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Materia magica at Ugarit: Reflections on Some Realia

Valérie Matoïan

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Rituale und Magie in Ugarit

Praxis, Kontexte und Bedeutung

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Materia magica in Ugarit

Reflections on Some Realia

VALÉRIE MATOĀN

1. Introductory remarks

In the field of research on Ugaritian civilisation, our knowledge of magico-religious practices is based principally on making full use of the textual documentation. The study of the *realia* of magic, through an analysis of the material culture, is still a somewhat under-developed approach. Of course, professional specialists in magic referred to texts, the recitation of which could form one facet of a ritual. But in practice, gestures and the manipulation of objects, plants, minerals or substances of various kinds were also customary. A subtle combination of the power of the written word, the power of spoken words, the symbolic meaning of materials (stone, metal, clay, etc.) and of colours as well as the power of images was undoubtedly a guarantee of unflinching efficacy.

In the perspective of preparing an overall summary, taking into account the various sources documenting religious and magical practices in Ugarit,¹ over the course of the last few years we have been interested in several categories of objects that seem to have a connection with *materia magica*.²

This approach is particularly delicate in view of the present state of research in this area – an important part of the documentation is still unavailable, one of the current challenges being an *editio princeps* of as yet unpublished material – and the nature of our documentation. No texts are available to us that describe these *realia* exactly – those used by specialists in magic or objects considered to be amulets (generally speaking, the descriptions in the texts connected with magic have very little detail) –, there are relatively few inscribed objects, and images correlated with an associated text are rare.³

¹ This study of *materia magica* is part of a large programme the aim of which is to produce a summary, as yet unpublished, of all the archaeological and iconographical information relating to religious and magico-religious practices in Ugarit.

² Here additional studies are mentioned for a better understanding of the position held by images of deities that originated in Egypt: MATOĀN, *Étude*; EADEM, *Naissance*; EADEM, *Statuette*; EADEM, *Ougarit, l'Égypte et les "Phéniciens"*; EADEM, *Horon*.

³ Furthermore, the connection between a text and an image is not always explicit. Here we consider the case of the models of livers used for divination, found in the "House of the priest-magician". Whereas the text of several of these (RS 24.326 / KTU 1.143; RS 24.654 / KTU 1.155) names the object bearing the inscription (*kbd* = "liver") (DIETRICH / LORETZ, *Lungen- und Lebermodelle*; PARDEE, *Textes rituels*; SAUVAGE / HAWLEY, *Fusaïole inscrite*, 385), on the model of a lung RS 24.277 / KTU 1.127, there is no explicit mention either of the organ represented by the replica, nor of the actual

Often it is difficult to draw a line between the decorative function or aesthetic value of an object and its magical potential. In this perspective, interpretation is based equally on the analysis of forms, materials and colours as well as on the images on some of the *realia*.

In other respects, the range of documents and the variety of their provenance (local or foreign), the often incomplete nature of information concerning the contexts of discovery due to the age of the archaeological excavations (most of the items were discovered during the first campaigns), and the fact that the objects were not found in a functional context complicate our task further when trying to establish a corpus of *materia magica*.⁴ The greatest prudence is required in interpreting what actually happened in the past: an object could have been used in various contexts; the ancients played with the polysemy of symbols; the material and written culture of Ugarit testify to cultural interactions; the boundaries between the genres of the texts sometimes seem to be fluid. Finally, Ugaritian society was composite.

Two cases are sufficient to evoke the array of questions and show how our analysis is forced to evaluate the range of possibilities and how it can depend on the adopted point of view.

The first example concerns the practice of sealing. The seal ring of Šipti-Ba^ʿalu (only known from its impression) is one of the rare objects with an inscription which both defines it (as a seal) and indicates the name of its owner;⁵ however, the ethnic origin of Šipti-Ba^ʿalu is not certain and the underlying reasons for the use of the Egyptian hieroglyphic script remain unknown.

As for written culture, it is clear that while the religious texts in Akkadian found in Ugarit are generally considered to be part of the curriculum for training scribes, the use of the incantations by professionals in magic is also envisaged.⁶ The possibility of a “language specific to incantations” has even been proposed by Florence Malbran-Labat:

“pour autant qu’elles nous sont connues, elles sont en ougaritique quand elles sont destinées à préserver des morsures de serpents et en akkadien quand elles concernent l’accouchement et les attaques de la démonsse Lamaštu, le traitement des maladies d’yeux, des maux de tête, de fièvres et diverses autres maladies”.⁷

R. Hawley also has proposed the hypothesis of a possible connection between the application of a medical prescription described in the text of the Ugaritic tablet RS 18.107 (KTU 1.88) and the recitation of incantations from Mesopotamian tradition, in order to increase the efficacy of the therapeutic act.⁸

action of extispicy (PARDEE, Textes rituels, 727). For liver models made of ivory see GACHET, Ivoires inscrits, and PARDEE, Ivoires inscrits.

⁴ Our approach is principally interpretative and leads to the formulation of hypotheses. Cf. the recent study of the mace RS 24.57 decorated with an engraved scorpion, hypothetically classified as part of *materia magica* as a whole (DALIX / MATOÏAN, La tête).

⁵ VITA / GALÁN, Šipti-Ba^ʿalu.

⁶ VAN SOLDT, Babylonian, 177f.

⁷ MALBRAN-LABAT, Langues, 76f. See also ARNAUD, Corpus; MÁRQUEZ ROWE, Babylonian Incantation Texts.

⁸ HAWLEY, Fragment, 20.

By presenting a selection of objects, we shall attempt to underline some questions that have arisen from the analysis of the archaeological evidence and the avenues of research provided by a comparison with the textual documentation. We shall focus in particular on the various forms adopted by cultural interactions. The *realia* studied are either unique or form a series illustrated by only a few specimens.⁹

The first is the steatite seal RS 25.188 (*fig. 1*) on the plate of which (4,2 x 3,6 x 1,5 cm) is both an image of a sphinx and an inscription comprising three letters (KTU 6.95).¹⁰ According to Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, this inscription uses the long cuneiform alphabet of Ugarit and is to be read as: *ald*.¹¹ This word would correspond to the Ugaritic form of Sumerian ^dalad (= *Šêdu*), a term that denotes a protective genie in Mesopotamia. Viewed in this interesting way, on the seal from Ugarit, *ald* would be the name of the being portrayed, that is, a sphinx, or an epithet given to it.¹²



Fig. 1: Steatite seal (RS 25.188), Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra).

⁹ The purpose of this article is not to present an overall summary of this topic and, therefore, it is not exhaustive.

¹⁰ For the *editio princeps*, see DALIX, *Dlq.*

¹¹ DIETRICH / LORETZ, *Die apotropäische Sphinx*.

¹² Here we can refer to André Caquot's comments on the god *šd* in Ugarit: it "est certainement impossible de le séparer du *šedu* des Mésopotamiens connu comme une puissance protectrice, un génie", remembering that if "*šedu* en accadien paraît aussi imprécis que *ilu*, l'Égypte aide à cerner les traits du *šd* des Sémites occidentaux" (CAQUOT, *Chadrapha*; IDEM, *Contribution*, 6).

In view of the important evidence this object can provide, we have made a study of the evidence in the documents in the excavation archive in an attempt to pinpoint the context of its discovery.¹³ This object was discovered in 1962, in the sector called “Tranchée Sud-acropole”, at topographical point (tp) 4126 (at a depth of 1,25 m). This point is indicated on the plan of the northern sector of the “Tranchée Sud-acropole” published on fold-out page I in *Ugaritica* VII. According to the archives, this object was brought to light during the excavation of a building located at the eastern edge of this trench, east of the “maison du prêtre magicien”, which is well known from the texts found there. The archival material available does not make it possible to know whether the building was excavated completely. Only a resumption and extension of the excavation, towards the east, would enable us to define its boundaries with accuracy. As of now, three *loci* (a large area to the north and two smaller rooms to the south), connected with each other,

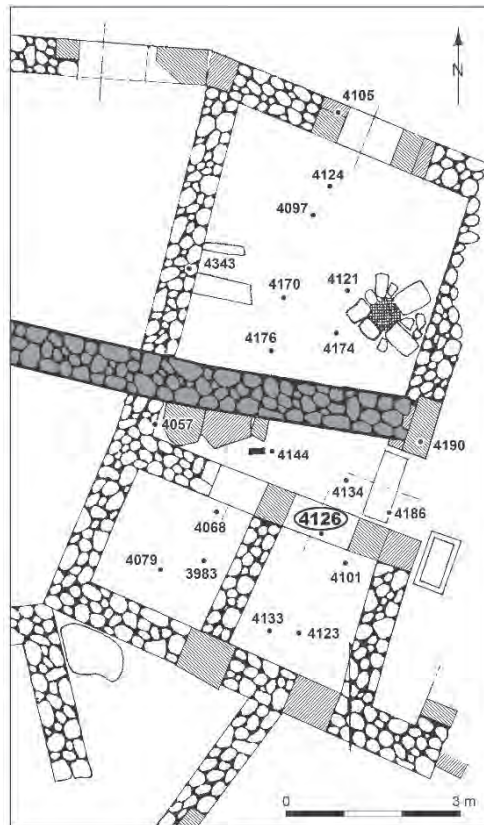


Fig. 2: Location (topographical point 4126) where the seal RS 25.188 was discovered in “Tranchée Sud-acropole”, Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, computer graphics by V. Matoïan & G. Devilder).

¹³ The context of this find was not described in the *editio princeps* (DALIX, *Dlq*, 45).

belong to the same architectural unit.¹⁴ Excavations have brought to light evidence of later reoccupation (in the second half of the first millennium BCE) in this sector, indicated on the plan by the wall lying east-west, coloured light grey on *figure 2*.

Twenty topographical points are marked on the plan. For nine of them, the inventory of finds does not provide any information about the artefacts that could have been associated with them; some could correspond to specific structures (for example, tp 4057 corresponds to Tombe [610] identified by S. Marchegay).¹⁵

Without considering the data concerning the depth of the discoveries, the archives provide no information on the chrono-stratigraphic context of the finds, with the exception of a bronze arrowhead (RS 25.241) which is associated with the occupation in the first millennium.¹⁶ Two finds were made at a shallow depth and probably come from soil on the surface: a fragment of a terracotta figurine (RS 25.308, the head of a quadruped) found at a depth of 0,35 m, at tp 4101, which is located close to the seal RS 25.188; a steatite cylinder seal RS 25.162, found at a depth of 0,45 m at tp 3983.¹⁷

The seal RS 25.188 was found at the level of the threshold of the door of the south-eastern *locus*. The other objects discovered during the excavation of this building are: two bronze scissors (RS 25.234, tp 4134, depth 1,25 m, and RS 25.238, tp 4133, depth 1,20 m); a steatite spindle (RS 25.371, tp 4068, depth 1,75 m); a limestone weight in the shape of a dome RS 25.505 (tp 4176, depth 2,10 m);¹⁸ a pottery juglet (RS 25.549, tp 4174, depth 1,70 m) the description of which in the inventory suggests that it could be a White-Shaved juglet; a bronze ring engraved with a geometrical pattern (RS 25.486, tp 4124, depth 1 m), shaped very like ring RS 24.145 (with the name “Patiluwa”). A tablet (RS 25.417 = RS 25.463, KTU 4.745) was found not far from the seal (tp 4144, depth 1,80 m).¹⁹ It is an administrative accounting document in Ugaritic (a list of professions).²⁰ This means that none of these discoveries seems to provide important elements to determine the function of this exceptional seal,²¹ found in a building standing less than 10 m from the building known as the “*maison du prêtre-magicien*”.²² It is worth mentioning that from this building have come a number of documents (rituals, paramythological texts, divination texts, incantations, etc.). These provide information on religious practices as well as exhibiting features showing the local culture and Ugaritic (sometimes mixed with Hurrian) and features associated with Akkadian.

¹⁴ It is not possible to determine, from an analysis of the plan, whether the opening to the south-east of the northern *locus* corresponds to the entrance of the building or to an internal passage.

¹⁵ MARCHEGAY, Tombes.

¹⁶ STUCKY, Leukos Limen, 72 n° 16.

¹⁷ AMIET, Corpus des cylindres, n° 216.

¹⁸ BORDREUIL, Peser, vol. II, cat. 344, weight 44,8 g.

¹⁹ Correct TEO (BORDREUIL / PARDEE, Trouvaille), which states that the provenance is the “*Maison aux textes magiques*” (“House with magical texts”).

²⁰ BORDREUIL, Peser, vol. I, 378f.

²¹ A study of the iconography of the seal RS 25.188 is in progress (MATOÏAN, in press).

²² “House of the priest-magician”. On its other names, see MALBRAN-LABAT, Langues, 74f n. 52.

2. Interpreting objects from outside Ugarit

Cultural interactions are also shown by the presence of imported objects, from Egypt, Cyprus, Mesopotamia, etc. Ensuring that their provenance is foreign – the first stage in research – often depends on a set of indications taken from typological, stylistic, epigraphic and technical studies, even from analysis in a laboratory. Here are some illustrative examples.

2.1. Objects with depictions having a prophylactic meaning

From Egypt come chiefly some notable objects in ivory or alabaster,²³ numerous scarabs,²⁴ as well as some rings,²⁵ beads, and pendants decorated with images of deities and apotropaic motifs such as the *nefer* sign, the *ânkh* symbol, the *ouadj* symbol or even the *Tilapia nilotica*.²⁶ One such example is the pendant made of Egyptian blue RS 21.175 (Damascus Museum), decorated with an image of *Tilapia nilotica* in relief (fig. 3).²⁷



Fig. 3: Pendant decorated with an image of *Tilapia nilotica* (RS 21.175), Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, photo V. Matoïan, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

²³ See: the “magic wand” RS 24.412, made of ivory from a hippopotamus (GACHET-BIZOLLON, *Ivoires d’Ougarit*, cat. 394, with references; MATOÏAN, *Ugarit et l’Égypte*, 44 fig. 6); an *appliqué* in the shape of a *djed*-pillar RS 28.32, also made of ivory from a hippopotamus (GACHET-BIZOLLON, *Ivoires d’Ougarit*, cat. 354); the alabaster vase decorated with an image of Bes RS 23.371 (MATOÏAN, *Ugarit et l’Égypte*, 56 fig. 21).

²⁴ Cf. the research by Béréenice Lagarce-Othman (see LAGARCE-OTHMAN, *Scarabées*).

²⁵ MATOÏAN, *Étude*, 218 n. 43.

²⁶ MATOÏAN, *Ugarit et l’Égypte*. On amulets in ancient Egypt, see especially ANDREWS, *Amulets*.

²⁷ MATOÏAN / BOUQUILLON, *Le bleu égyptien*, 995.1002 fig. 2; MATOÏAN, *Ugarit et l’Égypte*, 59 fig. 24. This object was found during the excavation of the “Quartier égéen” (“rue de Mineptah”, tp 2076, depth 2,10 m).

This motif, which in Egypt is associated with the concept of rebirth, is not very common in Ugarit; it is found on a few vases made of blue faience decorated with black paint, typical of Egyptian products of the New Kingdom.²⁸ A typological study and an archaeometrical analysis of the pendant have allowed the proposition that an Egyptian provenance is more than likely. The use of blue, which evokes the aquatic world and refers to the primordial ocean from which the sun emerged on the first morning of the world,²⁹ reinforce the symbolism of the fish *Tilapia*.

The second example is an unpublished item from Cyprus: the stone seal RS 10.095 (Aleppo Museum). This object is registered in the archives of the mission (fonds Schaeffer, Collège de France). With a parallelepipedal shape, the seal is decorated on both sides (*fig. 4*). The central space, framed by a double rectangle decorated with lines, has figurative motifs: on one side a person standing in profile, who seems to be walking towards the right, and, upside-down on the other side, a bovine head on top of a motif evoking “horns of consecration”, a symbol of Minoan religion. The shape of the seal³⁰ and the engraved motifs allow this object to be classed among Cypriot imports dating to the final period of the Late Bronze Age.

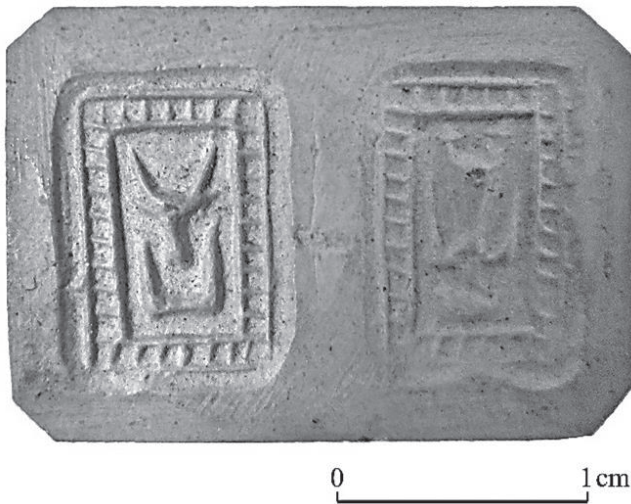


Fig. 4: Modern impression of the seal RS 10.095 (Mission of Ras Shamra, photo V. Matoïan, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

²⁸ MATOÏAN / MARCHEGAY, À propos, 110–112.116.

²⁹ PIERRAT-BONNEFOIS, En Égypte, 69.

³⁰ In Cypriot glyptic from the Late Bronze Age, alongside cylinder seals and conoid seals, which are the most commonly occurring forms, there are some less common types including the tabloid seals (REYES, Stamp-Seals, 8f). There are several items of this type in Ugarit: the seal RS 10.095 under discussion here, and the seal RS 10.116, an example of the “Date-Palms” group.

However, this piece from Ugarit is unusual in associating the bovine head motif with “horns of consecration”.³¹ In general, Cypriot glyptic shows the bovine head in association with a motif understood to represent an oxhide shaped ingot.³² The representation of the “horns of consecration”, a motif originating from Crete, is very rare among the archaeological evidence found in Ugarit. This motif occurs on two fragments of a Mycenaean ceramic krater: in both cases, the “horns of consecration” are placed on an altar.³³ These two fragments were found in the “Tranchée Sud-acropole”, the first in the “maison du prêtre-magicien” (in the southern part of this building, from which the incantations against Lamaštu had come), and the second in a building located to the north of this building. The decorative motif is more common in Cyprus, where it appears on various types of furniture – vases, sarcophagi (Yalisos, Hala Sultan Tekke, Enkomi, Kalavassos Ayios-Dhimitrios),³⁴ cultic basin (Pyla-Kokkinokremos) – and where the “cornes de consécration” were found in several buildings (in Palaepaphos, Kition and Myrtou-Pigadhes).³⁵

Interpreting the purpose of these two *realia* as well as the semantic field of the images on them depends on information about them that the documentation available does not supply. Consequently, the lack of data about the contexts where these two objects were discovered severely limits any interpretation.³⁶ Did they belong to Ugaritians or to foreigners, residents or temporary occupants? This last hypothesis is certainly feasible since the texts available mention the presence of Egyptians and Cypriots (Alashiyotes) in Ugarit. Were they worn by their owner while he was alive? Were they used as identity markers, seals, or protective amulets? Or were they intended to be offered during a ritual, and if so, in which context?

2.2. A Babylonian agate bead with a dedication to the god Enki

The third example considered here – the bead made of ribboned agate RS 14.242 – leads us to Mesopotamia (*fig. 5*). Once again, this is a unique and a very small document (2,0 x 2,4 x 1,0 cm). Its shape may resemble a small tablet,³⁷ with one side flat and the other rounded, on which is engraved a dedication in Sumerian, written inside a cartouche. The text is addressed to Enki by an individual.

³¹ Perhaps they appear together on a Cypriot cylinder seal: GJERSTAD ET AL., Swedish Cyprus Expedition, 474 n° 68.

³² LAGARCE, *Lingots*, 82 fig. 5; MERRILLEES, *Cylinder Seals*, 290 seal n° 376; ÅSTRÖM, *Swedish Cyprus Expedition*, 645 fig. 88, for some cylinder seals found on Cyprus. The same association also occurs on a Cypriot cylinder seal from Ras Shamra (RS 10.007: LAGARCE, *Lingots*, 80 n. 17; see also AMIET, *Corpus des cylindres*, n° 467). S. Cluzan does not discuss this association in his study on the presence of bovines in the glyptic from Ugarit and Enkomi (CLUZAN, *Presence bovine*).

³³ CARBILLET, *Motifs marins*, 238f cat. II.C.2f pl. XIII.

³⁴ KARAGEORGHIS, *Early Cyprus*, 95; CARBILLET, *Motifs marins*, 239 n. 64.

³⁵ KARAGEORGHIS, *Early Cyprus*, 37.67.91.94.

³⁶ The pendant RS 21.175 was discovered during the extrication of a street in the “Quartier égéen” and RS 10.095 was “acquis de bergers de Ras Shamra”.

³⁷ As far as we know, this interpretation has not yet been proposed.



Fig. 5: The bead made of ribboned agate (RS 14.242), Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

Daniel Arnaud has stressed the “archaizing” script of this divine dedication (“To Enki his lord, Ilu-qī[š]anni offered (this) for his life”) and suggested a provenance from central Babylonia.³⁸ In a Mesopotamian context, he considers that the object was intended to be offered to a deity and did not have a “useful purpose”.³⁹ He also stresses the wear on the stone;⁴⁰ this factor and the fact that the dedicator’s name does not appear to be “Western” leads him to conclude that it was “un bijou d’occasion’ qui est parvenu sur la Méditerranée”.

Do the exceptional nature of this object, the rarity in Ugarit of the type of stone from which it is made, as well as the context where it was found allow us to improve on his interpretation? In fact, few objects in stone found in Ugarit have an inscription in syllabic cuneiform (either in Akkadian or in Sumerian),⁴¹ and ribboned agate, quite rare in Ugarit, was a semi-precious stone mostly found in palatial contexts.⁴²

After the publication by D. Arnaud, re-examination of the context has provided new data. The bead RS 14.242 comes from the sector of the “Ville Basse ouest” and was found at topographical point 109, at a depth of 1,20 m. The data collected from the excavation archives, meagre as they are due to the exploration having been made in the past, allows us today to locate precisely the topographical point in the south-west of this sector. However, an analysis shows it was not a completely isolated discovery,⁴³ as had been stated by D. Arnaud.⁴⁴

³⁸ ARNAUD, *Cinq dédicaces*, 203f; photograph in GALLIANO / CALVET, *Catalogue*, 269 (information from C. Roche); MATOĀN, *Roches*, 208f n. 95.

³⁹ ARNAUD, *Cinq dédicaces*, 204 n. 28.

⁴⁰ Which makes the name of the dedicator almost illegible.

⁴¹ Cf. ARNAUD, *Prolégomènes*; IDEM, *Cinq dédicaces*.

⁴² MATOĀN, *Roches*.

⁴³ MATOĀN, *Production*, tome IB, 474; EADEM, *Image*, 561 n. 68.

⁴⁴ ARNAUD, *Cinq dédicaces*, 204.

The object comes from an area described by C. Schaeffer, in his preliminary report on the excavation of the 14th campaign, as

“un atelier de bijoutier qui fabriquait des colliers en perles de verre, de cornaline et même d’ambre. Il gravait aussi des cylindres dont nous avons retrouvé plusieurs à l’état d’ébauche. Parmi les restes de cet atelier gisait un gros scarabée en faïence blanche portant le nom de couronnement du pharaon Aménophis III”.⁴⁵

After its excavation in 1950, the “Ville Basse ouest” was not published in detail. Recently, we published a plan of the western part of this area (previously unpublished) in order to indicate the location of Tombe I excavated in 1950 (*fig. 6*).⁴⁶

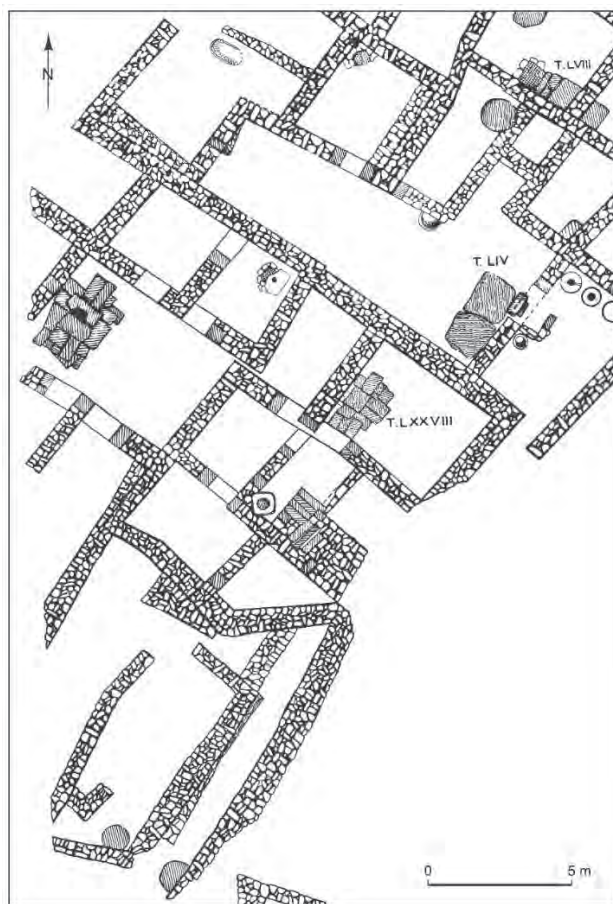


Fig. 6: Western part of the area “Ville Basse ouest”, Ras Shamra (Mission de Ras Shamra, computer graphics by V. Matoïan & G. Devilder).

⁴⁵ SCHAEFFER, Reprise, 20.

⁴⁶ MARCHEGAY / MATOÏAN, À propos.

The finds in question here were brought to light south of this grave, in a building of which only one part was cleared. An unpublished architectural drawing shows in two adjoining *loci* the presence of numerous topographical points (almost forty) including topographical point 109. We decided to include only finds made at the same or almost the same depth as for the bead RS 14.242 (depth 1,20 m). As a result, 22 topographical points corresponding to finds made at depths between 1,90 m and 3,40 m are not taken into account here. We are only interested in 14 topographical points corresponding to finds at depths between 1,20 m and 1,70 m (tp 85, 93, 109, 115, 119, 121, 135, 141, 151, 207, 225, 235, 245, 249). These include:

(1) Topographical points 109 and 115 corresponding to the agate bead RS 14.258 and the scarab RS 14.248 respectively (*fig. 7*).⁴⁷ A fragment of an ivory handle (RS 14.[288]) was also found at topographical point 115.⁴⁸

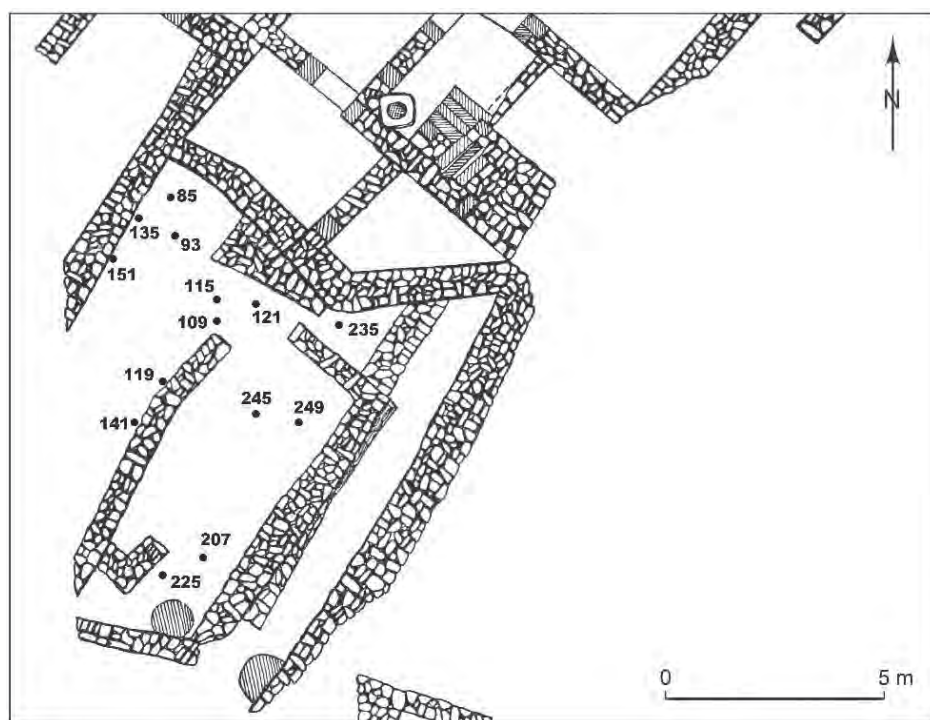


Fig. 7: Western part of the area “Ville Basse ouest”: Location (topographical point 109) where the bead RS 14.242 was discovered (Mission de Ras Shamra, computer graphics by V. Matoïan & G. Devilder).

⁴⁷ Recently, Bérénice Lagarce-Othman has studied the scarabs with the name Amenhotep III found in Ugarit (LAGARCE-OTHMAN, *Les scarabées*). Like two other scarabs from Ras Shamra, on RS 14.228 there are the three hieroglyphs of the name Neb-maât-Rê. This type is quite common in Egypt and the Levant.

⁴⁸ GACHET-BIZOLLON, *Ivoires d’Ougarit*, n° 430.

(2) Several topographical points (119, 121, 141) correspond to what the excavator calls “dépôts” of beads (inventory numbers: RS 14.264, RS 14.265, RS 14.266). These collections represent more than two hundred small and medium sized beads, mostly of vitreous material. With the exception of some specimens in Egyptian blue, these beads are made of faïence and glass. Their state of preservation is variable (some of these items are broken), with the material most often damaged. There is large range of types (generally simple geometric forms; a fragment of a spacing bead) and geometric decorations. The material in glass also comprises a disc with “eye decoration” (*infra*).⁴⁹ We have also identified some shells, a lapis-lazuli tubular bead and a fragment of a silver pin. A bead made of cornaline is indicated at topographical point 207.⁵⁰

(3) Some objects of various artefacts have been brought to light in this sector: two stirrup vases (tp 85 and tp 93), part of a mould (tp 85), three bronze arrowheads (tp 135 / RS 14.198, tp 151, tp 235 / RS 14.168), a weight in haematite (tp 119 / RS 14.063),⁵¹ and a Mycenaean figurine (tp 141 / RS 14.102).

(4) Only two stone cylinders, undecorated, called “ébauches de cylindre” (“unfinished cylinders”) by the excavator, are assigned to topographical points 93 and 119.

With the exception of these last two pieces, which were not described in the inventories of the mission and for which as yet we only have the description given by the excavator, all the other artefacts are completed objects. Without an exact context, any interpretation of these finds remains difficult: we have noted a concentration of objects generally classed as elements of jewellery, without knowing whether they were intended to be worn, used on a special occasion or in a particular ritual. At this stage of our enquiry, absolutely no evidence for a “workshop” has been revealed.

The association of a bead with a Sumerian inscription with a scarab bearing the name of a pharaoh is unique. Should we view the owner of these items as an educated person who appreciated *exotica*? If that was the case, then we should draw attention to the glass disc with the “eye decoration” mentioned previously. In fact, this type of object is rare in Ugarit (only two fragmentary specimens are known) and parallels come from inner Syria (Emar, Tell Brak), from North Mesopotamia, from Babylonia (Nuzi, Kar Tukulti Ninurta), as well as from Elam (Tchoga-Zanbil).⁵²

Possibly RS 14.242 and RS 14.228 are contemporary (context contemporary with slightly later than the reign of Amenhotep III?), but with no certainty. Bérénice Lagarce-Othman proposes that scarab RS 14.228, like other scarabs with the name of this pharaoh found in the dwellings of the city, were probably used by its owner as a piece of jewellery, perhaps even as part of domestic ritual practices.⁵³

In the case of the bead RS 14.242, could the mention of Ea / Enki – the god of magic in Mesopotamia, who is the equivalent of Kôṭaru in Ugarit – in the inscription be due to

⁴⁹ RS 14.266/66: MATOÏAN, Production, cat. 932.

⁵⁰ A perusal of the archives did not reveal the RS inventory number for this carnelian bead. The only amber bead found in this sector was discovered at a depth of 2,10 m (tp 137) and so is not considered here.

⁵¹ BORDREUIL, Peser, vol. II, n° 254, weight 21,3 g.

⁵² BOUQUILLON ET AL., Faïences, cat. 70.178.

⁵³ LAGARCE-OTHMAN, Scarabées, 181.

the object possibly being considered as magical, supported in this instance by Sumerian, guaranteeing antiquity and efficacy?⁵⁴ Was the beneficiary the owner of this stone? Was he a local *homme de lettres* or a scribe speaking Akkadian who came to Ugarit?⁵⁵ Is the wear on this stone to be connected with the object being used in rituals for protection, and so testifying to an alteration to its primary purpose? So many hypotheses that remain pure conjectures in the absence of more detailed textual evidence on magico-religious practices in Ugarit.

Concerning the last hypothesis, it is clear that so far the study of traces of wear has not been included in our reflections on the documentation from Ugarit. It could be an avenue of research on materials in stone and metal. In fact, we have also wondered about the wear on the surface of the bezel of a silver ring with a depiction of “Bes” (RS 23.267), which was part of a collection of rings with perfectly intact decoration.

2.3. A series of “eyes” made of agate

It has also been proposed that a series of objects which are also cut from ribboned agate were intended for prophylactic purposes. They are uninscribed; their shape and decoration evoke images of eyes (RS 14.178, RS 14.233, RS 17.167, RS 17.172, RS 17.173) (fig. 8). Their concentration in the area of the palace has already been emphasised⁵⁶ and it is likely that these are imports from Mesopotamia. In fact, parallels are to be looked for principally in inland Syria and in Mesopotamia, where written examples have been found. Written on these votive “eyes”, well known from the Kassite period to the Neo-Babylonian period, are royal dedications to various deities. These *realia* have often been compared with a passage in the Akkadian version of the myth of *Ishtar’s Descent to the Underworld* which refers to the breast of the goddess as “covered with eyestones” when she was given back her powers⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ MALBRAN-LABAT, *Langues*, 66.

⁵⁵ MALBRAN-LABAT, *Langues*, 100.

⁵⁶ I drew attention to this class of objects in 2008 (MATOĀN, *Roches*, 196f, with references). They vary in size (with diameters ranging from approximately 1 cm to 3 cm). Four have been found in three *loci* of the Palais royal and a fifth may come from the sector of the entrance to that building.

⁵⁷ LAMBERT, *Eye-stone*, 70f; ANDRÉ-SALVINI, *Idéologie*, 378f nn. 14.24. However, the purpose of these eyes made of stone is not certain. Comparable is the use of eyes made of stone in one of the canonical versions of the ritual against Lamaštu (Lamaštu Series III); see FARBER, *Lamaštu*.

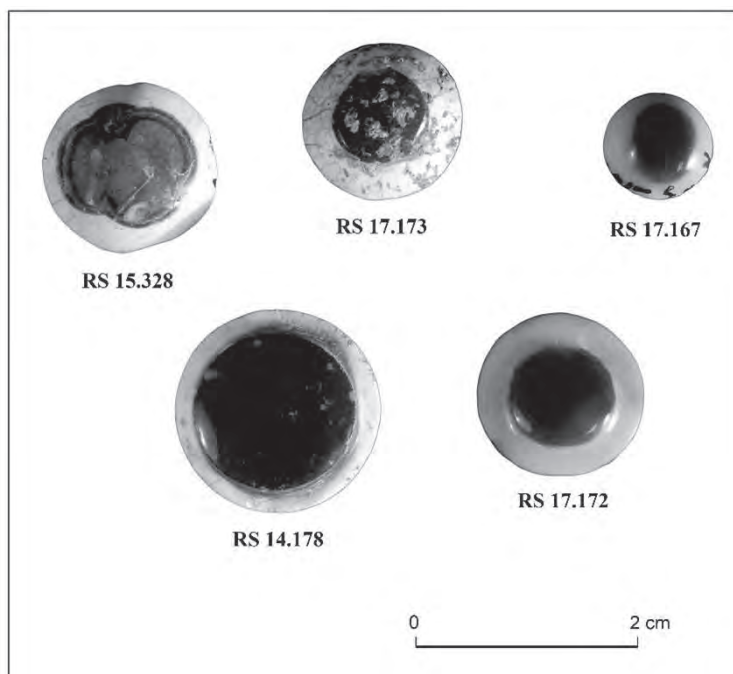


Fig. 8: “Eyes” made of agate, Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, photo V. Matoïan, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

While the texts discovered in Ugarit do not refer to such *realia*, there are several texts in which eyes are mentioned. Two texts are in Akkadian. The first, discovered in the “maison de Rapanu”, is an incantation for diseased eyes (RS 20.006).⁵⁸ The second, RS 25.418, from the “maison du prêtre magicien”, has had various interpretations: the editor, D. Arnaud, sees it as a magical ritual, and I. Márquez Rowe as incantations against diseased eyes, accompanied by rituals.⁵⁹ Among the few known incantations in Ugaritic, the text written in poetic language on tablet RS 22.225 (KTU 1.96),⁶⁰ which is intended to ward off attacks by the Evil Eye (*fig. 9*),⁶¹ belongs to a type of text that is well documented in Mesopotamia.⁶² We consider it interesting to stress, here, the similarities established with Mesopotamia, in respect of both material and written culture,

⁵⁸ NOUGAYROL, *Textes suméro-accadiens*, n° 19; ARNAUD, *Corpus*, 88 n° 22; MÁRQUEZ ROWE, *Babylonian Incantation Texts*, 69–71.

⁵⁹ ARNAUD, *Corpus*, n° 27; MÁRQUEZ ROWE, *Babylonian Incantation Texts*, 71f.

⁶⁰ This tablet was discovered during the 22nd campaign, in *locus* 2 of house B in insula X (“maison aux tablettes littéraires”). Among the tablets discovered in this sector, it is worth mentioning also the presence of an incantation in Akkadian for a messenger (according to ROCHE-HAWLEY, *Scribes*, 430: RS 23.023, an unpublished text [in fact, this text was not included in ARNAUD, *Corpus*]).

⁶¹ PARDEE, RS 22.225; DEL OLMO LETE, *Incantations*. In Mesopotamia, incantations against the Evil Eye also do not refer to the use of *realia* shaped like eyes (THOMSEN, *Evil Eye*).

⁶² THOMSEN, *Evil Eye*; DEL OLMO LETE, *Incantations*, 129f.

although we do not know whether this parallel is really significant or whether it reflects the nature of the sources available.

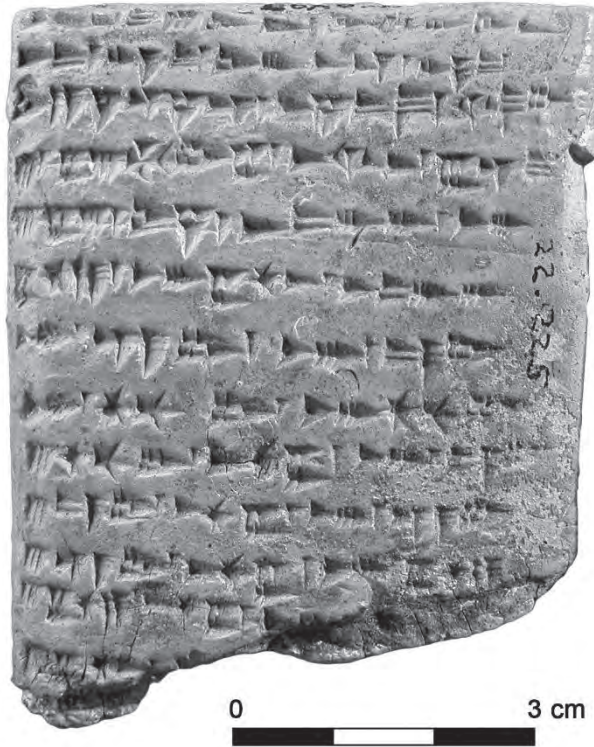


Fig. 9: Tablet RS 22.225, Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

Recently, we have also drawn attention to two depictions of an enemy whose eye is threatened or pierced by a weapon. These two exceptional scenes in Ugaritian iconography are on very different types and sizes of item. The first, which is well known, is the decoration on one of the ivory bed panels from the Royal Palace (RS 16.56 + RS 28.31).⁶³ A male, considered to be the king of Ugarit, is shown as the victor, following a pattern which has its origins in Egypt, but which here has been reinterpreted in an original way. The sovereign's arm is not raised. He holds his sword – a weapon of the same type as the one found in the “ex-cour V” in the Royal Palace⁶⁴ – in such a way that the tip of the weapon is exactly at the level of his enemy's eyes,⁶⁵ shown on his knees in front of him (*fig. 10*).

⁶³ GACHET-BIZOLLON, Panneau, esp. 42–44 fig. 12.

⁶⁴ Sword RS 18.14; see SCHAEFFER, *Corpus des armes*, 276–278 fig. 239 pl. X (on the left).

⁶⁵ On the stone seal cylinder RS 21.032, a kneeling hunter aims his spear at a lion facing him, with the tip of the weapon at the level of the animal's eyes (AMIET, *Corpus des cylindres*, n° 319).



Fig. 10: One of the ivory bed panels from the Royal Palace (RS 16.56 + RS 28.31), Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra).

The second scene is engraved on the cylinder seal RS 4.129 found in Minet el-Beida (fig. 11),⁶⁶ published in the corpus compiled by Pierre Amiet. Even though it has a motif that is unique in Ugarit, as yet this composition has not been the subject of extensive comments. This motif, the rarity of which was emphasised by Pierre Amiet,⁶⁷ is of someone holding, in front of himself, a spear on which a human head is impaled. This image on seal RS 4.129 is the only one known in Ugarit that refers to this form of decapitation, a physical mutilation also evoked in the poetic literature of Ugarit.



Fig. 11: Modern impression of the cylinder seal RS 4.129 (Mission of Ras Shamra, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

In fact, several passages in the mythological poems and epic texts refer to battles and fights where the result is often the death of enemies. One of the passages most often quoted belongs to the Ba^ʿalu Cycle. The description of the combat of the goddess ʿAnatu against the enemies of her brother Ba^ʿalu uses images that express warlike violence. The battle rages and the fate that the goddess assigns to her enemies is hardly to be envied: heads and hands are cut off, but there is no mention of a head displayed on top of a spear or impaled on a stake.

“Thereupon ʿAnatu’s [sic!] begins to smite (her adversaries) in the valley,
to attack (them) between the two cities.
She smites the people (dwelling) on the seashore,
wreaks destruction on the humans (dwellings) to east.

⁶⁶ Louvre AO 15771, AMIET, *Corpus des cylindres*, n° 300.

⁶⁷ AMIET, *Corpus des cylindres*, 122 n. 6. P. Amiet refers to a cylinder seal classified as Syrian glyptic of the Middle Bronze Age: BUCHANAN, *Ancient Near Eastern Seals*, n° 875. On this seal, a head impaled on a spear is positioned between two persons.

Under her are heads like balls,
above her are hands like locusts...⁶⁸

The enlarged photograph of a modern impression of the seal (*fig. 12*) shows how expressive the artistic creation is, even though the actual act of decapitation is not depicted, unlike what we see in, for example, the scene of the execution of the Elamite king by the soldiers of king Ashurbanipal at the end of the battle of Til-Tuba.⁶⁹ Here it is a *fait accompli*: the enemy's head, impaled, is displayed like a trophy, clearly expressing the annihilation of the enemy.



Fig. 12: Modern impression of the cylinder seal RS 4.129: detail showing the severed head (Mission of Ras Shamra, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

This scene, which is very interesting, deserves to be included in current studies on war in the Ancient Near East and its procession of physical and psychological damage, and to find its place between the representations of the 3rd millennium (from Girsu, Mari or Ebla) and the Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs.⁷⁰

The lack of any text directly associated with this image makes the attribution of this scene to a specific semantic field a delicate matter. Which visual message is being conveyed here? Is this victory scene real or symbolic? The severed head of the man has shaggy hair or wears a helmet. A vertical line in the middle of the top of the skull could correspond to the tip of the pike. A closer examination makes it possible to draw attention to another important detail. In fact it is possible to see a straight horizontal line engraved at the level of the eyes of the severed head. It could be a weapon – a pike, an arrow – embedded in the enemy's left eye. This motif, which is exceptional, raises the question as to a possible apotropaic function of this cylinder seal.

⁶⁸ PARDEE, *Ugaritic Myths*, 250.

⁶⁹ WATANABE, *Reading*, ill. 232.213.

⁷⁰ DOLCE, *Losing*.

3. Comparing the archaeological evidence with the textual evidence

3.1. Protection against scorpions

On tablet RS 92.2014 (KTU 1.178), discovered in the “maison d’Urtēnu”, there is the text of another incantation in Ugaritic, also in poetry (*fig. 13*). It is distinctive because it mentions explicitly the name of the beneficiary, a certain Urtēnu,⁷¹ and is intended to ward off attacks by serpents and scorpions.⁷²



Fig. 13: Tablet RS 92.2014, Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

When the mace RS 24.57 mentioned above was published (see n. 4), we became interested in representations of scorpions in Ugarit. This study made it possible to emphasise how frequent this animal motif was in glyptic (especially on cylinder seals made of stone) and led to the identification of *realia* recorded in the archives of excavations by the *Mission of Ras Shamra – Ougarit*. Among these, the unpublished bead-seal RS 26.53 (Damascus 2987) seized our attention (*fig. 14*). This object, in steatite, parallelepipedal in shape (1,6 x 1,2 cm), was discovered in 1963 during the excavation of the “Tranchée Sud-acropole” (tp 4263, depth 1,20 m). The four faces have an engraved decoration. The two main faces show, upside down, a scorpion on one side and a seated person on the other, while each of the small sides is filled with a plant.

⁷¹ For another interpretation, see MALBRAN-LABAT / ROCHE, Urtēnu, 99: “L’incantation, quant à elle, pourrait témoigner davantage de l’activité en ce lieu d’Ur-Tešab – peut-être le scribe exorciste qui emploie la première personne du singulier dans ce document – que de la présence de son destinataire.”

⁷² PARDEE, Textes rituels, 829–833; HAWLEY, Hyssop; DEL OLMO LETE, Incantations, 173f.

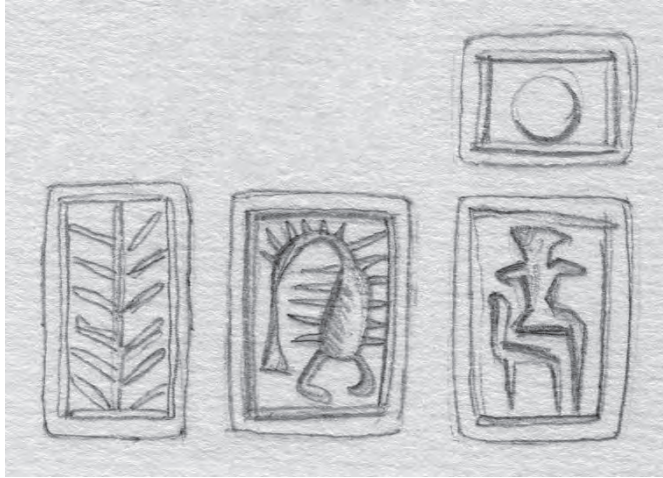


Fig. 14: Drawing of the bead-seal RS 26.53, Ras Shamra (Mission de Ras Shamra, computer graphics by V. Matoïan & G. Devilder).

The pencil drawing shows depictions which are portrayed in a stylised way. The plant is formed by a vertical line (the trunk), with branches arranged symmetrically on each side of the trunk. The scorpion motif has five pairs of claws (whereas that arachnid only has four) and seven pointed appendages.

This decoration reinforces the view that this object is apotropaic. Was it perhaps worn, like an amulet, as protection against attacks by a scorpion? Was the mere fact of wearing this object enough to activate its magical power? Did the seated person represent the beneficiary of this protection, who also owned the object? Should we ask whether it may have been used in a ritual? Could the bead-seal have been deployed while an incantation was being recited, and if so, how and by whom?

The association of motifs engraved on RS 26.53 will provide a better perception of these *realia* in connection with the text of tablet RS 92.2014, the specific aim of which is to protect against attacks by scorpions and requires the use of a plant for this purpose.

A study in progress of the complete corpus of tabloids made of stone from Ugarit will allow this class of objects to be identified better,⁷³ most of which use apotropaic motifs, such as an image that can be compared to that of the god “Bes”.⁷⁴

RS 26.53 comes from a small building, located at the edge of the eastern end of the trench (fig. 15), to the east of the “maison de Patiluwa”. A study of this sector, which was not published in detail by the excavators, is in preparation. According to the inventories, excavation of this house has yielded few objects (RS 25.166; RS 25.276;

⁷³ The importing of Cypriot tabloids (see the comments on RS 10.095 *supra*) does not exclude the existence of local production in Ugarit. On the seal RS 7.088 (Louvre AO 18576) with an alphabetic inscription, see most recently SAUVAGE / HAWLEY, *Une fusaïole inscrite*, 386 fig. 23.

⁷⁴ Cf. for example, 79/RS-34, found in the “Centre de la Ville” sector: YON ET AL., *Maisons*, 53 fig. 34.

RS 25.277; RS 25.490; RS 25.491; RS 25.546) and one tablet (RS 25.462).⁷⁵ It would seem that none of these items discovered is associated with bead RS 26.53.

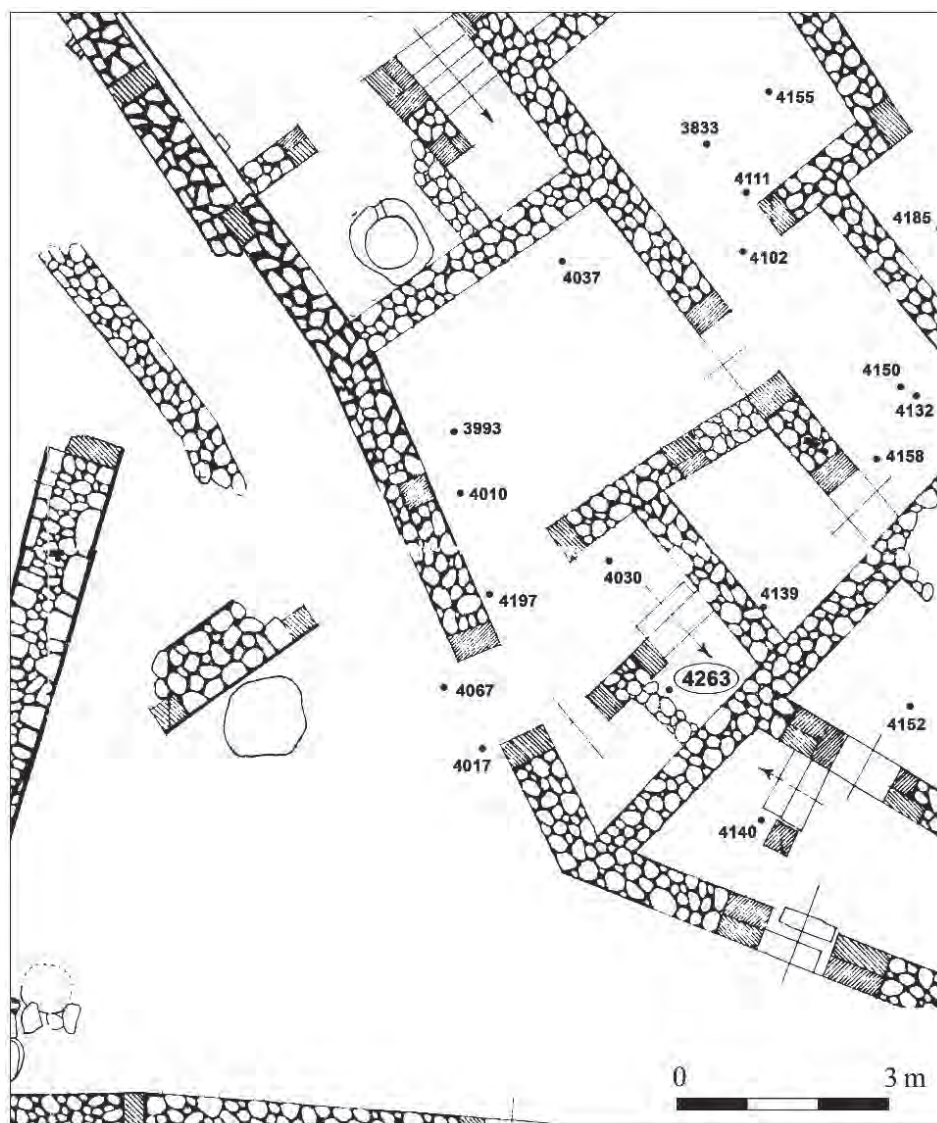


Fig. 15: Location (topographical point 4263) where the bead-seal RS 26.53 was discovered (Mission de Ras Shamra, computer graphics by V. Matoian & G. Devilder).

⁷⁵ Syllabic text: library catalogue (ARNAUD, Corpus, n° 67).

3.2. “Bes” and the protection of births

Comparison of the texts with the archaeological evidence, with all the prudence that this approach requires, is likely to open up new avenues of research. As an example, we wish to close this article by going back to the exceptional set of three bronzes decorated with a figure that refers to representations of the Egyptian god “Bes” (RS 4.016 / Louvre AO 15719; RS 15.317 / Damascus 4079; RS 21.131 / Damascus 5733), a type found only in Ugarit (we have not found any objects in Egypt that are similar to the “spatulae / razors” from Ugarit) and brought to light some years ago.

These tools have two functional parts, separate and almost identical, positioned symmetrically on each side of a central part of the handle in the shape of the figure of “Bes”. The general attitude of this figure, very thin, is identical on all three objects. The god is shown naked, facing outwards, standing, legs bent, feet splayed at 180°, heels together or slightly apart. His arms are also bent, his hand placed on top of his thighs, at the level of the donkey. The excellent technique and aesthetic of the person in RS 21.131, as well as its size (height 6 cm), make it an exceptional example (*fig. 16*).



Fig. 16: “Spatula / razor” decorated with the figure of “Bes” (RS 21.131), Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, photo V. Matoïan, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

Moreover, it has several distinctive iconographic features, the first being the association of two serpents in relief, whose bodies coil round the upper and lower limbs of the deity, in a symmetrical composition. The animals' heads are shown at the level of the pectorals and seem to be opposite each other, while their tails appear behind the figure, ending asymmetrically.⁷⁶

In Ugarit there are about twenty images that can be compared with the Egyptian "Bes", as jewellery, as statuettes, as glyptic (cylinder-seals and beads), as stone vases and as items made of metal. Most of them feature on objects considered to be local productions.

Our initial studies have already led us to wonder about the commissioners and users of these artefacts, on the ways in which the figure of "Bes" was adopted in Ugarit and the meaning of a foreign image with strong symbolic connotations in the context of Ugaritian civilisation. Iconological analysis is limited in the absence of written sources on this type of object and on depictions of "Bes" in Ugarit.⁷⁷ Did this image have the same functions in the context of Ugaritian civilisation as in Egypt? Did the inhabitants of Ugarit view in the Egyptian god "Bes" an aspect of his efficacious power, or did the image refer to a deity of the local pantheon?

In Egypt,⁷⁸ "Bes" is the enemy of dangerous animals, whom he can fight with weapons. His aspect, at once grotesque and frightening, was considered as repelling malevolent forces and harmful beings. His growing popularity is already evident in the period of the New Kingdom, as shown especially by his belonging to royalty. Companion, like Taweret, of the goddess Hathor, he protects chiefly the sphere of women and infancy. He is the apotropaic protector of the womb, gestation, childbirth, the new-born and very young divine or royal children. In this sense, "Bes" has become the protector of young Horus, identified with the rising sun, and of Pharaoh. "Bes" is also the god of music, dance and wine, who provides amusement with his grimaces, his dances and his tambourine.

The bronze figure RS 21.131 differs from other representations of "Bes" in Ugarit by his stance but also by how his anatomy is depicted. Thus, this person is noticeable for the size of his member, which extends as far as his ankles, forming a sort of equivalent to the (lion's) tail visible on his rear. The treatment of his head is unique. It is not framed by a large lion's mane and the lion's ears have disappeared. The lower part of his face is beardless.⁷⁹ The figure RS 21.131, with no animal attributes except for a tail, seems to affirm an accentuated anthropomorphism. Analysis of RS 21.131 suggests a complex process of incorporating this "divine image" into the imagery of Ugarit, having led to

⁷⁶ On other representations, in Ugarit, where the person is associated with serpents, the reptiles are shown inside the god's mouth, exactly as in Egyptian images from the New Kingdom (ROMANO, *Bes-Image*, vol. I, 117).

⁷⁷ Not a single text found in Ugarit mentions "Bes". It is worth remembering that the first occurrence of the name of this god is late, and, generally speaking, outside Egypt, the name of figures assimilated to "Bes" remains unknown.

⁷⁸ On Bes in Egypt, see, for example, MALAISE, *Bès*; IDEM, *Croyances solaires*; MEEKS, *Le nom*; ROMANO, *Bes-Image*; IDEM, *Origin*; VOLOKHINE, *Dieux*; IDEM, *Frontalité*.

⁷⁹ The technique used may suggest that the figure is wearing a sort of "cap", no details of which are shown.

some alterations to the initial iconographic design, indications of local reworking. The most marked feature is his expression: a smile rather than a grimace, according to our interpretation of this piece.

Is this motif a key to an explanatory reading in order to understand the function of this piece? Postulating that this smile is significant and expresses “joy” leads us to ask questions about the semantic field of this motif. (1) Does it express or foretell the beneficial result (protection) of the warlike and combative nature of the god? Are the serpents completely dominated under the divine grip? (2) Could it refer to the connections that “Bes” has with music and dancing? (3) And perhaps also, after the New Kingdom, with sensual pleasures? (4) Is it connected with conception and a birth (promised or real)? The depiction of a large member could show the god’s role as protecting fertility (or its connection with sensual pleasures).⁸⁰

Could comparison with the textual documentation throw some light on the semantic field? The use of thematic “formulae”, explained as inherited from a literary oral tradition, is one of the characteristics of the poetic texts of Ugarit.⁸¹

The pattern of a “literary formula” of joy includes smiling and several known occurrences concern the announcement of good news and refer to a birth or to a “renaissance” (rebirth) to come: Danilu will have a son (KTU 1.17 II 8ff.), Ilu dreams that Ba^salu will be revived (KTU 1.6 III 14ff.). Could iconography reflect the use of stereotypes, just like poetry?

If one accepts, hypothetically, using these objects as razors / axes, two spheres of activity can be envisaged. The first concerns the ability “Bes” had to protect from and heal bites or stings from dangerous animals; this would match the presence of two serpents that form one body with the deity and seem to be completely tamed in the divine grip. To some extent this image echoes the opposition and complementary nature of “Bes” and of the serpents.

The second concerns pregnant women, women giving birth and new-born whom “Bes” has the ability to protect. In favour of this interpretation, we had suggested a comparison with a bronze from Gezer, dated to the Middle Bronze Age IIB,⁸² decorated with a naked female figure supporting (protecting) her rounded belly with her hand.

The possibility of a connection with the concepts of maternity and fertility leads us to evoke another text in Ugaritic. It is the poem narrating the union of the goddess Nikkalu-wa-³Ibbu with the god Yariḥu (RS 5.194, KTU 1.24) (*fig. 17*). It is a mythical marriage between two lunar deities, one Hurrian, the other West Semitic, and a birth to come. The Koṭarātu, goddesses who had an important role in marriage and childbirth,⁸³ are mentioned there and a song to them appears at the end of the poem. There one finds a list of their names in the form of literary epitheta expressing one aspect of marriage and of bringing children into the world. The literary formulae in line 48 denote two

⁸⁰ PINCH, Hathor, 238f.

⁸¹ XELLA, Tradition orale.

⁸² SCHROER, Ikonographie, 178f n° 401.

⁸³ The Kōtarātu, goddesses of childbirth, were concerned with human reproduction in respect of women (PARDEE, Textes rituels, 304f.799; THEUER, Mondgott; PARDEE, Chant; DEL OLMO LETE, Mythologie, 93–95).

Koṭarātu using two verbs expressing separation. For Dennis Pardee, this is the physical separation of the mother’s part of the body allowing the baby to emerge or the separation of the baby’s body from the mother’s (“Celle-qui-Sépare, avec Celle-qui-Fend”),⁸⁴ whereas Nicolas Wyatt sees it as the specific act of cutting the umbilical cord (“Cord-Cutter and Womb-Opener”).⁸⁵



Fig. 17: Tablet RS 5.194, Ras Shamra (Mission of Ras Shamra, computer graphics by G. Devilder).

Could RS 21.131 have been used for such an action, the image of “Bes” – smiling – ensuring its success and so expressing the joy that the birth of a child elicits? Was the efficacy of the instrument only dependent on its being present or did it require manipulation or a specific action?

In this particular case, comparison of these two forms of expression – iconography and texts – suggests including the roles of oral elements and gestures more systematically in our reflections and to be careful in defining the distinctions that we make between textual genres, between classes of objects, between indigenous and foreign. In the same way that we questioned the nature of the bronze RS 21.131, we are led to question the nature of written texts. Could text RS 5.194 also have assumed a “magical

⁸⁴ PARDEE, *Chant*, 26.

⁸⁵ WYATT, *Religious Texts*, 340f. See also WATSON, *Further Parallels*, 438.

dimension”?⁸⁶ Could the bronze RS 21.131 belong to the dossier of *realia* that would enable us to comprehend the connecting links between Hurrian and West Semitic cultures?

However stimulating the analysis of RS 21.131 may be, it still raises a number of questions some of which remain unanswered due to the nature of our sources while others concern chiefly images that could be connected with the Koṭarātu. This exceptional object shows how much its creator(s) / designer(s) – who must certainly have belonged to the educated intellectual *élite* – knew about the visual arts. It raises the question of interactions between Ugarit and Egypt in the domain of *materia magica* and more widely, and makes it possible to reflect more deeply on the spatial and cultural fluidity of figures associated with the sphere of the divine in the domain of magico-religious practices in ancient societies.

Ugarit, a meeting-place and a frontier town on the Mediterranean, which would make the kingdom wealthy, both materially and culturally, was the setting for a cosmopolitan society nourished by exchange. Study of its material culture shows that, to respond to the most immediate and elementary human needs – protecting pregnant women and the new-born, protecting humans from dangerous animals, ensuring future generations – it adopted foreign figures in the domain of *apotropaïa*, objects used for magical protection, either in the future or as a cure. The notion of magical efficacy may have been primordial.

Seen in this perspective, materials certainly had an essential role. In the case of objects on which there is an image of “Bes”, could the choice of metal be connected with the apotropaic / magical quality conferred on these objects? In the same way that an “inert” mineral is transformed / metamorphosed by the action of heat into a shiny metal, these *apotropaïa* become “weapons” to combat, through an image, harmful and disruptive forces.

In Ugarit, metal-working was in the hands of a specific deity, Kôṭaru, whose two names, *Kṭr w ḥss*, describe him as “expert” and “wise”, and whose residences, two in number, are: *Kptr*, Kaptor, i.e. Crete, and *ḥqkpt / ḥkpt*, i.e. Memphis, two important artistic centres in the Bronze Age.⁸⁷

Kôṭaru appears in the mythological texts of Ugarit as the god of crafts par excellence. His technical expertise was chiefly in the sphere of metallurgy; he is a master goldsmith and blacksmith. He creates luxury furniture intended for the goddess Aṭiratu and the bow for Danilu that ṢAnatu would covet. He is also an architect and shares in the construction of palaces, for Yammu and for Baṣalu. It is he who, above all, fashions the unerring (“magic”) weapons with which Baṣalu was able to defeat Yammu, the Sea. Kôṭaru also has the ability to create *realia* (objects, buildings) that give their owners the possibility of changing their condition: with new weapons, Baṣalu becomes the victor

⁸⁶ Cf. the interpretation by W. Hermann, according to whom RS 5.194 is a “magical” text allowing its user to share the powers of the Koṭarātu (HERMANN, Yariḥ und Nikkal).

⁸⁷ On this god, see CAQUOT ET AL., *Textes ougaritiques*, 97–99; PARDEE, *Textes parmythologiques*, 99–101; SMITH, *Baal Cycle I*, 165–167; SMITH/PITARD, *Baal Cycle II*.

(over Yammu), with his palace, he finally gains access to royalty. By naming Ba^ʿalu's weapons (Yagrush and Ayyamur), Kôtaru ensures their efficacy.⁸⁸

The literary texts from Ugarit refer to the use of other materials for magical purposes. So, in the Legend of Kirta, because of the silence of the other gods when faced with the king's illness, Ilu, the supreme god of the Ugaritian pantheon, decides to intervene by creating, from clay, an animated being (a "figurine"?) which he makes a point of naming.⁸⁹ This being, called Sha^ʿatîqatu, will be victorious over evil, so that Kirta can then resume his position on the royal throne, but that is another "story".⁹⁰

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⁸⁸ On ceremonial weapons, see DEL OLMO LETE, Panoply; BORDREUIL / PARDEE, Combat; DURAND, Mythologème, 52f; WATSON / WYATT, De nouveau.

⁸⁹ See especially LEWIS, Healing of King Kirta; IDEM, Identity and Function.

⁹⁰ On medicine and magic see also WATSON, Daily Life. For the mention of a "tamarisk figurine" in KTU 1.124, see WATSON / WYATT, KTU 1.124 Revisited; IDEM, KTU 1.124 Again.

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