

Mekal

I. Introduction. *Levantine god.* A small limestone stela (1*) discovered in the southern building-complex (the so-called “M. temple”) of str. IX (Late Bronze Age IIA, 14th cent.) at Beth-Shean (ROWE 1930: 10-15) provides the main source for an iconographical discussion of M. The preserved part of the stela’s upper register shows on the left side an enthroned deity holding a *was* scepter in his left hand and an *ankh* sign in his right. On the right side the deity is approached by the Egyptian dedicator of the stela and his father, each holding a lotus flower in their hand. The hieroglyphic inscription above the enthroned deity identifies him as “MKL (*m^c-kṣ*), the lord of Beth-Shean.” To this may be added a small fragment of a faience bowl from the same place with a partially preserved inscription, probably also mentioning M. and showing part of a kilt and a leg (ROWE 1940: pl. 67A:4, 5).

The M. stela is the only contemporary representation of an enthroned deity from the Levant which is identified by name, thus fulfilling the scholarly desire to connect representations of a deity with a particular name (KEEL 2001: 248f). But scholarship has been hampered by the fact that apart from the two documents cited, MKL is an unknown deity in contemporary records. As a result, various arguments have been put forward to relate MKL to a better-known deity. While connections with →Baal (VINCENT 1928: 533) or →Nergal (ALBRIGHT 1943: 33) have found little support, a number of scholars have either related or even identified →Resheph or →Seth (or sometimes both, cf. VINCENT 1928: 532f; STADELMANN 1967: 165f) with M. on onomastic and/or iconographic grounds.

The onomastic identification with *Resheph* (POWER 1929: 131; HAUSSIG 1965: 298; STADELMANN 1967: 53-55; CONRAD 1971: 165f; SCHRETTNER 1974: 164; THOMPSON 1970: 164ff; WEIPPERT 1988: 295, n. 3) rests on 4th-cent. Phoenician texts from Cyprus that mention the name “Resheph-MKL” (CIS no. 89:3; 90:2; 91:2; 93:5; 94:5). This identification has been strongly rejected on methodological grounds by LIPÍŃSKI (1987: 91). STADELMANN (1967: 55) attempted to find contemporary Egyptian and Semitic equivalents for the equation, but with little success (for a summary of suggestions concerning the etymology of the name “MKL” itself, see THOMPSON 1970: 180-192; SCHRETTNER 1974: 159-165; LIPÍŃSKI 1987: 89).

Attempts at an iconographic identification of M. with *Resheph* generally start from the onomastic connection with Phoenico-Cypriote Resheph-MKL, which is then said to be supported by observations on visual similarity regarding, e.g., face profile, pointed beard, horns, and headgear with streamers (VINCENT 1928: 528ff; ROWE 1930: 15; STADELMANN 1967: 54, 62f; WEIPPERT 1988: 295). These arguments have been dismissed by CAQUOT/MASSON (1968: 311), LIPÍŃSKI (1987: 91) and CORNELIUS (1994: 25f).

The identification of M. with *Seth*, suggested on the basis of iconographic arguments (VINCENT 1928: 514ff; MALLON 1928: 128f; BARROIS 1928: 91; STADELMANN 1967: 165f; CONRAD 1971: 166), rests particularly on M.s conical headgear (resembling the Egyptian white crown [→Crown (Egypt)]) with its two →bull horns (not gazelle horns, as WEIPPERT 1988: 295 claims) and streamers. The one ending in a flower having its closest parallels on Egyptian stelae depicting Seth in Asiatic garb (CORNELIUS 1994: nos. BR5, BR9, BR13; pace CORNELIUS, these documents do not depict Baal). Last defended by THOMPSON (1970: 129), this interpretation has since been abandoned (FULCO 1976: 53 considered M. as local epithet for Seth but without any explanation).

LIPÍŃSKI (1987: 89f with fig. 2) and WEIPPERT (1988: 298, 300 with fig. 3.49:1, 2) have contrasted the “EI” stela from Ugarit with the M. stela, concluding that the latter should be classified as an “EI type” representation (note THOMPSON 1970: 192; LIPÍŃSKI 1987: 89 for a putative onomastic relationship between M. and EI). However, the iconographic evidence does not support such an assertion.

II. Typology. The overall composition of the M. stela conforms to Egyptian representations of officials paying homage to their god (e.g., LOUD 1939: Pl. 62:377 [ivory plaque from Megiddo] and LAMON/ SHIPTON 1939: pl. 73:1 [stamp seal] both depicting →Amun; Mami stela from Ugarit showing Baal-Zaphon [→Baal 8*]). The stela features Egyptian, Asiatic, and mixed elements: →throne, a variant of the palace facade throne (METZGER 1985: 246, § 45), *was* sceptre and the horizontally-held *ankh* sign that conform to the Egyptian canon, while the curved beard (→Resheph 1*) or →“EI” [ANEP no. 493; also →Baal § II.1.A.7.2]) and the horned headgear with streamers are characteristic of an Asiatic deity. The conical headgear has its closest parallels on Egyptian stelae depicting Seth in Asiatic garb. Still, the streamer ending in

a flower is also attached to the headgear of Resheph (CORNELIUS 1994: no. RR21), Baal-Zaphon in Egyptian garb (→**Baal 8***), or winged Baal fighting the →serpent (→**Baal 17***) and winged Seth attacking →Apopis, respectively (CORNELIUS 1994: no. BM78). In sum, the stela depicts M. in his role as major city god, a lord who dispenses life in response to the homage of his worshippers.

III. Conclusion. The M. stela displays a combination of Asiatic and Egyptian features which are not diagnostic for any specific deity. The majority of features are Egyptian and not Canaanite. Moreover, the whole composition is Egyptian and does not conform to Canaanite offering scenes (such as the depiction of “El” from Ugarit →**El** [ANEP no. 493]). As in the parallel case of the Mami stela from Ugarit, the M. stela is Egyptian in most respects, though depicting a local deity augmented with some Asiatic features. It is neither possible to deduce the original Canaanite appearance of M. from it, nor to positively conclude an identification of M. with →Baal, →Resheph, or →Seth.

V. Catalogue

1* Stela, limestone, 28.3 x 20 cm, Beth-Shean, 14th cent. Jerusalem, Rockefeller Museum, S 982. ROWE 1930: 14f, pl. 33; PRITCHARD 1954: no. 487; *THOMPSON 1970: pl. 5

VI. Selected Bibliography

VINCENT 1928 • Rowe 1930: 14f, Pl. 33 • THOMPSON 1970 • LIPÍŃSKI 1987: 89-91 • CORNELIUS 1994: 25f

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