

THE SHEET METAL FIGURINES FROM BYBLOS: EVIDENCE FOR AN EGYPTIAN IMPORT AND ADAPTATION

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Abstract: *This paper considers some peculiar types of figurines found in Byblos, which are cut from a tiny, thin sheet of metal (copper alloy, silver, or gold). They represent human figures, mainly male, in a standing position. These figurines have been documented in various deposits in the acropolis of Byblos and their chronological range spans from 2100 to 1650 BC. Usually presented as a Gublite product, these figurines may actually be part of an Egyptian tradition, directly imported to Byblos and then developed and readapted locally. The evidence for an Egyptian import is provided by a foundation deposit discovered at Deir el-Bahri, in the mortuary complex of Montuhotep II (c. 2020 BC), which presents similar sheet metal figurines, but of clear Egyptian manufacture and conception.*

Key words: *Byblos, votive and funerary deposits, sheet metal figurines, Middle Bronze Age, Middle Kingdom, Montuhotep II.*

Nearly 1700 metal miniatures were discovered by Pierre Montet and Maurice Dunand in the acropolis of Byblos, mainly distributed in twenty-five deposits from different temple areas. Among these, there is a type, which is peculiar in style and

manufacturing technique. The figurines are cut from a tiny, thin sheet of metal (copper alloy, silver, or gold),² and each represents a human figure, mainly male, in a standing or striding (?) position. The specimens found in Byblos belonging to this type number approximately³ 150 (see Table 1).

They can be divided into four broad categories based on their key features: *A*) human male with a conical headdress and profile face view;⁴ *B*) human male with a rounded head – or bald – without a headdress and occasionally represented in a frontal face view;⁵ *C*) females;⁶ and *D*) figurines with peculiar features that deviate from the standard type of representation as listed in letters *A-C*. To these main four categories, one could add a fifth: *E*) indeterminate humans (for which it is impossible to define a gender and other stylistic features, due to bad preservation or poor manufacture).

The sheet metal figurines have been found in the following four structures, distributed in fourteen different deposits: *1*) Baalat Gebal Temple; *2*) *Champ des Offrandes*; *3*) *Enceinte sacrée*; *4*) Obelisk Temple. Other figurines have been found scattered in the various layers of the acropolis (*5*). In eight deposits, only a single type of these figurines is attested (*A*, *B* or *E*): *Niche East*, η, μ, π, φ, *nos*.

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² NEGBI 1976, 25; SEEDEN 1980, 86.

³ The exact number of these specimens is not easy to establish due to differences between the various authors who have studied these objects.

⁴ This typology has been labelled by Ora Negbi as 'Byblo-Egyptian group' (NEGBI 1976, 25-6). Helga Seeden differentiates this category of artefacts not based on the presence of a headgear, but on the general appearance of the figurines, dividing them into plain (type *a*) and elaborate silhouettes (type *b*) (SEEDEN 1980, 86). It can be said that the majority of the most elaborate figurines (Seeden type *b*) represent male human beings with a conical headdress and profile face view (Negbi 'Byblo-Egyptian group').

⁵ Labelled by Negbi as 'Byblo-Syrian group' (NEGBI 1976, 25-6).

⁶ Corresponding to Negbi female figurine type II class B 'Byblo-Syrian group' (NEGBI 1976, 80-1), and Seeden type *c* (SEEDEN 1980, 86).

13007-13026, *a* and *e*. In the remaining six deposits, different types of figurines are mixed: *Dépôts de Fondation*, σ , nos. 13600-13657, *b*, *d* and *f* (see Table 1).

Description of the different sheet metal types

Type A. This type of sheet metal figurine comprises 70 specimens and is distributed in the following areas/deposits: 1) Baalat Gebal Temple; 2) *Champ des Offrandes*; 3) *Enceinte sacrée*; 4) Obelisk Temple; 5) scattered in different layers of the acropolis (see Tables 1-2).

The miniatures have their torsos and heads in profile and wear a cone-shaped headdress, sometimes pointed, sometimes rounded. On some specimens, cut from thicker metal sheets,⁷ it is possible to notice that the headdress is decorated with vertical engraved lines and that there are slanted incised bands on the kilt (see Fig. 1). Negbi defined this type of sheet metal figurines as ‘*Byblo-Egyptian*,’ because their salient features seem to be borrowed from Egyptian iconography (see below). The addition of the prefix ‘*Byblo-*’ is given by the fact that this type of object is only attested in Byblos and lacks any parallels in the material culture of Egypt. Therefore, she presumed that they had actually been created in the Levant, but inspired by Egyptian iconography.

Type B. The second group of figurines comprises 24 specimens and is distributed in the following areas/deposits: 1) Baalat Gebal Temple; 2) *Champ des Offrandes*; 3) Obelisk Temple; 4) scattered in different layers of the acropolis.

The torso and the head of these figurines are represented frontally, with a rounded head and with no distinctive headdress – they represent either baldness or short hair. They evidently represent male individuals with some types showing crossing lines at waist height, which can be interpreted as a dress or kilt. The manufacture of these figurines is rougher than those listed in the type *A*, probably due to an underlying difference in conception/development (see Fig. 2). This type of figurine was labelled by Negbi as ‘*Byblo-Syrian*,’⁸ mainly due to the analogy with similar (but better detailed) solid cast metal figurines,⁹ which show

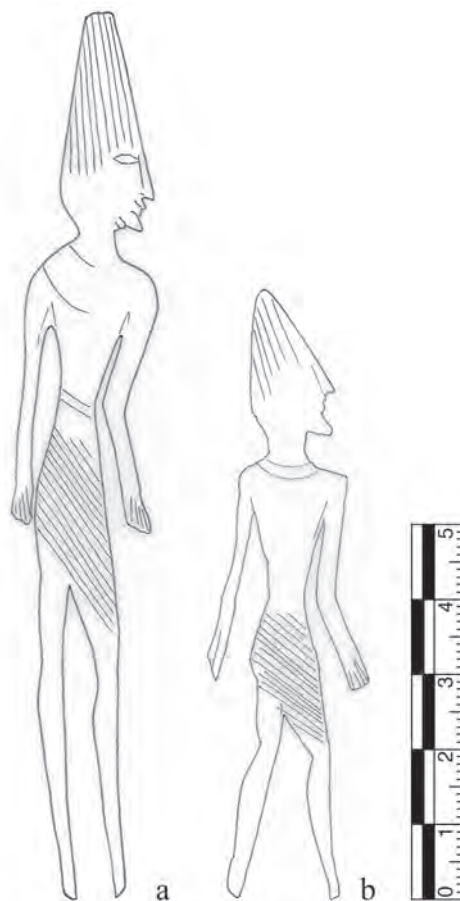


Fig. 1: Sheet metal figurine – Type A © drawing by Lucia Grassi from DUNAND 1950-58, pl. CXXVII: a) no. 15013 and b) no. 15020.

some features typical of the Northern Levant and Syria. However, the type of head or headdress could also evoke Egyptian parallels in the arrangement of the iconography of Old and Middle Kingdom statuary.¹⁰

Type C. This group of figurines comprises 6 specimens and might include some female individuals. They are attested in *Dépôt* σ of the *Champ des Offrandes*¹¹ with the exclusion of nos. 8163 and 17798-17790, which were found scattered in the acropolis, but outside the deposits.

Figurines nos. 10627-10628 could be classified as female, given the shape of the hair and the long dress (see Fig. 3). Figurines nos. 8163 and 17798-17790, which were found outside the deposits in the Obelisk Temple area (square 11/22, *levée*

⁷ See for instance, nos. 15013 and 15020 from the *Dépôt b* of the Obelisk Temple.

⁸ NEGBI 1976, 26.

⁹ NEGBI 1976, 21-2.

¹⁰ Cf. HAYES 1953, vol. I, figs. 64, 66, 129; ROEDER 1956, 279 ff. See also the wooden miniatures of Nubian mercenaries from the late Eleventh Dynasty (WESTENDORF 1968, 72).

¹¹ DUNAND 1950-58, vol. I, 379-80.

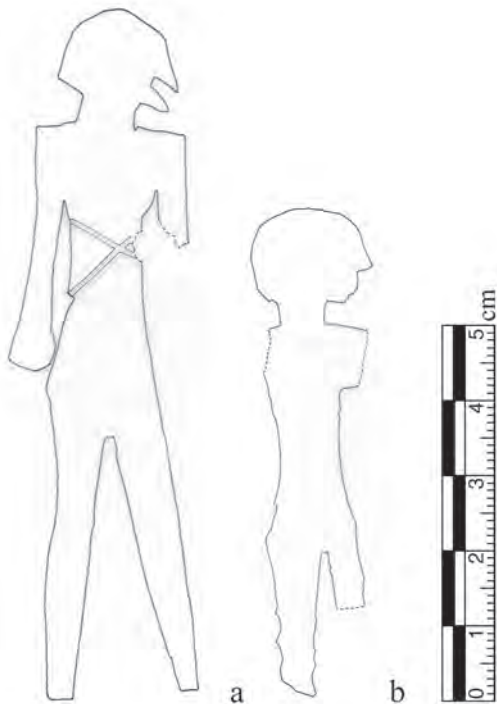


Fig. 2: Sheet metal figurine – Type B © drawing by Lucia Grassi from MONTET 1928, pl. LI: a) no. 156 and from DUNAND 1950-58, pl. LXXIV: b) no. 10632.

XXII, 23.80-23.60 a.s.l.), could also be identified as female.¹² Figurine no. 10633, from *Dépôt σ*, seems to be featured by female breasts.¹³

Type D. In addition to the above categories, there are a few sheet metal figurines made with the same technique as types A-C, but featured by completely different elements. Only 4 figurines of this type are listed in the following areas: 1) Baalat Gebal Temple; 2) *Champ des Offrandes*; 3) Obelisk Temple; 4) scattered in the acropolis layers.

Figurine no. 154, from the *Dépôts de Fondation* of the Baalat Gebal Temple, may represent Anubis in profile holding a *was*-sceptre with his right hand (see Fig. 4 and discussion below). Figurine no. 15557 from *Dépôt f* of the Obelisk Temple is featured by a profile face with an accentuated

¹² NEGBI 1976, 80-83.

¹³ This figurine was compared by Negbi with four specimens from Nahariya found in a pottery jar (Jar 858): they were found in the *bamah* of Phase B and are dated to MBI (NEGBI 1976, 81, 130-1; DOTHAN 1956). However, the female feature was not noticed either by Dunand or by Seeden, see DUNAND 1950-58, vol. I, 381, pl. LXXIV no. 10633; SEEDEN 1980, 89, pl. 91, no. 1583. In the absence of close inspection, figurine no. 10633 cannot be included among the female specimens in the present work. Specimens



Fig. 3: Female sheet metal figurine – Type C, from the *Dépôt σ* of the *Champ des Offrandes* © drawing by Lucia Grassi from DUNAND 1950-58, pl. LXXIV: no. 10627.

chin and nose (see Fig. 5). The eye is carved from a frontal perspective and a rhomboid incision below the hair can be interpreted as an earring. The striped hairstyle featured by a long pending lock is interpretable as hair or as a headdress, though it differs from the conical headdress worn by most of the specimens. The group of two figurines no. 13037 (see Fig. 6), found in the area of the Obelisk Temple (square 11/21, *levée XV*, 25.40-25.20 a.s.l.), is composed of two human figures in profile framed inside a rectangular structure, very similar to an Egyptian shrine.¹⁴ The figure on the right advances with her/his arm outstretched backwards as if s/he wanted to extend her/his hand towards the figurine behind her/him. Unfortunately, the object is badly preserved to be correctly interpreted, but the pose of the person on the right can be paralleled with that of the ‘prisoner’ in Egyptian iconography.¹⁵

Type E. This group of figurines comprises 46 specimens, distributed in the following areas: 1) *Champ des Offrandes*; 2) *Enceinte Sacrée*;

men no. 9469, retrieved from *Dépôt η* of the *Champ des Offrandes*, is a nude female figurine made of an embossed gold sheet, which was presumably applied to a now lost support (hence it has not been included in the present work), see DUNAND 1950-58, vol. I, 286, pl. LXIII.

¹⁴ Cf. N. de G. DAVIES 2004, pl. XV; BORCHARDT 1938, pl. 10.

¹⁵ Cf. battlefield palette from Hierakonpolis, Ashmolean Mus. 1892.1171, SPENCER 1980, 79-80 (with full bibliography), n. 576, pl. 64.



Fig. 4: Sheet metal figurine – Type D, depicting Anubis (?) coming from the Baalat Gebal Temple © drawing by Lucia Grassi from MONTET 1928, pl. L: no. 154.

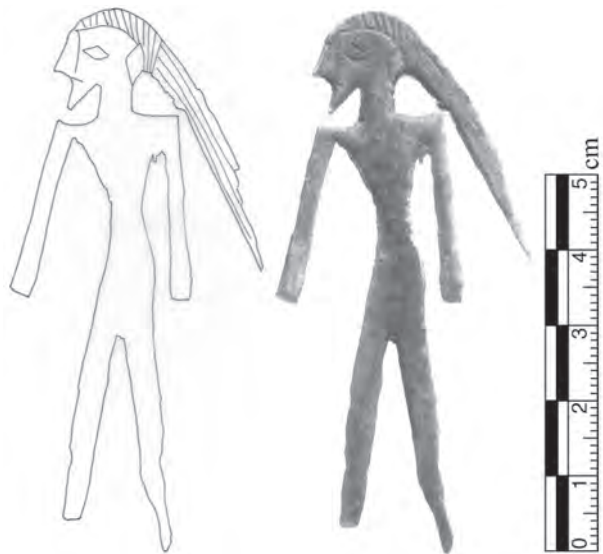
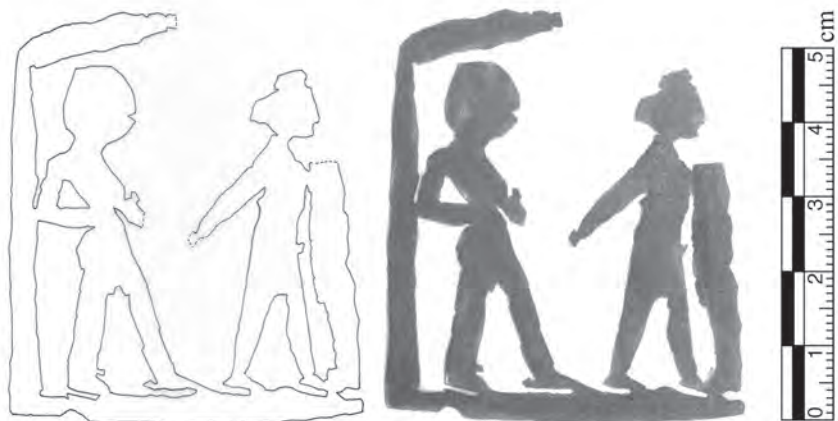


Fig. 5: Sheet metal figurine – Type D, from the Dépôt f of the Obelisk Temple © drawing by Lucia Grassi from DUNAND 1950-58, pl. CXXVII: no. 15557.

Fig. 6: Sheet metal figurine – Type D, from the Obelisk Temple © drawing by Lucia Grassi from DUNAND 1950-58, pl. CLXIII: no. 13037.



3) Obelisk Temple; 4) scattered in various layers of the acropolis. Unfortunately, given their rough manufacture and state of preservation, no information can be drawn from these specimens at this moment.

Several distinctive features reproduced on these sheet metal figurines show elements typical of Egyptian art or inspired by it, such as the elongated headdress, similar to the Egyptian white crown (type A), or the pointed beard, similar to the Egyptian false beard (types A-B). Other motifs are clearly taken from Egyptian iconography, such as the Anubis-shaped head, *was*-scepter, ‘prisoner’

position, and the shrine (type D). However, for several of them the most Egyptian/Egyptianising feature is provided by the so-called ‘*Geradvorstellung* mode of representation,’ which is based on a perspective-free combination of frontal and profile images:¹⁶ the head is shown in profile, the eye (where present) in front, the upper part of the bust in front and the legs in profile again.¹⁷ It is a body that completely contradicts nature, but which provides full control over the represented human being.¹⁸

Notwithstanding the number of distinctive Egyptian features, these figurines were interpreted

¹⁶ BAINES 1974, xi-xix; ROBINS 2008; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1974, 421-46.

¹⁷ ROBINS 2008, 21-2.

¹⁸ PECK 2015.

by Negbi and Seeden as a Levantine product, bearing in mind that they also did not find any precise parallels within Egyptian material culture. In addition, since they are not attested at other sites in the Levant, except for Byblos, scholars notably envisaged a Gublite production.¹⁹ To support this suggestion, three unfinished figurines were found in the acropolis area of Byblos,²⁰ showing that incomplete objects would have been less liable to being imported (see Fig. 7). Nonetheless, there is an archaeological context in Egypt which can change such a perspective and shed some more light on the origin of these sheet metal figurines from Byblos.

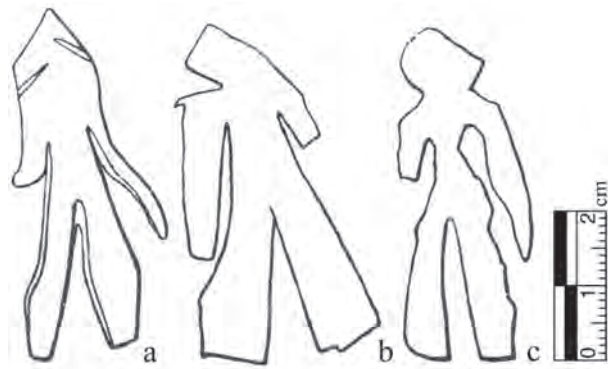


Fig. 7: Unfinished sheet metal figurine from the Enceinte Sacrée, from DUNAND 1950-58, 618, fig. 734: a) no. 13660; b) no. 13661; c) no. 13662.

Dating the deposits where sheet metal figurines have been found

The dating of the archaeological contexts in Byblos where sheet metal figurines were found is not always easy to assess, due to Dunand's excavation methods and the nature of the deposits, which may have assembled objects from different times.²¹ However, a few deposits contain some diagnostic objects which can define wide chronological rang-

es: *Dépôts* η and σ from *Champ des Offrandes*; *Dépôts* *a*, *b* and *f* from the Obelisk Temple.

The 19 objects which comprise *Dépôts* η ²² were not stored inside a jar, but were found in open ground near a wall. The deposit consisted of weapons and only 3 metal figurines, including one cut from a metal sheet (no. 9471 – type A). Jean-Paul Thalmann dates the spears found in the deposit to the MB I (c. 2000-1750 BC).²³ The fenestrated axes, nos. 9472-9473, correspond to Guillaume Gernez type H.4.A and can be dated to c. 2100-1900 BC.²⁴ Therefore, the chronological diagnostic artefacts from *Dépôts* η seem to span from late EBIV to MB I (c. 2100-1750 BC).

Dépôts σ from *Champ des Offrandes*²⁵ was mainly composed of statuettes and 20 sheet metal figurines. Inside, there were also four fenestrated duck-bill axes of Graham Philip type 1²⁶ – Gernez type H.4.B²⁷ – datable to c. 1950-1750 BC.²⁸

Dépôt *a* (also called by Dunand '*Dépôt d'offrandes aux ors*') was found in the northwest corner of the court of the Obelisk Temple and contained mostly gold and bronze weapons, and 31 solid cast statuettes representing human males standing with their left legs forward and wearing pointed headdresses. Of the 32 statuettes in this deposit, only one was cut from a metal sheet (no. 14498 – type A). Inside this deposit were also found, a stud with a geometric granulated decoration, which was part of a handle for a stone lid (no. 14451) and a gold shaft ornamented with a geometric granulated decoration (no. 14437). These objects can be compared in style and technique with some of the ones retrieved in the princely burial from the so-called Lord of the Goats tomb, located below the Western Palace in Area Q of Ebla, which can be dated to between the end of the Nineteenth and the first half of the Eighteenth century BC (c. 1800-1750 BC)²⁹ (see Fig. 8).

Dépôt *b* in the Obelisk Temple preserved numerous statuettes, including the highest number

¹⁹ NEGBI 1976, 22-9.

²⁰ NEGBI 1976, nos. 1298-1300; DUNAND 1950-58, 618, nos. 13660-13662.

²¹ On this behalf see SAGHIEH 1983, vii-viii; LAUFFRAY 1995.

²² DUNAND 1950-58, 286-288, figs. 317-18, pl. LXIII.

²³ THALMANN 2008, 74-5, fig. 9. Only the dagger blade (no. 9483) could span between EB III and an early MB I (THALMANN 2008, 74-5, fig. 8), given its type D2c. However, given the predominance of later material in the deposit, a date of EB III could be ruled out from the plausible chronological range covered by the objects in the deposit.

²⁴ GERNEZ 2011, 328, fig. 1.

²⁵ DUNAND 1950-58, 377-82, figs. 413-14, pl. LXXIII-LXXIV.

²⁶ PHILIP 1988, 84-6, fig. 6.

²⁷ GERNEZ 2007, 194-7, pl. 142-50.

²⁸ GERNEZ 2011, 328, fig. 1.

²⁹ PINNOCK 2012; NIGRO 2009, 159-75. See also discussion in MINIACI 2020.

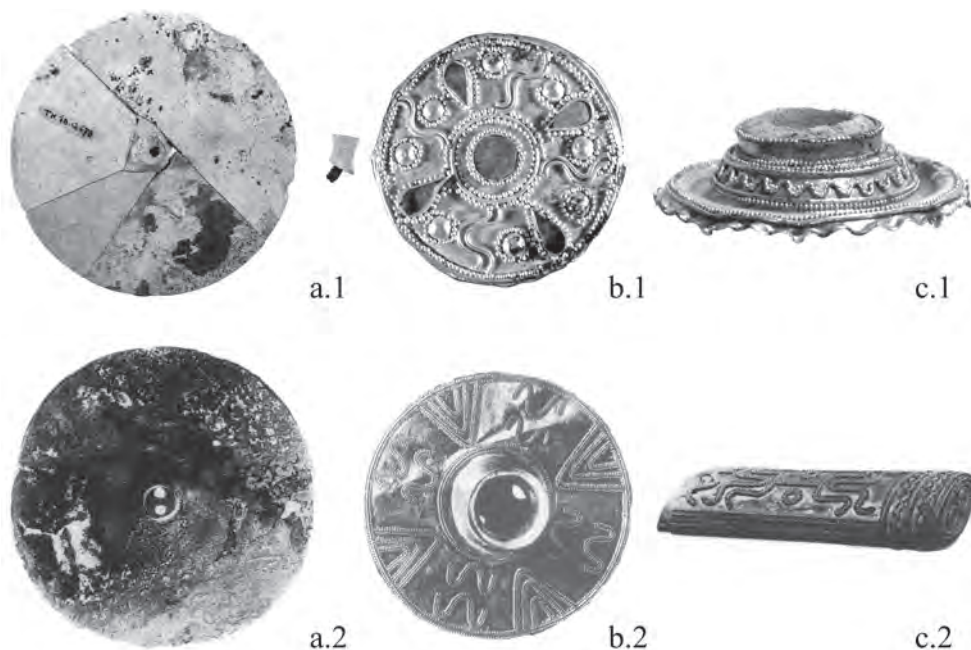


Fig. 8: Comparison between some objects from the tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla and the Obelisk Temple Dépôt a: a.1) limestone lid TM.78.Q.470 from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats © Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria; a.2) silver lid no. 14454 from DUNAND 1950-58 pl. CXXII; b.1) gold stud with granulated decoration TM.79.Q.200 from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats © Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria; b.2) gold stud with granulated decoration no. 14451 from DUNAND 1950-58, pl. CXXII; c.1) gold stud TM.78.Q.408 with paste inlays from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats © Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria; c.2) golden shaft with granulated geometric decoration no. 14437 from DUNAND 1950-58, pl. CXVII.

of sheet metal figurines stored in a deposit (55). The double rib daggers, Gernez type P.7.B, are generally dated to MB I (c. 2000-1750 BC).³⁰ The fenestrated axe (no. 14840) might be ascribed to Gernez type H.4.A dated to 2100-1900 BC.³¹

Dépôt f in the Obelisk Temple contained a wide range of objects, which seem to be firmly dated to the late Middle Kingdom (c. 1800-1650 BC).³²

In conclusion, the primary diagnostic artefacts found in deposits containing sheet metal figurines seem to indicate a definite chronological trend (which must be proven with more accurate scientific research) spanning from 2100 to 1650 BC. After 1650 BC, metal sheet figurines were not included in any of the deposits at Byblos. Thus, at least two chronological segments could be assumed, within such a wide range, for the sheet metal figurines: a) an earlier, corresponding to the early (original?) and major phase of use at Byblos, which could be placed between EB IV and MBI; b) a later, corresponding to the phase of contraction or obsolescence at Byblos, which could be placed somewhere in MBII.

Evidence for an Egyptian import (?)

In the valley of Deir el-Bahri, ancient Thebes/modern Luxor, four intact foundation deposits were found below the solid platform³³ of the mortuary complex of Pharaoh Montuhotep II. They were in shallow pits of c. 70 cm depth, located beneath the casing blocks at the corners of the structure.³⁴ From the foundation deposits were retrieved: *a*) four necked copper alloy adzes; *b*) four copper alloy axes; *c*) four copper alloy mortise chisels; *d*) four miniature vessels and two faience sceptres; *e*) eight vase stands; *f*) eleven linen sheets; *g*) eight tube-beads and necklaces; *h*) food offerings; *i*) charcoal, incense, husked barley grains and *j*) forty-three sheet metal figurines representing seven male and eight female humans, standing (or in a walking position), six bovines, seven plain offering tables, eight *hetep*-offering tables, and seven offering basins (see Fig. 9).

Given their positions, these four deposits could be dated to Phase C, corresponding to the time after the unification of the country, *i.e.*, after year

³⁰ GERNEZ 2007, 498, pl. 649-53.

³¹ GERNEZ 2011, 328, fig. 1.

³² MINIACI 2018.

³³ ARNOLD 1974, vol. I, 28-31 (the central core is usually interpreted as the remain of a pyramid).

³⁴ WEINSTEIN 1973, 57.

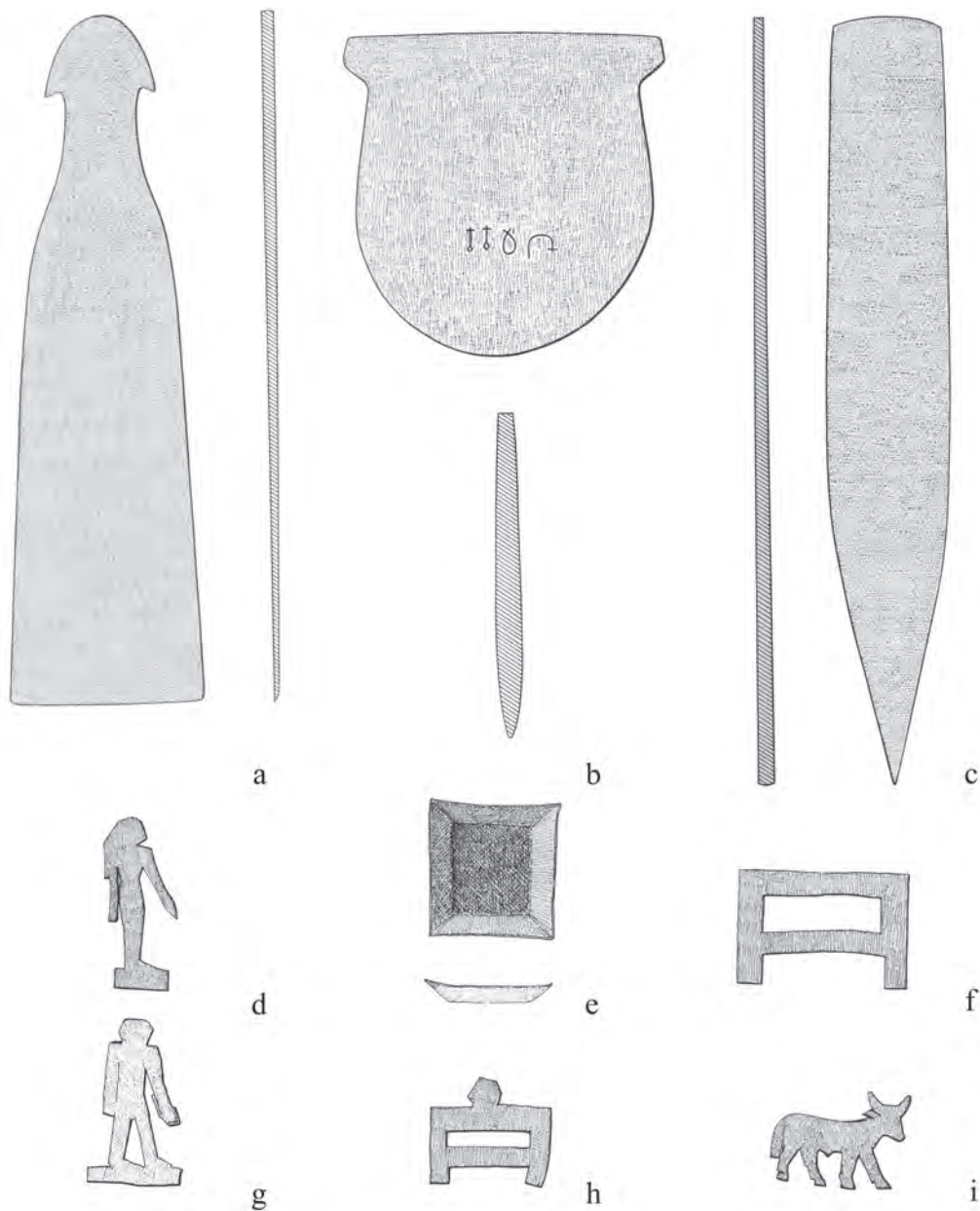


Fig. 9: The objects from the four deposits of the Kernbau of Montuhotep II's Temple in Deir el-Bahri, from ARNOLD 1981, pl. 79: a) adze NW 20; b) axe NW 21; c) chisel NW 22; d) female figurine SW 12; e) offering basin SW 18a; f) plain offering table NO 8; g) male figurine SW 16b; h) hetep-offering table SW 16c; i) bovine figurine SO 15, edited by the authors © courtesy of Dieter Arnold.

30/39 of Montuhotep II, approximately around 2022 BC.³⁵ It is interesting to note that one of the axe-heads found in these deposits was inscribed with 𓆎𓆏𓆑 , which are the same signs reproduced on a linen sheet wrapped around the body of the Hathor priestess Aashyet.³⁶ She was one of the six

women buried in a row of tombs and shrines included during Phase B of the construction of Montuhotep II's temple.³⁷ These tombs date to the first half of the reign of Montuhotep II, as the king's titularity in the inscriptions still bears the Horus name Netjeryhedjet.³⁸

³⁵ ARNOLD 1974, vol. I, 66, n. 178. Building phases after ARNOLD 1974, vol. I, 62.

³⁶ WINLOCK 1921, 50, fig. 27.

³⁷ On Aashyet's rank see most recently LISZKA 2018 and BAKES 2020, 527-31.

³⁸ ARNOLD 2015, 60.

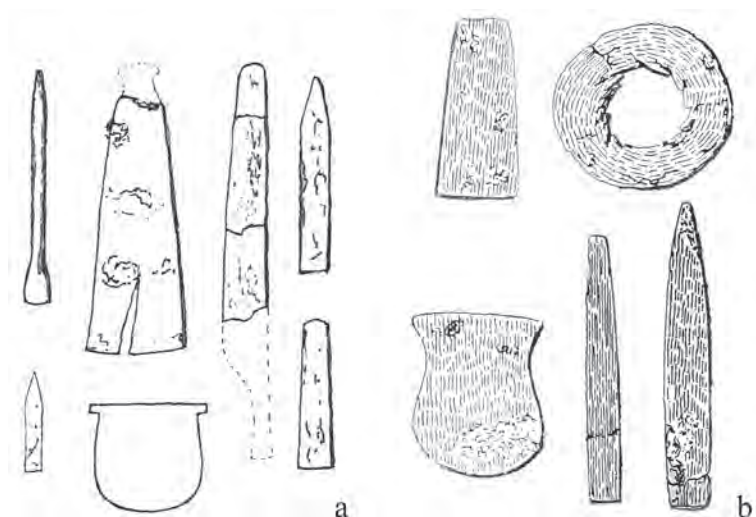


Fig. 10: a) Deposit from Sesostri II Valley Temple at Lahun, from PETRIE 1890, pls. XIV [1-17]; b) Deposit from an anonymous funerary XIIIth dynasty complex at Saqqara, from JÉQUIER 1933, fig. 45, edited by the authors, not to scale.

The composition of the foundation deposits is a typical set of Egyptian manufacture: the copper alloy miniatures all represent motifs typical of Egyptian art: the standing human individuals are portrayed in an Egyptian shape, clothes, attitude, and position. Faience was a typical product of Egypt at the time, although the shape and type of the objects, apart from the bowl, do not find any close parallels within Egyptian art.³⁹ The metal tools are Egyptian in style and type and have close parallels with other deposits containing metal tool, spanning from the First Intermediate Period to an advanced phase of the Middle Kingdom.⁴⁰

While metal tool assemblages have been found in other foundation or votive deposits contemporary or subsequent to Montuhotep II (see Fig. 10),⁴¹ the sheet metal figurines seem to disappear from this type of context. They have not been documented in any Egyptian Middle Bronze age contexts,⁴² and only rarely attested afterwards. For instance, in the Late Bronze Age (mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, c. 1480-1450 BC), circa 6 sheet metal fig-

urines together with engraved copper alloy plaquettes were found by Herbert Winlock in the so-called Hatshepsut Hole (at Deir el-Bahri).⁴³ These figurines, dated to the time span of Hatshepsut–Thutmose III, may only have a tiny connection to previous similar object types found in the nearby temple of Montuhotep II, since the selected objects and their purpose seem to be completely different. Standing human figures are absent in the Hatshepsut Hole, and the focus is on cows – represented as the goddess Hathor (with sun-disks between their horns) – and human body parts (eyes, ears, Hathor heads). Moreover, on the back of the cow figurines, there are two elongated loops, which were probably intended for stringing the plaques together with a series of similar small pieces.⁴⁴ This feature is absent in the sheet metal figurines from the temple of Montuhotep II.

In conclusion, there is remarkable synchronism between the figurines attested in the temple of Montuhotep II and the earlier segments in the dating range proposed for the specimens attested at

³⁹ Cf. MINIACI 2022.

⁴⁰ SHAW 1991; ODLER 2015, 101-105, fig. 7; WEINSTEIN 1973, 57.

⁴¹ Metal tool assemblages (axe and adze), like those found in the deposit at the Deir el-Bahri temple, have been found in various contexts: e.g., deposits 80 and 92 at the Osiris Temple Complex in Abydos (PETRIE, AYRTON, CURRELLY and WEIGALL 1902-04, vol. II, 10, 20, pls. LII, LIV-LV, LXII 80, 92), both dated around the Eleventh Dynasty (WEINSTEIN 1973, 65, *contra* PETRIE, AYRTON, CURRELLY and WEIGALL 1902-04, vol. II, 31, who opted for a Fifth Dynasty); deposit in the Valley Temple of the funeral complex of Senwosret II at Lahun, dated to the mid Twelfth Dynasty (PETRIE 1890, 22, pls. XIV [1-17], XV); western

deposit in the southern courtyard of the Temple of Montu in Medamud, dated to the time of Senwosret III (ROBICHON and VARILLE 1939, fig. 2); deposit in an anonymous funeral complex found at Saqqara of the Thirteenth Dynasty (JÉQUIER 1933, 61, fig. 45).

⁴² A handful of copper fragments of two-dimensional hieroglyphs found at Dahshur come from one of the queens' tombs in the south part of the pyramid (ARNOLD 1981, 55, n. 178), but they could be intended as appliques (part of an inscription) to be inlaid on other supports (wooden furniture?) rather than proper sheet metal figurines.

⁴³ WINLOCK 1923, 38.

⁴⁴ See for example MMA 23.3.99, 23.3.160, 23.3.105.

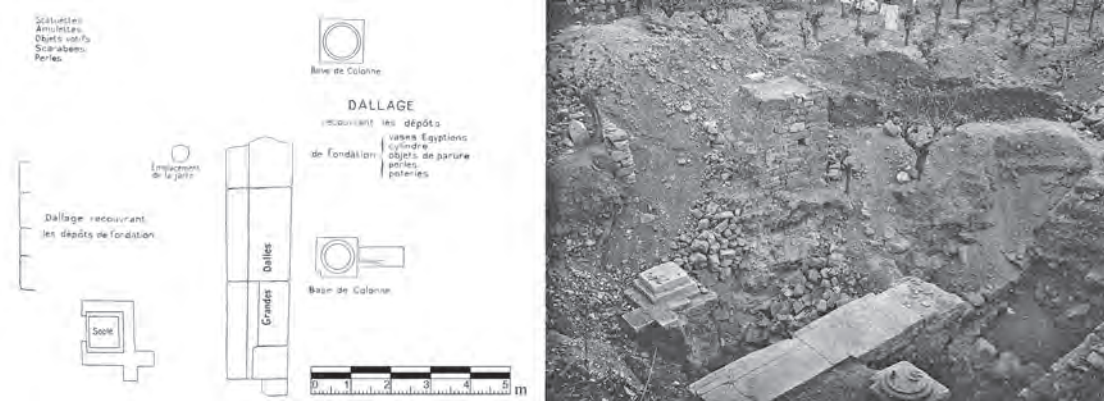


Fig. 11: Collocation of the *Dépôts de Fondation*, plan and photo from MONTET 1928, pls. XXXII-XXXIII.

Byblos, followed by a rather striking asynchronism for the later segments in the proposed dating range. Especially in the mid and latter parts of the Middle Kingdom (MBI and MBII), sheet metal figurines in Egypt are no longer documented in the archaeological context, while they continued to be used in Byblos.

Evidence for the earliest dating for sheet metal figurines in Byblos (?)

It can be argued that the noted chronological overlap of Egyptian sheet metal figurines from the temple of Montuhotep II and the earliest segments in the date range for the Byblos figurines is pure coincidence, especially given the fact that the chronological scope is extremely wide – occupying more than half millennium – and that the technique for making sheet metal figurines is rather simple, straightforward, and intuitive. Nonetheless, at the rise of the second millennium, there is a precise iconographic overlap between the Gublite and Egyptian figurines, which might testify to the transition from one culture to another.

Figurine no. 154 (Type *D*; see Fig. 4) has only Egyptian features and does not show any traces of hybridity or adaptation:⁴⁵ a human figure with a canid head (Anubis representation?), holding a *was*-sceptre in the hand, standing over a bidimensional square platform.⁴⁶ The iconography of figurine no. 154 shows a very distinctive feature,

which isolates it from the rest of the corpus, but connects it directly to the sheet metal miniatures from the temple of Montuhotep II: the profile of the figure lies over a base and the subject/iconography is undoubtedly of Egyptian nature. The base is a unique element, not occurring in the Byblos examples except for no. 13037 (Type *D*; see Fig. 6) and the Egyptian motif is not mixed with local traits. The only discrepancy in the figurines from the temple of Montuhotep II is given by the fact that no. 154 does not represent a human figure, but probably a deity or a masked human being represented with the head of a jackal and holding a *was*-scepter.

Figurine no. 154, found during Montet's 1920s excavations, comes from the *Dépôts de Fondation*, in the area of the Baalat Gebal Temple. Unfortunately, the nature of this archaeological deposit is far from clear and cannot be interpreted *stricto sensu* as one of the closed deposits in Byblos. The so-called *Dépôts de Fondation* is formed by a layer containing 336 objects⁴⁷ placed above an ash layer, covered with sand and sealed by flagstones.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Montet does not indicate whether the objects were found grouped together or scattered in different sectors.

The exact place where Montet's *Dépôts de Fondation* were found is not well specified; however, by comparing the photographs of the 1920s excavations, the plans reported by Montet and the information reported by Dunand, a more precise

⁴⁵ Cf. MINIACI 2019 for similar process at Kerma (Sudan) during the Middle Bronze Age.

⁴⁶ Cf. MINIACI 2022.

⁴⁷ The list of artefacts under the heading *Dépôts de Fondation* actually comprises 352 objects, but, of these, 16 come from a purchase (nos. 50, 58, 62, 121, 285–286, 295–303, 388).

⁴⁸ MONTET 1928, 61, '[...] les dépôts de fondation, enfouis à une plus grande profondeur [...]. Les objets avaient été placés au-dessus d'une couche de ciment fait avec de la cendre. Par-dessus, les constructeurs du temple ont répandu du sable et enfin posé les dalles'.

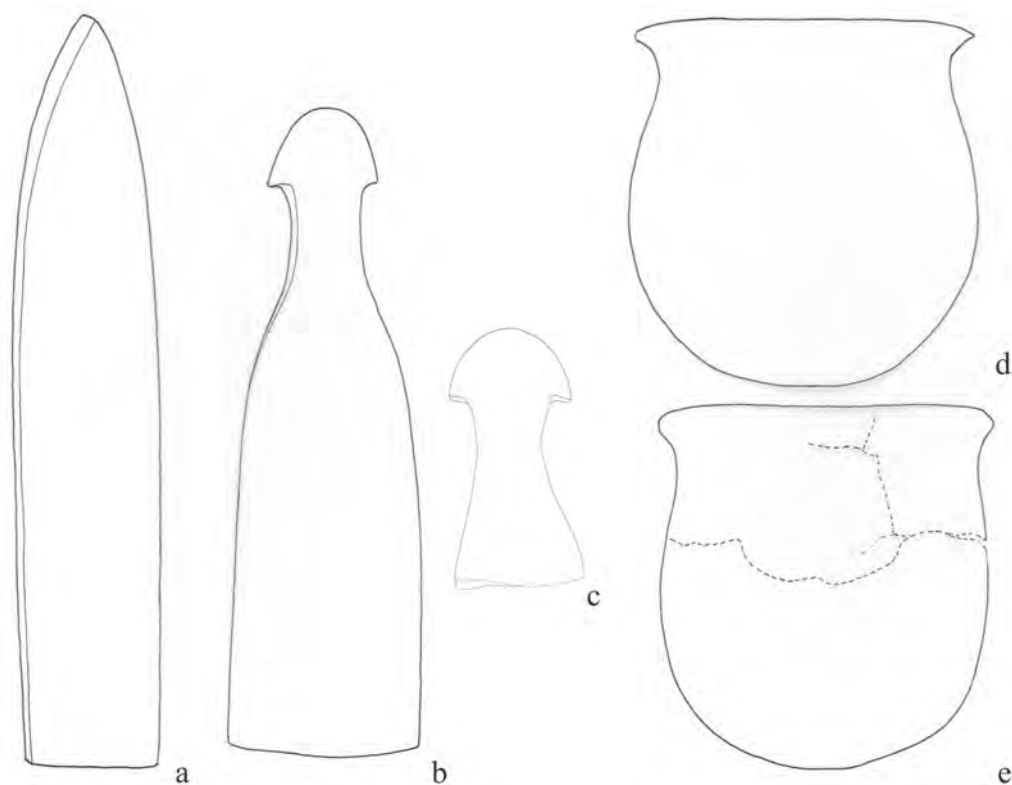


Fig. 12: Bronze chisel and adzes from the *Dépôts de Fondation* and axes from rectangle 19 of Baalat Gebal Temple © drawing by Lucia Grassi from MONTET 1928, pl. LVIII: a) no. 340; b) no. 338; c) no. 339 and axes from Baalat Gebal Temple from DUNAND 1937-39, pl. XCV: d) no. 1916; e) no. 1917, not to scale.

idea of the location of these objects inside the temple of Baalat Gebal could be offered. Looking at the plan shown on table XXXII and the photographs shown on table XXXIII,⁴⁹ the *Dépôts de Fondation* lay to the east and possibly west of the *grandes dalles* (the three limestone slabs placed between a column base and the so-called *socle*). Dunand also mentioned that the deep trench dug by Montet in the Baalat Temple, went from the northwest corner of room B to the east half of room E.⁵⁰ Being the *grandes dalles* above a wall, it is possible to state that the objects belonging to this deposit came from rooms B and E (see Fig. 11).

Among the objects from the so-called *Dépôts de Fondation*, 162 can be identified with a good degree of certainty as Egyptian or Egyptianised. Karin Sowada dates 72 of these artefacts from the Early Dynastic to the First Intermediate Period;⁵¹ the rest of the Egyptian material may date from the late First Intermediate Period to the first half of Middle Kingdom (c. 2100-1800 BC).⁵² Inside this large deposit of objects, two adzes (nos. 338-339) and a mortise chisel (no. 340) (see Fig. 12a-c) were found, whose manufacture and style are undoubtedly Egyptian. Their type corresponds exactly to the metal tools in Montuhotep II's foundation deposits.⁵³ Necked adzes with pronounced tangs and

⁴⁹ MONTET 1928.

⁵⁰ DUNAND 1937-39, 80.

⁵¹ SOWADA 2009, Appendix I.

⁵² Scarab designs in MONTET 1928, pl. LV can be paralleled with the finds from the Montet Jar (TUFNELL and WARD 1966, fig. 2), whose content cannot be dated beyond the earliest phase of the Twelfth Dynasty (time of Amenemhat I–Senwosret I), see BEN-TOR 1998. Also, the toilet jars (MONTET 1928, pls. XLIII-XLV) find close parallels with Egyptian types of the First Intermediate Period–early

Middle Kingdom, see SEIDLMAYER 1990; ASTON 1994. The small amulets (MONTET 1928, pl. LIV, nos. 224-5) may represent a reinterpretation on a local base of the *heh*-sign amulet, very well attested in the First Intermediate Period–early Middle Kingdom region of Qau and Badari, cf. BRUNTON 1928; DUBIEL 2006. For an overall view of the material culture of this time in Egypt, see GRAJETZKI 2020.

⁵³ MONTET 1928, 104, pl. LVIII.

round butt seem to span from the end of the Old Kingdom–First Intermediate Period to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (c. 2200–2000 BC).⁵⁴ The chisel can be dated from the end of the Old Kingdom to the first half of the Middle Kingdom.⁵⁵

From the rectangle 19 *levée* VI in the Baalat Gebal Temple, Dunand reported having also found two *mineb* axes (nos. 1916–1917) (see Fig. 12d–e) that display a similar style to those found in Montuhotep II's deposits.⁵⁶ This type of plain axe can be dated from the Sixth Dynasty to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (c. 2345–2000 BC).⁵⁷ Rectangle 19, where the axes were found, occupies rooms B, C and D of the Baalat Temple. It is, therefore, not impossible that they were originally part of the same deposit (*Dépôts de Fondation*) from which Montet had retrieved the two adzes (nos. 338–339), the chisel (no. 340) and the no. 154 sheet metal figurine. Unfortunately, Dunand did not give more precise information regarding the exact place where the axes were found, therefore the connection to the *Dépôts de Fondation* can only be assumed and not fully proven.

In sum, although a secure dating for all the objects found in the *Dépôts de Fondation* cannot be provided, due to the uncertainty of the context, it seems an unlikely coincidence that from the same area come a sheet metal figurine with very emphasised Egyptian traits and Egyptian tools (two adzes, a chisel and two axes)⁵⁸ which are similar in style to the objects found at the temple of Montuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri. Therefore, it is not impossible that all these objects were part of a unique context, which was reshuffled in the *Dépôts de Fondation* and/or during the excavations of Montet/Dunand. If this is the case, then sheet metal figurine no. 154 may represent one of the earliest attestations of sheet metal figurines, thanks to the dating of the 'possibly associated' metal tools found in the same 'deposit.'

Conclusion

The Type *D* figurines (especially based on the supposed dating of the Anubis-type, see above) may

belong to an earlier phase of the development of sheet metal figurines (c. 2050–1800 BC), finding close parallels – also in terms of chronology – with the sheet metal figurines found in the temple of Montuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri (c. 2020 BC).

This may point to more defined contours for the presence of sheet metal figurines in Byblos which could have originated in Egypt and been imported to the city of Byblos probably via commercial connections, at the dawn of second millennium BC. Once sheet metal figurines entered the Gublite material culture, they might have been absorbed and independently transformed on contact with the local cultural *milieu*, developing their own shape and features (c. 1900–1650 BC), whilst in Egypt, this type of figurine fell into disuse. The standard types (*A–B*) of sheet metal figurines attested only at Byblos could, therefore, represent a later development of this category of artefacts, adapted to Levantine taste and maintaining a strong Egyptian influence, given their probable origin in the Nile Valley.

A historical remark from the case of sheet metal figurines

Scholars usually position the restoration of trade and contact between Egypt and Byblos in the early/mid-Twelfth Dynasty,⁵⁹ after a probable interruption at the end of the Old Kingdom.⁶⁰ However, there is little evidence to indicate that in the transition phase from the First Intermediate Period to the Middle Kingdom, contacts between Egypt and Byblos had already resumed with more intensity (and hence, archaeological visibility).

In a fragmentary stela dated to the reign of Montuhotep II, found in a secondary context in an Eighteenth Dynasty palace at Deir el-Ballas,⁶¹ there is mention of the Qedem (*Ḳdmw*).⁶² *Ḳdmw* is the term, with a Semitic origin meaning 'the East', used by Sinuhe to describe the region in which he spent most of his exile.⁶³ There is no consensus among scholars on the location of Qedem, but it seems to be located in the northern Levant, with various opinions placing it in Lebanon, in the area

⁵⁴ PETRIE 1917, 16, pl. XVII; ODLER 2015, 97.

⁵⁵ PETRIE 1890, pl. XVII.4; PETRIE 1917, 19, pl. XXI; HAYES 1953, 288, pl. 189.

⁵⁶ DUNAND 1937–39, 130, pl. XCV.

⁵⁷ W.V. DAVIES 1987, 30, pl. 3.

⁵⁸ In addition, these types of axes are of Egyptian origin and in Byblos only three examples were found, two of which were in the Baalat Gebal Temple, GERNEZ 2007, 113–4.

⁵⁹ AHRENS 2020, 27–8. Some scholars posit the resumption of trades between Egypt and Byblos only during and after the reign of Amenemhat II, see MARCUS 2007, 171–3. See also COHEN 2002, 34–6.

⁶⁰ MUMFORD 2014, 72; GREENBERG 2019, 200.

⁶¹ LACOVARA 1996.

⁶² COHEN 2002, 34.

⁶³ REDFORD 1992, 84.

of the Biqaa Valley, or in Syria, in the area of Qatna/Tell Mishrife.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, this inscription is too fragmentary, and there is no secure evidence of any expedition led by Montuhotep II into

the Levant.⁶⁵ However, the sheet metal figurines may represent a little piece of evidence of the possible increase in contact between Egypt and Byblos already at the time of Montuhotep II.

Table 1: List of the sheet metal figurines found in Byblos arranged by finding areas and deposits, with the correspondence between Montet, Dunand, Negbi and Seeden publications inventory numbers. NG* = Number not given.

Byblos Area	Deposit	Figurine nos (DUNAND 1950-58/ MONTET 1928)	Figurine nos (NEGBI 1976)	Figurines nos (SEEDEN 1980)	Type (MINIACI- SALER)	Quantity
Baalat Temple	<i>Dépôts de Fondation</i>	155	1218	NG	A	3
		156	1187	1579	B	
		154	NG	NG	D	
	Niche East “ <i>Massif de Maçonnerie</i> ” nos. 2000-2063	2027	NG	1577	A	1
<i>Sub-total:</i>						4
Champ des Offrandes	<i>Dépôt η</i> nos. 9469-9487	9471	1270	1580	A	1
	<i>Dépôt μ</i> nos. 9673-9685	9682	NG	1603	B	1
	<i>Dépôt π</i> nos. 10228-10236	10235	NG	1581	A	1
	<i>Dépôt σ</i> nos. 10585-10652	10625	1203	1587	A	1
		10623, 10632, 10640-10641	1204, 1208, 1209-1210	1586, 1588, 1590-1591	B	1
		10624, 10627- 10628	1205, 1207, NG	B, 1601-1602	C	1
		10629	1304	1585	D	1
		10622 10626 10630-10631 10633-10639	1271 1206 1272, NG 1604, NG	C A NG 1583, NG	E	20
	<i>Dépôt φ</i> nos. 10714-10779	1582	10718	NG	A	1
	<i>Sub-total:</i>					
Enceinte Sacrée	<i>Dépôt</i> nos. 13600-13657	13606-13607	1274-1275	1605-1606	A	3
		13605	1273	1604	E	
<i>Sub-total:</i>						3
Obelisk Temple	<i>Dépôt nos. 13007-13026</i>	13025-13026	NG	1638	E	2
	<i>Dépôt α</i> nos. 14433-14501	14498	1220	1611(?)	A	1

⁶⁴ GUBEL and LOFFET 2011; MOURAD 2013; *contra see* KNAPP 2014.

⁶⁵ AHRENS 2020, 27-8.

Byblos Area	Deposit	Figurine nos (DUNAND 1950-58/ MONTET 1928)	Figurine nos (NEGBI 1976)	Figurines nos (SEEDEN 1980)	Type (MINIACI- SALER)	Quantity
Obelisk Temple	<i>Dépôt b</i> nos. 14840-15120	15013-15024	1221-1232	1563 G	A	55
		15025	NG	1562		
		15026-15031	1233-1238	1552(?) -1557, 1560		
		15032-15037	1239-1244	1545-1550		
		15038-15041	1245-1248	1540-1543		
		15044-15045	1251-1252	1538-1539		
		15046-15047	1253-1254	1561, 1558		
		15057	1192	1537		
		15054-15055	1189-1190	1535-1536	B	
		15058-15060	1193-1195	1530, 1526, 1524		
		15062-15067	1197-1202	1519-1523, 1525		
		15042-15043	1250-1251	1527, 1559	E	
		15048-15053	1255-1259, 1188	1528-1529, 1531-1534		
	15056	1191	1551			
	15061	1196	1544			
	<i>Dépôt d</i> nos. 15979-16185	16155-16158	1263-1266	1574-1576, NG	A	6
		16159-16160	1267-1268	1572 S-1573 S	B	
<i>Dépôt e</i> nos. 14560-14607	14606	1260	NG	E	1	
<i>Dépôt f</i> nos. 15121-15566	15558-15559	1261-1262	1565-1566	A	8	
	15560-15562	NG	1568-1570			
	15564	1303	1571 a	D		
	15557	1301	1567			
	15563	1302	1571 b	E		
<i>Sub-total:</i>						73
From the acropolis area		9269	NG	NG	A	46
		12483	1277	1631		
		13296	1278	NG		
		13298-13299	1280-1281	NG		
		13301-13302	1283-1284	NG, 1627		
		15834	1289	1630		
		16608	1290	NG		
		16685	NG	1626		
		17252	1292	1622		
		17283	1293	1628		
		17327	1294	NG		
		17593	1295	1607		
		17791-17792	1296-1297	NG		
		18920	1276	1564 G		

Byblos Area	Deposit	Figurine nos (DUNAND 1950-58/ MONTET 1928)	Figurine nos (NEGBI 1976)	Figurines nos (SEEDEN 1980)	Type (MINIACI- SALER)	Quantity
From the acropolis area		13359	1212	NG	B	
		14089	NG	NG		
		14155	1213	NG		
		15827	1214	1636		
		16599	NG	1633		
		8163	NG	E	C	
		17789-17790	1605-1606	NG		
		13037	NG	NG	D	
		7751	NG	NG	E	
		9266	NG	1646		
		10861	NG	NG		
		11130	1211	D		
		12072	1305	NG		
		13297	1279	NG		
		13300	1282	1624 or 1642		
		13303-13305	1285-1287	1637, NG, 1639		
		13383-13384	NG	NG		
		13397	1306	NG		
		13425	1288	NG		
		13660-13662	1298-1300	1619-1621		
16609-16610		NG	NG			
16683	1217	NG				
<i>Sub-total:</i>						46
<i>Total:</i>						150

Table 2: Distribution of sheet metal figurines from Byblos by type (A-E).

Type	Quantity (in the deposits)	Quantity (outside the deposits)	Quantity
A	53	17	70
B	19	5	24
C	3	3	6
D	3	1	4
E	26	20	46
<i>Total:</i>			150

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