

Berichte

Semitic Worship at Serabit el-Khadim (Sinai)¹

Meindert Dijkstra (Utrecht, The Netherlands)

In 1904/1905 W.M. Flinders Petrie discovered the first proto-Sinaitic inscriptions in the temple and mines of Serabit el-Khadim (Sinai).² To date about 50 inscriptions and artefacts related to the Semitic workers at Serabit are known. They will be republished this year with new handcopies and photographs in a *Corpus of Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions (CPSI)*.³ About twenty texts provide some information about the Semitic cult and gods at Serabit, information which is of interest for the study of West Semitic religions in the Late Bronze Age in Egypt's periphery. In his *Researches in Sinai*, Flinders Petrie described also some observations about Semitic worship in and around Hathor's temple at Serabit. In this paper, I would like to discuss his observations and review the gods and cult at Serabit in the light of the texts and artefacts found so far.

1 *Ba'alat, the Cow goddess*

The cult of the temple at Serabit was first and foremost the cult of the Egyptian goddess Hathor and her paredros in this part of Egypt's periphery, the Lord of the Eastern Desert, Sopdu. The Semitic worshippers at Serabit called Hathor by her West Semitic name and title, Ba'alat. Ba'alat was the first word and name discovered by Gardiner in the inscriptions. The frequent use of her name in the inscriptions is clear evidence of her prominence at Serabit el-Khadim. In all probability, this Ba'alat was a manifestation of the Ba'alat of Byblos (*b'lt gbl = b'ltu ša uru Gubla = Βααλιτις*), also known and worshipped in Egypt as *ht.hr nbt kbn(y)* since the Middle Kingdom.⁴ Quite a number of Egyptian funerary texts mention Hathor, the mistress of Byblos as a mortuary goddess.

This raises the question whether the Ba'alat of Serabit is but a local Semitized manifestation of Egyptian Hathor, or a local numen identified with Hathor. The

¹ This paper was presented at the Fourteenth International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland 21-24 July 1996; Professor Hans-Peter Müller kindly invited me to publish it in the *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* as an introduction for the publication of the *Corpus of Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions* (Note 3). Only a few essential footnotes have been added to the original paper.

² W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Researches in Sinai*, London 1906.

³ Ian D.G. Biggs – Meindert Dijkstra, *Corpus of Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions (CPSI)*, AOAT 41, Münster 1997. This paper is based on Chapter 5 of the *Corpus*.

⁴ A. Gardiner, *The Egyptian Origin of the Alphabet*, *JEA* 3 (1916) 15; C.J. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thot*, Leiden 1973, pp.72-73;

Egyptians certainly saw the Ba'alat of Byblos as a foreign avatar of Hathor. The existence of close cultural and commercial contacts since the Middle Kingdom suggests that the cult of the Byblite Hathor = Ba'alat may also have found its way to Egypt early in the 2nd Millennium BC through maritime trade and cultural exchange, as happened during the 2nd Intermediate with Ba'al Saphon, similarly a patron of mariners.⁵ The cult of Hathor = Ba'alat at Serabit was probably introduced from Egypt by Egyptian expeditions that included Semitic craftsmen based in Egypt. There is no evidence for the assumption that the Egyptians at Serabit imposed their Hathor cult on a local numen with a specifically Semitic cult, despite local peculiarities noted about her cult at Serabit. Petrie, for instance, argued that the rituals there were Semitic, citing four allegedly diagnostically un-Egyptian practices: the offering of burnt sacrifices on high places; the dedication of conical stones; elaborate ablutions; and the custom of visiting shrines to receive oracular dreams.⁶ Certainly evidence for these practices in Semitic religions exists, but whether they were observed in Serabit is less certain. The evidence for burnt offerings at Serabit (the ash layer beneath the 18th-Dynasty temple) is not conclusive. Campbell Thompson proposed, more prosaically, that the ash-bed was the remains of the expeditions' camp-fires, and the potsherds within it support this alternative.⁷ For Petrie's second allegedly un-Egyptian practice (the dedication of conical stones), the principal doubt again relates to the evidence at Serabit itself. The two conical stones illustrated by Petrie (and of unclear provenance) strongly resemble the cones given as votives to Hathor and Sopdu. The matter of ablutions and oracular dreams would require consideration at greater length. Let it suffice to refer to the Corpus. In particular, Petrie's suggestion that the enclosures were used for oracular dreams, has been refuted by several scholars. Many scholars, notably Albright, thought these stone circles to be burial cairns (broken into in antiquity). Explorers after Petrie found at least five of the proto-Sinaitic inscriptions inside just such cairns near Mine L. A recent archaeological survey of the Charles de Gaulle University of Lille has shown that distinction should be made between enclosures and shelters used as temporary habitats, administration quarters and storehouses on the one hand and commemorative 'cairns', sometimes marked by stelae and offering tables, on the other.⁸ There is no reason to doubt the essentially Egyptian character of the Serabit temple, its goddess and its rites. Since Hathor was the goddess responsible for missions abroad, the construction of a temple to her in Sinai was probably essential. "Lady of the Turquoise" is one of at least twenty-four epithets, referring to regions, and to precious stones and metals. Interestingly, the title "Lady of the Turquoise", presumably acquired because of the association with Serabit el-Khadim, was later adopted at shrines unconnected with turquoise mining, namely Timna (strictly a

⁵ M. Bietak, *Zur Herkunft des Seth von Avaris, Ägypten und Levante* 1 (1990) 9-16, esp. 10f.; M. Dijkstra, *The Weather-God on Two Mountains*, UF 23 (1991) 127f. with references.

⁶ Petrie, *Researches*, pp. 186-189.

⁷ Campbell Thompson in A.H. Gardiner – E.T. Peet, *The Inscriptions of Sinai. Part II. Translation and Commentary* (edited and completed by J. Černý), London 1955, p. 45.

⁸ M. Chartier-Raymond et al., *Les sites miniers pharaoniques du Sud-Sinaï. Quelques notes et observations de terrain*, CRIPEL 16 (1994) 31-77, esp. 58ff., 76f.

copper-mining site), and Ġebel Abu Hassa in the eastern Delta (a New Kingdom shrine on the Turquoise Road to Sinai).⁹ In all probability the Egyptians initiated the cult of Hathor in Sinai as they did in Timna before any Asiatic involvement.

However, Semitic craftsmen, joining the Egyptian expeditions brought their own Ba'alat = Hathor. Textual and iconographical data confirm a certain syncretism of Hathor = Ba'alat from the Semitic side. Her Semitic titles express a predominant position in the cult and also a motherly character. The title ^ʾ*adattu** (Sinai 375 = 37:3), feminine of ^ʾ*adanu*/ʾadôn* is used once for her as it is used for Ba'alat of Byblos and Astarte in Phoenician texts of the 1st Millennium (KAI 6:2; 7:4; 29:2). It occurs also in Ugaritic personal names, particularly female names.¹⁰ In Ugarit and elsewhere in the Levant, it was used as a respectful title for the heavenly matriarch. Also the title *št šittu** "Lady", an epithet given to Asherah and Anat in Ugarit, was given to Ba'alat at Serabit, if we may assume that she is meant by the epithet *št lbnn* (*šittu labanāni**) "Lady of the Lebanon" (Sinai 352 = 9:2). The epithet does not occur in this form in younger texts, but it is comparable to Ba'al of Lebanon (KAI 31:1), *l'štrt wltnt blbnn* (KAI 81:1) and similar names.¹¹ The epithet is perhaps further evidence that the cult of Ba'alat at Serabit came from the Lebanon.

The motherly nature of Ba'alat is expressed by the epithet ^ʾ*arhatu** "Cow Goddess", once combined with ^ʾ*adattu** (Sinai 353 = 10:2; Sinai 375 = 37:4; perhaps also in Sinai 352 = 9:4), an epithet that she shares with some other mother goddesses in the ancient Near East in general, but especially with Hathor. Hathor is often depicted in bovine form in Egyptian iconography, including Serabit.¹² The bovine imagery of the mother-goddess though a universal one, was in particular a significant element

⁹ R. Giveon, *The Impact of Egypt on Canaan. Iconographical and Related Studies*, OBO 20, Göttingen 1978, p. 66. Also Kom Abu-Billo in the western Delta (22nd Dynasty) and the Alexandria Sarapeum (Ptolemaic), Giveon, *Impact*, pp. 66f.

¹⁰ As such also once attested for an Asiatic woman ^ʾ*dwtw* in Second Intermediate Egypt, pBrooklyn 35.1446 Vs 15, see Th. Schneider, *Die semitischen und ägyptischen Namen der syrischen Sklaven des Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446 verso*, UF 19 (1987) 264; M. Dijkstra, *Adat*, in: K. van der Toorn et alii (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, Leiden-New York-Köln 1995, Col. 11.

¹¹ In all three instances it concerns a cult outside the home country of the gods mentioned. The element *lbnn* seemingly has a function similar to *spn* in *b'l spn*. There was a temple of *b'l lbnn* in QRTHDŠT (Cyprus), and there were temples and chapels of Ba'al Saphon in Transjordan (*b'l spn b' r' r' KTU 1.109:29*), perhaps also Edrei = *der'ā* and 'Ashtarorth Qarnaim = *tell ash'ari*, if the stele from Sheikh Sa'd was dedicated to [Ba'al] Aliyan(?), [lord] of Saphon (R. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten*, Leiden 1967, pp. 45f.); Kasios = Baal Zephon, Tahpanhes and the harbour *Prw.nfr* of Memphis in Egypt (Stadelmann, *ibidem*, pp. 32-47; de Moor, *TWAT I*, col. 712; Bietak, *Ägypten und Levante 1* (1990) 10f.; Dijkstra, *UF 23* (1991) 127f.

¹² On two blocks from the temple, she is depicted as a cow suckling the king (Sinai 337 and Giveon, *Impact*, p. 57 nrs. 23-24). About her bovine form and nature, see M. Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt. An Illustrated Dictionary*, London 1980, pp. 58f; F.D., *Hathor, LexÄg II*, Cols. 1024ff., esp. 1025; H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, New York 1948, p. 15; H. Brunner, *Grundzüge der altägyptischen Religion*, Darmstadt 1983, pp. 21f. Anat and Asherah are the wet-nurses of gods and kings in Ugaritic mythological tradition (KTU 1.15.I.26ff.; 1.23:24f.; 61f.; also A. Caquot – M. Szyner, *Ugaritische Religion*, Leiden 1980, pl. XXIX).

of the Hathor-iconography. It comes therefore not as a surprise to find this image of Hathor = Ba'alat as a Cow also in the Semitic cult of Serabit and Timna.

If this Semitic Ba'alat indeed be a genuine Canaanite goddess, it would be of interest to define her character more closely from her Levantine background as Hathor = Ba'alat of Byblos. For a more detailed treatment of this issue, I refer again to our Corpus. In the past, scholars identified Hathor = Ba'alat directly with Canaanite Qudshu-Asherah and even the Egypto-Asiatic goddess *Qdš(t)* = Qadesh(tu)*. However, it would be hazardous to define the character of Ba'alat of Byblos and Serabit on the basis of the cult of *Qdš(t)* in Egypt. Her position and cult was quite different from that of Qudshu = Asherah in Levantine tradition, as for instance at Ugarit. Because of her deferential titles and bovine associations Hathor = Ba'alat at Serabit seems also far removed from the erotic symbolism of the Qudshu goddess (lion, snakes, caprides, lotus flowers etc.). Moreover, beside Ba'alat there was a goddess called "The Lady of the Serpents" in the alphabetic texts of Serabit. The question arises whether the name and position of this goddess could have bearing on this problem.

2 *El, the Grey-(haired) One*

The divine name and title ^l is second in frequency after *b'lt*. It occurs about six times, three times as a divine name (Sinai 350 = 7:1; Sinai 363 = 20:4; Beit Arieħ 1 = 46) and perhaps three times in personal names (Butin 1932, 199A = 34; Butin 1932, 200B = 35; Gerster 1 = 44). I assume that all instances mean the god El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon. In Sinai 350 = 7, he is associated with a particular place of worship *bt gn* = Bet Gan, but the place name, if read correctly, cannot be identified with certainty. In Sinai 363 = 20, El perhaps received a cultic object as a votive gift. One stela (Beit Arieħ 1 = 46) apparently contained only El's name. Unfortunately, the ^l *du'olam** "El of Eternity", which Cross, Albright et alii found on Sinai 358 = 15 cannot be maintained. Later collations of the text proved this rendering impossible.¹³

The character of El at Serabit is not at all clear. Albright suggested in his final decipherment that the epithet *d tb* 'Merciful One' referred to the god El. Though we suggest reading this epithet as *zu šiba(ti)** "The Grey-(haired) One", this epithet may indeed refer to Ptah = El, the special manifestation of El at Serabit. The Semites at Serabit represented their El in the form of Ptah of Memphis, as was done in Egypt.¹⁴ The epithets 'Ancient One', 'Lord of years', 'Lord of Eternity' frequently

¹³ M. Dijkstra, El 'Olam in the Sinai?, ZAW 99 (1987) 249f.

¹⁴ Despite the identification of the creator god and artisan Ptah with Kothar in Ugaritic tradition, (H. Gese et alii, Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer [RAAM], Die Religionen der Menschheit 10,2, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln-Mainz 1970, p. 148; W.F. Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan, London 1968, pp. 193ff.; but see also A. Caquot – M. Sznycer, Textes Ougaritiques I, Mythes et Légendes, Paris 1974, p. 99). There are indications that in the Egypto-Canaanite tradition Ptah and El were assimilated, in particular in the Astarte papyrus, in which Ptah takes the position of El as head of the ennead (Gese, RAAM, p. 62; Stadelmann, Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten, p. 127). Astarte and Anat were the daughters of Ptah, and

given to Ptah are consonant with El's image in Canaanite tradition. The special manifestation of Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, the ancient creator-god of Memphis was indeed worshipped in the temple of Serabit. The steliform panel Sinai 351 = 8 includes to the right of two columns of text the well known statue of Ptah in his shrine. Though the inscription in its present state does not reveal a clear connection between text and picture, the picture of Ptah in his shrine may have been closely associated with the name *zt bšnm* "the Lady of the Serpents" and that the divine pair of Ptah = El and his consort was therefore represented on this stela as on other stelae.

3 *Qudshu(?)*, the Lady of the Serpents

Some of the gods of Serabit are not mentioned by name, but are known through an epithet of a type that appears frequently in Ugaritic and ancient Arabic texts. They consist of a demonstrative pronoun with a noun added in construct state. The latter is often a toponym or a special attribute, e.g. *du-š-Šarā* 'Dušara/Dusares', *ḡat Ḡadran* 'Lady of Gadran' (also known as *b^clt Ḡdrn*); *du Samawi* 'Lord of Heaven'.¹⁵ Divine epithets formulated on this principle from North-West Semitic religions are in Ugarit *dpid* 'the Benevolent One' (El), *dkbkbm* 'the Lord(s) of the Stars' and in Mari *zu-Ḥatn*. Well known in the Old Testament are *zèh sinay* "the Lord of Sinai" (Judg 5:5 = Ps 68:9) and *zèh šālôm* "the Prince of Peace" (Micah 5:4). Albright deserves the credit for having discovered this type of epithet in the proto-Sinaitic inscriptions.¹⁶ Two of them are rather well established, because they are attested several times. I discussed the epithet *zu šibati** "The Grey(-haired) One" above (Sinai 360 = 17; Sinai 361 = 18). *zat bašanim** (Sinai 351 = 8:1; Sinai 353 = 10:1; Sinai 360 = 17; Sinai 361 = 18:1) and *zu galuni** (Sinai 353 = 10:3), I will now discuss.

First the epithet *zat bašanim** which I suggest to translate as "Lady of the (two) Serpents". Albright suggested initially an identification with Qudshu = Asherah, who was in turn identified with Hathor = Ba'alat because of the Qudshu-representations in Egypt. It is true that stelae from Egypte, plaques from Egypt and Palestine, and some pendants from Ugarit and elsewhere show a nude goddess with one or two snakes, which she holds either two in one hand or one in each hand. Because more than one serpent was often depicted, we prefer to read the epithet *zt*

Qudshu was his spouse, consonant with the Canaanite tradition (Note 27). The bowl of Sen-nefer (TUAT I/6, pp. 540f.), dedicated in the temple of Ptah-South-of-his-Wall at Memphis, contains an almost Canaanite pantheon (Ptah, Astarte, Anat, Resheph, Qudshu).

¹⁵ M. Höfner, *Altsüdarabische Grammatik*, Osnabrück 1976, pp. 42ff; idem, RAAM, pp. 240ff. These kind of epithets alternate with those of the pattern *b^clt + noun/toponym*. With Albright et alii, we translate such epithets by 'the One of, the Lord/Lady of ...'.

¹⁶ i.e. *d ḡ* 'the offerer'; *ḡt bḡn* 'the Serpent Lady'; *d ḡb* 'the Merciful One' (Ptah = El); *ḡ tn* 'the Lord of Jackals' (Anubis) and *ḡ gnt* 'the Lord of the Wine-press' (Shesmu) (W.F. Albright, *The Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from Sinai and their Decipherment*, BASOR 110 [1948] 16f.); the last three were first noted in W.F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and their Decipherment*, Harvard Theological Studies XXII, London 1966, 1969³, pp. 12-14; 20-22.

bšnm “Lady of the (two) Serpents”.¹⁷ If we look for a goddess to identify with the divinity described in this epithet, the Egypto-Semitic goddess *Qdš(t)* = Qudshu is the most likely candidate. Neither the epithets, nor the iconography of Ba^calat = Hathor in the Egyptian texts at Serabit favour the identity of these goddesses. Similarly, nothing in the alphabetical texts supports the view to see the same goddess in Ba^calat and the “Lady of the Serpents”. On the contrary, some of the inscriptions apparently mention them as distinctive goddesses (Sinai 351 = 8; Sinai 353 = 10). Qudshu = Asherah was construed as Ptah = El’s wife in Egypto-Asiatic tradition. Also in Serabit they are closely connected to one another, receiving the offering of a sheep as a pair.

4 *Resheph(?)*, the Lord of GN

In Sinai 353 = 10:3 a male divinity *zu galuni** “the Lord of GN” is mentioned. The word *gn* could mean ‘garden, court’ or, even ‘(holy) precinct, temenos’. I suggest to connect this epithet to a particular manifestation of the god Resheph known as *ršp gn* = ^d*Rašap Gunu(m)*^{ki}, the Resheph, (Lord) of Gunu found in Eblaite and Ugaritic sources.¹⁸ It is not entirely clear whether the toponym is indeed a geographical one or denotes a particular temple, part of a temple or a cultic installation. In Ugarit, a rhyton in the shape of a lion-head was presented to this Resheph as a votive (KTU 6.62), and an administrative text mentions rates of wine to Astarte and Resheph-of-GN in their respective temples (RS 16.179 = KTU 4.219:2-3) This is significant, for Byblos possessed a temple of Resheph built as twin temple for Ba^calat = Hathor from the Middle Bronze Age.

Numerous local Reshephs are known from 3rd Millennium Ebla, from the 2nd Millennium Amorite personal names and Ugaritic rituals, and the 1st Millennium Phoenician-Punic texts. The cult of Resheph was wide-spread in the Levant. Early in the New Kingdom, it was also introduced into Egypt.¹⁹ The appearance of a special manifestation of Resheph in Sinai in the environment of Hathor = Ba^calat does not come as a surprise. Resheph was most certainly her *paredros* at Byblos. So why not at Serabit if her cult was influenced by the Byblite Hathor = Ba^calat? The epithet *mg dt rht* ‘Warrior of the Lady Cow Goddess’, found once, could imply a reference to Resheph. Perhaps the Semitic workers even identified Resheph with the ‘Asiatic’ form of the warrior-god Sopdu at Serabit. Resheph’s warlike nature is particularly well attested in Egypt.²⁰ Why this special manifestation as “The Lord of GN/Gunu”

¹⁷ We may point here to comparable epithets in Ugarit *b^cl qrmn wdnb* ‘He-with-the-two-horns-and-the-tail’ KTU 1. 114:21-22; *ym lšnm/dnbtm* ‘Yam-with-the forked-tongue/with-the-forked-tail’ KTU 1. 83:4-5,7 and Old Testament *ba^cal haqqarnayim* (Dan 8:6, 20 cf. Quranic *du-l-qarnayn*) and the toponym *‘ašf^crôt qarnayim* (Gen 14:5).

¹⁸ M. Dahood – G. Pettinato, Ugaritic *ršp gn* and Eblaite *rasap gunu(m)*^{ki}, *Orientalia* 46 (1977) 230-232; for a different opinion, see P. Xella, ‘Le dieu Rashap à Ugarit’, *AAS* 29-30 (1979-80 [1983]) 152f.

¹⁹ P. Xella, Reseph, in: *DDD*, Cols. 1324-1330, esp. 1326.

²⁰ Especially since the adoption by Amenophis II, see Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten*, pp. 56-76, esp. 57-61; Gese, *RAAM*, p. 143; Xella, *DDD*, Col. 1326.

was worshipped by the Semites of Serabit remains an unanswered question. As a chthonic deity, Resheph was closely associated in the Levant with death and netherworld, identified with the Mesopotamian pest-god Nergal from ancient times. Since the Ramessid Period, Resheph as a healer-god became especially associated with Qudshu's cult in private Egypto-Asiatic piety. If Resheph at Serabit was still associated with Ba'alat = Hathor, this seems to point to a date early in the New Kingdom.

5 Anat

The steliform panel Sinai 527 = 49 contains a text mentioning the goddess Anat. The stela in the form of a shrine or the facade of a shrine contains also some vestiges of a person either adoring or offering to the deity. The stela was perhaps put at Rod al-^cAir to mark the entrance of the holy area for the Semitic community. If so, the inscription suggests that Anat was a goddess worshipped in the area, perhaps identical with the goddess Ba'alat = Hathor herself, as is supported by the text on the squatting statue Sinai 346 = 2, if we are allowed to read her name here pseudo-hieroglyphically ^c*n.t* instead of ^c*t*. If this reading be accepted, it remains unclear whether the name Anat was used as a kind of epithet of Ba'alat, or that, conversely, *b^clt* was used as Anat's title. Either interpretation: "she who is present, or: 'the Anat' in this great temple", is possible.²¹ Such an identification of Ba'alat = Hathor with Anat at Serabit is probable in the light of Levantine-Egyptian evidence. The two are related by their bovine imagery in text and iconography, in particular as wet-nurses of the king. In Egypt, her cult became indigenous in the Ramessid Period, but her name appears at an earlier date in royal names of Hyksos. The temple of Ba'al = Seth at Piramesse, in which also Anat had her chapel, had a Canaanite predecessor at Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a).

6 Abib-Malik

New in the alphabetic texts is the name of ^b*bb mlk* 'Abib, the king' or, 'Abib-Malik'. If an epithet, the word *mlk* 'king' denotes here a male divinity. King Abib could be a deified ancestor or a minor god. Nothing else is known about him. Alternatively it is the name of a binomial deity: 'Abib-Malik'. This would associate Abib with Malik, a chthonic deity known from a great number of ancient Near Eastern texts since the 3rd Millennium.²² The graffiti Sinai 347 = 14 vert., in which the name is found, is perhaps a short prayer to ensure protection for deceased members of the Semitic community.

²¹ M. Dijkstra, The Statue Sinai Nr. 346 and the Tribe of the Kenites, in: M. Augustin – K.-D. Schunk (eds.), »Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden«. IOSOT Congress Jerusalem 1986, BEATAJ 13, Frankfurt am Main – Bern – New York – Paris 1988, p. 95, see discussion CPSI, Sinai 346:2.

²² Cf. J. J. M., Roberts, The Earliest Semitic Pantheon, Baltimore-London 1972, pp. 42f.; H.-P. Müller, ThWAT IV, Col. 965; C. C. Heider, The Cult of Molek; a Reassessment, JSOTSuppl 43, Sheffield 1985, pp. 114ff.; 137ff.; Müller, Malik, DDD, Cols. 1005-1012. A parallel of ^b*bb mlk* could be *ršp mlk* in PRU 2, 106:58 = KTU 4.182:61, but unfortunately the context is broken.

7 Ba^ʿal

The Canaanite weather-god Ba^ʿal (Saphon) is conspicuously absent in the texts of Serabit. We find *ba^ʿal* as theophoric element of personal names in hieroglyphic texts (Aper/Abdu-Ba^ʿal Sinai 423) and proto-Sinaitic texts (*yḥnb^ʿl* Sinai 367 = 24, *b^ʿltm* Sass 2 = 48 hor.2), but not a clear attestation of worship of Ba^ʿal in the Semitic community. The names alone cannot prove that the Ba^ʿal par excellence or even another Ba^ʿal was known at Serabit. The absence of Ba^ʿal in the Semitic cult of Serabit is primarily explicable by the prominent position of Sopdu as the Egyptian *paredros* of Hathor = Ba^ʿalat. In addition Ba^ʿalat appears to be associated with “Lord of (the) GN” at Serabit. If this deity is a form of Resheph, the cult of Resheph would seem to have arrived in Sinai before the advent of the Syrian Ba^ʿal as did the Levantine Ba^ʿalat. The cult of Ba^ʿal Saphon was brought to Egypt by sailors and craftsmen, who settled in Avaris = Piramesse and spread during the New Kingdom to the harbour of *Prw nfr* (Memphis) and places on the different roads to Palestine and Sinai. The Syrian Ba^ʿal became prominent during the Ramessid Period. As such, he appears in his Egypto-Asiatic outfit also on the 19th Dynasty stela of Mentu-Nakht at Serabit. Ba^ʿal’s cultic absence in the Semitic inscriptions is either accidental, or could be taken as an *argumentum e silentio* pointing to a pre-Ramessid date for the inscriptions.

8 Other deities

Other deities and divine names and epithets are incomplete, uncertain or do not exist at all. The name Astarte is suggested for Sinai 349 = 6:7, but unfortunately incomplete. The name *Qnmn* (Sass 2 = 48 vert) might contain the Egyptian divine name Amun/Min. The phrase *p gnt* (38 = Starr 1936 pl.9, 18) could denote a flight of female demons (*ginnātu**). Lastly the reuse of Sinai 345 = 1 may imply a certain veneration of King Snofru, if it is his name that was written between the paws of the sphinx,²³ but active participation in his cult at Serabit is difficult to prove. The occurrence of Phoenician-Punic *tnt* ‘Tinnit/Tannit’ is highly improbable at this early stage (Sinai 347 = 3).

Summary

Gardiner’s discovery of the name of Ba^ʿalat on stelae and votives at Serabit indicated that the religion there was of Semitic type. This basically Semitic character has been confirmed by other Semitic names and epithets of Ba^ʿalat and other gods of Levantine provenance. Names such as El, the Lord of GN (Resheph?), Anat and

²³ The rendering remains uncertain, though plausible, (Petrie, *Researches*, p. 129; Gardiner, *JEA* 3 (1916) 13 n. 2; Sprengling, *Alphabet*, pp. 28f. Figs. 1-3). Personal collation of the sphinx did not reveal anything more than a pigmented ‘sickle’ inside a crude *serekh*, which could be part of Snofru’s name.

the Lady of two Serpents (Qudshu) put a clear Canaanite stamp on the worship of the Semitic craftsmen of Serabit. However, this does not mean that we can identify this local cult with one of the better known West Semitic religions. In spite of the presence of the well known divine couple Ba'alat and Resheph from Lebanon, there is evidence that the cult at Serabit was a mixed affair, containing elements of Egypto-Semitic origin. Also a certain South Semitic influence is attested in the use of epithets, consisting of a demonstrative pronoun connected to a noun, or toponym in the genitive case (*z šbt* = El; *z gn* = Resheph?; *zt bšnm* = Qudshu). Abib was presumably a numen of local or tribal origin, perhaps the ancestor of the tribe identified as a Malik god. Egyptian divine names do not appear in the texts, but the epithet *ʾarhatu** 'Cow Goddess' for Ba'alat clearly reveals the Egyptian influence of the Hathor-iconography.

Semitic worship at Serabit was not a primitive desert cult, but a local manifestation of the many 2nd Millennium Canaanite cults, including some aspects of tribal religion. Though involvement in the cult of Hathor in the Egyptian temple is implied by dedication of votives, the daily cult of the Semitic community took place in their own *gannu**, a sacred precinct somewhere near the Mines L and M. Their rites knew bloody and bloodless sacrifices, and several stelae commemorate donations and sacrifices for otherwise unknown occasions. Some of the steliform panels were perhaps funerary stelae. Officiants of this local cult were probably the tribal chiefs, because there is no evidence that the community was served by a professional priest. The texts tell us next to nothing about other cultic activities like festivals, oracular consultation and so on. One or two texts may be of magical nature, conjuring spirits or praying for protection (Sinai 357 = 14:37). The iconography is very much Egypt-orientated, like the pictographic character of the Serabit script itself, but the gods worshipped and the ritual are definitely Semitic.

A sketch like this remains incomplete because the texts are open to multiple interpretations at many points. The few data gleaned from texts and artefacts show that the worship of the Semitic community remained essentially an Egypto-Canaanite affair with atavistic elements in the sphere of the superior cult of Hathor. Since this Canaanite tribal cult was influenced iconographically and conceptually by its Egyptian environment, it indeed seems to be a unique product of time, place and symbiosis. An Egypto-Canaanite origin for this seemingly migrant group of craftsmen, apparently serving the Egyptian expeditions to Sinai during the New Kingdom, is therefore more likely than recruitment and employment of a local Sinaitic tribe.

Address of the author:

Dr. M. Dijkstra, Universiteit Utrecht, Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, Postbus 80105, NL-3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands