



Syria

Archéologie, art et histoire

95 | 2018

Dossier : Sur les routes de Syrie et d'Asie Mineure

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/syria/7070>

DOI: 10.4000/syria.7070

ISSN: 2076-8435

Publisher

IFPO - Institut français du Proche-Orient

Printed version

Date of publication: 31 December 2018

Number of pages: 297-315

ISBN: 978-2-35159-750-7

ISSN: 0039-7946

Electronic reference

Ted Kaizer and Rubina Raja, “Divine symbolism on the *tesserae* from Palmyra
Considerations about the so-called “symbol of Bel” or “signe de la pluie”, *Syria* [Online], 95 | 2018,
Online since 01 May 2021, connection on 03 May 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/syria/7070> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/syria.7070>

DIVINE SYMBOLISM ON THE *TESSERAE* FROM PALMYRA
CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE SO-CALLED
“SYMBOL OF BEL” OR “SIGNE DE LA PLUIE”

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Abstract — An enigmatic symbol that is often depicted on the Palmyrene *tesserae* has commonly been interpreted as either the sign of the main god Bel or a mark of rain. This article brings together all appearances of the symbol and puts forward the hypothesis that it stands rather for something that cannot otherwise be represented, namely the notional presence of the divine at religious dining occasions. As such, it may be compared with the seemingly unessential labelling of obviously divine figures as 'lh' or θεός.

Keywords — Palmyra, tesserae, iconography, divine symbolism, religious life, religious banquets.

Résumé — Un symbole énigmatique, souvent représenté sur les tessères de Palmyre, a généralement été interprété, soit comme le signe du dieu principal Bel, soit comme le signe de la pluie. L'article rassemble toutes les attestations du symbole et fait l'hypothèse qu'il s'agit plutôt de signaler quelque chose qui ne peut être représenté, c'est-à-dire la notion de la présence de la divinité aux dîners religieux. On peut donc le comparer au fait d'apposer sur des figures évidemment divines le qualificatif qui peut sembler inutile de 'lh' ou bien θεός.

Mots-clefs — Palmyre, tessère, iconographie, symbolisme divin, vie religieuse, banquets rituels.

خلاصة - فسر عادةً رمز ملغز، ممثل غالباً على بطاقات (تيسيرا) التدمرية، إما كإشارة للإله الرئيسي بل، أو كإشارة للمطر. يجمع المقال جميع الأدلة حول الرمز ويقدم فرضية بأن الأمر يتعلق بالأحرى بالإشارة إلى شيء ما لا يمكن تمثيله، أي مفهوم وجود الإله في الأعشية الدينية. بناءً عليه، يمكن للمرء أن يقارنه بحقيقة كونه يلصق بالشخص الإلهية بوضوح نعت <lh> أو θεός الذي يمكن أن يبدو عديم الجدوى.

كلمات محورية - بطاقات (تيسيرا) تدمرية، وصف الصور، رمزية إلهية، حياة دينية، مآدب طقسية.

* The authors would like to thank the Carlsberg Foundation for funding the Palmyra Portrait Project generously since 2012 as well as the Danish National Research Foundation (grant: 119), and the Aarhus Institute for Advanced Studies for awarding Ted Kaizer a Dale T. Mortensen Senior Fellowship in 2014 during which research leading to this article was undertaken. Acknowledgements are also due to the Leverhulme Trust for awarding Ted Kaizer a Major Research Fellowship (2014-17) during which it was completed. We are furthermore grateful to PhD student Julia Steding for help with the images, to Christina Levisen for help with the editing and also to Dr. Signe Krag for assistance with scanning at an early stage. The editor thanks Richard Berthaux (USR 3225 MAE) for preparing the photographs for publication and Dr Chadi Hatoum (UMR 7041 ArScAn) for the abstract's and keywords' Arabic translation.

The so-called *tesserae* remain the most under-researched source for the study of the religious life of Palmyra, for which they are potentially the richest mine of information. They are small tokens, mostly made of clay with a few made of other materials, such as glass, lead, metal and bronze. They are widely believed to have served as entrance tickets to religious banquets. Several thousands of them are distributed over collections throughout the world, and more than eleven hundred types have been identified. The majority was found in drains of the banqueting hall situated within the *temenos* of the great temple of Bel. The main corpus is the *Recueil* by Harald Ingholt, Henri Seyrig and Jean Starcky (with linguistic commentary by André Caquot) from 1955, superseding the earlier publications from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹ In 1944, the French count Robert du Mesnil du Buisson had published a plate volume of specimens from the Cabinet des médailles et antiques in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, followed nearly twenty years later by an accompanying text volume.² Additional types from the temple of Baal-Shamin were published in 1959,³ a few *tesserae* were found in the area of the so-called Hellenistic city,⁴ and recently some more have appeared as a result of the Syro-American expedition to Palmyra.⁵ A peculiar find was made in the 1980s at the temple of Arsu, where one hundred and twenty-five identical *tesserae* were discovered inside a pot, suggesting that they had been prepared for a particular banquet (or, alternatively, were collected afterwards).⁶ Michał Gawlikowski kindly informed us about the find, in a domestic setting, of a similar hoard of identical *tesserae*, which currently remains unpublished.⁷

Despite the fact that they are remarkably small, the *tesserae* contain an immense amount of information aimed at the individuals who used them. One really ought to have held them in one's hand in order to fully appreciate the impact they may have had on the participants and worshippers at the occasions to which they provided admission. The *tesserae* contain a large variety of imagery: reclining priests; deities depicted in bust-shape or as standing figures; aniconic imagery (in the shape of a *betyl*); divine attributes (e.g. the club of the Heracles figure or the lyre of Apollo/Nebu); astral symbolism; lunar and solar images. A number of the *tesserae* carry signet-seal imprints, which would have tied them closely to an individual person.⁸ Similarly to the funerary inscriptions, the *tesserae* are inscribed almost exclusively in Palmyrene-Aramaic, and this concerns, therefore, an aspect of Palmyrene civilization that does not engage with the city's public bilingualism.⁹ The inscriptions contain mostly names (of deities, persons, groups and/or families) and some sacrificial terminology,¹⁰ but no dates.¹¹ The *tesserae* come in many different shapes, and shapes were definitely part of the repertoire of choice and preference, but since it is highly unlikely that a particular shape belonged to a specific group, we are not differentiating between shapes in our text nor in our catalogue.¹²

1. See *RTP*. For the most recent studies of the Palmyrene *tesserae*, see RAJA 2015a; RAJA 2015b; RAJA 2016.

2. See MESNIL DU BUISSON 1944; MESNIL DU BUISSON 1962.

3. DUNANT 1959.

4. SCHMIDT-COLINET & AL-AS'AD 2005; SCHMIDT-COLINET 2011; SCHMIDT-COLINET & AL-AS'AD 2013, II, p. 243-247.

5. As announced by Cynthia Finlayson at a conference in Warsaw in April 2016. For some of the images, see <http://archaeologicalillustrator.blogspot.dk/2011/08/tesserae-from-2011-palmyra-excavation.html>.

6. See AL-AS'AD, BRIQUEL-CHATONNET & YON 2005, who also announced a joint venture to produce a supplement to the *Recueil* and a database of all Palmyrene *tesserae*. See also BRIQUEL-CHATONNET & YON 2003.

7. It concerns a lot of fifty-seven *tesserae* which were all of the same mould and belong to the type *RTP* 552. They were found in 1996 in a sounding during the excavation of the southern part of a house north of the central colonnade (block F on the map by GABRIEL 1926, pl. XII).

8. Many of the male figures, both priests and ordinary men, depicted on the funerary reliefs wear rings, which would have carried signet-seal stones. See RAJA 2016, p. 352.

9. For the few exceptions in Greek, see *RTP*, p. 191.

10. Unexplained Aramaic vocabulary is generally taken to refer to otherwise unknown family names, but see KAIZER 2002a, p. 215 with n. 7, for the suggestion that some of these words could also be unknown terms designating professional associations. See also KAIZER 2002b.

11. An exception is *RTP* 691, which gives a date of 430 of the Seleucid era (AD 118/9).

12. All the relevant information can be found in *RTP*. See NYNS 1987, p. 67; RAJA 2016, p. 346.

More than ninety of the types, ca 8 % of all Palmyrene *tesserae*, depict a small and enigmatic sign (or rather, three main variants of it): a circle with three lines hanging from it, a semi-oval shape with three lines hanging from it as well as a version, which iconographically lies in between the two other versions (fig. 1). It was initially interpreted by scholars as the “symbol of Bel,” despite the fact that it could also be associated with a host of other gods and goddesses,¹³ and has subsequently been explained as a “rain symbol.”¹⁴ The editors of *RTP* left it unexplained, simply depicting it in their catalogue (though always in the same shape, with no regard for the variety in format).¹⁵ The symbol does appear in conjunction with the divine name Bel on approximately forty of the types, thus just under half of its total number of appearances, with another deity named alongside Bel in six of those instances, namely the *Gad* of the olive merchants (*gd mšh'*),¹⁶ Baaltak,¹⁷ Herta or Nebu. It can also accompany other divine names, in addition to those already mentioned: Allat, Bel-Hammon (also together with the *Gad* of Agrud), Belti, Elqonera, Nanaia, Yarhibol and Aglibol, Malakbel (also together with the *Gad* of Taimi), Shadrafa (also with Du'anat), Ma'nu and Sha'd/ru, or Shai al-Qaum. The symbol furthermore appears alongside astral symbols, with anthropomorphic imagery (a deity, but also a reclining priest), with inscriptions only, with divine requisites (the club of the Heracles figure, with the name of Nergal on the reverse), with sacrificial elements (a ladle, but also terminology for religious measuring), with an animal (griffin, ram, horse, lion, camel), or on its own.



Figure 1.

The three versions of the sign
© drawing by Signe Bruun Kristensen.

Our evidence is insufficient to support the idea that the symbol was linked to any particular cultic context or used by a specific group of worshippers. There is also nothing to indicate that it should be interpreted as an apotropaic symbol. Its widespread appearance certainly suggests that its meaning must have been sufficiently well known in Palmyrene society. Its popularity notwithstanding, it is also clear that there was not always a need to depict it. But it should be emphasized that the absence of the symbol (on over 90 % of all *tesserae*) does not necessarily mean an absence of the notion of whatever it stood for. Since the iconography, and not least the details of it and the variety in general, leaves no doubt that the artists were perfectly able to depict in splendid detail whatever they wanted to depict,¹⁸ the symbol epitomizes something that could simply not be depicted, whose meaning was beyond “normal” representation: if the artists *could* have depicted it, they would have done so. Besides, it is always seen as detached, never held by anyone, and never involved in action. One should therefore leave behind any expectation that the imagery of the symbol is subject to a “logical” system or explanation. The symbol is not an “item” but rather a depiction of something that cannot actually be depicted, something *notional*. As Henri Seyrig put it long ago: “Ce signe ne semble pas être affecté à une divinité particulière, mais avoir eu un sens religieux plus général, difficile à déterminer aujourd’hui.”¹⁹

As we have seen, the *tesserae* are commonly understood within the context of religious banqueting. Sacred dining was one of many ways in which the relationship between humans and deities could find ritual expression at Palmyra.²⁰ The evidence for it is multidisciplinary: archaeological remains

13. FÉVRIER 1931, p. 55, 216. But see already SEYRIG 1933, p. 245, n. 1.

14. First by P. V. C. Baur in BAUR, ROSTOVITZEFF & BELLINGER 1932, p. 111-112, then by MESNIL DU BUISSON 1962, p. 147-152.

15. See also SEYRIG 1937, p. 207: “Le symbole ..., très fréquent à Palmyre, n’a jamais été expliqué.”

16. KAIZER 1997, p. 162-163.

17. GAWLIKOWSKI 1990, p. 2639.

18. E.g. *RTP* 18, showing an extremely detailed tree alongside two of the symbols (= cat. no. 2 in the catalogue at the end of this article, and fig. 2).

19. SEYRIG 1941, p. 34.

20. See, for further detail and discussion, KAIZER 2008.

of banqueting halls; terminology of dining fraternities; banqueting scenes on funerary reliefs and sarcophagi lids; tableware and equipment found as grave goods; a wall painting from a Palmyrene context in Dura-Europos; and indeed many *tesserae* depicting reclining priests.²¹ In contrast to other rituals in vogue in Palmyra, such as the ceremony in which the recipient deity would receive (and purportedly consume) offerings without the presence of worshippers,²² and the manifold sacrificial acts where the deity was present in a symbolic way (through evocation in prayer or through location in front of a cult statue), religious banqueting concerns an occasion where a deity was more *notionally* present amongst the human participants. It is precisely because of the assumption of divine presence that, to a certain degree, each Palmyrene dining association had, by definition, a religious dimension. That is, of course, not to undervalue the important societal function of the religious banqueting phenomenon, and the *tesserae* fulfilled an essential role as markers within Palmyra by serving as a means to diversify on the religious level within the local society.²³

The abstract presence of the deity can be perceived as key to a proper understanding of the phenomenon of religious banqueting at Palmyra – as part of the city’s “rhythm of religious life,”²⁴ and we therefore put forward the hypothesis that the unexplained symbol on the Palmyrene *tesserae*, whose earlier interpretation as “rain sign” or as “symbol of Bel” remains unconvincing, simply stands for the conceptual manifestation of the divine during the sacred banquets. The symbol did not have to be depicted, because the deity was notionally present anyway. But it *could* be depicted, simply to emphasize this notional presence. This theory would go some way to explain the comparative popularity of the combination of the symbol and the divine name Bel. After all, as the leading deity of Palmyra, Bel stands for a unity in cultic heterogeneity, and his large temple was also known as the temple “of the gods of the Palmyrenes.”²⁵

The apparently “unnecessary” symbol may be fruitfully compared with the similarly “unnecessary” label often applied in the epigraphy of the Roman Near East to designate divine status, especially in Aramaic (*lh*’) but also in Greek (θεός). Thus, as regards the Palmyrenean formula, the first part of the *cella* of the temple of Bel was dedicated in AD 32 to “Bel and Yarhibol and Aglibol, the gods” (*bl wyrhbw l w’ glbw l’ lhy’*), and in AD 73, altars were offered “to Baal-Shamin, the god” (*lb’ lsmn’ lh’*).²⁶ Of course, the term could also be used as part of a phrase to explain the peculiar nature of the god, as in the dedication “to Nebu, the good and rewarding god” (*lnbw’ lh’ ṭb’ wškr’*),²⁷ but often, it is simply drawn

21. The evidence for the terminology and archaeology of banqueting groups is assembled in KAIZER 2002a, p. 220-229. On the link between the *tesserae* and banqueting, see GAWLIKOWSKI 1990, p. 2651-2652, and now also RAJA 2016, p. 347-351. For further evidence from the area of the so-called Hellenistic city, see SCHMIDT-COLINET & AL-AS’AD 2005, p. 172; SCHMIDT-COLINET and AL-AS’AD 2013, II, p. 247. For funerary banqueting scenes, see SADURSKA & BOUNNI 1994, fig. 208-250. For the find of multifarious earthenware vessels in tomb F in the Southeast necropolis, see HIGUCHI & SAITO 2001, p. 135-144. A painting (now divided between the Louvre and the Yale University Art Gallery) from a private house in Dura-Europos that is accompanied by a Palmyrenean inscription - a memento for the persons depicted before four Palmyrene gods - shows a combination of a hunting and a banquet scene, the latter with at least five reclining men and one female figure, with an Eros figure in between the two sections. See DIRVEN 1999, p. 281-292. For some examples of *tesserae* depicting reclining priests, see RTP 441 and 700. RTP 700 is part of the catalogue at the end of article and depicted here as well (= cat. no. 76, fig. 6).
22. The rite is known under different names, signifying different facets, such as *lectisternium*, *τραπεζώματα*, and *θεοξένια*, on which see KAIZER 2008, p. 186-187.
23. For discussion, see RAJA 2016, p. 362-366. If this counts as evidence for a process of religious systematization going on within the unified society of Palmyra, it may be telling that no *tesserae* have been found amongst the many known communities of Palmyrene expatriates at Dura-Europos and elsewhere. It could perhaps be seen as evidence for the idea that outside Palmyra, the worship of Palmyrene gods took place within a different organizational framework, without the same need to diversify into various cult groups and associations.
24. The title of chapter three in KAIZER 2002a. See also KAIZER 2008.
25. PAT 1353 (AD 25) and 0269 (AD 51). See KAIZER 2002, p. 70, n. 21; KAIZER 2006, p. 104.
26. PAT 1347 and 0180, respectively.
27. PAT 0009.

on as the common noun to convey godly power.²⁸ The situation with its Greek equivalent is slightly different, in that the term comes to the Roman Near East with its own classical baggage,²⁹ but also θεός can be applied to a divine name with a straightforward explanatory function, rather than being used in any predicative manner.³⁰ A bilingual inscription from AD 164 records the consecration of someone “to Bel the god” (Βήλω θεῶ);³¹ in an undated Greek text, mention is made of the sedan chair “of Bōrroaōnos the god” (Βωρροαωνου θεοῦ);³² and the Greek part of a bilingual text from AD 99 records how a statue was set up following the order “of Hera, Artemis and Rasaphos, the gods” (Ἡρας καὶ Ἀρτεμίδος καὶ Ρασαφου θεῶν).³³ In Dura-Europos, scholarly convention has led to “Zeus Theos” being commonly (though not necessarily convincingly) considered as a specific deity, to be distinguished from other appearances of the divine name Zeus in the town.³⁴ Like the symbol on the *tesserae*, the Aramaic and Greek terms for “god”, *lh*’ and θεός, are sometimes present and sometimes absent from the inscriptions. But it will be clear that, in those cases where a divine name appears on its own, without the addition, we are still dealing with a deity. The label is applied with its explanatory function both to well-known deities such as Bel (in which case it was unnecessary) and to more obscure divinities such as Bōrroaōnos (in which case it might, actually, have been useful) – and the same can be said about the symbol.³⁵ Both label and symbol can be interpreted as means to heighten expressions of piousness, and both ought to be considered typical for the religious mentality of the oasis settlement.³⁶

As far as we are aware, the symbol appears only twice elsewhere than on a *tessera*. Firstly, it can be seen on a fragment of an altar or a *cippus*, at the end of the third line.³⁷ The precise place of the

28. HOFUIJZER & JONGELING 1995, I, s.v. “lh’”.

29. PRICE 1984, p. 79-85.

30. Frank Brown made the point that the Greek noun “appended to the name of a deity is a common feature of the Greek inscriptions of the Near East of Hellenistic and Roman date”, and that it could be explained (when not used as appositive) either “as affirming the divinity of an obscure or lesser god which might not be apparent to the uninitiated from the mere name”, or when “applied to certain widely known but purely oriental gods . . . as mere formal concession to the Greek.” With regard to the rest-category, the “many examples . . . in which the familiar Greek name of the divinity is supplied with the epithet”, he stated that “they pose a problem not answerable here, but worthy of a detailed and special study.” See F. E. Brown, in ROSTOVITZEFF, BROWN & WELLES 1939, p. 195-196, n. 28. Like *lh*’, θεός can of course also form part of a longer epithet, such as e.g. in the Greek counterpart of a bilingual inscription recording offerings “for Malakbel and the Tyche of Taimi and Atargatis, the ancestral gods” ([Μα]λαχβήλω καὶ Τύχη Θαιμεῖος καὶ [Ἄτα]ργάτει πατρώοις θεοῖς; see *PAT* 0273; *IGLS* XVII, 1, no. 306.

31. *PAT* 1372; *IGLS* XVII, 1, no. 262. The Aramaic counterpart is damaged, and it is not clear that the expected *bl lh*’ would fit.

32. *IGLS* XVII, 1, no. 308.

33. *IGLS* XVII, 1, no. 177. In this case, the Aramaic equivalent only gives the names of the deities, “Herta and Nanai and Reshef” (*hrt wnmny wršp*). The same constellation, however, is attested in an Aramaic text from 6 BC, which records how the priests of Herta had commemorated a benefactor “to Herta, Nanai and Reshef, the gods” (*lhrt wlnmy wlršp lh’y*), see *PAT* 2766.

34. The evidence has now been collected by DUCHÂTEAU 2013, p. 113-122, at p. 113: “l’épiclese *Theos* (le dieu) est caractéristique des épiclese que les dieux orientaux recevaient.” The combination Zeus *Kyrios* (Κύριος, “Lord”) is used in Dura-Europos only as the Greek counterpart of Baal-Shamin, as on the bilingual inscription accompanying a relief, see DOWNEY 1977, 208-201 with pl. IV, 10, and *PAT* 1089. Cf. DUCHÂTEAU 2013, 121, where it is argued that Zeus *Theos* was instead assimilated with Bel. On a silver libation bowl found in one of the houses, dated to AD 232/3 and dedicated “to Zeus *Theos* who is in Adatha” (Διὶ Θεῶ τῶ ἐν Ἀδαθα), the god is - like the dedicant, who is also a non-Durene (“of Adatha, dwelling in Bethzena”, ἀπὸ Ἀδαθα οἰκῶν ἐν Βηθζηνᾶ) - explicitly identified as coming from elsewhere. See ROSTOVITZEFF 1934, 307-310, no. 610 with fig. 13; BAIRD 2014, 284.

35. Terms denoting a specific class of divine beings, such as *gny*’ (commonly associated with the Arabic word for divinity, *jinn*) and possibly šd’ (“demon?”), are of course a different matter. See HOFUIJZER and JONGELING 1995, I, s.v. “*gny*’”, and II, s.v. “šdy₂”, respectively.

36. In this context, one may also draw attention to the thesis put forward by KUBIAK-SCHNEIDER 2016, that Palmyrene dedications without theonym, most notably in the form of worship of “He whose name is blessed for ever,” should not be viewed as the cult of a so-called “anonymous deity,” but as a similar method to give prominence to actions of benediction instead. For Palmyrene religious mentality in general, see KAIZER 2004.

37. *PAT* 0321, *CIS* II, III, tab. XVIII with no. 3975 (see fig. 9).

symbol in the inscription, directly between the name of the god (Arsu) and the word for god ('lh'), does support the interpretation that is put forward in this article, namely that it stands for the abstract notion of divine presence. Here, following the name of the god (and by its very position also forcing the term 'lh' onto the next line), it can be said to have served as a further means to accentuate Arsu's divine status – in addition to the label meaning “god” itself, which can, in the case of a well-known divine figure as Arsu, be viewed as already superfluous. Secondly, it is visible on a relief showing a figure mounting a dromedary, from the *temenos* of the temple of Bel.³⁸ In this case, the symbol is placed high up on the right front leg of the animal. Since there is some debate, with regard to other pieces, as to whether the figure riding the animal is indeed a rider god or simply a cavalry soldier, its presence on this relief could be used to support the view that the figure on top of the dromedary, in this case, certainly is a deity.³⁹

Finally, attention may be drawn to an alternative that was available to the Palmyrenes: a *tessera* showing a reclining priest depicts the bust of a radiated divinity in the background.⁴⁰ In this case, rather than a deity's notional presence, as suggested by the symbol, the interaction between those participating in religious dining and the divine world is elucidated by means of the concrete presence of divine imagery at a banqueting scene.

The present contribution is but an attempt to open up and stimulate a debate that starts to pay proper attention to this unique source material. There is more work to be done in order to fully investigate how the *tesserae* play into an overall framework of religious symbolism at Palmyra, which was shared by a wider society, but which indeed did not seem to have travelled with Palmyrenes abroad and was therefore restricted to the local religious sphere of the city of Palmyra itself.

CATALOGUE OF *TESSERAE* CARRYING THE SYMBOL

The *tesserae* are only briefly described here, since we focus on the context of the symbol only (fig. 2 to 8). All *RTP* nos. are described in detail in that publication, including measurements and shapes. Obverse and reverse are naturally constructed, and often arbitrary terms, but used in order to make descriptions easier to follow. Readings and translations follow the original publications, unless stated otherwise.

Catalogue no.	<i>RTP</i> no.	Description (Obverse = O; Reverse = R)
1	11	O: <i>KMRY' DY BL</i> (priests of Bel), with the symbol below R: <i>YRH'Y</i>
2	18	O: Priest on kline, <i>[K]MRY BL</i> (priests of Bel) R: Tree with the symbol depicted on each side
3	20	O: Bucranium, below <i>KMRY / BL</i> (priests of Bel) R: Symbol placed between two circles, symbol also at the bottom (not viewed according to comment in- <i>RTP</i>)
4	40	O: <i>BRYKY ŠK' T' 'HYRY [W]NT'</i> (for the phrase, see KAIZER 2002a, p. 226 with n. 64) R: Above <i>BL</i> between two globes, large globe in the middle, the symbol on each side. Below two globes and crescent in the middle
5	44	O: Symbol next to <i>BL</i> R: <i>BLH' J</i> (Belha)

38. SEYRIG 1941, p. 33-34 with pl. I, 2; TANABE 1986, p. 175, pl. 142 (see fig. 10).

39. Thus KAIZER forthcoming, n. 28. See, however, for a similar relief of a figure mounting a dromedary, but without the divine sign on display, SEYRIG 1941, 33-34 with pl. I, 3; TANABE 1986, pl. 141.

40. *RTP* 381; HVIDBERG-HANSEN & PLOUG 1993, 175 and 180, no. 155.

Catalogue no.	RTP no.	Description (Obverse = O; Reverse = R)
6	45	O: Symbol next to <i>BL</i> R: Smooth <i>Cf.</i> CHARLES-GAFFIOT, LAVAGNE & HOFMAN 2001, p. 279, no. 177.
7	46	O: Symbol next to <i>BL</i> R: Visible finger imprint
8	48	O: Symbol next to <i>BL</i> R: Smooth
9	49	O: Symbol placed below <i>BL</i> R: Blurred signet-seal imprint
10	50	O: Symbol next to <i>BL</i> R: Star on top of circle, surrounded by dots
11	52	O: Symbol next to <i>BL</i> . Sign shaped as a lying <i>Z</i> at the bottom R: Two heads in profile facing each other. Above another head
12	54	O: <i>BL</i> (described in <i>RTP</i> on the basis of LIDZBARSKI 1898, 492, no. VA 391) R: Non-bearded bust turned to the right, symbol next to bust
13	55	O: Bush with berries, on top <i>BL</i> and the symbol R: Blurred and potentially partly fragmented
14	66	O: <i>BL B' LTK / BNY / TYMRŠW</i> (Bel, Baaltak, the sons of Taimarsu) and a globe R: Crescent with a decorated globe and a symbol on each side of the globe
15	69	O: <i>BL</i> , below to the left a crescent with a globe, to the right a crescent and the symbol R: Blurred and worn
16	70	O: <i>[.J]DY'Y / BL</i> , the symbol, <i>[.J]RY'Y / BL</i> , the symbol R: <i>MKB[L] / 'GYLW</i> (Makkib[el] Ogeilu)
17	71	O: <i>BL</i> and the symbol. Below an inscription consisting of three letters, one is a <i>Q</i> R: Two-line illegible inscription
18	75	O: <i>BL</i> and the symbol R: Horned bust
19	83	O: 'GN <i>BL BNY BWL</i> ' (symposium of Bel, tribe of Bola'a), inscribed in a circle around a globe R: Unbearded bust facing right, surrounded by crescent and stars. To the left and to the right a globe and the symbol
20	84	O: 'GN <i>BL</i> (symposium of Bel) and the symbol R: 'BDY / WHBLT (Abdai Wahballat)
21	86	O: 'GN <i>BL</i> (symposium of Bel) and the symbol R: Oval signet-seal imprint with standing figure (Tyche?)
22	88	O: 'GN / <i>BL</i> (symposium of Bel), the symbol, <i>YRHÏY</i> (Yarhai) R: Distyle building façade with unclear inscription in the pediment. <i>HT (?) Y</i> (Hatay?)
23	89	O: Centrally placed head of bull surrounded by a symbol on each side. 'GN <i>B[L]</i> (symposium of Bel) R: Blank
24	90	O: 'GN <i>BL</i> (symposium of Bel), a globe and below the symbol R: A camel to the right. Traces of letters
25	92	O: Scorpion to the right. Below 'GN <i>BL</i> (symposium of Bel) and below this the symbol and a globe R: <i>BL / YBRK / LBNY / BWDL</i> (Bel blesses the tribe of Bodla). A snake is located below
26	95	O: 'GN <i>BL</i> , below a globe situated between two symbols R: <i>[B]N[Y] YDY['B]L</i> (tribe of Yedibel)
27	99	O: Centrally placed symbol. Inscription running around the border of the <i>tessera</i> . 'GN <i>BL BNY 'GRWD</i> (symposium of Bel, tribe of Agrud) R: A hill with a fortress (?), to the left three globes and a crescent

Catalogue no.	RTP no.	Description (Obverse = O; Reverse = R)
28	103	O: 'GN BL (symposium of Bel). Above a globe, below three globes and to the right the symbol R: A globe flanked by the symbol on each side. 'TNWRY / BWRP' (Atenuri Borpa)
29	104	O: Damaged inscription. []GN BL. Second line [B]L and the symbol (RTP after LIDZBARSKI 1898, 490, no. M84/VA 362) R: Signet-seal imprint – standing male figure
30	105	O: 'GN BL (symposium of Bel), crescent, three globes and two small crescents R: BNY MGD T (tribe of Magdat) followed by the symbol, below six globes
31	106	O: Bunch of grapes in the middle, surrounded by inscription and symbol. 'GN BL BNY QŠMYT (symposium of Bel, tribe of Qasmayat) R: Wine branches surrounded by inscription and symbol. 'GN BL BNY BHR (symposium of Bel, tribe of Bahr)
32	108	O: BL YBRK (Bel blesses), the symbol, LBNY TYMY (tribe of Taimi) R: Signet-seal imprint nude male figure
33	111	O: TG' / DY BL / TYMRŠW / DYN Y (crown of Bel, Taimarsu Dinai), followed by symbol R: Wreath or diadem with a star in the middle and surrounded by floral decoration
34	129	O: BL / BLTY (Bel, Belti), on the sides, respectively, a star and the symbol R: Female deity head in profile with crown or kalathos and diadem
35	130	O: 'GN BL (symposium of Bel), the symbol, GD BLM' (Gad Belemma) R: Bunch of grapes hanging from a wine branch
36	131	O: Bust of deity with kalathos and diadem. Above to the left BL and to the right the symbol. Below GD MŠH' (protective Fortune of the oil merchants/olive tree? See KAIZER 2002a, p. 219-220 n. 25) R: Three long objects (swords?)
37	132	Bronze tessera O: Bust of Bel with kalathos. Below: GD MŠH' (protective Fortune of the oil merchants/olive tree?) R: Same three objects as 36. Above BL and the symbol Cf. CHARLES-GAFFIOT, LAVAGNE & HOFMAN 2001, p. 275, no. 167-168
38	133	O: 'GN BL (symposium of Bel), the symbol, HRT' (Herta) R: Signet-seal impression, sitting figure playing a lyre
39	136	O: BL, the symbol R: NBW (Nebu)
40	137	O: 'GN BL / WNBW (symposium of Bel and Nebu), the symbol, BNY 'LYY (the tribe of Olayai) R: A palm, to the right and the left, NBW / ZBDBWL (Nebu. Zabdibol)
41	151	O: Radiate bust R: Lion turning to the right, to the right the symbol and below ŠMŠ(?)RM' (Shamshirama)
42	165	O: Lion turning right 'LT (Allat) and other symbols R: Lying camel. Above BNY NWRBL (tribe of Nurbel) Symbol in front of the camel
43	212	O: BL / HMWN / MQYM[W] 'QT[.] (Bel Hammon. Moqimu Aqt[.]) R: Amphora with two handles, the symbol is placed on the front side of the amphora
44	213	O: BL (Bel), the symbol, HMWN (Hammon) R: GD (Gad), the symbol, 'GRWD (Agrud)
45	215	O: Unbearded bust. BLHMN (Bel Hammon), below globe R: Striding horse towards the left, star above and the symbol below

Catalogue no.	RTP no.	Description (Obverse = O; Reverse = R)
46	217	O: Above <i>BLTY</i> (Belti), in the middle the symbol, below star- or sun-shaped figure and small globes R: <i>YRHŶ / KLB'</i> (Yarhai Kalba), below six circles
47	223	O: ' <i>LQNR'</i> (Elqonera), below the symbol and a globe R: [<i>TY</i>]M' MD / <i>ZDBDL</i> (Taimoamad Zabdibel)
48	227	O: Club with the symbol on each side of it R: <i>NRGL / YRHŶ B[R] ZBD'</i> (very unclear)
49	238	O: <i>HRT' / NNY</i> (Herta, Nanai), the symbol R: Unbearded bust turning left, in front of it the symbol
50	239	O: <i>HRT'</i> (Herta), underneath the symbol R: <i>NNY</i> (Nanai), surrounded by a wreath. On the top <i>HGGW</i> (Hagegu)
51	240	O: <i>HRT' WNNY</i> (Herta and Nanai) followed by the symbol R: Globe with rays and a circle with a dot at the centre in each corner
52	242	O: <i>HRT' / WNNY</i> (Herta and Nanai) followed by the symbol R: <i>TBRKN / LMQYMW</i> (blessing Moqimu)
53	244	O: <i>YRHBWL W' GLBWL</i> (Yarhibol and Aglibol) R: <i>BRYKYN</i> or <i>BRYKY' / TRY'</i> , followed by the symbol
54	248	O: <i>M'NW / Š'D/RW / GNY'</i> (Ma'nu, Sha'd/ru, the divine beings) R: A camel turning to the left. In front of it the symbol and behind it a star and crescent
55	264	O: <i>MLKBL</i> (Malakbel), the symbol, ' <i>KHT</i> R: A bull turning to the left, in front of the bull a person is standing with one arm lifted (sacrificial scene)
56	276	O: <i>MLKBL GD TYMY</i> (Malakbel, Gad Taimi) R: <i>BNY RB 'L</i> (tribe of Rabbel), at the end of line 1 the symbol followed by a star. At the end of line 2 a sign in the shape of a lying Z
57	293	O: <i>NBW</i> (Nebu), the symbol, <i>ZBYD 'LG</i> (Zebida Ilg.). At the end of line 3 a globe R: A star above a crescent and one star in each corner
58	297	O: <i>NBW 6</i> (Nebu 6). Above, between two small globes, the symbol R: A bunch of grapes
59	300	O: <i>NBW</i> (Nebu) R: The symbol
60	304	O: <i>NBW / YBRK</i> (Nebu blesses) surrounded by two globes R: <i>MŠMŠY</i> , the symbol, <i>PHDY'</i> (the tribal officials)
61	305	O: <i>NBW / YBRK</i> (Nebu blesses). At the end of line 1 the symbol R: <i>LMTN' / ZBD' TH</i> (Mattana Zabdaateh)
62	306	O: <i>QNYT' / NBW</i> (the association (?) of Nebu), the symbol R: <i>NBWZBD / MQYMW</i> (Nebouzabad Moqimou)
63	315	O: Griffin turning to the left with right paw on a wheel R: <i>MLKW HGGW</i> (Malku Hagegu). At the end of line 1 the symbol
64	321	O: <i>ŠDRP'</i> (Shadrafa). At the bottom from left to right, a star, a globe and a scorpion R: [...] <i>IT</i> (or <i>H</i>) / <i>MTNY</i> , ... (Mattanai). At the end of line 2 the symbol
65	329	O: <i>ŠDRP' / D'NT</i> (Shadrafa, Du'anat) R: <i>DNY' / 'BD'</i> (Dinai Abda). At the end of line 1 the symbol
66	332	O: Face shown frontally R: <i>B' LTK' / [ŠY]' LQWM</i> (Baaltak, Shai al-Qaum). Above crescent and the symbol, below a star
67	434	O: Seated female figure turning to the right. Crescent in front of her and globe below R: Wreath. Globe below and the symbol above

Catalogue no.	RTP no.	Description (Obverse = O; Reverse = R)
68	511	O: <i>HYKL'</i> (the temple). Below the symbol between two palms R: Blurred
69	521	O: Tetrastyle building façade (or box?) R: Ram turning towards the left. In front of the animal the symbol
70	545	O: Amphora and globe R: Ladle, the symbol and hooked cross
71	547	O: Amphora with branch in it and surrounded by two branches and two symbols R: <i>BRYQY / YRḤBWL</i> (Bariqai, Yarhibol[a]?)
72	548	O: Amphora between two globes. Above <i>B' LTK</i> (Baaltak) R: <i>MLKW</i> (Malku). Below the symbol and a globe
73	638	O: A horse turning to the right. A circle in front, a globe and a crescent over its behind, the symbol is placed between its legs R: <i>'BL'LY / MQYMW / TYBWL</i> (Abibelaali or Abelaali Moqimou Taibbol)
74	680	O: A bunch of branches with fruits/berries and a pomegranate in the middle. The bunch is standing on a support R: The symbol, <i>'GN GD'T' DY BL</i> (after VOGÜÉ 1868, 76, no. 125)
75	684	O: A bush with the symbol on top R: A signet-seal imprint with a crescent and a globe over it
76	700	O: <i>HMR MKL</i> , the symbol, <i>[W]PLG Q[R]Š</i> (measurements, see KAIZER 2002a, p. 188-189, n. 85) R: Priest reclining on a <i>klinè</i> . Eagle at the foot end of the <i>klinè</i> with branch in beak. Star between eagle and priest. Name below the <i>klinè</i> : <i>LQNYŠ BRS</i> (Licinius Burrus)
77	830	O: Bust of a priest. <i>ZBDLH BR ZBD'TH MYK'</i> (Zabdilah, son of Zabdaateh Mika). The symbol, star and crescent R: <i>ZBDLH / ZBD'TH / MYK'</i> (Zabdilah Zabdaateh Mika)
78	940	O: The symbol, three globes R: Small traces of signs (illegible)
79	985	O: <i>BNY</i> (tribe of), the symbol, <i>YŠW'L</i> (Ieshouala) R: (not seen)
===		
	DUNANT 1959	
80	2	<i>TG' DY BL</i> with name
81	5	Nebu (NB: RTP 292, identical inscription, does not have the symbol!)
82	6	Nebu
===		
From the Syro-American campaigns in 2010 and 2011 (fig. 7)		
83		Figure with lyre? Bel, 2 globes, crescent and symbol (no image)
84		Two symbols, globe and crescent (drawing)
85		Vegetation and hyssop? symbol/wedge = Nebu (?) Nebu inscription (drawing)
===		
From the internet (https://uk.pinterest.com ; fig. 8)		
86		Tree (cf. image of RTP 18)
87		Horse
===		
Palmyrene reliefs carrying the symbol		
88	CIS II, III, tab. XVIII with no. 3975	Altar dedicated to Arsu (fig. 9)
89	TANABE 1986, p. 175, pl. 142	Relief of dromedary rider (fig. 10)

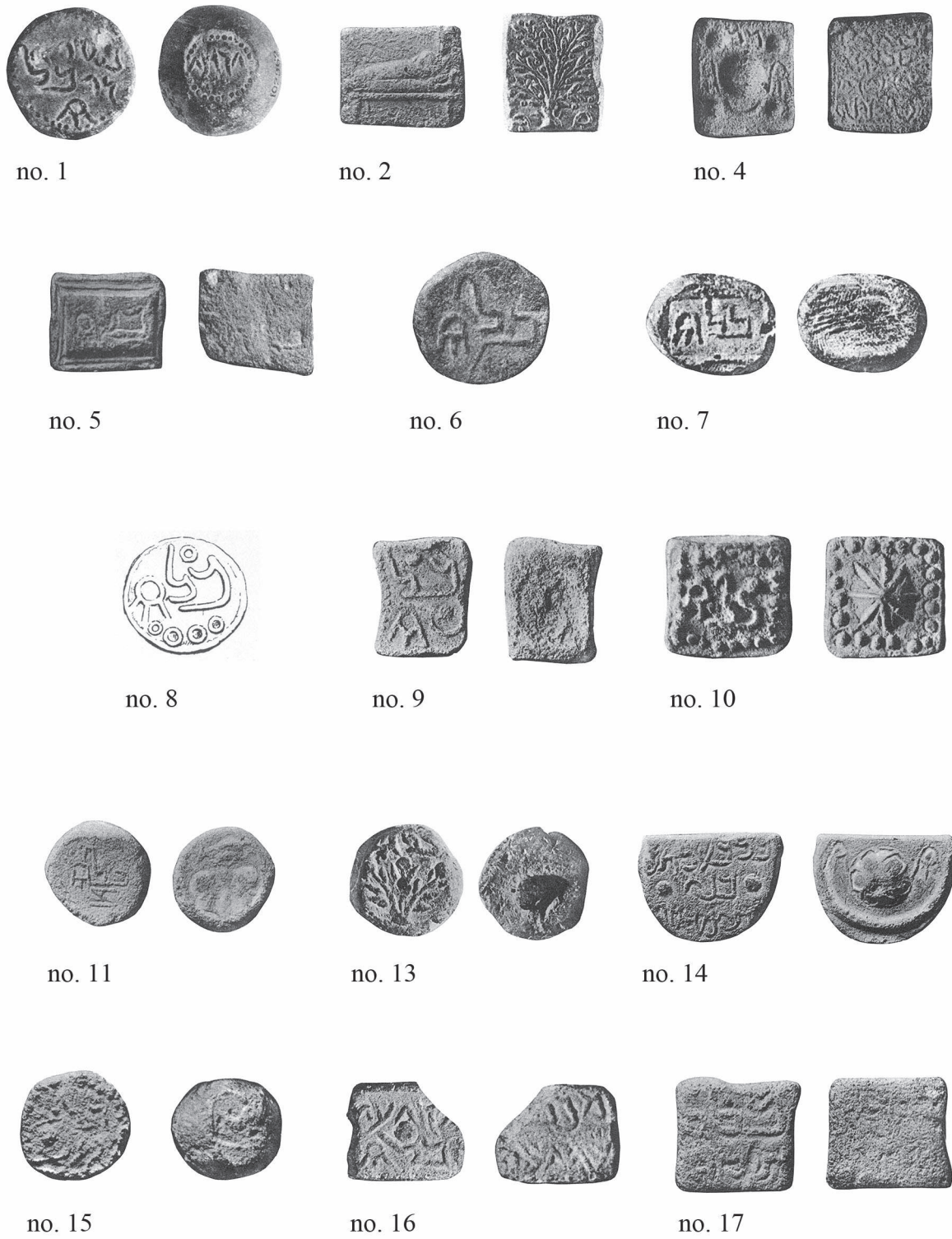


Figure 2. *Tesseræ* carrying the symbol: cat. no. 1 to 17
© RTP.



Figure 3. *Tesseræ* carrying the symbol: cat. no. 18 to 34
© RTP.



Figure 4. *Tesseræ* carrying the symbol: cat. no. 35 to 48
© RTP.



Figure 5. *Tesseræ* carrying the symbol: cat. no. 50 to 65

© RTP.



Figure 6. *Tesseræ* carrying the symbol: cat. no. 66 to 79
© RTP.

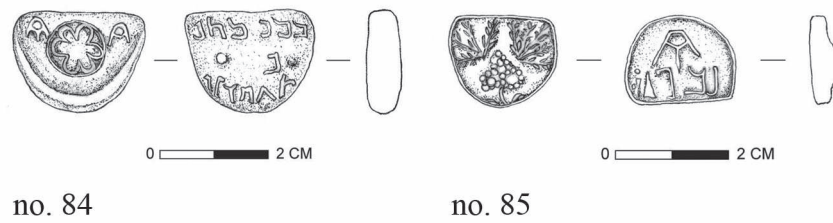


Figure 7. *Tesserae* carrying the symbol: cat. no. 84 and 85 (drawing published in *Archaeological Illustrator*, 8 August 2011; <http://archaeologicalillustrator.blogspot.com/2011/08/tesserae-from-2011-palmyra-excavation.html>).



Figure 8. *Tesserae* carrying the symbol: cat. no. 86 and 87 (<https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/399413060675261002> [no. 86] & <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/andreacaneane/palmyra-art-artifacts-syrian-heritage/> [no. 87]).



Figure 9. Altar to Arsu (*CIS* II, III, tab. XVIII).



Figure 10. Relief
© Ted Kaizer.

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