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Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts Outside of Ugarit: Evidence for an Overland Trade Network in the LBA Levant?

Joanna TÖYRÄÄNVUORI[1]

Abstract. *The cuneiform alphabetic script from Ugarit was in use during the Late Bronze Age. The origins of the script remain shrouded in mystery but it is generally assumed that the script was an invention of local scribes, as the majority of text finds are from the kingdom. The cuneiform alphabetic texts found outside of the kingdom of Ugarit make up a small percentage of the overall text corpus. These finds, spanning the Eastern Mediterranean and consisting altogether of ten inscriptions on a variety of objects, may shed light on Ugarit's role in the commercial network of the LBA in which the kingdom seems to have been an important node, especially in examining the overland trade connections from the maritime powerhouse that remain largely unexplored. The cuneiform alphabetic script, an artefact characterizing the entire Ugaritian culture in its unique combination of Semitic, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian influences with a particularly local flair, is a case example of an idea at the crossroads of several LBA cultures.*

Rezumat. *Scrisul alfabetic cuneiform din Ugarit a fost utilizat în perioada târzie a epocii bronzului. Originile alfabetului rămân învăluite în mister, dar se presupune în general că alfabetul a fost o invenție a scribilor locali, deoarece majoritatea textelor descoperite provin din regat. Textele cuneiforme descoperite în afara regatului Ugarit reprezintă un mic procent din întregul corpus de texte. Aceste descoperiri, care acoperă estul Mediteranei și constau în total din zece inscripții pe o varietate de obiecte, pot aduce lumină asupra rolului Ugaritului în rețeaua comercială a LBA, în care regatul pare să fi fost un nod important, în special în ceea ce privește examinarea legăturilor comerciale terestre din centrul puterii maritime, care rămân în mare parte neexplorate. Scrisul alfabetic cuneiform, un artefact care caracterizează întreaga cultură ugaritiană prin combinația sa unică de influențe semitice, egiptene și mesopotamiene, cu o notă locală deosebită, este un exemplu al unei idei aflate la intersecția mai multor culturi din LBA.*

Keywords: Ugarit, alphabet, writing, script, Late Bronze Age.

Introduction

The cuneiform alphabetic script used in the Late Bronze Age (1550–1150 BCE) is identified with ancient Ugarit, a maritime hub in the international LBA trade network, and especially with the sites of Ras Šamra and Ras Ibn Hani, where the initial and the majority of textual finds

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have been made.[2] The origins of the script remain shrouded in mystery but it is generally assumed that the script was an invention of local scribes – the assumption based on sheer number of the finds from the sites of the Ugaritic kingdom and their dearth outside of it.[3] Several different repositories, usually called archives in academic literature,[4] have been found within the capital city of the kingdom (also called Ugarit) as well as in one of the kingdom's four commercial harbours (Mahadu, modern Minet el-Beida) that hosted the city's necropolis, and Ras Ibn Hani (ancient Raʾšu or Biruti), which may also have functioned as the summer palace of the Ugaritic royals and a residence of the queen.[5] However, there are also some examples of the cuneiform alphabetic script having been used outside of Ugarit. These finds, spanning the Eastern Mediterranean and consisting altogether of ten inscriptions on a variety of objects, may shed light on Ugarit's role in the commercial network of the LBA in which the kingdom seems to have been an important node.[6] They may be especially useful in examining the overland trade connections from the maritime powerhouse that remain largely unexplored.

The kingdom of Ugarit was host to a multilingual culture, and texts written in at least seven different languages have been found in the capital city. It seems that at least some of the people living in Ugarit were also polyglottal, and the spoken languages, in addition to the native Ugaritic,[7] likely included Akkadian, Amorite, Egyptian, Hurrian, Hittite, and possibly some form of Cypriote and Luwian.[8] In addition to the multitude of spoken languages, texts were also written in several languages using a host of different scripts. In addition to standard cuneiform and the local cuneiform alphabetic script, texts written in hieroglyphic Egyptian, hieroglyphic Luwian, and the Cypro-Minoan syllabary have been discovered.[9] It is known through the

[2] On Ugarit in general, see WATSON, WYATT 1999.

[3] E.g., HAWLEY 2005, 2008; PARDEE 2007; FERRARA 2019, 16. On the relation of the cuneiform alphabetic script(s) to cuneiform, cf. VITA 2004. Byblos may have served as an intermediary between the hieratic and cuneiform alphabetic tradition although no examples of the latter have been found there. Cf. DOBBS-ALLSOPP 2023, 38.

[4] On the use of the term archive in the study of the ancient world, see PEDERSÉN 1998.

[5] NA'AMAN 2004, 33–39.

[6] On Ugaritic trade, see HELTZER 1978; MCGEOUGH 2007.

[7] Ugarit is a North West Semitic language that is closely related to Aramaic, Phoenician, and Biblical Hebrew.

[8] The main spoken languages in the city, however, were Ugaritic, Hurrian and Akkadian. NIEHR 2021, 54. Out of these, Akkadian was the language of international diplomacy of the era while Hurrian was the native language of a sizeable portion of the Ugaritic population. Cyprus was one of Ugarit's closest neighbours and trading partners, so at least cursory knowledge of the language was likely possessed by merchants and traders. See also MALBRAN-LABAT 1999, VITA 1999; 2009; ANDRASON, VITA 2016; ČECH 2018.

[9] On the Cypro-Minoan script used by the Cypriot merchant colony at Ugarit, see BILLIGMEIER 1976; STEELE 2012; EGETMEYER 2013. It is not entirely certain whether one and the same scribe would have been proficient in more than one script but texts containing alphabetic signs with cuneiform syllabic equivalents (KTU 5.14, RS 19.159) exist. VAN SOLDT 1995, 183. FERRARA 2019, 17, makes the claim that the multilingualism and multigraphism of Ugarit is often exaggerated but does not really give reasons why this should be the case. It is undisputed that texts written in several

Amarna correspondence from ancient Egypt, the text discoveries from Ugarit's northern neighbour Mukiš (whose capital was at Alalakh/Tell Atchana), as well as various other locations in the Levant, that most correspondence during this era was conducted in cuneiform Akkadian within and between the local Syrian and Levantine kingdoms and the so-called 'great kingdoms' (Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Hatti, and Mitanni).[10] Hence, the amount of cuneiform alphabetic texts within Ugarit that greatly outnumber those written in other scripts and their lack without is somewhat perplexing. Especially significant for unravelling the mystery of the cuneiform alphabetic script is the lack of discoveries of texts written in the script from the area of Ugarit's northern neighbour Mukiš, given that during the heyday of the usage of the script parts of the kingdom were contested between Mukiš and Ugarit, especially following the Battle of Qadeš and the ensuing Hittite redistribution of the land by Suppiluliuma. During this time the kingdom of Ugarit and its cuneiform alphabetic administration stretched far into Mukiš-territory but still no examples of the script have been found within the area.[11]

A small number of finds containing alphabetic cuneiform script have however been found outside of Ugarit and its environs.[12] This article takes a closer look at the texts in an attempt to answer the question of whether any inferences regarding Ugarit's foreign policy, international relations, and trading network in the Late Bronze Age can be made based on the inscriptional evidence. Texts containing cuneiform alphabetic script from the Levantine coast have been found on clay tablets, earthenware and metal vessels, and weapons from the areas of modern Syria (2), Lebanon (3), and Israel (4), from Tell Sukas to Beth Shemesh (Fig 2), with one find on the island of Cyprus (Hala Sultan Tekke), and another in mainland Greece in Tiryns (Fig. 1).[13] The distribution of the finds is curious, especially given the primacy for maritime connections and the difficulty for overland connections to southern Levant based on Ugarit's geographic

different languages and in distinctly different scripts have been found in the kingdom. Attempts at displaying the scarcity of different scripts in the text corpus is meaningless without comparanda – which would be most difficult to find, as no other site on the Levantine coast can boast such an assortment of scripts. Her characterisation of the use of Sumerian "only as a cultural reference" is simply wrong in light of the evidence. Cf. TÖYRÄÄNVUORI 2024.

[10] See e.g., LIVERANI 2000; CASSANA 2009, 10. The Akkadian used in the correspondence contained some local flair depending on their places of origin. On the characteristics of Amarna Akkadian, see KOSSMANN 1989; 1994.

[11] CASSANA 2009, 25. More than 50 towns, mountains, and bodies of water between Mukiš and Ugarit were transferred to the latter following the Hittite victory.

[12] There are also cuneiform texts from Ugarit that have been discovered elsewhere, recognized usually by the naming of the kingdom within the text. Among these are the Amarna letters EA 45–49 and an Akkadian letter from Tel Aphek. See OWEN 1991, 1–20. While these letters are also important in trying to establish the commercial and political connections of Ugarit, this article focuses on the cuneiform alphabetic texts only.

[13] All texts, barring the last one, have been published in KTU[3].

location and topographic situation.[14] It is also notable that most of the inscriptions were written on objects. Most known Ugaritic texts are written on clay tablets and only 128 inscribed objects that are not clay tablets are known.[15] Through looking at the use and distribution of the script outside of Ugarit, it may be possible to look at the role of the kingdom within the network of Northern Levantine kingdoms.

Cuneiform Alphabetic Script

The cuneiform alphabetic script from Ugarit is more accurately an augmented abjad, a consonantal alphabet, consisting of 30 distinct signs. It is not known when cuneiform alphabetic writing was first developed. Dates from 15th to 14th centuries have been proposed.[16] It is a combination of two separately developed writing technologies: cuneiform writing originating in Southern Mesopotamia (its putative origins in Uruk IV, c. 3400 BCE)[17] and alphabetic writing originating somewhere between Egypt and the Levant (its putative origins in the Sinai in 1800 BCE),[18] itself a combination of hieroglyphic alphabetic signs and some form of Canaanite language.[19] The hieroglyphic 'alphabet' was in use in ancient Egyptian writing since Middle Egyptian, beginning to be used c. 2000 BCE, consisting of 24 distinct consonantal phonemes. [20] The use of phonographs or hieroglyphic signs indicating sounds and pronunciation were found for uniliteral, biliteral, triliteral sounds, and it is the uniliteral signs

[14] The kingdom of Ugarit is both protected and closed off from mainland Syria by the Syrian Coastal Mountain Range (Jabal al-Ansariya, classical Bargylus) that runs parallel to the coastal plain and which also hosts the thickest forests in Syria. Crossing these, travelers would have come across the unnavigable Orontes and its marshes. The easiest access from the Mediterranean to the mainland is through the Homs Gap, which was used by traders from ancient times. It is the only passage through the mountain ranges open year-round. Cf. VAN SOLDT 2016.

[15] BOYES 2020, 36.

[16] See FERRARA 2019.

[17] See e.g., GLASSNER 2003, XII–XIV. FERRARA 2019, 16, writes: "It was normally used to write logo-syllabaries, until it was borrowed lock stock and barrel for an alphabetic system." Note also that some cuneiform alphabetic signs may have been modelled after cuneiform signs and not linear alphabetic signs. DIETRICH, LORETZ 1988, 35.

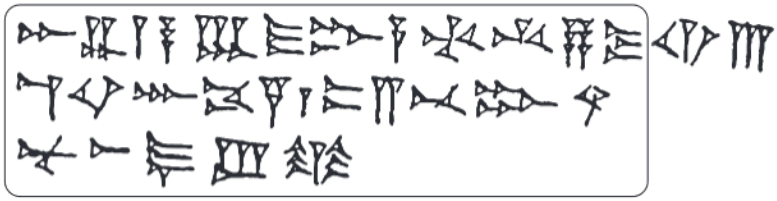
[18] DOBBS-ALLSOP 2023, 30. There is some debate on the dating of the oldest discoveries which seems to be based on ideological rather than academic reasons, the crux of the issue being whether the alphabet was developed in Egypt or in the Levant. The dating ranges from 1850 to 1550 BCE (the cusp between Middle and Late Bronze Age) with the inscriptions of 19th century date being called Proto-Sinaitic and alphabetic writing hence being of Egyptian origin and the 16th century inscriptions called Proto-Canaanite with the origin of the alphabet being of Levantine origin. FERRARA 2019, 16, claims that there is no direct evidence for the Proto-Sinaitic (or 'linear') alphabet having originally prompted the invention of the cuneiform alphabet, but this is contradicted by the Sarepta jar handle that contains letters from both scripts.

[19] HAMILTON 2006, GOLDWASSER 2006. DOBBS-ALLSOP 2023, 39, writes: "the invention of the alphabet and its diffusion over the course of much of the second millennium is characterized by adaptation and/or modification stimulated by contact with other writing systems and their supporting scribal apparatuses."

[20] EDGERTON 1940.

or signs that signified single sounds that are thought to form the basis of alphabetic writing.[21] While there was at least one hieroglyphic sign with a phonetic value that corresponded to the phonemes of the language, the Egyptian uniliteral signs differed from later alphabetic scripts in that there could be several different signs for one and the same phoneme.[22] Unlike alphabetic writing, the uniliteral sign were also often coloured, which was likely meant to aid in differentiating signs that have a similar shape.[23] Many of the shapes of the uniliteral sounds are found in later alphabetic scripts but their sound values have changed from their Egyptian predecessors.[24]

Proto-Sinaitic or Early Alphabetic writing is initially found in the region between Egypt and the Levant, the oldest exemplars from Wadi el-Hol in Upper Egypt and Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai.[25] The origins of the script are not known but it has been theorized that it is based on repurposed hieroglyphic uniliteral signs either by the Hyksos[26] or by Levantine migrant workers or prisoners of war working in the turquoise mines around Serabit el-Khadim.[27] By the time that cuneiform alphabetic script is attested, alphabetic writing was known and had been used in the Levantine area for centuries.[28] The attested inscriptions in alphabetic writing from the Late Bronze Age, however, are few and it could even be argued based on the number of text finds that up until the collapse of the LBA world system, cuneiform alphabetic writing was the



[21] GOLDWASSER 2016a, 168–169.

[22] BARTHÉLEMY, ROSMORDUE 2011, 75. On the phonetic system of Ugaritic and its correspondence with the cuneiform alphabetic signs, cf. PARDEE 2012.

[23] DAVIS, LABOURY 2020, 18.

[24] GOLDWASSER 2016A, 168.

[25] DARNELL 2003, 2006.

[26] Especially LEMAIRE 2000, 2017.

[27] See especially GOLDWASSER 2006, 2010, 2012. Serabit el-Khadim, the place of the earliest inscriptions (30 incised graffiti) was the location of an Egyptian turquoise mine. The inscriptions were found in the Hathor temple and in the mines themselves. This theory is contested by NA'AMAN 2020 who argues for the role of Egyptian imperial scribes in the Levant in the invention of the alphabet.

[28] FERRARA 2019, 17. Also GOLDWASSER 2006, HAMILTON 2006. This is presumed, as NA'AMAN 2020, 34, points out that we know practically nothing about the use of the alphabetic script between its invention in the late 19th century and its appearance in the Levant in LB II–III. Sass, one of the original proponents of an early 19th century dating for alphabetic writing has since rescinded his view and seems to have adopted a 14th–13th century dating for the origin of alphabetic writing with it "surfacing in the Levant shortly thereafter". Cf. SASS 2004–2005; 2005. His seems to be the minority view.

predominate technology for alphabetic writing.[29] This is true even if the comparison is only made between cuneiform alphabetic texts from outside of Ugarit and linear alphabetic inscriptions in the Levant, which in the Late Bronze Age number only six.[30] In the Levantine area, alphabetic writing was beginning to be used in the LBA but it did not completely take off until after the Bronze Age collapse when Phoenician traders spread it across the Mediterranean world.[31] All throughout the LBA, the technology of alphabetic writing (most extant examples are lapidary inscriptions, but undoubtedly it could be written with ink as well, just like hieroglyphs) was known in the area and was used primarily in writing NWS languages, at least until the end of the LBA.[32] While consisting of a small number of finds, the corpus of cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions outside of Ugarit form a significant group which may even tell us something about the development and spread of alphabetic writing in general.

Cuneiform alphabetic script is not the only alteration of cuneiform writing. The technology was used to write Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurrian, and Hittite, languages entirely unrelated to one another, but in addition, entirely other sets of cuneiform signs were used to write e.g., Linear Elamite and later Old Persian cuneiform writing.[33] The writing of Sumero-Akkadian cuneiform is a technology, but pressing signs and signifiers into clay is a technology in and off itself, and this technology can be used to write several different scripts. While most texts written in the cuneiform alphabetic script were written in the Ugaritic language, there are a few examples of it being used in the writing of Akkadian and another, non-Semitic, language (Hurrian), and it could potentially have been used in the writing of any number of

[29] Also LEHMANN 2023, 16. All the examples in the interim between Proto Sinaitic and Proto Canaanite inscriptions are in cuneiform alphabetic. According to DOBBS-ALLSOPP 2023, 38, this may have been due to the lack of standardization for writing readily recognizable languages with the script(s) until Iron IIA. HÖLFMAYER et al 2021, 215, also write: "Indeed, Lachish has yielded more examples of Late Bronze Age early alphabetic inscriptions than any other site" which is untrue even if the inscriptions written on clay tablets from Ugarit are discounted and only inscribed objects are taken into account.

[30] FINKELSTEIN, SASS 2013, 153. There are a few older inscriptions from the area dated to the Middle Bronze Age but even accounting for these, the cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions form the majority of finds. There are a few other inscriptions that have been promoted as Levantine alphabetic inscriptions from the LBA which have been discounted as being non-alphabetic fitters' marks or merely painted decoration. Discounting the cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions from discussions of the distribution of early alphabetic writing causes e.g., FINKELSTEIN, SASS 2013, 183, to place the core area of the alphabet in the Shephelah/Philistia, where based on sheer numbers the core area of alphabetic writing should be placed much more north.

[31] According to DOBBS-ALLSOP 2023, 34, it required the end of the supporting scribal infrastructures of the large territorial states of the LBA. On the spread of alphabetic writing in the ancient world, see LEMAIRE 2008.

[32] On the development of Greek scripts, see JEFFERY 1961, POWELL 1991, WOODWARD 1997, GOLDWASSER 2006.

[33] On Linear Elamite, DESSET 2018, on Old Persian cuneiform, STRONACH 1990. DOBBS-ALLSOP 2023, 29, notes the delinguistic character of writing – the *notion* of a writing system being separate from the writing *system.*

other languages as well.[34] It is also noteworthy that there is not just one form of cuneiform alphabetic script but three – a long form (30 signs), short form (22 signs), and intermediary form (27 signs) – that share many sign forms but also contain unique sign forms. The long form, found mostly within the kingdom of Ugarit, was written left to right (dextrograde) and the short form was written mostly outside of Ugarit and was written predominately right to left (sinistrograde).[35] Given the *wide use* and *popularity* of the technology of cuneiform writing and the *relative ease* of alphabetic writing especially with Semitic languages (like the language of international diplomacy of the LBA, Akkadian),[36] it is surprising that the technology of cuneiform alphabetic did not spread through the ancient world like wildfire.[37] By taking a closer look at the examples of cuneiform alphabetic writing outside of its purported homeland, we may gain some insight as to what kind of a role the script played in the inscriptional world of the LBA, and especially the international relations of the kingdom. In the following, all the texts containing cuneiform alphabetic writing that have been found outside of the kingdom of Ugarit are discussed in detail.[38]

The Objects and their inscriptions

Clay Tablets

While hundreds of tablets containing cuneiform alphabetic writing have been discovered at Ugarit, and it is by far the most numerous medium for texts written in the cuneiform alphabetic script, only three tablets have been found outside of the kingdom, all from different locations: Tell Sukas, Tell Ta'annek, and Beth Shemesh. The vast majority of the texts are on clay tablets, the predominate material for writing in the LBA, and given the hundreds of clay tablets found within the kingdom of Ugarit, the fact that only three have been found outside

[34] SCHNIEDEWIND, HUNT 2007, 31. E.g., TOBOLA 2015, 60, argues that the ivory rod from Tiryns (see below) is an attempt at writing early Greek in the Ugaritic alphabet. While his reading of the inscription is unconvincing, such attempts may well have been made.

[35] BOYES 2020, 35.

[36] It has been argued that the orthography of (Sumero-Akkadian) cuneiform was based on the non-Semitic monosyllabic and logographic Sumerian language, making it ill-suited for the writing of Semitic Akkadian. See e.g., PEARCE 2010.

[37] One of the reasons, despite its greater ease, efficiency and speed of learning, may have been the loss of (high) iconicity that took place in the conversion of semi-pictographic morphological shapes of alphabetic signs into their cuneiform alphabetic equivalents. Only a few cuneiform alphabetic letters retain their iconic character (*b*, *g*, *ś*). See DOBBS-ALLPSOP 2023, 30–31. It is often claimed that alphabetic scripts were simpler (e.g., BOYES 2020, 48) and hence would have made it more accessible beyond elite circles but this is not necessarily true due to this loss of iconicity.

[38] All of the inscriptions discussed here were briefly discussed by BOYES 2020. In other discussions of cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions from outside of Ugarit merely their places of discovery are listed.

of its borders is noteworthy. The three tablets containing cuneiform alphabetic writing outside of Ugarit are discussed in the following.

(1) DO 849 (tablet) | KTU 4.766 (inscription)[39] [dextrograde]

The first of these is the least surprising, as Tell Sukas (ancient Šukši) was at least occasionally a part of Ugarit, although more aligned with Ugarit's vassal state Siyannu, and has been considered its southernmost port (there are actually two harbours to the north and south of the site). It is possible that more texts exist in the area of Šukši but no excavations have been conducted on the site since 1963. The tablet, 67 x 89 x 29 mm in size, contains a list of names which unfortunately have not for the most part been preserved. The text reads:

[ ]1	One to/from NN
[ ]1	One to/from NN
[ ]xxn 1	One to/from ...nnu
[ ]ġl 1	One to/from Iġġallu(?)
[ʻb]d*bʻl* 1	One to/from Abdibaal
[ ]l*by* 1	One to/from Libbiya
[ ]l*yd* 1	One to/from Liyaddu
[ ]ḥ*bn* 1	One to/from Hibbanu
[ ]*šmn* 1	One to/from Šimmanu/oil
[ ]n*n* 1	One to/from ...nnu
[ ]x*py* [1]	[One to/from] ...ppayu
...	
up.e.[40] [bn]š . *d bt mlk*	Service personnel, (those) of the household of the king

The text contains a list of names followed by the numeral for one. The numbers in the tablet are written in numerical notation which is on par with economic texts from Ugarit (they were likely used because they take fewer strokes than writing the numbers out, as they would have to have done if written in Ugaritic). All of the names are broken, and as the entire left side of the tablet is broken off, it is possible that what remains of the names are the patronymics rather than personal names of the people indicated. The names are of men – or at least there is no unambiguous female name in the list – but in the case of patronymics, that would be the case even if the entire list consisted of women. Hence the gender of the listed persons cannot be determined. It is also not clear what the list is for and what it enumerates or whether the

[39] Published by AAAS 11 (1961), fig. 6, 144.

[40] For the various conventions in transcribing Ugaritic texts, see KTU[3].

one is something that was given or belonged to the people listed or was owed by them. It seems that there are eleven names listed, even though the beginning of the tablet is broken.

What is clear is the meaning of the end of the final line: belonging to the palace. Only the final character of the probable word *bnš,* likely in reference to service personnel, men that belong to or are of the palace, is readable. While the word is again masculine, it does not necessarily indicate more than that one of the names is a male. It is also likely that the beginning of the line contained the noun (whether object, animal, or volume) the quantity of which was enumerated as belonging or coming from each of the names. With this crucial piece of information missing, it is impossible to determine what the list entailed even though the format of a list of names is laid out clearly. Such administrative lists are known from Ugarit is vast quantities, containing lists of names, occupations, numerals, and things in various combinations. More examples of texts written in the cuneiform alphabetic script might be expected to be unearthed in future excavations of the site.

A connection between Šukši and Ugarit is not surprising and as near-by coastal sites, traffic between them likely took place via ship, and in fact the town boasted two harbours in the LBA.[41]A land route via the coast may also have existed as both sites are on the same side of the al-Ansariya mountain range and Ugarit's perpetual vassal Siyannu (Tell Sianu) is practically next to Tell Sukas, which also occasionally fell under its domination.[42] In all likelihood this text is from a period in time when Šukši was a part of Ugarit and its administration, and hence ought to be discounted in discussions on the use of the alphabetic cuneiform script outside of Ugarit.

(2) TT 433 (tablet) | KTU 4.767 (inscription)[43] [dextrograde]

The tablet from Tell Ta'annek (TT 433) contains a complete text. The tablet of burnt clay is 22 x 12.5 x 4.8 cm in size. Discovered in 1963 and published in 1964,[44] the tablet has been dated to the early 12th century BCE. Albright had initially interpreted the tablet as an amulet cast from a metallic or stone mould containing an inscription invoking the Ugaritic birth-goddesses, the Kotharoth.[45] The place of discovery was a large building. It is not known whether the text was written in Ta'annek or its vicinity or written elsewhere (likely Ugarit) and imported there. The text reads:

[41] HEINZ 2016, 776.

[42] HEINZ 2016, 776.

[43] Published by BASOR 173 (1964), 45–50.

[44] Published by D. R. HILLERS: An Alphabetic Cuneiform Tablet from Taanach (TT 433). BASOR 173, 45–50.

[45] ALBRIGHT 1964, 51.

kkb ’sp . ’s Star(-like) gather the tree,

———

krpt . y’kl henna, let it be eaten!

rev. *dw* the sick/inflicted

The text has been interpreted as a medical prescription or legal notice of remittance. If the former, it could have been used as an amulet after the fulfilling of the prescription to ensure its continuing efficacy. In amuletic use, the origin of the tablet may be far from its place of discovery and may even have been written for a remedy in the kingdom of Ugarit for either a local person (tradesman?) or a visitor, either of whom could have taken the tablet to southern Levant on their journey.

Ta'annek seems to have had a notable Hurrian population based on the amount of Hurrian names in the cuneiform texts found in the city, which is also true of Ugarit.[46] The city was close to Megiddo and seems to have been under Egyptian domination in the LBA. Megiddo was a central node in the inland trade network, guarding the narrow pass of Wadi Ara and having a strategic location overlooking the Jezreel Valley. A trade route from Ugarit would probably have gone through one of the transverse roads from a coastal port, either Tell Abu Hawam or Tell Akko, which were both active in the LBA and which seem to have economic ties to the northern Levant.[47] Both sites also functioned as important anchorages serving the transverse trading routes from the Mediterranean to the Transjordan.[48] Out of these Akko is the likelier candidate as it is mentioned in the Ugaritic texts.[49]

(3) PAM 33.1876 (tablet) | KTU 5.24 (inscription)[50] [sinistrograde]

The tablet from Beth Shemesh contains an abecedary, a sequence of the cuneiform alphabetic signs (that roughly corresponds to the sequence of alphabetic signs still in use today). The arrangement of letters is in the so-called *halaḥam*-sequence, considered an alternative – and by some, even the older or more original – alphabetic sequence.[51] It is also

[46] GUSTAVS 1927.

[47] ARTZY 2013, 7.

[48] ARTZY 2013, 7.

[49] ARTZY 2013, 11. Note however that the material goods found in Tel Nami, another coastal site, resemble those of Ugarit, and ARTZY (p. 14) even speculates that Ugarit may have been the patron of the site in the LBA.

[50] Published by E. GRANT. Beth Shemesh in 1933, 4.

[51] BORDREUIL, PARDEE 2001, 314–348. HARING 2015 discusses the ostracon TT 99 from Thebes that seem to contain the sequence and which he claims is older than either the Beth Shemesh and Ugaritic halaḥam-sequence and hence would have been of putative Egyptian origin. He compares the texts on p. 195.

one of four cuneiform alphabetic texts outside of Ugarit that were written from right to left which may indicate the identity of the scribe as one learned in Proto Canaanite linear script.[52] The alphabet encountered in the text contains 27 characters, which is less than the full cuneiform alphabet of 30 characters and less than the so-called short alphabet that contains 22 characters. [53] Altogether 18 abecedaries and abecedary fragments in Ugaritic cuneiform alphabetic script are known.[54] The very presence of the alphabetic sequence outside of Ugarit, in the southern Levant, suggests that there was at least an attempt to educate people outside of Ugarit in the use of the script.

The place of discovery at Beth Shemesh is so far from the coast and seaports that it cannot have been accidentally left there by Ugaritic merchant sailors *en route* to other ports. Unlike most of the other sites from which cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions have been found, Beth Shemesh appears not to have been a notable trading post during the LBA, and in fact little is known about any of the sites in the northern Shephelah during this era.[55] It is notable that to date Beth Shemesh is the only site from which both cuneiform alphabetic and linear alphabetic inscriptions have been found.[56] While there may have been a transverse road connecting the city to the coast, it is much more likely that it was connected to the trade network through other inland sites and was connected to the sea through the port of Jaffa, an Egyptian city on the coast, and of the most important ports along the southern Levantine coast in general. Jaffa was in an ideal location for serving maritime traffic along the Levantine coast while also functioning as a conduit for trade from the central coastal plain to inland sites.[57] There is no clear reason why the sequence of the cuneiform alphabetic signs should have been used or deposited in the site, or how they found their way there. Out of all the sites discussed here, Beth Shemesh is the most remote.

Vessels and Earthenware

The majority of the cuneiform alphabetic texts outside of Ugarit are found on ceramic earthenware vessels and pieces of pottery. However, these texts are not ostraca in the sense of

[52] Examples of alphabetic writing prior to the 10th century BCE in the southern Levant seem to come from inland sites. DOBBS-ALLSOPP 2023, 45.

[53] It was debated from early on whether this alphabet represented a different alphabet altogether or variant caused by errors committed by student scribes. See HILLERS 1964, 45. It was especially this short form alphabet that could be written in either direction, where the longform was written dextrograde and the shortform sinistrograde. LEHMANN 2012, 17.

[54] LEHMANN 2012, 16.

[55] PAZ, BIRKENFELD 2017, 232.

[56] FINKELSTEIN, SASS 2013, 186.

[57] BURKE, AL 2010, 1.

broken off sherds of pottery where writing has been added. All of the texts seem to have originally been written on whole vessels that have broken afterwards likely due to the fact that the technology of pressing signs to clay with a cuneus works best on wet clay. It is notable that all of the linear alphabetic inscriptions from the Levant in the LBA have also been written on ceramic vessels. These include three inscriptions from Lachish (ewer, bowl, and bowl fragment), a bowl from Qubur el-Walaida, and sherds from Nagila and Gezer.[58] A few of the finds are ostraca with the inscriptions written post-firing with chalk or ink (Lachish bowl and bowl fragment)[59] or had been incised on the object after firing (Qubur el-Walaida bowl) but the others (Lachish ewer, Nagila and Gezer sherds) had been incised before firing like the cuneiform alphabetic examples.[60]

All of the examples of linear alphabetic inscriptions were written sinistrograde. All of the examples of linear alphabetic inscriptions are from the southern Levant where the distribution of cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions is more widely spread. It is notable that Lachish has the densest concentration of linear alphabetic (and hieratic) inscriptions, but no cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions have been found there. Lachish (Tell el-Duweir) was the main local centre in southern Canaan and may have functioned as the local counterpart for Egyptian Gaza in the LBA.[61] Also of note is that no linear alphabetic inscriptions have been found on coastal sites despite several well-excavated sites, all of the examples coming from inland sites.[62]

Likely or possible interpretations for inscriptions on pottery sherds, presuming the words were inscribed on a whole unbroken vessel and not scratched on a sherd used as an ostracon, include the (metric) contents of the vessel, the volume of the vessel, the personal name of the owner of the vessel, the name of the potter, or something alluding to the use or ownership of the vessel.[63] Ostraca as such are not known from Ugarit. This may be due to the technology of writing cuneiform alphabetic signs by impressing them on clay. It would be possible to press them on the soft clay of earthenware before firing but impressing them on fired pottery would be much more difficult than incising alphabetic signs of the Proto-Sinaitic variety.

[58] FINKELSTEIN, SASS 2013, 153–156. Four of the finds are from secure archaeological contexts.

[59] The bowl sherd is a rim fragment from a Cypriote White Slip II milk bowl. HÖLFMAYER et al 2021, 713.

[60] FINKELSTEIN, SASS 2013, 153–156.

[61] FINKELSTEIN, SASS 2013, 184. The linear alphabetic inscriptions from Lachish may also be the oldest examples of alphabetic writing in the Levant, dating to the 15th century BCE. Cf. HÖLFMAYER et al 2021. They describe (p. 708) Lachish as "one of the most prominent Bronze and Iron Age sites of the Southern Levant."

[62] FINKELSTEIN, SASS 2013, 176.

[63] BOYES 2020, 41, categorized these as references to the owner, maker, or recipient of the objects.

(4) TNM 022 (sherd) | KTU 6.71(inscription)[64] [sinistrograde]

The sherd from Qadeš (Tell Nebi Mend) contains an inscription. The text reads:

[ ]x*ml . l mbġl skn* Barley draff for Mabbiġġallu, the commissioner

It is also one of four cuneiform alphabetic texts outside of Ugarit that were written from right to left which may indicate the identity of the scribe as one learned in Proto Canaanite linear script. It is also written in the short alphabet. Likely interpretations for inscriptions on vessels include the names of the owners of the vessel, the contents of the vessel, or the authority that has either guaranteed the contents or to whom they were intended as tribute. A personal name is therefore expected, and the interpretation of *mbġl* as a name or a title is made all the more probable by the preposition *l*, frequently found on inscribed sherds.[65] It is not impossible that it refers to the same name that is found partially in KTU 4.766:4. The meaning of the name is not as significant as its function as a personal name in the inscription but interpretations like "the mule" have been offered.

What follows after the name is very likely a designation and *skn* is a known word for a royal representative or commissioner, but it was also used to refer to town governors.[66] They seem to have been the highest officials in the Ugaritic administrative system.[67] Outside of the kingdom, the *skn* seem to have acted as the representatives of the king of Ugarit and may even have taken on the duties of a viceroy on occasion.[68] The first word of the inscription is not entirely legible but possible candidates are *ṣml,* (barley draff) which is the remainder of the process of brewing beer, or some other commodity. The *skn* of Ugarit were involved in the gift exchanges trade of the LBA and it is unclear whether goods and items labelled with the title were meant for their households or to the royal household in whose name they would have

[64] Published by in UF 8 (1976), 459–460. DAVEY 1976, 18–20, mentions that a number of other tablets were also found and had not been read by the time of publication but no subsequent texts in the cuneiform alphabetic script have been published. The texts were likely found in the other one of the two LBA trenches excavated from which an Akkadian text to Ari-Teshup was uncovered. This trench was in the administrative district of the city but there is no mention of where the trench with the cuneiform alphabetic text was.

[65] Out of the twelve known *skn* of Ugarit, 8 had Hurrian names. VAN SOLDT 2010, 255. The name mentioned in this inscription is otherwise unattested and hence its ethnic background is uncertain.

[66] See MORAN 1992, XXVI. In EA 256:9 and 362:69 the Sumerian term maškin (envoy) is elaborated by the syllabic *sú-ki-ni/sú-ka-na*. It is likely that some kind of official is indicated.

[67] VAN SOLDT 2010, 250, 253. He points out that there are more than 200 place names known from Ugarit and only 8 of them have a *skn* which may indicate the special status of the towns.

[68] VAN SOLDT 2010, 254.

accepted them.[69] Regardless, the interpretation of the inscription as a label dedicating the contents of the vessel to the district governor seems the most likely.

The sherd has a parallel in the incised sherd (9.9 x 8.3 x 0.7 cm) found from Lachish dating to the 12th century BCE. The inscription had been incised before firing below the neck to the shoulder of the jar that was likely a large transport amphora.[70] The inscription was written in three lines with nine letters altogether preserved: [ ] *pkl* [ ] *spr* [ ] x*p*x, likely written from right to left or sinistrograde.[71] Schniedewind's reconstruction suggests that it contains a personal name (Phicol, cf. Gen. 21:22), the title for scribe, and the enumeration of 5 hekat of wheat, hekat (hqʾ.t) being an Egyptian measure for volume.[72] Reading the middle word as a title would make it a suitable parallel for the Tell Nebi Mend sherd, also seeming to contain a personal name, a title, and a reference to the contents of the vessel. There may be a difference in the cuneiform alphabetic inscription recording the recipient of the contents where the Lachish inscription may instead have been a reference to the guarantor of the contents.

There is another parallel in the inscribed rim fragment (4.0 x 3,5 cm) of a milk bowl from Lachish, albeit the inscription was written in dark ink post-firing. The sherd likewise seems to contain a (fragmentary) personal name and a name for a commodity, in this case honey or nectar: [ ]*ʿbd npt*.[73] The Tel Nagila sherd is closer in age to the cuneiform alphabetic inscription and had also been incised before firing.[74]

Tell Nebi Mend is traditionally associated with Qadeš on the Orontes, a buffer state between the Egyptians and the Hittites in the LBA, but the identification is not certain. If the identification is correct, the text was found squarely on the Homs Gap, the passage from the coastal plain to southern Levant. The strategic and central location of the city at the entrance to the Beqaa Valley means that it must have been a node in a possible overland trading route between northern and southern Levant – albeit a possibility remains that Qadeš was reached from Ugarit via the port of Sumur. Qadeš was the southern neighbour of Qatna and hence along the established trade route from Qatna to Hazor in the south.[75]

(5) CM 1450 (bowl) | KTU 6.68 (inscription)[76] [sinistrograde]

[69] VAN SOLDT 2010, 254–255.

[70] SASS ET AL 2015.

[71] SASS ET AL 2015, 236, go through the different possible readings ultimately deciding that the text is too fragmentary to be decipherable.

[72] SCHNIEDEWIND 2020, 137.

[73] HÖLFMAYER ET AL 2021, 714.

[74] HÖLFMAYER ET AL 2021, 715.

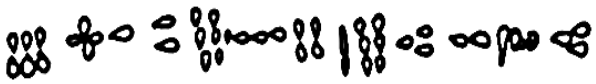
[75] PFÄLZNER 2012, 780.

[76] Published by P. ÅSTRÖM, E. MASSON. A silver bowl from Hala Sultan Tekke. RDAC 1982, 72–76.

The final vessel with cuneiform alphabetic writing is on a silver bowl from Hala Sultan Tekke on Cyprus. The shallow and roughly hemispherical bowl is 4.2 x 15.2 cm (base 9.2 cm) in size and was found hidden in the town wall of the Late Cypriote IIIA town, dating to the 12th century BCE. The bowl, which is otherwise unremarkable and typical to the era, was found upside down inside the rubble wall of a Late Cypriot building and has hence been interpreted as a building offering. The inscription is on the outer side. The text reads:

ks . aky . bn yptḥd The bowl of Aky/Akkuya, son of Yiptahhaddu

The inscription contains a personal name, recognized by the patronymic *bn*. The name of the father is a Semitic name with the theophoric element Haddu (Hadad), connected to the local storm god of Mount Saphon. The name Aky is more difficult to place. It may be a diminutive of the Semitic name Yakov[77] or a noun denoting the bird owl.[78] Voskos & Knapp claim that it is a Hurrian name, basing it on the initial discussion by Åström & Masson.[79] Aky is either the maker or the owner and recipient of the bowl. There is a possible parallel in the inscribed pithos rim from Ras Ibn Hani (KTU 6.106).



Finding a piece of Ugaritic writing on the island that was one of the closest neighbours and trading partners of Ugarit is not surprising – it is, rather, surprising that there are not more exemplars that have been discovered. It is not possible to ascertain whether the bowl was an import or local manufacture, although there is little reason to suspect that it would have been made at Ugarit rather than produced locally. The site in the LBA was also known for its metal work, production of silver objects, and copper workshops of an industrial scale that were featured in its long distance trade. For this reason, it seems likely that the object was produced locally and had been meant for the use of an Ugaritian. It should also be noted that the form of the signs are rounded in a typical Cypro-Minoan fashion. Since Hala Sultan Tekke (or its neighbouring Kition with an international port) is only reachable from Ugarit by the sea, there is no doubt that it was a node in the maritime trading network of the LBA – albeit the port of Enkomi has been seen as the main trading partner of Ugarit.[80] While anchors have been found

[77] The name Jacob is found at Ugarit but spelled *yrgb, ygb* or *yaqb*. On the origin of the name in the Egyptian context, see RYHOLT 2010.

[78] So WATSON 2007, 108, although he does not give reasons for the interpretation nor even the designation of the list of proper nouns in which the name is supposedly listed.

[79] VOSKOS, KNAPP 2008, 663, ÅSTRÖM, MASSON 1982, 72–76.

[80] Although note that the site of Maa has yielded the most weights of the Ugaritic standard from Cyprus. PARPAS 2022, 28. Maa and Tell Nami share similarities in material culture during the LBA, and the latter has been proposed as a Ugaritian satellite port.

at Hala Sultan Tekke, its port may also have been silted up during the 13th century BCE making it unsuitable for navigation.[81] Cyprus in general was one of the most important trading partners of Ugarit with evidence of Ugaritian trading activity at multiple sites, and hence it is even a little surprising that no further examples of cuneiform alphabetic writing have been found there.

Jar Handles

Three of the inscriptions on earthenware vessels were specifically found on the handles of the vessels. This is significant in that storage vessels were often stamped or marked on the handles. Inscriptions on vessel handles usually indicated the ownership or contents of the vessels. Given the low proportion of handles bearing inscriptions, it has also been suggested that the inscriptions may reference regional managers overseeing the production of the vessels where a single vessel would have been marked to stand for the whole batch.[82] Except for clay tablets, jar handles are the most numerous type of object inscribed in the cuneiform alphabetic script with seven examples altogether, the other four examples from Minet el-Beida (KTU 1.77, a possible votive dedication) and Ugarit (KTU 6.76, 9.413, 9.415). These may be paralleled by the later *lmlk*-stamped jar handles from the area of Palestine,[83] or the jar handles from el-Jib containing personal and geographic names,[84] but Boyes pointed out that inscribed handles do not necessarily bear the same meaning at Ugarit as they did elsewhere.[85] He made the observation that the examples from within Ugarit were from residential areas and those from outside were from industrial areas, speculating that they might have been produced in 'Phoenician' (Levantine coastal) workshops and from there sold to customers, being 'Phoenician' imports *into* Ugarit.[86]

(6) KL 67: 428p (sherd) | KTU 6.2 (inscription)[87] [dextrograde].

[81] PARPAS 2022, 20.

[82] BOYES 2020, 43.

[83] Eleven stamp seal impressions containing this construction were found at Ramat Raḥel. LIPSCHITS, VANDERHOOFT 2007, 23. The same impression has also been found at Jericho and Rogem Gannim. The theory of Lipschits and Vanderhooft is that jars stamped with the seals would have been distributed empty to citizens who would then have returned them to the administration full of taxed goods. Similar stamp seal impressions on storage jar handles dating to the 6th century are also known from Gibeon. See CROSS 1962; PRITCHARD 1960. See also STERN 1971 for the jar handles stamped with iconographic motifs of lions instead of text.

[84] Published in PRITCHARD 1966. El-Jib produced 60 inscribed handles and 80 handles stamped with the *lmlk*-seal. These are dated to the Iron Age.

[85] BOYES 2020, 38.

[86] Boyes 2020, 40.

[87] Published by G. WILHELM in Eine Krughenkelinschrift in alphabetischer Keilschrift aus Kamid el-Loz (KL 67: 428p), UF 5 (1973), 284–288.

The first of the two inscriptions containing alphabetic cuneiform writing from Kamid el-Loz, ancient Kumidi, was written on the jar handle of a clay vessel (8 cm in height) that was found buried near the MBA city wall. The text, written in the short alphabet, reads:

l rb (Dedicated) to the prince[88]

Inscribed objects containing a dedication using the *l* preposition are common and it can be expected that the inscription had once belonged to a whole vessel, and it was not merely the existing piece of the handle that had the dedication. The preposition is the likely beginning of the inscription despite a break in the handle, but it is uncertain whether additional letters follow the rest of the inscription. The word *rb* is an adjective meaning 'great' and has been used in reference to chiefs of groups (e.g., *rb khnm* is the chief of the priests, i.e., the high priest, KTU 2.4:1 or *rb qrt*, the great one of the city, i.e., the village chief, KTU 4.141 iii:3).[89] The adjective can appear also attached to ethnonyms e.g., *l rb kṯkym*, to the chief of the Kaskians (KTU 6.3). The parallel between this inscription and the Judean *lmlk* labels was made already in the first edition.[90] It has been suggested that the word in this inscription corresponds with the Akkadian *rabû* (lú-gal), which was during the Amarna era the title for the highest Egyptian official in the southern Levant in the Akkadian correspondence.[91] Perhaps notable is that the name Ili-rabi (*'ilrb*) known from Ugarit is also found in the cuneiform texts from Kumidi (KL 74:300) in a context where the *rabû* of Kumidi is sent for. This means that the title of *rabû* was in use in the city and the label in the jar handle may be meant for the *rabû* of Kumidi in particular.

(7) KL 77:66 (sherd) | KTU 6.67 (inscription)[92] [dextrograde]

The second inscription from Kamid el-Loz is written on the handle of a pithos. The handle is 3.0 x 4.0 cm in height. The text reads:

ymn Right (hand) / Ionia(n)

[88] DIETRICH & LORETZ 1988, 228–231, read the inscription *d rb,* 'the one of the great one' but their reading may be inspired more by a desire to prove the 'Ugaritianness' as opposed to the 'Phoenicianness' of the inscription. The relative pronoun (*d* at Ugarit and *z* in Phoenicia) is one of the few factors with which distinction may be shown between the languages.

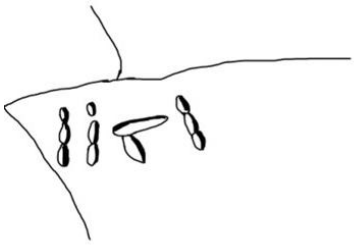
[89] Note that the term *rb qrt* is attested only once and it is found in connection with *bnš mlk*, the men of the king, also enumerated in the Tell Sukas tablet.

[90] WILHELM 1973, 288.

[91] WILHELM 1980, 99.

[92] Published by MANSFELD 1986 p. 45, fig. 20.

While *ymn* is a common noun for the right hand in Ugaritic,[93] the text has been interpreted as referring to the island of Cyprus.[94] The identification of Yamanu with Cyprus is based on Akkadian, although in Akkadian texts Cyprus is usually indicated by Yadana and Yamanu refers to Ionia.[95] The easiest interpretation for the text is that it had belonged to a transport amphora from the Aegean and the text indicated the place of origin of what ever had been imported from the island. Mycenaeans were especially known as wine traders, making the reading of Ionian rather than Cypriote more likely.[96] According to Boyes, any number of alternative interpretations suggest themselves rather than the inscription bearing the label of the place of manufacture of the object.[97] For example, the sherd might be an ostracon and the text had been written purposefully on a small piece of clay either to record an oracular pronouncement or as a piece belonging to some kind of a game – whether for children or adults.[98] If the reference is to 'Ionian', it might be the designation of the origin of the contents of the vessel or the moniker of the owner or sender of the contents.



Ancient Kumidi was an Egyptian centre in the LBA, used as a kind of base of operations through which the Egyptian administration oversaw the local Levantine rulers. It was one of the largest sites in the region.[99] In the Beqaa Valley, it is separated from the coast by the Mount Lebanon range, the city was, like Qadeš, a midway station within a trade route from Qatna to Hazor in the south and from the Mediterranean coast to Damascus in the east, it stands at the

[93] WYATT 1996, 139–141, discusses the connotations of the word in Ugaritic. The orientation indicated by *ymn* is South, which fits ill with interpreting it as a reference to Ugarit's Western neighbour.

[94] DIETRICH & LORETZ 1988. According to them, the diagnostic letter forms in the inscription resemble those of the Hala Sultan Tekke silver bowl, both of which contain rounded letters that resemble the teardrop shape of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions all of which would have been caused by the rounded tip of the Cypriote stylus.

[95] KUHRT 2002, 19. There are not that many attestations of *ia-man-a* in the Akkadian records either. It is mentioned in an administrative record from Nineveh (SAA 07 048 6, cf. FALES, POSTGATE 1992) and in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon. There are no attestations of the word in Assyrian sources before the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III in the 8th century. The attestations are discussed by KUHRT 2002, 18–19. Note that Yadnana and Ionia are both mentioned in Esarhaddon 060 10'/RINAP 4 (cf. LEICHTY 2011) meaning that they were considered different places.

[96] The most comprehensive volume on Greeks trading in wine in the LBA is by PRATT 2021, based on her 2014 dissertation. Wine and oil are often mentioned together when Mycenaean trade is discussed. The interpretation of the inscription as 'Ionian' = "Greek peoples in general" is also supported by BOYES 2020, 39.

[97] BOYES 2020, 39.

[98] Egyptian evidence suggests that games were enjoyed by adults, and they might even have had philosophical, metaphysical interpretations e.g., representing the journey of the soul in the afterlife like with the game Senet.

[99] PFÄLZNER 2012, 781.

crossroads of two major transregional overland routes.[100] The Orontes, which is easily accessed from Ugarit through the Ghab Basin, flows from the valley which means that Kumidi was one of the sites that could have been reached through an inland trade route and for which using such a terrestrial route from Ugarit would have made sense.[101] In fact, the centrality of the location of Kumidi owed especially to its overland connections, as it was easily accessible from the north and the south.[102] Tell Nebi Mend, ancient Qadeš, is upstream from Kumidi, and would have been a stop along a terrestrial route from Ugarit to Kumidi.[103]

(8) SAR 3102 (sherd) | KTU 6.70 (inscription)[104] [dextrograde]

The Sarepta jar handle fragment was discovered in 1972 during the University of Pennsylvania excavations in Sarafand, Lebanon. It seems to have originally formed a part of a large transport vessel or amphora that has been dated to 1290±52 BCE. The handle, approximately 12 x 9 cm in size, was found in the industrial area of the city near a concentration of kilns (Area II X) next to a kiln within a workshop which suggests that the amphora had been locally made.[105] The inscription was incised on the ridged handle of the vessel and had been pressed into the clay before firing.[106] The text reads:

ʾgn z pʿl yd[ ]	The vessel[107] which was made by Yadnu-
[ ]r/n *bʿl z lḫdš bʿl*[ ]	Baal, belonging to Hadšu-Baal[108]

[100] HEINZ 2016, 10.

[101] The Amuq Valley north of Ugarit and the Beqaa Vally south of Ugarit are connected by the Orontes river system and are both a part of the larger Syro-African Rift valley. PFÄLZNER 2016 discussed the bones of the Syrian Elephant that have been found in Ugarit, Qatna, and Kumidi.

[102] HEINZ 2016, 8.

[103] Although it remains a possibility that both Tell Nebi Mend and Kamid el-Loz could have been reached through a transverse road from Sumur on the coast.

[104] Published by J. TEIXIDOR, D. I. OWEN. Sarepta: A Preliminary Report on the Iron Age, 1975: 102–104. They recognize the script as that of Ugarit but do not consider the inscription necessarily written in Ugaritic language. GREENSTEIN 1979, 49, likewise suggests it may have been written in Phoenician – or what would later become Phoenician. In this case, it would be the oldest known Phoenician inscription.

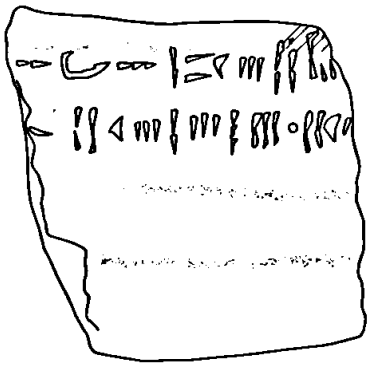
[105] BOYES 2020, 33.

[106] BOYES 2020, 29.

[107] The letter *g* in *ʾgn* is written in the Proto-Canaanite script instead of the cuneiform alphabetic script, prompting GREENSTEIN 1979, 54, to suggest that the scribe may have been used to writing in linear script. It does seem to indicate at least that there were persons who knew both the cuneiform alphabet and the Proto-Canaanite alphabet.

[108] Originally read as "for the festival of the new moon" but recognized as personal names by GREENSTEIN 1979, 50–54. Instead of a theophoric personal name it is also possible that the name is a theonym and hence the inscription would be a dedication to the god of the new moon. See BOYES 2020, 42, for possible interpretations.

The text was written using the so-called short alphabet, a simplified version of the cuneiform alphabetic script that only contains 22 characters. The short-form alphabet was usually written from right to left or sinistrograde, unlike the full cuneiform alphabetic script known from Ugarit. This may have been a Levantine adaptation, as the Proto-Sinaitic script is generally written from right to left, albeit the writing direction of various alphabetic scripts was not settled until late into Iron Age, and even after that different daughter-scripts took on different writing directions.[109]



The short form alphabet seems to have been used predominantly in inscribing objects rather than written on tablets.[110] One of the peculiarities of the short form script is that in some signs (*b*, *d*), the horizontal wedges have been turned into upside down vertical wedges one assumes for the reason that they are easier to inscribe on objects. The second sign does not look like any cuneiform alphabetic sign and explanations for the shape have ranged from it being an example of the Proto-Canaanite linear alphabetic script to an inscribing error where a stroke has been drawn too far. The sign is generally interpreted as symbolizing the letter *g*. The inscription has been interpreted as containing the name of the maker of the object (Ydnb‘l) and the name of the recipient (Hdšb‘l).[111] Boyes discards the interpretation “the vessel that Yadnubaal made for [his] new lord [...]” on the basis that it does not contain the definite article (which does not exist in Ugaritic), the enclitic possessive suffix (which would have been cut off with the break in the sherd along with the possible name of this new lord) and adjectives usually following nouns in Phoenician (it is not certain that the underlying language is Phoenician).[112] I do not find this interpretation to be any more unlikely than the others.

Sarepta was a coastal city with two harbours in the LBA, situated 13 km south of Sidon, and had been a part of the Eastern Mediterranean sea trade network as well as the regional trade network that connected it to inland centres. Ugarit’s connection to the inland trading networks may well have been through the coastal connection of Sarepta. Sarepta in the LBA also had a

[109] The dating of the change from multidirectional to unidirectional horizontal writing is still debated with dates ranging from 1050–950 BCE. After this time, the shapes of the letters become more schematized and lose their iconicity. DOBBS-ALLSOPP 2023, 29, proposes that the direction from right to left that was adopted in the Levantine linear alphabetic scripts of the first millennium BCE owes its origin to Egyptian hieratic scribalism.

[110] BOYES 2020, 31.

[111] BOYES 2020, 40. This personal name is otherwise unattested.

[112] BOYES 2020, 42.

trade relationship with Cyprus, and hence it may have served as an important node in Ugaritian trade.[113] Where Cyprus was famous for its metal workshops, Sarepta boasted extensive pottery production areas, indicating that pottery was one of the main trading wares of the site.[114]

Ritual Weapons

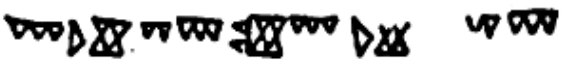
There are two weapons with inscriptions containing cuneiform alphabetic script. Inscribed weapons are also known from the kingdom of Ugarit and in fact one of the very first texts ever deciphered in the cuneiform alphabetic script was written on a ritual axe head (KTU 6.6), of which several kinds have since been discovered.

(9) PAM 44.318 / IAA 1944–318 (knife) | KTU 6.1 (inscription)[115] [sinistrograde]

The first is the blade of a 14.6 cm long bronze knife found at Mount Tabor (or more accurately, the dry riverbed of Nahal Tabor) in northern Israel. The text, written parallel and very close to the blunt edge of the blade, reads:

lṣ[ ]bl*ʾl bp lṣbʾl* Belonging to Sillibaal, son of Pulsibaal[116]

The text seems to contain a dedication which is on par with other inscribed weapons from Ugarit. It is also one of four cuneiform alphabetic texts outside of Ugarit that were written from right to left which may indicate the identity of the scribe as one learned in Proto-Canaanite linear script.[117] It is noteworthy that two of the texts found in the southern Levant (this and the Beth Shemesh text) are written in this fashion whereas among the hundreds of texts from Ugarit, there is only one written from right to left.



The repetition of the same letters (*dittography*) in continuous script (*scriptio continua*) and without word dividers in the inscription makes it seem like a scribal exercise or a failed and

[113] PARPAS 2022, 130.

[114] PFÄLZNER 2013, 775.

[115] Published by S. YEIVIN: A New Ugaritic Inscription from Palestine. Kedem II. 1945: 32–41.

[116] This is the traditional reading. Assuming that the *bp* digraph was the intention of the inscriber and it is not in error or incomplete, the likely meaning is *b*-preposition combined with a noun, *p*. Possible interpretations for this are "from the mouth" i.e., 'this was dictated by' or "in/from here" i.e., 'NN[1] who is known here as NN[2]'.

[117] Dextrograde writing seems to owe to Egyptian origin whereas sinistrograde direction comes from Mesopotamia. Cuneiform alphabetic script being a combination of the technologies, it is surprising that there are not many more examples of multidirectional writing (the examples are collected in DIETRICH & LORETZ 1988, 145–275). Finding examples of dextrograde cuneiform alphabetic writing in the southern Levant is also natural and even to be expected. This may even suggest that the inscriptions were not written at Ugarit and imported to these southern Levantine locations but that they may actually have been produced locally. On the direction of alphabetic writing, cf. DOBBS-ALLSOP 2023.

restarted attempt at an inscription, but the fact that the letters have been inscribed on a metal object is an argument against this.[118] The script must have had significance for the inscriber or owner of the object, as incising the inscription in the Proto-Canaanite lapidary script would have been much easier and quicker. The existence of a personal name on an object is to be expected, once more corroborated by the existence of the preposition *l* at the beginning of the inscription. Parallels on inscribed ritual weapons can be found, e.g., on the ceremonial bronze axe heads dedicated to the high priest at Ugarit (KTU 6.6, 6.7, 6:81, 6.10). The blade is paralleled by the Lachish bronze dagger, a 21 cm blade incised with an alphabetic inscription dated to the late Middle Bronze Age bearing the inscription [ ]*rn*[ ].[119] It is possible that such weapons were inscribed with the names of their owners due to the preciousness of metallic objects that would have made it easier to locate their owners after battles, where one might easily have lost their weapon on the battlefield. The Lachish dagger was found in a mortuary context, emphasizing the personal quality of the object.[120] The inscription bears four letters, two of which have been identified, and it has been interpreted as a personal name,[121] and the readings *ṭrnz* and *lrnz* have been proposed with reference to a possible non-Semitic personal name Turranza.[122] Once more the cuneiform alphabetic inscription is considerably longer than the linear alphabetic parallel.

It is possible that the weapon had initially contained the name of the first owner whose son had subsequently inscribed it with his own name which would also explain the missing *n* from *bn* – for which the space would have run out when the second inscription (*lṣ*[ ]bl*'l b*<n>) was incised before the first one (*plṣb'l*), subsequently turning the first owner's name into a

[118] It is especially striking that the four *l*-letters appear at seemingly regular intervals, punctuating the inscription: *l* ... *l* ... *l* ... *l*. If the interpretation of the middle-most signs as *b* and *p* is correct (and both characters are somewhat unorthodox in form – the horizontal bottom wedges of *b* are instead inverted vertical wedges, although this is true of the other *b*-signs of the inscription, as well – and the two horizontal wedges of the *p* are written so close to the *b*-sign as to form a part of one and the same sign), they would seem to form a central sign around which the letters *l, ṣ, b, ', l* are all repeated twice. There is a space between the first *ṣ* and *b*, but damage to the knife makes it impossible to tell whether a sign ever stood there. The inscription reads **𐤋** *ṣ*[ ]*b'* **𐤋** *bp* **𐤋** *ṣb'* **𐤋**, which is suspiciously symmetric. Of course, although rare in LBA Semitic onomastics, it is possible for a father and a son to carry the same name ('John Johnson') but while the middle-most sign *b* has been read as *b*<n> (son), it is clear that no sign could possibly have fit between *b* and *p*. Presuming a mistake on the part of the inscriber, an intention of *n* (3 sequential horizontal wedges) or *t* (1 horizontal wedge, for *bt*, house) would be just as likely for *p* (2 overlaid horizontal wedges). Regardless, it has little effect on the meaning of the text indicating the name of a person. Note that the name ⌜t⌝*ṣb'l* appears on the Mesad Hashavyahu ostracon. The meaning of the name is unknown but in light of Ugaritic could stand for something like 'ewe of Baal'. On the reading of the name on the ostracon, cf. TIGAY 1986, 14; 1987, 163.

[119] HÖLFMAYER ET AL 2021, 714.

[120] SASS 1988, 53–54. This is significant especially because daggers are not found in Levantine tombs following MB IIc, GOLDWASSER 2016b, 140.

[121] GOLDWASSER 2016b, 142.

[122] LIPINSKI 2016 129.

patronymic. This would also confirm the direction of writing from right to left. This in turn suggests that the dagger was either an (inherited) import from Ugarit or owned by a Ugaritian family stationed in the southern Levant that had been educated in the cuneiform alphabetic script where the latter or both inscriptions would have been produced locally.

Mount Tabor is located at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley and at an important crossroads where the Via Maris intersects with a transverse road from the Levantine coast to Damascus. A landmark along the trade route, it served especially as a waystation between Megiddo and Damascus. Mount Tabor seems to have been the site of several battles across the millennia,[123] the first identified battle from the time of Thuthmose III and subsequently by Amenhotep II.[124] It seems likely that a weapon would have been lodged in the riverbed during one of the skirmishes rather than having wound up there through the process of trade. Whether the Ugaritian man named in the inscription was a warrior and possibly slain in one of the recurring battles in the area is unknown but it bears noting that the Syrian ne'arim (*n'rm*, e.g., KTU 4.367:7) troops seem to have been favoured by the Egyptians in their wars in the Levant, described even as "all the foremost men" of the Pharaoh's army indicating that the Syrian soldiers consisted of a warrior elite.[125] While possibly witnessing to the presence of Ugaritians in the wider LBA world, the inscription gives us little information regarding Ugarit's trade relationships.

(10) Ti 02 LXIII 34/91 VI d12.80 (rod) | KTU 6.104 (inscription)[126] [sinistrograde]

The second is a cylindrical piece of an (hippopotamus) ivory rod found at Tiryns. The preserved length of the object is 3.7 cm x 1.0 cm, but it was likely longer when intact. The original object had a carefully smoothened and polished surface which indicates its use as a ritual rather than an everyday object, although the initial publication suggested its use as a measuring rod, a label, or a 'tally stick'.[127] This is the find furthest from Ugarit and seems to witness to a commercial relationship from Ugarit to mainland Greece and the Mycenaean world.[128] Found in the excavation season 2002–2003, the object was *in situ* in the Lower Citadel

[123] Cf. MAYES 1969 on the possible historical background of the battle in Judges 4–5.

[124] The site of Anaharath mentioned in his list of conquered cities has been identified with the area. Cf. AHARONI 1967.

[125] MACDONALD 1980, 70.

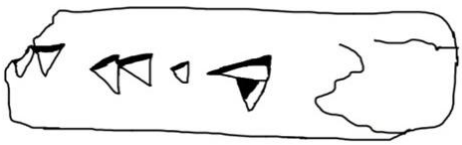
[126] Published by C. COHEN, J. MARAN, M. VETTERS. An Ivory Rod with a Cuneiform Inscription, Most Probably Ugaritic, from a Final Palatial Workshop in the Lower Citadel of Tiryns. Archäologischer Anzeiger 2. 2011: 1–22. They interpreted (p. 13–14) the object as a handle, possibly of a mirror, the shaft of a spindle, a measuring stick, or a decorative rod. They suggest as parallels for the latter the pomegranate and opium poppy rods from LBA contexts from Cyprus and the Near East. These rods likely represent symbolic weapons.

[127] COHEN, MARAN, VETTERS 2010, 14.

[128] Note that cuneiform texts in general are excessively rare in Mycenean Greece. COHEN, MARAN, VETTERS 2010, 13.

of Tiryns (Building XI, Room 78).[129] Since the building was in use for a very short time in the LH III B Final period (c. 1200 BCE), the object can be dated with more accuracy than most objects containing text in the cuneiform alphabetic script.

The purpose or function of the rod is unclear. It is possible that it represents a ceremonial weapon, which were often made from precious but brittle materials, unsuited for actual use as weapons.[130] One of the suggestions is that it was an oracular rod and was used to record a prophecy. The text reads:



ms'l[t] An oracle

The interpretation of the text is unclear, but several possibilities have been suggested.[131] The *edition princeps* by the excavators read the text as containing numerical signs (60 + 10 + 10) and a word for either container or measure.[132] Other possibilities are a personal name *Mš'* that is otherwise unattested,[133] a non-Semitic personal name *M'l*,[134] the word for loan, debt or donation with the preposition *l* (*mš' l*)[135] or the word for oracle (*mš'lt*) where the final letter is cut off.[136] The first letter is clear but the interpretation of the second and third letters is uncertain. The second character resembles the word-divider. The fourth letter may be a *l* but it is missing the final wedge. Across the board the interpretations of the text read the second sign as *ṯ* and render it with another sibilant phoneme. While all of the readings have problems, the existence of rhabdomantic practices in the Mycenaean world is an argument in the favour of the latter reading.[137]

Tiryns could only have been reached by the Ugaritians through a maritime connection, and Tiryns was one of the major ports in the Aegean during the LBA and as such would have been a natural trading partner with the Ugaritians – witnessed e.g., by the amount of Mycenaean pottery found at Ugarit.[138] The route from Ugarit to Tiryns via the sea likely followed the Anatolian coastline and the Dodecanese islands eastward to the mainland.

[129] COHEN, MARAN, VETTERS 2010, 1.

[130] TÖYRÄÄNVUORI 2012.

[131] Reviewed in TOBOLA 2015.

[132] They also read the inscription from left to right or dextrograde. See COHEN, MARAN, VETTERS 2010, 3. Their interpretation hinges on their reading of the character *ṯ* as a short form of the measure *ṯ't* that is not known from elsewhere.

[133] WEIPPERT 2011.

[134] TOBOLA 2015.

[135] TROPPER, VITA 2010.

[136] DIETRICH, LORETZ 2010.

[137] Discussed by DIETRICH, LORETZ 2010. Also implicated in the Hebrew Bible in Hos. 4:12, Ez. 21:21, and Num. 17:2.

[138] HEINZ 2016, 795.

Whether the rod was inscribed locally or was an import remains unresolved. However, it seems probable that the rod was purposefully left to Tiryns as a dedication or votive offering by someone with knowledge of the cuneiform alphabetic script, possibly a Ugaritian merchant sailor. There is also evidence that Cypriots lived in Tiryns during the 13th century BCE with close commercial ties between the two – with Cypriots involved in the metalworking workshops there – so a triangular trade relationship between Ugarit, Tiryns, and Hala Sultan Tekke with its metal workshops is also not out of the question.[139]

Levantine overland trade in the LBA

Late Bronze Age trade networks are some of the best-studied in the ancient world, especially those of maritime trade. The LBA world, one of intensive trade and interregional exchange, is seen as a complex interconnected network with trade as one of the most important drivers of these connections between regions.[140] While private trade took place, the period is characterized by the tendency of the socially and politically powerful to monopolise as far as possible the production and circulation of materials or goods on which their social status or their practical power depended. Especially in the Levant, these the LBA trade networks were decentralized, profit-driven, and without strict demarcation between private and public commerce.[141] Trade during this period was a complex system of various economic principles, among them reciprocity, redistribution, and a kind of a free market system. Long-distance trade was conducted by specialized merchants.[142] It is noteworthy that all of the sites listed here that featured inscriptions in the cuneiform alphabetic script are counted among the cities of the two main ancient trade routes of the Eastern Mediterranean: the Via Maris, which ran along the coast all the way to Ugarit, and the King's Highway through the Syrian interior.[143]

This commerce took place along long-distance route networks and intersection points along these networks.[144] Maritime trade routes and overland routes articulated at coastal centres, Ugarit being perhaps the foremost among them in the LBA. Of the great kingdoms, both the Egyptians and the Hittites seem to have been uncomfortable on the open sea and were inherently suspicious of people who sailed the seas with ease.[145] It was easier to monitor overland trade routes by means of customs-posts, military garrisons, and roadblocks.[146] The

[139] PARPAS 2022, 81.
[140] PFÄLZNER 2012, 792.
[141] BOYES 2020, 44.
[142] HEINZ 2016, 793.
[143] JOSEPHSON HESSE 2008, 38–39.
[144] SHERRAT 2016, 291.
[145] SHERRAT 2016, 292.
[146] SHERRAT 2016, 292.

geographical features of the Levant strongly control the direction of the roads that run along valleys, passes, and wadis, making the routes fixed through times.[147]

Only three of the inscriptions have been found at coastal cities, which is to be expected due to the maritime trade networks of the LBA. The majority of the texts, however, are such a distance from the coast as to suggest alternative routes. There was an alternative route that ran from Qatna to Hazor and further south that was frequented in winter and spring. The Qatna route was connected to the east-west transverse road from Tell Kazel (Sumur) through the Homs Gap.[148] Other transverse routes went from Ugarit directly through the Nahr el-Kebir valley and from Sarepta along the Litani to Kamid el-Loz, Sarepta also connected to Hazor.[149] This places Ugarit not only has a hub in the maritime trade but also either the starting or ending point of an overland trade route to southern Levant – whether from Ugarit directly or through the port of Tell Kazel. Ta'annek and Mount Tabor were also along transverse roads along the Jezreel Valley which connected to the route from southern Arabia to northern Syria, used especially for incense trade.[150] These cuneiform alphabetic texts witness to Ugarit's position in both the maritime but *also* in the overland trade network in the Levant, and the connections from the Levant to the wider Eastern Mediterranean trade.

Conclusions

The cuneiform alphabetic texts found outside of the kingdom of Ugarit make up a small percentage of the overall text corpus. The origins of the script notwithstanding, the wealth of texts from Ugarit and a lack of texts from its neighbours, barring a single text from ancient Šukši, give strong indication that the script was a native Ugaritic invention. The script is mostly a cuneiform rendering of the more widely spread Proto-Sinaitic or linear alphabet of putative Egyptian origin, and correspondences between the alphabetic and cuneiform alphabetic signs can be demonstrated, but why the scribes from Ugarit chose to render these characters into cuneiform shapes is unknown.[151] It is, however, known that correspondence on clay tablets using standard cuneiform was a common practice in the Ugaritic kingdom throughout the LBA and the question might rather be, why the cuneiform rendering of the Proto-Sinaitic or later alphabetic characters was not *more* common in the Levant, given that most kingdoms of the

[147] JOSEPHSON HESSE 2008, 38.

[148] JOSEPHSON HESSE 2008, 39.

[149] JOSEPHSON HESSE 2008, 39.

[150] JOSEPHSON HESSE 2008, 39.

[151] For speculation on the topic, see ZEMÁNEK 2006, who argues that the script was used primarily for internal communication within the kingdom since that is where we find most of the texts. Of course, the burning of Ugarit preserved texts there whereas archives elsewhere on the Levantine coast may not have been similarly preserved so this is an argument from silence. See also MYNÁŘOVÁ 2006.

Egypt-dominated Levant were nodes in a cuneiform writing network.[152] This is curious, especially in light of the alphabetic sequence of cuneiform alphabetic signs discovered at Beth Shemesh (perhaps incidentally, the furthest findspot to the south from Ugarit) which likely would have been used to introduce Levantine cuneiform scribes already familiar with the Proto-Sinaitic script to writing alphabetic cuneiform.

The Levantine scribes clearly used the technology of writing with *cuneus* or a stylus on clay tablets, meaning that both clay and reed pens would have been abundantly available for them. This raises the question of why the 'easier' script was not adopted, as alphabetic writing is known from the Levantine area already from the MBA onward. Outside of Ugarit, the use of cuneiform alphabetic writing seems to have been a mere curiosity. It is notable that especially in the southern Levant, the examples of cuneiform alphabetic writing seem to be written in the short alphabet from right to left or sinistrograde like the linear alphabetic inscriptions which again may indicate the meshing together of two distinct ideas: the cuneiform alphabetic script with the linear alphabetic script.

It is likely that most of the cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions in the Levant originated at Ugarit and were spread to various locations through trade. These texts were not, however, the only texts from Ugarit that have been found outside the kingdom. While it is difficult to determine the origins of letters written in cuneiform (unless their sending place is mentioned in the text), at least letters in the Amarna corpus have been sent from Ugarit to the Egyptian king. Likely many more communications were sent from the kingdom given its propensity for both trade and for correspondence with other parts of the LBA world, but it is a precious few that can securely be connected with the kingdom. In addition to such letters, there are various examples of material culture witness to the presence of Ugaritians in the wider LBA world.

Out of the instances of cuneiform alphabetic writing discussed here, the one from Tell Sukas was likely an example of an administrative document from the kingdom of Ugarit and had been either written there locally or dispatched through their internal road network. The ones from Hala Sultan Tekke, Tiryns, and Sarepta were either imported from Ugarit or brought by Ugaritians via sea routes and these sites were party to the LBA maritime trading network. The other six finds, however, paint a more interesting picture. These remaining locations in the Levant could not easily be reached by sea and the objects bearing the inscriptions must have been brought by a land route or reached from coastal ports via transverse roads.

One would expect to find many more texts written in the cuneiform alphabetic script and in the Ugaritic language around the Eastern Mediterranean basin given the established maritime trade connections from the kingdom. One of the reasons for their dearth may be that

[152] For a comprehensive study of this network, cf. YUVAL, FINKELSTEIN, NA'AMAN 2004.

the cuneiform alphabetic signs are not easily inciseable on objects but must be pressed with a cuneus on a soft surface.[153] Such soft surfaces, barring (often incidentally) baked clay tablets, are more perishable than hard objects whose inscriptions would more likely have been made in the Proto-Canaanite or linear script that lends itself more suitably for incision.[154] There are, however, a few examples of cuneiform alphabetic signs being incised, like the silver bowl, bronze knife, and ivory rod (and various other objects from Ugarit), but incising cuneiform alphabetic characters is not as easy or convenient as using the other set(s) of alphabetic signs for the writing of inscriptions. And yet it may be that there are more texts written in the cuneiform alphabetic script buried in various locations around the Eastern Mediterranean,[155] or they may simply have been interpreted as some form of defective cuneiform and labelled scribal exercises. Regardless, there is at least an expectation that more examples of cuneiform alphabetic inscriptions will be found on future excavations, allowing for the forming of a more comprehensive picture of the commercial routes and connections of the LBA and the position the kingdom of Ugarit played within this complex network.

Ancient Ugarit stood, at the same time, in the periphery of the great kingdoms and at the centre of the trade routes that connected them to one another. Mostly used within the kingdom and in writing culturally important texts, using the script would have created unity within the Ugaritian population. But at the same time, it is only one of the scripts that were used in the kingdom, and not the one that was used in communication with neighbours and trading partners, creating a distinction between Ugaritians and the others. The script may also have been, especially early on, a divisive matter among the alphabet and cuneiform scribes, the latter forming the traditional and established scribal faction within the kingdom, the Ugaritian scribes formally trained in the Middle Babylonian scribal school system. This is why the interplay between unity and distinction can be seen in both Ugarit's internal customs and policies, as well as its interactions with the wider LBA world.

The cuneiform alphabetic script, an artefact characterizing the entire Ugaritian culture in its unique combination of Semitic, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian influences with a particularly local flair, is a case example of an idea at the crossroads of several LBA cultures. The script was a unifying force within the kingdom but separated it from its neighbours, making the kingdom

[153] Even clay tablets have often been baked, either on purpose or by accident, ensuring their survival.

[154] Albeit likewise makes it more suited for writing with ink on papyrus and it is likely that the vast majority of texts written in the Levant with the linear alphabetic script have been lost to time. In fact, most early alphabetic texts were likely written on papyrus or animal skins. DOBBS-ALLSOP 2023, 40. NA'AMAN 2020, 34, points out that we know next to nothing on the writing of alphabetic scripts of papyrus.

[155] Disciplinary boundaries in the study of the ancient world have an unfortunate but notorious tendency of hindering important discoveries. An example of this is the initial publication of the Tiryns inscription which has been completely reinterpreted in subsequent studies.

distinctly different among the Syrian city states and in their relationships with the great kingdoms. At the same time, the use of the script may well have been a matter of contention within the economic and occupational strata within the kingdom itself, possibly functioning as a class marker. The cuneiform alphabetic script is a particularly Ugaritian cultural form whose use came to an abrupt end on the eve of the LBA collapse, and texts referring to the hostile forces approaching the city by sea may be some of the final artefacts produced in the city before its downfall during a time when a variety of cultural and environmental forces were tearing the entire Bronze Age world system asunder.

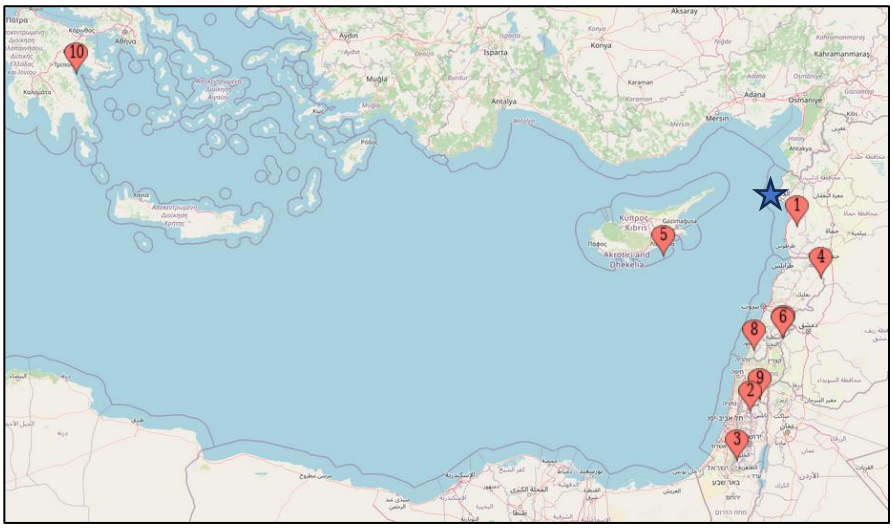


Figure 1: Ugarit and the findspots of cuneiform alphabetic texts outside of Ugarit.

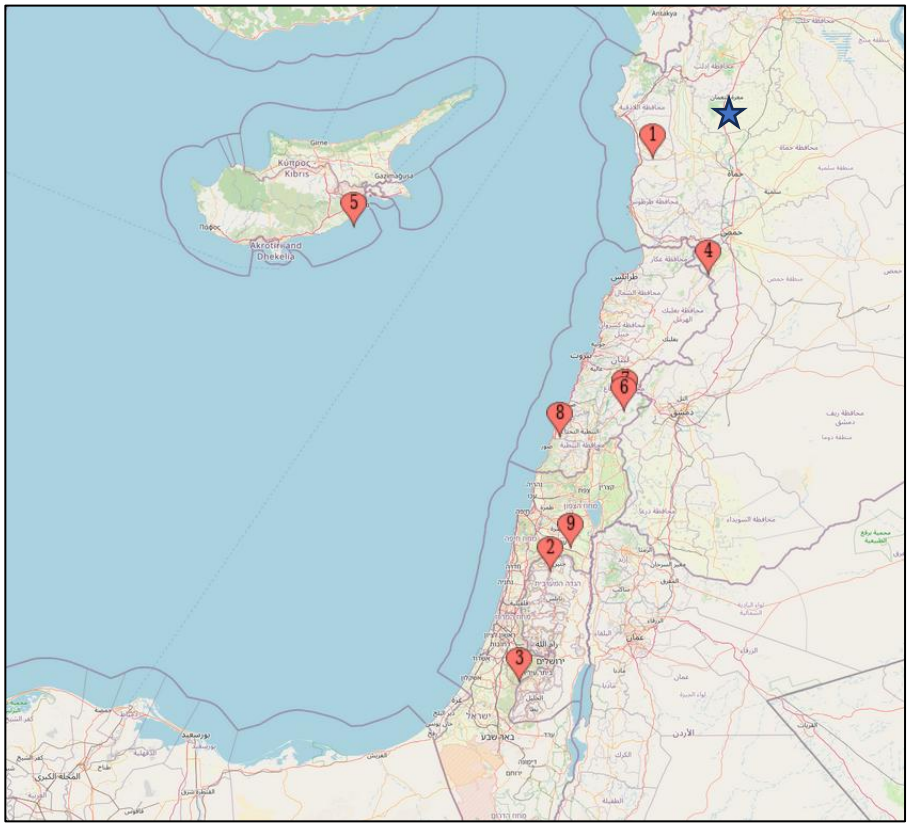


Figure 2: Ugarit and a close-up of the findspots in the Levantine area.

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