

In November 1963, several tombs were discovered at Magharet Abloun in the suburbs of Sidon. These tombs revealed a number of Anthropoid sarcophagi dating back to the 5th or 4th century B.C.<sup>1</sup> One sarcophagus contained a variety of different artifacts<sup>2</sup> including a crown, a necklace, rings, etc., four of which are discussed in the following paragraphs: a mirror, a comb, a pendant, and a scarab. These objects do not appear to be part of some funerary rite but are more likely to be either the personal possessions of an aristocratic Sidonian lady or a form of ritual offerings. They are housed in the Beirut National Museum of Beirut and are not available for close examination having been not yet recovered from their wartime storage. Consequently the only dimensions one is able to use are those described in *Les Phéniciens* published in 1975.<sup>3</sup>

### Mirror

The bronze mirror is round and flat with a simple narrow protrusion designed for insertion into a handle of ivory or wood. Mirrors were quite common in the late Bronze Age before almost completely disappearing in the Iron Age. Towards the end of the latter period they were again found to be in common usage before reaching the height of their popularity during the Persian Period.<sup>4</sup>

### Comb

The comb is made of bone and is 14.2 cm long. It has opposing rows of teeth, one fine the other thick,<sup>5</sup> both of which are framed by two vertical bars. These bars are fixed on to a rectangular panel with pegs embedded in lateral holes. On each side of the panel, a reclining winged sphinx is illustrated with its body and paws barely outlined. The animal wings are subdivided in three sections like those found on later Phoenician examples.<sup>6</sup> Its tail is raised. Inherited from the Bronze Age Egyptian iconography, the Sphinx became one of the most commonly used motifs in Phoenician art. On one side it has a bearded face, an exceptional feature only paralleled in Persian-Age Phoenician art.<sup>7</sup> The rectangular panel is decorated with undulating lines similar to examples found in Palestine (Megiddo), in Assyria (Nimrud) and Iran (Ziwiye and Susa).<sup>8</sup>

Ivory combs and boxes are usually associated with ancient Egypt and Syria and then later with Phoenicia and the Hellenistic world. In Palestine, the earliest examples came from Beth Yerah (Early Bronze III, 2550-2250 B.C.). The origins of ivory hair combs are very ancient dating back to Pre-dynastic Egypt. Their popularity, spreading very slowly northwards, is believed to have reached Canaan only in the Early Bronze Age III. There are eight examples at Megiddo (Palestine). Fashioned in the Late Mycenaean style they were probably imported from Cyprus where around 1200 B.C. it is believed there were workshops specialised in ivory.<sup>9</sup>

Ivory seems to have been extremely popular in the Levant, Assyria, Urartu and Northern Iran during the Assyrian primacy until the Persian epoch when it went into an astonishing decline and was replaced like, our example, by bone.<sup>10</sup>

### Pendant

The gold pendant is 3 cm long and was the central feature of a gold-bead necklace. It depicts the head of a gorgon, known for their magical and protective powers. A lion's mask convention was adopted in the mid-seventh century and used for Greek gorgons. The ears were human-like but the bearded mane, lolling tongue, tusks, gaping jaws and wrinkled nose all remained characteristic until the head was thoroughly humanised in the fifth century.<sup>11</sup> The gorgon's hair evenly rounded in the front with snail-shell curls is a common hairstyle on Greek masculine figures at the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 5th century B.C.<sup>12</sup> Cypriot engravers<sup>13</sup> continued to use this hairstyle until the end of the 5th century B.C.<sup>14</sup> The tiara bridging the front uniform curls and the rearward hairstyle was also copied from Greek statues. The leaf-shaped eyes are slightly oblique. The eye-brow is formed by a well proportioned arch that meets the ridge of the nose. The gorgon is wearing a flower-shaped earring<sup>15</sup> also similar to those found on archaic Greek statues.

### Scarab featuring a Goddess and Worshipper Under a Winged Sun Disc<sup>16</sup>

Amethyst (3,4 x 2,7 cm)

### Female Worshipper

The standing figure, with both arms raised (open palms) in a gesture of benediction or salute is facing a goddess seated on a "sphinx throne."<sup>17</sup> Her hair hangs down her back. Her long robe, decorated in a cross motif has ample folded sleeves.

### Seated Goddess

The head is covered with a knobble-edged veil. She is wearing a mural crown and is dressed in the same manner as the female worshipper.<sup>18</sup> She is lifting her left hand forward with the palm open as in a blessing. In her right hand she holds a sceptre topped by a sun disc which is itself surmounted by an inverted crescent. Her feet are resting on a *thymiaterion*<sup>19</sup> dais. Behind, is a star with seven rays and a disc inside of a crescent. A double-edged border underlines the lower side of the scarab.

Sphinx-shaped thrones, typical of Levantine iconography were, as of 1250-1150 B.C. occupied by bearded gods. As of the 5th century B.C. a change occurs and female goddesses, coiffed in the Egyptian manner<sup>20</sup> were in turn pictured on these thrones (a series of representations depicts the sphinx throne as the seat of the goddess Ashtart). The Sidon seal falls into this later series but differs in that the illustration of the *mural crown* on the head of the seated goddess represents a change of



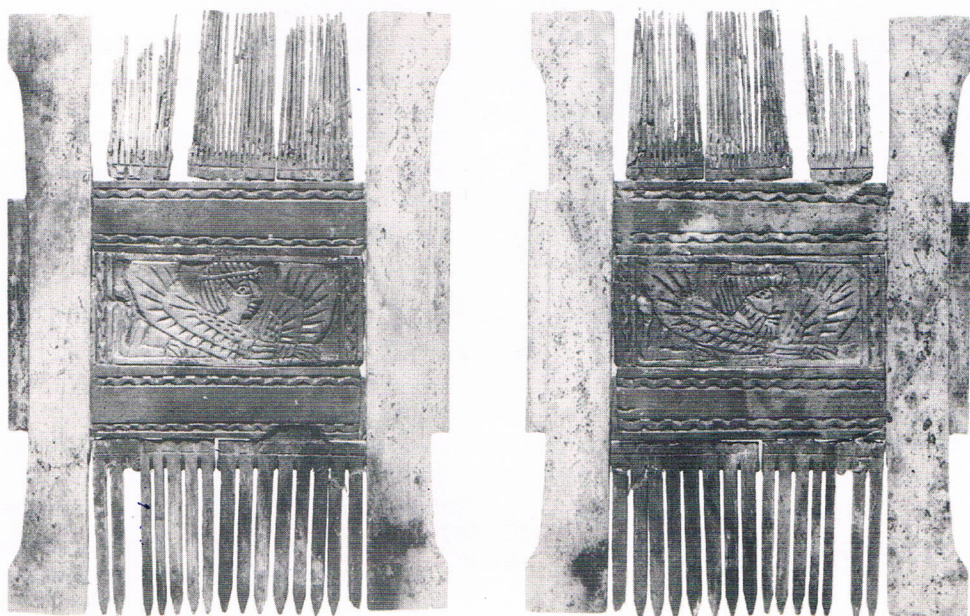


*Anthropoid sarcophagus in which the artifacts were found*



*The bronze mirror*

*The comb*







Necklace with a pendant featuring the Greek Gorgone



Detail of the Gorgone

hairstyle in the repertoire of the Levantine depicter. This new coiffure which appears in Cyprus (Salamis) from the 4th century B.C.<sup>21</sup> onwards is generally seen on the two goddesses Cybele<sup>22</sup> and Tyche.<sup>23</sup> The illustration of a woman wearing a turreted crown symbolised to the Greeks of the 4th century B.C. the divine protector of the town or even the city-state itself. The emergence of the mural crown in sidonian iconography is a new element borrowed from Greek art which probably underlines the importance of the socio-political structures of the city of Sidon under Persian domination.<sup>24</sup>

The sceptre held by the seated goddess is found on West-Semitic seals representative of the group known as the "royal iconography" type. These seals would have been used if not directly by the sovereign himself then certainly by high officials.<sup>25</sup> The illustration of this sceptre held by the goddess sitting opposite a *thymiaterion* in a ritualistic scene, just as her headdress, would imply that the evolution in her portrayal was politically and religiously symbolic.

If the mirror and comb, like our examples, illustrate the importance attached to the various types of cosmetic objects that began to appear in large numbers in the Persian period, the pendant and the seal are representative of other changes in taste and technology in Phoenicia from the 5th century B.C. onwards. Namely the exposure to Greek influences and hence the appearance of a new "greco-persian" style that acquired true Phoenician identity from the 4th century B.C. and after, principally in Phoenicia itself as well as in Cyprus.<sup>26</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> C. Doumet-Serhal, "Anthropoid Sarcophagi," *National Museum News* 1 (1995): 18-19.
- <sup>2</sup> R. Saidah, "Chronique," *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* XX (1967): 164-165.
- <sup>3</sup> A. Parrot, M. Chehab, S. Moscati, *Les Phéniciens* (Paris, 1975) 102-110.
- <sup>4</sup> E. Stern, *Material Culture of the land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.* (Warminster, 1982) 147.
- <sup>5</sup> P. Amiet, "Les ivoires achéménides de Suse," *Syria*, XLIX, 1972, 180-182, 334.
- <sup>6</sup> E. Gubel, *Phoenician Furniture*, *Studia Phoenicia* VII (Leuven, 1987) 52, note 7.
- <sup>7</sup> Gubel, *op. cit.*, 62, 63. "Concept of sphinxes with male, bearded faces as represented on the Fi'a base were quite current in the art of Persian Sidon."
- <sup>8</sup> Amiet, *op. cit.*, 189, 334.
- <sup>9</sup> R. D. Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East and Adjacent Countries* (Jerusalem, 1982) 15, 26, 38.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.
- <sup>11</sup> J. Boardman, *Archaic Greek Gems, Schools and Artists in the Sixth and Early Fifth Centuries B.C.* (London, 1968) 38; D.R. West, *Some Cults of Greek Goddesses and Female Daemons of Oriental Origin*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995) 146, 147.
- <sup>12</sup> N. Weill, "Une tête de Kouros archaïque à Salamine de Chypre," *Salamine de Chypre* IV (Paris, 1973) 57, 79.
- <sup>13</sup> M. Yon, "Un dépôt de sculptures archaïque," *Salamine de Chypre*, V, (Paris, 1974) 49, 50. A. Hermay, "Un nouveau chapiteau hathorique trouvé à Amathonte," *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, CIX (1985): 690, 695.
- <sup>14</sup> Weill, *op. cit.*, 69.
- <sup>15</sup> Yon, *op. cit.*, 128. "Certaines rosettes en or qui proviennent de Chypre se présentent comme un disque plat entouré d'un grenetis d'autres avaient réellement l'aspect d'une fleur..."
- <sup>16</sup> Winged Disc: a symbol of the sun and the sky it was often





The seal



Detail of the seal featuring a goddess and a worshipper

used as an emblem of royalty. With time its function was to repel evil spirits. The discs with downward facing wings (like the Sidon example) and positioned at the top of the scarab seem, throughout the centuries, to typify a purely Phoenician tradition. The custom of depicting tripartite wings increases under the influence of both, local monumental art as well as the artistic influence of Persian Satrapy. Certain examples of the Achaemenid Phoenicia are even subdivided in four sections. D. Parayre, "Les cachets ouest-sémitiques à travers l'image du disque solaire ailé (perspective iconographique)," *Syria* LXVII (1990): 273, 276.

<sup>17</sup> Sphinx Throne: the term "sphinx throne" designates a specific type of ceremonial furniture... The concept of thrones flanked by decorative zoomorphic side members is a firmly rooted artistic tradition of both the Egyptian and Near Eastern civilisations. The use of sphinxes (leonine bodies combined with human heads) as supporting devices of such thrones emphasises the originality of this Levantine type furniture. Gubel, *op. cit.*, 37,49.

<sup>18</sup> P. R. S. Moorey, "Aspects of worship and Ritual on Achaemenid Seals," *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Iranische Kunst und Archäologie, München 7-10 Sept 1976, Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, 6 (Berlin, 1979) 221. "The worship of an incense altar had occasionally appeared earlier in Assyro-Babylonian and Neo-Elamite art but it had never before been the focus of symmetrical designs as it was in Achaemenid art."

<sup>19</sup> *Thymiaterion*: a term used to describe a number of incense burners used in the Phoenician cult. "To burn incense before a cult statue seems to be a common rite in several religions and the incense burners are often pictured in cult scenes." A. Caubet, *La religion à Chypre dans l'antiquité* (Lyon, 1979) 17. The example used here has a "trumpet-shape shaft with three successive rows of drooping leaves in its upper section. The basin supports a carinated double bowl. The upper recipient contains a heap of incense burning under a dome-shaped lid pierced at the top in order to ensure the circulation of the

smoke," Gubel, *op. cit.*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Gubel, *op. cit.*, 41, 45-47 "The limestone sculptured socle from Fi'a south west of Tripoli, the green jasper scarab from Sardinia and a relief from Cairo Museum." On Ashtart see page 62, note 27.

<sup>21</sup> E. Babelon, *Les Perses Achéménides, catalogue des monnaies grecques de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1893) 604.

<sup>22</sup> Cybele (from the name of mountain in Phrygia) represented from the 1st century B.C. onward as carrying the mural crown seated on a lion-shape throne. M. Hörig, *Dea Syria* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1979) 138; M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, I (Leiden, 1987) 7-8; On the assimilation of Cybele to Rhea, D.R. West, *Some Cults of Greek Goddesses and Female Demons of Oriental Origin*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995) 76; G. Sfameni-Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden, 1985) 1, 3, 65.

<sup>23</sup> From the time of Alexander, Greek art often used Tyche to personify the divine protection of cities. The coins of Asia Minor offer an infinite number of examples showing the "City Tyches" as they were called. From a passage in Pindare, there is proof that although not yet established, by the 5th century B.C. the concept was becoming more common. What is certain is that a coin from Marathos stamped in the first half of the 4th century B.C. (before 364) already represents the city state as a woman wearing a mural crown, F. Allegre, *Etude sur la déesse grecque Tyche* (Paris, 1889) 184-207, 235, 236.

<sup>24</sup> J. Elayi, *Pénétration grecque en Phénicie sous l'empire Perse* (Nancy, 1988) 162-163; J. Elayi, *Sidon cité autonome de l'empire Perse* (Paris, 1989) 143.

<sup>25</sup> P. Bordreuil, "Inscriptions sigillaires ouest-sémitiques III: sceaux de dignitaires et de rois syro-palestiniens du VIII<sup>e</sup> et du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C., *Syria* 62 (1985): 21. E. Gubel, "Le Sceau de Menahem et l'iconographie royale sigillaire," *Semitica* XXXVIII (1990): 168, 170.

<sup>26</sup> M. Yon, A. Caubet, "Arouad et Amrit VIII<sup>e</sup>-I siècles av. J.-C. Documents," *Transeuphratène* 6 (1993): 47-66.