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SOME GUBLITE ARTIFACT POSSIBLY MADE AT EBLA

Frances PINNOCK


Mots clés – Byblos, Ebla, dépôts votifs.

Abstract – This contribution aims at analyzing some objects from a votive deposit in the area of the Obelisks Temple of Byblos, jar 16694. These objects, in the interpretation proposed here, might have been made in palace workshops of Ebla, for the presence of some strong elements of comparison with productions peculiar to the great centre of north inner Syria. Moreover, a hypothesis is proposed about the circumstances which led to the creation and burial of the deposit of jar 16694, and about the titular deity of the Obelisks Temple. According to this hypothesis, as first maintained by M. Dunand, the god should be Rašap, god of war, plague, and of the Netherworld.

Key-Words – Byblos, Ebla, Votive Deposits.

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INTRODUCTION

The discovery and excavation of ancient Byblos, modern Jebeil, on the Lebanese coast, started by the mid-19th cent., and ended by the end of the Fifties of the 20th cent. The exploration was the work of a French team directed by P. Montet and M. Dunand, and brought to light an important amount of data concerning the architecture and material culture of this important centre. They brought evidence, albeit in a not homogeneous way, about several phases of occupation starting with the Neolithic period, and reaching to the Mediaeval age, with the only, relevant, and inexplicable absence of the level of the Iron Age, when Byblos was, according to the contemporary written evidence, one of the main Phoenician ports on the east Mediterranean coast. Among the numerous findings, which are sometimes difficult to place in a chronological position, for obstacles created by the excavation method adopted in particular by Dunand, who imposed an arbitrary and totally artificial stratification, the amount of rich objects belonging to the furniture of the royal tombs stand out, as well as the equally outstanding votive deposits, found in jars within the temple areas.

At the time of its discovery this patrimony of findings, often of a high workmanship, and made with quite precious materials, was difficult to take into consideration from the chronological point of view, as well as from the historical-artistic point of view, as adequate comparison was missing. Now, as our knowledge becomes deeper, after the great impulse the archaeological research in the Syrian region received since the end of the Second World War, and specially since the end of the Seventies, a more precise consideration of the Gublite findings is possible, and they may be placed in a larger organic picture. Among the most important archaeological researches the systematic exploration of Ebla, in north inner Syria is undoubtedly offering a very strong contribution to the reconstruction of the development of the material and artistic cultures of a region, which, specially in the period between EB IVA and MB II, witnessed the elaboration and the development of handicraft, artistic themes and figurative motifs of great originality when compared with the contemporary Mesopotamian world, with whom it certainly had close relations. Its productions were so appreciated that they had some influence, sometimes in unpredictable ways, on artistic genres of different regions, and different periods.

As an example of the contribution the Ebla discovery may offer for the reconstruction of the development of art in Syria in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, and in the first half of the 2nd millennium, we will take here into consideration one jar, n. 16694 (fig. 1), coming from the region of the Obelisk Temple, and precisely from the forecourt of the sanctuary, whose content, deposit A, seems quite homogeneous for the quality of artifacts, dating from the beginning of the Old Syrian period, and of strong interest for the quality and typologies of objects it contained. The jar has a pear-shaped body, everted mouth, and flat base, is approximately 34.3 cm high, and the diameter of the mouth measures 13.2 cm; from the published figure, and on the base of its size, it seems,

Figure 1. The jar n. 16694 from Byblos (after DUNAND 1958, pl. CXXXI).

2. E.g. the town is mentioned among the three first, with Tyre and Sidon, in a list of coastal centres paying tribute to the Assyrian king, in the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II: GRAYSON 1976, p. 143.
3. In this sense the choice to dedicate almost completely to the Iron Age the analyses contained in ACQUARO 1994, looks peculiar, albeit certainly justifiable, the only exceptions being the contributions by J.-Cl. Margueron, G. Scandone Matthiae and, in part, P. Xella.
4. For the reconstruction of the complete picture of the development of the pre-classical culture of Syria in the phases following those taken here into consideration, another powerful stimulus comes now, in a clearer and clearer way, from the exploration, started again since some year and with astounding results, at Mishrifé/Qatna, by a Syrian expedition, directed by M. Al-Maqdissi, with the co-operation of German and Italian scholars: see, e.g., AL-MAQDISI 2003; AL-MAQDISI et al. 2003.
6. Ibid., p. 852, pl. CXXXI.
therefore, a medium size preservation jar, quite likely belonging to the class of the Simple Ware, and to a widespread typology of the Middle Bronze age. Inside it, there were 55 different objects, all made of metal, some of them of precious metal, of which we present here a description.

**The Objects**

One of the most outstanding objects of the cache is a small gold situla (fig. 2), featuring a rich granulated, encrusted, and inlaid decoration; the vase is characterised by the peculiar shape of the body, divided into four lobes, and by the presence of an applied human figure, possibly a female, of gold foil.

A gold handle with oval section (fig. 3) was found inside the situla. It features a rich decoration with granulation, forming different motifs, and wavy lines in relief. A much damaged gold pendant was also found inside the gold vase. It is quite badly preserved and, therefore, difficult to describe, but it looks like a kind of barrel, with both ends decorated with a double line of granulation, with half rounded suspension ring, and suspension loop made by a double twisted thread.

A gold element of decoration (fig. 4a-b), lozenge-shaped, and with ellipsoidal section was found inside the handle n. 16698. The whole decoration was made with granulation, and it limited two figurative registers, where the same scene appears: a sitting personage, in front of whom there is a standing man; in the field there are, as filling elements, a moon crescent over a globe, and some swollen circles, while the scene is framed by filled triangles at the top and at the bottom, and by oblique lines on the sides; the two registers are separated by a line of small circles on both sides. The sitting man wears a long cloak which wraps him completely, and a skull-cap with a point on the fore-head; the standing man wears a cloak, which leaves the right shoulder bare, and a simple skull-cap.

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7. Pinnenck 2005, Type 1452, Tav. L; for the diffusion and comparanda of this type see ibid., pp. 95-96.
8. Dunand 1958, p. 853, pl. CXXXVI, n. 16695, h. 13.7 cm.
9. To the vase also a number of minute lapis lazuli fragments belong, nn. 16696-97, ibid., p. 853.
10. Ibid. p. 853, pl. CXXXII, n. 16698, l. 13.3 cm, w. 2.7 cm.
11. Ibid. p. 853-854, pl. CXXXIV, n. 16699, w. 1.7 cm, diam. 2.5 cm.
12. Ibid. p. 854, pl. CXXXII, n. 16700, 5.5 cm long, and 3.5 cm large.
With this foil, two other elements of gold foil were found (fig. 5), with an oval shape. They too have an elaborated granulated decoration with figures, identical on both pieces: the figurative field is framed by a line of small swollen globes, and is divided in two by a similar line of small spheres; at the ends, two bands with a waving line limit, to the outside, two arched sectors, where a moon crescent with a globe on each side appears, and, to the inside, two rectangles, where two bull-men are represented, in quite a schematic way, who hold in their hands a kind of spear.

The jar contained also other precious decorated items, among which a gold foil lid stands out (fig. 6): its handle decorated with an inlaid carnelian, and with an incision representing four stylized palm-trees, with the base corresponding with the centre of the lid.

As it is quite usual in this kind of deposits, the clay jar also contained a large group of fenestrated axes (fig. 7-8), of “large” kind, made of precious metal, and featuring different kinds of filigree or relief decorations. The deposit included also a group of metal cylinders (fig. 9-10), with ellipsoidal section, which might be the decorations for the middle or end section of the wood handles of fenestrated axes.

13. Ibid. p. 854-855, pl. CXXXII, nn. 16701-16702, one 4.8 cm long, 3.7 cm wide, and the other one 5.3 cm long, 3.9 cm large.
14. A small disk of gold foil, n. 16703, ca 1.4 cm in diameter, found between the two previous objects, with the edge made as a string in relief, bordered by granulation inside, where a stylised flower with four petals was inscribed, made in the same way: ibid. p. 854-855, pl. CXXXIX; a gold sheet, n. 16704, 2.5 cm long and 6.6 cm large, with the outer edges decorated with a double line of granulation: ibid. p. 855, pl. CXXXIV. A small disk of blue paste, n. 16705, of the same material as the inside of pendant n. 16699, 1.8 cm in diameter:
15. Ibid. p. 855, pl. CXXXIV.
17. N. 16707 has a straight edge with three fangs for the application on the handle: ibid. p. 856-857, pl. CXXXII-CXXXIV, size is not given, it might be related with the handle. N. 16709 has a thick central ribbing and the elements decorating the handle, in the section left free from the “eyes”, with a decoration of wavy lines of filigree: ibid. p. 856, pl. CXXXII, length cm. 13.7, width cm. 8.6. N. 16710 belongs to a type intermediate between the “large” one and that defined “duckbill” type, the “eyes” are bordered and riveted, the metal foils on the handle, inside the “eyes” have a filigree decoration with a series of half circles, which follow the line of the axe openings, and a motif with lozenges with a point in the middle: ibid. p. 856, pl. CXXXVII, length cm. 9.2, width cm. 9.5. N. 16711 has no decoration either on the blade or on the handle, but, on one side of the blade, there is a kind of “greyhound” in relief, and, on the other side, a ram, made with the same technique: ibid. p. 856, pl. CXXXVII, length cm. 10.3, width cm. 7.3. Two axes have no decoration, nn. 16712 and 16713: ibid. p. 856, pl. CXXXVII, length cm. 12.9 and width cm. 8.7 the first one, length cm. 13.1 and width. cm. 8.2 the second one. Axe n. 16714 has the handle decorated with two gold foils without decoration: ibid. p. 856, pl. CXXXVII, length cm. 7.2, width cm. 7.5. N. 16715 is made of gilt silver, and only its blade is kept: ibid. p. 857, pl. CXXXII. N. 16716 is completely of silver, it is much spoiled by oxidation, and the inside of the “eyes” is decorated by two gold leafs with filigree decoration in wavy lines, triangles, and lobes: ibid. p. 857, pl. CXXXVII, length cm. 9.9, width cm. 7.9. N. 16717 is of bronze, and the edges of the “eyes” are decorated with a gold band with inlaid stones: ibid. p. 857.
18. N. 16710bis, of gold, has the wider edge decorated with four fillets in relief: ibid. p. 856, pl. CXXXIII, length cm. 12, diam. cm. 2.3 and cm. 2.8. N. 16718 is a fragment of bronze handle, like n. 16719: ibid. p. 857, n. 16718 length cm. 9.5. N. 16720 is a gold cylinder, with oval section, with oblique lines in filigree, alternating with lines of small globes with incrustations; at the top end, closed by a kind of lid, the decoration becomes perpendicular, and includes only three series of wavy lines in filigree: ibid. p. 857, pl. CXXXIV, length cm. 9, diam. cm. 2. N. 16721 is made of gold, it is decorated like the previous one with oblique...
lines alternating with small globes, and one end of its is closed by a lid: *ibid.* p. 857, pl. CXXXIV, united with axe n. 16708, length cm. 35, diam. cm. 2.5. N. 16722 is made of gold and has one end closed by a lid too, it has at both ends a filigree decoration in festoons, to which two double lines of granulation are added at the open end, while at the close end there is a double line of granulation to the outside and a wavy band between two lines of granulation to the inside, and a series of W-shaped elements appears on the body: *ibid.* p. 857, pl. CXXXI. N. 16723, of gold, has a slightly convex profile, with a decoration of festoons at one end and of lines at the other end, both made of filigree, while in the middle of the body the bronze pegs for fixing it are still preserved: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI. N. 16724 is a slightly convex gold cylinder, decorated at one end with a wavy line and with a band filled with triangles of filigree, and at the other end with another wavy line, with a series of double half-circles of granulation: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI, length cm. 8.4. N. 16725, of gold, like the previous specimen, is decorated at one end with a double line of globes, and at the other end with a motif of triangles made by two series of double lines of granulation: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI, length cm. 8.7. N. 16726 is similar to the previous objects and is made of gold too, it has at both ends the same motif, like an elongated eight, with a double line of granulation inside: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI, length cm. 8.5. N. 16727, made of gold like the others, has a simple line of granulation at both ends: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI, length cm. 8.3. N. 16728, made of gold like the others, is decorated at both ends with a wavy line on the outside, and a double line of granulation inside: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI, length cm. 8.5. N. 16729, made of gold like the other pieces, is decorated only at the end, which is closed by a kind of lid, with a wavy line between two parallel lines: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI, length cm. 8.7. N. 16730, of gold, similar to the other pieces, is decorated at both ends with the same motif, a wavy line between two lines of granulation: *ibid.* p. 858, pl. CXXXI, length cm. 8.6. N. 16731, of gold, is decorated at both ends with a simple line of granulation, and was found inside the previous cylinder: *ibid.* p. 858; it is possible, on the base of this finding, that all the cylinders decorated at one end only should be united one with the other, in order to create a double element of decoration. Two longitudinal halves of decorative elements for handles, nn. 16742 and 16743, cannot actually be described in detail for the heavy incrustations of bronze and silver: *ibid.* p. 859.
Besides these kinds of objects, the jar contained other minor finds, yet still of a high quality: a vulture with spread wings, of hammered gold foil with incisions, imitating Egyptian art; 19 two hair-rings of gold (fig. 11), with round incisions and double vertical lines at regular distances one from the other; 20 one fragment of a thin gold band, decorated with granulation and small alveoli in the shape of half circles; 21 one gold round bead of hammered foil; 22 a silver torque; 23 a silver drinking-tube; 24 a hemispherical silver bowl with flat base, and undulated body surface; 25 a silver goblet, with flat base and everted sides, decorated with thin longitudinal ribblings; 26 another silver bowl, carinated, with flat base; 27 two small standing bronze figures, representing two personages with their arms stretched along their bodies and truncated conical caps; 28 a white stone scarab (fig. 12); 29 seventy round flattened beads of carnelian; 30 a globular bone object, pierced through in the more rounded section by a gold rivet made of two pieces, with plano-convex head. 31

At a first glance, deposit A from the forecourt of the Obelisk Temple, found inside jar 16694, looks quite homogeneous: in fact, it includes mostly fenestrated axes, or parts of fenestrated axes, usually made of gold, and, in a smaller amount, ornaments and vases, or parts of vases, of gold or other metals, characterised for the largest part by the granulated decoration.

**DISCUSSION OF THE EVIDENCE**

Taking into account, in the first place, precisely this fact, namely the type of decoration, it is well attested in other objects found in the Gublite deposits, like, for instance, a decorative cylinder for the handle of a fenestrated axe from the double deposit of the Enceinte sacrée, found inside jars 14759 and 14750, 32 parts of fenestrated axes from a deposit in the north-west corner of the court of the Obelisk

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19. N. 16732, *ibid.* p. 858-859, pl. CXXXIV, length cm. 2.6, width cm. 5.7.
20. *Ibid.* p. 859, pl. CXXXIV; nn. 16734-16735, both are 2 cm long, the first one is 2.2 cm large and the other one is 2.4 cm large.
22. N. 16736, *ibid.* p. 859, pl. CXXXIV, diam. cm. 0.9.
24. *Ibid.* p. 859, n. 16738, length cm. 32, diam. of the ring cm. 25, yet it is not clear if the second datum refers to the ring or to the drinking-tube itself, though the first hypothesis look more likely.
26. *Ibid.* p. 859, pl. CXL, n. 16740, height cm. 7.7, diam. cm. 9.7, strongly stitched to the previous object for the oxidation of the metal.
27. *Ibid.* p. 859, fig. 968bis, n. 16741, diam. cm. 7.4, was placed inside the previous goblet.
28. *Ibid.* p. 860, nn. 16744 and 16745, height cm. 5.8 e 5.2. The two figures, belonging to a typology quite frequent in the Gublite deposits, are of the flat kind, with a cursory workmanship.
29. *Ibid.* p. 860, pl. CXXXIV, n. 16746. According to the interpretation kindly communicated to me by G. Scandone Matthiae, whom I warmly thank, the scarab has the hieroglyphs rendering the name S.n.Wsr.t “The man belonging to the Powerful Lady”, not well done, and thus quite likely not made in Egypt; the name should belong to one Sesostris, as a whole, and in the individual hieroglyphs which make it up, it has a strong apotropaic value.
31. *Ibid.* p. 860, fig. 968bis, n. 16748, length cm. 5.5, width cm. 28.
32. *Ibid.* p. 725, 14754, pl. LXXXII.
Temple and a stud, which was a part of the handle for a stone lid from the same deposit. The technique of granulation is also well known in other groups of Old Syrian jewels, like, for instance, those from Tell el-'Ajjul.

However, at Ebla, in particular among the rich furniture of the three tombs in the princely burial area located below the Western Palace, in Area Q, one may find, in an organic way, objects which can be compared in general with the Gublite repertories: a stud with granulated decoration (fig. 13), thin wavy bands, small dots and paste incrustations bears strong elements of resemblance with the lid handle n. 14451, mentioned previously; the stone lid TM.78.Q.470 (fig. 14) may be compared with the same lid decorated by the stud mentioned above, and also with the similar lids nn. 14453 and 14454, which have a simpler inlaid decoration in the small central handle; in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats one may also find a gold element for the handle of a fenestrated axe (fig. 15), with the surface completely covered with half circles with small dots inside, which create a motif similar to the stylisation of mountains, that reminds the motifs found, with simpler accomplishments, in the elements of handles nn. 16722-16724, 16698, and in the decoration related with the axe 16740 from Deposit A in the Obelisk Temple; another Eblaic gold stud (fig. 16), with paste inlays, has a wavy decoration similar to that on the foils nn. 14754, 14437, 16722, 16728, 16724, 16729, 16730, 16698, and on the stud n. 14451; lastly, in the Tomb of the Princess, belonging to the Eblaic Royal Cemetery, like the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, there were two stone flacons (fig. 17), one of limestone and one of sardonyx, and a bronze specimen, belonging to the same typology (fig. 18), with modelled round body, cylindrical neck and everted rim, flat on the top, as a Gublite bronze flacon found in the Jarre Montet.

It seems thus evident that the Gublite and Eblaic repertories are both expressions of a very high level handicraft, represented, in this peculiar context, by the creation of refined jewels, characterised by the frequent use of granulation, particularly in the production of precious ceremonial fenestrated axes, with the handles decorated with cylinders of metal foil; to the same furniture belong also the elegant metal and stone vases.

So, deposit A from the forecourt of the Obelisk Temple is, therefore, no exception, but rather it may be organically included in the picture. Yet, in our opinion, some objects in it reveal a link with Ebla closer than the mere belonging to the same cultural and artistic milieu. In this sense the most meaningful specimens are the gold situla, n. 16695, the small decorative plaques from the handle of a fenestrated axe, nn. 16700-16702, and possibly also the end pieces of the handles of the same axes, namely artifacts which do not have, thus far, comparisons in other sites of the Syrian region, even taking into account the peculiarity of the finding contexts, i.e. a votive deposit at Byblos, the princely tombs at Ebla.

In fact, the original Gublite gold situla finds only one close comparison in the vases held by two attendants in the banquet of the main scene on the basalt basin from Temple D at Ebla (fig. 19), dedicated to the goddess Ishtar in her quality as patron deity of the ruling dynasty, while the analysis of the

33. Ibid. p. 694, 14436, 14437, pls. CXX-CXXI.
34. Ibid. p. 698, 14451, pl. CXXII.
36. MATTHAE 1984: Tav. 78c; for its shape, the stud was identified with the covering of the top end of a ceremonial stick.
37. The objects described are undoubtedly lids, yet it seems thus far difficult to attribute them to any specific container, as in both examined contexts, at Byblos and Ebla, no trace was left of vases or pyxides to which they might belong; the only possible explanation might be that the original object was made of perishable material, wood or metal, which has completely decayed.
38. MATTHAE 1984: Tav. 82f-g; at that time the piece was thought, albeit only as a hypothesis, to be a part of the Egyptian ceremonial mace belonging to the Hyksos Pharaoh Hotepibra Harnejheryotef; yet, the gold used to make it does not seem to be of the usual reddish type, peculiar of Egyptian artifacts, while the A. himself pointed out at the difference in diameter between the gold decoration piece and the thinner handle of the ivory mace, which was attributed to a certain decay of the organic material.
39. MATTHAE 1984: Pl. 80a; 1989: Fig. 139.
40. MONET 1928: n. 608, p. 125, Pl. LXI.
41. TM.65.D.226, for which see MATTHAE 1966, p. 117-118, where he already proposes a comparison between the two pieces of evidence.
Figure 13. Gold stud with granulated decoration TM.79.Q.200 from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla (© Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

Figure 14. Limestone lid TM.78.Q.470 from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla (© Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

Figure 15. Gold handle with filigree decoration TM.78.Q.XXX from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla (© Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

Figure 16. Gold stud TM.78.Q.408 with paste inlays from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla (© Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

Figure 17. Limestone and sardonyx vases TM.78.QIA.7 and TM.78.QIA.76 from the Tomb of the Princess at Ebla (© Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

Figure 18. Bronze vase TM.79.Q.127 from the Tomb of the Cisterns (© Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).
peculiar small figure applied approximately on the middle of the body of the vase is more complicated. In fact, it seems to be the result of a mixture of inspirations of different origins: the tradition of applying human figures on vases looks, thus far, typical only of the Old Syrian Ebla milieu 42 (fig. 20), while elsewhere, already during the Early Bronze age, applied animal figures, mainly snakes, were to be found, albeit seldom, 43 but the figure itself, specially the modelling of the face, in the rendering of the nose and hair, bears strong elements of contact with an ivory figurine from Kültepe. 44

As regards the small plaques, which represent a scene of homage paid to a seated personage, and two pairs of bull-men facing each other, the evidence for their belonging to a milieu we consider strongly influenced by the Eblaic culture is provided by individual antiquarian elements, as well as by the scene as a whole: in fact, the seated personage, who receives the homage paid by the standing figure, is wrapped in a large cloak, and wears the peaked cap which almost certainly characterised the Eblaic kings’ attire during MB I, before the advent of the more typical Old Syrian royal costume, with a large cloak and ovoid tiara, adopted by the kings of Yamkhad. 45 Such head-dress, whose attestations are quite a few, appears with the royal figures on two Eblaic basins, the one already mentioned from Temple D (fig. 21), but also in the other nearly complete specimen, found before the beginning of the Italian excavations in the region

42. See, at this regard, PINNOCK 2000, p. 127-134, 2011. A vaguely similar specimen, a clay jar with a large front-facing sitting figure, probably female, with her arms at the waist, was found at Mari in a funerary context, dating from the Ville III, MARGUIERON 2004, p. 421, fig. 414.
44. AKURGAŁ 1961: Taf. 35. Really, precisely the production of ivory figurines may, in its turn, be understood in the frame of the relations between Ebla and Kültepe: see, at this regard, the offerings-bearer from Ebla (MATTHAÉI, PINNOCK & SCANDONE MATTHAÉI 1995, n. 382, p. 463), and the kneeling figure from Kültepe (MATTHAÉI 2000, p. 235). The relations between the two centres are also documented by a well recognisable group of cylinder seals, where the king wearing the peaked cap is depicted: TEISSIER 1994, nn. 526-530, 533, 536, 539, p. 233, 546, p. 234, 581, p. 235.
45. MATTHAÉI 1966, p. 126.
of Temple B1 (fig. 22), in the Lower Town south-west, dedicated to Rašap. The man wearing the peaked cap is also the protagonist in the already mentioned small group of seal impressions, found at Kültepe, kārum II, one of which bears an inscription, where the person is called me-KI-im eb-lá, the same title qualifying Yibbit-Lim on the statue fragment found at Ebla in 1968; 46 the title can be interpreted as “king of Ebla”. 47 Lastly, the same person is also represented on a cylinder seal found at one Tell Ledîs or Yedis, where he is depicted facing Ishtar, accompanied by two interceding goddesses. 48 Thus this peculiar male figure, characterised, as has just been recalled, by a peaked cap, is certainly not a frequent one in the figurative art of Middle Bronze Syria, the objects where he is depicted date from the earliest phases of the period, and, when they have inscriptions, they belong to the Eblaic milieu, where some evidence was effectively found, too. Thus the hypothesis proposed at the beginning seems confirmed, namely that this is a representation of the king of Ebla of the beginning of the Old Syrian period, previous to the final achievement of the Aleppo style, following the establishment of the dominion of Yamkhad over a large part of northern Syria, when the royal attire was unified, with the adoption of the large cloak with swollen edge, and, most of all, of the typical ovoid tiara. 49

The two small plaques with bull-men do not reveal such marked peculiarities: in fact, the personage is well known in Mesopotamian, as well as in Syrian art, where he appears, mainly in glyptics, in relation with astral deities, in particular with Shamash and Ishtar. Yet, the representation of the bull-man alone, or in relation with a royal figure, as happened in the object, quite likely a fenestrated axe, where the plaques with the seated king and those with the bull-men probably belonged, is rarer. 50

This connection is, on the other hand, quite frequent in the already mentioned seal impressions from Kültepe kārum II, 51 inspired from, or made at Ebla, and also a small base in the shape of a parallelepiped, found at Ebla in Temple N (fig. 23), in the Lower Town north looks quite interesting for this discussion. The temple was dedicated to the god Shamash, and on each face of the small base a pair

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47. Tonetti 1997. The title was also apparently used as a personal name, Charpin-Ziegler 1997, as certainly happens in the later bilingual Hittite-Hurrian text from Boghazköy, where a personage called Megi also has the title of “Star of Ebla”, Neu 1996, p. 19. It seems also very interesting that this name appears again, always used as a personal name, in “Simuše’s Tale”, where one Meki of Qedem is mentioned among the kings loyal to the Pharaoh: Scandone Matthaei 1997, the A. even proposes to identify Qedem precisely with the kingdom of Ebla.
49. The connection between the Gublite gold pieces and Ebla culture was already recognized by E. Braun-Holzinger (Braun-Holzinger & König-Faran 2001, pp. 39-40), while for the “presentation scene” Babylonian parallels were preferred (ibid., pp. 41-48). As concerns, on the contrary, the “Syrian presentation scene”, see Pinnock 2006.
50. Dunand 1958: Pl. CXXXIII.
51. Teissier 1994, n. 529, p. 233, 546, p. 234; it also appears in a similar context related with Ebla, but where the king does not wear the peaked cap, ibid., n. 550, p. 234.
of bull-men facing each other is represented: they are separated by a vertical line, 52 with a composition closely resembling that used for the Gublite plaques. The only difference is that at Byblos the two figures hold in their stretched hands a spear with upturned head, according to the classical iconography, while at Ebla they have their hands clasped at the belt, in the traditional prayer attitude.

According to the plausible reconstruction proposed by Dunand, the plaques, fixed onto the handle at the height of the openings of the fenestrated axe, and, therefore, bent in order to adapt to the base, allowed the vision of two superimposed beings on each side. Thus, they did not face each other, creating a final effect quite similar to that of the small Eblaic base, where, even though the bull-men face each other on each side, in the repetition of the identical groups, not included in a larger context, they created an effect of uninterrupted frieze, which seems to change, at least in part, the original meaning of this peculiar iconographic motif. From the technical and stylistic points of view, the proposal to link the gold foils with bull-men with those of the homage paid to the king seems quite reasonable, and the main points of contact are the following: 1) the contour lines of all the figures are made by a line of very small packed spheres in relief, apparently made by hammering and not in granulation, while the bodies are modelled inside, albeit in a very low relief; 2) the vertical elements which separate the pairs of bull-men between them, and the two sectors with the homage to the king are also made by a line of globes, always hammered and equally packed, but of larger size, which in the foils with the bull-men also create the oval frame of the whole figurative register; 3) in the field of the homage scene, and in the lunette at both ends of the plaques with bull-men one may see some small hammered globes, of medium size, with the contour line underlined on the outside by granulation; 4) on the other hand, the moon crescents placed over the homage scenes, and included in the side lunette of the other two plaques have a contour line in relief but uninterrupted, while the inner surface is concave.

The handles decorations, plausibly reconstructed by Dunand as the top ends of the objects, are, as has already been recalled, often made of precious metal, and are characterised by quite differentiated decorations, made by ribbings in relief and with a very fine granulation, combined in order to create geometric motifs, which cannot be reduced to one model only. Among those present in Deposit A, examined here, the elements nn. 16698 53 and 16720, 54 both made of gold, look quite elaborated: they are characterised by vertical or ellipsoidal bands, which include regular lines of small hammered globes, with the outer edge marked by lines of dots like those found on the plaques just examined. Therefore, they might have been made in the same workshops. We may also recall that this way of making small globes may be found on the already mentioned Eblaic stud from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, 55 whose furniture also includes a possible handle ending of gold, decorated with vertical plain bands, alternated with sectors limited by double lines of granulation in zigzag. The already mentioned gold element from the same tomb, with the surface completely worked with a motif of half circles, 56 also has, inside each half circle, a small globe in relief, surrounded by very fine granulation. 57

53. Dunand 1958: p. 853, Pl. CXXXII.
54. Ibid. p. 857, Pl. CXXXIV.
55. Matthias 1984: Tav. 78e.
56. Matthias 1984: Tav. 82f-g. As previously stated, it was also proposed that the cylinder were the decoration of Pharaoh Hotepibra’s ceremonial mace, found in pieces in the same tomb, though the difference in diameter between the two objects was pointed out at. As the furniture was scattered inside the funerary chamber it is not possible to propose final hypotheses, but, while the connection with the Egyptian mace does not have any comparison, the belonging to a fenestrated axe finds a parallel in the Gublite evidence.
57. The object from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla was interpreted as the decoration of the ivory handle of Hotepibra’s mace, yet the light colour of the gold foil, quite different from the reddish typical of Egyptian made objects, makes this proposal quite problematic: the mace is certainly of Egyptian handicraft, thus the gold handle, if it belongs to it, might have been added at Ebla, when the mace was restored. Another possibility is that it was a part of a fenestrated axe: some specimen of large bronze axes belonging to this typology were found in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, while the real appurtenance of parts of objects is made difficult for the scattering of the furniture remains in the tomb, at the time of its pillage, during the final destruction of Ebla.
One final element of discussion is the chronological setting of the findings taken into account: the comparisons between the situla and the objects represented on the Eblaic cult basin, and between the gold foils with figurative decorations, and, once again, the Eblaic cult basins, and the glyptic from Kültepe, are consistent also as concerns chronology, as the basins and the cylinders whose impressions were found at Kültepe date from the initial and central phases of MB I. On the other hand, the furniture from the Tombs of the Princess and of the Lord of the Goats of Ebla are definitely later, and date from the end of MB I, and the beginning of MB II. This phase is not well represented archaeologically in the north inner Syrian capital, due to the heavy refurbishing of all the public buildings thus far attested on the site. On the other hand, the possible royal residence, employed between the end of EB IVB and the very beginning of MB I, the Archaic Palace, certainly features a high standard in building technique, and architectural concept. The range of international contacts the town had in those same periods, on the one side with the IIIrd Dynasty Ur in the Sumer for EB IVB, and on the other hand with Cappadocia in MB I, makes it quite likely that the town could afford the presence of important palace and temple workshops, and what we can infer from later productions clearly shows that in those phases, and particularly in MB I, the Eblaic court was the focus of basic elaborations about the roles and representations of kingship.

Conclusions

Before any further discussion, it seems necessary to establish whether Deposit A may be considered a unitary deposit, beyond the circumstances of its final placement. Of course, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to imagine which rite led to the deposition of jars, whose location, moreover, is not always registered with complete reliability, particularly in the case of individual findings, like the Jarre Montet, and, most of all, which was the primary destination of the objects placed into the jars.

The hypotheses which apparently can be proposed are basically two: 1) the objects were offered to the temples, and, later on, due to the lack of room, after some time had elapsed, were taken off their original placement, and were placed in favissae; 58 2) the objects were offered at the same time, in groups corresponding more or less to those found, and were placed at the same time, and immediately, in the deposits as they have been found.

As a matter of fact, both hypotheses look convincing, though they also present some problematic aspect. The strong contemporaneity of the deposits does not seem to concord too much with the first kind of rite proposed, if one does not think rather to a contextual elimination of dismissed furniture, which may have taken place some time after their delivery. The objects might have been offered, on the other hand, in different moments, yet not too far away in time from each other; in this instance, the ritual must be located some time in an archaic phase of the Old Syrian period. In the second proposal, considering that the temples of Byblos are usually quite articulated buildings, apparently not lacking suitable spaces for the storage of “treasures” with a sure aesthetic, cultic, and patrimonial value, we do not understand the need to bury the objects, in containers, moreover, which are not particularly relevant, following a ceremony more suitable for the procedure proposed in the first instance.

As we tried to demonstrate, other objects from the favissae, and particularly the precious fenestrated axes, seem to belong to the same cultural horizon, inasmuch as the axes found in the royal tombs of Byblos do not have the same characteristics, as, though they all are of precious metal, they do not have the rich figurative or granulated decoration of the weapons included in the deposits. Therefore, it seems quite likely that the weapons of the funerary furniture represent a production of local palace workshops, while those from the deposits belong, at least for the largest part, to workshops belonging to, or anyhow related with temples, and in some instance, they may even hint at a foreign production.

Moreover, similar, and contemporary funerary contexts did not include gold axes, either simple, or decorated. This is not astounding in the case of a site like Baghouz, 59 where the tombs are certainly

58. JIDJIAN 1968, p. 38.
59. MESNIL DU BUISSON 1948: Pl. XLVII-XLVIII.
not royal, yet more peculiar is what happens in places like Tell el-Ajjul, where one may find pendants with rosettes in granulation, and other jewels, already compared with findings from the royal necropolis of Ebla, and Ebla itself, in whose royal burials there were only bronze axes, though, as has been recalled, possibly decorated with gold handles similar to those from Byblos.

It is, therefore, quite evident that the cult complexes of Byblos were the places where objects of a very high value were collected in important amounts, which were offered in those sanctuaries by powerful foreign courts. The link between Memphis and the temple of the Baalat Gebal is well known, and it was traditionally very close, as the Lady of Byblos had even been identified with Hathor, the Lady of Denderah. On the other hand, the possible interest for the cult areas of Byblos by Eblaic sovereigns probably needs some more discussion.

The devotion for the Baalat Gebal by the princes of the great North Syrian town does certainly not provoke astonishment, as there is a strong possibility that this divine figure had some form of convergence with Ishtar, patron deity of Ebla, and patroness of that ruling dynasty.

On the other hand, as concerns the deity whom the Obelisk Temple belonged to, there is no sure element. M. Dunand proposed to identify him with Rašap, for the presence of the figurines of marching warriors and for the dedication to the Egyptian god Herishef carved on one obelisk. This last argument was convincingly dismissed by P. Xella, who also pointed out at the fact that there is no evidence of a role of Rašap’s as patron deity of a town. Yet, we would like to propose again the attribution of the Obelisk Temple to Rašap, but on the base of other considerations, precisely descending from the presence of the important deposits of the favissae and from one, in our opinion quite probable, important presence of objects made in Eblaic royal workshops.

In fact, Ebla and Byblos seem to have many a point of contact even in their physical morphology, even taking into due consideration the strong difference in size between the two sites, and the difficulty to evaluate with full reliability the urban pattern of the Old Syrian coast town because precisely the Obelisk Temple was moved from its original placement by M. Dunand. Anyhow, both towns have two important cult areas, one dedicated to a great female deity — the temple of the Baalat at Byblos, and Ishtar’s Cult Area in the Lower Town north of Ebla — and one belonging to a possible male deity. At Ebla this god was identified with Rašap, for the connection among the temple (Temple B1), the Western Palace (Area Q), the Crown Prince’s residence, which included arsenals, and the Royal Necropolis, which developed below the Western Palace itself. Temple B1 at Ebla was also related with another cult building, Sanctuary B2, dedicated to the cult of royal deified ancestors, a cult which quite likely included the consummation of community meals. The features just described, and the presence in the

60. Petrie 1934: Pl. XIV; Matthiae 1981.
63. One probable Eblaic reference to the Lady of Byblos may possibly be identified in the Hathoric figures well known in the capital town of north inner Syria, and, in particular, in a small elegant faience vase, coming from a region of private houses (Matthiae 1984: fig. 96) and in a small head carved on a beautiful unwritten cylinder seal, with a scene of adoration to Baal (ibid. p. Tav. 88). According to a probable hypothesis of P. Matthiae’s, ibidem, in the seal they probably reproduced precisely a small vase modelled as a Hathor’s head. From the chronological point of view the Eblaic specimen should belong to a later phase than the deposits of Byblos, as it dates from the mature and late Old Syrian period: the seal, in particular, should date from the final phase of Middle Bronze II. One cannot, lastly, rule out the possibility that the use of an undetermined definition, like “Lady of Byblos”, in order to designate the patron deity of the coastal town, were meant precisely to make the relations with foreign courts easier; in fact, they could more easily see in her the aspects, certainly present in that divine figures, closer to specific deities of theirs, as might have been the case, on the one hand, with Hathor, and, on the other hand, with Ishtar of Ebla. The more up to date picture of the problems concerning this important divine figure can be found in Scandone Matthiae 1981, p. 63-65.
64. Xella 1994, p. 197. However, as Scandone Matthiae 1981, p. 66-68 maintains, there was, in the Gublite region, a male deity, called in Egyptian Khai-Tau, whose prerogatives had many points of contact with Rašap. See also Pulco 1976, p. 55. One may perhaps also recall that in the latest attestations of Rašap in the Egyptian territory, he was also related with Herakleopolis, the town whose patron deity was precisely Herishef. Stadelmann 1967, p. 76.
Temple of a cult basin celebrating a military accomplishment, led to propose the identification of the deity adored in Temple B1 with Rašap, god of war, death and the Netherworld.

The Gublite sanctuary belongs, as is the rule in the cult architecture of the Syro-Palestinian coastal areas, in an articulated and complex structure, which has, in the older phase, the so-called L-Temple, a cella with the classical Early and Old Syrian plan, with one room only, axial and with entrance between antae; it can still be recognised, notwithstanding some important changes, in the later phase — the true Obelisk Temple. The temple of Byblos of the Early Syrian period had, in the north corner of the building, a square unit, divided into three rooms: the first room was rectangular, with a latitudinal plan, more than 10 m wide and approximately 7 m deep, and had benches along three sides at least, while near the long wall opposite the entrance there were four basins placed in a kind of mudbrick bench. On the base of the fittings present inside it, one may perhaps infer that in this room communal meals took place, rather than ablutions, somehow of the same kind as those which were made, later on, in Sanctuary B2 of Ebla.

In the Old Syrian period the sanctuary of Byblos underwent some refurbishing, which did not change the overall distribution of its rooms: these were still differentiated, and irregular, with the exception of the hall between the front unit and the precinct of the cella. Thus, even though fittings comparable with those of the previous period are apparently not attested, it does not look likely that the owner of the temple changed, as also the ways of using the cult area look basically the same. One last element, which it seems important to recall, is the close connection between the two cult areas, the Baalat’s temple and the male deity’s sanctuary, and the region where the royal tombs were built, which was quite likely located below the royal palace of the Old Syrian period, now completely lost.

It seems, therefore, quite likely that the L-Temple/Obelisk Temple were dedicated to a deity particularly worshipped in inner Syria, which led the builders of the cult area not to choose for the cella a typical coastal model. He was probably not too different from the owner of Temple B1 at Ebla, where he was identified with Rašap, namely with a male deity specially related with the complex rituals concerning kingship. Thus, if the Pharaohs preferred to send their gifts to the Lady of Byblos, the Eblaic sovereigns could find in the second sanctuary the possibility to pay homage, in the way they considered customary, deified royal ancestors, in an approximately familiar context which included, in a space certainly more restricted than the Eblaic one, two important cult areas, a palace and a royal burial area.

From this point of view, the sanctuary just examined in particular, but, generally speaking, perhaps also the other deposits from the same region, look particularly functional for the royal ideology of that time, with the figures of marching personages, who are quite often human and not divine, with the fenestrated axes, typical paraphernalia of Old Syrian kingship, and, most of all, in the deposit we analysed here in detail, with the scene of adoration for the man sitting on a throne, and with the situla, which recall the Eblaic basin, where also a banquet scene with a royal protagonist is carved.

As written documentation is missing, it does not seem possible to reach final conclusions, yet, in our opinion, at least as regards the deposit examined here, for the reasons we think we have explained, we propose to consider it as a unitary offer, quite likely coming from the court of Ebla. Summing up, we cannot rule out the possibility that Eblaic kings of the Old Syrian period not only sent their gifts to the Gublite sanctuary, but that sometimes they even went there in person to accomplish rituals of kingship, as had happened in the mature Early Syrian period, or that, in any case, the offer of royal gifts included at the same time a complex ceremony, which might also take place without the real donor’s presence. In this instance, it is also possible to propose two scenarios for such ceremonies: in the first place, we can imagine that, as happened in the Early Syrian period, when the rituals of kingship obliged the royal couple to go out of town, in order to present gifts in other centres of the kingdom, sometimes seats of

66. For a recent reappraisal of this cult building see SALA 2008.
67. MARGUIERON 1994: fig. 6. In the region of the tombs some sections of important stone walls may still be seen, which, for the technique of cutting and building might belong to an important Old Syrian building. For a discussion about the topography of Byblos, and the comparisons with Ebla see PINNOCK 2007, pp. 120-127.
ancestors’ mausolea, during the Old Syrian period the sovereigns used to send, or even bring, offerings to sanctuaries and cult centres outside the Eblaic territory, always within the picture of the cults for the deified royal ancestors. In the second place, considering that the gifts date from the beginning of the Old Syrian period, as is proved by the king’s peaked cap, we cannot rule out the possibility that ceremonies such as those imagined here were a part of a kind of legitimisation ritual of the young Eblaic dynasty, and, in this sense, the figures of marching warriors, which were elsewhere identified with deified rulers of the past, might be a kind of “presentation” of the ancestors, and therefore of the new rulers, their descendants, in a kind of visual genealogy, not too different, in its intention, from “The Genealogy of Hammurabi’s Dynasty”, which a few decades later would be not a secondary element in the ideological program of that great king of Babylon. 68

Beyond these hypotheses, which cannot certainly be proved, there remains the picture of a system of relations between high court milieus of the Old Syrian world certainly more articulated and complex than it was possible to infer previously, and which more and more, thank to the deepening of reflections, and enlargement of the data at hand, seems related with an idea of kingship imbued of special ideological meanings, and which manifested itself by means of extremely elaborated rituals. 69

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68. It is quite interesting, in fact, that these lists of previous kings might be read in the course of kispu ceremonies for dead ancestors: FINKELSTEIN 1966, p. 117.

69. Recently, other elements of evidence were brought to light at Ebla, concerning the accomplishment of rituals, including also the burial of gifts in temple areas: PINNOCK 2009.
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