HELTZER, *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions*, Yaffa 1994, No. 26, pp. 58-59.

Also from the VII cent. BCE (19).

7) *l'mdyhw/bt šbnyhw* "Belonging to 'Amūdīyāhū, daughter of Šebanyāhū"

VII cent. BCE (20).

8) *l'mnwyhw/bt gdl* "Belonging to 'immanūyāhū, daughter of Giddel"

The seal belongs to the same period (21).

9) *lyhwyšm'/bt šw ššršr* "Belonging to Yehōyišm' a daughter of Šāwaššar'ušur"

The seal belongs to the beginning of the Persian period (VI cent. BCE) and its owner was one of the returnees to Judah born in Babylonia, for her father's name is Babylonian (22).

10) *l'md bt/yqmyhw* "Belonging to 'Amūd, daughter of Yeḡamyāhū"

VII cent. BCE (23).

11) *lyfh b/t. šm'/yhw* "Belonging to Yafā, daughter of šm'/yāhū"

---

19) A. LEMAIRE, *Nouveaux sceaux nord-ouest Sémitiques*, "Syria", 63, 1986, pp. 305-325, No. 3.

20) IAP, p. 218, No. 61.

21) AVIGAD, *Two Seals of Women and Other Hebrew Seals*, EI, 20, 1989, pp. 90-96, No. 1 (Hebrew).

22) N. AVIGAD, *Seals of Exiles*, IEJ, 15, 1965, pp. 223-230; P. BORDREUIL, *Catalogue des sceaux ouest-sémitiques inscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale, du Musée du Louvre et du Musée biblique de Bible et Terre Sainte*, Paris, 1986, No. 54.

23) DEUTSCH - HELTZER, 1994, pp. 58-59, No. 26.

VII cent. BCE. (24)

12) *ln'mh/bt š'l* "Belonging to Na'ama, daughter of Šu'al"  
(25)

The seal can also be dated by the VII cent. BCE.

3.2.1 A stamped jar handle with the seal impression: *lḥnh b/t 'zryh* "Belonging to Ḥannā, daughter of 'Azaryā" (26)

This handle was found at the excavations near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It has nothing in common with the stamped jar-handles of officials which accompanied the *lmlk* stamps of the end of the VIII cent. BCE (27).

The date: VII cent. BCE.

And we receive from here also clear evidence that this woman had her own seal. This gives clear evidence that she could act as an independent person.

3.2.2 Till now, only one bulla belonging to a woman, or made from a woman's seal is known. It belongs also the end of the VII - beginning of the VI cent. BCE.

24) R. DEUTSCH, M. HELTZER, *New Epigraphic Evidence from the Biblical period*, Tel Aviv - Yaffo, 1995, No. 64 (9).

25) DHL, A9 and p. 5 above left. The carved *lyra* comes from the same workshop from where the seal of *lm'dnh/bt hmlk* originates, only the artistic level of it is much lower. Concerning the reading *Šu'al* cf. DEUTSCH - HELTZER, *Forty New...*, No. 5 (25), pp. 56-58.

26) N. AVIGAD, *A Note on an Impression from a Woman's Seal*, IEJ, 37, 1987, pp. 18-19.

27) D. USSISHKIN, *The Judean Storage Jars and "Private" Seal Impressions*, BASOR, 233, 1976, pp. 1-14; D. USSISHKIN, *The Destruction of Lachish by Sennacherib and the Dating of the Royal Judean Storage Jars*, "Tel Aviv", 4, 1977, pp. 28-60.

*l'mdy[b]/t pltyh[w]* "Belonging to 'Amdy, daughter of *Paṭiyāh[ū]*" (28).

3.3 We have also a number of Ammonite seals where the names of the woman appear together with the name of their father.

1) *l'byhy/bt/ynḥm* "Belonging to 'Abiḥay, daughter of Yenahem"

Seventh cent. BCE (29).

2) *l'hyhy/bt'zy'* "Belonging to 'Aḥiḥay, daughter of 'Uzzīyā'"

About 600 BCE (30).

3) *l'b'dn bt sdd* (or *srr*) "Belonging to Abi'adan, daughter of Sdd/Srr"

Beginning of the VI cent. BCE (31).

4) *l'ldš'* (or *'lrš'*)/*bt šlmt* "Belonging to 'ldš' (or 'lrš') daughter of Šalmat"

Seal unearthed in Byblos, but iconographically typical Ammonite. About 600 BCE (32).

28) DHL, A34.

29) IAP, A34, Sigilli, No. 103; AUFRECHT, No. 23.

30) N. AVIGAD, *Some Decorated West-Semitic Seals*, IEJ, 35, 1985, pp. 3-4; AUFRECHT, No. 26.

31) A. LEMAIRE, *Cinq nouveaux sceaux inscrits ouest-Sémitiques*, SEL, 7, pp. 97-109, No. 5.

32) N. DUNAND, *Fouilles de Byblos*, I, Paris 1937 (Plates) 1939 (First), p. 48, No. 1291; F. VATTIONI, *I sigilli fenici*, AION, 41, 1981, 177-193, No. 59.

5) *l' lšgb/bt 'lšm'* "Belonging to Elšagab, daughter of Elišama"

Late VII cent. BCE (33).

6) *lḥmyws'/bt smṭ* "Belonging to Ḥamyōsa', daughter of Smṭ"

From Tell el Mazar excavations. VIII cent. BCE. The reading is doubtful (34), but the word *bt* "daughter" is clear.

7) *l'l' b/t 'mr* "Belonging to 'Alā, daughter of Amar/Immer"  
VIII-VII cent. BCE (35).

8) *l'bdds'/bt b'lnn* "Belonging to 'Abddaša', daughter of Ba'alnatan"

VII cent. BCE. Not only the script is Ammonite, but also the depiction of the running bull is characteristic to Ammonite seals (36).

3.4 It seems also that we have one Moabite seal, according to the written principles, given above: *lbqšt bt/'bdyrḥ* "Belonging to Baqqašat, daughter of 'Abdiyerah"

---

33) IAP, Sigilli, No. 59; AUFRECHT, No. 9.

34) K. IASSINE, P. BORDREUIL, *Deux cachets ouest-sémitiques inscrits découverts à Tell Mazar*, *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, I, Amman, 1982, pp. 192-194; AUFRECHT, No. 117.

35) A. LEMAIRE, *Nouveaux sceaux nord-ouest sémitiques*, "Semitica", 33, 1983, pp. 21-22, No. 7; AUFRECHT, No. 121.

36) DEUTSCH - HELTZER, *New Epigraphic Evidence...* No. 69 (14).

It belongs to the VII cent. BCE. The “lunar” theophoric name and iconography forces us to agree with F. ISRAEL and P. BORDREUIL, that we have here a Moabite seal <sup>(37)</sup>.

3.5 In our preliminary conclusions we have to point out that these women having a personal seal, could seal documents and participate in legal actions. Very important is the fact that they appear there as daughters of their fathers. We do not know were these women unmarried, married, divorced or widows. By all means it is clear that their sealing by their seal had some legal value. The same is to be said about women whose name only without any patronymics appear on the seal.

Concerning the seal-impression on the jar handle, it seems that Ḥannā, daughter of ‘Azaryā, used her seal for sealing her storage capacities (possibly of oil or wine), before the vessel was put in the ceramic workshop to the kiln for firing. Possibly she was a rich woman, having her property by her own (?)

4. Next we have to take the seals where we find a) the name of the woman, b) the statement that she was “the wife” (‘*st*) and c) the name of her husband.

4.1 We begin with the Judean seals.

1) *l’bgyl’št’šyh w* “Belonging to Abigayil, wife of ‘Aśayāhū”

---

37) F. ISRAEL, *Note di onomastica semitica 6: l’apporto della glittica all’onomastica aramaica*, VO, 8, pop. 227-228; P. BORDREUIL, SDB, 66, 1992, p. 180 middle/bottom.

The seal has to be dated by the VII cent. BCE (38).

2) *l'dt' 'št pšhr* "Belonging to 'Adata', the wife of Pašhur" VII or beginning of the VI cent. BCE (39).

#### 4.2 Ammonite seals

1) *lmnhmt' 'št/p/gdmlk* "Belonging to Menaḥemet wife of Gadmelek (or Padamelek)"

About 600 BCE. Some authors attribute this seal to the Moabites, but the p.n. Mnḥm, Ynḥm etc. are more frequent in Ammonite (40).

2) *l'htmlk 'št yš'* "Belonging to 'Aḥātmelek, wife of Yaš' "

The date seems to be the VII cent. BCE. The appearance of the name *Yš'* shows that the seal can not be Phoenician or Aramaic and we must consider the seal as an Ammonite one (41).

38) IAP, Sigilli, No. 62.

39) EEA, Sigilli, No. 33; HD No. 32. The name '*dt*' is of Phoenician origin, and '*dt*' means "lady", but *Pašhur* despite the Egyptian origin of the word was a common name in priestly families according to the OT; cf. Sh. AḤITUB, *Pašhur*, IEJ, 20, 1976, pp. 95-96. Cf. 1) AHARONI, *The Lachish Inscriptions*, Jerusalem, 1978, No. 54; 2) *lpšhur* 'Belonging to Pašhur' - N. AVIGAD, EI, 20, 1989, No. 14 (Hebrew), 3) *lpšhur bn/'dyhw* "Belonging to Pašhur, Son of 'Adayāhū" - EEA, Sigilli, No. 28; 4) *lpšhur bn/'h'mh* "Belonging to P, son of Aḥ'imo' " - on a bulla from ca. 600 BCE from Jerusalem; 5) *lpšhur bn/mnḥm* "Belonging to P., son of Menachem" - on a bulla from Jerusalem from ca. 600 BC 9 Nos. 151 and 152. N. AVIGAD, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah*, Jerusalem 1986. At least Nos. 2-5 could be the husbands of 'Adata't, but it is by no means sure.

40) IAP, Sigilli, No. 64; Cf. B. TIMM, *Moab zwischen den Mächten, Studien zu historischen Denkmälern und Texten*, Wiesbaden, 1989, No. 39, attributes the seal to the Moabites. 40. IAP, Sigilli, No. 63; BORDREUIL, SDB, 66, 1992, pp. 164-165, fig. 47 treats it as a Phoenician seal.

41) IAP, p. 219, No 63, Tav. XX, 32.

4.3 So we see that these women, Judean and Ammonite, appear as the wives of their husbands. It is not definitely clear - did they act in the common family interests or they could do it only with their dowry. It is clear that they possessing the seal did not belong to the lower classes of the population. By all means we can suppose that these women had a living husband and acted sometimes legally together with him.

5. And now we have to turn to the *'mh* (*st. cstr. 'mt*). In Biblical hebrew this word has the meaning (*'ammā*) "slave maid" "maid servant". But how to understand this term, if it is a woman, who has her own seal?

5.1 From the preexilic time we know only one Hebrew seal where the reading is not definitively clear: *ḥnnyhw/'mt* *'Ḥananyāhū/ammāt(?)* (42).

On the top register of the seal we see the winged royal emblem (cf. above the seal of *s'dh*). The second line bears the name of *Ḥananyāhū* and the third *'mt*. This word can be also a hypocoristic name known in biblical Hebrew as *'Amittay* (II Reg. 14, 25; Jon 1,1). But there are no other names derived from the root *'mt*. Otherwise it can be that the seal cutter confused and by mistake wrote the first word as the second and vice versa. If to accept such view we can understand the inscription as "The

---

42) P.J. KING, *American Archaeology in the Mideast*, Philadelphia, 1983, pp. 196-197.

'*mmah* of ḥananyāhū". But we cannot be sure here, although such proposal is very tempting.

## 5.2 Ammonite seal inscriptions

1) *l'lyh 'mt ḥnn'l* "Belonging to 'Alyā the 'ammā of Ḥanan'el" (43)

The seal belongs to the late VII cent. BCE.

2) *l'nmwt 'mt d/rblbs* (44) - "Belonging to 'aynmaut, the ammā of D/Rblbs' "

Also from the late seventh cent. BCE. (45). Who was this '*mh*? What was her position in the society? The clearing of the question forces us to turn to two additional inscriptions.

5.3.1 This is a burial inscription from Šiloah (*Silwān*) in Jerusalem from the 1st half or middle of the VII cent. BCE. (46).

The text:

1) *z't[qbrt..]yhw 'šr 'l hbyt 'yn [p]h ksp wzhb*

2) *[hy] 'm ['smtw] w'smt 'mth...y* (47)

43) N. AVIGAD, *A Seal of a Slave Wife ('Amah)*, PEQ, 78, pp. 125-231; EEA. Sigilli, No. 39; HD, No. 28; AUFRECHT, No. 36.

44) We do not enter the question of the reading of *d/r*.

45) HD, No. 29; AUFRECHT, No. 44.

46) An enormous literature exists about this inscription. The most recent selection and commentaries with use of all the most recent studies: J. RENZ, W. RÖLLIG, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*, Bd. I, J. RENZ, *Die althebräischen Inschriften*, Darmstadt, 1995, pp. 264-265.

47) The curses towards the persons, who open the grave, follow.

1) "This is [the grave of...] *yāhū*, the mayordomo. [He]re is no silver and gold. 2) [but] only [his bones] and the bones of his '*mh*..."

So we see here the burial inscription of the mayor-domo ('*šr l hbyt*) one of the highest dignitaries of pre-exilic Judah (48). And the fact that he took to his grave his '*mh*, who possibly died after him, and the fact that he did not hide this fact but made it public in his inscription, shows us that we do not deal here with a slave maid.

5.3.2 At our disposal is a scaraboid seal of black stone coming from a find of a hoard of bullae and seals from the Persian period (49). No. 14 of this collection is the seal: *lšlmyt' mt 'ln/tn ph[w']* "Belonging to Šelomīt, '*mt* of Elnatan the gove[rmor]" (50). So we see that it is the seal of the '*mt* of the governor of Judah, of the late VI cent. BCE (51). The publisher of the seal, Prof. N. AVIGAD brings a lot of examples according to which '*mt* appears in the OT as a "second wife" (Gen. 16, 3;

---

48) Concerning this title, I Reg., 4, 6; 16,9; 18, 3, 16; II Chr. 26, 21; Jes. 36, 3, 22; 27, 2; II Reg. 10, 5; 15, 5 18, 18; 37; 19, 2; Jes. 22, 15 - T. METTINGER, *Solomons State Officials*, Lund 1971, pp. 78-110; U. RÜTERSWORDEN, *Die Beamten der israelitischen Königszeit*, Stuttgart, 1985, pp. 77-85. A summary of all seals of these dignitaries, Y. AVISHUR, M. HELTZER, *Studies* (in print, Hebrew).

49) N. AVIGAD, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive*, "Qedem", 4, Jerusalem 1976.

50) N. AVIGAD, *Bullae and Seals...* p. 11, fig. 14, Pl. 15; cf. also No. 5 of the same collection - a bulla: *l'ln/tn/phw'* "Belonging to Elhatan, the governor". This puts the reconstruction of the seal inscription of Šelomiit on an absolutely firm ground.

51) AVIGAD, *Bullae*, p. 35.

21,10) (52). A wife, having the title *amtū* is also known by her influence at the Assyrian court. Additionally to the data brought by AVIGAD we can put our attention on the text from Mari from the XVIII cent. BCE - ARMT, IX, 291. It consists of 14 columns listing personal names of women of various settlements of the kingdom of Mari. And after the name of each woman appears the designation of her together with the name of the man to whom she belongs (Exceptions are only, when the woman is designated as *almattum* "widow"). The woman are designated in the "total" of each city as *sinniṣatMEŠ* "women" (plur.). And their definition is always divided to *amtū*, *qašṣatu* (= *qadiṣatu* - priestess, hierodule) and *almatu*. So it is clear that also these women were not slave maids, for they passed into the status of *almatu* from the status of *amtū* after the death of the man (husband). But no less important for us is here the biblical data.

As E. M. MEYERS has shown (53), that if we accept, as also other scholars do, the date, that Elnatan succeeded Zerubabel in the late VI cent. as *pḥw* "governor" of Judah, so Šelomīṭ had an official status at the administration, having her seal. In our opinion the most important thing stated by MEYERS (54) is the list of the descendants of the governor of Judah - Zerubabel. I Chr. 3, 19 "And the son of Zerubabel: Mešullam and Ḥananyā and

---

52) IDEM, 12-13.

53) E.M. MEYERS, *The Shelomith Seal and the Judean Restoration, Some Additional Considerations*, EI, 18, 1985, pp. \*33-\*38.

54) MEYERS, p. 34.

Šelomīt, their sister" (55). And as MEYERS points out, the mention of daughters of the Davidic dynasty in genealogical lists is a very rare thing. So Šelomīt is mentioned with a certain purpose - to show that she played a certain political role and that the governor Elnatan was a son-in-law of Zerubabel (56).

5.4. So we see that the 'mt, who had their seals were not slave maids but they were women, having a relatively high social position at the pre-exilic times (including at least early post-exilic). But in our further description we will take into account only the pre-exilic appearances of the 'mt on seals.

6. Quite today we can say that at our disposal are a number of documents from Israel and Juda, where various payments or deliveries are registered. The bulk of these documents belong to the Samaria ostraca of the VIII cent. BCE and to the Arad ostraca from the VIII-VII centuries BCE (57). Among people listed in these payment or delivery lists we find only male persons.

6.1 The first exception comes from an ostrakon, apparently from Jerusalem from the late pre-exilic period (58). According to

---

55) ūben-Zerubbābel M<sup>c</sup>šullām wāHananyā ūŠelomit 'aḥōtām.

56) Cf. also H.G.M. WILLIAMSON, *The Governors of Judah under the Persians*, "Tyndale Bulletin", 39, 1988, pp. 70-76, with the previous literature given.

57) The Samaria ostraca cf. IAP... Y. AHARONI, *The Arad Inscriptions*, Jerusalem, 1978. Here we have no need to mention the other delivery or pay documents, scattered all over ancient Palestine.

58) DEUTSCH - HELTZER, *New Epigraphic Evidence*, Ostrakon, No. 2.

this text, which has 6 lines and is absolutely legible, six persons receive certain products. All they are listed according to their name and name of the father. They all receive certain amounts (from 1 to 3) designated with the letters *n(nūn)* and *š(šadi)*. It seems that we have here the abbreviations, designating the product (59). It seems also that the distribution was made by official (government) authorities.

But the fully new feature here we find in line 6. There appears: *mšlmt bt 'lkn nIIIšII* "Mešullemet, daughter of Elken - n III šII". So, it is the first known text, where a woman appears as the recipient from government or public authorities.

7. And now we approach the most important question. What was the role of woman in public appearances and public life in the preexilic Juda (as also in Ammon)? The scarcity of the Moabite material does not give possibilities for conclusions.

For this purpose we have to look what is the percentage or rate of the female appearances in the written epigraphic documents and particularly on the seal-inscriptions.

We have to take into account the following numbers in ancient Judah.

1 daughter of the king

3 women, listed only by their personal name

---

59) The discussion in the book.

11 women named by their name and the name of their father  
(<sup>60</sup>)

1 women's stamp on a jar handle (name and name of the father)

1 bulla of a woman (name and name of the father)

2 women designated as "wife" of their husband

1 woman designated as an '*mh* (*hnnyhwh/'mh*)? (<sup>61</sup>)

Total 20 women.

Concerning the Ammonite seals

8 women named by their name and name of their fathers

2 women designated as "wife" of their husband

2 women designated as an '*mh*

Total 12 women (<sup>62</sup>).

But at the moment it is difficult even to make an exact reckoning of the number of the seals, stamps and bullae belonging to male persons.

So, to the beginning of 1993 approximately 350 inscribed seals of male persons were published (<sup>63</sup>). We have to add to

---

60) We exclude the seal of *Yhwyšm'/bt šwš/šr'šr* for it comes from the post-exilic time.

61) We exclude the *lšlmyt 'mt 'ntn ph[w']*, as also the '*mh* from the Judean burial inscription and *Mšlmtbt 'lkn* appearing on the ostrakon.

62) For we have only one possible Moabite seal of a woman, we will give up the calculations of rates.

63) SASS in SASS - UEHLINGER, pp. 197-198.

them 26 seals of the DHL preliminary publication (A1-A8; A10-A11; A13-A15; A17-A27; A29-A30) (64).

The publication of DEUTSCH - HELTZER, have also 5 new seals of men (65). And a number of scattered publications of single seals and the most recent publication of DEUTSCH - HELTZER (1995) gives us the opportunity to estimate the general number of the Hebrew males seals as 400.

It has to be added that there are seal stamps on jar handles from ca. 700 BCE from Juda and the number of persons, their owners, who were royal officials is 40 (66).

There is a considerable number of bullae. And we must mention first of all, the collections. These are the 7 bullae from Lachish from about 600 BCE (67). The excavations of the City of David gave after the joining of fragments 43 bullae (68).

Legible bullae published by AVIGAD from a hoard are made from 172 seals and they belong to the same period (69). The DHL

64) The other numbers belong to women or are anepigraphic.

65) Pp. 49-61.

66) AVISHUR, HELTZER (in print) Ch. 1; DEUTSCH - HELTZER, *New Epigraphic Evidence...*, pp. 45-48.

67) Y. AHARONI, *Lachish V: Investigations at Lachish - The Sanctuary and the Residency*, Tel Aviv, 1975, p. 21.

68) Y. SHILOH, *A Group of Hebrew Bullae from the City of David*, IEJ, 36, 1986, pp. 16-38; Y. SHOHAM, *A Group of Hebrew Bullae from Yigal Shiloh's Excavations in the City of David*, in H. GEVA (ed.), *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, Jerusalem, 1994, pp. 55-61.

69) N. AVIGAD, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah*, Jerusalem, 1986.

edition has a number of bullae made from the seals of the AVIGAD bullae, but 9 male items are there completely new <sup>(70)</sup>. The DEUTSCH - HELTZER publication (1994) gives 9 new bullae <sup>(71)</sup>. Some additional bullae are in the state of publication by DEUTSCH and HELTZER and there are also some other bullae which have to be published, as also some scattered single bullae. So we can speak without any exaggeration about 250 bullae. The names of their owners are unknown from the seals. We do not count here illegible bullae.

Speaking about Ammonite seals, we must point out that till now no bullae, or sealed jar-handles are known. From the *Corpus of Aufrecht* with the amendments of HÜBNER <sup>(72)</sup> and some other recent scattered editions <sup>(73)</sup> we can reckon about 150-152 Ammonite seals and among them 140 male ones.

After these calculations we can reach the following conclusions:

---

70) A31-A33; A35-A40; A42.

71) Pp. 38-47.

72) U. HÜBNER, *Die Ammoniter. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte, Kultur und Religion eines transjordanischen Volkes im I. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Wiesbaden, 1992.

73) W.E. AUFRECHT, *Three Inscribed Seals*, EI, 23, 1992, pp. 1-3. K.G. HERR, L.T. GERATY, *The Joint Madaba Plains Project, A Preliminary Report*, AUSS, 31, 1993, pp. 221 and 238; L. HERR, *Epigraphic Finds from Tell El-Umeiri during the 1989 Season*, AUSS, 30, 1992, pp. 187-200.

Taking the Hebrew seals of men, sealings and bullae as 690 equal 100% which makes 6,9 as 1%, we can get the conclusion that the rate of the female inscribed seals (2) was a little less than 3% of the male ones. If we do not reckon here the bullae (250 male and 1 female) as also the sealings on the jar handles we receive the rate of 19:400, i.e. the percentage of women was a little less than 5%.

But we have to take into account another important thing. Our seals of women are Judean and we date them, as also the vast majority of the male jar handle stamps and bullae, not earlier than the second half of the VIII cent. BCE. At the same time a number of seals come from the northern kingdom - from Israel, although their number is not very big. Their number did not exceed 30 (74).

This does not change the general result of all epigraphic sources (seals, handle-stamps, bullae) of the 3% rate of the female seals to the male ones, but if we take only the seals we have 19:370 and it gives us a little more than 5%.

The Ammonite female seal rate to the male ones is 12:140 ~ 8.5% much higher than in Judah. Is it accidental or was the participation of the woman there in public life broader, we do not know. But we have to remember that no bullae from Ammon are known.

---

74) The scarce material did not allow till now exhaustive studies about the northern seals. Cf. G. GARBINI, *I sigilli del regno di Israele*, Vol. 21, 1982, pp. 163-176; A. LEMAIRE, *Cinq nouveaux sceaux inscrits ouest-sémitiques*, SEL, 7, 1990, pp. 97-101.

Naturally that all data given here is preliminary. The forthcoming publications can change in a certain measure the picture given here.

But by all means we see that the percentage of women, who participated in public or business life was in pre-exilic Juda a very low one. And we also have to take into account that the seals did not belong to persons from the lower classes of the society.

Therefore, whatever smaller changes in the rates connected with further publications may happen, the general picture is that the participation of women in the social and economic life was very limited and did not exceed in Juda by the most optimal calculations 5% of the male participation. Taking into account that we deal with a patriarchal society, it is a normal feature for that time.

# ABBREVIATIONS

AION	<i>Annali. Istituto Orientale, Napoli</i>
AOI	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
ARMT, IX	<i>Archives royales de Mari, Textes administratifs de la salle 5 du Palais, par M. BIROT, Paris, 1960.</i>
AUFRECHT	W.E. AUFRECHT, <i>A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions</i> , Lewiston / Queenston / Lampeter 1989
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
DHL	<i>Das Heilige Land. Antike Münzen und Siegel aus einen Jahrtausend jüdischer Geschichte</i> , Catalog der Sonderausstellung, München, 1993.
EEA	S. MOSCATI, <i>Epigrafia ebraica antica</i> , Roma, 1951.
EI	<i>Eretz Israel</i>
HD	R. HESTRIN, M. DAYAGI-MENDELS, <i>Inscribed Seals. First Temple Period - Hebrew, Ammonite, Moabite, Phoenician and Aramaic</i> , Jerusalem, 1979.

- IAP D. DIRINGER, *Le iscrizioni antico-ebraici palestinesi*, Firenze, 1934.
- IEJ *Israel Exploration Journal*
- JESHO *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient*
- OA *Oriens Antiquus*
- PEQ *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
- SASS-UEHLINGER B. SASS, Ch. UEHLINGER, *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, Freiburg/Göttingen, 1993.
- SDB *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*
- SEL *Studi epigrafici e linguistici*
- VO *Vicino Oriente*