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## THE SILVER HOARD FROM CITY IV, QALA'AT AL-BAHRAIN

Rolf Krauss, Pierre Lombard, and Daniel Potts

During the eighth campaign (1961-62) of the Danish Archaeological expedition to Bahrain a silver hoard contained within a ceramic jar was discovered. It was described as consisting of « pieces of smelted silver, portions of bracelets clipped into several pieces, and a number of complete rings and earrings » (1). The hoard was provisionally dated to between 650 and 550 B.C. by the presence of a signet ring bearing an inscription in pseudo-Egyptian hieroglyphs. The purpose of this article is to reexamine the hoard, virtually neglected since its initial publication.

The first section consists of a description of the hoard's contents based on notes made by P. Lombard in the Manama Museum in November, 1981. It is accompanied by his drawings and photographs of the hoard and the pottery vessel in which it was found. In the second section, authored by Krauss, the question of the signet ring with pseudo-hieroglyphic inscription found within the hoard will be taken up, both from a chronological and cultural point of view. Finally, the third section by Potts deals with the nature and function of the hoard.

### I. General Description of the Hoard

The hoard was contained within a jar (*Pl.V, 1a*) found buried beneath the floor of a building attributed to the « Kassite » City III period (2), apparently having been deposited in a pit dug down from a City IV level above. The date of the jar in which it was contained cannot be put earlier than the beginning of the sixth century B.C. (3). The form appears to be typical of « Neo-Babylonian » pottery found on Bahrain, and vessels of this type have been found in or related to bath-tub coffins from City IV. One of these has recently been illustrated by Larsen in his dissertation (4). As the photograph and drawing show (*Pl. V, 1a, b*) overfiring has distorted the shape of the vessel. The ware of the vessel is brown in color, with a yellowish slip turned green from over-firing; it contains exploding white lime grits, a well-known characteristic of earlier Barbar ware. The vessel was almost certainly made locally on Bahrain, as demonstrated by the fact that similar sherds were excavated recently by M. Kervran in a pit on the Qala'at. Comparable material was also found recently at the site of Rumeilah in Abu Dhabi. A vessel of exactly the same shape is said to have been found at the site of Karzakan on Bahrain, where bath-tub coffins were also discovered by members of the

Dept. of Antiquities (pers. com. to P. Lombard from Shaikha Haya al-Khalifa).

As to the contents of the hoard, 583 pieces of silver and 11 pieces of electrum (?) - an uncorroded, yellowish material in this case - are stored in the Manama Museum. Of these, 358 were unshaped fragments of silver, including 58 pieces of coarse, smelted silver and 22 fragments of silver ore (*Pl. VI, 3*). Another 228 were pieces of jewelry, mostly broken. These consisted of the following:

- 43 fragments of arm(?) - bands, av. dia. .6 cm. (*Pl. VI, 4.5*)
- 65 fragments of finger-rings. av. dia. .35 cm. (*Pl. VI, 6*)
- 25 fragments of miniature rings, av. dia. .15 cm.
- 4 fragments of earrings
- 9 fragments of flat rings, av. thickness .08 cm.
- 15 fragments of crushed tubular rings, (*Pl. VII, 7*)
- 33 fragments of undecorated sheet silver
- 31 fragments of incised sheet silver (*Pl. VII, 8-9*)
- 1 complete signet ring (*Pl. VIII, 10-12*)
- 1 complete pendant (*Pl. IX, 13-11*)
- 1 complete ring with snake head

Additionally, 8 small objects (*Pl. IX, 15-16*) shaped like truncated pyramids were recovered.

Stylistically little can be said of this collection due to its broken nature. Several pieces, however, find close parallels in the corpora of published small finds from sites of the same period. The arm(?) - band fragments with ribbed and flattened ends can be compared with a gold bracelet from Ur (5), and with a lead (?) one from a tomb in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia (6). Several of the fragments of decorated sheet silver could be compared with bronze ring fragments from Bogazköy (7), dated to the Phrygian period. Some of these fragments, of course, could be from small cups, hair ornaments, pectorals, etc.

Undoubtedly the most noteworthy find, is the ring with pseudo-hieroglyphic inscription (*Pl. VIII, 10-12*). On the one hand this find was significant because it was used as the chief means of dating the hoard. On the other hand, the rarity of non-Egyptian copies of hieroglyphic inscriptions, known otherwise almost exclusively from the Phoenician realm, makes the Bahrain find especially interesting. In the next section of this article, a brief study of the ring will be offered.

## II. The Signet Ring

The form of the signet ring found in the Bahrain hoard suggests that it was made in the Late Period, i.e., some time after about 650 B.C. (8). Specifically, the shank's uniformly rounded section is a feature that is typical for the Late Period. The ring does not seem to have been cast in a single piece; rather, the shank was apparently soldered to the underside of the bezel,

a feature of Late Period rings (9). By contrast, the oval form of the bezel is known beginning already in the New Kingdom. The bezel itself is not splayed - i.e., the underside is not thickened or shaped at an angle, as is often the case in Late Period rings. The parallel arrangement of the shank and bezel is known in the Late Period (10).

In general, the bezel's decoration - both the hieroglyphic arrangement of the individual elements and the oval field with its interior border - is egyptianizing. A straight line divides the surface into two fields. One is reserved for a fish and a second sign (unintelligible to me) while the other is filled with hieroglyph-like signs (11). Three of these can easily be associated with familiar hieroglyphs: the *mn* sign (a gaming board with playing pieces on top) (12), *n* (a zigzag line), and *r'w* (the sun disk). The orientation of the hieroglyph suggests that the field with the fish should be understood as the « top » of the bezel, provided the engraver did not turn the ring as he was working on it. The remaining hieroglyph-like signs cannot be identified with certainty. For example, the tall element that resembles the *tj* sign (a pestle) at first glance could also just as convincingly be identified as an ostrich feather (with the value *m3't*) or even the reed leaf (the weak consonant *j*) (13).

Doubtless the engraver referred to a hieroglyphic prototype (perhaps a scarab or even another ring?), but his misunderstood reproduction of the signs implies that he was not familiar with them. Thus I strongly suspect that the engraving was done by a non-Egyptian. Probably the ring itself is not of Egyptian manufacture, but an egyptianizing imitation instead, created by a silversmith who produced a satisfying result when rendering the form but was less successful in carrying out the decoration of the bezel. He may well have been Phoenician, for the silver pendant (*pl. IX, 13-14*) found with the ring is in all likelihood a contemporaneous Phoenician product (14).

### III. The Nature of the Bahrain Hoard

The original publication of the hoard suggested it was « apparently the stock of a silversmith buried in the ruins of the Kassite building » (15). Later, it was noted that the hoard might have been buried during a time of danger, such as when Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal conquered Dilmun (16). Now, the publication of an important article on money in ancient Mesopotamia prior to the advent of coinage places the Bahrain hoard in a new light (17), and it will be suggested here that at least some of the contents of the hoard (*e.g. Pl. VI, 4-6; Pl. VII, 7*), functioned as money.

Marvin Powell has suggested that Sumerian *ḫ a r* and Akkadian *šewirum*, both normally translated as « ring », sometimes stood for a « coil » or « spiral » used as money. The clearest attestations for this practice are of Old Babylonian date, although in the Old Assyrian texts from Kültepe the practice is also known, and it may be present in some Neo-Babylonian texts as well (18). Writing on one text (HTS 143) which discusses payments of silver rings to several people for various services rendered, E. Sollberger wrote, « The rings in question would be similar to those helicoidal rings well known from North-European tombs of the Early Middle Ages. Payments or gifts could be made by cutting off pieces equivalent to the desired amount » (19). Such pieces may be present in *Pl. VI, 4-6*.

Further, as Powell points out, the Akkadian term for one-eighth of a shekel -*bitqu* -

has, among its meanings, that of « a cutting » (20).

The term *bitqu* for an eighth of a shekel would derive from the circumstances that fractional amounts larger than one-eighth shekel were probably exchanged in some other form (coils, chunks, pellets, bar, etc.), whereas it would have been standard practice to cut one-eighth pieces from a coil made especially for that purpose, thus giving this piece the term « cutting » or « snippet ». Amounts smaller than one eighth were probably paid in fragments of scrap silver (21).

Although they have not been weighed, it could be suggested that the fragments shown in *Pl. VII*, 7, apparently crushed remnants of coil fragments, might be pieces of *bitqu* as described by Powell. The interesting pieces shown in *Pl. IX*, 15-16, shaped like truncated pyramids, might represent fractions larger than one-eighth of a shekel, although they must be weighed to be certain.

It is also important to note the existence in ancient Mesopotamia of another type of silver used to make payments which was designated *šibirtu*. This noun is derived from the verb *šeberu*, meaning « to shatter » or « to break to pieces », and can therefore, Powell suggests, be understood as a designation for scrap silver fragments. As a form of « money », *šibirtu* is attested for nearly two thousand years, from the Old Akkadian period right down into the Achaemenian era (22). Powell writes, « Some idea of what *šibirtum* might have looked like can be obtained from a horde (sic) found at Megiddo dating to the early Iron Age », which contained « sheet-like pieces from vessels, left-over pieces of cast silver, remnants of jewelry (especially earrings), pellets, and of special importance, remnants of silver rods, which by their curvature, appear to derive from coils » (23). The fragments of smelted silver illustrated in our *Pl.V*, 2, and the sheet silver fragments shown in *Pl. VIII*, 8-9 would seem to belong to this category. In addition to the Megiddo hoard, Powell points to another found in a private house of the period at Tell Asmar (24). To these cases can be added several more. At least two such hoards are known from Larsa. During the first campaign (1992-93) of the excavations by the French mission there, a jar containing 13-15 kgs. of scrap silver was discovered in a house of Larsa dynasty date (25). A hoard was also discovered during the 1976 season which contained, among other things, a large quantity of scrap silver (26). It is dated to the eleventh year of Samsuiluna.

That such a conglomeration of silver fragments as that from Bahrain, Megiddo, Tell Asmar, or Larsa could have had a rational, economic function should not be questioned simply because of the irregular sizes and shapes of the individual pieces. It must be remembered that whenever payments were made, they were above all weighed to determine their value, not simply counted out in fixed units (27).

In conclusion, Powell's work provides a setting in which the Bahrain hoard can now be understood. Rather than a silversmith's stock, it seems more likely that this was a hoard of silver whose contents illustrate some of the different types of money current in the Near East prior to the beginnings of coinage. While the philological documentation for silver *šewirum*, *bitqu*, and *šibirtu* is not rare, relatively few hoards containing these forms of money are known (or have as yet been so identified and/or published) from archaeological excavations in

the Near East. Thus, the Bahrain hoard is an important document for the study of early money in the ancient Near East prior to the beginnings of coinage.

## NOTES

1. T.G. Bibby, « Arabian Gulf Archaeology », *Kuml 1964* (1965) : 102.
2. *Idem.*
3. J.-F. Salles, « Bahrain 'hellénistique' : données et problèmes », in R. Boucharlat and J.-F. Salles, eds., *Arabie orientale, Mésopotamie et Iran méridional de l'Age du Fer au début de la période islamique*, Maison de l'Orient, Lyon, to appear 1983.
4. C.E. Larsen, *Holocene Land Use Variations on the Bahrain Islands*, unpubl. PhD. diss., Univ. of Chicago, p. 383 and Fig. 56a.
5. C.L. Woolley and M.E.L. Mallowan, *UE IX, The Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods*, 1962, Pl. 21 : U.457
6. D. Potts *et al.* , « Preliminary Report on the Second Phase of the Eastern Province Survey 1387/1977 », *Atlat 2* (1978) : Pl. 10 : 52.
7. R.M. Boehmer, *Die Kleinfunde von Boğazköy*, Mann, Berlin, 1972, Taf. XXXV : 1057.
8. The following discussion of the ring and its decoration is necessarily based on the photograph (Pl. VIII, 10-11) and the drawing (Pl. VIII, 12a-b) since neither the object itself nor an impression of the bezel's design was available for examination.
9. In rings of earlier periods, the shank was usually joined to the *sides* of the bezel. For these observations and those, following, concerning the manufacture of metal rings in ancient Egypt, see G. Möller in *Ägyptische Goldschmiedearbeiten*, ed. H. Schäfer, Königl. Museen zu Berlin, Mitteilungen aus der Ag. Sammlung, 1910, p. 50ff; G. Möller, *Die Metalkunst der alten Ägypter*, 1924, p. 55; A. Wilkinson, *Ancient Egyptian Jewellery*, 1971, p. 194f.; H.R. Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs etc. in the British Museum I*, 1913, p. XXXV : C.R. Williams, *Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities Numbers 1-160, Gold and Silver Jewelry and Related Objects*, The New York Historical Society, 1924, p. 106; G. Clerc, V. Karageorgis, E. Lagarce, J. Leclant, *Fouilles de Kition II. Objets égyptiens et égyptisants*, 1976.
10. Note, however, that the form with the bezel and shank joined at right angles is *characteristic* for the Late Period.
11. W.M.F. Petrie, *Objects of Daily Use*, British School of Archaeology in Egypt Memoir 42, London, 1927, pls. XI : 5, XIV : 207, 209, illustrates three rings with « Near

Eastern traits » that exhibit a similar division of the bezel.

12. The cursive strokes incised perpendicular to one edge of the long rectangular sign are recognizable as the playing pieces that constitute a distinctive element of the sign.
13. For other possibilities, cf. e.g., E. Drioton, in: *Egyptian Religion* I, 1933, 40 note 4.
14. Cf. J.E. Reade, in: *Jewellery through 7000 Years* (H. Tait, ed.), London, 1976, No. 352. Thus the assignment of the ring to ca. 650-550 B.C. by M.-L. Buhl (in *Kuml* 1964, without, however, a of dating criteria) is confirmed.
15. Bibby 1965 : 103.
16. T.G. Bibby, *Looking for Dilmun*, Knopf, New York, 1970, caption to Pl. XVII.
17. M.A. Powell, Jr., « A Contribution to the History of Money in Mesopotamia prior to the Invention of Coinage », *Festschrift Lubor Matous II*, *Assyriologia* V, ed. B. Hruška and G. Komoróczy, Budapest, 1978, p. 211-243.
18. Powell 1978 : 219.
19. E. Sollberger, « Selected Texts from American Collections », *JCS* 10 (1965) : 23, note to 9 : 16. Silver ring gift texts have also recently been studied by P. Michalowski in « The Neo-Sumerian Silver Ring Texts », *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 2 (1978-1979) : 43-58.
20. Powell 1978 : 222, cf. CAD s.v. *bitqu* 3. It is also interesting to note the likelihood of a connection between Akkadian *nuḫḫutu* and Arabic *nahata*. The meaning of the Akkadian adjective has been discussed by various scholars. Powell suggests that « clipped, struck off, cut off » is most appropriate. The Arabic verb, on the other hand, has several meanings similar to « cutting », but can also mean « to coin ». This strongly suggests that the practice of cutting pieces of silver for payment was directly antecedent to the beginnings of true coinage, cf. Powell 1978 : 225.
21. Powell 1978 : 222.
22. Powell 1978 : 223.
23. G. Loud, *Megiddo II : Seasons of 1935-1939* , OIP 62, Chicago, 1948, Pl. 229 and Powell 1978 : 231, and Pl. IIIC.
24. Powell 1978 : Pl. IIIA-B. This will be published in full, along with a hoard from Khafajah, by R. Ellis in a forthcoming volume on the small finds from the Oriental Institute excavations in the Diyala region.
25. A. Parrot, « Les Fouilles de Tello et de Senkereh-Larsa, Campagne 1932-1933 », *RA* 30 (1933) : 180.

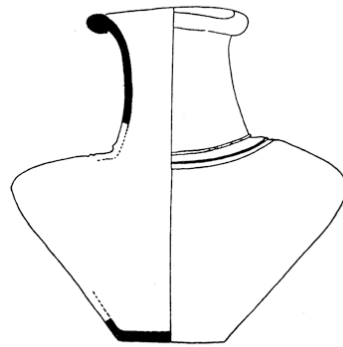
26. D. Arnaud, Y. Calvet and J.-L. Huot, « Išū-Ibnišu, orfèvre de l'E.BABBAR de Larsa : La jarre L.76.77 et son contenu », *Syria* LVI (1979) : Fig. 46.
27. Powell 1978 : 217. In fact, even more complete silver coils often weighed more or less than the intended value/weight of the piece, due to the fact that no means for manufacturing ḫ a r of exact weights existed. On this point, Powell writes, « The fact that a five-shekel ḫ a r did not weigh precisely five shekels certainly did not cause the Ancient Mesopotamian the consternation that it would a modern westerner, because, from the beginning to end, valuable metals used in commerce in ancient Mesopotamia seem to have been weighed, not counted ».



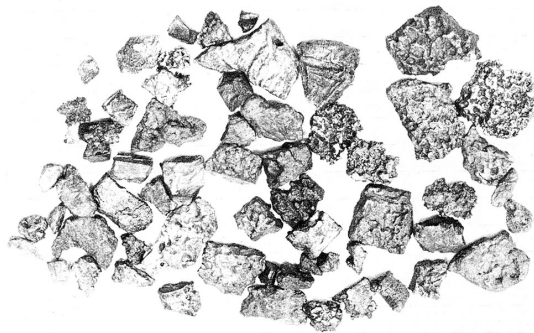
**FIGURES**



**1a**



**1b**

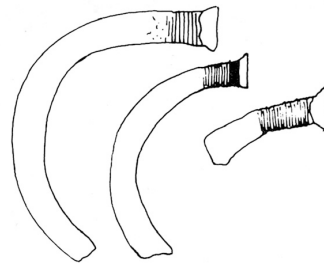


**2**

**Planche V**



**3**



**4**



**5**



**6**

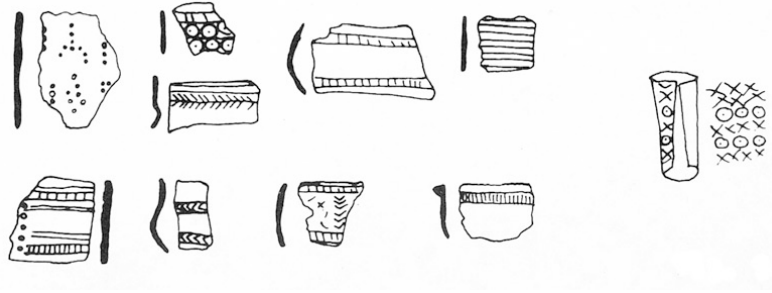
**Planche VI**



7



8



9

Planche VII



10



11



12a

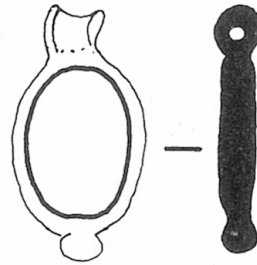


12b

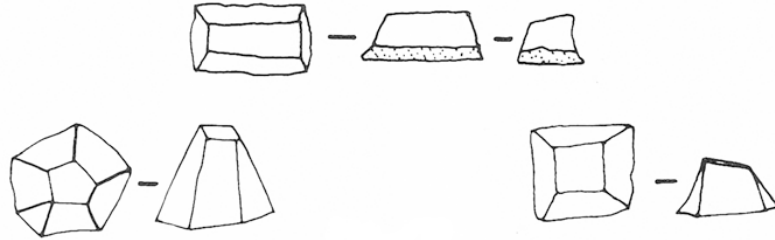
Planche VIII



13



14



15



16