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MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE
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Open Cults and Temples in Syria and the Levant

FRANCES PINNOCK

As was recently proposed by Lorenzo Nigro, in a synthetic and accurate presentation, in many pre-classical sanctuaries of the Syro-Palestinian region important moments of religious ceremonies took place in open areas, in the presence of a large number of persons. These open areas could be isolated, might include a small sanctuary, or could be related with a great town sanctuary: in the two first instances, the open cult area was limited by a wall, but in the third case this wall could be missing. As already proposed, these peculiar ceremonial-cult structures were often connected with the main town deity, frequently to be identified with Ishtar, but deepening the analysis, it is perhaps possible to propose that the ceremonies taking place in them were really functional for the exercise of kingship, and, therefore, they were related with Ishtar particularly since the beginning of Middle Bronze, when the goddess became the main patron deity of kingship in some of the major centres of northern Syria, while during Early Bronze, similar cults and ceremonies were dedicated to other gods, who shared with Ishtar the quality of being protectors of a ruling dynasty.

1. Introduction

In a recent contribution Lorenzo Nigro examined several evidences of cult areas in the open air in the Syro-Palestinian region, areas which seem to have had an important development since the Old Syrian period¹. In particular, the sites which that analysis covered were Megiddo, Nahariyah, and Ebla, with special concern for Ishtar's Cult Area in the Lower Town north. The elements in common identified among the sanctuaries in southern Levant were the presence of an enclosure, limiting the cult space, of a room, quite likely covered, with *Breitraum* structure, and of a cult platform². Moreover, at Nahariyah, several votive deposits were found, including miniature

pots, containers with multiple vases, jars with figures applied on the neck, metal female figurines, beads of different precious materials, among these one may also mark the presence of a small crouching lion of pink chalcedony, of an agate dove, and of some clay dove figures, which were probably parts of other objects, as would be proved by the holes in their bases³. According to the excavator the sanctuary, related with a spring of sweet water, actually below sea level, but at the time probably located on the shore, was dedicated to a form of Asherah⁴.

Taking into account this evidence, together with Byblos, and with documents coming from Ishtar's Cult Area at Ebla, Nigro thus proposed that the cult areas in the open in the Syro-Palestinian region were

places where a large number of persons gathered in order to pay homage to Ishtar. Here, basing our analysis mainly on Byblos and Ebla, and in the light of recent discoveries in the second site, we would like to go further, and propose other possible hypothesis of interpretation, which, in our opinion, do not contrast but rather articulate better the previous one.

2. Temples and Cult Areas at Byblos

The analysis of the Gublite evidence is made somehow uncertain, for the not perfect excavation technique used by its discoverer, and for the fact that a detailed and overall revision of the documents of the Old Syrian period is still missing, similar to the praiseworthy work produced by Muntaha Saghih for the Early Syrian period. Yet, as we will try to demonstrate here, even in the light of a peculiar, and probably secondary evidence, the Old Syrian period is a basic phase in the elaboration of the Syrian concept of kingship, and of its relation with gods, on the base of the older formulations of the mature Early Syrian period.

The archaeological exploration has brought to light a part of the site of Byblos, which certainly includes the whole fortified acropolis, but which might even represent the entire urban area of this centre. It includes some relevant public buildings, prevalently cultic in nature, pivoting, as is also indicated by the radial street pattern, on the spring located nearly in the middle of the area limited by the defensive wall. The remains of the royal palace were not identified for certain, yet, the placement of the royal tombs, and some imposing ruins of walls, and large halls, probably parts of larger buildings, lead to believe that it were located near the Baalat Gebal's temple, in front of the sea, and, therefore, in a position stressing the close relation with the goddess protecting the town, and, at the same time, overlooking the ports.

The space, not a very large one, among the main temples of Byblos, and where the large cavity related with the spring opened, seems to have been not only the meeting point for the main transversal axis of the town street pattern, but also an integrated sector in the ceremonial and cult paths connecting the cult

areas with one another, and including, besides the sanctuaries proper - meaning the Baalat Gebal's and Obelisks Temples - two areas at least in the open, namely the *Champ des Offrandes*, and the *Enceinte Sacrée*⁵.

The two last sectors are characterized by the presence of enclosures, and by a large number of jars, buried inside their grounds for the deposition of precious gifts. In the *Champ des Offrandes* one may also notice the presence of an altar, or a dais, while jars with votive offerings were also brought to light in the region of the Obelisk Temple, and, in a lesser amount, of the Baalat Gebal's Temple⁶. The presence of the built structure, altar or dais, leads to believe that such depositions took place during ceremonies, including other cult acts besides the burial of gifts, like, for instance, offerings of liquids, or sacrifices.

Taking into account the votive deposits of Byblos in general, one may observe that they frequently include preservation jars of medium size, usually of the same typologies, as containers, while the objects include for a large majority metal human figurines, some more accurate, and some very schematic, some perhaps divine, but many, quite likely, human, a large amount of weapons, mostly spear, and arrow heads, and, most of all, fenestrated axes, sometimes richly decorated with figures embossed on the blade, or with refined gold handles with filigree decoration.

Analyzing in detail these collections of votive offerings, and in particular the content of jar 16694, found in the region of the Obelisk Temple, I recently tried to propose some hypothesis of interpretation about the modes of deposition of the jars, and about the meaning of the eventual ceremonies during which they were buried. This deposit, in fact, is particularly rich and peculiar, because, among the objects it contains, the usual precious fenestrated axes, and jewels, one may also notice some strongly characterized items, which may point to locate the workshop which produced them outside Byblos⁷.

Thus, among the objects contained in the jar 16694, we mention a precious gold situla with an applied human figure, and some elements decorating fenestrated axes with a pattern of figures and filigree. These precious items have not many comparisons, and, therefore, the few parallels which it was possible to identify seem even more meaningful⁸.

The small situla has a peculiar lobed shape (**Fig. 1**), and it looks similar to the situlae held by two attendants on the main face of the ritual basin found in Temple D at Ebla (**Fig. 2**)⁹, the detail of the applied figurine is certainly quite rare, probably unique on metal vases: a similar application is to be found, on a clay pot of a different typology, in a possibly slightly older funerary context at Mari¹⁰. Yet, at Ebla small jars, always made of clay, with different kinds of applications, mainly birds figures or heads, and female figurines, are widely attested, particularly in Middle Bronze II¹¹.

The evidence of the gold sheets with figures and filigree is, in our opinion, even more meaningful: these were parts of the decoration of the handle of a fenestrated axe, and on two elements there are two bull-men facing each other (**Fig. 3**)¹², in a composition strongly recalling similar figures carved on a small basalt base found at Ebla, in Temple N (**Fig. 4**). The two other sheets, representing a group including a sitting personage, and a man standing in front of him (**Fig. 5**)¹³, also point towards the great centre of north inner Syria, because the sitting man, wearing a peculiar spiked cap, as was several times maintained, must certainly be identified with a royal figure: this really is the representation of the king of Ebla at the beginning of the Old Syrian period (**Fig. 6**), when Ebla was the capital of north inner Syria, and before it entered the political milieu of the kingdom of Yamkhad, whose capital was Aleppo, when also the Ebla kings adopted the typical Aleppo costume, with large fringed cloaks, and egg-shaped tiaras.

Also other luxury objects included in this specific deposit find precise comparisons in the high quality handicraft production of Ebla, while other artifacts, of this, as well as of other deposits from Byblos were certainly made, generally speaking, in goldsmiths' workshops related with palaces, rather than with temples, of the Syrian region.

The basic questions are: were the Gublite deposits collected in the course of time, as a consequence of the discarding of temple fittings, and, therefore, of the casual unification of objects belonging to temple furniture or treasures? Or rather, does each jar represent one individual operation of presentation of offerings, intentionally chosen and collected in that container?



Fig. 1- Golden situla from Byblos (after Dunand 1958, Pl. CXXXVI, n. 16695).



Fig. 2- Detail of the limestone basin from Temple D at Ebla, TM.65.D.226 (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).



Fig. 3- Gold sheets with filigree decoration and bull-men figures from Byblos (After Dunand 1958, Pl. CXXXII, nn. 16701-16702).



Fig. 5- Gold sheet with the representation of the homage paid to a king, from Byblos (After Dunand 1958, Pl. CXXXII, n. 16700).



Fig. 4- Basalt base with bull-men from Temple N at Ebla (After Matthiae, Pinnock, Scandone Matthiae 1995, n. 238: 393).



Fig. 6- Detail of the limestone basin from Temple D at Ebla, TM.65.D.226 (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

Had the jars been found only in the regions of the main sanctuaries, the first hypothesis might appear more probable, but, on the contrary, the largest amount of votive deposits was found in the two areas in the open, the *Champ des Offrandes*, and the *Enceinte*

Sacrée, whose main function seems to have been to host the buried jars, possibly, as already maintained, as a result of more complex rites. Moreover, the detailed analysis of jar 16694 seems to hint that each deposit was the result of one cult act only.

This second hypothesis, namely the intentional burial of the jars, seems even more likely in the light of the structure of the Obelisk Temple, where jar 16694 was found: here the pattern of the spaces joining the sanctuary proper, with large rooms and open spaces, seems to hint at a complex ritual, and the presence of the obelisks, from which the sanctuary took its name, is one further element of proximity with the traditional pattern of the cult areas in the open typical of the Levantine region. Another interesting aspect of the plan of this temple is the presence of an approximately square unit, with quite large rooms, with jars and benches, which cannot be only considered a services quarter, all the more as it is located at the end of the ramp leading to the temple. Moreover, for the similarity with the general structure of the Sanctuary of the Deified Royal Ancestors at Ebla (Sanctuary B2), this unit must, in our opinion be considered as a place for communal meals, quite likely related with rituals of kingship, which also included the burial of rich gifts¹⁴. We may also rapidly recall that, as concerns the problem of the identification of the titular deity of this sanctuary, also in the light of what we have now observed, we believe it quite likely that it were dedicated to Reshef, god of death and the Netherworld, who, at Ebla, was closely related with the cult for the deified royal ancestors¹⁵.

3. Temples and Cult Areas at Ebla

Excavations at Ebla brought to light two presumed cult areas in the open, a more monumental one in the Lower Town north, related with the great sanctuary of Ishtar in her quality of patron deity of the town, and a smaller one, connected with the temple built in Middle Bronze II, as the last of a series of cult buildings erected over the massive Tempe of the Rock, in the Lower Town south-east¹⁶.

Ishtar's Cult Area includes the great temple dedicated to the goddess, and a monumental cult terrace, quite likely used for ceremonies in the open, as well as for the

ritual killing of prisoners, and for hosting the goddess's lions¹⁷. The two main buildings were located on two sides of a large square, the Cisterns Square, which, since its creation, at the beginning of the archaic Old Syrian period, included a peculiar installation, namely a cistern surrounded by wells, which were not functional only, as is proved by the proximity of two dogs burials, and of two votive deposits with objects and food offerings; just in front of the monumental terrace façade there were a burial with a human being and a ram's head, a human deposition, another *favissa*, and a burial with the disarticulated body of a sheep. In later phases of use of the square, to the raising of the floor level corresponded the digging of other votive pits, two of which were created one at the end of the archaic Old Syrian period (F.5327), and the other at the beginning of the mature Old Syrian period (F.5238), and were particularly rich with objects, and particularly useful for the study of the rituals practiced for their deposition¹⁸.

In the older *favissa*, F.5237, the lowest deposit included jars with food offerings, and was followed by a filling with ash, animal bones, objects and fragmentary pots, by a level of virgin soil, and by a level with pots with burnt offerings, with more than 200 vases placed in regular lines, goat and dove bones; the pit was closed by a stratum of earth thick with shards.

In the later *favissa*, F.5238, three levels of activity were singled out: level i was a cone of materials thrown from above, most of all middle and small size vases and objects, and was sealed by a stratum of crushed limestone, possibly the unintentional result of the collapse of the ceiling; level ii included grey ash with materials, vases and objects, which had again been thrown, not placed inside, and was intentionally closed by sterile soil; level iii was made of grey earth with ash, charcoal, burnt animal bones, broken vases and objects, with more than 200 vases and 100 objects (**Fig. 7**), and it was sealed by the collapse of the floor of the Square above, probably at the time of the final destruction of Ebla, around 1600 BC.

Similar modes for the formation of deposits were observed in P.9308¹⁹, the *favissa* created in an open space south of the cult area in use from the mature Early Syrian period to the late Old Syrian period, between 2300 and 1600 BC, with a stratification of temples, the most monumental ones of which are

certainly the first one, the Temple of the Rock, of Early Bronze IVA, and the last one of Middle Bronze II, related with the *favissa*²⁰.

The lower level of the well, level 3, included a compact layer of vases, animal bones, animal horns, 15 human and animal clay figurines, and was sealed by a thick layer of earth, with a few limestone fragments, possibly fallen from the ceiling; level 2 was a compact layer of vases, animal skulls, most of all of rams and gazelles, bones – of rams, gazelles, goats, and birds – and parts of fish and crabs, animal jaws, 153 fragments of coarse figurines of unbaked clay, 48 human and animal clay figurines, mixed with charcoal and ash. These materials were prevalently complete, and looked as if they had been placed, not thrown in the pit. Level 1, grey in colour, included pots, animal bones, 73 fragmentary figurines of unbaked clay, and 4 clay figurines. The *favissa* was closed with a layer of grey earth with shards, and a stone block sealing the opening.

Thus, all the *favissae* taken into account show phases of intense cult activity, alternating with phases of abandonment, to the complete filling of the pits. Curiously in all the *favissae* there were apparently three phases of activity, and two periods of abandonment.

As regards the typology of the objects and pottery, we may present the following general observations:

a) The pottery includes for the greatest majority medium to small size pots, mainly bowls and table jars.

b) The objects include a percentage of clay figurines, of the usual Old Syrian types, a percentage of objects belonging to high quality productions, like beads of semi-precious stones or precious metals, and bronze figurines, particularly snakes, and a percentage of objects, which, on the contrary, seem to belong to a lower level of handicraft productions, and which, therefore, one might be tempted to define popular, and that, most of all, do not find any comparison in the products usually attested in temple, palace, or domestic contexts.

c) Some objects had been placed in the *favissae*, and were thus intact or could be reconstructed, but many of them, particularly pots, had been broken before they were thrown into the pits, and could not be reconstructed.

For their location in the Cisterns Square, in close relation with the great Temple in the Lower Town, and with Monument P3, whose attribution to Ishtar patron goddess of Ebla was clear since the beginning, on the base of the topographic organization of the complex, and of the finding of the probable head of the goddess's cult statue, and of two fragments of the usual cult basin, depicting the goddess in a winged shape, accompanied by a hierodule, the *favissae* of the Lower Town north were also connected with this divine figure, the most important deity of the town and dynastic cult.

Such attribution is also confirmed by the analysis of the findings from the pits, among which one may point to the presence of dove bones, beads, and, most of all, of lapis lazuli and carnelian beads²¹, of two small carnelian lion figures, of the bronze snakes, possibly hinting at chthonic aspects of the goddess, and of a small bronze bull. Among the objects we attributed to a kind of "popular" handicraft, there is a group of clay juglet with applied figurines (**Fig. 8**), where dove images are prevailing. This class of pots, which appears for the first time in the *favissa* F.5238, of the beginning of Middle Bronze II, is not attested during this phase in other contexts of the town, while it will definitely be quite frequent later on, with more and more schematic decorations, where birds, or rather dove heads, will become nearly the only motif attested, and with a definite prevalence of their presence in palace context²².

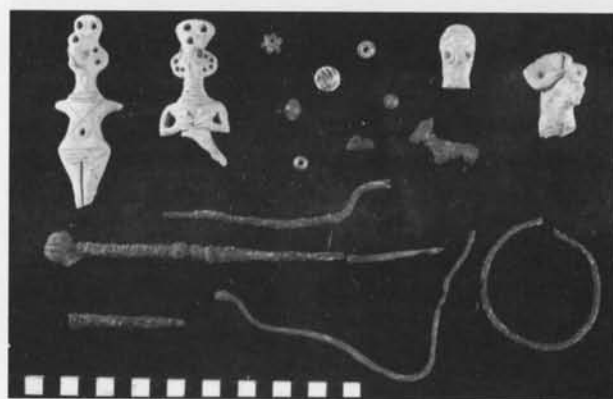


Fig. 7- Some of the objects of clay, bronze and semi-precious stones from F.5238 in Ishtar's Cult Area at Ebla (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

Therefore, it seems quite reasonable to conclude that the votive pits in the Cisterns Square were an integral part of Ishtar's Cult Area, used during periodical, possibly seasonal, ceremonies, quite spaced in time, as can be inferred by the thickness of the abandonment levels, whose culminating act was the deposition or throwing of objects, or the ritual breaking, followed by deposition, of offering for the goddess.

Actually the attribution of the *favissa* in Area HH looks more difficult, as the titular deity of the Old Syrian temple is still uncertain, while it seems quite sure that the first building, the Temple of the Rock, was dedicated to god Kura. The small objects found in it belong to the same categories and typologies as those of Ishtar's *favissae* (Fig. 9), and the exceptions do not give clear and final hints: in the pit in Area HH the vases with applied figures are missing and the bizarre clay figurines appear (Fig. 10), which, though they are very schematic, look prevalently female, some are similar to pedestal figures, and others are more complex, but also a snake head can be singled out; the presence of jadeite idol (Fig. 12), and of a limestone male head of good quality (Fig. 11) is also very interesting, and quite enigmatic.

Other considerations may be done: the first temple built in Area HH, the Temple of the Rock, as just recalled, according to Paolo Matthiae's reconstruction²³, is most likely the temple dedicated to god Kura, a male deity, who had a basic role in the complex ritual for the renewal of kingship, minutely described in the texts of the Early Syrian State Archives²⁴. The element characterizing the Temple of the Rock is the fact that it was built around a cavity in the rock, served by three wells, which occupied a large portion of the cella, that had no flooring in order to leave the rock itself visible.

If, in the succession of the temples until the mature and late Old Syrian periods, a great male deity still was the titular god of the temple, one might propose that Temple HH2 of Middle Bronze II were dedicated to Hadad, whose position of pre-eminence in the late Old Syrian pantheon was closely related with the ascent of Aleppo, whose patron deity he was. We stress, moreover, that Temple HH2 had a tripartite structure, as was considered the rule with palatial temples – the temples built in close topographic relation with royal



Fig. 8- Clay juglets with applied figures from F.5238 in Ishtar's Cult Area at Ebla (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).



Fig. 9- Clay bowls from P.9308 in Area HH at Ebla (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).



Fig. 10- Raw clay figurines from P.9308 in Area HH at Ebla (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).



Fig. 11- Male limestone head from P.9308 in Area HH at Ebla (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).



Fig. 12- Jadeite idol from P. 9308 In Area HH at Ebla (Photo Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla).

residences, as is, for instance, the case at Ebla with Temple D, located in proximity of the Royal Palace E, and dedicated to Ishtar²⁵.

Yet, if we suppose that Temple HH2 were still somehow related with rites of kingship, as it stood over a place, where the cavity in the rock was, which was basic for the foundation of Ebla, or of kingship at its origin, the choice of the tripartite pattern might have underlined this role, traditionally royal, of the temples built in that region of the town, and the keeping of rites connected with kingship might not contrast with an eventual attribution to Hadad of the sanctuary, also taking into account that it was certainly in use in the final phase of life of Old Syrian Ebla, when the town was under Aleppo political influence, and that Hadad was anyhow a royal divine figure, so that in the Aleppo glyptics he is the god conferring royal powers, in a characteristic composition, also adopted, quite likely not per chance, by the most probably last king of Ebla²⁶.

4. Conclusion

Summing up the considerations thus far presented, we may observe what follows:

- Both at Byblos and Ebla important moments were identified of religious ceremonies taking place in the open air, or at least in part in the open air, culminating with the ritual burial, or throwing of objects and vases into pits.
- At Byblos the objects prevalently belong to high quality handicraft productions, probably made in palace workshops, which in one instance at least can be attributed to the milieu of the archaic Old Syrian Ebla.
- At Ebla, in the three deposits thus far examined, a very large amount of pottery was found, with peculiar categories of objects, which have no parallel in other contexts of the town, and which seem to represent forms of popular religious feeling, and sometimes include items patently roughly made with poor materials. But

also small artefacts were found, made with precious materials, more elaborate imported pots, a male head of a very peculiar and refined handicraft, and a kind of stone spirit of jadeite, namely a very rough figure, yet carved in quite a big block of a precious imported stone.

This last consideration prevents us from considering the *favissae* uniquely as a manifestation of the common people's religious belief, and we also believe that there is some kind of connection among these apparently disparate evidences, whose only point in common seems to be the ritual burial of objects.

At Byblos, as already maintained, the objects can be attributed to court milieus. At Ebla, the rites taking place in Ishtar's Cult Area in the Lower Town were addressed to a particular form of the goddess, in her quality as patron deity of the town, not as patron of the ruling dynasty, for whom the palatial temple on the Acropolis was reserved; yet, the presence of the imposing basalt statues of kings and queens, probably dead, placed in the temple porch, the rites of killing of prisoners, which took quite likely place on the terrace of Monument P3, and the connection with the sweet water producing fertility, albeit artificially collected in the large underground cistern, are undoubtedly a form of exaltation of kingship, which, in connection with the great goddess, ensured peace and prosperity to the town. It is not a chance that these royal prerogatives, for which the king acts as the ultimate protector of the town with the goddess's patronage were celebrated in Ishtar's stele, found in the cult area of Temple D on the acropolis.

On the other hand, the rites taking place in the Lower Town south-east, in Area HH, which may have had a greater vitality in a later, possibly only slightly later, phase than the period of great flourishing of Ishtar's Cult Area, seem to have a stronger mythical-symbolic value, linked with the ancestral memory of the holy place whence the town probably originated, and where the imposing Temple of the Rock had been built in the Early Syrian period, as primary location of the complex rituals for the probably periodical renewal of the first kingship of Ebla.

Thus, in Old Syrian Ebla probably periodical rituals reproduced, possibly with a large gathering of people, ancient rites for the renewal of kingship, in connection, on the one side, with the main sanctuary

of the Old Syrian town, and, on the other hand, with a temple which, though being less important in that phase, was closely related with an area traditionally dedicated to the achievement and renewal of the town's life through the king's role and prerogatives. At the beginning of the Old Syrian period partly similar ceremonies might have been celebrated, at Byblos, maybe in part by high officials, who at least in some instance came from the court of Ebla, in a situation presenting quite a number of similarities with Ebla, from the religious-ideological point of view: there they found a dynasty placed under the protection of a great female deity, quite likely not too much different from Ishtar of Ebla, a town whose pattern pivoted on a spring, and, therefore, on a cavity in the rock, and with a sanctuary, the Obelisk Temple, where it was possible, as happened in the Eblaic sanctuary dedicated to the deified royal ancestors, to gather for ritual meals, probably addressed to these same personages, the *rapi'uma*, of the Middle Syrian tradition. The relations between Ebla and Byblos, though not explicitly asserted, or rather not yet clearly limited in the written evidence, were certainly active, and probably strong, since the Early Syrian period, when quite likely through Byblos precious Pharaonic gifts reached Ebla, among which the lamp with the names of Chefred of the IVth Dynasty, and the lid with the cartouche of Pepi I of the VIth Dynasty²⁷. At the same time, it looks more and more patent that Ebla played, in the archaic Old Syrian period, a basic role in the definition of the king's prerogatives and image, and, in fact, notwithstanding the political role of Aleppo in the mature and late Old Syrian periods, it was the Ebla king, called "Star of Ebla" in the bilingual Hurrian/Hittite *Epos der Freilassung* from Boghazköy²⁸, who became an archetype for kingship in the Syrian region until the end of the so-called pre-classical period, before the Roman conquest, yet giving life to figurative prototypes we may still identify in the Western imagery even beyond the end of the ancient Near East as traditionally defined²⁹.

Notes

- 1- Nigro 1996.
- 2- Ottosson 1980: 21, 25, 29, 94, 99-100.
- 3- Ben-Dor 1949, Pl. XII; Dothan 1956.
- 4- Ben-Dor 1949: 41; Dothan 1981: 74; *Ibid.*: 78 Dothan recalls the presence of vases similar to the multiple bowls from Nahariyah at Byblos and Ugarit, where the evidence is related with the use of cult terraces after the destruction of the main sanctuaries, in the passage between Middle and Late Bronze. In a comment to this contribution, *Ibid.*: 81, F.M. Cross proposed to identify the titular deity with Anat, though recalling the well-known phenomena of syncretism among Asherah, Anat, and Astarte in Canaanite texts.
- 5- The pattern of secondary streets, ending at the sides of the "square", near the centre of which opens the large cavity connected with the spring, forms a ring, around the square itself, pointing, in fact, to the fact that the path did not end into the open space, but that, in some instance at least, it also allowed to move around the square, where, moreover, besides the sanctuaries mentioned above, there also were other buildings, whose function is not totally clear, and whose structure is quite monumental. In particular one may recall, for the Early Syrian period, the presence of large halls, possibly pavilions, located precisely at the borders of the square: Pinnock 2007: 120-127.
- 6- The two areas in the open were placed over previous structures: the *Enceinte Sacrée* is located over the remains of an older Early Syrian sanctuary, with two main phases at least, and, therefore, in an area traditionally dedicated to cult; the *Champ des Offrandes* was created already in the Early Syrian period in a region previously occupied mainly by residential buildings, or anyhow by buildings not directly related with cult, and was used only for the deposition of jars with offerings.
- 7- For a detailed analysis of jar 16694, and its content: Pinnock in press.
- 8- Dunand 1958, Pl. CXXXVI, n. 16695: 853.
- 9- Matthiae 1966: 117-118.
- 10- Margueron 2004, fig. 414.
- 11- Pinnock 2000.
- 12- Dunand 1958, Pl. CXXXII, nn. 16701-16702: 854-855.
- 13- *Ibid.*, Pl. CXXXII, n. 16700: 854.
- 14- As a further evidence of the destination of this unit for important moments of cult ceremonies, we may recall that in later phases of use of the sanctuary, the unit, though losing the specific destination for ritual meals, still was a basic part of the cult complex: in fact, doors and staircases seem to show that it was included in ceremonial paths, and its rooms, now displaying entrances with columns, seem to have a more definite official function. In the complex stratigraphic reconstruction of the phases of this sanctuary, U. Finkbeiner, who does not deal with the question of absolute chronology, attributes the creation of this unit to his *Bauphase 2* (Finkbeiner 1981, Beilage 2, S. 39), which, as can be inferred from Saghie's study (Saghieh 1983, Plan II), should date from Early Bronze IVB. In *Bauphasen 3* to 8, the building underwent progressive refurbishing, which led to the loss of the side chambers of the cella, and to the progressive simplification of the unit, until it became, in *Bauphase 8* another court, possibly the only entrance to the sanctuary: Finkbeiner 1981, Beilagen 3-8, Sn. 39-45. Dealing with the votive deposits, Finkbeiner connects the deposition of jar 16694, with its content, with *Bauphasen 5-6*, *Ibid.*, S. 67, when the unit displayed the plan with smaller rooms, and staircases. For a recent reappraisal of this building see Sala 2008.
- 15- In fact, in the Lower Town west of Ebla, where Sanctuary B2 is located, it was possible to limit a large area, including Sanctuary B2 itself, Temple B1, dedicated to Reshef, and the Western Palace, the probable residence of the Crown Prince, placed over the Royal Cemetery, as his occupant had, among his duties, to perform the funerary rites for the royal ancestors, and to take care of the burial area itself. For a discussion about the titular deity of the Obelisk Temple see Xella 1994: 197; Scandone Matthiae 1981b: 66-68; Fulco 1976: 55.
- 16- Matthiae 2006.
- 17- Such hypothesis is based on the consideration that the terrace features a rectangular room, whose floor is identical with the pavement of the Cisterns Square, and which has no entrance: Matthiae 1993: 638-662.
- 18- Marchetti, Nigro 1997.

19- A preliminary presentation of this context was made by A.R. Lisella at the 6th ICAANE in Rome, which is now in press.

20- For a presentation of the cult area of Area HH, and a discussion of the different typologies of the temples built there between Early Bronze IVA and Middle Bronze IIB see Matthiae 2006.

21- See, at this regard, Pinnock 1993: 146-147.

22- A volume of *Materiali e Studi Archeologici di Ebla*, about this particular class of artifacts is in preparation by the author.

23- Matthiae 2006: 490-492, first proposed the attribution to Kura as an alternative possibility to an attribution to Hadad, the most likely titular deity of the later Temple HH2 of Middle Bronze II. The attribution to Kura was later on confirmed in other contributions by the same Author, for instance at the 6 ICAANE in Rome.

24- Fronzaroli 1993: 3-4 (Text 1), 54 (Text 2): according to this text, in both versions, the queen had to spend one night in the cultivated fields outside the town, where she dressed up, before entering through Kura's gate, into Kura's temple. The Temple of the Rock is located near the south-eastern gate of the town, and its entrance is to the east, thus leaving a very limited space between the entrance and the town walls.

25- In this instance, as it is quite likely that the temple, called Red Temple, brought to light during the 2008 campaign below Temple D, were Kura's Temple in the SA.ZA, also mentioned in the Early Syrian ritual, here there would have been a shift from a male to a female deity, from Kura to Ishtar, who shared, anyhow, the role of patron deities for the ruling dynasty.

26- It is possible that, in the elaboration of religious belief in Syria, particularly during the Bronze Age, divine figures of different nature were created, who shared the fact that they accomplished deeds considered a royal prerogative, like the killing of monsters or enemies. They were thus considered eminently royal gods, for their role in the pantheon, as well as for their capacity to guarantee, by means of their actions, the prosperity of the centres dedicated to them. This would certainly be the case with Baal at Ugarit, but also of his opponent Athtar, in whose contrast they represented the contrast between the right to rule through birth or through

deeds, according to Wyatt 2005: 700-701. Wyatt also stresses the points of contact among Eblaic Addu/Hadad, Ugaritic Baal, and Sumerian Ninurta, as killers of monsters and patrons of agriculture: *Ibid.*: 698, fn 13. To this same picture belong the dead and deified sovereigns, the *rapi'uma*, well known from the Ugaritic texts, for which see again Wyatt 2005: 719-721; Matthiae 1979.

27- Scandone Matthiae 1979; 1982; Ead. 1981a about the complete *corpus* of Egyptian stone vases found in the Royal Palace G at Ebla.

28- Neu 1996, Sn. 19, 374, KBo XXXII 18, S. 277, KBo XXXII 16, 12, where the king "Stern von Ebla" is called Megi. About this name/title see the Dossier: Autour de Mekum d'Ebla in *M.A.R.I.* 8 1997, with the contributions by Tonietti, Charpin et Ziegler, Scandone Matthiae. In another passage of the *Epos der Freilassung* Ebla is meaningfully called, in the Hittite version "Stadt des Thrones": Neu 1996, Sn. 379, 381, KBo XXXII 19, 5, 12, 21, a definition not present in the corresponding Hurrian text.

29- Pinnock 2006.

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