

Warehouses and the Economic System of the City of Ugarit

The Example of the *80 Jar Deposit* and *Deposit 213* from Minet el-Beida

Caroline Sauvage, Lyon/Berkeley

The aim of this article is to publish from an economic point of view part of Schaeffer's work in Minet el Beida during the 1931 season. This work is based on Schaeffer's unpublished excavation notebooks that M. Y. Calvet, co-director of the "mission syro-française de Ras Shamra – Ugarit" allowed me to study. The present paper was written after my communication at the Vth ICAANE workshop "*Bronze Age Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East*" held in Madrid in April 2006.

During the Late Bronze Age, the city of Ugarit, situated on the northern coast of Syria, became an important maritime trade centre because of the auspicious location of its harbour, Minet el-Beida (fig. 1). The kingdom prospered and became a leader of international trade. Through 75 years of excavation at Ugarit, we have come to better understand this transformation as well as the physical and cultural city. Yet the nature of its economic system is still unclear. What we do know is that many trade agreements existed, which have been revealed through archaeological research and textual analysis¹. In fact, we have many ancient texts that deal with the commercial intentions of traders or with specific transactions, such as "royal gifts", sales or the payment of tribute. We thus know of many commercial agreements in the city, but the status of the traders themselves is still hotly debated. Some scholars suppose that freelance trading did exist², while, conversely, other scholars assert that only international royal trade took place³. Still others affirm that traders were semi-independent⁴.

At Minet el-Beida, the remains of buildings that may have served a role in trade were discovered and excavated at the beginning of the last century by Claude Schaeffer (fig. 2). But today, these structures are located in a military

¹ Sauvage 2006.

² Branigan 1989, p. 65–67; Wiener 1991; Valbelle 1990.

³ Janssen 1961.

⁴ Warren 1991, p. 295: "along with palatial and other forms of central economic control there were also strong elements of private and semi-independent merchant groups, especially in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages"; Foster 1987; Liverani 1979.

harbour and are, therefore, inaccessible to archaeologists. Because the excavations were conducted long ago and in outdated fashion we only have partial information about them, including an article in *Ugaritica* II⁵ and some reports of excavations in *Syria*⁶. Those publications mention warehouses (“entrepôts”) or deposits (“dépôts”), initially interpreted wrongly as ritual deposits because Schaeffer thought he was excavating a cemetery. Since those notes were published, many scholars have used them to support and to strengthen their economic assessments. In the meantime, nothing on the context of the finds has been published.

Since the first publications on the excavations in Minet el-Beida in 1933, members of the modern French excavation team have taken an interest in these older excavations and have tried to understand the background and the buildings in which foreign ceramics were “kept in stock”⁷. However, their main interest has been the general understanding of the area and, inasmuch as possible, of the main features of the structures’ ground plan. We are continuing this research, re-examining trade-related finds in Minet el-Beida, and comparing them with trade clauses in textual sources, a necessary step since Schaeffer never studied the economic meaning of these deposits. First, we will present the “deposits” and “warehouses” as described both in the published sources and Schaeffer’s unpublished notebooks. Then we will make a general comparison of the trade system and traders’ social status based on the textual data.

I Presentation of the deposits

The occupation of Minet el-Beida was relatively short; it began in the 15th century B. C. and ended around 1180 B. C. Schaeffer began his excavation of the site in 1929 and spent five seasons there. He excavated houses with tombs similar to those located in the city of Ugarit, and he identified many deposits⁸. We do not describe all of them; rather, we focus on some deposits found in 1931 in the southern excavation area, and especially on the so-called *80 jar deposit* and *deposit 213*, which are well documented.

Entrepôt aux 80 jarres

Schaeffer described this deposit as isolated or juxtaposed *cellae* without any entrance. Here he found large jars and various artefacts, which were covered by a layer of burnt clay. One of the *cellae* contained 80 jars. We have no real idea of the dimension of this room, but, according to the notebooks, the jars were

⁵ Schaeffer 1949, p. 3–52.

⁶ Schaeffer 1929, 1932 and 1933.

⁷ See for instance Yon 1997, Marchegay 2001 and Marchegay 2004.

⁸ Schaeffer 1932, p. 2: “Toutes les couches du sol archéologique superposées à la craie à partir de 0m 60 et jusqu’à 4 m de profondeur étaient littéralement farcies de dépôts intentionnels comme ceux rencontrés les années précédentes autour des grandes tombes”.

stored side-by-side in lines of 8. We know from photographs (fig. 3 and 4) that the jars were touching the walls, we can propose that the width was about 3.20 m. The room's length was at least 4 m. The entrance of the *cella*, made of large blocks (probably doorjambs), was located in the north. The *cella* was surrounded by walls 60 centimeters thick; they are at approximately the same level as, or just below, the rims of the jars, since they were seen after the jars. A large amount of broken pottery was found against the south wall, and we think that the pottery belonged to another *cella* in the south.

Given this description, we can infer that these jars belonged to the first phase of construction of the building, but we can hardly suppose, as did Schaeffer, that it was razed to the ground in order to rebuild, since it would seem strange to build a new floor on well-organized Canaanite jars⁹. Rather, we think that the layer of burnt reddish clay was partly due to fire and to the collapse of the roof. The building, after its collapse, was probably rebuilt from the same floor plan, using the destroyed level as a floor.

During the 1931 excavation season, many jars were found on the south side of the excavation and it is difficult to locate exactly the one *80 jar deposit*. However, two of them were mapped onto the plan (but only one appears clearly on the notebook) and it can be identified with the northern ones. Because Schaeffer said that the west wall continues south, we can locate the storage room in the north (fig. 5).

Deposit 213

North of the *80 jars deposit*, Schaeffer discovered a well-built structure called an "enclosure wall". *Deposit 213*, also called the *enclosure deposit*¹⁰, was found inside this structure, but no enclosure wall is recorded in the notebook. This part of the excavation is not mapped onto the plan because it was buried, one year after its excavation, in 1932, while the map was drawn in 1935.

It is likely that this deposit included both *deposits 203* (27 Base-Ring juglets) and *207* (20 Base-Ring juglets), which were later re-classified by Schaeffer as the same deposit. Indeed, a few pages further on in the notebook, the name of *deposit 213* appears suddenly and Schaeffer writes that the deposit still held some beautiful juglets. So, it seems that deposits 203 and 207 were combined together with a new name: *deposit 213*.

This deposit was found under the same layer of reddish-burnt clay as the *80 jars deposit* and thus belonged to the first phase of the building. It contained at least one thousand artefacts, given Schaeffer's estimation of the large amount of sherds. Most of the material was intact (more than 150 objects according to the notebook, including Base-Ring juglets, other ceramics, alabaster vessels, ivory cosmetic dishes, faience, gold, beads, etc., that are not recorded in the inventory,

⁹ Yon 1997, p. 365. We have some example of such practice in the Roman world, for sanitary purposes, but the amphorae were turned upside-down.

¹⁰ Schaeffer 1932, p. 4–10, pl. V, 1, 2, 5.

cf. table 1). Apparently, ceramics were also found alone with sheep bones. *Deposit 213* was seemingly distributed across two different rooms. In the notebook, a *deposit 213 bis* is noted for the west room. If the distinction is made in the inventory (table 2), it is not made in the publication. The majority of the ceramics was of Cypriot origin, and most were Base-Ring juglets¹¹. Alabaster vessels, of local origin according to Schaeffer¹², were stored in a jar¹³. Given the inventory, *deposit 213 bis* consisted mainly of jewellery such as necklaces, beads and gold pendants. *Deposit 213* was made up of mostly Cypriot vessels (45 Base-Ring juglets, 3 Red-Lustrous bottles, and probably few White-Shaved potteries), as well as some Aegean vases.¹⁴ As we have no plan of the area, we have to note that these artefacts might also have come from a tomb not seen by Schaeffer¹⁵.

II Trading system

Even though Schaeffer did not recognize some buildings as houses during his excavations at Minet el-Beida, S. Marchegay¹⁶ has been able to match some of the structures that he found to the floor plan. It was only after 1934 that Schaeffer tied the town of Minet el-Beida to the harbour town of Ugarit. He first discussed warehouses and qualified them as “warehouses made of long/elongated and juxtaposed rooms like our moderns harbours”¹⁷. However, the maps we possess do not allow us to locate those rooms nor to identify any adjacent storage rooms.

According to Ugaritic Texts, the city harbour was inhabited by both locals and foreigners. The ancient name of Ma’ahadu may be related to the word *mīḥd*, which is equivalent to the Latin notion of the “*portus*”. Ma’ahadu was the harbour but also the place where all maritime taxes were collected¹⁸. The Ugaritic name comes from the semitic *ḥd* which means “to measure, to take”¹⁹ and matches well with the Arabic *ma’ahad* “a place where we take or where we can find something”²⁰.

¹¹ Schaeffer 1939, p. 31, fig. 20.

¹² Schaeffer 1939, p. 33, fig. 22.

¹³ Schaeffer 1939, p. 32, fig. 21.

¹⁴ Yon 2000a, p.4, 10, 11, 16, who also includes *Deposit 43* and its rhyta to *Deposit 213*.

¹⁵ Although it is probably not a build tomb.

¹⁶ Marchegay 2001.

¹⁷ Schaeffer 1939, p. 31: “de véritables entrepôts composés de nombreuses grandes pièces alignées comme les hangars dans nos ports modernes”.

¹⁸ Teixidor 1983, p. 310.

¹⁹ Astour 1970, p. 118.

²⁰ Astour 1970, p. 118, et Marchegay 2001, p. 14.

Some texts from Ugarit show that the palace gave many jars of oil to foreigners, as well as to locals. In the text RS 18.42, for example, we find that 160 jars are given to a Cypriot, 130 to an Egyptian and 100 to *Tlmyn*, son of *ʿdy*. These individuals were probably traders²¹ from Ugarit or people there on business. It probably means that foreign traders had to store the jars until their departure, if their boats were not available or if they were waiting for a caravan.

But what were these buildings? Were they real warehouses? The difficulties in identifying the type of structure mostly entail distinguishing domestic storage from storage in warehouses, since, as was usually the case with houses in the Mediterranean world, jars were kept in storage for domestic purposes. In the city of Ugarit few warehouses were identified. One of them, located in the locus 20 of the house E²², can either be a warehouse or a craftsmen room²³. This big room is isolated from the rest of the building by a large court²⁴.

In the present study, and given the facts stated in the excavation notebooks and the quantities of artefacts, the evidence points in the direction of warehouses even if the floor plan of these buildings does not confirm it²⁵ and shows similari-

²¹ Cf. Sauvage 2005.

²² Îlot XIII, Tranchée Ville Sud.

²³ Callot, 1994, p. 176, fig. 88 and 319.

²⁴ Callot, 1994, p. 176.

²⁵ Traditionally, we identify a warehouse, without domestic purpose, by its elongated shape, its large size and the type of goods kept in it. But, since few storage buildings from the Late Bronze Age have been clearly identified, it is still not known whether this type of identification is valid. In fact, the function of some of these elongated structures is still debated. This is, for instance, the case of the building P in Kommos (Crete). This 38-meter long building consists of 4 long *cellae*, orientated E–W; each *cellae* was originally 5.60 meters wide and open to the west facing the sea. At first, given the ground plan of this building, we might think that it was devoted to the storage of goods. However, M. C. Shaw (Shaw 1985, p. 22–25) argues convincingly that, given the open side of the building, it might have been a ship-shed. The ashlar building (building X), excavated by A. K. South (South/Todd 1985; South *et alii* 1989), in Kalavassos Ayios Demetrios (Cyprus), to be identified as a warehouse, is 35 by 30 meters wide and divided into 3 *cellae* by two rows of pillars. The storage capacity was about 40 large *pithoi*. This structure is considered an official building of the State because of the caliber of its construction as well as the quality of its ceramics. If it was indeed a warehouse, we can further deduce that the storage of goods was probably controlled by the administration. Other examples include Cretan palaces (Palaikastro, Sitia, Mochlos, Knossos, Tylissos, Zakros and Malia, all important examples of possible warehouses or associated structures) such as Haghia Triada, where one room was filled with oxhide ingots (Baurain 1984, p. 147, Buchholz 1967, p. 236–237 and ΚΡΗΤΗ-ΑΙΓΥΠΤΟΣ. Πολιτιστικοί δεσμοί τριών χιλιετιών, p. 135, n° 116), or the building G in Kato Zakros (Platon 1963, p. 273 and 275, and Bass 1967, p. 61 and 76), where 6 oxhide ingots and an elephant tusk were found together. In Egypt, warehouses are well documented like the ones in the Ramesseum or Um el Rakham (Snape 1998 and 2003). All of them consist of side-by-side *cellae*. These buildings, commonly located near temples or palaces, usually con-

ties with workshop areas such as the Petsas house or the house of the Wine Merchant in Mycenae²⁶. It is even possible that those buildings were royal warehouses in which goods were collected either from taxes or were stored before being distributed to traders.²⁷ Yet, as of today, no warehouse has been clearly identified in the royal palace of Ugarit; Schaeffer only mentions rooms with storage jars, and it is thus likely that any possible storage facilities were located outside the palace. We can suppose they were located in Minet el-Beida because the harbour's captain, Rashapabu, used to collect taxes there²⁸. The deposits of Minet el-Beida could also be the remains of foreign traders' warehouses. The latter stocked some goods in their houses at the harbour of Ugarit before sending them on to their own countries or selling them in Ugarit. But, according to RS 17.130, because no foreign trader was allowed to own a house or land in the city of Ugarit, these buildings were either rented by the foreign traders or lent by the city administration. If these buildings were used by Ugaritic traders or by a firm of traders from Ugarit, those warehouses would be related to royal power, as it seems that Ugaritic traders were mostly or entirely dependant on the state²⁹.

Here, it seems that imported goods were not stored in the same building as the local ones. In those two deposits, the complete absence of White Slip ceramics is striking. However, Cypriot artefacts are predominant in *deposit 213* while the *80 jar deposit* is of Levantine origin. This observation can lead us to different hypotheses:

- The exchange of common Cypriot ceramics (*i. e.* White slip) was not part of the same economic system as prestigious goods³⁰. After their arrival in Western Asia, some imported ceramics shifted to local trade, which was not recorded in economic texts. The absence of such “common” ceramics suggests that those warehouses were dependent on the king's administration³¹.
- Traders specialized in a particular kind of trade or in a particular kind of goods. Traders dealing with prestigious goods on the international scale were certainly not the same as those selling common ceramics on a local scale.

It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the Minet el-Beida structures. However, we can compare Ugaritic's traders with Polanyi's *factor*, who were in

tained jars and ceramics and are clearly related to official or royal buildings.

²⁶ Haskell 1981, p. 226; Shelton 2000–2003.

²⁷ This could have been the case of the House of the Oil Merchant in Mycenae where tablets and fragments of pictorial wall paintings were found; both considered as the mark of a palatial control. Darcque 2005.

²⁸ Cf. RS 17.21, RS 17.22 + 17.87, RS 17.20, RS 17.33, RS 17.149.

²⁹ Sauvage 2005.

³⁰ M. Yon suggests that they were used locally after their importation, Yon 2001, p. 123.

³¹ Cypriot White Slip ceramics, found in great quantities in the Levantine sites, were not considered a high social mark associated only with elite, Bergoffen 1991.

a position to make profit thanks to the royal endowments.³² From this comparison, we can infer that traders' warehouses were, to a certain extent, managed by the royal administration. The quarter of Minet el-Beida, excavated in 1931 by Schaeffer could thus be either the royal warehouses of the harbour, the place where taxes were stored or some trader's buildings. Only further excavation and new texts on trade will help us to determine definitively what its use was.

Type of find	Number
Ivory	9
Jewell- cylinder-seals, etc.	4
Base-Ring juglets	46
Glass pearl	3
Alabaster	19
Shell	1
Ax	1
Red lustrous	3
Lamp	1
Other Cypriot ceramics?	7
Rhyton ³³	3
Domestic stirrup jar	1
Scarab	1
Total	99

Table 1 : Inventoried finds from *deposit 213*

Type of find	Number
Glass	1
Gold pendant	11
Beads	2
Silver pendant	3
Bilbils	1
Necklace	2
Total	20

Table 2 : Inventoried finds from *deposit 213 bis*

³² Sauvage 2005.

³³ And maybe a 4th one, cf. Yon 2000b, p. 30.

Bibliography

- Astour, M. C., 1970: Maḥadu, the harbor of Ugarit. *JESHO* 13, 113–127.
- Bass, G. F., 1967: Cape Gelidonya. A Bronze Age Shipwreck. *Transactions of the American Philosophy Society N. S.* 57/8, 163–167.
- Baurain, Cl., 1984: Chypre et la Méditerranée orientale au Bronze Récent. Synthèse historique, *Etudes Chypriotes IV*. Paris.
- Branigan, K., 1989: Minoan Foreign Relations in Transition. In *Transition, le monde égéen du Bronze Moyen au Bronze Récent, Actes de la deuxième rencontre égéenne internationale de l'Université de Liège (18–20 avril 1988), Université de Liège*. Liège. Pp. 65–71.
- Buchholz, H.-G., 1967: Analysen prähistorischer Metallfunde aus Zypern und den Nachbarländern. *Berliner Jahrbuch für Vor- und Frühgeschichte* 7, 189–256.
- Callot, O. 1994: La tranchée «Ville Sud», *Études d'architecture domestique*. Ras Shamra-Ougarit 10. Paris: ERC.
- Darcque P., 2005: Mycènes: une ville ou un palais?. In I. Bradfer-Burdet / B. Detournay / R. Laffineur (eds.): *KPHΣ TEXNITHΣ, L'artisan crétois, Recueil d'articles en l'honneur de Jean-Claude Poursat*, publié à l'occasion des 40 ans de la découverte du Quartier Mu. *Aegaeum* 26. Université de Liège. Pp. 51–60.
- Foster, B. R., 1987: The Late Bronze Age Palace Economy: A view from the East. In R. Hägg / N. Marinatos (eds.): *The Function of the Minoan Palaces, Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens*, 10–16 June, 1984. Stockholm: Paul Aströms Forlag. Pp. 11–16.
- Haskell, W. H., 1981: Coarse-Ware Stirrup-Jars at Mycenae. *BSA* 76, 225–238
- Janssen, J. J., 1961: Two Ancient Egyptian Ship's logs, *Papyrus Leiden I 350 verso and Papyrus Turin 2008+2016*. Leyde: E. J. Brill.
- ΚΡΗΤΗ-ΑΙΓΥΠΤΟΣ. Πολιτιστικοί δεσμοί τριών χιλιετιών. exhibition catalogue. Heraklion, 2000.
- Liverani, M., 1979: La dotazione dei mercanti di Ugarit. *UF* 11, 495–503.
- Marchegay, S., 2001: Un plan des fouilles 1929–1935 à Minet el-Beida, le port d'Ougarit. In M. Yon / D. Arnaud (eds.): *Études Ougaritiques I, travaux 1985–1995*. ERC, Paris: ERC. Pp. 11–40.
- Marchegay, S., 2004: Minet el-Beida, port d'Ougarit. In Y. Calvet / G. Galliano (eds.): *Le royaume d'Ougarit, aux origines de l'alphabet*. Paris: Somogy, éditions d'art. Pp. 54.
- Platon, N., 1963: A New Minoan Palace. *Archaeology* 16, p. 269–275.
- Sauvage, C., 2005: Quelques figures de commerçants d'après les textes égyptiens et ougaritiques, au Bronze Récent. In *Autour de Polanyi*. Paris: De Boccard. Pp. 155–170.
- 2006: Les routes maritimes en Méditerranée orientale. PhD Dissertation, Université Lumière, Lyon 2.
- Schaeffer, C. F. A., 1929: Les fouilles de Minet el-Beida et de Ras Shamra (campagne du printemps 1929), *Rapport sommaire*. *Syria* 10, 285–303.

- 1932: Les fouilles de Minet el-Beida et de Ras Shamra, Troisième Campagne (Printemps 1931), rapport sommaire, Syria 13, 1–27.
- 1933: Les fouilles de Minet el-Beida et de Ras Shamra Quatrième Campagne (Printemps 1932), rapport sommaire. Syria 14, 93–127.
- 1939: Ugaritica I. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
- 1949: Ugaritica II, Nouvelle étude relative aux découvertes de Ras Shamra. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
- Shaw, M. C., 1985: Late Minoan I Building J/T, and Late Minoan III Buildings N and P at Kommos: Their Nature and Possible Uses as Residences, Palaces, and/or Emporia. In J. W. Shaw / M. C. Shaw (eds.): A great Minoan Triangle in South-Central Crete: Kommos, Hagia Triadha Phaistos, Proceedings of the Kommos Symposium held at the Royal Hotel, Toronto, Canada on December 29, 1984. Scripta Mediterranean VI.
- Snape, S. R., 1998: Walls, Wells and Wandering Merchants: Egyptian Control of Marmarica in the Late Bronze Age. In C. J. Eyre (ed.): Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists. OLA 82. Louvain: Uitgeverij Peeters. Pp. 1081–1084.
- 2003: Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham and Egyptian Foreign Trade in the 13th Century BC. In N. Stampolidis / V. Karageorghis (eds.): Sea Routes ... Interconnections in the Mediterranean 16th–6th c. BC. Proceedings of the International Symposium held at Rethymnon, Crete, September 29th – October 2nd 2002. Athènes: University of Crete and the A. G. Leventis Foundation. Pp. 63–70.
- South, A. K. / Todd, Ian A., 1985: In Quest of Cypriote Copper Traders, Excavations at Ayios Dimitrios. Archaeology 1985, 40–47.
- South, A. K., et alii, 1989: Vasilikos Valley Project 3: Kalavassos-Ayios Dimitrios II: Ceramics, Objects, Tombs. Specialist Studies. Göteborg.
- Teixidor, J., 1983: Palmyrene *mḥwz* and Ugaritic *mḥd*. UF 15, 309–311.
- Valbelle, D., 1990: Les 9 arcs: l’Égypte et les étrangers de la préhistoire à la conquête d’Alexandre. Paris: A. Collin.
- Warren, P. M., 1991: A Merchant Class in Bronze Age Crete? The evidence of Egyptian Stone Vessel from the City of Knossos. In *Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean*. SIMA 90. Göteborg. Pp. 295–301.
- Wiener, M. H., 1991: The Nature and Control of Minoan Foreign Trade. In *Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean*. SIMA 90. Göteborg. Pp. 325–350.
- Yon, M., 1997: Ougarit et le port de Mahadou/Minet el-Beida. In S. Swiny / R. Holfelder / H. Wylde Swiny (eds.): *Res Maritimae, Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean from Prehistory to Late Antiquity*, Proceeding of the second international Symposium “Cities on the Sea”, Nicosia, Cyprus, October 18–22, 1994. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press. Pp. 357–369.
- 2000a: Répartition et contextes de la céramique mycénienne d’Ougarit. In M. Yon / V. Karageorghis / N. Hirschfeld (eds.): *Céramiques mycéniennes*. RSO XIII. Paris: Fondation A. G. Levantis, ERC. Pp. 1–28.
- 2000b: Index chronologique des lieux de trouvaille de la céramique mycé-

- nienne d'Ougarit au Louvre. In M. Yon / V. Karageorghis / N. Hirschfeld (eds.): *Céramiques mycéniennes*. RSO XIII. Paris: Fondation A. G. Leventis, ERC. Pp. 29–35.
- 2001: White Slip Ware in the Northern Levant. In V. Karageorghis (ed.): *The White Slip Ware of Late Bronze Age Cyprus, Proceedings of an International Conference, Nicosia 29th–30th October 1998*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Pp. 117–125.

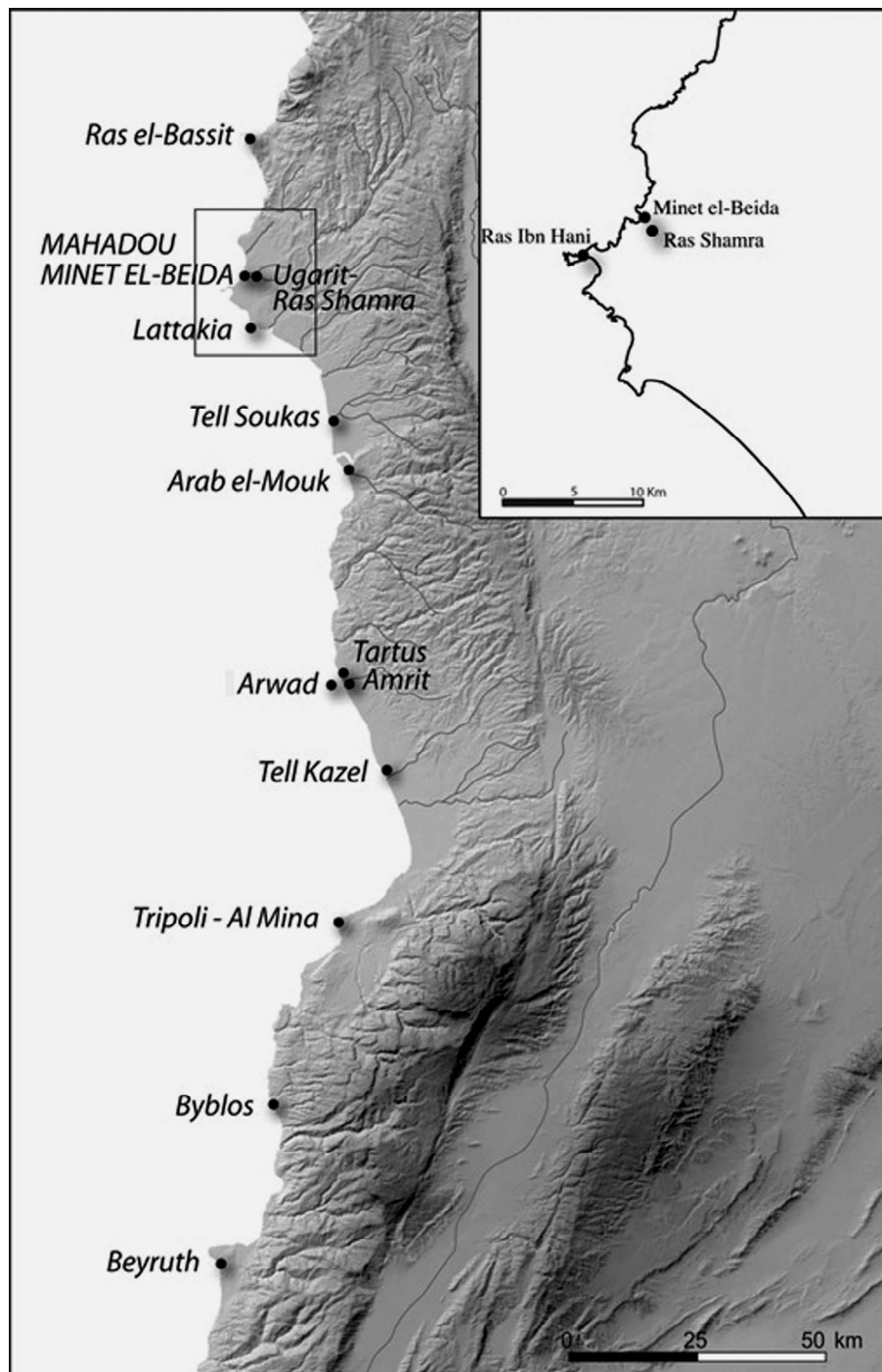


Fig. 1: the northern Levant, DAO (C. Sauvage)



Fig. 2: Minet el-Beida. after Marchegay 2001, p. 26



Fig. 3: the 80's jars deposit, photo: archives of the French Mission



Fig. 4: the 80's jars deposit, photo: archives of the French Mission



Fig. 5: Minet el-Beida after 1935 (after Marchegay, 2001)