

BEIRUT AND UGARIT IN THE 13TH CENTURY BCE

by JORDI VIDAL

The aim of this paper is to analyze the political and commercial relationships between the kingdoms of Beirut and Ugarit during the second half of the 13th century BCE, a period which most texts related to Beirut found in the Ugaritic archives date from¹. At that time both kingdoms were placed under the hegemony of two different great powers, Egypt (Beirut) and Hatti (Ugarit). However, the Hittite-Egyptian treaty that followed the battle of Qadeš (1269 BCE) and the subsequent *Pax Aegyptiaca* offered the best setting in which commercial ties and political contacts could be developed between the main sea-ports of the Levant, and therefore between Beirut and Ugarit too, in spite of their place in the geo-political order of the time.

1. THE TEXTS

As Yon pointed out, most products from Phoenician cities (textiles, wood, food) have not left any traces in the archaeological record of Ugarit (Yon 1994, 426). This is why the relationships between Beirut and Ugarit that we intend to analyze must be reconstructed in a fragmentary manner, basically through the documents recovered in various Ras Šamra archives. Such documents can be divided into two main groups: (1) letters from Beirut, and (2) texts written in Ugarit and other places containing references to Beirut and its people². The following texts can be found under the first heading:

RS 11.730 (= PRU 3 12): Letter from the king of Beirut addressed to the *sākinu* of Ugarit, concerning the presence in Ugarit of a messenger from Beirut. The tablet was found in the Western archive (Western entrance) of the Royal Palace.

RS 34.137 (= RSO 7 n. 37): Letter from the king of Beirut addressed to the *sākinu* of Ugarit, in which the former conveys his best wishes to the king of Ugarit, who is on a voyage away from Ugarit. Singer points out that the letter was probably referring to Niqmaddu III's visit to Ḫatti implied from other documents³ (Singer 1999, 669, 700). The tablet was found in the house of Urtenu.

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¹ For the history of Beirut during the Late Bronze Age see Klengel 1970: 15ff.

² See van Soldt 1994: 368 n. 20 about the supposed existence of two different sites called Beirut posed by Arnaud 1984.

³ RS 11.872 (= KTU 2.13); RS 16.379 (= KTU 2.30).

RS 86.2212 + 86.2214A (= RSO 14 n. 11): Letter from the king of Beirut addressed to the king of Ugarit, concerning again the presence in the city of a messenger from Beirut. The tablet was found in the house of Urtenu⁴.

The following documents belong to the second group:

RS 16.191 + 16.272 (= KTU 3.4): Legal text, with Niqmaddu's III(?) seal, concerning the redemption for one hundred silver shekels of seven individuals from Ugarit from the hands of the men of Beirut by Iwrikili. The tablet was found in the central archive (Northern part of court IV) of the Royal Palace.

RS 17.341 (= PRU 4 161): Verdict by Ini-Tešub, king of Carchemish, concerning border problems between Ugarit and the Southern kingdom of Siyannu. According to the text, the people of Ugarit blamed the people of Siyannu for providing the men of Beirut with food, as well as allowing them to use the territory of Siyannu as a base from which to attack Ugarit. The tablet was found in the Southern archive (rooms 68-69) of the Royal Palace.

RS 18.24 (= KTU 4.337): Administrative text that records the supply of five talents and one thousand shekels of copper, and six hundred shekels of tin for the bronze smiths of Beirut, in exchange for eighty three shekels of silver. This was part of a cluster of tablets found in court V of the Royal Palace.

RS 21.183 (= Ug 5 41): Letter in a very fragmentary condition, addressed by the king of Siyannu to Ammittamru II of Ugarit, that mentions inhabitants from Beirut. The tablet was found in the house of Rap'ānu.

RIH 81/04 (Arnaud 1984): Letter in which the gods of Beirut are mentioned. The tablet was found in the North Palace of Ras Ibn Hani⁵.

2. POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS. THE LETTER'S TERMINOLOGY

Both in RS 34.137 and RS 86.2212+ the king of Beirut refers to the king of Ugarit as 'my brother' (*šeš-ia*), thus using the so-called 'brotherhood' metaphor (Liverani 1998-1999, 314ff; 2000, 18f; 2003, 191ff; see also Zaccagnini 2000, 144; Pardee 2002, 93 n. 39). The kings of Beirut and Ugarit were not in fact related. 'Brotherhood' here reflects a conventional relationship with outstanding diplomatic relevance. Using the expression 'my brother' the king of Beirut placed himself the same level as the king of Ugarit, thus defining what according to his point of view was a true relationship between kings of equal status. It is important to bear in mind that, as Liverani points out, the 'brotherhood' metaphor between kings was not an unavoidable convention, but an expression voluntarily chosen conveying personal support, political alliance and horizontal solidarity among kings. In this

⁴ Focusing on strictly philological criteria Arnaud has pointed out that RS 92.2021 (= RSO 14 n. 12) came originally from Beirut. However, due to the fragmentary condition of the text its initial words have not been preserved, so we cannot be certain if the letter was in fact sent from Beirut.

⁵ See del Olmo-Sanmartín 2003: p. 204 about the possibility of RIH 78/02 (= KTU 4.771) mentioning Beirut (suggested e.g. by Belmonte 2001: 57).

instance the personal content of such ‘brotherhood’ is obvious. It ought to be noted that both letters probably refer to the same individuals, Niqmaddu III and an anonymous king of Beirut. Moreover, the close relationships between both ‘brothers’ are evidenced in the interest shown by the king of Beirut in the voyage of Niqmaddu III (RS 34.137).

Family metaphors appear again in RS 11.730, where an anonymous king of Beirut refers to the *sākinu* of Ugarit as ‘my son’ (*dumu-ia*). It is more difficult to determine the meaning of this metaphor. According to Liverani, in the Amarna letters the ‘father-son’ metaphor had not a political meaning. It only alluded to the wide age gap between the partners, a gap which would not allow the use of the ‘brotherhood’ metaphor (Liverani 2000, 18; 2003, 192). On the other hand, in spite of pondering the possibility that the use of the ‘father-son’ metaphor was determined by elements of age, Fensham (Fensham 1971, 124) concluded it had a political meaning. In his opinion the ‘father-son’ metaphor conveyed, among others, an idea of political hierarchy, characteristic of the relationships between a king and his high officials (Fensham 1971, 123ff). There is also a third possibility, that is that the family metaphors, at least in certain contexts, were simply a matter of politeness, with no further meaning. This seems to be the case in RS Varia 4 (= KTU 2.14), a letter in which the same individual was referred to as ‘my brother’ (*aḥy*) and ‘my son’ (*bny*) (Cunchillos 1989, 247f). However, the importance of RS Varia 4 for our analysis of the use of family metaphors is diminished because it is a private letter, probably written by and addressed to merchants, and not kings. Moreover, the double designation ‘my brother / my son’ does not appear anywhere else in Ugarit (Pardee 2002, 114 n. 216).

In any case, the Ugaritic texts do not offer any information to make the choice between the proposed meanings about RS 11.730 possible. There are two other letters from Phoenician kings addressed to the *sākinu* of Ugarit: RS 17.424C+ (= PRU 4 219), a letter from Ba^lu-dān, king of Tyre, addressed to Ba^lu-ṣaduqu, the *sākinu* of Ugarit; and RS 25.430, a letter from Yapa^c-^dIM, king of Sidon, addressed to the *sākinu* of Ugarit. However, no family metaphors figure in any of them. Nor does overriding information concerning this matter appear in other texts of non Phoenician origin. In RS 15.24+ (= PRU 3 18), Abuškā (nu) from Amurru referred to the *sākinu* of Ugarit as ‘my brother’, the same metaphor used by Ḥišmi-kušūḥ when referring to the *sākinu* of Ugarit. However, they are not letters written by kings to an Ugaritic high official, so they do not exactly coincide with the contents of RS 11.730.

In fact, the meaning of the ‘father-son’ metaphors put forward by Liverani seems the most accurate. As Zaccagnini pointed out “interactions between subjects of different rank (...) follow a lord-to-servant schema (...) Father-to-son relationships are reserved for less politically defined interactions, in which official position, prestige, authority, and age combine to create an objective disparity between partners” (Zaccagnini 2000, 144; see also Liverani 1979, 1323f; 1998-1999, 55).

Apart from the use of family metaphors, the opening words of RS 11.730, RS 34.137 and, particularly, RS 86.2212+ have another feature to which a political meaning has been granted. In the three texts the king of Beirut referred in the first place to himself, and only afterwards did he mention the recipient of the letter, either the king or an Ugaritic high official. We find this same feature in the letters

addressed by the king of Sidon found in Ugarit⁶. On the other hand, in the letters from Byblos and Tyre, the king of Ugarit always figures in the first place⁷.

It was common in the correspondence between kings of the same rank that the name of the recipient preceded the name of the sender as a mark of politeness. This ordering was only modified when the higher rank of the sender was intended to be underlined (Nougayrol PRU 3 p. 2f; Liverani 1979, 1328; Arnaud 1992, 184; Cunchillos 1999, 361; Huehnergard 1999, 376). We know Sidon was in the 13th century BCE the most important Phoenician city (Arnaud 1992, 182; Singer 1999, 670; Aubet 2000, 73; Vita 2001-2002, 428ff). The fact that the king of Beirut, as did the king of Sidon, placed himself before the Ugaritic monarch has led to consider the possibility of Beirut occupying at the time an outstanding position similar to that of Sidon, and above the one held by Tyre and Byblos. This possibility would also be supported by the fact that both Beirut and Sidon used in their correspondence the logogram *kur* ('country') instead of the logogram *uru* ('city') that appears in the letters from Byblos and Tyre, to refer to its own domains (Arnaud 1992, 184f; Aubet 2000, 72).

However, reaching political consequences from features such as the order in which kings figure in letters or the use of certain logograms poses some problems. One such problem arises in relation to Byblos. While in the city's letters the logogram *uru* was certainly used, in RS 34.145 (= RSO 7 n. 9) the king of Carchemish used the logogram *kur* to refer to both Sidon and Byblos itself, and it could be concluded from this, against what has been suggested above, that both kingdoms maintained a similar political and territorial status. Moreover that same letter points at Byblos and Sidon, and not at Beirut, as the main sea-ports of the Lebanese coast. All this makes it more reasonable to explain the king of Beirut figuring before the king of Ugarit in the letters found in Ras Šamra as a result of an epistolary habit in the city⁸, without a real political meaning. There are no data supporting the conclusion that Beirut held during the 13th century BCE a political status above that of Byblos or Tyre.

The diplomatic relationships between Beirut and Ugarit were certainly of a similar depth than those held between Ugarit and Sidon and Tyre, from which seven⁹ and three¹⁰ letters respectively survive, and deeper than those held with Byblos, about which only one letter remains¹¹. But according to RS 34.137, and bearing in mind the weak economic links between Beirut and Ugarit (see below), that depth in diplomatic relationships was rather than a proof of the importance of Beirut, a result of the existing closeness between Niqmaddu III and the king of Beirut.

⁶ RS 11.723 (= PRU 3 9); RS 34.149 (= RSO 7 n. 38); RS 86.2221+ (= RSO 14 n. 13).

⁷ RS Varia 25; RS 18.31 (= KTU 2.38); RS 18.134 (= KTU 2.44).

⁸ This epistolary habit is also present in the letter addressed by the king of Beirut to the king of Ugarit, and dated in the XIV BCE century, recently published by D. Arnaud and M. Salvini (Arnaud-Salvini 2000).

⁹ RS 11.723 (= PRU 3 9); RS 18.54; RS 25.430A; RS 34.149 (= RSO 7 n. 38); RS 86.2208 (= RSO 14 n. 14); RS 86.2221+ (= RSO 14 n. 13); RS 86.2234.

¹⁰ RS Varia 25; RS 18.31 (= KTU 2.38); RS 17.424C (= PRU 4 219).

¹¹ RS 18.134 (= KTU 2.44).

3. COMMERCIAL TIES

The commercial relationships between the Ugaritic kingdom and other sea-ports of the Levant, particularly the Phoenician cities of Byblos, Sidon and Tyre in the route to Egypt are relatively well documented thanks to the archives of Ras Šamra (Liverani 1979, 1329f; Castle 1992, 253ff; Aubet 2000, 73ff).

Thus the already mentioned RS 34.145 attests the trips of Ugaritic ships to the sea-ports of Byblos and Sidon¹². Another document, RS 19.28 (= PRU 6 126), shows the importance textile and clothing items from Ugarit had for Byblos. Finally, RS 18.25 (= KTU 4.338; see Loretz 1994, 118ff) points to the fact that commercial ties between the two cities went beyond the mere exchange of goods. Such document registers the 'leasing' of Byblian ships by Ugarit in order to carry out its own expeditions; moreover this information is useful to attest the power of the commercial fleet from Byblos at the end of the Late Bronze Age.

But in written sources the best attested commercial relationships are undoubtedly those held with Tyre (see Bordreuil 1992). We shall only refer in the following lines to the most explicit evidences about this matter. Thus, in RS 17.424C+ (= PRU 4 219), the king of Tyre complained to the *sākinu* of Ugarit about the high *miksu*-tax his agents were required to pay by the harbour inspector (*rab kāri*) of Ugarit. RS 34.167+ (= RSO 7 n. 25) is more interesting in relation to the exchanges themselves. In this letter Aḥi-Milku requested Uri-Tešub to send him 50 jars of oil(?), 30 silver shekels and one talent of copper from Ugarit to Tyre. In return he proposed to send typical products of Tyre such as purple-dyed wool and dried fish. The arrival of Tyrian textiles is attested again in RS 15.04 (= KTU 4.132), where reference is made to the importing of robes from that city. Finally RS Varia 25 (Arnaud 1982) attests the importing of wood, another typical Phoenician product, from Tyre.

As regards to Beirut, the only direct proof of its commercial relationships with Ugarit is the supply of copper and tin to the Phoenician city recorded in RS 18.24 (Sasson 1966, 135). This information shows the importance of Ugarit in the international trade in metal, particularly copper, in which it acted as an intermediary between the producer country, Cyprus, and the centres of consumption (Heltzer 1978, 152; Yon 1994, 429; Aubet 2000, 74 with references).

It is also possible that the messengers of the king of Beirut mentioned in RS 11.730 and RS 86.2212+ performed commercial activities in Ugarit. It should be pointed out here that mention is made in the Amarna letters of ambassadors and messengers acting as merchants for their kings¹³. However, the contents of the two Ugaritic letters we have referred to do not confirm such possibility.

Finally, another possible evidence of the commercial ties between Beirut and Ugarit can be found in the information contained in RS 17.341. According to Nougayrol, the editor of the text, that verdict mentions an economic conflict between Ugarit and Siyannu concerning the trade in wine in which Beirut was also involved¹⁴. Nougayrol's interpretation, accepted afterwards by other scholars (e.g.

¹² See Belmonte 2002 about the importance of the role played by Sidon in the commercial circuits of the Late Bronze Age, particularly according to the texts from Emar.

¹³ See EA 7 and EA 11 (Liverani 2003b: 121).

¹⁴ According to Nougayrol RS 21.183 could also be referring to that conflict.

Xella 1995, 258; Singer 1999, 669; Malbran-Labat 2003, 72), was based to a great extent in his proposal for reading *níg.kaš* ('vin(?)') in lines 14' and 17'. However, both del Monte (del Monte 1983, 227) and Lackenbacher (Lackenbacher 2002, 143f) are right when they point that the correct reading is *ninda.kaš* ('bread and beer', 'food and drink', 'supplies'); and this changes considerably the interpretation of the text. In fact such text would not be referring to a supposed 'war of wine', but would contain an accusation from Ugarit to the inhabitants of the neighbouring kingdom of Siyannu of selling supplies to individuals from Beirut. Individuals from Beirut that, from the very territory of Siyannu, plundered the Southern lands of Ugarit (Zamora 2000, 154). If this is so, then the text does not really contain any information about commercial activities.

However, according to the new interpretation of the text, it could seem contradictory that, in spite of the plundering by individuals from Beirut, the royal palaces held such friendly relationships, as we have seen in part 2. Such apparent contradiction withers quickly away if we bear in mind the chronology of the texts. As Nougayrol pointed out, RS 17.341 was probably a verdict by Ini-Tešub, king of Carchemish contemporary of Ammiṭtamru II (ca. 1260-1235 BCE). The letters' approximate dating can be deduced from the chronology of the archives where they were found. Thus, the Western archive of the Royal Palace, where RS 11.730 was found, was used from the second half of the 13th century BCE until the destruction of the city (van Soldt 1991, 57). The dating of RS 34.137 and RS 86.2212+ is more relevant. Both letters were found in the archive of Urtenu, an archive that covers a very short time span, just the last thirty years of Ugarit, embracing therefore both the reigns of Niqmaddu III (ca. 1225/1220-1215 BCE), to whom those letters were probably addressed, and ʿAmmurapi (ca. 1215-1190/1185 BCE) (Malbran-Labat 1995, 241; van Soldt 2000, 240ff). According to these datings the conflicts between Beirut and Ugarit recorded in RS 17.341 took place decades before the easy diplomatic relationships attested by the letters.

Thus the written sources only attest trade in metal between the cities, in which the royal palaces played a monopolistic role. There could certainly have existed a private trade between merchants from Beirut and Ugarit, but it is not attested in any of the written sources available. However, the archaeological record attests that the commercial relationships between both cities did not involve a large volume of goods. In this sense, for example, the extraordinary wealth of Mycenaean, Cypriot and Ugaritic imports found in the Late Bronze Age tombs of the necropolis of Sidon-Dakermann contrasts with the more modest findings in Beirut (Saidah 1979-1980 and 1993-1994; Aubet 2000, 73).

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the letters from Beirut shows a certainly meaningful picture, in which the city appears as one of the most important sites in the Phoenician coast. The dynasty of Beirut felt particularly linked to the last kings of Ugarit, especially Niqmaddu III, and granted itself the same status it granted the Ugaritic monarchs. However, those good diplomatic relationships did not seem to have a particular economic relevance. As we pointed out a single text attests the existence of com-

mercial ties between both cities, a meaningfully scarce reference if we compare it to the relatively plentiful texts that attest the commercial contacts between Sidon and, particularly, Byblos and Tyre with Ugarit.

In this way, and in spite of the prestige of its monarchy, grounded on a solid regional position, it seems evident according to the Ugaritic documents that Beirut performed, during the second half of the 13th century BCE, a secondary economic role in the context of international trade. Cities such as Ugarit or Tyre were part of the great Mediterranean commercial circuits linking the main states of the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria-Canaan, Cyprus, Anatolia and Egypt; however Beirut remained in a secondary position, limited by the greater political and economic dynamism of its two neighbouring kingdoms, Byblos and Sidon.

Jordi Vidal
Departament de Prehistòria
Facultat de Geografia i Història
Universitat de Barcelona
c/Baldri i Reixac s/n
Es – 08028 Barcelona

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