

## A YAHVEH PICTURE AND WHAT IT TEACHES.

BY THE EDITOR.

A PICTURE of Yahveh made by an artist of ancient Israel would seem an impossibility when we bear in mind the sweeping prohibition<sup>1</sup> which reads thus:

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

And yet the excavator's spade has discovered a seal which, according to most orthodox interpreters, bears an unequivocal picture



SEAL OF GEDAL-YAHU.

After Dalman, *Palästinajahr buch*, II, Plate I. (Considerably enlarged.)

of Yahveh, the god of ancient Israel. We here reproduce this significant little monument and will briefly consider the lesson which it teaches. Its discovery is a justification of the main results of Biblical research and incidentally throws much light on Hebrew art and on the shortcomings of artistic taste in ancient Israel.

<sup>1</sup>The very manufacture of images was branded as a crime and severely punished. See Deut. iv. 16-18; xxvii. 15; Lev. xxvi. 1; Jer. x. 14; li. 17; Is. xlv. 16.

Biblical research has discovered the key to a great many problems of the Old Testament through the discovery of the character of Deuteronomy which claims to be the law of Moses, but bears all the traces of a later date. About a century ago Professor De Wette published a dissertation on the subject proving that Deuteronomy is the book found in the temple in 621 B. C., on account of which the temple was cleaned of pagan paraphernalia and through which a rigorous monotheistic reform was introduced which became the basis of the Exilic and post-Exilic Judaism.

It is very strange that a number of religious institutions most vigorously condemned in Deuteronomy, such as the use of house gods or teraphim, the ephod used for divination in connection with the Urim and Thummim,<sup>2</sup> images and emblems of God in the shape of a bull, etc., and also the worship on high places, are quite commonly mentioned in the historical books without a thought of being objectionable. Only now and then when the Israelites disregarded the injunctions of Deuteronomy, has a passage been inserted by a post-Exilic redactor declaring that at that time Israel had again fallen away from the ways of the Lord. An instance of this kind is Gideon's manufacture of an ephod, as told in Judges viii. 22-27. The latter part of verse 27 is the redactor's comment which interrupts the context and is unquestionably a later insertion.

Worship on the high places was common in the days of the patriarchs, and it was the only form of worship because the temple of Jerusalem had not yet been built. The temple on the other hand was originally only one high place among others. It was the high place of Mount Moriah, and when Solomon built his palace at Jerusalem it became a kind of court chapel. However, the temple reform made the temple of Jerusalem the only legitimate place of sacrifice, and the priests of Jerusalem looked with scorn upon any other form of worship on the high places in the country. The institution of the monopoly of the temple worship at Jerusalem and many of the details of the priestly code are therefore of a comparatively late origin.

According to the report in the Second Book of Kings xxii and xxiii the temple reform was introduced under the reign of Josiah, who at that time was a mere child and a willing tool in the hands of the Jerusalemite priesthood. The kingdom did not last long under the rule of priestly advisers. The poor young sovereign fell in the battle of Megiddo in 609, as the Bible says, in punishment of the sins of his fathers, while he himself was proclaimed by the

<sup>2</sup> See the author's article "The Oracle of Yahveh," *Monist*, XVII, 365.

priestly writer as the best king that ever ruled since the days of David. The kingdom of Judea was destroyed in 607, and the aristocracy as well as all educated classes of the country were transferred to Babylonia. Here they developed that form of faith, based on the priestly code of Deuteronomy, which bears the name of Judaism and which was decidedly different from the old Israelitish religion. It was a new development in which a rigorous monotheism was established, the center and indeed the sole place of worship of which was located in Jerusalem.

De Wette's ingenious theory has been accepted by Old Testament scholars, because it explains many apparent contradictions which we meet with in the several books of the Old Testament. All critical research is based upon it and we must add that its results have been fully verified by incidental discoveries. For instance, we know that when the Jews established their hierarchy at Jerusalem under the protection of Cyrus, they had some trouble in carrying out their nationalistic institutions. We must remember that among the rules most severely insisted upon was an injunction against intermarriage with Gentiles, and both Ezra and Nehemiah met with great resistance in enforcing this rule which in ancient Israel had never been carried out, or was most flagrantly and constantly violated. Jews who had married Gentile women were required to abandon their wives, and when this applied to men of prominence, a schism originated which caused the secession of the Samaritans who built a temple of their own and claimed to preserve more carefully the original Israelitish traditions. In a certain sense they were right in this, but in the long run their greater breadth proved fatal to their existence. There is only a remnant of them preserved in Nablous, Samaria, and they have never played so significant a part in the history of the world, as have their brethren the Jews.

Further we have discovered of late the existence of a Jewish temple in Elephantine (Jeb), situated in Upper Egypt, where a prosperous Jewish colony must have existed; and in agreement with the results of Biblical research, although in contradiction to the statements in Deuteronomy, we find that these Jews had a temple of their own, and that their institutions and relations to the Gentiles were not in agreement with the priestly code of the temple reform.

In the meantime the excavator's spade has discovered at Tahpanhes in Lower Egypt the representation of a Semitic deity<sup>3</sup> which

<sup>3</sup> A picture of this altar piece of the Hyksos god has been published in the January number of *The Open Court* for 1909, and is accompanied by an article written by Prof. W. Max Müller, the discoverer of the monument.

can only be the god of heaven of the Semitic invaders of Egypt, known in history under the name of Shepherd Kings or Hyksos,<sup>4</sup> and this god can scarcely have been any other than Yahveh.

Yahveh, also pronounced Ya-u or Ye-hu, and abbreviated Ya or Yo, is an old deity who, if we may accept the interpretation of Delitzsch, is mentioned in some cuneiform tablets of ancient Babylon. Passages in the Psalms and the Book of Job prove that, in the religious traditions of Israel, he played the part of Bel Marduk, the conqueror of the dragon, and the creator of heaven and earth. It is certainly not accidental that the Jews when addressing Gentiles speak of Yahveh as the god of heaven, or as the god of heaven and earth, a usage which is especially adhered to in the Apocrypha.

The monument of the Semitic deity of Tahpanhes is a rare but not an isolated instance of a representation of the God of Israel. The seal discovered by the German Palestine Exploration Society is another case and in spite of its small size it is more important, because its interpretation admits of no doubt. It shows a picture of Yahveh between two palm trees, each of seven branches, enthroned on a ship which shows a bird's head on both the bow and the stern. This ship is the heavenly barge on which, as we know from similar Babylonian representations, the moon- and sun-gods ride on the ocean above the firmament. The inscription on the reverse of the seal is written in the Phœnician alphabet used in Palestine before the Exile, the characters being the same as those of the Siloam inscription, and, transcribed into Chaldean, it reads thus:

לאֵלֶּשְׁמַעב  
נְגַדְיָהוּ

which means "[Belonging] to Elishama, son of Gedal-Yahu." The line is broken between the initial and the final letter of the word *ben*, i. e., "son," which is obviously done so as to distribute the fourteen letters evenly into two sets of seven, reminding the owner of the sacredness of the number seven. For the same reason the letter *iod* appears to have been omitted in the first name.<sup>5</sup>

The seal is only 18 mm. long, 16 mm. broad and 5 mm. thick on the rim, 7 in the thickest part. It has the appearance of an Egyptian scarab, the flat surface being the picture of Yahveh, and

<sup>4</sup> The Egyptian *Hik-shasu* means literally "chief of shepherds." *Shasu* is the common designation of the Bedouins or nomads who lived in the fashion of the Old Testament patriarchs.

<sup>5</sup> In the Bible the name Elishama was commonly spelled with *iod* thus:  
אֵלִישָׁמָע

the curved parts on either side of the double line indicating the wings of the beetle, bear the inscription.

For two reasons the origin of the seal must be dated before the Exile: first, after the Exile a picture of Yahveh would not be considered admissible, and secondly the Phœnician alphabet was no longer in use. The names Elishama and Gedalyahu (i. e., Gedaliah) are mentioned in Jeremiah xxxvi. 12 ff., and xl. 5 ff., but we have no means of identifying the owner of the present seal with any definite historical personality.

The root of the word *shama* means "to hear," and *Elishama* may either mean, "he who hears God," or "he who is heard by God." The former would denote "one obedient to God," the latter, "one whose prayer is granted by God."

Judging from the name of Elishama's father, the deity here represented can only be Yahu, that is Yahveh, or as is now commonly said, using an absolutely wrong pronunciation, "Jehovah."<sup>6</sup>

The picture of Yahveh is awkward, but the idea that underlies it is not unworthy. As a sample of art the seal is very poor and we may regard it as an instance of the lack of artistic temperament in the Jewish race.

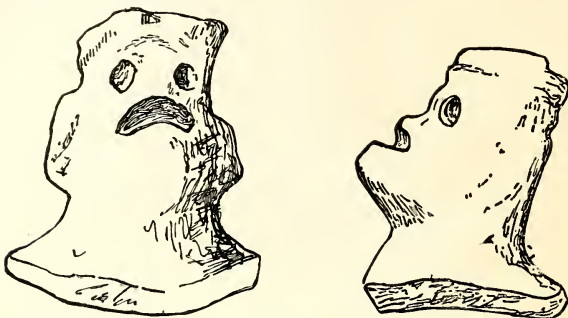
The question has been raised whether the Deuteronomic law forbidding images has stunted the growth of artistic development in the Jewish race, or, *vice versa*, whether the lack of artistic temperament has produced this condemnation of images and pictures. There seems to be a mutual cooperation of both factors. If we compare the most ancient paintings and carvings found in the caves of pre-historic man<sup>7</sup> with the artistic work discovered in Palestine we are compelled to acknowledge a lack of taste and artistic talent in the people of Israel, which is the more remarkable as the Jews rank very high in almost all other branches of intellectual attainments. Their amulets and seals, such as have been found at Gezer, are crude and do not compare in any way with the most primitive ornaments of any other race.

Whatever has been found on the soil of Palestine shows a decided dependence upon the art of either Phœnicia, Babylonia or Egypt, and the more artistic any object may be judged to be, the

<sup>6</sup> The pronunciation "Jehovah" dates only from the sixteenth century A. D. and is due to the mistake of some scholars of the Reformation who did not know that the consonants (JHVH) belong to one word, and the vowels (ēoa) to another, *ādonaï*, which means "the Lord."

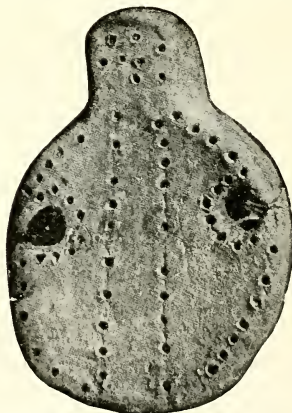
<sup>7</sup> The most important productions of primitive man are collected in the author's book *The Rise of Man*, and they are supplemented in the current number by the article "The Art of Primitive Man."

closer is the resemblance to the style of one or another of these three countries. The most artistic seal found in Palestine is a scarab, the seal of Asaph of Tell el-Mutesellim, which is in purely Egyptian style and shows a hawk-headed griffin wearing the double crown of



PRIMITIVE HEAD FOUND AT GEZER.

Palestine Exploration Fund, London. Quarterly Statement for 1904, p. 19.

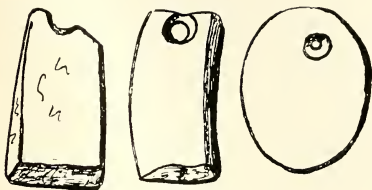


PRIMITIVE FIGURE FOUND AT GEZER.

After Benzinger, *Hebräische Archäologie* (2d ed., 1907), p. 326.

Egypt. Perhaps the second best seal is a lion scarab also found at Tell el-Mutesellim. It is cut in jasper and reminds us very much of the famous mural painting of the lion on the great procession street of Marduk in Babylon. Though its manufacture shows Baby-





AMULETS OF GEZER.

Palestine Exploration Fund, Q. S. 1902, p. 343.



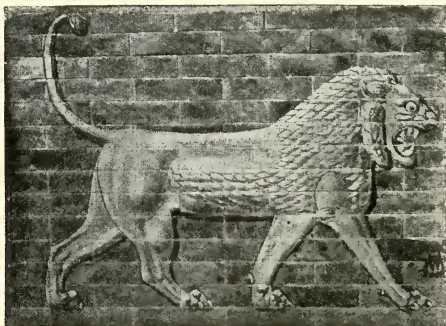
SEAL OF ASAPH, FROM  
TELL EL-MUTESELLIM.

After Benzinger, *H.A.*, p.226.



SEAL OF "SHEMA THE SERVANT OF  
JEROBEAM."

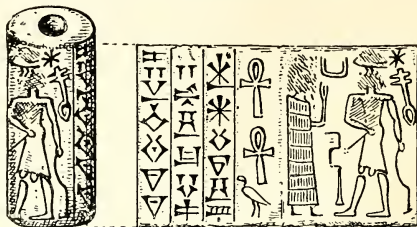
After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 226.



THE ASSYRIAN LION OF THE MARDUK STREET OF BABYLON.

lonian influence, we judge from the names of both its owner and the master of its owner that it belonged to an Israelite. The words *Shema* as well as *Jeroboam* are Hebrew.

A seal cylinder found in Tell Ta'annak shows a mixture of Egyptian and Babylonian taste and was the property of a pagan from Mesopotamia. The inscription is in cuneiform writing and

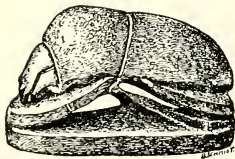


SEAL CYLINDER FROM TELL TA 'ANNAK.

After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 82.

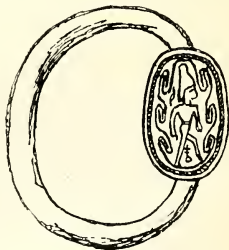
reads "Attana 'hile, son of 'Habsi, servant of Nergal." It is much older than the seal just described, for connoisseurs date the seal back to the time of Abraham or 'Hammurabi about 2300-2000 B. C.

The picture of Attana 'hile's seal cylinder shows a bearded man with a long gown standing in adoration before a god in a short dress. The god has in his right hand a kind of club and in his left



SCARAB FOUND IN PALESTINE.

After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 225.



SCARABAEOID ON A RING.

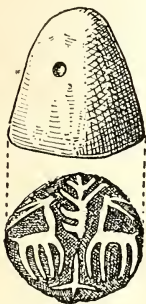
After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 82.

hand a *gamlu* or boomerang, which is found in the hands of Marduk and other gods. Two Egyptian *ankhs* and a bird, presumably a phoenix, separate the picture on the one side from the writing, while on the other side above the shoulder of the god is found an Egyptian lute and a seven-rayed star.



A scarabæoid,<sup>8</sup> held in a bronze ring, shows a man in walking attitude covered with the North Egyptian crown.

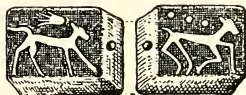
We may state here that as a general rule seal cylinders belong to the oldest period and show Babylonian influence. They were



SEAL CONE FROM TELL TA'ANNAK.  
After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 225.



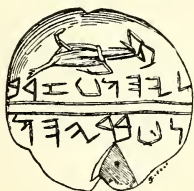
SEAL OF "NETHANYAHU, SON  
OF 'OBADYAHU."  
After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 230.



SEAL CUBE FROM TELL TA'ANNAK.  
After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 225.

replaced between the 17th and 15th centuries by the Egyptian scarab which had acquired a peculiar sanctity as the symbol of immortality.

A seal in the shape of a cone shows two gazelles, perhaps the two sacrificial goats. It ought to be compared with other seals with two goats, for instance the seal of Nethanyahu and another seal in



SEAL OF "YEHO'AZAR, SON OF  
'OBADYAHU."  
After Clermont-Ganneau, *Rec. III*, p. 190.

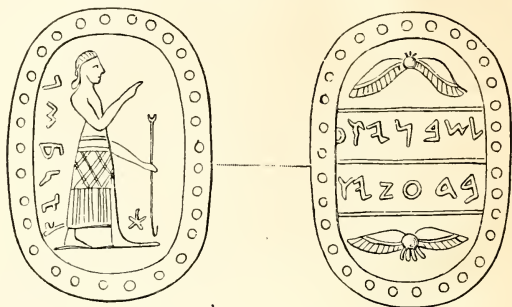


SEAL OF KEMOSHJEKHI, FOUND  
IN MOAB.  
After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 229.

the form of a cube which bears on either side an animal resembling a goat. The cube is perforated so as to be worn on a string. One goat of very crude but most interesting workmanship appears on the seal of Yeho 'azar belonging to the Clermont-Ganneau collection.

<sup>8</sup> This is the name of seals which are not exactly in the shape of a scarab but bear a resemblance to it.

We must remember that seals were intended to protect property. They were used for sealing the clay cases of letters or the doors of store rooms and treasuries, or the lids of boxes and jars so as to make it impossible for the servants or slaves in the house to get at



SEAL OF "SHEBANYAU, SERVANT OF 'UZZIYAU.'"

After Benzinger, *H. A.* p. 180.

the contents without breaking the seal. In order to make any intrusion a sacrilege, divine protection was invoked by placing on the seals a symbol of religious significance. Thus we have either representations of the deity as a winged disk, or the symbol of gods



SEAL OF "KHANANYAHU, SON OF 'AKBOR.'"

After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 230.



SEAL OF NATANYAU FROM GEZER.\*

After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 230.



such as the bull for Marduk; the lion for Nergal; the seven-branched tree of life; the Egyptian *ankh*, the emblem of life; the trinity of solar disk, moon and star; sphinxes, griffins, eagles, etc., and sometimes the owner is portrayed on the seal in the posture of adoration.

\* This seal appears in a contract tablet as the signature of the owner of a field sold to another party. The impression is repeated three times. The document is published by C. H. W. Johns in the *Palest. Explor. Fund*, Q. S., 1905, p. 206 ff.

The solar disk is most common during the period of Egyptian influence, while the seven palm branches are of Babylonian origin. In the seal of Natanyau of Gezer both symbols appear. The seal of



THE ASCENSION OF ETANA, BABYLONIAN SEAL.\*

After Messerschmidt. *Berichte a. d. k. Kunstsamml.*, 1908, No. 232 ff.



SEAL OF "ELIAMAZ, SON OF ELISA"  
FROM 'AMMAN.

After Benzinger, *H. A.*, p. 228.



SEAL OF "YAKHMOLYAHU, SON OF  
MA'ASEYAHU."

After Clermont-Ganneau, *Rec. II*, p. 27.



SEAL OF "YORAM, SON OF  
ZIMRIYAHU."

After Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris I*, p. 11.

Khananyahu shows the seven branches planted upright on an artistic two-handled dish.

Babylonian seals frequently represent scenes of the deeds of

\* The seal is rolled a little beyond the beginning so that Etana on the eagle appears twice.

the gods, or of the national epic. So we have for instance the ascension of Etana pictured on one of them. The hero is rising up to heaven seated on an eagle. The seals discovered in Palestine bear only the owner's name and a divine symbol but no complicated illustration or pictures. The seal of a certain Eliamaz, the son of Elisa shows the owner in the posture of adoration, but no deity present.



SEAL OF "ABIYAU, SERVANT OF UZZIYAU."

After Benzing, *H. A.*, p. 180.



SEAL OF "ZAKKUR, SON OF HOSEA."

After Levi, *S. u. G.*, Tab. III, 9.



SEAL OF "SHEMAYAHU, SON OF 'AZARYAHU."

After Benzing, *H. A.*, p. 229.

The seal of Yaklmolyahu shows outlines of an eagle. The seal of a certain Yoram shows a crude image of a Uraeus snake. The seal of Abiyau, the servant of Uzziyau, is Egyptian, for it represents the divine child Horus on the lotus flower, having on his head the combined symbol of the sun and moon.<sup>9</sup>

The seal of Zakkur shows the head and wings of a griffin. The seal of Natanyau shows two figures in the posture of adoration



SEAL OF "KHARANYAHU, SON OF 'AZARYAHU."

After Benzing, *H. A.*, p. 229.



SEAL OF "ELSIGGEB, DAUGHTER OF ELISHAMA."

After Levi, *Siegel und Gemmen*, Tab. III, 3.



SEAL OF "MENAKHEMETH, WIFE OF GADDIMELEK."

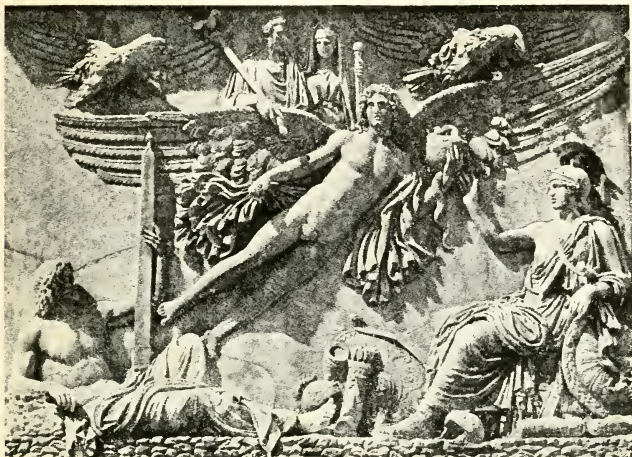
After Levi, *S. u. G.*, Tab. III, 12.

under a winged solar disk on either side of an Egyptian *ankh*, the symbol of life. The reverse shows a very crude seven-branched tree. Yahveh in the form of a bull is pictured on the seal of Shemayahu, while on the seal of Kharanyahu the name of the owner is surrounded by a circle of pomegranates. There are two seals belonging to women, one the seal of Elsiggeb, the daughter of Elishama, with two figures squatting on either side of a plant; and the

<sup>9</sup> See the author's article "The Persistence of Symbols," *Open Court*, XXII, 391.

other, the seal of Menakhemeth, the wife of Gaddimelek, exhibits two men in the posture of adoration, while between them appear the sun and the moon and above them the winged disk, an emblem of God.

In looking over the seals presented in this article, we must grant the palm of artistic beauty to the "Ascension of Etana," and this is of Babylonian, not of Israelite workmanship. When in addition we consider other facts of history, especially for instance, that the



THE APOTHEOSIS OF ANTONINUS AND FAUSTINA.

From Springer's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*, Vol. I, p. 276.

temple at Jerusalem was built by a Phœnician architect with Phœnician workmen we cannot help conceding that the Israelites were lacking in artistic originality. On the other hand we may claim for them a superiority in working out religious ideas to which they gave an excellent literary form, best instanced in the Psalms, prophetic books, and the Book of Job.

The Babylonian seal representing the ascension of Etana possesses another interest for us which throws much light on the history of religious ideas. Etana, the hero of the Babylonian national epic, is lifted up to heaven at his death, and the idea of this triumphant end to life on earth was as dear to the Babylonian as the resurrection and ascension of Christ have been to Christians.



The main figure of this seal is Etana seated on the back of a soaring eagle, holding to the bird's neck with his hands. Above the eagle's wings we see on the right the disk of the sun, on the left the crescent of the moon. Underneath on the ground stands a human figure looking up to Etana and throwing a kiss of adoration with his finger tips. Another figure surrounded by two dogs raises his hands in astonishment, and even the dogs look upward. On the left a herdsman with staff in hand drives a goat and two rams out into the field. Behind him appears a hurdle. At a distance beyond the hurdle which in wrong perspective appears above it, a potter is busy at his work while some finished vases stand before him. Further toward the right, a baker is kneading and before him lie eight round loaves. It is apparently the artist's intention to characterize briefly the entire population of the country as being all concerned in the apotheosis of the national hero. The idea of Etana's ascension symbolizes the immortality of the human soul, and it was common all over the pagan world. The artistic representation of it continued in faithful tradition throughout the ages and may be considered as typical, so that the same kind of composition continued to be current even as late as in the early days of the Roman empire.

It is interesting to note the similarity between the ascension of Etana and later art productions, and this indicates that the conceptions of mankind present a continuous development. When we compare the Babylonian seal cylinders of Etana's ascension with the apotheosis of Antoninus and Faustina as represented in relief on the bases of the Antoninus column now preserved in the Vatican, we find a similar attitude in the figures who are lifted up to heaven, only instead of the eagle there is a genius with large eagle wings. Above the wings of the genius there are two ornamental eagles accompanying the transfigured emperor and his wife in their flight up to Olympus.