CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF UGARIT

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1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever the name Ugarit is mentioned, people tend immediately to think of the cuneiform texts discovered there. Other important discoveries which were also made at Ugarit and the art treasures found there—stelae, statues, ivory pieces, seals and metalwork—are of no less importance. This chapter deals with the art and iconography. Iconography is here taken to refer to the theme or subject matter of a work of art. Only the motifs and not the technical manufacture or archaeology of the objects will be scrutinized. Architecture is excluded, but included is the specialized subject of the iconography of the deities.1 In order to make it easier for the general reader to find the relevant images, the excavation (RS) number, the present location and museum number and the source of a photograph of good quality are given—as far as possible from ANEP or else from CAQUOT – SZNYCER (1980) or WEISS (1985). The Ugaritica volumes edited by SCHAEFFER (1939–1978) are quoted only if no new source is available and in cases where these contain detailed analysis.

A recent overview of the excavations and discoveries at Ugarit can be found in YON (1992a and 1997).2 Very handy in this regard is also YON (1991a, 275–8, 322, 324–5) for find-spots of the stone stelae. In monographic form there are the earlier overviews of SCHAEFFER 1939 and SAADÉ 1978.

All major histories of ancient Near Eastern art have sections dealing with objects from Ugarit (e.g. AMIET 1995, FRANKFORT 1979, ORTMANN 1975). More specific treatments of Syrian and ‘Canaanite’

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1 CAUBET 1996b, 530 speaks of the ‘profoundly religious character of their iconography . . .’.

2 A new book by YON (1998a, b) was announced when this chapter had already been completed.
or ‘Phoenician’ art appear in the older books of Contenau, Dussaud and Matthiae, with a chapter in Gray (1964b, Ch. VII). Recent treatments are the catalogue of Weiss (1985, 279ff.) and the chapter by Caubet (1995). There is no monograph on Ugaritic art or iconography in general, but individual studies dealing with different artistic media (e.g. the glyptic) have been appearing. These are cited below.

2 Stone Sculpture

The stone sculptures from Ugarit were studied by Yon (1991a, 273–353), who dealt with both the stelae and statues.

2.1 Statues

Earlier excavations revealed Egyptian statuary from the Middle Kingdom (Schaeffer 1949, 212–25, Figs. 19–25), which reflects the influence of Egypt in Ugarit: a sphinx of Amenemhat III (RS 4.416), a damaged statue of the wife of Senusret II (RS 3.336) and of an Egyptian official Senusret-anhk (RS 4.466 + 5.144 + 5.144a). Other examples are monumental statues and some statuettes (Yon 1991, 350–2, Figs. 1–3).

In 1988 a statue of calcite (25 cm) (RS 88.70 = Fig. 10) was found near the temple of the rhytons (Caubet 1995, 267–9; Yon 1990, 1991a, 347–8, Fig. 2a). It shows an older bearded figure seated on a high-backed throne, wearing a high crown and a long garment with rolled borders. Most interpreters identified the figure with El, the father of the gods and the creator of mankind. The high crown is comparable to that of the figure on the (now lost) ‘Job stela’ (Cornelius 1994, 145, Fig. 34) containing the inscription ‘El creator of Saphon’. The figure is also comparable to the relief and bronze depicting the older seated ‘father type’ deity discussed below (ANEP §§ 493 and 826). Recently Niehr (1998, 28, 65) has proposed that the statue represents a deified king.

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3 But note that recently Caubet (1995) still used ‘Canaan’.

4 German and French editions of the catalogue were edited by Strommenger and Kohlmeyer, and Amiet.

5 Cf. also the headdress on the fragmentary stela in Yon 1991a, 327 Fig. 7: No. 19.