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THE DATING OF THE EARLY ROYAL BYBLIAN PHOENICIAN INSCRIPTIONS: A RESPONSE TO BENJAMIN SASS[1]

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I. INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Sass has recently argued that the Aḥiram Sarcophagus, the Yehimilk Inscription, the Abiba'l Inscription, the Eliba'l Inscription, and the Shipitba'l Inscription must be dated later than has been the conventional view (since the middle of the twentieth century). To be precise, he states that "a beginning between 900 and 850 B.C.E., hence an end between 800 and 750 B.C.E. (according to the 100-year assumption), is my best conjecture for the date of the Byblos inscriptions as an ensemble." Of these dates, Sass has stated that he "prefers the 850–750 B.C.E." time frame. That is, Sass generally wishes to affirm that the earliest of the great Byblian Inscriptions dates to ca. 850 B.C.E. and the latest of them dates to ca. 750 B.C.E.[2] Because of the potential significance of Sass's

[1] I am grateful to Frederic Husseini the Director General of Antiquities of Lebanon for permission to collate various inscriptions, and to Curator Suzi Hakimian of the National Museum in Beirut for her kind assistance. In addition, I would also like to thank Glenn Schwartz and Sally Dunham for providing several bibliographic references. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. and Anson Rainey read a penultimate version of this article and made a number of helpful suggestions. In addition, I am grateful to James Hoffmeier for discussing the cartouches of Sheshonq and Osorkon with me, and to Peter Daniels for discussing some of the historical Semitic grammar with me. Finally, my research assistants, Stephen Paul and Shaun Brown, have my gratitude for their assistance.

[2] B. Sass, *The Alphabet at the Turn of the Millenium: The West Semitic Alphabet ca. 1150—850 B.C.E.* (Tel Aviv: Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2005): 49. Cf. R.

proposal, I have decided to analyze it at length, detailing some of the problematic assumptions upon which it is based. From the outset, however, I should like to note that I do this in a spirit of collegiality and with enormous respect for Sass's many contributions to the field.

A. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DISCUSSION

During the second quarter of the twentieth century, there was much discussion about the absolute date of this corpus of Byblian Phoenician inscriptions. It is useful to provide a synopsis of that discussion here.[3] The Abiba'l Inscription (on a statue of Sheshonq) was published in 1903,[4] but the entire text was not deciphered (because scholars had misunderstood the archaic *kap* as a *šin*). Nevertheless, even though the text was not fully deciphered, the fact that it was inscribed on a statue of Sheshonq I (reigned ca. 945–924 B.C.E.) resulted in its being dated to the late tenth century B.C.E.[5] The Aḥiram Sarcophagus was discovered in 1923.[6] Because two fragments of alabaster vases in the tomb of Aḥiram bore the name of Ramesses II, the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription was initially believed to have hailed from that chronological horizon (i.e., the thirteenth century B.C.E.). However, because the script of the Abiba'l Inscription and that of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription were so similar, it soon began to be argued that the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription would be better dated to the tenth century rather than the thirteenth century. Two years after the discovery of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus, R. Dussaud published fragments

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Wallenfels, "Redating the Byblian Inscriptions," *JANES* 15 (1983): 79–118. In large part, the arguments of Wallenfels are reiterated, and augmented, in Sass. For this reason, my focus will be on Sass; nonetheless, it should be understood that these criticisms of Sass apply as well to the arguments of Wallenfels.

[3] For a nice summary of these finds, see also B. Mazar, "The Phoenician Inscriptions from Byblos and the Evolution of the Phoenician-Hebrew Alphabet," in *The Early Biblical Period: Historical Studies* (S. Aḥituv and B. A. Levine, eds.; Jerusalem: IES, 1986 [original publication: 1946]): 231–247.

[4] C. Clermont-Ganneau, "Inscription égypto-phénicienne de Byblos," *Comptes rendu, Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* (Paris, 1903).

[5] Note that the names in the cartouches of these statues of Sheshonq and Osorkon are those of Sheshonq I and Osorkon I. Hence, it would be problematic for someone to suggest that these statues are those of Sheshonq II (reigned ca. 890 B.C.E.) and Osorkon II (reigned ca. 874–850 B.C.E.), as the readings of the latter two are quite different. See J. von Beckerath, *Handbuch der aegyptischen Königsnamen* (Mainz: Philip von Zabern, 1999): 185. I am grateful to James Hoffmeier for discussing this issue with me and providing this reference.

[6] R. Dussaud, "Les inscriptions phéniciennes du tombeau d'Aḥiram, roi de Byblos," *Syria* 5 (1924): 135–157.

of the Eliba'l Inscription, inscribed on the torso of a statue of Osorkon I (reigned ca. 924–889 B.C.E.).[7] The Phoenician script of this inscription was very similar to that of the Abiba'l and Aḥiram Inscriptions. Soon thereafter, M. Dunand published the Yehimilk Inscription from Byblos.[8]

W. F. Albright had been active in the analysis of all of these inscriptions. Initially, he had dated the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription to the twelfth century, but he subsequently lowered his date from the twelfth century to ca. 1000 B.C.E. He suggested that the lowest date he would consider tenable was ca. 975 B.C.E.[9] Dunand published the Shipitba'l Inscription in 1945. This was the last of the great royal Byblian Inscriptions.[10] Dunand stated that the Shipitba'l Inscription antedated the "autre inscriptions Phéniciennes" and he argued that this was established with absolute decisiveness on the basis of its palaeographic features. Indeed, he argued that it was plausible to date this inscription to the end of the eighteenth century B.C.E. or the beginning of the seventeenth century.[11] Dunand had few followers, however, with regard to his early dating of Shipitba'l. About this corpus of Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions, Albright stated that in his judgment "there is no need to date any of them after the beginning of the ninth century, and the group as a whole belongs to the tenth century."[12] Based on the fact that there was initially such diversity of opinion among epigraphers and archaeologists concerning the dating of these inscriptions, Albright noted that "when the first documents of this category were published there was much less external evidence bearing on grammar, lexicography and spelling than there is today. All scholars made numerous mistakes."[13] Behind Albright's statement is the assumption that a strong scholarly consensus had emerged by, or during, the 1940s. Of course, Albright himself was among those who contributed substantively to the ongoing discussion of these texts and, to no small extent it was his view that shaped this consensus.

Based on his dating of the Royal Byblian Inscriptions, Albright chronologically arranges the succession of kings as follows: (1) Aḥiram: ca. 1000 B.C.E.; (2) Ittoba'l (son of Aḥiram): ca. 975 B.C.E.; (3) Yehimilk:

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[7] R. Dussaud, "Dédicace d'une statue d'Osorkon Ier par Elibaal, roi de Byblos," *Syria* 6 (1925): 101–117.

[8] M. Dunand, "Nouvelle Inscription Phénicienne Archaïque," *RB* 39 (1930): 321–331.

[9] W. F. Albright, "The Phoenician Inscriptions of the Tenth Century B.C. from Byblus," *JAOS* 67 (1947): 153–154.

[10] M. Dunand, *Biblia Grammata: Documents et Recherches sur le Dévelopment de L'écriture en Phénicie* (Beyrouth: Direction des Antiquité, 1945): 146–151.

[11] Ibid., 150–151.

[12] Albright, "The Phoenician Inscriptions (N 9): 154.

[13] Ibid., 155.

ca. 950 B.C.E.; (4) Abiba'l (son of Yehimilk?): ca. 930 B.C.E.; (5) Eliba'l (son of Yehimilk): ca. 920 B.C.E.; (6) Shipitba'l (son of Eliba'l): ca. 900 B.C.E.[14] Significantly, since Albright's era, the dates for which he argued have been broadly accepted. Thus, based on his detailed analysis of these inscriptions, P. K. McCarter has posited the following royal dates: (1) Aḥiram: ca. 1000 B.C.E.; (2) Ittoba'l: ca. 980 B.C.E.; (3) Yehimilk: ca. 960 B.C.E.; (4) Abiba'l: ca. 940 B.C.E.; (5) Eliba'l: ca. 920 B.C.E.; (6) Shipitba'l: ca. 900 B.C.E.[15] Although there have been some voices of dissent, these were based on some problematic assumptions and so did not result in major modifications of the basic chronology that Albright proposed.[16]

B. ROLLSTON'S SYNOPSIS OF THE RATIONALE FOR THE STANDARD DATING

The reasons for the persistence of this standard chronology of the Early Royal Byblian kings and inscriptions can be summarized as follows: (1) Monumental inscriptions such as the Mesha Stele and the Tel Dan Stele can be dated securely on the basis of historical content to the ninth century. The scripts of these inscriptions are typologically later than the scripts of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. (2) The inscription of Abiba'l was inscribed on a statue of the Egyptian King Sheshonq I. (3) The inscription of Eliba'l was inscribed on a statue of the Egyptian King Osorkon I. (4) The Aḥiram sarcophagus refers to Ittoba'l as the son of Aḥiram. Thus, in terms of royal chronology, it can be affirmed that Aḥiram was succeeded by his son Ittoba'l. (5) The Shipitba'l inscription contains a three-generation genealogy: Shipitba'l, king of Byblos; son of Eliba'l, king of Byblos; son of Yehimilk, king of Byblos. Thus, in terms of royal chronology, the following sequence can be affirmed: Yehimilk, then Eliba'l, and then Shipitba'l. (6) In terms of script typology, the script of the Shipitba'l Inscription is definitely the most developed of all of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. That is, the script of this inscription can be affirmed to be the latest of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions.[17]

Thus, at this juncture, there are two sets of royal sequences that can be discerned on the basis of the early Byblian Royal Inscriptions:

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[14] Ibid., 160.

[15] P. K. McCarter, Jr., *The Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet* (HSM 9; Missoula: Scholars, 1975): 34.

[16] E.g., Wallenfels (N 2).

[17] McCarter (N 15): 29–63.

Aḥiram	Yehimilk
Ittoba'l	Eliba'l
	Shipitba'l

Because the script of the Shipitba'l Inscription is definitively the most developed (i.e., typologically latest), it has been considered reasonable to argue that the sequence that includes Shipitba'l should be understood as the later of the two royal sequences. This then yields the following combined chronology:

Aḥiram

Ittoba'l

Yehimilk

Eliba'l

Shipitba'l

At this point in the reconstruction, the Early Royal Byblian inscriptions of Aḥiram, Yehimilk, Eliba'l, and Shipitba'l have been factored into the discussion. However, for the Abiba'l Inscription, there is no preserved patronymic; therefore, the question of placement for Abiba'l within the royal sequence cannot be known with certitude. Certain things can be noted, however. (1) The script of the Abiba'l Inscription is not as late as that of the Shipitba'l inscription, so the palaeographic evidence would militate strongly against placing the reign of Abiba'l after that of Shipitba'l.[18] (2) The Eliba'l Inscription is on a statue of Osorkon I and the Abiba'l Inscription is on a statue of Sheshonq I. Sheshonq I reigned before Osorkon I; therefore, it can be reasonably postulated that Abiba'l reigned before Eliba'l. Although it might be tempting to suggest that Abiba'l reigned before Aḥiram, in light of the fact that the inscription of Abiba'l was inscribed on a statue of Sheshonq I (who was the immediate predecessor of Osorkon I) it is most natural to posit that he was the immediate predecessor of Eliba'l.[19] The sequence then is as follows:

[18] E.g., ibid., 34–63 passim.

[19] E.g., *KAI*, 2.9.

Aḥiram

Ittoba'l

Yehimilk

Abiba'l

Eliba'l

Shipitba'l

Of course, a question arises regarding the paternity of Abiba'l. Because there is no preserved patronymic in his inscription, it is not possible to answer this question with certitude. However, Albright's tentative proposal that Abiba'l and Eliba'l were brothers (and thus both sons of Yehimilk) is plausible (cf. also Kings Ahaziah and Jehoram, both sons of King Ahab, 2 Kgs 1:17).[20] Nevertheless, the precise placement of Abiba'l within the royal sequence does not materially impact negatively on the argument in favor of an overall tenth century dating of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. Rather, this minor ambiguity in the royal chronology is best viewed as a non-essential point.

C. SASS'S CRITIQUE: SUMMARY OF SALIENT ASPECTS

Sass, however, has penned a broad critique of the traditional dating and its rationale.[21] Substantial attention must, therefore, be given to

[20] So also *KAI*, 2.8–9.

[21] The Aramaic and Old Hebrew alphabets did not develop directly from Early Alphabetic script, but rather from the Phoenician alphabet. Note in this respect that the number of consonantal phonemes in Aramaic and Old Hebrew are greater than twenty-two, but the number of graphemes used to write these languages is just twenty-two—the number of graphemes in the Phoenician alphabet. For example, in Aramaic, the phoneme *ḏ* (a voiced interdental fricative) was preserved, but this phoneme was no longer present in Phoenician and therefore not graphically represented in Phoenician script. Therefore, Aramaic used the *zayin* (in Old Aramaic) and *dalet* (in Imperial Aramaic) to signify the phoneme *ḏ*. The reason for this is understandable: the letters *zayin* (a voiced dental fricative) and *dalet* (a voiced dental) were phonetically similar to the original *ḏ* and so the graphemes used to signify *zayin* and *dalet* were used to signify it. Similarly, in Aramaic, the phoneme *ṯ* was preserved, but in Phoenician it was not (hence, Phoenician has no letter to signify the phoneme *ṯ*). Therefore, Aramaic used the letter *šin* (in Old Aramaic) and *taw* (Imperial Aramaic) to signify the phoneme *ṯ*. This happened for the same basic reason as above: the letters *šin* and *taw* were considered to be reasonably close phonetically to *ṯ*.

the potential cogency of his critique of the standard dating of the Early Royal Byblian inscriptions and of his own desire to date these inscriptions to ca. 850–750 B.C.E. The following points may be noted: (1) Sass wants to argue that the inscriptions of Abiba'l (on the statue of Sheshonq I) and Eliba'l (on the statue of Osorkon I) are to be dated to reigns *after* the Egyptian kings on whose statues the Phoenician inscriptions are inscribed. He has also stated that "in the same vein the claim that Abibaal, because his inscription is incised on the statue of the earlier pharaoh, preceded Elibaal, is best dropped." Sass proposes that it may be the case that a certain Zakarbaal, mentioned in the Egyptian text known as Wenamun, was the original recipient of the earlier of these statues. After mentioning these basic points, Sass writes "so much for the top end of Abibaal and Elibaal's time range."[22] (2) Sass has argued that the script of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions (i.e., Aḥiram, Yehimilk, Abiba'l, and Eliba'l) is archaizing, not archaic. (3) Sass has also stated that he does not believe there is enough development in the scripts of the Early Byblian Inscriptions to be palaeographically significant and that whatever distinctions do exist are essentially stylistic and thus unreliable for purposes of relative dating. In other words, he believes that the script of these inscriptions is too homogenous to be considered chronologically significant. (4) Sass believes that Shipitba'l is the latest of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions and he believes that the script of this inscription is not as archaizing as the rest of the corpus. (5) Sass believes that it is possible, and necessary, to compress the script of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions into the ninth century and the first half of the eighth century. (6) Sass believes that the script of the Tekke Bowl and the Kefar Veradim Bowl (both from more secure archaeological contexts) require the lowering of the dates for the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. (7) Sass considers the script of the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription to support his lowering of the date of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions.[23] (8) Sass

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Similarly, with Old Hebrew, the phoneme *ś* was preserved, but this letter was not present in the Phoenician script. Therefore, Old Hebrew used the *šin* to signify both the phoneme *š* and *ś*. Why did Aramaic and Hebrew not have graphemes for all of the consonantal phonemes present in their languages? The obvious reason is that the Arameans and Hebrews directly adopted the Phoenician script for writing their languages, even though that alphabet was designed for the smaller repertoire of phonemes in Phoenician. See Z. Harris, *Development of the Canaanite Dialects: An Investigation in Linguistic History* (AOS 16; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1939): 33–36; S. Moscati, *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of Semitic Languages: Phonology and Morphology* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980): 24–45; and R. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000–586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1985): 23–30.

[22] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 17.

[23] Sass also considers the date for the borrowing of the Phoenician script for Aramaic

has argued that the artistic scenes on the Aḥiram Sarcophagus cannot antedate Iron II. Let us consider these arguments in succession.

1. Sass on the Statues of Abiba'l and Eliba'l

Sass has stated that the standard dating of the Early Royal Byblian inscriptions "has hinged since 1947 on the conviction that Abibaal and Elibaal must have been contemporaries of Sheshonq I and Osorkon I respectively, i.e., on picking out the highest possible dates for the two Byblian kings and presenting these as the sole acceptable ones."[24] Note, however, Albright's statement regarding the Abiba'l inscription: "the Phoenician text must have been incised on the statue during the lifetime of Shishak, or immediately after the latter's death."[25] *Clearly Albright did not pick out the* "highest possible dates." In fact, he was comfortable with a date at any point during the reign of Sheshonq I, and even with a date immediately after his death. Sass's representation of the scholarly consensus on dating, therefore, is misleading. In any case, if Sass were simply quibbling about a decade or two (i.e., whether one assigns the inscription of Abiba'l on the statue of Sheshonq to the beginning, middle, or the end of the reign of Sheshonq), I would be very sympathetic to that argument. After all, it is not possible to determine something of this nature with absolute certainty. However, the discontinuity between the date of the Egyptian and Phoenician chronologies that Sass argues in favor of is hardly so minor. Rather, Sass wishes to date the inscription of Abiba'l to somewhere between the mid-ninth and mid-eighth centuries.[26] Thus, Sass is proposing that pharaoh(s) that reigned some time after Shesonq I and Osorkon I were (was) responsible for the sending of the statues of Sheshonq I and Osorkon I to Byblos.[27] And it was in the time of these later Pharaohs that the inscriptions were inscribed. Because it is Sass's desire to lower the dates for the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions, his

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and Greek to be important data supporting his contention that the date of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions should be lowered (ibid., 14). However, I contend that attempting to date the precise time frame for these respective borrowings of the Phoenician script is too difficult to determine based on the existing evidence and cannot therefore serve as a reliable basis for redating the series of Early Byblian inscriptions.

[24] Ibid., 17.

[25] Albright, "The Phoenician Inscription" (N 9): 153.

[26] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 34, 49.

[27] It could be that Sass would wish to argue that the statues were sent much earlier, but were retained as heirlooms and inscribed at a later date. Theoretically, this is possible, but the problem with this is that there is no evidence that this was the case. Indeed, the palaeographic evidence militates strongly against this position (see below).

desire to challenge this component of the standard dating is predictable.

Pace Sass, I contend that it is more reasonable to posit that upon the ascension of Sheshonq I to the throne, or at some point during his reign, this pharaoh sent a statue of himself to Abiba'l in order to reinforce the historic political alliance between Egypt and Byblos. It is also reasonable to argue that Osorkon I was similarly intent on maintaining the strong historic relationship between Egypt and Byblos, and so Osorkon himself sent his statue to Eliba'l of Byblos. Furthermore, it is at least plausible to argue that because the inscription of Abiba'l was inscribed on the statue of Sheshonq I (the earlier of the two Pharaohs) that his reign preceded that of Eliba'l (whose inscription was inscribed on the statue of Osorkon I, the later of the two pharaohs). Sass contests this and states that "in the same vein the claim that Abibaal, because his inscription is incised on the statue of the earlier pharaoh, preceded Elibaal, is best dropped."[28] From my perspective, the precise sequencing of these two reigns is not a linchpin for either argument. However, I contend that it is problematic for Sass simply to dismiss this construct with just the words "[it] is best dropped." After all, the traditional sequence is a logical and reasonable reconstruction of these data that is at least as likely as that of Sass.

To be sure, within this segment of his monograph,[29] Sass does refer to a prior publication in which "a background for the arrival of these two statues in Byblos is proposed."[30] Based on Sass's position, readers would arguably assume that Sass's proposal for the two statues in Byblos would assert that the statues were sent to Byblos some time after the reigns of Sheshonq I and Osorkon I. After all, it is his contention that the inscriptions of Abiba'l and Eliba'l date to the ninth or even the eighth century B.C.E. Because of the potential importance of Sass's proposal for the arrival of the statues, it is necessary to devote substantial attention to it. Basically, Sass believes that the Egyptian Story of Wenamun provides "a background for the arrival" of the statues of Sheshonq I and Osorkon I. To be precise, (1) Sass has argued that the Egyptian Story of Wenamun should be understood as a composition of the Egyptian Twenty-Second Dynasty (though set in the transitional period between the Twentieth and Twenty-First Dynasties). He argues that the date of composition for *Wenamun* is the reign of Pharaoh Sheshonq I. (2) He believes this because he considers the main theme of the Story of Wenamun to be that "the hard times in which *Wenamun* is set are a thing of the

[28] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 16.

[29] Ibid., 17.

[30] B. Sass, "Wenamun and His Levant—1075 BC or 925 BC?" *Ägypten und Levante: Zeitschrift für ägyptische Archäologie und deren Nachbargebiete* 12 (2002): 252–253.

past."[31] Moreover, he affirms that this would be a message that would be particularly true of the time of Sheshonq I. (3) He states that "it may have been Zakarbaal, mentioned in *Wenamun*, who originally received the earlier of the statues," that is, the statue of Sheshonq.[32] He considers all of these data to be relevant for his lowering of the dates of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. There are, however, some serious problems with Sass's proposal.

a. The Historical Setting and Date of Composition of Wenamun: Egyptologist M. Lichtheim has stated that the *Report of Wenamun* (about the Egyptian pursuit of Lebanese timber) was "written at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty, that is to say, directly after the events which the report relates." She states further that "it is the third decade of the reign of Ramesses XI, 1090–1080 B.C., during which the king yielded power to the two men who shared the effective rule of Egypt: Herihor in the south and Smendes in the north."[33] Herihor was a High Priest of Amun that became "king" (ca. 1081–1074 B.C.E.) and Smendes ruled after him (reigned ca. 1069–1043 B.C.E.). Piankh is credited with ruling between these two (ca. 1074–1070 B.C.E.). Most Egyptologists date *Wenamun* to this chronological horizon.[34] However, W. Helck has affirmed that he accepts a date in the Twenty-Second Dynasty.[35] Note that A. Rainey has stated that the early date of Wenamun is supported by the texts of Tiglathpileser I.[36] Sass's desire to affirm that the date of composition could be the Twenty-Second Dynasty is at best a minority view, but such a dating admittedly cannot be excluded.

For his corroborating evidence for the late date for *Wenamun*, Sass states that the "archaeological picture at Dor does not stand in the way of dating *Wenamun* to Sheshonq. . . . The Tjeker of Dor could easily have retained elements of their old-country identity, including the ethnic designation, until c. 900 B.C."[37] Regarding the history and archaeology

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[31] Ibid., 253.

[32] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 17; Sass, "Wenamun and His Levant" (N 30): passim.

[33] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume II: The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1976): 224.

[34] E.g., J. Assman, "Kulturelle und Literarische Texte," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (Probleme Der Agyptologie Bd 10; A. Loprieno, ed.; Leiden: Brill): 78 and J. Baines, "On Wenamun as a Literary Text," in *Literatur und Politik im pharaonischen und ptolemäischen Ägypten: Vorträge der Tagung zum Gedenken an Georges Posener* (BdE 127; Cairo, 1999): 211.

[35] W. Helck, "Wenamun," *Lexikon Ägyptologie* 6 (1986): 1216.

[36] A. Rainey and R. S. Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006): 104–130.

[37] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 252.

of Byblos, Sass states that "nor does what we know of this city interfere with the dating of *Wenamun* to Sheshonq." We should note that he does concede that it is "impossible to decide whether Zakarbaal is just a plausible name made up, or the city's ruler at the time of the late twentieth dynasty, or indeed a Byblian king contemporary with Sheshonq."[38] He also believes that carbon dates from Dor assist him in dating the Story of Wenamun to ca. 925 B.C.E. Of course, Sass's statements regarding the material culture of Dor and Byblos are quite telling. That is, basically he affirms that the archaeology does not necessarily rule out a date of ca. 925 B.C.E. for the date of composition for the Story of Wenamun. However, simply "not ruling out" is hardly the same thing as "proving" or "strongly supporting" his argument. The same objection can be leveled against the carbon dates to which Sass refers.

b. Problems with Assuming Wenamun is Relevant for Abiba'l and Eliba'l: Ultimately, I would be strongly disinclined to accept Sass's proposal that the Story of Wenamun is relevant for discussions about the time frame for the Abiba'l Inscription (= Statue of Sheshonq I). (1) Regarding the connections between Wenamun and Sheshonq, one may note that there are actually no references in the Story of Wenamun that suggest a connection with Sheshonq. That is, there are no references in this narrative to Sheshonq himself or to any official known to have been associated with his administration. (2) There are also no references to Wenamun's transporting a statue of a Pharaoh to Byblos. (3) There are also no statements alluding to historical events that must be connected to Sheshonq. (4) There are no references to customs or people-groups that require a date in the tenth century B.C.E. (5) The name Zakarba'l can hardly be affirmed to be relevant to the Statue of Sheshonq while, unquestionably the name of Abiba'l is. (6) Moreover, Sass is arguing that the "Zakarbaal" of Byblos, mentioned in Wenamun as associated with Ramesses XI (reigned 1090–1080 B.C.E.) is a good candidate for the recipient of the statues of Sheshonq I (reigned ca. 945–924 B.C.E.) and Osorkon I (reigned ca. 924–889 B.C.E.) despite a chronological gap in excess of a century. (7) Also, although Sass understands the Story of Wenamun to be reflecting the motif of the resurgence of Egypt's power (which he correlates with the time of Sheshonq), the story is normally understood as a narrative about Egypt's "political decline."[39] After all, Wenamun departs from the harbor of Byblos en route to Egypt with the Tjeker (Rainey: "Sekel") in pursuit. He sails to Cyprus and the text

[38] Ibid.

[39] Lichtheim (N 33): 224. See also Rainey and Notley (N 36): 132.

describes him as pleading for mercy from the Cypriot crown.[40] It is difficult to construe this story as one revolving around a renaissance of power for Egypt. In any case, political decline and political resurgence are common motifs in Egyptian literature. No period can be said to have a monopoly on these themes. (8) Some Egyptologists consider the story to be literary fiction;[41] therefore, to attempt to posit that it can be used to reconstruct a historical event (i.e., the arrival of pharaonic statues in Byblos) is potentially problematic.[42] (9) Finally, one may note that Sass's attempt to press the Story of Wenamun into service for his project would seem counter-productive. After all, none of this discussion of the date of Wenamun actually helps his case. In the final analysis he is conceding that a statue of Sheshonq I was transported to Byblos during the reign of Sheshonq I. That is, basically Sass states that he is not comfortable with those who wish to suggest that the statue of Sheshonq I was sent to Byblos during the reign of Sheshonq I, and then he himself presses into service the Egyptian story of *Wenamun* and argues (on the basis of *Wenamun*) that Sheshonq did send a statue of himself, during his own reign, to Byblos! One might suggest that Sass changed his views between 2002 and 2005, but in his 2005 publication he nonetheless seems to appeal to his 2002 publication for support. With some justification, therefore, one might characterize his arguments as "Sass against Sass."[43]

2. Script. Section A. Sass on script of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions:

Regarding the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions Sass states that "the 'hand' of the majority of the Byblos letters reflects a phase shortly after the transition from Proto-Canaanite."[44] Similarly, regarding the script of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription, the Yehimilk Inscription, the Abiba'l Inscription, and the Eliba'l Inscription, Sass states that "a glance at [these inscriptions] demonstrates how most letters—e.g., the

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[40] Rainey has noted (personal correspondence) that Wenamun "was dashing for Alashia because his enemies were coming up the coast." He has suggested that the same basic situation "prevailed in El Amarna [text] 114." Finally, he has stated that "the Egyptians often went straight from Cyprus to Egypt in the open sea."

[41] Lichtheim (N 33): 224.

[42] On the historicity, see Rainey and Notley (N 36): 132.

[43] It is possible that Sass might state that he believes the statue(s) arrived during the reign of Sheshonq I, but was (were) not inscribed with Phoenician texts for ca. one century. However, there is no palaeographic reason to propose this, so I am very disinclined to consider such a proposal to be cogent.

[44] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 58.

legless *dalet* and *kap*, the tall *zayin*—correspond to a universal archaic pattern."[45] To be precise, Sass believes that the following letters in these inscriptions are archaic in appearance: *ʾalep*, *bet*, *gimel*, *dalet*, *ḥet*, *ṭet*, *yod*, *kap*, *lamed*, *samek*, *ʿayin*, *pe*, *ṣade*, *reš*, *šin*, *taw*.[46] He states that he is not certain about *zayin* and *qop*.[47] Thus, there are just four letters that Sass believes are non-archaic in appearance: *he*, *waw*, *mem*, *nun*. Sass believes that the letters that he classifies as non-archaic are of particular importance because in his view, they demonstrate that these inscriptions were *not written* during the tenth century B.C.E., but rather in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E.[48] That is, he believes that the script of these inscriptions is not a genuine archaic script, but rather an "archaizing" script and so even though the script appears archaic "the inscriptions themselves were written later."[49]

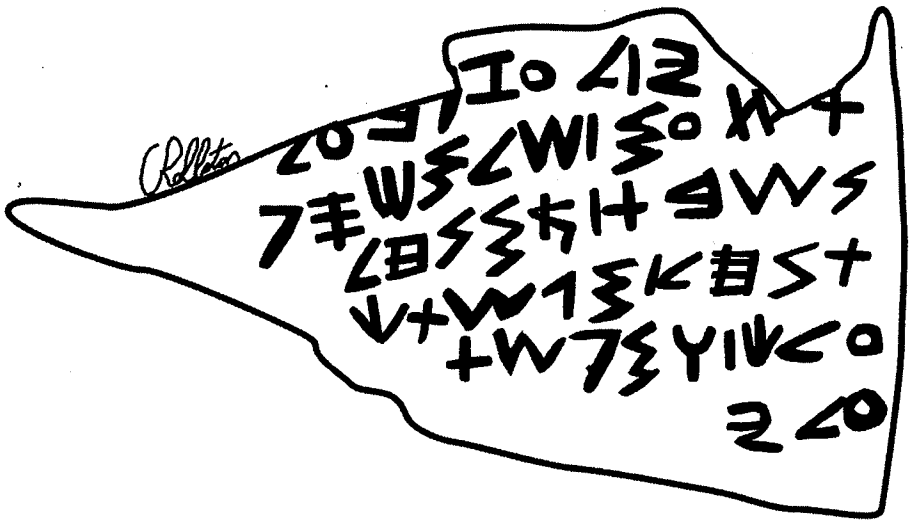

Fig. 1: Azarba'l Spatula (*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

To be sure, one must affirm that it is possible that an ancient scribe might attempt to archaize; therefore, it is prudent and reasonable for Sass

[45] Ibid., 46.

[46] Sass states that he believes the *taw* of the so-called Bordreuil champlevé inscription to be non-archaic. However, because this inscription is from the antiquities market and entirely without provenance (ibid., 32), I do not consider it methodologically prudent to base any aspect of a precise palaeographic or historical argument on it (see C. Rollston, "Non-Provenanced Epigraphs II: The Status of Non-Provenanced Epigraphs Within the Broader Corpus of Northwest Semitic," *Maarav* 11 [2004]: 57–79).

[47] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 30.

[48] Ibid., 23, 34, 46.

[49] Ibid., 58.

to consider this scenario seriously. However, I believe that for a good case to be made for "archaizing," there must be good empirical palaeographic evidence. Because Sass believes that the letters *he*, *waw*, *mem*, and *nun* in the Early Royal Byblian inscriptions are the non-archaizing ones, it is his analysis of these letters that is pivotal. In fact, from the palaeographic perspective, Sass's case stands or falls on the basis of the cogency or non-cogency of his arguments regarding these four letters.

(a) Unfortunately, there is no *he* in the Bronze Spatula (fig. 1, pl. XIII) nor in the Abiba'l Inscription or in the Eliba'l Inscription. Thus, of the royal inscriptions that are often ascribed to the tenth century, it is only the Aḥiram Sarcophagus (fig. 2, pl. XIV) and the Yehimilk Inscription (fig. 3, pl. XIII) that have good exemplars of the letter *he*.[50] Therefore, these inscriptions are the ones that must provide the evidence for *he*. Regarding Aḥiram, Sass states that "the seven Ahiram *he*s show a mix of the legless shape, Proto-Canaanite in origin, with the more advanced form possessing a short leg."[51] This is, however, definitely *not* the case. During my collations of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription in Beirut, it became readily apparent that every *he* in this inscription reflects elongation of the downstroke, that is, there is a "leg" in every single exemplar that extends below the bottom-most of the three horizontal strokes.[52]

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[50] There does appear to be a *he* in the Aḥiram Graffito (inscribed in the rock chamber through which the Aḥiram Sarcophagus was lowered into the Byblian tomb). I have collated this, but I cannot determine the precise original form of the *he*, as the abrading of this inscription has become quite severe. I do think that it is tenable to argue that the vertical of the *he* originally extended below the bottom horizontal, as there are traces that can be understood in this fashion. Nevertheless, because of the poor state of preservation, I would be disinclined to attempt to base much, one way or the other, on the form of this *he*.

[51] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 30.

[52] Note that M. Lundberg and R. Lehmann have recently each independently redrawn the Aḥhiram Sarcophagus Inscription and their drawings also reflect that there is no *he* without a leg extending below the bottom-most horizontal in this inscription. See M. J. Lundberg, "Editor's Notes: The Aḥiram Inscription," *Maarav* 11 (2004): 81–93 and R. G. Lehmann, *Dynastensarkophage mit szenischen Reliefs aus Byblos und Zypern: Teil 1.2: Die Inschrift(en) des Aḥīrō-Sarkophags und die Schachtinschrift des Graves V im Jbeil (Byblos)* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2005). Both these drawings were done based on detailed pictures made by the West Semitic Research Project and now available through the InscriptiFact Image Database (see www.inscriptifact.com). In order better to clarify the letters, images were done from contrasting light angles. These images also consistently show that the downstroke of all *he*'s extends below the bottom-most horizontal stroke.

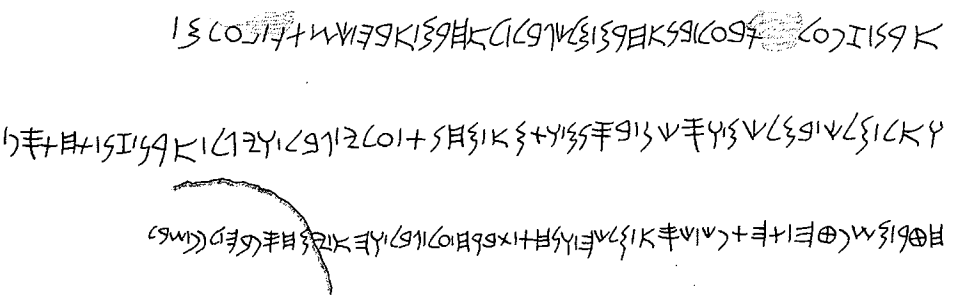

Fig. 2: Aḥiram Inscription (*Drawing by Marilyn Lundberg*, N 52)

Furthermore, Sass claims that "in at least one example (*mšpṭh*) the parallel strokes are slightly oblique, likewise an advanced trait."[53] Actually, the horizontal strokes of each *he* in this inscription are rather nicely parallel. When there is variation, it is modest and, *most importantly*, to be expected in any inscription chiseled into stone. That is, based on my own collation of hundreds of provenanced linear Northwest Semitic inscriptions of the Iron Age, I would suggest that one should not always expect perfectly formed letters. Also, some degree of imprecision can often be the natural result of carving in the medium of stone.

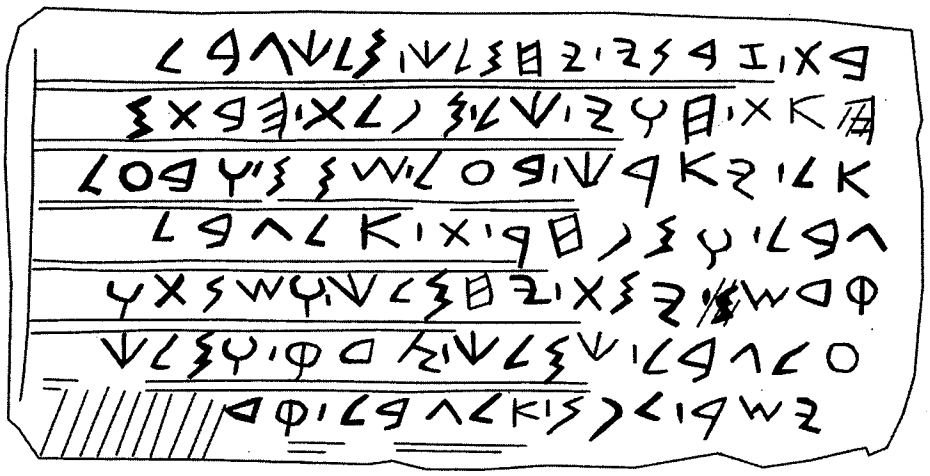

Fig. 3:Yehimilk Inscription (*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

With regard to the Yehimilk Inscription, there are two exemplars of *he*. The first exemplar is very poorly preserved. The second exemplar, however, is preserved reasonably well and it is clear that the vertical downstroke does extend below the bottom horizontal. That is, there is

[53] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 30.

an extended "leg." Note that although there is no *he* in the Shipitba'l Inscription (fig. 4, pl. XV), there is a *he* in the Abda Sherd (fig. 6; often considered contemporary with the Shipitba'l Inscription, that is, late tenth century B.C.E. or early ninth century B.C.E.). This inscription is fragmentary, but the *he* is preserved well enough to determine with certitude that it has an extended leg below the bottom horizontal.

In sum, the evidence is very clear. Sass wishes to argue that there is a mixture of forms for the *he* in the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. For Sass, this alleged "mixture" demonstrates that the scribes were slipping up with regard to the formation of the *he*, sometimes archaizing well (and thus making forms that had no "leg"), but sometimes not archaizing so well (and thus making forms that had a leg). A major component of his argument was the alleged variation regarding the legless and legged forms in the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription. However, the forms of *he* in the Aḥiram Sarcophagus *all have a visible leg*. Moreover, this is the case for the Yehimilk Inscription as well. Thus, Sass's assumption of a "mixture of forms" for the *he* in the Aḥiram Sarcophagus (so important for his argument for "archaizing") is severely undercut by the evidence. Indeed, there is substantial uniformity with regard to morphology and stance of *he*.

(b) Sass has stated that the "Elibaal and Yahimilk *waws* are of the archaic 'crescent on pole' shape." He goes on to state that "some of the Aḥiram *waws* display small variations on this form, of uncertain chronological significance." Furthermore, he states that "the two Šipiṭbaal examples are indeed the most developed in that the head is on the left of the shaft, a characteristic not otherwise documented in historically dated Phoenician-Aramaic texts before the Kilamuwa and Dan inscriptions of the second half or last third of the ninth century."[54] Basically, Sass assumes that his statements (cited here) about the *waw* of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions support his argument that the script of these inscriptions is "archaizing," and not, therefore, archaic. However, with all due respect, it is readily apparent that his statements do no such thing and so his conclusions constitute a classic non sequitur *vis à vis* his (ever so brief) analysis of the *waw*. After all, basically, Sass states that the *waw* of Eliba'l and Yehimilk are archaic. Moreover, he states that he is not certain of the meaning of the variations he believes to be present in the exemplars of *waw* in the Aḥiram Sarcophagus. Finally, he also states that he considers the *waw* of Shipitba'l to be the latest typologically. Obviously, then, there is no actual argument for "archaizing" in his analysis.

[54] Ibid., 30.

Regarding the morphology of the *waw* in these Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions, I analyze the palaeographic data in the following manner: the *waw* of the Azarba'l Inscription, the Yehimilk Inscription, and the Eliba'l Inscription reflects the standard archaic morphology, with a bowl-shaped head and a short vertical downstroke. The *waw* of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription reflects the same basic morphology, although the vertical downstroke tends to be slightly longer. There is not a good exemplar of the *waw* in the Abiba'l Inscription. The *waw* of the Šipiṭba'l Inscription exhibits morphological development *vis à vis* the *waw* of the Azarba'l Inscription, the Yehimilk Inscription, the Eliba'l Inscription and the Aḥiram Inscription. That is, the *waw* of the Šipiṭba'l Inscription is typologically later (i.e., no longer with the bowl-shaped head) and serves as a harbinger of the subsequent development of the Phoenician *waw* of the ninth and subsequent centuries. Because the Šipiṭba'l Inscription is the latest of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions, it stands to reason that the script would at times (as in the case of the *waw*) be typologically later. Obviously, therefore, it can be stated that there is no need to resort to the suggestion that there must have been archaizing so as to account for the script.

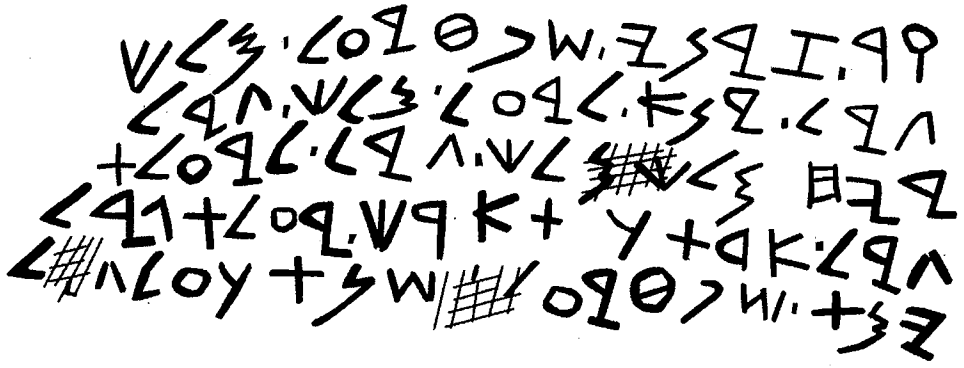

Fig. 4: Shipitba'l Inscription (*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

(c) Regarding the *mem* and *nun*, Sass states that "the most archaic-looking Byblos *mem* and *nun* are found in Elibaal, the former letter with its bottom stroke the same length as the others, the latter with its outer strokes the same length and the middle one shorter. . . . One or two of the Ahiram and Yahimilk *mems* may also be of the same kind, whereas in the others, and nearly in all *nuns* of these inscriptions, the bottom stroke is slightly longer than the others—the beginning of a leg." Sass also states that "Šipiṭbaal's *mems* (to a certain extent also the *nuns*) display the longest, most advanced legs." Finally, he also states that in this inscription

"one of the *mems* (first *mlk*) also has a slightly oblique rather than vertical head, another developed feature."[55] Again, Sass basically assumes that his statements (cited here) about the *mem* and *nun* of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions support his argument that the script of these inscriptions is "archaizing," and not, therefore, genuinely archaic.

These arguments are unconvincing. Regarding the script of the *mem* and *nun* of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions, I analyze the palaeographic data in the following manner: the *mem* consists of five oblique downstrokes and the *nun* consists of three oblique downstrokes. The *mem* and *nun* of the Azarba'l Inscription, the Aḥiram Inscription, the Eliba'l Inscription have a vertical stance. Often the five strokes of the *mem* are all about the same length and often the three strokes of the *nun* are all about the same length. Thus, the five strokes of the *mem* and the three strokes of the *nun* in the Azarba'l Inscription and in the Eliba'l Inscription are each about the same length, with some slight variation. The fifth stroke of *mem* in the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription and the Yehimilk Inscription and the third stroke of *nun* in the Aḥiram Sarcophagus and the Yehimilk Inscription do (sometimes) exhibit some lengthening (i.e, the final stroke of each letter is often slightly longer than the preceding strokes). The slight lengthening of the final stroke would be classified as being slightly more advanced typologically. However, in the Šipiṭba'l Inscription, significant typological development is attested for both *mem* and *nun*. Namely, the elongation of the final strokes of both letters has become dramatic and the stance is in the process of transition to the horizontal stance that will dominate during the ninth and subsequent centuries of the Phoenician series.

Thus, with regard to the *mem* and *nun* of Azarba'l Inscription, the Aḥiram Inscription, the Yehimilk Inscription, and the Eliba'l Inscription there is substantial continuity with regard to both stance and morphology. All are consistently quite archaic. However, the *mem* and *nun* of the Šipiṭba'l Inscription exhibit two critical typological developments (i.e., when compared to the *mem* and *nun* of the Azarba'l Inscription, the Yehimilk Inscription, the Eliba'l Inscription and the Aḥiram Inscription): substantial elongation *and* a stance that is transitioning to horizontal. Obviously, the *mem* and *nun* of the Šipiṭba'l Inscription are typologically later and serve as a harbinger of the subsequent development of the Phoenician *mem* and *nun* of the ninth and subsequent centuries. Because the Šipiṭba'l Inscription is the latest of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions, it stands to reason that the script would at times be typologically later. That is, for the *mem* and *nun* in this corpus, the script morphology and stance fall within a standard variation, with the exception of Shipitba'l. However, the fact that the script of Shipitba'l is typologically

later is in keeping with its status as the last of the corpus. In short, the palaeographic data line up very nicely.

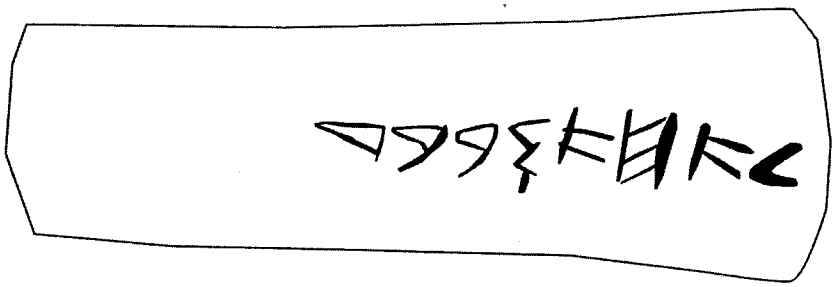

Fig. 5: Inscribed Cone, Phoenician 23928, Lebanon
(*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

Based on the palaeographic data, therefore, I believe that the Aḥiram Sarcophagus, the Yehimilk Inscription, the Eliba'l Inscription, and the Abiba'l Inscription all appear to exhibit an archaic script because they are written in an archaic (rather than a archaistic) script. Moreover, the script of these four inscriptions is largely homogenous. Minor variations occur, but this is the norm for the corpus of Iron Age Northwest Semitic linear inscriptions. Furthermore, the script of the Shipitba'l Inscription is the latest chronologically of the corpus and this is the reason for its script being typologically the latest—an interpretation fortified by the patronymic data contained in the Shipitba'l Inscription. Also of significance is the fact that Byblian cone inscriptions (fig. 5, pl. XV) and the 'Abda Sherd (from the same horizon as Shipitba'l) also reflect the same script as the Early Royal Byblian lapidary inscriptions, *even though not inscribed in stone.*[56]

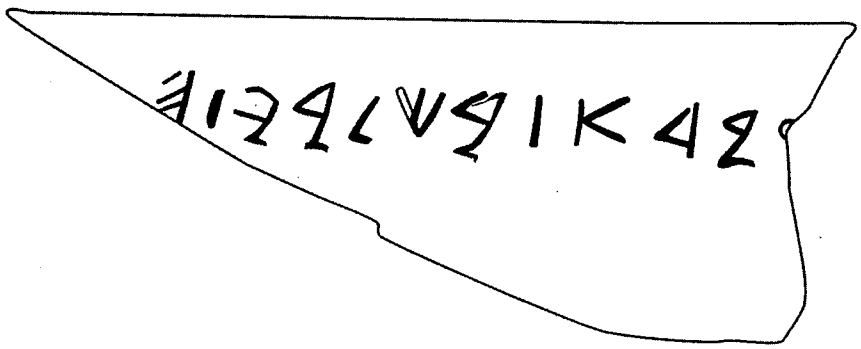

Fig. 6: ʿAbda Inscribed Sherd, Phoenician (*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

[56] Dunand, *Biblia Grammata* (N 10): plate 15.

Ultimately, for one to make a solid case for "archaizing," there must be good empirical evidence. However, such evidence is not present in this instance. To summarize the argument made here: the palaeographic data demonstrate that the script of Aḥiram, Yehimilk, Abiba'l and Eliba'l is a rather homogenous script. There is some variation, but nothing dramatic. Only in the script of the Shipitba'l Inscription is there significant development for some of the letters. It is most sensible to argue that this is because Shipitba'l is the latest of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions.

2. Script. Section B. Evolution of Scripts

In reference to the argument presented above, it is notable that Sass himself is often forced to concede that the script of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus, the Yehimilk Inscription, the Abiba'l Inscription, and the Eliba'l Inscription appears archaic. Because Sass understands that this point militates against his argument, he makes an attempt to turn the tables. He does so by claiming that the archaic *appearance* of the script and the fact that there is substantial continuity with regard to its archaic morphology and stance "underlines the artificiality of the script."[57] To fortify his argument, he states that such uniformity could not have been present in inscriptions that span such a significant time span as that encompassed by these inscriptions. To be precise, he writes: "Had the Byblos inscriptions spanned several decades or as much as a century of *living* script, a distinct palaeographical development would be expected."[58] Basically Sass is making a circular argument: Because the script is so uniform in its archaism, it must be artificial, because it if were not artificial, it would not be uniform. Moreover, Sass is also basically attempting to force his readers to conclude that *the scribes producing all four of these inscriptions, over the course of as much as a century (850–750 B.C.E.), made a concerted effort to make these inscriptions appear artificially archaic*. One would wish to see some solid evidence before concluding that this sort of organized and orchestrated "archaizing" occurred. But, instead, Sass's arguments require the acceptance of a fair amount of special pleading. For example, on the one hand, he wishes to state that (1) if there is modest variation or development in a script during the course of a century, it is too little to be significant and so the script must be artificial. However, on the other hand, he wishes to affirm that (2) if there were some sort of development in the course of a century, the accusation of scribal "archaizing" should be leveled. Using Sass's logic,

[57] Ibid., 46.

[58] Ibid., 46.

the ancient scribes are "damned if they do and damned if they don't."

However, from the perspective of normative palaeographic typology, one should note the following: As scripts develop through time, sometimes the development occurs rapidly (especially during periods of extensive use) and sometimes scripts develop very slowly.[59] Therefore, Sass's contention that the continuity of the Early Royal Byblian script (in Aḥiram, Yehimilk, Eliba'l, and Abiba'l) must be demonstrative of artificiality is problematic. The fact of the matter is that sometimes scripts do sometimes develop slowly (various reasons account for this, including factors such as media, range of usage, scribal education, etc.). It is striking that Sass actually concedes this point. Thus, he writes that "during the period from ca. 1150 to ca. 900 B.C.E. . . . the letters developed at a slower pace and . . . no regional variants have been discerned."[60] Therefore, Sass is willing to concede that sometimes scripts develop very slowly and he affirms that this was the case for the period under consideration. Moreover, he is also willing to concede that the script of Aḥiram, Yehimilk, Abiba'l and Eliba'l is quite archaic. However, rather than drawing the logical conclusion that these inscriptions look archaic *because* they are all to be dated in tenth century, and rather than concluding that the script is uniform *because* this was a period of modest development for the script, he decides to posit that the script is artificial in its archaism and artificial in its uniformity.

2. Script. Section C. Shipitba'l.

Palaeographers have argued for some time that the script of the Shipitba'l Inscription and that of the 'Abda Sherd should be dated to the late tenth or very early ninth century B.C.E.[61] That is, for decades now, palaeographers have considered Shipitba'l to be the last of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. The reason for this is the typological development attested in the script of Shipitba'l (*vis à vis* Aḥiram, Yehimilk, Abiba'l and Eliba'l) and the evidence from the patronymic. The latter would not have been decisive evidence on its own (because of putative naming practices such as patronymy and papponymy), but because these two lines of evidence (palaeographic and patronymic) converge, the argument for considering Shipitba'l to be the last of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions becomes more persuasive.

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[59] F. M. Cross, "Alphabets and Pots: Reflections on Typological Method in the Dating of Human Artifacts," *Maarav* 3 (1982): 121–136.

[60] Ibid., 51.

[61] Albright (N 9): 154 and McCarter (N 15): 34.

Regarding Shipitba'l, Sass has made various statements. For example, he has affirmed that (1) the Shipitba'l Inscription and the 'Abda sherd "are probably no earlier than the second half of the ninth century";[62] (2) he has also stated that Shipitba'l can be dated "in the ninth century or the first half of the eighth century;[63] and he has stated that Shipitba'l dates to the "ninth-century (or early-eighth century)."[64] (3) Furthermore, he has also affirmed that he considers "Shipitba'al's position" to be that of the "last" of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions.[65] (4) Moreover, he has also stated that: his "working hypothesis emerging from section 1.3.4. [= pp. 45–50] is that the Byblos inscriptions date to ca. 850–750 B.C.E."[66] That is, he dates the latest of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions to 750 B.C.E. (5) However, Sass has also stated that, regarding the script of Shipitba'l, the "letter forms in the Byblos inscriptions are too few to establish with certainty the inner order of the royal authors, even . . . Šipiṭbaal's as last."[67] As may be seen in citations above, there is some tension and variation regarding Sass's view of Shipitba'l. Nevertheless, arguably, Sass is most comfortable with dating the last of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions to ca. 750 B.C.E. and the thrust of his discussions about Shipitba'l suggest that he is quite comfortable considering it to be the last of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions. The logical conclusion is, therefore, that Sass would be most comfortable assigning Shipitba'l to ca. 750 B.C.E. This lowering of the dates, however, results in a problematic compression of the palaeographic data.

2. Script. Section D. Sass's Compression of Inscriptions

Sass's desire to lower the absolute dates for the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions (as well as various other inscriptions) results in a dramatic, chronological compression of the epigraphic materials.[68] The result of this compression is that the ninth century becomes a period of most rapid

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[62] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 46.

[63] Ibid., 48.

[64] Ibid., 45.

[65] Ibid., 46–47.

[66] Ibid., 34, 49.

[67] Ibid., 48.

[68] During the course of his argument, Sass sometimes employs what amounts to a "straw-man argument" in order to bolster his proposal. The following rhetorical question regarding script development constitutes a typical example of this: "Should a constant pace everywhere and at all times be posited a priori?" The fact of the matter is that no trained palaeographer would ever state that "there was a constant pace of development everywhere at all times" (ibid., 50–51).

(and unparalleled) development. Sass recognizes this; therefore, he refers to this period of the script's development as the "galloping 800s." He argues that the Northwest Semitic linear alphabetic script went from "Proto-Canaanite via Byblos to Dan and Mesha in less than a century."[69] He affirms that there was a "unique quantum leap in the change-rate of the West Semitic letters."[70] Moreover, even Sass is aware of the "compression" problem he is creating, as he states that much of the epigraphic record is "crowded together at the end of the period in question, leaving but a thin spread for the preceding centuries."[71] In terms of precipitating factors, he believes that these "quantum leaps" occurred because of "intensive use" that he associates with the rise during the ninth century of "many a West Semitic state and its royal city."[72]

Basically, then, Sass is positing that during the course of a single century (i.e., the ninth) the Proto-Canaanite alphabet rapidly morphed into the Phoenician alphabet. He is also positing that from this century, various archaic Bronze Arrowheads, the Azarba'l Inscription, the Kefar Veradim Bowl, the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions, the Tel Dan Stele, the Mesha Inscription, and the el-Kerak Inscription all hail. Moreover, because the script of the Mesha Inscription and el-Kerak Inscription is definitely not Phoenician, Sass must be perceived as arguing that the Moabites borrowed the Phoenician script and that this script almost immediately became a distinct national script. One can only wonder how credible it is to postulate so much development in so limited a period of time.

[69] Ibid., 52.

[70] Ibid., 51.

[71] Ibid., 73.

[72] Ibid., 51.

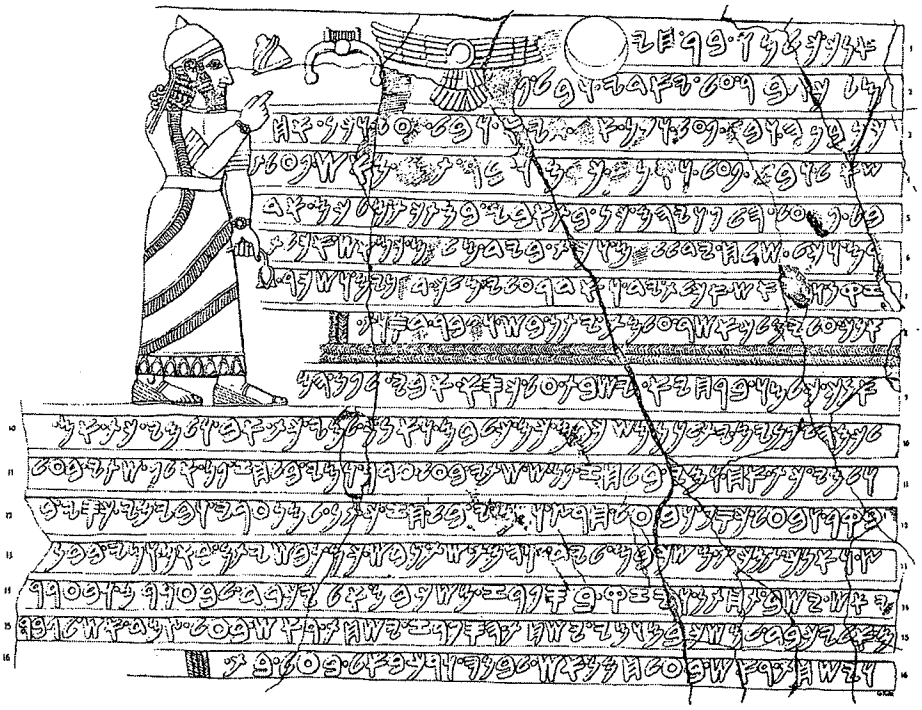

Fig. 7: Kilamuwa Inscription[73]

Nevertheless, there are still further difficulties. For example, as I have discussed, Sass considers it most plausible to date the latest of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions to 750 B.C.E. and he considers Shipitba'l to be the best candidate for the last of these inscriptions. This puts him in a very problematic palaeographic position. Here is the difficulty: Sass is willing to date inscriptions such as the Kilamuwa bar Haya Inscription (fig. 7, pl. XVI; written in the Phoenician script) to the ninth century.[74] The script of this inscription, however, is much more developed than the script of the Shipitba'l Inscription that Sass dates to ca. 750 B.C.E.![75] (1) Notice, for example, the long stem of the *kap* in the Kilamuwa Inscription. This is a late typological feature to be contrasted to the trident-shaped and thus more archaic *kap* of the Shipitba'l Inscription. This leaves Sass in the questionable situation of arguing that the Shipitba'l *kap* looks older than the Kilamuwa *kap*, but it is not older. Moreover, this is not the only such case. (2) Notice also, for example, the length of the vertical stroke of

[73] J. Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987): 55, drawing from F. von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen in Sendschirli* IV (Mitteilungen aus den orientalischen Sammlungen der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin 14; Berlin, 1911): 375, Fig. 273.

[74] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 33.

[75] Ibid., 34.

the *zayin* in the Shipitba'l Inscription. It is quite long. Indeed, the length of the vertical downstroke is almost as great as the length of the horizontal strokes. This is a very important early typological feature. Note, however, the more diminutive length of the vertical of the *zayin* in the Kilamuwa Inscription. This (relative shortness) should be seen as a late typological feature. Again, Sass would need to argue that, even though the Shipitba'l *zayin* looks older than the Kilamuwa *zayin*, it is not older. (3) Notice also the stance of *bet* in the Shipitba'l Inscription. There is some variation in the stance of the downstroke, forming the spine of the letter, but in no case is the stroke a pronounced diagonal with the topmost point to the left. A top-left stance becomes the norm in the ninth century in Phoenician and this is certainly the case with the *bet* of Kilamuwa. Thus, the *bet* of Shipitba'l (because of the stance) is typologically earlier than Kilamuwa. (4) Someone might suggest (in support of Sass's argument) that one should factor the *mem* and *waw* into the discussion. Let us therefore consider them in turn. There appears to be some typological development present that distinguishes the *waw* of Kilamuwa from that of Shipitba'l. Namely, the morphology of the *waw* of Kilamuwa is slightly later typologically (as it reflects the more angular morphology that dominates from the ninth century on, whereas that of Shipitba'l is a transitional form that still retains some of the roundedness of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions). (5) Regarding the *mem* of Shipitba'l and Kilamuwa, one may note that the form in Kilamuwa reflects what is normative for the ninth century and is the basis for subsequent typological development. The form of *mem* in Shipitba'l is transitional. Sometimes (e.g., 3.m1; 5.m1) it reflects the more vertical stance of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus, the Yehimilk Inscription, the Abiba'l Inscription and the Eliba'l Inscription, but harbinger forms that reflect a more horizontal stance are also attested (1.m1; 2.m1). In short, the forms of *mem* attested in Shipitba'l are suggestive of its transitional position between Aḥiram, Yehimilk, Abiba'l, Eliba'l on the one hand and Kilamuwa on the other hand. In short, the palaeographic evidence is unambiguous: Kilamuwa does not antedate Shipitba'l. Rather, the reverse is much more likely the case.

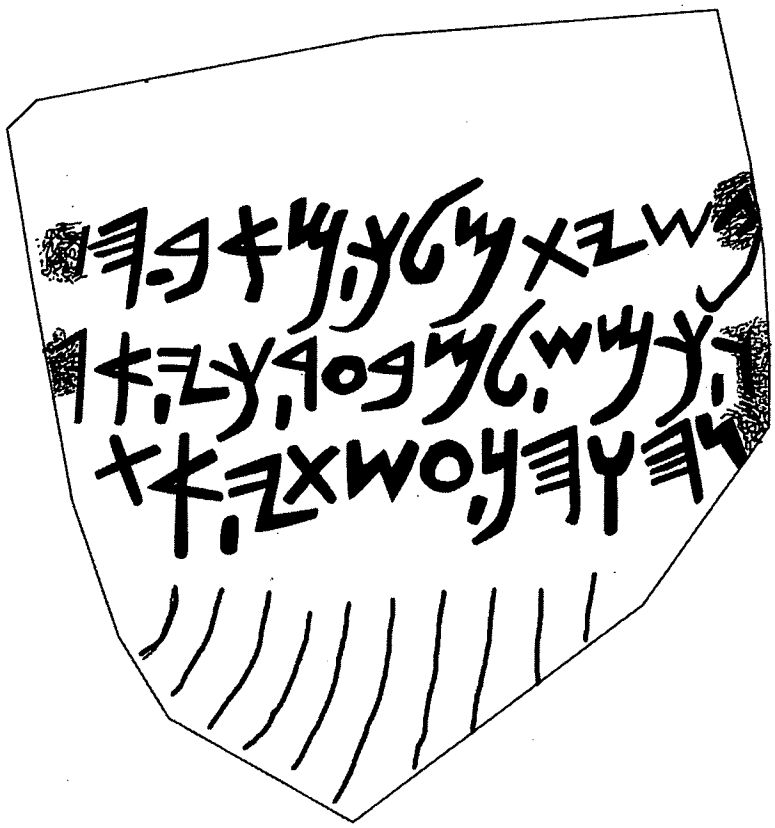

Fig. 8: El-Kerak Inscription (*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

It is notable that the same points can be made in reference to the scripts of the Tel Dan Inscription (fig. 9), the Mesha Stele and el-Kerak (fig. 8, pl. XVI) Inscriptions. That is, while Sass is willing to date these inscriptions to the ninth century, this makes more problematic his desire to date Shipitba'l to the eighth century. Again, the problem is that the script of Shipitba'l is much earlier typologically than the Tel Dan Inscription, the Mesha Inscription, and the el-Kerak Inscription. Sass, therefore, has put himself in the difficult position of arguing that Shipitba'al is much later than Dan, Mesha, and el-Kerak *even though its script is typologically much earlier*. Obviously, Sass's desire to lower the dates for the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions has put him in a something of a palaeographic bind. I believe that the "Occam's razor" principle becomes relevant here. That is, a much simpler and more direct argument should normally be considered the most cogent interpretation of data. Namely, the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions date to the tenth century and they look archaic because they are archaic. Furthermore, the ninth century inscriptions such as Dan, Mesha, Kerak, and Kilamuwa look less archaic

than the Early Royal Byblian inscriptions because they are less archaic. It is as simple as that. Of course, if there were good evidence for archaizing, that would strengthen Sass's case, but the problem for Sass is that his arguments for archaizing cannot carry the weight with which he has saddled them.

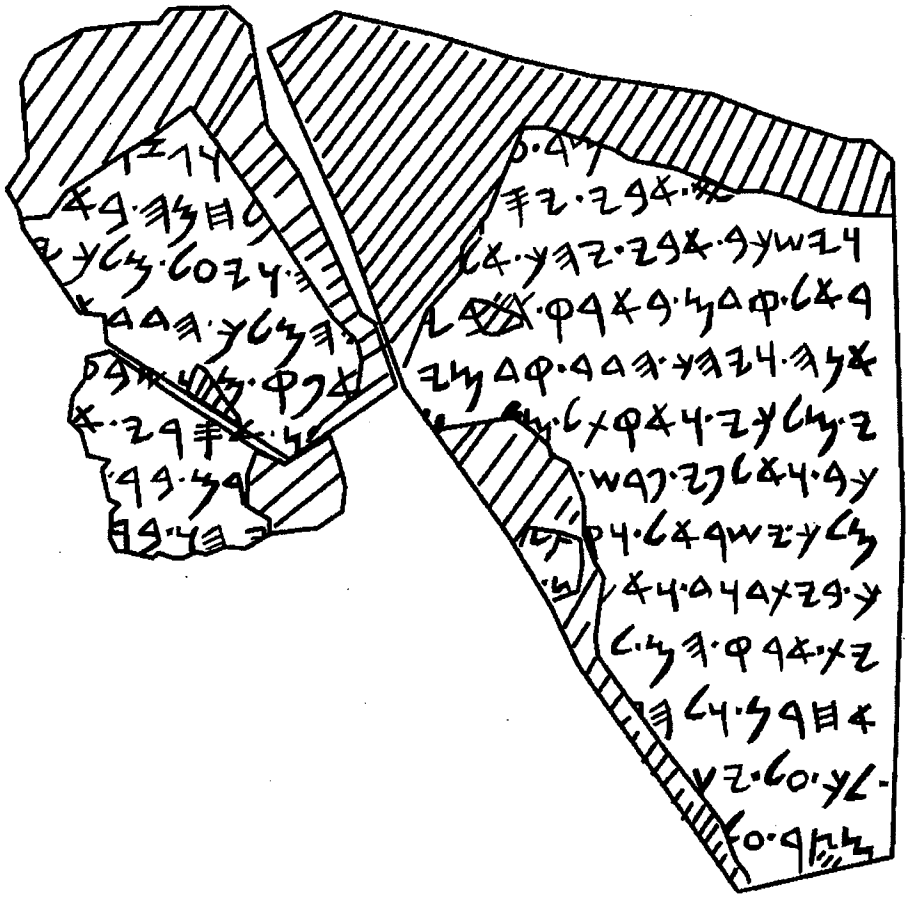

Fig. 9: Tel Dan Inscription (*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

2. Script. Section E. Sass on the Kefar Veradim and Tekke Bowls.

An important component of Sass's argument is his desire to date the Kefar Veradim Bowl (fig. 10) and the Tekke Bowl to the ninth century. Thus, he has written that "excavations of two ninth-century tombs, one in Crete, the other in Israel, each yielded an inscribed bronze bowl with letters that are quite similar."[76] Similarly, he writes that "the Kefar Veradim and Tekke inscriptions belong in the first half of the ninth

[76] Ibid., 34.

century."[77] He also states that the script of the Tekke and Kefar Veradim bowls is "less developed than that of the Byblos inscriptions."[78] In addition, he affirms that "the Tekke and Kefar Veradim bowls have clear early-ninth-century archaeological contexts, but their more conservative script still belongs to the previous phase—late Proto-Canaanite—in this transitional period."[79]

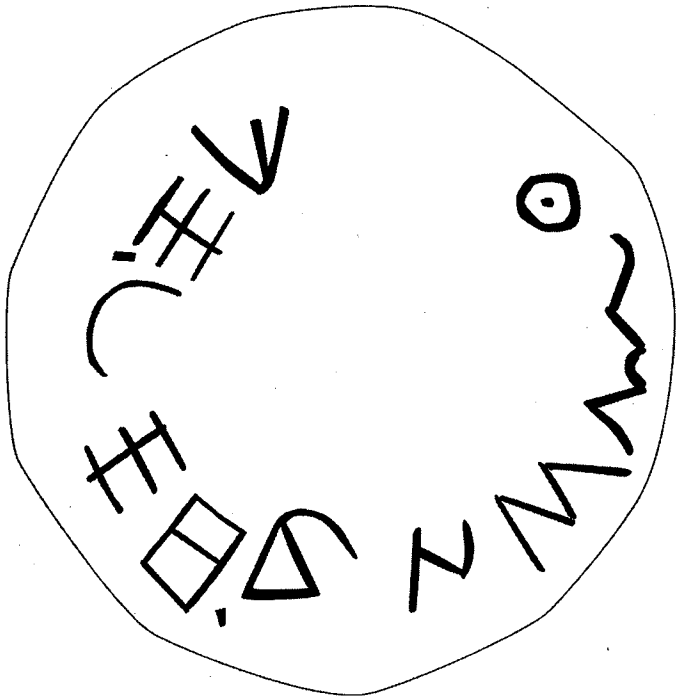

Fig. 10: Kefar Veradim Bowl (*Drawing by Christopher Rollston*)

The Kefar Veradim Bowl is a stunning artifact, made of fluted bronze.[80] The inscription consists of just four words, all well preserved, with two word dividers also present. The inscribed bowl was found in a burial cave at Kefar Veradim (Israel). According to the standard chronology, the associated archaeological materials (bowls, craters, including some black-on-red ware, etc.) can be dated to the tenth century,[81] or early ninth century.[82] Y. Alexandre considers the possibility that this bowl may have

[77] Ibid., 43.

[78] Ibid., 45.

[79] Ibid., 55 n. 74.

[80] Y. Alexandre, "A Canaanite-Early Phoenician Inscribed Bronze Bowl in an Iron Age IIA–B Burial Cave at Kefer Veradim, Northern Israel," *Maarav* 13 (2006): 7–41.

[81] Ibid., 31.

[82] Ibid., 22–23.

been an heirloom piece, but does not come down definitively on the subject.[83] Of course, Sass argues that the low chronology should be accepted and so dates the artifacts from this tomb to the mid-ninth century, and he argues that it is not tenable to consider the inscribed bowl to be an heirloom piece.[84] Moreover, with regard to the Kefar Veradim Bowl, Sass does engage in some scholarly caricaturing. For example, he states that if the standard chronology for "West Semitic palaeography and Palestinian archaeology" is applied, "an absurd situation ensues: the Kefar Veradim inscription would be 200 years older than the bowl it is written on. . . . the inscription would date to the eleventh century, the tomb assemblage to the tenth, and the bowl to the ninth."[85] Obviously, if Sass's premises were accurate, this would be an absurd situation indeed.

However, Sass's premises and conclusions are problematic. Thus, Alexandre considers the tomb to be tenth century, the bowl to be tenth century, and the inscription to be tenth century. Thus Sass's "absurd situation" is a chimera. From my perspective, as a palaeographer, I would state that the inscription can indeed be dated to the early tenth century (note also that its script is very similar typologically to the script of the Azarba'l Inscription). Nevertheless, it could be posited that none of the associated pottery should be dated to the early tenth century and that, instead, it should be assigned a later date. For various reasons, however, this is not a serious dilemma. (1) After all, there is always a degree of latitude for pottery typologies, just as there is for palaeographic typologies. This must be factored in, I would argue, to the composite picture. (2) Furthermore, I cannot agree with Sass's strong disinclination to consider the possibility that a beautiful inscribed bowl could have been an heirloom piece.[86] After all, the presence of heirloom objects in ancient Near Eastern excavations is an attested phenomenon. For example, M. Marcus (following E. Porada) has stated that some mosaic glass vessels from Hasanlu are heirlooms.[87] Moreover, sometimes seals are retained as prestigious heirlooms and reused. Thus, it has been argued that Dynastic seals (e.g., of the earlier Mitannian ruler Saushtatar) were retained and reused during the Late Bronze Age at Tell Brak.[88] Furthermore, a tablet

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[83] Ibid., 31.

[84] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 34–39, 50–74.

[85] Ibid., 39.

[86] Ibid., 39. Compare the more cautious statements of Alexandre (N 80): 31.

[87] M. Marcus, "The Mosaic Glass Vessels from Hasanlu, Iran: A Study in Large-Scale Stylistic Trait Distrubition," *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991): 537–560.

[88] D. Matthews, "The Matanni Seals from Tell Brak," in *Excavations at Tell Brak, Vol. 1: The Mitanni and Old Babylonian Periods* (D. Oates, J. Oates, and H. MacDonald, eds.; Cambridge: McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research, 1997) and D. Stein, "A

from the reign of the Neo-Assyrian King Esarhaddon was sealed with three Dynastic seals, namely, a seal of an Old Assyrian king, a Middle Assyrian king, and a Neo-Assyrian king.[89] Considering the exceptional quality of the Kefar Veradim Inscribed Bronze Bowl, it would be difficult to exclude the assumption that it is an heirloom piece. Indeed, this sort of prestige object might arguably be considered a paradigmatic heirloom piece. Ultimately, therefore, I would suggest that the excavator's date in the tenth century for the tomb and bowl is cogent. Also, a palaeographic date in the tenth century is convincing. Moreover, it is entirely possible that this piece was an heirloom piece (and thus was inscribed earlier in the tenth century and then deposited in the tomb later during the tenth century). In short, the archaeological data and palaeographic data dovetail just fine.

M. Sznycer published a bronze bowl from a tomb in Tekke (Crete), inscribed in the Phoenician script (fig. 11). Although corrosion has damaged the letters, it appears that the inscription consists of four words. Based on the script, he dated this inscription to ca. 900 B.C.E., although he did not wish to exclude a date earlier in the tenth century.[90] F. M. Cross has argued that he believes there is "not a typological feature of the script which requires or even suggests a date lower than 1000 B.C.E."[91] Cross considered the *bet* in this inscription to date to some point prior to ca. 1000 B.C.E. Also, although Sznycer did not consider the fifth letter of the inscription to be decipherable, Cross read it as an *ʿayin* and he has stated that it contains the pupil (a feature that is often considered to be reflective of an early script). Cross summarized his understanding of the script in the following manner: "the archaic forms of *ʿayin* and *bet* require a date no later than the end of the eleventh century (ca. 1000 in round numbers), and the remaining clear letter forms conform to this dating."[92] The archaeological context of the tomb is Cretan Early Protogeometric

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Reappraisal of the Saustatar Letter from Nuzi," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 79 (1989): 36–60.

[89] B. Parker, "Excavations at Nimrud, 1949–1953: Seals and Seal Impressions," *Iraq* 17 (1955): 93–125; idem, "Seals and Seal Impressions from the Nimrud Excavations, 1955–58," *Iraq* 24 (1962): 26–40; and P. Albenda, "Of Gods, Men and Monsters on Assyrian Seals," *BA* 41 (1978): 17–22.

[90] M. Sznycer, "L'Inscription Phenicienne de Tekke pres de Cnossos," *Kadmos* 18 (1979): 89–93.

[91] F. M. Cross, "Newly-Discovered Inscriptions in Old Canaanite and Early Phoenician Scripts," *BASOR* 238 (1980): 1–20 and idem, *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook: Collected Papers in Hebrew and West Semitic Paleography and Epigraphy* (HSS 51; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003): 229.

[92] Cross, "Newly-Discovered Inscriptions" (N 91): 17; and Cross, *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook* (N 91): 229.

(= Attic Late Protogeometric) and can be dated to ca. 950–900 B.C.E.[93] Obviously, Cross knows that his dating of the inscription to ca. 1000 B.C.E. is rather close to the dating of the archaeological context, but nevertheless slightly earlier. He notes that there are two viable alternatives. (1) Namely, the inscribed bowl may have been an heirloom piece, "a half century or so older than the main deposit in the Tomb." He draws attention to the fact that Lawrence Stager has suggested that there was a Late Minoan (LMIII) lentoid seal-stone in the tomb and that it is "certainly an heirloom." (2) Conversely, Cross suggests that a second alternative is that "the dates of the Proto-geometric series may be raised a half-century. That is to say, the inscription may furnish new evidence that our chronology is in fact low."[94] I am sympathetic to Cross's desire to date the bowl to ca. 1000 B.C.E. Nevertheless, (1) one may note that the morphology and stance of the Tekke *bet* could also be considered an acceptable tenth century form, or even an acceptable ninth century form (cf. the Nora Stone). (2) The general absence of elongation of the third stroke of *nun* is an archaic feature and argues for a date no later than the tenth century or early ninth century. (3) Moreover, regarding the Tekke *ʿayin*, note that this portion of the bowl is corroded; hence no typological emphasis can be placed on this with any confidence. Ultimately, in the final analysis, it may be best to posit a tenth century date for this inscription.

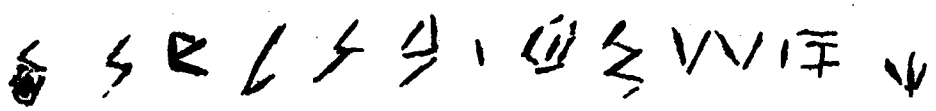

Fig. 11: Tekke Bowl (*Drawing by Cross* [N 91]: 227)

The sum total of the evidence from the bronze bowls from Kefar Veradim and Tekke is complicated, but I do not think that Sass has made a decisive case for his interpretation of the data. Sass believes that the palaeographic data from the Kefar Veradim and Tekke Bowls force palaeographers to repudiate the standard chronology and compels instead the low chronology. However, from my perspective, this is not at all convincing. After all, he is essentially arguing that—on the basis of eight words (four on the Kefar Veradim Bowl and four on the Tekke Bowl) on a total of two bowls (from different regions), and in tomb

[93] H. W. Catling, "The Knossus Area, 1974–1976," *Archaeological Reports* 23 (1977): 14.

[94] Cross, "Newly-Discovered Inscriptions" (N 91) and Cross, *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook* (N 91): 229 [no. 49].

contexts, palaeographers must lower the date of the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions (consisting of many scores of words). Moreover, and even more importantly, the data simply do not support his contention. After all, Alexandre has argued that the Kefar Veradim Tomb dates to the tenth century, and thus a palaeographic dating of the inscription to the tenth century is reasonable. Moreover, H. W. Catling has stated that he dates the Tekke Tomb to the tenth century and here too a palaeographic dating of the inscription to the tenth century is reasonable. To be sure, I am inclined to date the Kefar Veradim Bowl to the early tenth century, whereas Alexandre would desire to date the archaeological context to a horizon later in the tenth century. Again, I do not see this as constituting much of a problem. After all, neither the palaeographic typologies nor the pottery typologies can be fixed with absolute precision. Rather, within both there must be a plus or minus of some decades. Furthermore, a beautiful inscribed bowl would be just the sort of piece that could readily be an heirloom, kept in a family for several decades before someone decides to deposit it in a tomb with a deceased family member (e.g., a son or grandson of the original owner of the bowl). Similar statements can be made about the Tekke Bowl. In sum, I consider the archaeological and palaeographic data for the inscribed Kefar Veradim and Tekke Bowls to dovetail rather well, especially in consideration that various archaeologists and palaeographers independently take the view tenth century dates are justifiable. Thus, Sass's attempt to suggest that the data from these two bowls requires a lowering of the dates for the Early Royal Byblian remains problematic.

2. Script. Section F. Sass on Tell Fakhariyeh.

The languages of the Tell Fakhariyeh Bilingual Inscription (fig. 12) are Neo-Assyrian and Aramaic. Within the field of Northwest Semitic palaeography, it is the linear script of the Aramaic text that has generated a substantial amount of discussion. Namely, it has been argued that the linear script in some respects resembles the script of the eleventh and early tenth century Phoenician inscriptions. However, various non-palaeographic data suggest a date in the ninth century. Thus, J. Naveh has stated that the script was "reminiscent of the Proto-Canaanite script of the eleventh century B.C.E."[95] To be sure, Naveh was very much cognizant that (in the *editio princeps*) A. Millard, P. Bordreuil, and A. Abou-Assaf

[95] J. Naveh, "Proto-Canaanite, Archaic Greek, and the Script of the Aramaic Text on the Tell Fakhariyah Statue," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride, eds.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987): 103.

had made a strong case (on the basis of historical data, orthographic data, and art historical data) for a date in the ninth century.[96] Therefore, Naveh concluded that "the only possibility that can be taken into consideration is that we have here a very successful artificial archaizing script." He then continued and stated that "it is so extraordinary and out of context in the ninth century that it can only be explained by assuming that its set of letters was copied without a single failure from a stele of the eleventh century."[97] Regarding the script of the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription, Cross has stated that it "is typologically pure Phoenician, the Phoenician character of the end of the eleventh century B.C.E." However, with some reluctance, he was willing to concede that the text was composed in the ninth century B.C.E. Therefore, he argued that the script should be considered a "triumph of archaism."[98] Regarding the precise mechanism that resulted in the script of the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription, Cross has stated that a "ninth-century scribe copied earlier script models from Aramaic monuments of the late eleventh century. . . . He ignored the Aramaic script used by contemporary [ninth-century] scribes."

S. Kaufman has argued that the script of the Fakhariyeh Inscription should be understood as the Phoenician script that was used in that region.[99] That is, Kaufman wishes to posit that there were "Peripheral Phoenician" scripts and also a contemporaneous "Standard Phoenician script." Cross, however, has countered that he believes there is a problem with this proposal. Thus, after discussing various minor problems with the notion of a non-standard script in geographic peripheries, he states that "an even greater hindrance to the notion of a peripheral pocket of archaism is the existence of the Gozan Pedestal Inscription."[100] This inscription dates to the late tenth or early ninth century and uses the standard script of the late tenth and early ninth century. Gozan (Tell Halaf) and Tell Fakhariyeh are separated by ca. four kilometers. Cross believes, therefore, that if this region were actually employing a peripheral script (that perpetuated archaic forms), then the Gozan Pedestal Inscription

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[96] A. Abou-Assaf, P. Bordreuil, and A. R. Millard, *La Statue de Tell Fakherye: Son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (Etudes Assyriologiques; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilizations, 1982).

[97] Naveh, "Proto-Canaanite" (N 95): 109.

[98] F. M. Cross, "Paleography and the Date of the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (Z. Zevit, S. Gitin, and M. Sokoloff, eds.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995 [repub. in Cross, *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook* (N 91)]): 408.

[99] S. A. Kaufman, "Reflections on the Assyrian-Aramaic Bilingual from Tell Fakhariyeh," *Maarav* 3 (1982): 142–145.

[100] Cross, "Paleography and the Date" (N 98): 396.

(which antedates the Fakhariyeh Inscription) should have similarly employed the postulated peripheral script. However, because it did not employ the same archaic script as Tell Fakhariyeh, Cross affirms that the Fakhariyeh Inscription should be considered an archaizing script, not a peripheral archaic script. Sass has also stated that he considers the Fakhariyeh Inscription to be "archaizing."[101]

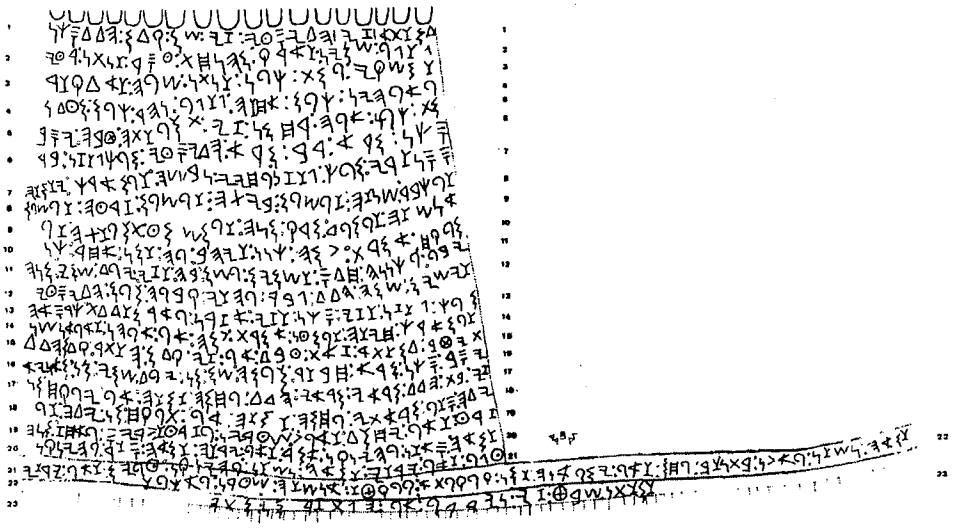

Fig. 12: Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription[102]

Ultimately, I would concur with the suggestion that the Phoenician script of Tell Fakhariyeh is archaizing. In fact, I consider it to be a textbook case of archaizing. Furthermore, I believe that there is solid evidence within the script itself (heretofore not sufficiently recognized) that suggests that this inscription does not date to the eleventh or tenth centuries. (1) Regarding the *samek* of Tell Fakhariyeh, I would note that the vertical downstroke intersects with the bottom horizontal but not with the top two horizontals. This is in striking contrast to the *samek*'s of the eleventh and tenth centuries, in which the vertical downstroke begins at (or above) the top horizontal and thus intersects with all three horizontals. The junction of the vertical and horizontals is a fundamental typological feature with rather decisive chronological significance. That is, the form attested in the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription is different from the form of *samek* in the Phoenician script of the eleventh and tenth centuries

[101] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 34, 52, 58.

[102] A. Abou-Assaf, P. Bordreuil, and A. Millard, *La Statue de Tell Fekherye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (Études Assyriologiques; Éditions Recherche sur les civilizations 7; Paris: ADPF, 1982): fig. 3.

B.C.E., but the form attested in Fakhariyeh is common in later periods. This militates strongly against a date for Fakhariyeh in the tenth or eleventh centuries. (2) Note too that the form of *waw* of Tell Fakhariyeh has a horizontal base. This feature should be considered typologically advanced, that is, typologically later. Note also that it is not attested in the Phoenician script of the eleventh or tenth centuries. If this were the only evidence, then the case for the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription as archaizing would not be decisive; however, this is not the case. (3) Rather, this palaeographic evidence dovetails with the orthographic evidence. That is, within the Northwest Semitic text of the Fakhariyeh Inscription, the full-blown system of Aramaic *matres lectionis* is used. This is strong evidence against a date in the eleventh or tenth centuries B.C.E. (4) Of course, the prosopographic evidence is also suggestive of a date in the ninth century, but I concur with Cross in his point that the prosopographic evidence cannot be considered decisive.[103]

At this juncture, I should also like to emphasize that, although rare, "archaizing" is a recognized phenomenon. Indeed, Northwest Semitic palaeographers have affirmed its presence in the linear Northwest Semitic script of the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription. That is, the fact that the Fakhariyeh script is archaizing can be considered a secure datum. Of course, Sass wishes for it to be present not only in the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription, but rather to view it as a widespread phenomenon. He believes that this would allow him to lower the dates for a multitude of texts and compress a massive amount of epigraphic data into the ninth century. However the burden of proof is upon him to convincingly show this to be so. In my opinion, he has not met this burden of proof.

3. Sass on Art History.

Obviously, the thrust of much of Sass's discussion of Iron Age scripts revolves around his conviction that the Early Royal Byblian Inscriptions cannot be dated to the tenth century. Significantly, Sass considers the reliefs on the Aḥiram Sarcophagus to be quite central to the discussion. In fact, he states that "the Ahiram sarcophagus reliefs should play a key role in dating the inscription." Based on his analysis of certain aspects of the banquet scene, Sass states that "these and other shared details place the sarcophagus reliefs—hence the inscription—in the ninth century at the earliest."[104] Regarding the relationship between the inscription and the reliefs, Sass has stated that "the manner in which

[103] Cross, "Paleography and the Date" (N 98): 400.

[104] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 22: esp. 75–82 and passim.

the inscription commences on the raised band that frames the top of the relief on one of the narrow edges of the receptacle, continuing on the broad edge of the lid, suffices to show that it was added to the otherwise finished sarcophagus."[105]

Porada's study of the relief(s) continues to be an authoritative contribution to the discussion. Indeed, many would suggest that it is the most decisive. She argued that "the style of the reliefs on the sarcophagus certainly fits a position between the art of the Late Bronze and Middle Iron Age periods." She then continues, stating that "Ahiram's reliefs continue the iconographic traditions of Syria and Palestine as well as of the New Kingdom of Egypt, but they have assumed the simplified, heavy forms found in the reliefs of Carchemish and Ashurnasirpal II of the ninth century." She considers a date of ca. 1000 B.C.E. for the Aḥiram Sarcophagus Inscription to be tenable.[106] However, Sass contends that Porada was influenced too heavily by palaeographers and that this accounts for her dating of the Aḥiram Sarcophagus reliefs to ca. 1000 B.C.E. Moreover, he argues that many of the parallels Porada found are better placed in ninth century Neo-Assyrian culture.[107] However, Porada's case is much more nuanced than Sass's citations might suggest. Basically, Porada argues (based on some very detailed analyses of precursors and successors) that the reliefs on the Aḥiram Sarcophagus can be placed in a chronological horizon between the Late Bronze Age and early Iron II. To be sure, she does cite some close parallels in the Neo-Assyrian period, but she states that she considers the Neo-Assyrian reliefs to be perpetuating motifs that originated in Phoenician and were subsequently used in the Neo-Assyrian realm.[108] One may note, in addition to this, E. Rehm has actually argued, on the basis of the art-historical data, for a thirteenth–twelfth century date for the reliefs.[109] I. Ziffer also seems quite comfortable with a date in the thirteenth–twelfth centuries.[110] Similarly, G. Markoe has dated the sarcophagus itself to the early twelfth century B.C.E.[111] Obviously, then,

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[105] Ibid., 21.

[106] E. Porada, "Notes on the Sarcophagus of Aḥiram," *JANES* 5 (1973): 364.

[107] Sass, *The Alphabet* (N 2): 21–22.

[108] Porada (N 106): 364. Note also that I. J. Winter has argued that at times the important role of Neo-Assyrian art has been foregrounded in scholarship, though the role of the Phoenicians was very important indeed. Winter, "On the Problems of Karatepe: The Reliefs and Their Context," *Anatolian Studies* 29 (1979): 115–151.

[109] E. Rehm, *Der Aḥiram-Sarkophag: Dynastensarkophage mit szenischen Reliefs aus Byblos und Zypern Teil 1.1* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004).

[110] I. Ziffer, "From Acemhöyük to Megiddo: The Banquet Scene in the Art of the Levant in the Second Millennium BCE," *Tel Aviv* 35 (2005): 155–158.

[111] G. E. Markoe, *Phoenicians* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 2000): 144. Cf. G. E.

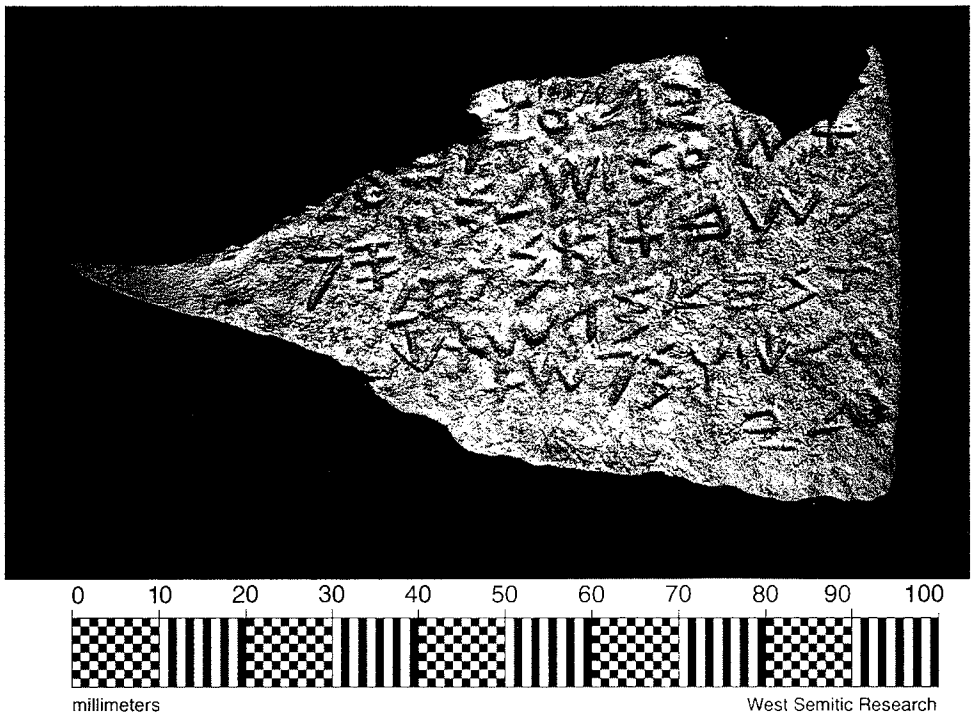
a fair number of art historians of the ancient Near East do not consider the reliefs necessarily to be later than the tenth century.[112] Indeed, some consider them much older than this. Sass's contention, therefore, that the art-historical data *require* a date after the tenth century is not a position that a number of art historians would accept.

In sum, Sass's proposal to redate the Early Royal Byblian inscriptions to ca. 850–750 B.C.E. has very significant problems and simply cannot be considered particularly cogent. However, in contrast, the standard dating of these inscriptions (to the horizon of the tenth century and early ninth centuries) remains a very convincing construct of the convergence of the data. To be sure, future discoveries will bring greater nuance to our understanding of the early Phoenician scripts, but I do not believe future data will undermine the early date for the Royal Byblian Phoenician herein discussed.

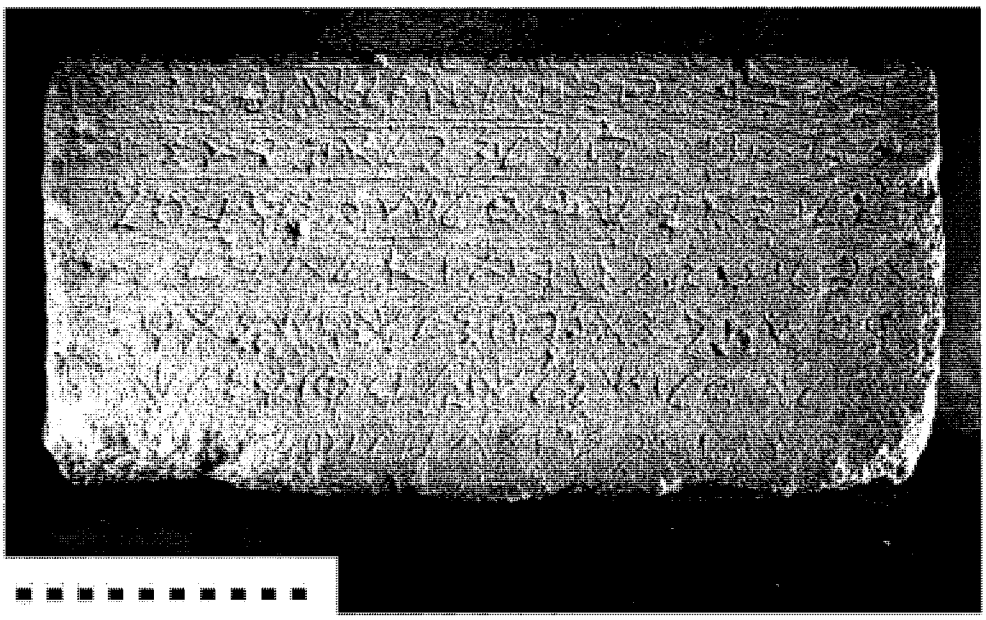
Markoe, "The Emergence of Phoenician Art," *BASOR* 279 (1990): 13–26.

[112] Sass focuses rather heavily on his belief, based on the placement of the inscription, that the inscription must post-date the reliefs. Even conceding this point, I do not think that this fact is of great consequence. After all, ancient Byblian artists could have carved the reliefs into the sarcophagus and immediately thereafter Byblian scribes could have incised the inscription.

PLATE XIII

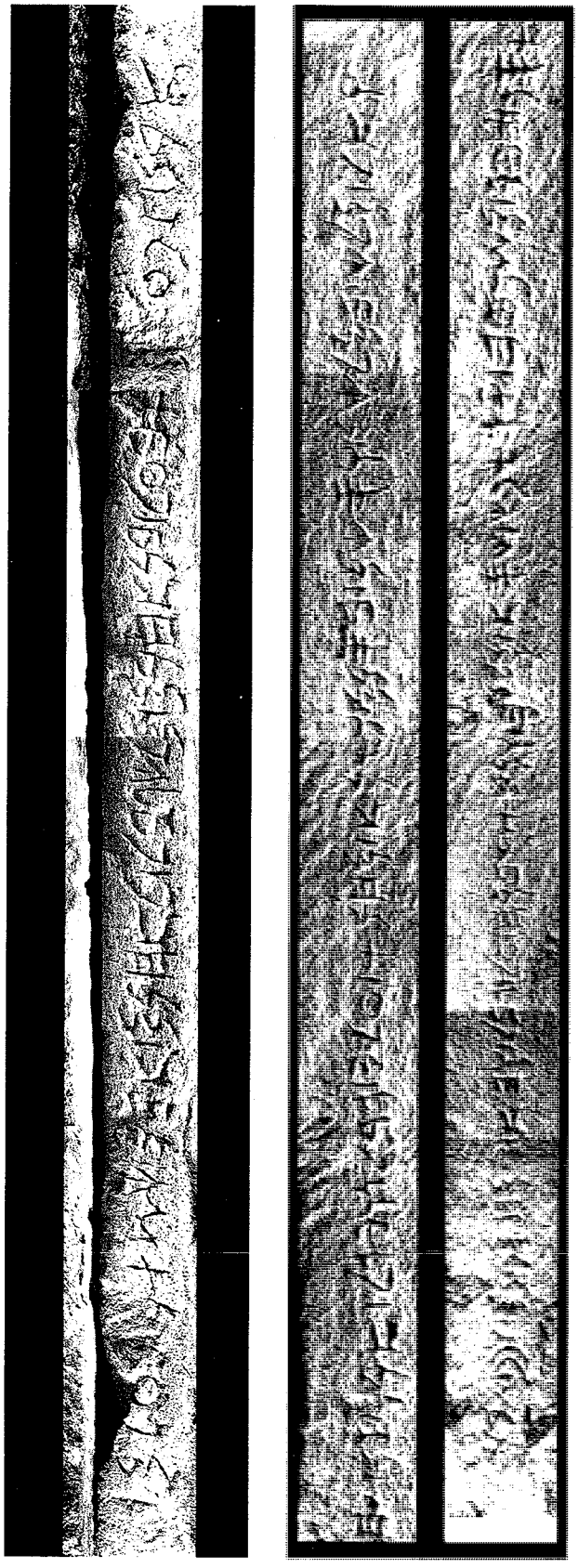


Azarba'l Spatula (InscriptiFact #MM_DAL_AZARBAAL_1T_X)
(*Photograph by Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Lebanon*)



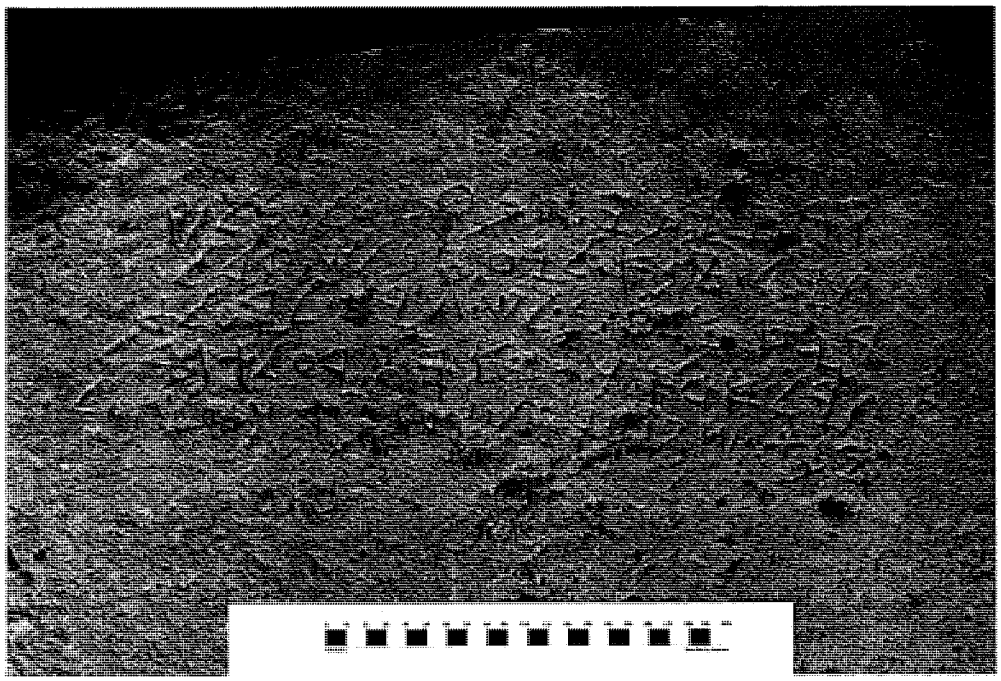
Yehimilk Inscription (InscriptiFact #MI_DAL_YHMLK_RLL_X)
(*Photograph by Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Lebanon*)

PLATE XIV

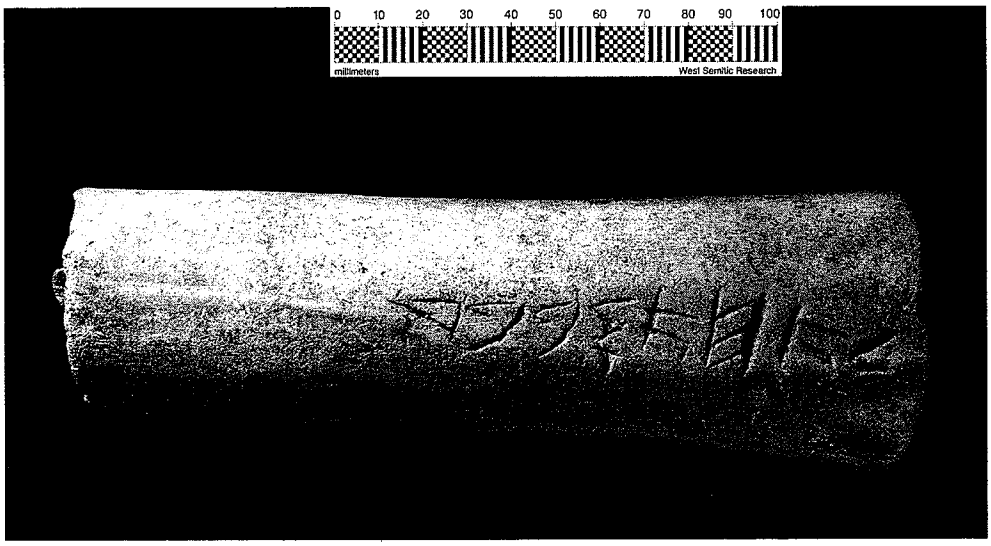


Aḥiram Inscription (InscriptiFact #MI_DAL_AHIRAM_RS_T and MI_DAL_AHIRAM_RL_T)
(*Photograph by Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Lebanon*)

PLATE XV



Shipitba'l Inscription (InscriptiFact #MI_DAL_SHIPIT_IBB_X)
(*Photograph by Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Lebanon*)



Inscribed Cone, Phoenician 23928 (InscriptiFact #MM_DAL_CONE28_L_X)
(*Photograph by Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Lebanon*)

PLATE XVI

Kilamuwa Inscription (InscriptiFact #MI_VAMKLMW_R2_P)
(*Photograph by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*)

El-Kerak Inscription (InscriptiFact #MI_DAJKERAK_REF_P)
(*Photograph by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic Research. Courtesy Department of Antiquities, Jordan*)