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Miriam’s Song of the Sea: A Women’s Victory Performance

Miriam and the Israelite women echo briefly the famous Song of the Sea sung earlier in Exodus 15… or do they? A closer examination reveals a more prominent role for Miriam and provides information about women as musical performers using song, dance, and drums in ancient Israel.

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The Songs of Joy, James Tissot c. 1896-1902, thejewishmuseum.org

*Shirat Hayam*, “The Song of the Sea” (Exodus 15: 1b-18), is a poetic tribute to Israel’s miraculous deliverance from the pursuing Egyptians.[1] It is generally considered a very ancient poem, much older than (and somewhat different from) the preceding prose account of this pivotal event in the story of the Israelites escape from bondage in Egypt.[2]

In both form and content, it draws on the imagery of Canaanite mythology in which the heroic deity Baal overcomes primordial chaos, represented by surging waters, in order to establish order. The military imagery of the cosmic struggle in the Ugaritic epic reverberates in the Israelite poem; natural elements (wind and water) become YHWH’s weapons against the Egyptian foes.

The divine warrior trope of Canaanite epic is quite explicit: YHWH is metaphorically called אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה, a warrior (verse 3, MT)[3] who subdues the enemy with a sword (חרב, verse 9). Unlike Canaanite myth, YHWH smites human enemies, not the waters.

The Two (?) Songs of the Sea

This hymnic account of the deliverance at the sea is preceded by a brief introduction:

שמות טו:א אָז יָשִׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַי־הוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר

Exod 15:1Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to YHWH. They said…

Thus, the song is often called “The Song of Moses,” a designation otherwise used for the poem in Deuteronomy 32, typically named after its first Hebrew word, *Ha’azinu, “Give Ear*.” The song is followed by a single-verse prose summation,[4] following which is another brief prose section, also introducing a poem:

שמות טו:כ וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֲחוֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת הַתֹּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתֵּצֶאןָ כָל הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתֻפִּים וּבִמְחֹלֹת. טו:כא וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם...

Exod 15:20Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, picked up a hand-drum,[5] and all the women went out after her in dance with hand-drums. 15:21And Miriam chanted for them…

And the poem she chants, often called the Song of Miriam, echoes the first verse of the Song of the Sea:

Moses Song (Exod 15:1b)

אָשִׁירָה לַי־הוָה  
כִּי גָאֹה גָּאָה  
סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם

I shall sing to YHWH  
for he has triumphed gloriously;  
Horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.

**Miriam’s Song (Exod 15:21b)**

שִׁירוּ לַי־הוָה  
כִּי גָאֹה גָּאָה  
סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם

Sing to YHWH  
for he has triumphed gloriously;  
Horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.

In both cases, this couplet is likely to be the title of the poem as well as the opening line, in accordance with the ancient Semitic practice of titling poems or other literary works by their first words or line. But, while the full poem appears in verses 1b–18, verse 21 only references the first line, i.e., the title, which arguably represents the entire poem. For example, in antiquity the Gilgamesh Epic was called “He who saw everything,” which is how the epic begins.

However, in a set of fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls called the Reworked Pentateuch (specifically, 4Q365/4QRPc), dating to 75–50 BCE, seven incomplete lines of a different poetic text have survived as Miriam’s Song and represent the survival of at least one tradition preserving Miriam’s own song, separate from that of Moses.[6]

Who Wrote the Song of the Sea?

Exodus attributes the poem to Moses, with Miriam’s rendition considered an antiphonal response. But a number of considerations support the possibility that, from a tradition historical perspective, the poem was Miriam’s before it was Moses’.

First, whereas the poem begins with the first-person verb, אָשִׁירָה “I will sing,” the prose introduction says that “Moses and the Israelites,” not Moses alone, sang the song. Moreover, it refers to הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת “this song”—not “his song” or “Moses’ song.” Thus, the biblical text itself is not so clear about attribution.

Secondly, the view that Exodus 15:21 is antiphonal is based on the assumption that the verb introducing the poetic snippet in verse 21 means “answer.” However, the verb there, וַתַּעַן, may be a merger of proto-Semitic *\*ʿny*, “answer,” and *\*ǵny*, “sing” (like Arabic *ǵny* and Syriac *‘ny*) and often refers to music or singing (e.g., Numbers 21:17). Moreover, the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Exodus15:21 translates וַתַּעַן as “led them in song.”[7] Thus what Miriam sings is not characterized as an antiphonal answer but rather her own song.

In fact, more than half a century ago, two leading biblical scholars, Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, both experts in biblical poetry, argued that the [long] hymn in Exodus 15 should be designated “The Song of Miriam.” They hold the ascription to her in Exodus 15:20–21 as superior and assert that it is easier to conceive of the long poem being re-attributed to a great leader (Moses) than to “explain the association with Miriam being secondary.”[8]

These points, as well as the existence of a Dead Sea Scroll fragment attributing an extended song to Miriam, suggest that the Song of the Sea should really be attributed to Miriam.[9] Indeed, the very presence of the beginning (that is, the title) of Miriam’s song in the Masoretic Text indicates that the tradition of her authorship was so powerful that it could not be completely edited out, even as editors or redactors associated the entire poem with Moses to heighten his apotheosis.[10]

Genre and Performance: A Woman’s Song

Another reason to connect the Song of the Sea to Miriam is its genre as a woman’s song. The genre can be identified as a performance tradition characterized by three elements in 15:20: a *song* accompanied by *hand-drum* and *dance* (בְּתֻפִּים וּבִמְחֹלֹת). These three elements appear in several other biblical texts and one extra-biblical text—*always* with women as performers.

**Jephthah’s Daughter Celebrates the Victory over the Ammonites**—In Judges 11, Jephthah makes an oath that if he defeats the Ammonites, he will sacrifice whoever comes out of his house first, as such a victory would have been made possible because (verse 29) “the spirit of YHWH empowered Jephthah (וַתְּהִי עַל יִפְתָּח רוּחַ יְ־הוָה), and because (verse 32) “YHWH delivered them into his hands” (וַיִּתְּנֵם יְ־הוָה בְּיָדוֹ). The story then takes a tragic turn:

שופטים יא:לד וַיָּבֹא יִפְתָּח הַמִּצְפָּה אֶל בֵּיתוֹ וְהִנֵּה בִתּוֹ יֹצֵאת לִקְרָאתוֹ בְתֻפִּים וּבִמְחֹלוֹת...

Judg 11:34 When Jephthah arrived at his home in Mizpah, there was his daughter coming out to meet him, with hand-drum and dance!

She is performing this dance (and presumably song), in celebration of the otherwise improbable Israelite victory.[11]

**Israelite Women Celebrate David and Saul’s Victories over the Philistines**—Another celebratory performance appears in 1 Samuel 18 in a narrative about David before he becomes king. At Saul’s behest David successfully overcomes the vaunted Philistine forces (verse 5), after which:

שמואל א יח:ו וַיְהִי בְּבוֹאָם בְּשׁוּב דָּוִד מֵהַכּוֹת אֶת הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי וַתֵּצֶאנָה הַנָּשִׁים מִכָּל עָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (לשור) [לָשִׁיר] וְהַמְּחֹלוֹת לִקְרַאת שָׁאוּל הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּתֻפִּים בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשָׁלִשִׁים. יח:ז וַתַּעֲנֶינָה הַנָּשִׁים הַמְשַׂחֲקוֹת וַתֹּאמַרְןָ הִכָּה שָׁאוּל (באלפו) [בַּאֲלָפָיו] וְדָוִד בְּרִבְבֹתָיו.

1 Sam 18:6 When the troops came home and David returned from killing the Philistine, the women of all the towns of Israel came out singing and dancing to greet King Saul with hand-drums, shouting, and sistrums. 18:7 The women sang as they danced, and they chanted: “Saul has slain his thousands; David, his tens of thousands!”

Again, we have women dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments to celebrate an Israelite victory.

**Deborah’s Song**—Judges 5:1, a celebratory poem commemorating the Israelite victory over Sisera, general of the Canaanite forces, is another example. This ancient poem is often called the Song of Deborah. Although the prose introduction to the song has Barak singing along with her, the poem is presented in the first person singular and Deborah references herself in verse 8. Later in the song, the division between Deborah as singer and Barak as conqueror is made explicit:

שופטים ה:יב עוּרִי עוּרִי דְּבוֹרָה עוּרִי עוּרִי דַּבְּרִי שִׁיר קוּם בָּרָק וּשֲׁבֵה שֶׁבְיְךָ בֶּן אֲבִינֹעַם.

Judg 5:12 Awake, awake, O Deborah! Awake, awake, strike up the chant! Arise, O Barak; Take your captives, O son of Abinoam!

The poem never says that Deborah is playing music or dancing, but the very fact of a woman singing a victory song elliptically invokes the image of drum and dance accompanying the song.

**Personified Israel—**Jeremiah 31, an oracle of hope and consolation to the survivors of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, describes a personified Israel as a young woman who goes out with hand-drums and dancing in celebration:

ירמיה לא:ד עוֹד אֶבְנֵךְ וְנִבְנֵית בְּתוּלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד תַּעְדִּי תֻפַּיִךְ וְיָצָאת בִּמְחוֹל מְשַׂחֲקִים.

Jer 31:4 I will build you firmly again, O Maiden Israel! Again you shall take up your hand-drums and go forth to the rhythm of the dancers.

This is not exactly a military victory, but it does attribute the similarly joyful return from exile to God’s power.

**Judith Celebrate the Defeat of the Assyrians**—In the ancient Jewish novel about Judith and her heroic deeds,[12] Judith saves her people by beheading the enemy general Holofernes (Judith 13–15) in a manner reminiscent of the Deborah narrative.[13] As in the Hebrew-Bible examples considered here, Judith leads all the women, with dance and hand-drums:

Judith 15:12 And every woman of Israel rushed together so as to see her, and they blessed her, and some of them performed a choral dance for her, and she took wands in her hands and gave them to the women who were with her. 15:13 … and she went before all the people leading all the women in dancing, and every man of Israel, vested in armor, was following along with crowns, and they were singing hymns with their mouth.[14]

Judith then sings a long poem (16:1–17) celebrating victory over the mighty Assyrians because of God’s intervention, at the hand of a woman, which begins thus:

Judith 15:14 And Judith began this confession in the midst of all Israel, and all the people were singing out this praise. 16:1 And Judith said:

 Address my God with hand-drums;  
 Sing to the Lord with cymbals.  
 Adapt a tune and a song of praise for him;  
 Exalt and invoke his name.[15]

Judith’s leading of women in a victory song is reminiscent of Miriam’s act in Exodus 15 and was likely composed with this account in mind.

A Woman’s Tradition

Taken together, these texts specifying drum-dance-song performance represent a distinct *women’s*tradition. Even when all three of these elements are not mentioned, the presence of all three would have been understood. Indeed, studies of traditional songs suggest an organic performance tradition, with movement (dance) and rhythm (drums) along with words constituting a compositional whole.[16]

In this case—the Song of Miriam and similar texts­­ involving dancing, drums, and song—the performance genre is a victory-song tradition associated specifically with women. Women are the ones left behind when armies go out to battle, and thus they are the ones to celebrate the return of warriors.[17] In its ancient cultural context, the Song of the Sea would have been sung by women—Miriam and her cohort—celebrating YHWH’s defeat of Israel’s enemies. In fact, from the accounts of Miriam, Deborah, Jephthah’s daughter, and Judith, we get a picture of women as leaders of musical groups.

Women and Drums

Consideration of the vocabulary for musical instruments in the Hebrew Bible sheds additional light on this genre and on women’s role as musicians, specifically drummers. The Hebrew Bible actually has a rich vocabulary of musical terms, especially ones denoting musical instruments. Musicologists have divided them into four categories,[18] listed here with the number of different types mentioned in the Hebrew Bible:

1. Chordophones: stringed instruments; at least nine different ones (e.g., *kinnor*, lyre).[19]
2. Aerophones: wind instruments; about a dozen of these (e.g., *shophar*, horn).[20]
3. Idiophones: instruments that produce sound when parts of it strike each other; five examples (e.g., *pa‘amonim*, small bells).[21]
4. Membranophones; percussion instruments: *only* *one*, the *toph* (hand-drum or frame drum), likely the oldest type of musical instrument.



Small hand-held drum, often used in school music groups today. This example is ten inches in diameter. Those used in the Iron Age were probably somewhat smaller. Photo by the author.

The appearance of only one membranophone in the Bible, the hand-drum (*toph*), means that virtually every musical performance involved that instrument, for the beat of a percussion instrument was a fundamental part of any musical performance. And who played the drums in ancient Israel?

Although the Bible mentions nearly thirty different instruments, the gender of the musician playing them is noted only for hand-drums. This appear in the victory-song passages and in Psalm 68, in which a procession to the temple includes singers, musicians, and young women playing hand-drums.[22]

תהלים סח:כו קִדְּמוּ שָׁרִים אַחַר נֹגְנִים בְּתוֹךְ עֲלָמוֹת תּוֹפֵפוֹת.

Ps 68:26 First come singers, then musicians, amidst maidens playing hand-drums.

Moreover, of the sixteen times the hand-drum appears in the Hebrew Bible, only five times does the text mention the musicians, and in all cases they are women.

A Woman’s Dance

Just as the hand-drum seems to have been a woman’s instrument, the Hebrew root ח.ו.ל, used for dance in the passages reporting women’s drum, dance, and song (Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:6; and Jeremiah 31:4), seems to refer to a women’s dance.

We see this root again in reference to the Shulamite woman in the Song of Songs:

שיר השירים ז:א מַה תֶּחֱזוּ בַּשּׁוּלַמִּית כִּמְחֹלַת הַמַּחֲנָיִם.

Song 7:1 Why will you gaze at the Shulammite in the Mahanaim dance?"

Elsewhere, when men are dancing, the root is ר.ק.ד (e.g., 1 Chronicles 15:29).[23] Women apparently moved horizontally in a specific kind of dance, likely a circle dance, whereas men moved vertically, leaping up and down.[24]

Women and Their Drums: Archaeological Evidence

The connection between women (not men!) and drums is supported by archaeological evidence. Small clay figurines have been recovered at virtually every Iron Age site in the East Mediterranean. Many of them represent animals, but figurines representing humans are also common.[25] A subset of the terracotta renderings of humans are those depicting musicians playing flutes, cymbals, lyres, and hand-drums.[26] Nearly forty of the figurines of musicians depict drum-players, and to the best of my knowledge, virtually all of those percussionists are women.[27]

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| https://firebasestorage.googleapis.com/v0/b/bageladmin.appspot.com/o/rtf%2F2.%20HSM%20terracotta.jpg?alt=media&token=0b9cf676-4c8e-4eb9-b7b1-ebb98273720e  Terracotta figurine depicting a woman playing a hand- drum. The pillar base is 14.8 cm. high and 8 cm. in diameter at the bottom, and the total height is 21.8 cm. This unprovenanced artifact probably dates to the eighth-seventh century BCE. Courtesy of the Semitic Museum, Harvard University (Photograph by Carl Andrews). |



Drawing of a terracotta figurine of a woman playing a hand-drum; from Shiqmona (near Haifa), probably ninth-eighth centuries B.C.E.

Today men dominate as percussionists; not so in the ancient Levant, where women were the drum players as sole accompanists to musical performances or as part of small ensembles of musicians. Women-only ensembles appear in the archaeological record in the form of a small ivory pyxis (cylindrical box with a lid, usually to hold cosmetics, jewelry, or other trinkets), dating to the Iron II period, discovered at Nimrud but probably originating in the Levant. It shows a procession of women musicians with a hand-drum player in the middle.[28] A similar scene appears on an early seventh-century BCE silver bowl discovered in Cyprus but probably made by an artist from the Levant.[29]



Ivory pyxis from Nimrud showing an ensemble of female musicians. This badly burnt cylindrical box, dating to the Neo-Assyrian period (900-700 BCE), is about three inches high and four inches in diameter. Photo **©**Trustees of the British Museum.

Concluding Comments

In sum, because only women played the *toph*, all the biblical passages that mention performances involving drums *and* other instruments must denote ensembles that were either all female (as when dance, using ח.ו.ל, is also mentioned; see Psalms 149:3; 150:4) or were mixed gender.[30] In the former case, when practicing together, women formed groups and provided opportunities for women leaders.

The Song of the Sea is a prominent biblical example of a woman’s performance genre. Its attribution to Miriam means that this powerful and perhaps earliest message about God’s power used to save the people is given voice by a woman.

The placement of Miriam’s song after the full version associated with Moses may seem to cede unwarranted credit to the male leader, but at the same time it forms the literary function of enveloping the first major section of the book of Exodus (Exodus 1–15:21) within woman-centered texts—from the twelve women who figure prominently in the opening chapters of Exodus (Shiphrah, Puah, Moses’ mother, his sister [Miriam], Pharaoh’s daughter, and the seven daughters of the priest of Midian)—to the ringing words of Miriam in Exodus 15.[31]

[View Footnotes](https://www.thetorah.com/article/miriams-song-of-the-sea-a-womens-victory-performance)

1. This essay is based on my “Miriam, Music, and Miracles,” in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 2005), 27–48.
2. The poem is written in Archaic Biblical Hebrew, which predates the Classical Biblical Hebrew of much of the Hebrew Bible. See Agustinus Gianto, “Archaic Biblical Hebrew,” *A Handbook of Biblical Hebrew: Volume I: Periods, Corpora, and Reading Traditions*, eds. W. Randall Garr and Steven E. Fassberg (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 19–29. The Song of the Sea is a major example in Gianto’s analysis.
3. SP reads גבור מלחמה, while LXX reads συντρίβων πολέμους, apparently reflecting שׁבר מלחמה.

שמות טו:יט כִּי בָא סוּס פַּרְעֹה בְּרִכְבּוֹ וּבְפָרָשָׁיו בַּיָּם וַיָּשֶׁב יְ־הוָה עֲלֵהֶם אֶת מֵי הַיָּם וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בַיַּבָּשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם.

Exod 15:19For the horses of Pharaoh, with his chariots and riders, went into the sea, and YHWH turned back on them the waters of the sea; but the Israelites marched on dry ground in the midst of the sea.

Note the difference between this summary and the poetic account; in verse 19 the horses, chariots, and riders go into the sea, whereas in the poetry YHWH casts or hurls them into the waters (verses 1, 4).

1. Like many translations, the NJPS version renders the onomatopoetic Hebrew word*toph*(plural *tuppim*) with “timbrels,” usually considered an archaic form of “tambourine.” Indeed, the NRSV and other versions have “tambourine.” Both are anachronistic, for a hand-held drum (hand-drum, or frame drum) with jingles—i.e., a tambourine—does not appear until the Roman period.
2. See George J. Brooke, “Power to the Powerless—A Long-Lost Song of Miriam,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20 (1994): 62–65. The Miriam fragment is published in Sidnie A. White, “4Q364 and 365: A Preliminary Report,” in *The Madrid Qumran Conference*, eds. J. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner, *Studies in the Text of the Desert of Judah 11*(Leiden: Brill; Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1992), 217–228 [222–224].

The additional lines in White’s translation (p. 222) are (4Q365, fragment 6 ii):

א בזית ע[...]  
ב כי גאות לע[...]  
ג גדול אתה מושיע א[...]  
ד אבדה תקות שונה ונש[כח ...]  
  
ה אבדו במים אדירים שונה [...]  
  
ו ורוממנה למרומם [...].ות ונתת.[...]  
ז [עו]שה גאות *vacat* [*vacat*]

1You despised (?)…  
2 for the majesty of...  
3You are great, a deliverer.(?)..  
4 the hope of the enemy has perished, and he is for[gotten] (or: has cea[sed]) ...  
5 they perished in the mighty waters, the enemy (or “enemies”)...  
6Extol the one who raises up.(?).. you gave(?) ...  
7 [the one who] does gloriously ... (or: [who perf]orms majestically…)

1. See William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,*Anchor Bible 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 548.
2. So Frank M. Cross, Jr. and David Noel Freedman, “The Song of Miriam,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*14 (1955): 237–250 [p. 237], who say that “vs. 21 is not a different or shorter or the original version of the song, but simply the title of the poem taken from a different cycle of traditions.” In a follow up article, Freedman explained that the editor of this section of Exodus “wanted it clearly understood that Moses composed and performed this dramatic song.” David Noel Freedman, “Moses and Miriam: The Song of the Sea,” *Realia Dei: Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Edward F. Campbell, Jr. at His Retirement*, eds. Prescott H. Williams, Jr. and Theodore Hiebert (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 67–83 [70–71].
3. For yet another argument, on literary grounds (analepsis), for asserting the primacy of Miriam’s song, see J. Gerald Janzen, “Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*54 (1992): 212–220.
4. As suggested decades ago by Phyllis Trible, “Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows,” *Bible Review*5 (1989): 19-20.
5. Editor’s note: For a discussion of this story and whether she is sacrificed in the end, see Jack Sasson, [“The Story of Jephthah: The Urge to Manipulate,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-story-of-jephthah-the-urge-to-manipulate) *TheTorah* (2015); Jonathan Magonet, [“Did Jephthah Actually Kill His Daughter?”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/did-jephthah-actually-kill-his-daughter) *TheTorah* (2014).
6. This book by an anonymous author is set in the period of the late monarchy but probably dates to late Second Temple times, perhaps to the end of the Hasmonean dynasty during the reign of Queen Salome Alexandra (76–67 BCE); see Denise Dembroski Hopkins, “Judith,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 383–390 [385]. See also, Deborah Gera, [“Judith: A Chanukah Heroine,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/judith-a-chanukah-heroine) *TheTorah* (2015).
7. See Sidnie White Crawford, “In the Steps of Jael and of Jael and Deborah: Judith as Heras Heroine,” *i*n *‘No One Spoke Ill of Her”: Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. VanderKam, Early Judaism and Its Literature 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 5–16. Similarly, Lawrence Wills (*Judith* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019], 375-378) sees a connection between Judith’s victory celebration and that of Deborah and especially Miriam; he suggests that Judith “restores the woman’s role to the victory song that Miriam lost when her song was ascribed to Moses” (376).

Jud 15:12 καὶ συνέδραμεν πᾶσα γυνὴ Ισραηλ τοῦ ἰδεῖν αὐτὴν καὶ εὐλόγησαν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐποίησαν αὐτῇ χορὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν καὶ ἔλαβεν θύρσους ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἔδωκεν ταῖς γυναιξὶν ταῖς μετ᾽ αὐτῆς 15:13 … καὶ προῆλθεν παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ ἐν χορείᾳ ἡγουμένη πασῶν τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ ἠκολούθει πᾶς ἀνὴρ Ισραηλ ἐνωπλισμένοι μετὰ στεφάνων καὶ ὕμνουν ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν.

Jud 15:14 καὶ ἐξῆρχεν Ιουδιθ τὴν ἐξομολόγησιν ταύτην ἐν παντὶ Ισραηλ καὶ ὑπερεφώνει πᾶς ὁ λαὸς τὴν αἴνεσιν ταύτην. 16:1 καὶ εἶπεν Ιουδιθ  
 ἐξάρχετε τῷ θεῷ μου ἐν τυμπάνοις  
 ᾄσατε τῷ κυρίῳ ἐν κυμβάλοις  
 ἐναρμόσασθε αὐτῷ ψαλμὸν καὶ αἶνον ὑψοῦτε  
 καὶ ἐπικαλεῖσθε τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

1. See, e.g., Alfred B. Lord, *A Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), and Ruth H. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
2. For a pioneering study, originally published in Hebrew in 1957, of women’s creativity as expressed in performance genres, see Shelomo Dov Goitein, “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres,” *Prooftexts*8 (1988): 1–33. Goitein (pp. 5–8) points to the song of Miriam and the other texts noted here as examples of a victory celebration genre.
3. Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 11-12. The numbers in each category may not be exact because of difficulties in identifying some of the instruments.
4. Biblical chordophones are lyres (*kinnor*, *‘sor*, *shushan*, *qatros*), harp (*nebelgittit*), lutes (*neginot*?, *sabbeka*) and zither (*pesant*er). The question mark indicate that the identification is uncertain.
5. The biblical examples include wood­winds (*‘ugab*, *khalil*, *makhol*, *nekhilot?*, *neqeb*?, *mashroqit*, *‘alamot*?, *sumponya*?), horns (*shophar* [shofar], *qeren*, *yobel*) and trumpet (*khetsotsra*). The question marks indicate that the identification is uncertain.
6. Biblical idiophones are cymbals (*metsiltayim*, *tseltselim*), sistrum (*shalishim*?), small bells (*pa‘amonim*), rattles (*mena‘an‘im*), and large bells (*metsillot*?). The question marks indicate the identification is uncertain.
7. One exception is the tradition of David playing the lyre (1 Samuel 16:23; 18:10).
8. The root ר.ק.ד also refers to the skipping movements of animals (e.g., Psalm 114:4, 6) or, metaphorically, places (e.g., Psalm 29:6). Several other words likely denote dance or some kind of movement: כ.ר.כ.ר (e.g., 2 Samuel 6:14, 17) and שׂ.ח.ק (e.g., 1 Samuel 18:7).
9. Tal Ilan, “Dance and Gender in Ancient Jewish Sources,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003): 135–136. Gender-differentiated dancing also appears in rabbinic literature (e.g., *m. Ta‘an.* 4:8; *b. Ketub*. 16a–17a).
10. Those depicting humans are simple, small (about six inches in height) figurines called “pillar figurines” because the bottom flares, making them free-standing. The most famous of these are the so-called Judean pillar figurines (JPFs; see Aaron Greener, [“What Are Clay Female Figurines Doing in Judah during the Biblical Period?”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/what-are-clay-female-figurines-doing-in-judah-during-the-biblical-period)) *TheTorah* [2017]), often thought to represent a goddess but more likely depicting a human woman. See my “Terracottas without Texts: Judean Pillar Figurines in Anthropological Perspective,” in *To Break Every Yoke: Essays in Honor of Marvin L. Chaney*, ed. Robert B. Coote and Norman K. Gottwald (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 115–130.
11. On the provenance of these artifacts, see Raz Kletter and Katri Saarelainen, “Judean Drummers,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*127 (2011): 11–28. Kletter and Saarelainen include plaque figurines and figurines with women holding discs against their chest in their corpus of drum players, but doing so his problematic; see my “Disks and Deities: Images on Iron Age Terracotta Plaques,” in *Le-ma‘an Ziony: Essays in Honor of Ziony Zevit*, ed. Frederic E. Greenspahn and Gary A. Rendsburg (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 115–133.
12. The circular disc held perpendicularly by a male musician has often been misidentified; the hand positions of those examples represent a man playing cymbals rather than a woman playing a hand-drum. See my “Miriam, Music, and Miracles,” 34.
13. This badly damaged artifact from the burnt neo-Assyrian palace at the Nimrud was acquired by the British Museum in 1856 and has been carefully restored. On the bottom is an inscription, in West Semitic, reading *l…bytgs*, “belonging to …of Bit-Gusi” according to the British Museum website, https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\_online/collection\_object\_details.aspx?assetId=105331001&objectId=282803&partId=1
14. So Vassos Karageorghis, “A Cypriot Silver Bowl Reconsidered I. The Iconography of the Decoration,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 34 (1999): 13­–20.
15. Examples of these musical ensembles are Genesis 31:27; 1 Samuel 10:5; 2 Samuel 6:5; Isaiah 5:12; 30:29 [or 32]; Psalms 81:3-4; 149:3; 150: 3–4; Job 21:12; 1 Chronicles 13:8. Many of these passages also mention dance.
16. On the structure of the book of Exodus, see my*Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16–18.