The Eighteen Century BC Princes of Byblos and Ebla and the Chronology of the Middle Bronze Age

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The discovery of Royal Hypogea at Ebla in 1978 provided a rich set of precious items and associated ceramic assemblages, firmly set into the stratigraphic/pottery sequence of Tell Mardikh. Such items exhibit a series of amazing similarities with symbolic and apparatus finds from Royal Tombs and other contexts (votive deposits in the Obelisks Temple) at Byblos. The analysis of these artifacts and imageries provides interesting insights into cultural and ideological connections between Ebla and Byblos in the Middle Bronze Age and, at a more detailed historical focus, allows to single out useful synchronisms between the Egyptian, Eblaite and Gublite royal personages. Metal vessels, ritual weapons, status symbols show a similar typological and chronological development, which permits to correlate tombs assemblages.

Inscribed items from Byblos Royal Tombs, as well as the Pharaohinic scepter bearing the name of Hotepibra (XIII Dynasty) from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla reflect cultural and political interactions which deeply influenced Syria-Palestine in the 18th century BC.

1. The Princely Necropolis at Ebla

Thirty years ago, in 1978, La Sapienza Expedition at Ebla, directed by Paolo Matthiae, discovered a princely necropolis concealed beneath the floors of the Western Palace, a royal building, hosting the Heir Prince of Ebla during the Middle Bronze Age. Three hypogea (Tomb of the Princess, Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, Tomb of the Cisterns) were excavated underneath courtyard L.2950 and the nearby room L.2975.

The stratigraphic setting of the tombs was clear, as the dromos of the Tomb of the Princess, the only hypogeum remained almost inviolate, was cut through the Middle Bronze I floor and covered by the latest MB II pavement of the palace. The two other tombs, the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats and the Tomb of the Cisterns were opened during the final sack of the city by the Hittites, and very quickly depredated, being afterwards concealed under the collapsed structures of the burnt Palace.

The funerary equipment associated to the princely burials finds several interesting comparisons at Byblos, suggesting enlightening cultural and chronological connections.
2. The Royal Necropolis at Byblos

Between 1922 and 1923 Pierre Montet excavated a group of nine royal tombs at Byblos (Figs 1 and 2)\(^7\). The tombs were cut into the limestone bedrock of the spur dominating the seashore, on a spot where possibly the Middle Bronze Age Royal Palace of Byblos was located\(^7\).

Thanks to a series of inscribed objects it has been inferred that they belonged respectively: Tomb I to King Abi-Shemu\(^5\); Tomb II to his son Ipy-Shemu-Abi (a sword and a pendant with inscribed his name were found)\(^9\); Tomb III to King Yakin-el\(^10\); and Tomb IV, though looted, to a prince (possibly the son of Yakin-El)\(^11\) known as Yantin-Ammu (see below § 7)\(^12\). To the same tomb also an amethyst scarab mentioning prince Ilimi-yapi was attributed\(^13\).

The rich Pharaonic gifts (Fig. 3) retrieved in these tombs testify to the strict relationships established between the kings of Byblos and Egypt. They are namely: a vase of obsidian and gold bearing the prenomen of Amenemhat III (1853-1806/05 BC; von Beckerath 1997, 189) in Tomb I\(^14\); a small chest of obsidian and gold\(^15\), and a grey stone vase\(^16\) with the name of his son Amenemhat IV (1807/06-1798/97 BC) from Tomb II.

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Fig. 1- General plan of the Royal Necropolis at Byblos (after Montet 1929a, pl. LXXII).
Such precious objects suggest that the two kings of Byblos were buried between the end of the reign of Amenemhat III and that of Amenemhat IV, i.e. around 1800 BC. It is, thus, possible to draw out a quite clear sequence of rulers of Byblos and Pharaohs (Tab. 1), and, as we will see, this sequence is firmly correlated with that of Ebla, the connections with which we are going to go through.

3. The Tomb of the Princess

The Tomb of the Princess at Ebla is one of the earliest burial so far identified underneath the Western Palace. It consisted of a dromos with steps partially cut into the bedrock and partly built up with stones, covered by five slabs ending in a small chamber realized by enlarging a natural cavity.

The Lady was buried with her personal ornaments (Fig. 4); a rich ceramic assemblage (Fig. 5), and some luxury items also accompanied the body. Especially
<table>
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<th>Byblos</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
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<td>Nefer-hotep I Cha-secham-râ (1741-1730 BC)</td>
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Tab. 1 - Chronological correlation between the rulers of Byblos and the Egyptian Pharaohs (according to von Beckerath) in the first half of II millennium BC.

the princess’s golden jewels\(^9\) find several comparisons at Byblos: a series of bracelets with twisted wire (TM.78.Q.370-375)\(^9\) shows the same technique of a specimen found in Tomb II at Byblos (Fig. 6)\(^8\); a necklace with amethyst beads (TM.78.Q.380)\(^21\) shows the employ also at Ebla of the distinguished Egyptian semi-precious stone extracted in the Wadi el-Hudi, attested to also in the Royal Tombs of Byblos\(^22\).

Another luxury gift of this burial are two small bottles with expanded horizontal rim, apparently containers of a precious ointment: one is made of sardonyx (TM.78.QIA.76)\(^21\), the other of calcite (TM.78.QIA.7; Fig. 7)\(^24\). These two precious unguentaria find a striking comparison in a bronze bottle found in the Montet Jar at Byblos\(^25\). The content of the latter votive deposit, including also several cylinder seals, was dated by Edith Porada to the last decades of the 19th century BC (end of Middle Bronze I)\(^26\).

Two more containers of precious stuff were found in the Tomb of the Princess. One is a double-handled alabastervessel (Fig. 5)\(^27\), the other is a pointed faience vessel with two lost loop handles (TM.78.Q.150; Fig. 8)\(^28\), a situla, which was compared to some specimens

![Fig. 4: Personal ornaments of the Lady buried in the Tomb of the Princess at Ebla (copyright Ebla Expedition).](image)

![Fig. 5: The rich ceramic assemblage found in the Tomb of the Princess at Ebla; note the double-handled alabaster vessel (copyright Ebla Expedition).](image)
(one in crystal of rock and two in obsidian) found in the Palace of Serikaya at Aчем Hуюк in Anatolia, dating from Kanesh Karum II[2]. Another kind of situla is visible in the hands of some officials in the carved face of the lustral basin from the Temple D of Ishtar at Ebla, where a great priestess of Ishtar, probably a queen, is taking part into a ritual banquet (Fig. 9)[3].

This ritual vessel, with a distinguished shape (a human hearth recalling the Egyptian hieroglyphic ib?), finds a striking counterpart in the golden specimen retrieved at Byblos in the Temple of the Obelisks (Fig. 9)[4]. The basin and its imagery were dated by Paolo Matthiae to the second half of 19th century[5].

As regards the ceramic assemblage of the Tomb of the Princess[6], it also shows an interesting comparison with Byblos. A peculiar jug of metallic inspiration (TM.78.QIA.73)[7], belonging to a very specialized production, called Orange Burnished Ware, also attested to at Tell Nebi Mend[8], finds a striking parallel in a specimen retrieved in Tomb II at Byblos[9]; both vessels belong to the final MB I horizon.
4: The Lord of the Tomb of the Cisterns (earliest burial)

The Tomb of the Cisterns was a double room hypogeum built together with the adjacent Tomb of the Princess (Fig. 10)\(^7\), but unfortunately badly damaged by a major intervention which affected both it and the nearby Tomb of the Lord of the Goats during the last century of the Middle Bronze Age, i.e. the building of a monumental dromos (Fig. 11)\(^8\).

Moreover, the Tomb was heavily looted during the final Hittite attack at Ebla\(^9\).

Nevertheless, some marks in the walls of the chamber and a close examination of what was left of the ceramic equipment inside it, revealed the existence of an early burial, almost contemporary to that of the Tomb of the Princess, and a later one, attributable to the last decades of the Middle Bronze at Ebla\(^10\).

The earliest burial (Q.79.A) gave back some amazing items, pointing to the presence of a lord or a king also in this hypogeum. The most noticeable was a club, an emblem of royal power (Fig. 12)\(^11\), consisting
of a fine limestone mace-head (TM.79.Q.148) with an ivory shaft including a golden and silver cylinder inlaid with exactly the same decorative technique as the handle of a golden knife found in Tomb II at Byblos (Fig. 12)\(^2\). Though not inscribed, this royal symbol may be considered a Pharaonic gift like the sceptre found in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, with which we are dealing with in a while, and the similarity with the knife found in Tomb II at Byblos corroborates a dating around 1800 BC for the earliest royal burial in the Tomb of the Cisterns to which it presumably belonged.

In this hypogeum also a bronze vessel (Fig. 7)\(^3\) almost identical to the already mentioned specimens from the Montet Jar at Byblos and the two sardonyx and calcite specimens from the Tomb of the Princess at Ebla was found, thus remarking the connection of the two earliest Eblaite princely tombs (Tab. 2).

As regards the pottery assemblage, the earliest burial in the Tomb of the Cisterns was characterized by the presence of a collared bowl\(^4\) and two Orange Burnished Ware jugs\(^5\), like the one found in the Tomb of the Princess.

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Tab. 2: Chronological correlation between Ebla rulers, Byblos and Egypt Pharaohs in the first half of II millennium BC.
5. The Tomb of the Lord of the Goats – King Immeya

The third major princely tomb at Ebla, the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats is the main royal burial discovered underneath the Western Palace, including two depositional chambers (Fig. 13), accessible through a vertical shaft and hosting an articulated funerary equipment, unfortunately partly removed and disrupted\(^5\). As stated above, the structure of the tomb was successively modified due to the insertion of the dromos at the joint with the adjacent Tomb of the Cisterns\(^4\).

A major find in the tomb is a silver bowl (TM.78.Q.497), decorated with two applied hands and an 'ankh (Fig. 14), symbol of Egyptian inspiration, with a cuneiform inscription bearing the name of the owner, "Immeya", most likely the king of Ebla buried into the tomb\(^6\). The shape belongs to a classic Middle Bronze type of Syro-Palestinian metallic bowls called "Gublite" from Byblos, which have one of their earliest example in the silver specimen retrieved in the Montet Jar\(^4\).

The king of Ebla was buried with several ceremonial weapons among which two fenestrated axes of the broad type, with median triple ridge\(^5\), and one duck-bill axe\(^1\), of the slightly later type. A detailed review of such class of weapons in the Levant\(^5\), points to a dating around 1800 BC for the two axes of the broad type and to a date around 1750 for the duck-bill one. Since Byblos is one of the places which provided the largest number and typological variety of such weapons, one may here also recall for comparisons at Ebla, the burial of a smith which included the moulds for the fusion of broad fenestrated axes\(^5\), very similar to the renown golden specimens with central ridge found in the votive deposits of the Temple of the Obelisks dating from Abi-shemu times\(^5\).

A small but outstanding find belonged to the Lord of the Goats is a golden and silver inlaid snake (TM.78.Q.430+TM.81.Q.123)\(^5\), which, for its shape and dimensions, recalls the uraeus of the Egyptian harpè found in Tomb II at Byblos\(^6\). The "niello" technique of the inlay is the same, as well as the shape of the snake head to be placed in the apex of a ceremonial sword.

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**Fig. 13:** Plan showing the original shaft of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats.

**Fig. 14:** The silver bowl (TM.78.Q.497) of King "Immeya" from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla (copyright Ebla Expedition), and the similar silver specimen retrieved in the Montet Jar at Byblos (after Montet 1969a, pl. LXXI, n. 605).
Moreover, the granulation and filigree technique visible on a golden shaft (TM.78.Q.420) from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats\(^6\) finds a series of possible parallels in some similar shafts from a deposit of the Temple of the Obelisks (Fig. 15)\(^5\), also dating from the beginning of the 18\(^{th}\) century BC\(^9\). From the same princely burial of the Lord of the Goats comes a series of golden tubular beads (TM.78.Q.413)\(^3\), of a distinguished type which may be compared with similar specimens found in Tomb III at Byblos\(^61\), dating to the first half of the 18\(^{th}\) century.

6. The Ebla Synchronism: Hotep-ib-ra’s sceptre

Anyhow, the basic chronological pinpoint offered by the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats is the magnificent club with an ivory, golden and silver shaft with inlaid the name of Hotep-ib-ra Hornerjeryatet (TM.78.Q.453; Fig. 16)\(^2\), the 9\(^{th}\) Pharaoh of the XIII Dynasty, who reigned between 1770-1760 BC\(^6\). This symbolic emblem of royal power provides a terminus post quem of around 1770 BC to the whole burial equipment. Since the sceptre proved to have been repaired in antiquity at a certain point, one may surmise that it was in use for a long time before being buried in the Tomb of King Inmeya, and thus
one may suggest that a reasonable time span for the closing of the tomb is 1760-1740 BC. The Eblaite relative sequence might, thus, be anchored to such an absolute reference point (Tab. 2).

7. The Byblos synchronism: Neferhotep and Yantin-Ammu

Also Byblos provides a fundamental synchronism with the XIII Dynasty, which allows to link Mesopotamian chronology with the apparently more reliable Egyptian one. A relief fragment found by M. Dunand (Fig. 17) bears an inscription of Pharaoh Nefer-hotep I, a successor of Hotepibre (the 22nd Pharaoh of the XIII Dynasty), who reigned between 1741-1730 BC. This inscription quotes a king of Byblos called “Entin”, probably the same Yantin-Ammu buried in Tomb IV (see above note 12). A personage bearing the same name Yantin-Ammu is, in fact, mentioned in a letter from Mari at the time of Zimri-Lim.

In order to make functioning this epigraphically based synchronism pivoted on Yantin-Ammu connecting Egypt, Byblos and Mesopotamia, one may put forward two hypothesis: 1) if one adopts Middle Chronology, King Yantin-Ammu would be first a contemporary of Zimri-Lim, who reigned between 1775-1758 BC, and then he was mentioned on Pharaoh Neferhotep’s relief, thus reigning at least 16 years until 1742 BC, but possibly some years more; 2) conversely, if one adopts Mesopotamian Low Chronology, Yantin-Ammu would have been first quoted in Neferhotep’s monument, and, after 20 years of reign, he became a contemporary of Zimri-Lim. Ultra Low Chronology may very difficulty match such a synchronism (there is even a third possibility, that there were two or more Yantin-Ammu, and in this case we would be not able to obtain any further absolute indication).

Fig. 17: The relief fragment found in Bâtiment 1 at Byblos with the inscription of Pharaoh Nefer-hotep I (after Byblos I, n. 3065, fig. 183, pl. XXX).
8. Conclusions

Archaeological observations (parallels and co-occurrences) so far illustrated allow to draw out the following sketch connecting Ebla, Byblos, Egypt and Mari in an absolute chronological perspective (Tab. 3). The Byblos synchronism and its Eblaite counterpart do not support automatically Low Chronology and may still be valid in a Middle Chronology system. In any case, one should perhaps be satisfied with the relative connections, which in general but substantial historical terms show how strong and enduring were the relationships between Ebla, Byblos and Pharaohnic Egypt during the first centuries of the 2nd millennium BC, when a new geo-political and cultural system affected the Levant.

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<td>(1525-1505)</td>
<td>Yarim-Lim III</td>
<td>(1500-1525)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1660-1640</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yarim-Lim</td>
<td>(1525-1505)</td>
<td>Yarim-Lim III</td>
<td>(1500-1525)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1640-1620</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yarim-Lim</td>
<td>(1525-1505)</td>
<td>Yarim-Lim III</td>
<td>(1500-1525)</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1620-1600</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yarim-Lim</td>
<td>(1525-1505)</td>
<td>Yarim-Lim III</td>
<td>(1500-1525)</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

Tab. 3: Chronological correlation in the ancient Near East in the first half of II millennium BC.
Notes

1. I wish to deeply thank friends and colleagues who carried out the International Symposium of Beirut, which surely will become a benchmark in Lebanese archaeology: Claude Doumet, Claude Asfar, Vassos Karageorgeorgis, and the friends of the DGA of Beirut, the General Director, Frédéric Hussein, Anne-Marie Afeiche, and Assaad Setif. The paper was read by my pupil Dr Maura Sala, who I sincerely thank.

2. Matthiae 1979a, 149-178; 1980a, 107-117; 1980b, 5-11; 1982a; 1982c; 1982d; 1985, pl. 69; 1995a, 162-171, figs. 37-38; 1997, 384-387, fig. 14.4. The historical-archaeological periodization adopted in this paper is the following: Middle Bronze I (2000-1800 BC), Middle Bronze II (1800-1600 BC); Matthiae 1995a, 54-56, 133-135, figs. 9, 26; 2000; Nigro 2002a; 2002b; 2007; Middle Chronology (Hammurabi's reign between 1792-1750 BC; Liverani 1988, 403-407, pl. XIII; 12th Dynasty of Egypt between 1776-1794/93, according to J. von Beckerath 1997, 131-135, 189) is followed only as a more conventional system.


8. Tomb I was attributed to the father of the King Ipy-Shemu-Abi, which is the owner of Tomb II, that is Abi-Shemu (Montet 1928, 174-176).

9. The sword is a bronze harpe (Montet 1928, 174-177, n. 653; 1929a, pl. XCIX); while the pendant is decorated with the coisonné technique (Montet 1928, 165-166, n. 618; 1929a, pls XCIII, CXXXIV; Liban, 87).

10. Albright 1964, 41.

11. Albright 1945, 11.

12. The name Entin (abbreviated form of Yantin-[Ammu] cited in the Mari Archives; Dossin 1939, 111; Albright 1945, 9-10, 12), "prince of Byblos", was read on a fragmentary alabaster vessel (Albright 1964, 39-40) retrieved in Tomb IV (Montet 1927, 88, fig. 3; 1928, 196, n. 787; 1929a, pl. CVII). The same prince is cited on the monumental bas-relief retrieved by M. Durozoi in Bâtiment I in 1927 (Byblos I, 197-198, n. 3065, pl. XXX), together with the cartouche of Pharaoh Neferhotep I (fig. 17), the 22nd Pharaoh of XIII dynasty (von Beckerath 1964, 55-56; 1997, 136-138).


14. Viroleaud 1922, 284-286, pl. LXII; Montet 1928, 155-157, n. 610; 1929a, pls LXXXVIII-LXXXIX; Liban, 72.

15. Montet 1928, 157-159, n. 611, figs. 68-69; 1929a, pls LXXXVIII-XC; Liban, 72.

16. Montet 1928, 159-161, n. 614, fig. 70; 1929a, pl. XCI.


20. Montet 1928, 170, n. 635; 1929a, pl. XCII. The Tomb of the Princes at Ebla and Royal Tombs I and II at Byblos are almost contemporary (Albright 1964; Tufnell 1969; Matthiae 1979a, 162, note 63).


22. Montet 1928, 170-171, 636, 640-643; 1929a, pls XCVI-XCVII, CXXXIV; Liban, 73.

23. Matthiae 1984, pl. 80a; Matthiae - Pinnock - Scandone Matthiae eds. 1995, 502 (n. 466).

24. Matthiae 1979, 161-162, fig. 62a-b; Nigro 2009, § 1.2.3.2.

25. Montet 1928, 125, n. 608; 1929a, pl. LXXXI; a fourth bottle of the same type was retrieved in the Tomb of the Cisterns (see below § 4).

27- Matthiae 1985, pl. 71b.
28- Matthiae 1979a, 158; 1985, pl. 71a; Matthiae – Pinnock – Sandone Matthiae eds. 1995, 456 (n. 369); Negro 2009, §1.3.2.2.
29- Özgüç 1966, 42, 48, figs. 5-6, pl. XXIII:3a-b.
30- Matthiae et al. 1966, 113-129, pl. XLVI:1; Matthiae 1984, 110-111, figs. 95, 97, pl. 59; Matthiae – Pinnock – Sandone Matthiae eds. 1995, 421 (n. 290).
34- Like the similar specimen retrieved in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, TM.79.QIB.31 (Matthiae 1979a, pl. O:2), and the two ones found in the Tomb of the Cisterns, TM.79. QIB.1 and TM.79.QIB.10.
35- Pézard 1931, pl. XLIII; Negro 2003a, 355-359.
36- Montet 1928, 200, n. 793; 1929a, pl. CXIX.
38- Negro 2009, § 1.4.1.1.
40- This discovery was made during the preparation of my PhD Thesis, under the tutorage of Prof. Paolo Matthiae: Negro 2009, § 1.4.
41- Matthiae 1984, pl. 84e, where it is suggested that this originally belonged to the funerary equipment of the Lord of the Goats; however, its finding spot and the identification of an earlier burial also in the Tomb of the Cisterns make no more necessary to attribute this important item to the latter: Negro 2009, § 1.4.3.4.
42- Montet 1928, 180, n. 655; 1929a, pl. CLI.
43- Negro 2009, § 1.4.3.2.
44- TM.79.QIA:8; Negro 2009, pl. 31:3.
46- Matthiae 1979a, 162-178; Negro 2009, § 1.3.
47- This transformation took place during MB IIB (around 1750 BC): Negro 2009, § 1.3.1.3.
48- Archi – Matthiae 1979; Matthiae 1984, pl. 84a-d; Negro 2009, § 1.3.3.6.
49- Montet 1928, 125, n. 605; 1929, pl. LXXI. On this diagnostic Levantine MB I ceramic shape and its metallic prototypes see: Negro 2000, 1192-1193; 2002a, 301; 2002b, 102.
50- Matthiae 1980d, 57-62, figs 10, 12; 1984, pl. 83b; Matthiae – Pinnock – Sandone Matthiae eds. 1995, 425 (n. 297); Negro 2003a, 345-349; 2009, §1.3.3.4.
51- Matthiae 1980d, 56-57, fig. 11; Matthiae 1985, pl. 83a; Matthiae – Pinnock – Sandone Matthiae eds. 1995, 423 (n. 293).
52- Negro 2003b, 10-26; Tubb 2007: 532-533.
54- Specimens ns. 14436 and 14438 (Byblos II, 694-695, pls CXX-CXXI), n. 16708 (Byblos II, 855-856, pl. CXXXVII), ns. 16709 and 16712 (Byblos II, 856, pl. CXXXVII); Negro 2003b, 20, figs. 13-16.
56- Montet 1928, 174-177, n. 653; 1929a, pl. XCIX; Liban, 56.
57- Matthiae 1984, pl. 82f-g; Matthiae – Pinnock – Sandone Matthiae eds. 1995, 466 (n. 385).
58- Specimens ns. 16708 (Byblos II, 855-856, pl. CXXXIV), and 16720 (Byblos II, 857, pl. CXXXIV).
59- The observations by C. Lilleyquist (1993) are no more reliable from a chronological point of view (see also Dever 1992, 8, 37). This kind of refined decoration was already attested to at Ebla in the Tomb of the Princess Matthiae 1984, pls 77a and 81.
60- Matthiae 1981, 216-217, fig. 55; 1985, 122, pl. 79a; Matthiae – Pinnock – Sandone Matthiae eds. 1995, 471 (n. 395); Negro 2009, § 1.3.3.2.
61- Montet 1928, 169-170, n. 627; 1929a, pl. XCIX.
62- Sandone Matthiae 1979; 1987; 1997, 417-418, fig. 15.4; Matthiae 1984, pl. 80b-e; 1980a, 100; Matthiae
- Pinnock – Scandone Matthias eds. 1995, 464-465 (rs. 383-384); Nigro 2009, § 1.3.3.5.

63- Kitchen 1996, 34; according to von Beckerath 1774-1764 BC (1964, 39-40, 231-232; 1997, 137-138); according to Ryholt 1791-1788 (1997, 97, tav. 36). Ryholt's criticisms on Hotep-ib-ra's club are not based upon a direct examination of the item.

64- Byblos I, 197-198, n. 3065, pl. XXX.


Bibliography


