

# Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant

## A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in Hirbet el-Qom and on the Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos\*<sup>U;U</sup>

Teil 2 <sub>U</sub>

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### 2.2 The Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos

The second primary source to discuss here has been chosen precisely because it reveals an analogous state of affairs in the Levantine area some three centuries later: The Phoenician temple consecration inscription of Yehawmilk of Byblos (which since 1967 resides in the Louvre [AO 22368]). The limestone stela with the dimensions of 114 x 55 cm. was found in 1869, but only 50 years later, around 1920, the bottom corner of the right side, the so-called connecting piece, was recovered by Maurice Dunand<sup>1</sup>. Both parts date approximately from the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and were probably discovered – the circumstances remain somewhat doubtful – in the courtyard of the large temple of the Lady of Byblos, the stela standing between two stone lions made of the same material as the stela. The front side contains a pictorial composition covering the upper third of the stela; below a double dividing line, an inscription is incised.

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\* The following study was written at the Warburg Institute, London, where I enjoyed the privilege of spending several months during 2006 as a Henri Frankfort fellow; parts of earlier drafts have been presented there and at the SBL Annual Meeting in Washington. That it is concerned to a considerable extent with the relevance of pictures or iconographic constellations seems not inappropriate at a place founded by Aby M. Warburg, one of the originators of the (later so-called) iconic turn (cf. only Gombrich, *Aby* 312-317; Didi-Huberman, *Préface*; Michaud, *Aby*, esp. 73-77.238-239).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dunand, *Stèle 57-59*; Dunand, *Fouilles 56-57*; Vogüé, *Stèle 24-26*.

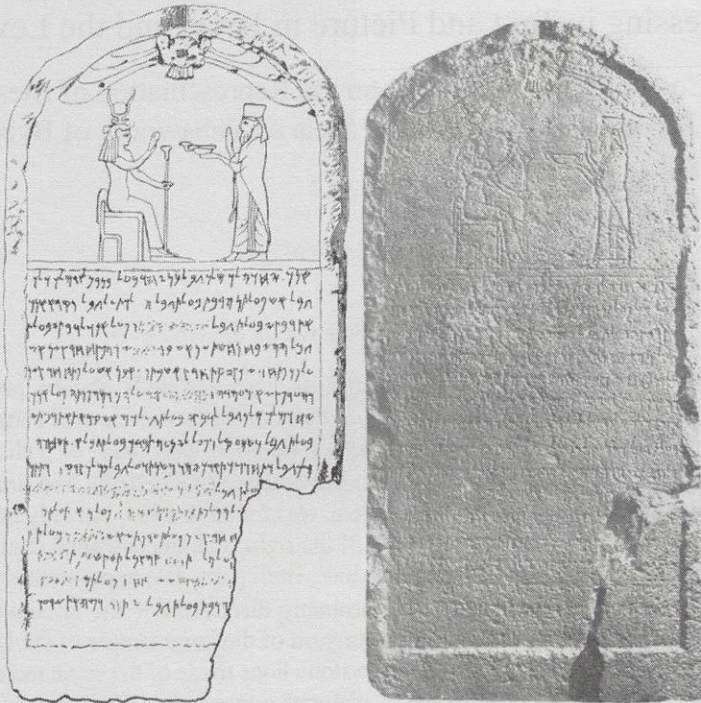


Fig. 3: Drawing and Photography of the Stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos<sup>2</sup>

### 2.2.1 Blessing in the Temple Consecration Inscription

The inscription belongs to the genre of temple consecration inscription while, with respect to the theme, blessing is the central issue. This temple consecration and blessing-inscription is incised below the double dividing line, and it is with 16 lines comparably long. As mentioned, due to the heavy weathering, the text can no longer be fully deciphered; nevertheless, the following reconstruction seems to me the most probable one, and the text certainly allows for an interpretation of the relatively well-preserved and barely disputed blessing-passages, which will suffice in the present context.

<sup>2</sup> The drawing is taken from de Vogüé, *Stèle 28-29*, the photography from Dunand, *Stèle Pl. V* (see Dunand, *Byblos 33*; Gubel, *Art 65* [P. Bordreuil / E. Gubel]; Jidejian, *Byblos Fig. 104*; CIS 1 / *Tabulae*, Pl. 1; ANEP, Fig. 477). The picture's quality is moderate, but due to the stela being so weathered, the legibility of the picture and particularly the text anyway is limited and quite delicate.

- 'nk yhwmlk mlk gbl bn yhrb'l bn bn 'rmlk mlk* (1) I <am> Yehiawmilk, king of Byblos, the son of Yahiarba'al, the grandson of Urimilk, king of
- gbl 'š p'ltm hrbt b'lt gbl mmlkt<sup>3</sup> 'l gbl wqr<sup>4</sup> 'nk* (2) Byblos: Me made the mistress, the Lady of Byblos king over Byblos. And as I called
- 't rbty b'lt gbl wšm<sup>5</sup> [h']<sup>5</sup> q'l wp'l 'nk lrbty b'lt* (3) my mistress, the Lady of Byblos, [she] heard (my) call. And I made for my mistress, the Lady of
- gbl hmzbnh nhst zn 'š bhs[sr]n<sup>6</sup> z whpth<sup>7</sup> hrs zn 'š* (4) Byblos, this altar of bronze, which <stands> in this cou[rtyard], and this gate of gold, which
- 'l pn pthiy z wh'p<sup>8</sup> hrs 'š btk<sup>8</sup> 'bn 'š 'l pth hrs zn* (5) <is> in front of this gate of mine, and the winged solar disc of gold, which <is set> in the midst of the stone, which <is> above this gate of gold,
- wh'rpt z' w'mdh whk[p]m<sup>9</sup> 'š 'lhm wmspth p'l 'nk* (6) and this portico and its pillars and the L[io]ns, which <are> upon them, and its roof. I made <these things>,

<sup>3</sup> The affirmative form often possesses a concrete meaning: 'king, ruler' (cf. Krahmalkov, Dictionary 293; Tomback, Lexicon 184).

<sup>4</sup> It remains unclear whether this form is an affirmative conjugation or, more probably, an absolute infinitive (cf. Friedrich / Röllig, Grammatik § 170; so Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 38; even a participle is assumed by de Vogüé, Stèle 32; CIS 1 / 1, 5).

<sup>5</sup> So with Gubel, Art 65 (Bordreuil / Gubel); TUAT 2/4 587 (Butterweck), while Dunand, Stèle 74 reads: [k šm't 't q]l (similarly also KAI 2,13; Fecht, Metrik 194); cf. for the content I.8.

<sup>6</sup> With CIS 1 / 1, 5.7; de Vogüé, Stèle 28,32-33; Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 39; ANET<sup>3</sup>, 656; Gubel, Art 65 (Bordreuil / Gubel); against this reading KAI II,12-13; Fecht, Metrik 194 (without a positive proposal), and Dunand, Stèle 74-76, opts for bh[l]wn z: 'dans ce sanctuaire'.

<sup>7</sup> Probably deriving from pth I: 'door, gate' (see Tomback, Lexicon 273), not pth II: 'engraving, inscription' (which would presuppose another inscription [so ANET<sup>3</sup>, 656; Krahmalkov, Dictionary 409]); so with Wagner, Einfluss 16 with note 5; Fecht, Metrik 196; TUAT 2/4 587 (Butterweck); Gubel, Art 65 (Bordreuil / Gubel), against KAI II,12.

<sup>8</sup> So Dunand, Inscription 74.77-78; KAI I,2; II,12.14; Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 39-40; Puech, Remarques 161; Fecht, Metrik 194; Gubel, Art 66 (Bordreuil / Gubel); differently Yeivin, 'Éduth 18-19 reading wh'dt, which he interprets as a headdress of the king.

<sup>9</sup> So Dunand, Stèle 74.79-80; Gubel, Art 65 (Bordreuil / Gubel); differently KAI I,2; II,12.14; Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 40; Fecht, Metrik 194 whk[t]m: 'und die

- yhwmlk mlk gbl lrbty b'lt gbl kn's qr't 't* (7) Yehawmilk, king of Byblos, for my  
*rbty* mistress, the Lady of Byblos: As I  
called to my mistress,
- b'lt gbl wšm' ql wp'l ly n'm tbrk b'lt gbl 'yt* (8) the Lady of Byblos, she heard (my)  
*yhwmlk* call and rendered me peace. The Lady  
of Byblos will / may bless  
Yehawmilk,
- mlk gbl wthww wt'rk ymw wšntw 'l gbl k* (9) king of Byblos, and she will / may  
*mlk šdq h' wtn* keep him alive, and she will / may  
prolong his days and years over  
Byblos, for he is a righteous king.  
And will / may give
- [lw hrbt b] 'lt gbl hn l'n 'lnm wl'n 'm 'rs z* (10) [him the mistress, the L]ady of  
*whn 'm 'r<sup>10</sup>* Byblos favour in the eyes of the gods  
and in the eyes of the people of this  
land and favour <for> the people of  
this la-
- s z<sup>11</sup> [qnmy 't]<sup>12</sup> kl mmlkt wkl 'dm 'š ysp* (11) nd. [Whoever you are,] every king  
*lp'l ml'kt 'lt mz* and every man who continues to do  
work on this
- bh zn [w'lt pt]h hrs zn w'lt 'rpt z' šm 'nk* (12) altar [and on] this [gat]e of gold and  
*yhwmlk* on this portico – my name,  
Yehawmilk,
- mlk gbl [tšt 't]k<sup>13</sup> 'l ml'kt h' w'm 'bl tšt šm* (13) king of Byblos [you should put with  
*'tk w'm is* you]rs upon that work. And if you do  
not put (my) name with yours, and if  
you re-

*Kapitüle* (?) (similarly Wagner, Einfluss 16.22; TUAT 2/4 587 [Butterweck]; Hartenstein, Angesicht 111; CIS 1 / 1, 7f for *wh[r'šm]*).

<sup>10</sup> Effacing the redundancies and reading with Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 40-41; KAI II,12.15: *whn l'n 'm 'rs z*: 'und Gnade / Gunst in den Augen des Volks dieses Landes' remains very much open to doubt.

<sup>11</sup> For the first 7-8 letters of l.11-16 see the connecting piece; since it remains missing, we still depend on the edition of Dunand, Fouilles 56-57.

<sup>12</sup> With Dunand, Stèle 74.80; ANET<sup>3</sup> 656; TUAT 2/4 588 (Butterweck); Gubel, Art 65 (Bordreuil / Gubel) exactly following the parallel formulations in the Ešmun'azar-inscription 1.4 (different still are KAI I,2; II,12.15: *[whn l'n] kl mmlkt*: 'und <Gnade> vor allen Königen').

<sup>13</sup> So do complete most editors – based on the continuation of the line (e.g. Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 42-43; differently Dunand, Stèle 74.81: *[pn bkl y]p'l*: 'je tournerai ma face contre quiconque fera', Halevy, Inscription 191-192.196-197: *[k 'nk] p'l*: 'car je suis l'auteur', and Clermont-Ganneau, Stèle 8.34: *[qnmy l]p'l ml'kt h'*: 'j'adjure l'auteur du travail susdit').

- $\overset{\circ}{r} \overset{\circ}{m}[l']kt z^{\circ 14} [wts]g^{15} 't h[... ]z^{\circ} dl ysdh^{16}$  (14) move this w[or]k [and trans]fer this  
 'lt mqm z wigl [stela (?)] with its base from this place  
 and uncovers  
 $\overset{\circ}{m}strw \overset{\circ}{sr}h[w]^{17} hrbt b'lt gbl 'yt h'dm h'$  (15) its hideout, (then) will / may the  
 wZR 'w mistress, the Lady of Byblos destroy  
 [him,] that man and his seed,  
 't pn kl 'ln g[bl] (16) before all the gods of Byblos.

A short recapitulation of the course and the sequel of the inscription's statements highlights the *relevance of blessing*, in which the temple consecration inscription obviously reaches its climax as the textual strategy of time and content prove:

- The inscription starts – after a self-introduction in l.1-2 – with a retrospect on Yehawmilk's prayers and their fulfilment by the Lady of Byblos. This experience causes the following temple construction resp. renovation accomplished by Yehawmilk, thanking the Goddess for making him king over Byblos ( $p'ltm hrbt b'lt gbl mmlkt 'l gbl$ , l.2) and answering his prayers (l.2-7). The retrospect concludes with the summarising declaration that  $wp'l ly n'm$ : 'and the Lady of Byblos rendered me peace / benefaction' (l.8)<sup>18</sup>.
- Shifting consequently to present and future, the temple consecration inscription culminates in the well-founded plea or wish (or declaration)

<sup>14</sup> Against Dunand, Stèle 74.82.85:  $w'm tr / b m[l']kt z'$ : '(et) si tu agran / dis cet ouvrage (là)' (see Dunand, Fouilles 56: l.14:  $b b[m]wt zn$ ).

<sup>15</sup> With Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 43; Fecht, Metrik 194. Gubel, Art 65 (Bordreuil / Gubel) omit in their transliteration (not in the translation) the *w* and read only  $[ts]g$ . – Puech, Remarques 162, reads differently:  $w[t]str hpth hrs lysdh$ : 'et / ou que tu caches la sculpture en or à sa fondation'.

<sup>16</sup> In l.14, the reconstruction meets its limits. At least  $ysdh$ : 'its base, fundament' (see Krahmalkov, Dictionary 211) is related to a previous feminine substantive and probably refers to the inscription (Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 43; TUAT 2/4 588 [Butterweck]; Gubel, Art 65 [Bordreuil / Gubel]).

<sup>17</sup> Differently Dunand, Stèle 74.83:  $kl hsr h'lt mqm z [wk]l / h'strw tpr[hw]$ : 'quiconque enlèvera ce qui est au-dessus de cet endroit là ou quiconque / le cachera' (see Dunand, Fouilles 56: l.15:  $.t trw \cdot bb$ ). – In the context of blessing (and therewith cursing) we may state more precisely that  $srh$  means 'destroy, extinguish', but not literally 'curse' (with Dupont-Sommer, Inscription 44; see Krahmalkov, Dictionary 348-349: 'make stink, render offensive'; see also below after note 19).

<sup>18</sup> For this spectrum of meaning cf. Kronholm, 𐤊𐤍 500-502; Krahmalkov, Dictionary 331, s.v. II,3; Tomback, Lexicon 216, s.v. III,2a (kindness); Hartenstein, Angesicht 107-108.111.

for present und future blessing: *tbrk b 'lt gbl 'yt yhwmlk*: ‘The Lady of Byblos will / may bless Yehawmilk’ (1.8), *k mlk sdq h*: ‘for he is a righteous king’ (1.9). With respect to content, this wish means a long life: *wthww wt 'rk ymw wšntw 'l gbl*: ‘And she will / may keep him alive, and she will / may prolong his days and years over Byblos’ (1.9) as well as favour from gods and people: *wttw lw hrbt b 'lt gbl hn l'n 'lmm wl'n 'm 'rs z*: ‘And the mistress, the Lady of Byblos, will / may give him favour in the eyes of the gods and in the eyes of the people of this land’ (1.9-10).

- Finally, the inscription concludes with remarks securing the temple renovated by Yehawmilk and ‘cursing’ any possible destroyer of the building (1.11-16).

Based on this outline of the inscription’s composition<sup>19</sup>, which establishes blessing as the main and central theme, we are now in a position to describe the *specific constellation of blessing*.

- *Linguistically*, the blessing-statement is formulated rather succinctly, not revealing any distinct formulaic structure. The verbal clause in affirmative conjugation may represent an indicative statement (in the future) or a jussive wish (again in the future)<sup>20</sup>. So, the context becomes decisive, however giving no stringent clue either; nevertheless, according to my view, it favours a jussive wish.
- With regard to *content*, as we saw, the endurance and quality of life is central as is dominion (over Byblos) and favour before the gods (resp. the main goddess of the city: *hrbt b 'lt gbl*) and the people of Byblos. While focusing on the life span is common in the Ancient Near East, the second accent on (public) favour seems to reflect the official position of King Yehawmilk, which fits to the stela’s character as an official document of state religion.
- *Causing* the blessing is the Mistress, the Lady of Byblos (*hrbt b 'lt gbl*), appearing in this stereotypical form of title – her proper name is unknown to us – repeatedly in the text. As other sources testify, she possessed in Byblos a temple nearly since the foundation of a proper city, i.e. since ca. 3000 BCE, and acquired in certain times an inter-

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly enough, as I learn only now, this analysis of the sequence of tenses corresponds to ANET<sup>3</sup> 656 beginning a new paragraph in 1.1, 8, 11 (for 1.8 see already Clermont-Ganneau, Stèle 7).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. for the morphological indistinguishability of imperfect and jussive Friedrich / Röllig, Grammatik § 261.263-264; Harris, Grammar 40-41.

national reputation<sup>21</sup>. Covering a wide range of competence, she acted – notably also during the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE – as “the leading dynastic deity of that city [sc. Byblos, M.L.]”<sup>22</sup>. In our artefact, she appears exactly in this function. While she possibly “is to be equated with the great Canaanite goddess Asherah, this deity could have been a syncretistic deity that combined some of the aspects of Asherah, Ashtarte, and Anath”<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, providing blessing stands in complete accordance with this character of hers: Our inscription takes it for granted that she is concerned with blessing, neither giving a reason for it nor exposing a problematisation. The Lady of Byblos, representing the only acting deity in the text<sup>24</sup>, provides blessing and also sort of intermediates the blessing for Yehawmilk securing favour before the gods and the people of Byblos (l.10-11).

- The *receiver* of blessing obviously is Yehawmilk, king of Byblos<sup>25</sup>. Since he acts as the official representative of the city-state within the Persian empire’s satrapy Syria, blessing – establishing the central theme in one of his central inscriptions – constitutes a basic factor of the official state religion of the Persian time Byblos (of Yehawmilk).
- Despite Yehawmilk being given unconditioned blessing, the wish (or, less probably, the declaration) of blessing receives a *justification*: In actual fact, the blessing roots in and bases on the former conduct of Yehawmilk as the textual strategy makes clear. Additionally, an explicit reason for the blessing is given: *k mlk šdq h’*: ‘for he is a righteous king’ (l.9). The present and future blessing intended for Yehawmilk is thus justified by his former conduct, including his temple renovation activities and culminating in his being a righteous king.
- At this point, the *context of excavation* and, associated therewith, the *pragmatic function* would have to be included. But since the former is identical for text and picture (and in addition not determinable beyond any doubt), it will be treated within the analyses of the overall composition (see below 2.2.3).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Dunand, Byblos 62-64; Halevy, Inscription 203-205; Deshayes, Byblos 1557.

<sup>22</sup> Mullen, Baalat 139; see also Niehr, Religionen 85-86.121-122; Görg, Byblos 360; Lipiński, Byblos.

<sup>23</sup> Mullen, Baalat 139.

<sup>24</sup> This feature becomes evident when compared to the other gods (l.11) resp. all gods of Byblos (l.16).

<sup>25</sup> Up to the present, we have no other information about him (see the above mentioned Lit.).

Striking a short balance, blessing obviously is of central relevance in Yehawmilk's temple consecration inscription, representing official state-religion of the Persian time Byblos. Correspondingly, the blessing-constellation focuses on the Lady of Byblos, providing the king with endurance and quality of life as well as favour before the gods and the people of Byblos.

### 2.2.2 Blessing in the Pictorial Audience Scene

The picture is located above the double dividing line covering the upper third of the stela. It shows an enthroned goddess and a man standing before her, both of them greeting / blessing each other with the raised right hand: Obviously, it depicts an audience scene, which is characterised by a specific *pictorial blessing-constellation*:

- On the left side, a *goddess* is sitting on an Egyptian styled throne, her feet resting on a small pedestal; she is holding a sceptre (possibly with a lotus flower) in the left hand and raising her right hand, greeting and blessing the person opposite her<sup>26</sup>. The depiction designs her as a goddess of the Isis-Hathor-type as is revealed by the horned crown with a solar disc on her head, the hairstyle and the tight-fitting, long-cut garment. This type of goddess covers a wide range of competence, containing notably protection for women (and female beings in general) and therewith fertility: "Hathor creates and sustains life"<sup>27</sup>. Taking the inscription into account, she can be labelled as Lady of Byblos (see below 2.2.3).
- In front of the goddess, at the same height, is standing a bearded *man resp. king*, dressed with a cylindrical tiara and a coat in the Persian style<sup>28</sup>; he is offering a double-handled sacrifice bowl with the left hand and greeting / blessing the goddess with his right<sup>29</sup> hand. Whether he is approaching the goddess in this manner or answering her in return to her gesture, the picture does not allow (nor want) to decide. Again, the

<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Gubel, *Représentation 267-268* hazards the guess that the deity is accompanied by a small messenger-bird, possibly a dove, transmitting good news. Despite only minimal traces being visible on the photography, an analogous scene (see below note 31) points to this possibility, which would complete the overall audience scene.

<sup>27</sup> Heerma van Voss, *Hathor 385*.

<sup>28</sup> See only Jidejian, *Byblos 92-93* with references.

<sup>29</sup> The pictorial depiction – as it is preserved – is not really conclusive, but in analogy to the goddess's gesture, this solution is the more probable one (so with e.g. Clermont-Ganneau, *Stèle 5*, who assumes an invocation gesture).



inscription informs us that his name is Yehawmilk, king of Byblos (see below 2.2.3).

- Above the two persons described hovers *a large winged solar disc* with tail feathers, symbolising in common Ancient Near Eastern tradition the divine order of protection and justice under which the encounter of goddess and king takes place. In its centre, there is a hole, which the text will help us to interpret (see below 2.2.3).
- All in all, we face an *audience scene*<sup>30</sup> as indicate the enthroned goddess, the vis-à-vis each other located persons, the offering and the gesture of greeting / blessing. Possibly, there is a correspondence between sceptre and sacrifice bowl (see below 2.2.3); but mainly, the scene is dominated by the mutual gesture of greeting and blessing between goddess and human ruler (which again corresponds excellently to the inscription underneath), so that communication between goddess and king is pivotal.
- Therefore, the pictorial scene undoubtedly can be subsumed under the 𐤆𐤇𐤃-*basic constellation*<sup>31</sup>: The scene is dominated by the reciprocal gesture of greeting / blessing. Varying from the inscription, the process of communication does not take place one-sided, declining from goddess to king, but is depicted as a mutual bestowing of blessing – despite the enthroned goddess of course vouchsafing Yehawmilk an audience. Therefore, goddess and king each cause and receive blessing, and a temporal sequence can only be surmised by including textual information. Also, the content of the blessing receives no specification at all, not even a pictorial representation of the content occurs, but rather it seems sufficient to depict the blessing-communication itself – as a dynamic process of reciprocal imparting of life securing and increasing welfare-strength (see below 2.2.3).
- For the picture's *context and pragmatic*, see below 2.2.3.

### 2.2.3 The Overall Composition: Combined of Text and Picture

So far, we have – due to methodical reasons – analysed text and picture independently as two separate categories of communication on the stela, and we have intentionally ignored any nexus or connection between them. Evidently, that is not what the stela expects her potential viewer(s) to do: The arrangement

<sup>30</sup> The term is borrowed from Hartenstein, Angesicht 112-114.

<sup>31</sup> This conclusion is corroborated by an analogous motive-constellation on a clay plaque from the same era (see Gubel, Représentation 264; Lipiński, Dictionnaire 309) as well as on a younger consecration-inscription for Aštarte from Tyre (see TUAT 2/4 595 [Butterweck]).

of picture and text within one and the same frame (being divided only by the double line) and several correlations already hinted at make it obvious that picture and text are to be interpreted together in order to understand the overall composition of the stela: There is a “*Sinnzusammenhang von Textzeugnis und ikonographischer Konstellation*”<sup>32</sup>. So, we try in a methodically reflected procedure to catch up with and substantiate interpretations usually done in a more intuitive way of ‘reading’ the pictorial-textual composition of the stela. Then, text and picture shed light on each other as follows:

- Starting with the enthroned *goddess* in the picture, the text again provides her name: She is the mistress, the Lady of Byblos (*hrbt b'lt gbl*), acting in the text as the goddess who is – in the tradition of Ašerah and Aštarte – concerned with Yehawmilk’s kingship, protection and blessing. Conversely, the picture supplies the Lady of Byblos with the capacious background of a Hathor-typed goddess<sup>33</sup> creating and sustaining life, so that it can safely be concluded: “she [sc. Hathor, M.L.] is also the ‘Lady of Byblos’”<sup>34</sup>. In textual and pictorial representations, she possesses a broad range of competence with similar focal points (see above); both categories of communication thus converge in their depiction of the Hathor-typed Lady of Byblos, which is well-known through other inscriptions and pictorial depictions: As goddess of the city, she provides not only protection and order but is also responsible for fertility and blessing.
- The text as well informs us that the pictured *man resp. king* is called Yehawmilk and that he serves as ruler of the Persian time Byblos, conducting several activities. At least of equal importance, though, seems the fact that the picture depicts him as a pious worshipper offering the Lady of Byblos sacrifice and blessing. The picture therefore provides a concentrated perspective for the reading of the inscription.
- It is highly probable that the *winged solar disc* at the top of the picture is also connected with the inscription since the expression *h'pt hrs 'š btk 'bn*: ‘the winged solar disc of gold, which is set in the midst of the stone’ in l.5 seems to refer to the winged solar disc on the picture, which contributes an important aspect to the pictorial composition (see above).

<sup>32</sup> Hartenstein, Angesicht 114 (his italics; see also 113-114); see already Clermont-Ganneau, Stèle 5: “texte et image s’éclairaient alors d’une vive lumière”; see also KAI II, 11-12; TUAT 2/4 587 (Butterweck); Al-Ghul, Aufbau 48. – For parallel audience scenes see in particular Hartenstein, Angesicht 112-114.

<sup>33</sup> According to the oldest known representation on a cylinder seal from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BCE (see Jidejian, Byblos, Fig. 15).

<sup>34</sup> Heerma van Voss, Hathor 386.

In addition, there is a cut out diameter in the centre of the pictured solar disc, to which once probably a *golden plaque* was affixed, splendidly representing the solar disc<sup>35</sup>. If this was indeed the case, then the winged solar disc of gold would even be more important and obviously also affect the pragmatic function of the whole artefact (see below).

- Taking the *audience scene* as a whole into account, the picture evidently is much more concrete than the text. While the latter wishes King Yehawmilk – as official political representative – in general blessing from the Lady of Byblos, the former provides a specific setting for the blessing: It is bestowed in a royal audience scene which the king is granted before the goddess. Additionally, the picture emphasises the reciprocity of blessing, depicting the gesture of goddess and king in an almost identical manner. In sum, the inscription and its blessing-constellation gain a plausible overall setting by the royal audience scene on the picture.

In the pictorial composition, possibly not only the mutual blessing-gestures correspond to each other, but also the *sceptre* and the *sacrifice bowl*. If this assumption is correct, then – including the textual information – the pictorial scene is readable as a sequence: The goddess's sceptre, symbolising the dominion which the city-goddess holds and delegates to Yehawmilk (according to the inscription [1.2]), may correspond with the sacrifice bowl which Yehawmilk offers the goddess in return, thanking for the protection she provided answering his prayers (1.2-8). Read in this manner, the corresponding sceptre and sacrifice bowl in the picture illustrate the temporal sequence of the textual events. (If that is correct, we have here an example of the first type of relation between picture and text<sup>36</sup>.) This interpretation remains, of course, somewhat risky as it does not methodically cross-check text and picture but instead adds them up, but can nevertheless, in my opinion, claim some plausibility.

In any case, it is clear that the overall audience scene focuses on the *reciprocal gesture of greeting and blessing* between goddess and human ruler – which corresponds excellently to the inscription underneath. Thus, the comprehensive communication process of the inscription as well as of the picture possesses its centre in the blessing-constellation (specifically accentuated in text and picture).

<sup>35</sup> So convincingly e.g. Clermont-Ganneau, *Stèle 4*; Gubel, *Art 65* (Bordreuil / Gubel).

<sup>36</sup> See Leuenerger, *Blessing*, 64 with note 7.

- The *excavation context* and the *pragmatic function* of the stela seem to corroborate this interpretation: Despite the above-mentioned uncertainties advising us to be careful with conclusions that are too far-reaching, the most probable context of the stela is a location within the courtyard of the temple of the Lady of Byblos, where the stela may have been standing between two (guarding) lions of the same material<sup>37</sup>. This position would confirm the identification of the goddess as well as the reading as a blessing dominated audience scene (possibly realised in the temple cult for the goddess supplied by King Yehawmilk). Pragmatically, it is evident that text and picture on one and the same artefact act together. Thereby, the picture – and especially the golden sticker supposedly affixed to the cut out diameter in the stela – manifestly causes the deeper impression than the inscription below, which might provide the interested (and literate!) expert with relevant details. Therefore, the stela as a whole, probably was designed as an official representation of state religion, splendidly depicting the mutual blessing between the city-goddess Lady of Byblos and the ruler Yehawmilk (representing the Persian time Byblos). And going one last step further, one may surmise, “que la stèle de *yehawmlk* par son contenu soit à situer dans les débuts du règne de ce roi comme action de grâces à la divinité pour les bienfaits accordés”<sup>38</sup>.

Providing a *short summary* of the above analysis, we evidently face again – as is undeniable on the grounds of the picture’s content – a correlation and convergence of picture and text, i.e. of the epigraphic and iconographic layer of the artefact (see also above note 88). (1) Comparing, correlating and combining the epigraphic and iconographic layer has led, in my opinion, to an impressive *overall (blessing) composition*: The inscription allows for a notional naming of the goddess (as Lady of Byblos) and the king (as Yehawmilk) in the picture, while conversely, the picture generates specifications of the textual figures by presenting the Lady of Byblos as Hathor-typed goddess bestowing life, increasing fertility and blessing, and Yehawmilk as pious worshipper offering the goddess sacrifice and blessing. (2) Thematically, the epigraphic temple consecration inscription as well as the iconographic audience scene possess their centre in the *blessing-constellation* which is specifically accentuated in text and picture: The epigraphic blessing wishes that the Lady of Byblos provides Yehawmilk with endurance and quality of life as well as favour before the gods and the people of Byblos; the iconographic depiction focuses on the reciprocal

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Dunand, *Stèle 57-58.62* (map); de Vogüé, *Stèle 25-26*; Gubel, *Représentation 271-272*.

<sup>38</sup> Puech, *Remarques 167* (see also 160).

blessing between goddess and human king. (3) Therefore, the epigraphic and iconographic composition constitutes a representation of the *772-basic constellation*: The overall composition of the stela, combining textual / epigraphic and pictorial / iconographic representation, forms an official, religious-political document of state religion in which the city-goddess Lady of Byblos bestows King Yehawmilk blessing (who, on the pictorial layer, in return offers her reciprocal blessing).

### 3. Comparison of both Blessing-Artefacts

As explained in the introduction, it was decisive for selecting the two artefacts (1) that they both contain an overall composition combining textual and pictorial layers and categories, and (2) that they stem from the rough cultural entity of the Levant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE allowing for a promising comparison (without having to accept too many presuppositions). Therefore, the above descriptions, analyses and interpretations enable us to develop a substantiated comparison of the blessing-constellations represented on the two artefacts<sup>39</sup>.

- Concerning the *language*, the blessing-statements refer to present and future, formulating their wish (or, less probably, their declaration) in indicative-jussive openness. While Qom 3:2 has (as have other Hebrew inscriptions) a formulaic nominal clause (i.e. a participle construction), the stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos (in the following: SYB) uses a succinct verbal clause (1.8).
- With respect to the *content* of blessing, both artefacts can be subsumed under the general definition as life securing and increasing welfare-strength (see above 2.1). Qom 3 focuses on protection and saving, implicitly including a material aspect (see 1.1), whereas SYB (in its inscription) emphasises life's endurance / quality, dominion and favour before gods and people (1.8-11), adding in the picture the reciprocal bestowing of blessing. Both artefacts differ not so much in the proper contents of blessing, but rather in assigning them to different domains: to the realm of death in Uriyahu's private tomb resp. to the temple cult of the official state religion of Yehawmilk's Byblos.
- *Causing* blessing is in both cases the central deity: Yhwh (limiting Ašerah's field of competence and excluding her from blessing-activities) resp. the mistress, the Lady of Byblos. (The pictorial layer of SYB adds reciprocally King Yehawmilk.) This similar structure of the blessing-process highlights an interesting aspect: As we have seen (above 2.2),

<sup>39</sup> For more detailed descriptions and specific reasons concerning the following positions, see Leuenberger, Blessing 66.

the Lady of Byblos displays essential features of Hathor resp. of Ašerah and Aštarte; so, it is exactly the type of goddess banned in Qom 3 from blessing which some centuries later executes the blessing in SYB (l.8)! As there are in SYB absolutely no traces of a similar process, the described development within the blessing-constellation, which took place in pre-exilic Israel (as document beside Qom 3 notably the silver blessing-amulets from Ketef Hinnom<sup>40</sup>) and was – at the latest – completed at the beginning of the post-exilic Persian time, constitutes a specific Israelite / Judean development, obviously reflecting internal discussions, argumentations and transformations.

- *Receiving* blessings are, of course, the deceased Uriyahu and King Yehawmilk (resp. the Lady of Byblos). Therefore, apart from the iconographic audience scene on SYB, blessing often and typically designates a process with a decline from the causing deity to the human receiver.
- With regard to the *argumentative structure* in which blessing is embedded, our artefacts proclaim *unconditioned* blessing (marking a significant difference e.g. to many biblical statements, particularly in Deuteronomy<sup>41</sup>). But interestingly enough, both inscriptions (being much more suitable for expressing such aspects than pictures) provide a *justification* for blessing: Each blessing-statement, referring to the present and future welfare of the respective receiver, is essentially based on events in the past: in Uriyahu's saving experience during his lifetime, which is extrapolated (in)to the 'other world' of death (Qom 3:2-3), resp. (implicitly) in Yehawmilk's past temple renovation activities (SYB, l.2-8) and explicitly his being a righteous king (SYB, l.8-10, especially l.9: *k mlk šdq h'*: 'for he is a righteous king').
- Taking finally also the *excavation context* and the *pragmatic function* into account, the artefacts converge in their aim to secure in present and future the welfare of the deceased Uriyahu resp. of King Yehawmilk (during his dominion but also after his death). As already remarked, differences occur on the grounds of the respective context: In Uriyahu's tomb we possess a reference of elevated private religion in Juda of the Iron Age IIC whereas Yehawmilk's temple consecration inscription in the courtyard of the temple of the Lady of Byblos documents the official religious symbol-system of Byblos of that time.

<sup>40</sup> See hereto Leuenberger, Segen 113-178 (with additional references to passages in secondary sources, i.e. the OT / Hebrew Bible).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Leuenberger, Segen 301-375 (Lit.).

So, despite all differences in detail, the overall text and picture combining compositions of both artefacts converge principally in their basic constellations of בָּרַךְ: The central deity in each case bestows the human receiver blessing consisting in life securing and increasing welfare-strength (i.e. protection, saving, life endurance, dominion, favour before gods and people) for a deceased private individual or for a reigning king (whereas the latter in return reciprocally blesses the deity on the pictorial layer of SYB). Divergences involve this constellation and its content only marginally, rather they concern specific transformations resulting from different contextual settings, to which the temporally and spatially wide ranging blessing-theme was adapted.

#### 4. Conclusions and Perspectives

Having substantiated a comparison of both blessing-artefacts in view of convergences and divergences, some further reaching *conclusions* and a few specific *perspectives* regarding the blessing-constellations in text and picture may be outlined.

The comparative case study carried-out in an exemplary manner leads to some *conclusions* advancing key issues and problems in blessing-research in general (and beyond).

- With respect to *content*, the insights summarised in the above comparison have resulted (and been clearly explained) and need not be repeated here.

But it may be stated again that against the international background of the Ancient Near East, where blessing appears as a widely spread phenomenon of primary religion, our analysis of two specific blessing-artefacts allowed for quite *a concrete and precise description of the two blessing-constellations* as they are perceivable in their different localisations in two religious symbol systems. In these examples, blessing appears as a basic and characteristic factor of religion in the Levant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE.

*Broadening the source basis*, one could derive conclusions for a more general depiction of blessing-constellations in Ancient Israel and the Levant – of course only as far as it can be validated by the respective source basis. Considering the distribution in time and space as well as other factors (such as the genre, the sociological context etc.), it would become possible to ‘map’ the blessing-constellations and to depict their transformations in time and space etc.<sup>42</sup>. For the understanding of a

<sup>42</sup> For such an investigation of the Old Hebrew blessing-inscriptions, see Leuenberger, Segen 113-178. Their distribution, compared to the totality of known primary sources, proves the importance and relevance of the blessing-concept in the Ancient

culture as a whole, it might be of interest that blessing in several cases is represented in pictures – and therefore as art (being more or less rich in content): In the Levant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE – already at that time in a millennia old tradition – religion and art undergo a close symbiosis and since then have, in combination with other forces, moulded occidental tradition and society.

- With respect to *method*, the analysed artefacts indeed prove to represent a coherent overall composition in which the constellations of blessing in text (epigraphic layer) and picture (iconographic layer) mutually correspond to and interpret each other.

(1) This relation implies, as argued above in 1.2, that one has to combine in an adequate manner both types of representation in order to perceive and describe the בִּרְךְ-basis constellation as well as the blessing-phenomenon as a whole. This approach can achieve a *synergy effect* out of text and picture that goes beyond a mere addition of both media, as Fig. 4 very tersely illustrates:

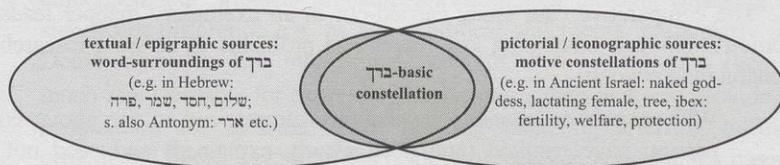


Fig. 4: בִּרְךְ-Basic Constellation in Relation to Textual and Pictorial Sources

(2) Concerning the sources, the elaborated paradigmatic analyses distinctly emphasise the importance and potential of the so-called *primary sources* – particularly in the context of religious-historical research in the field of the OT / Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel.

(3) Especially, and this statement is made again in the light of recent discussions in research on the OT / Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East, the *relevance of pictures* in addition to and in combination with texts becomes evident and, in my opinion, quite indisputable. Certainly, this outcome demands further methodological reflections and clarifi-

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Israel of the monarchic period: It functioned as one of the dominant idea-complexes of the religious symbol-systems. It goes without saying that the different functions, contexts and states of preservations have to be considered; nevertheless, a rough 'coordinate system' of blessing-constellations and transformations can be plotted (e.g. against Crawford, Blessing 231-232, denying changes in the concept of blessing).



cations than could be outlined above in 1.2<sup>43</sup>, but changes nothing in regard to the fundamental importance of pictorial sources.

The few conclusions just summarised imply some *specific perspectives for blessing-research*. Denoting only the three most important ones, continuing research on the phenomenon of blessing is, according to my judgement, strongly advised:

- to focus on *blessing-constellations* as they appear in representations combining text and picture,
- to elaborate methodically controlled the manifold relations of *picture and text*, particularly in primary sources, which still deserve more meticulous attention,
- and, additionally, to include also the *pragmatic functions* of overall blessing-compositions in their respective context.

So, the present investigation paradigmatically demonstrates, by means of a comparative case study of two selected examples, the relevance of the blessing-concept in two different religious symbol-systems from the Levant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE. Thereby, it may contribute a tiny piece to a progressive understanding of the Levantine cultures of that time. In certain cases – at least certainly in the two examples treated above –, a methodically reflected combination of textual / epigraphic and pictorial / iconographic blessing-representations prove to be indispensable for accurately describing, analysing and interpreting the בִּרְךְ-basis constellations as a whole, since a highly significant synergy effect of text and picture can be achieved that surpasses a mere addition of both layers categorically.

### Summary

The present article elaborates the relevance of the topic of blessing in the Levant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BCE on the basis of an exemplary case study on two primary sources: The Hīrbet el-Qom-inscription (Qom 3) and the stela of Yehawmilk of Byblos consist of text and picture. In a methodically reflected procedure, both artefacts are compared in order to depict and interpret in an adequate manner the בִּרְךְ-basis constellation, which is based on a significant synergy effect of text and picture.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. the preparative remarks in Leuenberger, Segen 66-74; but in fact, a monographic elaboration of the hermeneutics of pictures / pictorial sources would be required.

### Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Beitrag arbeitet die Relevanz der Segensthematik in der Levante des ersten Jtsd. v.Chr. anhand einer exemplarischen Fallstudie zu zwei Primärquellen heraus: Die *Hirbet el-Qom*-Inscription (Qom 3) und die Stele *Yehawmilks* von Byblos umfassen je eine Bild- und eine Textebene. Beide gilt es methodisch reflektiert miteinander zu kombinieren, um die auf einem signifikanten Synergieeffekt von Text und Bild beruhende  $\text{ברך}$ -Grundkonstellation angemessen beschreiben und interpretieren zu können.

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