

The iconography of the Ibiza gem MAI 3650 reconsidered

E. Gubel - Brussels

[The jasper seal under discussion has already aroused considerable interest because of its intriguing iconography. Nowadays, the bull-headed deity smiting an enemy is generally held to be a motif tributary to some Seth-Baal syncretism in ancient Phoenician belief, a fusion possibly personified by Reshep. In the present writer's opinion, however, the object in the god's left hand may serve as a clue to the better understanding of the deity represented. Although sometimes identified as a spear, Blázquez' earlier interpretation as a vegetal leaf is to be preferred on the basis of comparative evidence. As a review of the relevant material indeed reveals, the item concerned is a schematized rendering of the cypress tree which on other seals and on bowls from Cyprus and Italy serves as an indication of the dwelling-place of a dwarf-demon dispatched by the "hunter Baal". The identity of the bull-headed god on the Ibiza scarab and the former deity is furthermore corroborated by the logical place he assumes within the framework of a large iconographical class of seals established by the present contribution.]

The present contribution aims to revalue a detail figuring on the "Smiting Baal" seal found in the necropolis of Puig des Molins, Ibiza. The editors of *Aula Orientalis* having chosen this particular scarab to serve as the vignette of their new series, the opportunity for a renewed discussion of this item appears most suitable indeed, especially so in view of the detail's importance for the interpretation of the iconography supplied (fig. 1).

The seal in question became more widely known in 1967, when it was incorporated in J.M. Blázquez' discussion of a group of seals from Ibiza¹. Ever since, this gem has aroused the interest of several scholars including W. Culican² and, more recently, J.H. Fernández and J. Padró i Parcerisa³. In their admirable scientific catalogue of seals uncovered in the main Ibizan necropolis, they provide a full description of this

* The photograph fig. 1a,b appears by kind permission of J.H. Fernández, curator of the Museo Arqueológico de Ibiza. Fig. 2 was reprinted from E. Gjerstad, "Decorated Metal Bowls from Cyprus", *Opuscula Archeologica* 4(1946), pl. VIII; fig. 4 from A. Furtwängler, *Die Antiken Gemmen*. Leipzig-Berlin 1900, pl. XV:9. Fig. 3, finally, appears by courtesy of Dr. L. Limme, head of the Egyptian Department of the Royal Museums for Art and History, Brussels.

1. J.M. Blázquez, "Escarabeos de Ibiza (Baleares)", *RSL* 33(1967)336-339, n.º VIII.

2. W. Culican, "Baal on an Ibiza Gem", *RSF* 4(1976)57-68, pl. VIII:1.

3. J.H. Fernández - J. Padró, *Escarabeos del museo arqueológico de Ibiza* (Trabajos del Museo Arqueológico de Ibiza 7). Madrid 1982, n.º 40 p. 113-116, fig. 40 p. 133 (colour). To the bibliography should now be added J.H. Fernández, *Guía del Museo monográfico del Puig des Molins* (Trabajos del Museo Arqueológico de Ibiza 10). Madrid 1983, p. 121, below.

green jasper scarab to which readers of the present paper are referred for all technical data. It should be noted, however, that the latter authors also supplied firm dating evidence for this seal (450 B.C. or slightly later) as implied by the presence of an Attic red-figure *lékythos* this find was associated with. As for the motif itself, all scholars mentioned above agree that the seal represents the bull-headed Baal assuming the role of the vanquishing Pharaoh smiting an enemy.

This theme was propagated abroad by Egyptian artefacts such as scarabs, many of which eventually found their way to the Phoenician coastal strip⁴. Moreover, the "historical" Phoenicians' ancestors were made familiar with this iconographical tradition by way of the commemorative rock-cut stelae which marked the passage of the Egyptian army in their homeland. Thus, both Seti I and his son Ramesses II are portrayed in the posture of slaying their enemies with either a club or a scimitar on the well known stelae on the banks of the Nahr el-Kebir⁵. Much less known is a similar monument near Adloun, left behind by a Pharaoh whose name unfortunately vanished from history by erosion⁶.

The so-called "Pantheon" bowl from Nimrud possibly exemplifies the earliest adoption of this theme in Phoenician art (1. 9th?-m. 8th c.B.C.)⁷. The Egyptianizing fashion in which the victorious king or rather, Baal, appears here is prototypical for quite a few related scenes on later bowls and seals. In passing, it should be noted that this theme seems absent in the repertoire of the ivory carvers where, for reasons unknown, the icon of the victor as a sphinx trampling his enemies, was apparently given priority. Whatever the grounds for this marked preference may be, "the conquering Baal iconography has", as pointed out by W. Culican, "two strains in Phoenician art, one frankly Egyptian... the other a Phoenician version of the conquering hero vanquishing lions or a human enemy"⁸.

As far as known to the present writer, the oriental version of the triumphant Baal occurs for the first time on the fragmentary silver bowl from Kourion (fig. 2), classified by E. Gjerstad in his Cypro-Phoenician II group (700-600 B.C.)⁹. Both strains of the conquering Baal iconography are united on this document. Whereas the medallion represents the theme of the "Pharaoh smiting his enemies", the oriental Baal, armed with bow and fenestrated axe is pictured as slaying a victim on the same bowl's outer frieze. The latter scene appears here in the context of a narrative known as the "Hunter's Day" which recurs in other bowls from Cyprus and Italy. But this topic has already been discussed too thoroughly in previous publications to be repeated now. It is important, however, to emphasize that both the bowl fig. 2 and the related comparanda mark a distinction between the Egyptianizing Pharaoh-like figure and its oriental equivalent. On all bowls



Fig. 1

4. e.g. P.M. Bikai, *The Pottery of Tyre*. Warminster 1978, pl. XLVA: 50.

5. N. Jidejian, *Beirut through the Ages*. Beirut 1973, pls. 26, 29, 30, 32.

6. S. Ronzevalle, "Notes et études d'archéologie orientale I: IV. Stèle d'Adloun", in *MéFocOr* 3/2(1909)793, pl. IX.

7. R.D. Barnett, "The Nimrud Bowls in the British Museum", *RSF* 2(1974)23, pl. XVII.

8. W. Culican, *art. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

9. Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.514556 (= Cesnola 4556), E. Gjerstad, *art. cit.*, p. 10.

showing the respective representations of both strains in the Baal iconography, priority is given to the Pharaoh-like figure as the emblem figuring generally (though not invariably) on the central medallion¹⁰. Apparently, the icon of the Egyptian hero smiting his victims served as a visual idiom, a synopsis of the achievements of his oriental equivalent which were related in the encircling friezes. This hypothesis has the advantage that it accounts for the similarity in posture assumed by both figures, as well as for the interchangeability of their armour. It should be noted moreover that on several representations, they are both accompanied by a dog¹¹. On later seals, this animal frequently appears as an adjunct of the oriental "Smiting Baal"¹². It recurs in the iconography of another smiting deity identified as Melqart-Heracles¹³. Whether this assimilation and the presence of both dog and scimitar (a weapon used by both *baalim*) on the later mint of Tyre allows the identification of the divine huntsman as the-king-of-the-town/Melqart, tutelary god of Tyre, thus becomes an attractive alternative indeed¹⁴. This particular question, however, must be dealt with elsewhere. Having elucidated both strains in Phoenician art, the one harking back to an Egyptian propagandistic image, the other exemplifying but a momentum in an oriental narrative, we can now return to the Ibiza gem. Disregarding for the time being the peculiar shape of Baal's head, it should indeed be questioned which one of the two strains the present scarab displays. This question, to be sure, not merely draws on the mere style displayed by the seal's motif, but concerns first of all the identity of the antagonists. While acknowledging the oriental element in this icon's mythological background (the Baal-bull assimilation as known already from Ugaritic religion¹⁵, most authors have thus far privileged the connection with the theme of the "Smiting Pharaoh". Fair enough, this possibility not only seems attractive in view of the highly Egyptianizing details displayed, but also on account of the religious connotation of the latter theme in its original context. As pointed out by W. Culican, the theme of the Pharaoh dispatching his enemies is mirrored in the iconography of Seth attacking the Apophis serpent¹⁶. A fayence plaque from the reign of Shoshenq III (?) (825-773 B.C.) now in the Brussels Museums, renders this motif in a very orientalizing fashion¹⁷ (fig. 3). This item emphasizes the validity of Culican's remark that behind such Egyptian representations "must lie some Syro-Canaanite theme to account for these artistic borrowings, at least some Canaanite parallel to the Seth story"¹⁸. The tasseled mitre worn by this Seth-Baal forms the prototype of the one worn by the smiting Baal on the Ibiza gem, whereas the contour of the latter's sleeves is highly reminiscent of the former's wings¹⁹. As an intriguing conformity with this seal's motif, at least one version of the aforesaid theme depicts Seth with the head of a bull. These parallels and the ichtyomorph body of the supine victim on the item led Culican and other scholars to the conclusion that this motif was tributary to some Seth-Baal syncretism in ancient Phoenician belief, a fusion possibly personified by Reshep²⁰.

10. See A. Imai, *Some Aspects of "Phoenician Bowls" with special Reference to the Proto-Cypriote Class and the Cypro-Phoenician Class*. Columbia 1977, p. 447-477 for a discussion.

11. *Ibidem*, p. 411.

12. e.g. W. Culican, "The Iconography of Some Phoenician Seals and Seal Impressions", *AusJ BibArch* 1(1960)83, pl. III:A1, B1.

13. *Ibidem*, p. 88.

14. On this topic, see C. Tzavellas-Bonnet, "Le dieu Melqart en Phénicie et dans le bassin méditerranéen: un culte national et officiel", *Studia Phoenicia* 2(1983)195-207. Another attribute of the divine huntsman, the fenestrated axe, forms an additional conformity with the iconography of Melqart: W. Culican, "Melqart Representations on Phoenician Seals", *Abr Nahrain* 2(1960-1961)41-54.

15. *Id.*, *art. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 61-63.

16. *Ibidem*, pp. 64-67; J.H. Fernández - J. Padró, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.

17. Brussels, Royal Museums for Art and History, E. 6190 (ex Mc.Gregor coll.). Faïence, 6,84 × 5,5 × 0,97 cm; H. Seeden, *The Standing Armed Figurines in the Levant* (PBF I: 1). München 1980, p. 142, pl. 138:20.

18. W. Culican, *art. cit.*, p. 65.

19. *Ibidem*, p. 66.

20. *Ibidem*, p. 65.

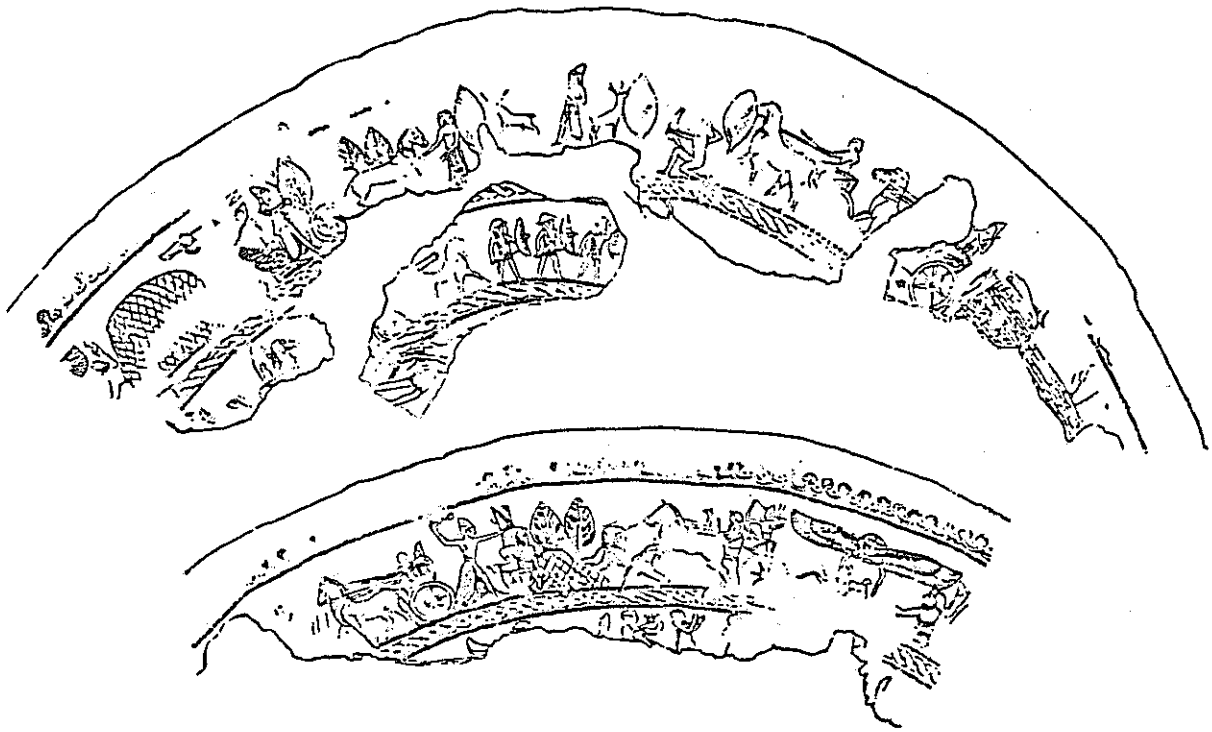


Fig. 2

By no means do I wish to question the validity of this train of thought. In spite of the obvious conformities with the Egyptian strain of the Baal iconography, however, I do propose to regard the motif on the Ibiza scarab as a momentum in the "Huntsman Day"-cycle, rather than as an effigy of the victorious (Seth-Rešep-)Baal smiting an ichthyomorph enemy. The reasons for this preference are intimately linked with the interpretation of a detail announced as the starting point of this contribution. The detail concerned figures immediately above the vanquished enemy's head. As will be demonstrated below, this singular item was correctly identified by J.M. Blázquez as a vegetal leaf ("una hoja")²¹. More recently, however, J. Padró proposed to identify this figuration as a weapon, albeit "una extraña arma", an interpretation in line with the Egyptian icon of the fearsome Pharaoh both he and Blázquez consider as the origin of the motif on the Ibiza gem²². But despite the thematic similarities, the subject representation merely highlights the artistic overlap displayed in renderings of the victorious "Pharaoh" and Baal motifs. Therefore, I find it hard to follow Padró when he states: "el arma que el dios sostiene con su mano izquierda sobre la cabeza de su enemigo tiene una extraña apariencia, asemejándose a una hoja vegetal o a un pequeño ciprés. En realidad ha de tratarse sin duda de un arma, que es posible identificar con una corta lanza de hoja extraordinariamente ancha"²³. This statement appears far too unconditional to be acceptable. To begin with, spears with broad leaved heads of the type referred to by Padró are never carried by the antagonists in the context of scenes which may have inspired Phoenician variants on the smiting Pharaoh-theme. As a matter of fact, the abovementioned characteristics are lacking in both the typology of Egyptian and Levantine spears. The heads of such spears would indeed have to show the marked nervation as exemplified in subject representation. Quite on the

21. J.M. Blázquez, *art. cit.*, p. 336.

22. J.H. Fernández - J. Padró, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

23. *Ibidem*, p. 115.



Fig.3. Seth attacking the Apophis serpent (Brussels Museum)

contrary, identical heads recur as the coronation of long shafts held by both male and female deities represented on other Phoenician seals²⁴. In our mutual discussion of the latter evidence, both Culican and I have explicitly cautioned for the one-sided identification of such elements as, specifically, broad-leaved spears, favoring the alternative of floral sceptres²⁵. The presence of an identical, albeit shorter element on the Ibiza seal, makes this possibility all the more likely, providing at the same time new evidence as to the identity of the figures shown.

As pointed out in Padró's description quoted above, the floral element does indeed resemble a cypress. Instead of looking for spears with cypresslike heads, however, our attention should rather focus on cypress representations in Phoenician art. Such a survey proves that cypress trees are an omnipresent feature of the landscape as depicted on many a Phoenician bowl found in Cyprus and Italy, representing events from the "Huntsman Day"-cycle²⁶. On the silver bowl fig. 2, two cypress trees represent the typical vegetation of the mountainous dwelling place of a dwarf-demon who is eventually dispatched with a blow of (oriental) Baal's fenestrated axe. Around the middle of the 1st millennium B.C., this version is again met with in the iconography of several seals, discussed by W. Culican²⁷. One example out of this series, the production of which seems to have been concentrated at Tharros, is of the utmost importance to our topic. Unlike most other seals, this particular gem situates the antagonists (smiting Baal and his dwarf-like victim) in the familiar landscape known from the Kourion bowl (fig. 4)²⁸; The *nb*-like filling design on the seal's lower segment serves as an illustration of the rocky landscape, for it is formed by a series of dots. Atop the *nb*, an arch-like configuration of such dots represents the entrance of the cave in which the dwarf-demon vainly seeks refuge. At the peak of this arch, a cypress once more appears as the typical vegetation form of his dwelling place.

Considering the conformity of the vegetal element on the Ibiza seal to the cypress trees figuring on the aforesaid evidence, there can be little doubt that this element had the same meaning as well. Its presence on the Ibiza scarab relates the bull-headed Baal to the human-headed divine huntsman attested on both bowls and seals alike and identifies the victim as the dwarf-like cave-dweller dispatched by the former. The singular use of the *nb* on the Tharros seal just discussed, does nothing but reinforce the accuracy of this view. As on the seal fig. 4, the *nb* once more symbolizes the dwarf-demon's home-grounds; the device is integrated with the troll's body, however, so as to give the impression that he is literally torn off his shelter. Along with the cypress, this inventive image provides the clue to the pictorial puzzle this seal represents. Both details refer to the typical setting of the divine huntsman's victory over the dwarf-demon, at the same time identifying the antagonists.

The Ibiza seal MAI 3.650 consequently yields an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of Phoenician religious iconography, for it stands proof to the fact that the divine huntsman known elsewhere in a human form could also assume a more animal form. The analysis of the vegetal detail figuring on this seal thus results in the confirmation of both *Baalim*'s identity, a hypothesis put forward earlier by Culican²⁹.

In order to situate this particular Baal within the wider context of the iconographical "families" as evidenced in Phoenician art, the following scheme may serve as a key:

The first group (1) embodies representations of the oriental divine huntsman, whose feats of arms

24. E. Gubel, "An Essay on the Axe-bearing Astarte and her Role in a Phoenician Triad", *RSF* 8(1980)pls. I-II; cf. *infra* nn. 32, 33.

25. *Ibidem*, p. 9-11; W. Culican, *art. cit.* (n. 14), pp. 47-48.

26. A. Imai, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-403.

27. W. Culican, *art. cit.* (n. 2), pls. VIII:3; IX:1,3; cf. *idem*, *art. cit.* (n. 12), pp. 86-87; S.F. Bondi, "Gli scarabei di Monte Sirai", in *Saggi fenici-I*. Roma 1975, n.º 7, pp. 75, 86-87, pl. VI:7, fig. p. 77.

28. A. Furtwängler, *op. cit.*, pl. XV:9.

29. W. Culican, *art. cit.* (n. 2), p. 57. In passing, it should be stressed that the rectangular *serekh*-like cartouche on the seal constitutes another link with the Huntsman Baal iconography, for similar designs decorate most of the bowls featuring this narrative.

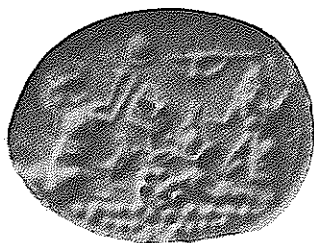


Fig. 4

include the slaying of a yet nameless troll³⁰. As pointed out above, this iconographical series “translates” the Egyptianizing image of the “victorious Pharaoh” (group 3)³¹ in terms of oriental mythology, emphasizing the narrative aspect as opposed to the emblematic nature of the latter group. The present seal (hitherto the only one representative of group 2), bridges the distance between both groups 1 and 3 in that it combines individual elements elsewhere characteristic of either one of these categories (Egyptianizing minutiae with both the cypress and dwarf-like demon). The Ibiza seal MAI 3.650 furthermore adds another element to the iconography of the huntsman Baal, providing him with the head of a bull. The latter detail links him with a series of seals from the western Mediterranean realm, representing seated bull-headed gods (group 4) and their female, cow-headed counterparts (group 6)³². Both groups are doubled by a series of representations depicting either a seated Baal (group 5) or a Baalat (group 7), both with human heads³³. The reasons for linking the last four categories to the iconographical pedigree of, more precisely, the huntsman Baal, are manifold. Not only do these seals depict the protagonists in an identical context (seated on sphinx-, *hwt* thrones³⁴, mostly in front

30. S.F. Bondi, *art. cit.*, p. 86, nn. 48-52 for a list of Sardinian examples and *ibidem*, n.º 7; add also A. Furtwängler, *op. cit.* pl. XV:9 (= our fig. 4) and the unpublished agate scarab N. 3314 of unknown provenance, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

31. For this motif on bowls, *cf. supra*, n. 10 and W. Culican, *art. cit.* (n. 2), for similar representations on seals.

32. It is extremely hazardous to mark the distinction between bull- and cow-headed deities in Phoenician glyptic art, as the sealcutters themselves seem to have confused both categories. Thus, the more female-looking ones wear broad-sleeved garments with open cuffs; their horns protrude in the same manner as those of the Ibizan Baal (!) with whom they share the same *Hedjet*-like mitre (or is it a *lebbude*?). In both examples conform with Mai 3.650 on the stylistical plan, they occupy a sphinx-throne: W. Culican, *art. cit.* (n. 2), pl. VIII:2 (= Cabinet des Médailles n.º 1055) and the recently published seal in P. Zazoff, *Die Antiken Gemmen*. München 1983, pl. 20:8 (Syracusa, Museo Archeologico n.º 25242). Both divinities hold a sceptre with a knob-like terminal, a schematized form of the leaf- or cypress-like terminals discussed above. Their presumed male counterparts hold different sceptres and occupy seats of a more modest appearance (S.F. Bondi, *art. cit.*, n.º 8, pp. 75-77, 88-89, pl. VI; C. Roman, *Antigüedades Ebusitanas*. Barcelona 1913, pl. C. top row central figure; H.B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Cameos, Greek, Etruscan and Roman in the British Museum*. London 1926, n.º 356 p. 43, pl. VI). Their garments are equally wide-sleeved, but with close-fitting cuffs as on the dress of the Ibizan Baal; their mitres are reduced to a meaningless shape in between their horns.

33. Group 5 embodies representations of a seated, bearded god who is distinguished from very similar representations by the fact that he wears a cap the horns of which are reminiscent of those of the bull-Baal: G. Ebers, “Sopra alcune antichità sarde e loro provenienza”, *Annali dell’Istituto di corrispondenza archeologica* 55(1883)135, pl. G:46; J.H. Fernández - J. Padró, *op. cit.*, n.º 43, pp. 121-126, 134; A. Furtwängler, *op. cit.*, p. 70, pl. XV: 3; A. Vives y Escudero, *Estudio de Arqueología Cartaginesa. La necrópolis de Ibiza*. Madrid 1917, n.º 352 p. 70, pl. XXV:6 and the examples from Carthage: J. Vercoutter, *Les objets égyptiens et égyptisants du mobilier funéraire carthaginois*. Paris 1945, n.º 584, p. 222, pl. XVI and Byblos: M. Dunand, *Fouilles de Byblos II (1933-1938)*. Paris 1954-1958, n.º 6950, p. 53, pl. CXCVIII. Closely related to this group as well is a series of seals representing a seated Baal carrying Melqart’s and the divine huntsman’s fenestrated axe in addition to a sceptre with cypress-like terminal: E. Gubel, *art. cit.*, pl. II:1-2 (Louvre E.25908); A. Furtwängler, *op. cit.*, II, p. 70, III, p. 109, I, pl. XV:4 and a very similar unpublished green jasper seal from the Castagnino collection (Cagliari, Museo nazionale, n.º 93.19764). Group 7 includes examples such as the jasper seal now in Hamburg, depicting a Baalat with cow’s horns, a fenestrated axe and the sceptre with leaf-like terminal, thus differentiating her from the current Isis/Hathor - Astarte types: E. Gubel, *art. cit.*, pl. I.

34. For the terminology of Phoenician furniture, see my forthcoming monograph on the subject (winter 1986).

of thymateria) as in groups 4 and 6; they also wear bovine crowns or hold sceptres aloft with cypress-like terminals.

This brief outline of the many ramifications of the huntsman Baal iconography emphasizes the importance of this theme in the Phoenician West. The chart drawn above merely deals with direct relatives of the figure on the Ibiza gem and could of course be completed with additional categories. Thus, seals depicting the huntsman chasing wild animals³⁵ could easily be linked with our group 1, while another group would include e.g. representations of the standing Baal³⁶ and gems confronting male and female horned divinities³⁷. Such an elaboration, however, falls beyond the scope of the present contribution, as does an in-depth comparison of the stylistic differences displayed by the individual items representing the groups isolated above.

To conclude, one more remark should be added concerning the origin of MAI 3.650. Both the style and the Sardinian connections of individual details, refute the possibility of local manufacture. The associated finds (an Attic *lékythos*, a glass pendant and a scarab) corroborate this view³⁸. The second scarab depicts a winged sea-dragon³⁹, a current theme on the so-called island gems⁴⁰, well attested in the art of later sealcutters working at Tharros⁴¹. With no similar evidence from the Phoenician homeland on hand to date, the hypothesis of an import from a Sardinian lapidary workshop will no doubt meet with general acceptance.

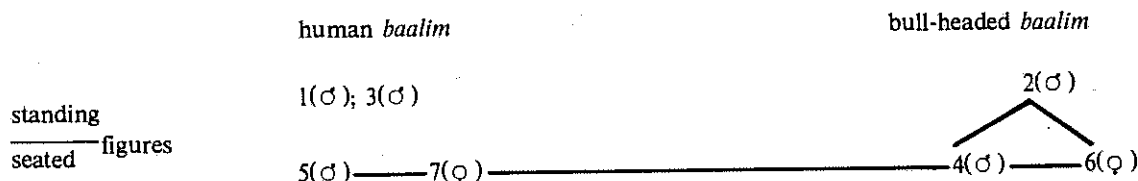


Fig. 5

35. e.g. W. Culican, *art. cit.* (n. 12), pl. III:A1, B1.

36. *Idem. art. cit.* (n. 2), pl. IX:2; E. Gubel, *art. cit.*, p. II:3-4.

37. as e.g. on the Aliseda ring in Madrid (n.º 28541): J.M. Blázquez, *Tartessos y los orígenes de la colonización fenicia en occidente*. Salamanca 1975², pls. 45B, 46A.

38. J.H. Fernández - J. Padró, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

39. *Ibidem.* p. 114 (top row, right), n.º 60, pp. 161-162.

40. P. Zazoff, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

41. In addition to the examples cited by J.H. Fernández - J. Padró, *loc. cit.*, cf. A. Della Marmora, *Sopra alcune antichità sarde ricavate da un manoscritto del luogotenente generale Alberto della Marmora*. Torino 1853, pl. B:99 for the general design.