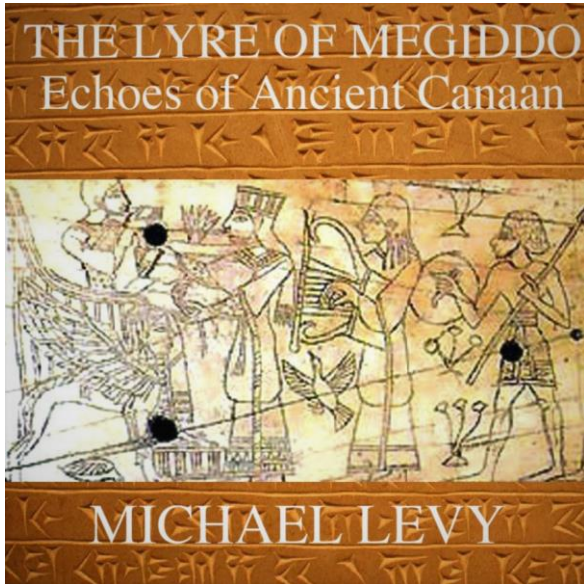
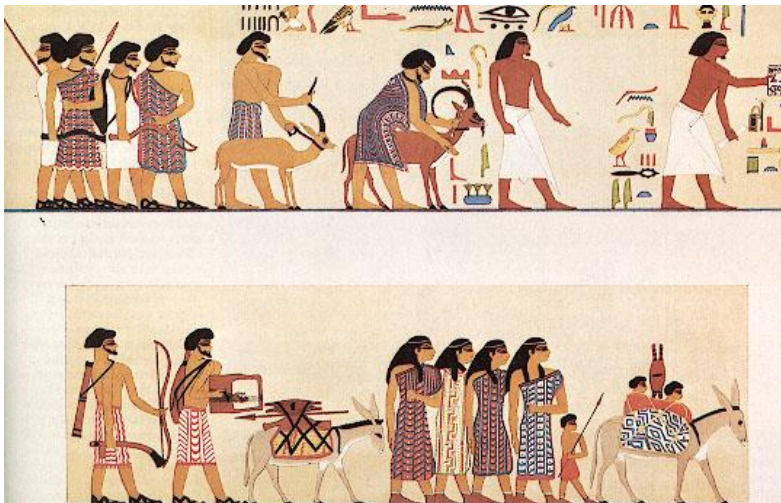


# THE LYRE OF MEGIDDO: ECHOES OF ANCIENT CANAAN

An experimental 3-track EP, to showcase the beautiful replica Bronze Age Canaanite form asymmetrical lyre, recently custom-made for me by [Luthieros](#):



Although my lyre is a replica of an ancient Egyptian lyre, these asymmetrical lyres are distinctively Canaanite, having probably been introduced to Egypt under the Canaanite [Hyksos kings](#). Indeed, this first form of truly portable lyre, was first illustrated in a famous ancient Egyptian mural dating to circa 1900 BCE found at Beni Hasan in the tomb of the Egyptian noble, [Knumenhotep II](#), which clearly shows nomadic Canaanite traders accompanied by a lyre player:

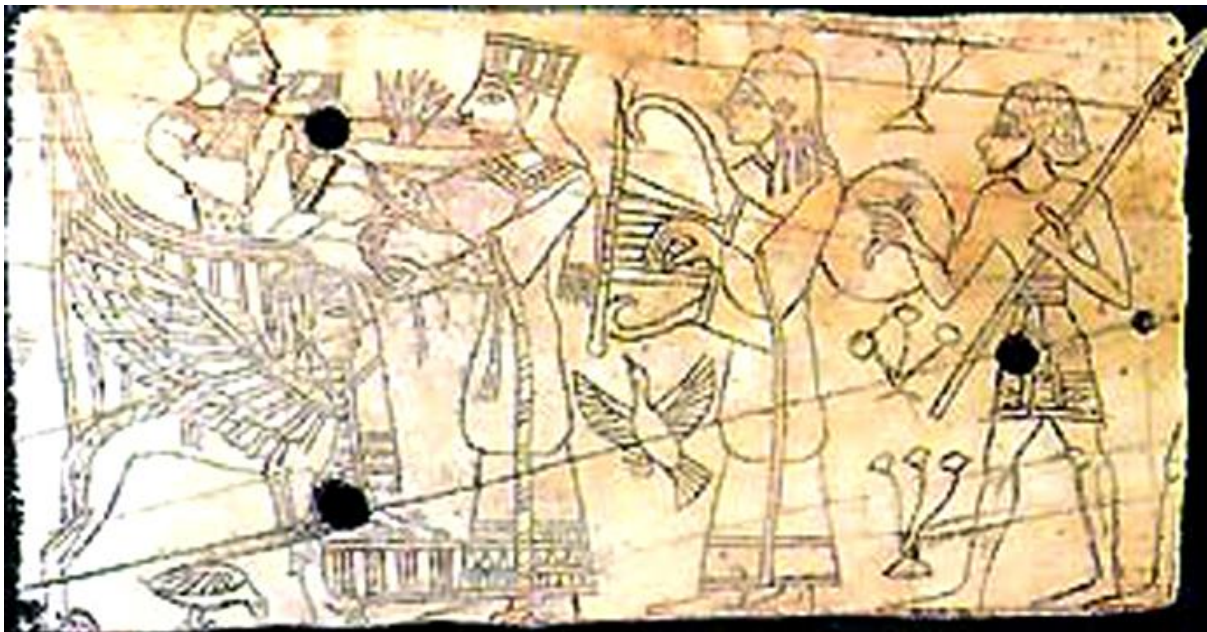


A few centuries later, this early form of portable lyre had developed into the typical asymmetrical Canaanite form of lyre and was fully established in ancient Egypt, which can be seen in this ancient

illustration of an ancient Egyptian woman playing a lyre - detail of a wall painting in the tomb of Djoserkaraseneb (TT38), Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, West Thebes, dating to the New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty: Reign of Thutmose IV, ca. 1401-1391 BCE:



Regarding the similarity between the ancient Egyptian and Canaanite lyres, *this ancient Egyptian asymmetrical lyre is strikingly similar to a Canaanite lyre illustrated on [the Megiddo ivory carving](#), circa 1300 BC* – also dating to almost exactly the same time period of the replica ancient Egyptian lyre featured in this recording:



*"The illustration is etched onto a sliver of a hippopotamus tooth, and probably adorned the lid of a box or some other decorative item. Since the hippo is found in the waters of the Upper Nile River, in Egypt, this piece shows the enormous range and influence of Egyptian culture throughout the Middle East in that period."* (Peter Pringle)

## THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN 'LEIDEN LYRE'

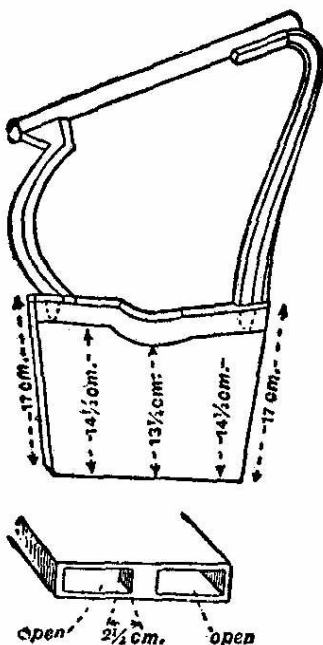
Remarkably, an almost completely intact Canaanite form, asymmetrical lyre has survived the ravages of the last 3 thousand years, and is preserved in Leiden! This particular lyre, also dating to almost exactly the same period, (circa 1,500 – 13, 00 BCE), is therefore literally the closest we can get, to the reconstruction of the strikingly similar Canaanite Megiddo lyre:



b

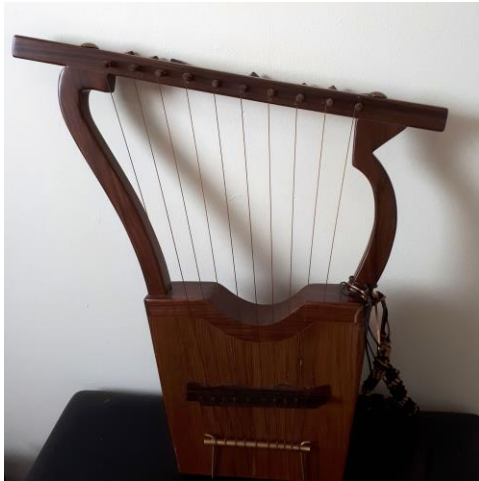
Fig. 1a,b The Leiden lyre front and back. Photo Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden.

Full details on about the ancient Egyptian Leiden lyre can be found [in this article](#). Here are the dimensions and fascinating details of the actual construction of the Leiden Lyre:



From these actual dimensions, Luthieros, the specialist lyre makers in Thessaloniki, recently custom made the replica of the lyre featured in this recording - which since the actual dimensions of the lyre are known, *the construction and timbre of this lyre is about as near as we can probably get, to what the almost identical Lyre of Megiddo must have once actually sounded!*

Here is their remarkable custom-made reconstruction of the Leiden Lyre:



To get even closer to what the original timbre of these ancient lyres may have once sounded, my replica lyre is fitted with a more authentic, wider bridge with a distinctively 'bench-shaped' top, similar to most actual ancient illustrations of lyre bridges seen in a few examples of ancient artwork.

A consequence of having a wider surface area at the top of the bridge, *is a distinctive, almost mystical buzzing timbre* - similar to the Ethiopian [Begenä](#); a fascinating 10-string bass register lyre still performed in Ethiopian sacred music to the present day; [a lyre which just may be the last direct ancestor of one of the ancient Biblical lyres - the bass register 'Nevel Asor'; once played in the Temple of Jerusalem.](#)

Also, even more fascinatingly, since the traditional time period of King David is only a few centuries after the Megiddo ivory was carved and from the same lands, the lyre which he once composed the Biblical Psalms to and which was later played by my ancient Levite ancestors in the Temple of Jerusalem (namely, [the Biblical 'Kinnor'](#)), almost certainly both looked and sounded like the replica of the Leiden lyre I am playing.

As can be seen from the illustration of the dimensions and construction of the Leiden lyre seen above, there are 2 sound holes at the bottom of this original ancient Egyptian lyre which have been reproduced in my replica instrument - as can be heard in opening of the first track of this experimental recording, when the left hand partially mutes either of these holes, *eerie 'wah' effects can be easily produced; certainly capable of waking the ancient Canaanite gods from their ancient slumbers!*

For more fascinating details of the musical exchange of ideas between ancient Egypt, Canaan and ultimately, later Israel, please also see my website blog:

## THE TRACKS

### 1. The Lyre of Megiddo: Echoes of Ancient Canaan

An improvisation in an exotic ancient Near Eastern mode, utilizing a wide variety of lyre playing techniques, including partially muting of the 2 sound holes, reproduced on the bottom of the replica lyre, to create other-worldly effects, capable of rousing the Canaanite pantheon of gods from their ancient slumbers!

### 2. Hymn to Asherah

Asherah, or Ashtoreth, was the name of the chief female deity worshiped in ancient Syria, Phoenicia, and Canaan. The Phoenicians called her Astarte, the Assyrians worshiped her as Ishtar, and the Philistines had a temple of Asherah (1 Samuel 31:10). Because of Israel's incomplete conquest of the land of Canaan, Asherah-worship survived and plagued Israel, starting as soon as Joshua was dead (Judges 2:13).

Asherah was represented by a limbless tree trunk planted in the ground. The trunk was usually carved into a symbolic representation of the goddess. Because of the association with carved trees, the places of Asherah worship were commonly called "groves," and the Hebrew word "asherah" (plural, "asherim") could refer either to the goddess or to a grove of trees. One of King Manasseh's evil deeds was that he "took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple" (2 Kings 21:7). Another translation of "carved Asherah pole" is "graven image of the grove" (KJV).

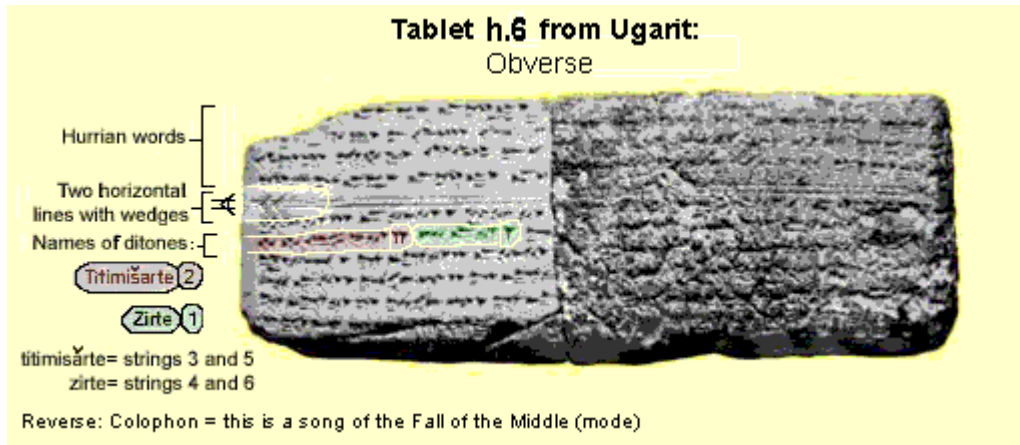
Considered the moon-goddess, Asherah was often presented as a consort of Baal, the sun-god (Judges 3:7, 6:28, 10:6; 1 Samuel 7:4, 12:10). Asherah was also worshiped as the goddess of love and war and was sometimes linked with Anath, another Canaanite goddess. Worship of Asherah was noted for its sensuality and involved ritual prostitution. The priests and priestesses of Asherah also practiced divination and fortune-telling.

### 3. Hymn to Nikkal

[The oldest surviving written melody so far discovered in History](#) which can actually be reconstructed, was the Hymn to Nikkal - catalogued by archaeologists as 'Hurrian Hymn Text H6'. This final arrangement of the several others I have recorded over the years is hopefully the most authentic to date!

The musical notation for this amazing 3400 year old melody, was discovered in Ugarit, Northern Canaan (now forming the Southern part of modern Syria) in the early 1950s, and was preserved for 3400 years on a clay tablet, written in the Cuneiform text of the ancient Hurrian language:

"Thought to be 3,400 years old, this relic has been in Damascus since 1955, following its discovery by a group of French archaeologists in the coastal town of Ugarit...The artefact records the Hurrian Hymn, a song directed to the goddess Nikkal [wife of the moon god]. Ugaritans worshipped a number of deities, each one specific to the various parts of their lives. Nikkal, meaning "Great Lady and Fruitful", was the goddess of the orchards....For now, at least, the exact lyrical content of the Hurrian Hymn remains partly concealed, although a translation undertaken by Hans-Jochen Thiel in 1977 is considered closest to the original's spirit" ([Article in "The National"](#))



In short, the tablet had the text of a song, which was an invocation to the Ugaritic goddess [Nikkal](#), goddess of the orchards and wife of the moon god, [Yarikh](#), to bestow her fertility upon barren women - here is a partial translation of the song, from the surviving portion of the original Hurrian text:

*"(Once I have) endeared (the deity), she will love me in her heart,  
the offer I bring may wholly cover my sin,  
bringing sesame oil may work on my behalf in awe may I...  
The sterile may they make fertile.  
Grain may they bring forth.  
She, the wife, will bear (children) to the father.  
May she who has not yet borne children bear them."*

The melody of Hurrian Hymn Text H6 was interpreted by Dr. Richard Dumbrill (one of several academic interpretations of the melody), from the ambiguous Cuneiform text of the Hurrian language in which it was written. Although discovered in modern day Syria, the Hurrians were not Syrian – they came from modern day Anatolia. The Hurrian Hymn actually dates to the very end of the Hurrian civilization (c.1400 BCE). The origin of the Hurrian civilization dates back to at least 3000 BCE.

In short, the lower part of the text which Dumbrill transcribed (the Hurrian musical notation below the words of the song), was in a corruption of Akkadian Babylonian, in which the specific names of 9 lyre strings represented the specific changes in pitch - which according to Dr Richard Dumbrill, clearly showed the outline of a 3400 year old Bronze Age melody, (which features descending 5ths and ascending 3rds), gave the names of 9 specific lyre strings, and the specific musical intervals between these strings. In other words, the notation of the Hymn was a sort of "guitar tab" - for lyre!

There were also numerical values given next to some of the lines of the text of the song - when Dumbrill added up the number of syllables in the text of the song in relation to the number of notes in his interpretation of the melody, remarkably, the curious numerical values written after some of the lines of the text actually precisely added up to the sum of the extra notes required which were not indicated by the syllables of the text! There are several such interpretations of this melody by other musicologists, but to me, the fabulous interpretation of Dr. Dumbrill just intuitively somehow sounds the most 'authentic'.

Although 29 musical texts were discovered at Ugarit, only this text, (text H6), was in a sufficient state of preservation to allow for modern academic musical reconstruction, as Richard Dumbrill recently explained to me via direct email correspondence:

*"Altogether, in the Library of the Royal Palace of Ugarit, 29 music tablets were found, all in pieces. Only one could be reconstructed, H6. This is the one I have used for my interpretation."*

Richard Dumbrill has recently arranged and recorded a purely vocal rendition of his interpretation of the Hurrian Hymn, in the original elusive Hurrian language. Here is what he kindly explained to me, when I asked about how his interpretation of the melody differs from similar attempts made at interpreting the melody of Hurrian Hymn Text H6, made by the musicologists, Martin R West, Kilmer & Krispijn:

*"The differences in interpretations of this text mainly come from the insistence of Western scholars to interpret Semitic (Jewish and non Jewish) music as if it responded to Western music theory which is essentially Christian material. Semitic, (Arabian Jewish, Christian and Islamic) music uses filled intervals called 'ajnas' or 'uqud' which are sets used in sequential order. West, Kilmer, Krispijn etc. know nothing about Semitic musicology and therefore understand intervals as being empty and played together a dyads, or as chords of 2 notes. The same scholars are also limited by the octave which is the boundary of Western music while Semitic music is not restricted by the octavial notion. This is why my interpretation is melodic while others are not.*

*In respect of the Hurrian language, it is with great caution that we should apprehend it. Too little is known about it. Was it melismatic or not in the context of Ugarit, we do not know. Initially my voicing of the Hurrian text equated to the number of beats in the piece. But that does not mean much.*

*Recently I recorded my latest version, in Byblos, Lebanon and in Damascus with the advice of local musicians who felt that it should be 'maqamised' as I have produced it in this version".*

According to Dumbrill, Maqamian microtonalism is the only way to understand the tablets. Probably the maqam is one of the outcome of the post Neo Babylonian studies. Then the Arabs took into account the past musical literature; finally the maqam as the heir of the Neo Babylonians...

In short, whereas most other academic interpretations of the melody sound too 'Western', Dumbrill, in his musicological studies of Semitic (both Arabic and Jewish ancient Middle Eastern music), realized [that the actual musical outline of the melody could be 'Maqamised' in the ancient traditional Middle Eastern style.](#)

Regarding whether the Hurrian Hymns were originally meant to be accompanied or sang solo, as in Dumbrill's arrangement above, we will probably never know for sure, but since the lyre was quite literally, 'the guitar of the Bronze Age' in being the most commonly used instrument that was used to accompany the human voice in these distant times, a typical asymmetrical Canaanite form of lyre

would be the most likely type of lyre that may have once accompanied the Hurrian Hymns – exactly the same type of lyre featured in this recording!

Circumstantial evidence for the performance of a similar Canaanite style of lyre to accompany the Hurrian Hymns, can actually be found at Ugarit itself - there is a carving of a female musician from Ugarit, playing this very same type of lyre:



Musician with a lyre, bronze age - Ugarit

The 'Leiden Lyre' upon which my replica Bronze Age lyre is based, *actually dates to more or less precisely the time of the Hurrian Hymns*; which in conjunction with the exotic Middle Eastern mode used in this arrangement in my attempt to 'Maqamize' the melodic line interpreted by Dumbrill and the distinctive buzzing timbre of this lyre, for me, brings both the 3400 year old text of the song and the melody, more truly *'back to life'...*

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