

# OCCUPANT SYMBOLISM IN PHOENICIAN MYTHOLOGY:

## Speculation concerning UFO-related rituals in ancient amulets

*Jacques Vallée*

THE purpose of this article is to place before the readers of *Flying Saucer Review*, who may be in a better position than I to clarify and document them, a series of observations of a speculative nature. If these observations can be confirmed we may be led to a revision of our concepts relative to the UFO problem, similar to the revision which followed Aimé Michel's discovery of Palaeolithic UFO shapes,<sup>1</sup> and we may have before us a new and significant piece in the "contact" puzzle.

My observations will be concerned with the nature of the scenes depicted on magical or religious objects of Phoenician origin that have been discovered and preserved, and need to be placed in the perspective of a short historical summary concerning the civilization which produced them.

Classical books tell us that the Phoenician civilization was established at a time, much anterior to the Hebrew migrations, when several Semitic tribes founded a series of cities on the Mediterranean littoral: the main ones were known as Tyre, Sidon, Tripoli, Byblos . . . and each was governed by an oligarchy or by a king. At the height of its development, Phoenicia itself extended through that part of Syria that goes from Nahr-al-Kabir (Eleutherus) on the North to Mount Carmel on the South.

Their language was close to Hebrew (it descended from the old Canaanite language) and their alphabet, possibly the oldest form of Semitic writing, is generally regarded as the predecessor of the Greek and Latin alphabets and, indirectly, of all Western alphabets.<sup>2</sup> It may itself have derived from either the Babylonian characters or from Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Sir E. A. Wallis Budge<sup>3</sup> states that "the Phoenicians were not a literary people," but there are indications that their literature may not have been negligible, although it is true that practically nothing has survived. A notable exception is the universal theological history compiled by Sanchuniathon<sup>4</sup> (1200 B.C.) which Philo of Byblos translated into Greek. Some artifacts have been discovered which are dated to the third millennium B.C., and the best known monuments of the Phoenicians are burial places.

Unlike most Semitic peoples, the Phoenicians loved the sea. They used the numerous forests nearby to supply the timber for their ships. Their work was exceptionally refined and their products were sold by their merchants throughout the ancient world, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and India. They had learnt from Babylon the art of dyeing, from Egypt the craft of glassblowing, and they used accurate systems of weights. Little is known of their

religious beliefs, although it is often pointed out, on linguistic grounds, that the names of their gods showed direct Babylonian, Egyptian, and Greek influences.

Of their ritual practices we are told that they sacrificed their first-born children in times of trouble; that they similarly killed their prisoners of war on the altars of their gods;<sup>5</sup> and that their women sacrificed their virginity in the sanctuaries of Astarte.<sup>6</sup> For their personal magical protection the Phoenicians appear to have adopted the type of amulets used in Babylonia and Assyria, and a small collection of cylinder-seals has been preserved in the British Museum (Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities) which I urge my London readers to visit at their earliest opportunity. These artifacts, which are shown in Figures A through E, with an enlargement of about 1.5 times the actual size, may date from a few centuries B.C., probably from about 400-300 B.C.

*All five of these cylinder seals depict the Winged Disc, often with appendages. Figures which are referred to in the literature as "divine beings" are seen emerging from these discs in four cases. And in every one of them human figures in ceremonial dress appear to be involved in rituals that contain Assyrian features.*

### Figure A

This cylinder seal shows a hero holding with each hand a fore-leg of a winged beast. One of these two beasts (the one on the right) has horns on its head, and



Figure A

a tail. Above the human being is the winged disc, from which a god is emerging. ("Ahuramazda or some Assyrian god," writes Sir Wallis Budge.)

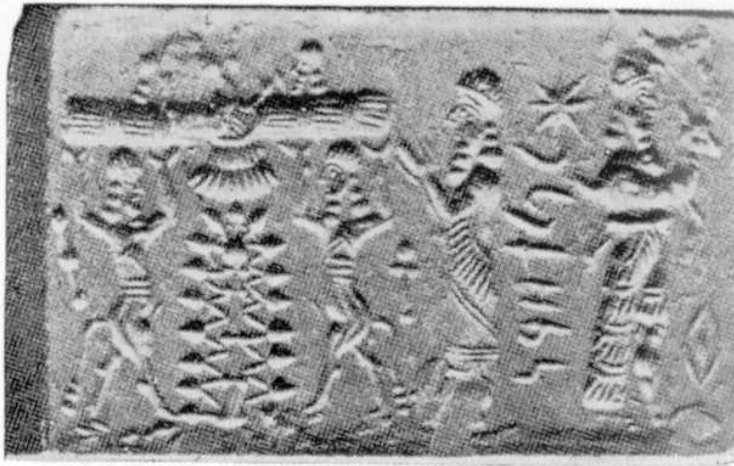


Figure B

**Figure B**

The interpretation of this amulet, as given in Sir Wallis Budge's book *Amulets And Superstitions*, involves Scorpion-men and sexual symbols. It is apparent that two strange creatures, obviously males, are supporting a winged disc above a sacred tree. To



Figure C

the right is a worshipper, while another person is bringing some sort of animal as a sacrifice. Here, again, two divine figures are to be seen, emerging from the disc. The inscription reads "Belonging to PLTHAN."<sup>7</sup>

**Figure C**

Two large winged figures—classically interpreted as "priests wearing winged garments"—frame a large disc with extended legs; directly beneath the disc is a symbol



Figure D

of lightning or thunderbolt, before which a man appears to be standing in adoration. There is something on top of the disc, which is interpreted by authorities as "a lion's head" . . . The inscription reads, in translation: "YRPAL, the son of HR'DD."<sup>8</sup>

**Figure D**

A sphinx and a goat stand on either side of a sacred tree above which is a winged disc. Two men are performing a ritual in connection with the scene . . .

**Figure E**

Again two of the strange dwarfish figures which authorities call "Scorpion-men" (despite their quite obvious breasts on this particular seal) are supporting a "winged disc from which project the heads of three divine beings." Two men are in adoration before the disc, beneath which a sort of vaulted door can be seen. To the left is a very strange figure interpreted as "a god holding a gazelle or goat under each arm."

All five seals are about one inch in height. This collection of artifacts raises several questions that are important from an historical point of view. In the first place, is it common for the winged disc (a frequent symbol in Antiquity) to show several beings



Figure E

emerging from its upper part? In what context are such representations encountered?

If the disc is interpreted as some mythological symbol of flight connected with the Cosmos (as is indicated by the abundance of astronomical symbols in the seals: stars, crescent moons), should we think of the appendages of the disc in terms other than biological? In other words, should we speculate that the representation of a winged disc with extended claws may in fact be associated with the vision, or observation, of a flying disc with landing-gear, of the type so frequently described in more recent history?

Tempting as it is, this speculation does not answer certain important questions connected with these remarkable scenes, but it is certainly fascinating to read that the best accepted interpretation for the zigzag symbol in Figure C is "lightning or a thunder-bolt." Why should a thunder-bolt be associated with a winged disc, and why should three people in elaborate magical garments stand in adoration before it? The scene suggests plan and purpose rather than a chance occurrence or the observation of some purely natural phenomenon.



Equally fascinating to the student of close-encounter UFO cases are the scenes in which animals are carried to the hovering disc, as in figures B and E: in the latter case, a god is seen holding some horned animal under each arm—a scene certainly reminiscent of Alexander Hamilton's cow<sup>9</sup> and of many a claim of animal-kidnapping by UFO occupants. Three of the cylinder seals (B, D, E) show approximately the same thing: a disc above some elaborate ground structure; a human in adoration; someone bringing a horned animal towards the centre of the scene.

A third class of observation which we can make concerns the beings themselves:

1. The first category consists of human beings that Assyriologists call "worshippers," "priests," "kings," etc. Sometimes they are wearing winged garments.

2. The Gods. They are shown either emerging from the disc, and wearing in some cases elaborate head-dresses, or walking outside the disc as in Figure E, where the figure at the left seems to be wearing its hair in three long tresses on either side of the head.

3. The "Scorpion-Men," who have phallic attributes in Figure B but in Figure E would more properly be called "Scorpion-Women," are only seen supporting the disc. It would be interesting to find out where this word "scorpion" comes from in connection with these figures. The "Scorpion-Men" are consistently about two-thirds of the height of the "men" and the "Gods."

4. Various monsters, such as the horned creature in Figure A, the sphinx in Figure D, etc.

I have stated above that certain important questions were left unanswered by this interpretation of the scenes shown on the cylinder seals. If we assume that the Phoenicians were thus transmitting recent or ancient knowledge of the details of UFO landings, why should such knowledge be preserved in seals rather than in other types of inscription? Of what importance would be such a reference to "YRPAL, the son of HR'DD," who was probably the owner of a glass-blowing shop somewhere in Sidon, or perhaps the captain of a sailing ship from the harbour of Tyre?

More important, why should the observation of a UFO be represented in the context of an obviously magical ceremony that does not appear to have any traditional character of Phoenician religion? We are told, for instance, that they held the same view as the Hebrews concerning the survival of the soul; that they buried their dead with great care; and that their sacrificial ceremonies involved the killings of human beings and sacred prostitution. Why then is it that, if the seals are associated with spiritual or religious values, they depict nothing of this, but do instead show winged discs which appear to come from a star, which contain strange beings who carry off Earth animals, and which emit lightning-bolts? And why are the human assistants wearing special vestments with wings on them?

#### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> FSR XV, 6, November/December 1969, pp. 3-11.

<sup>2</sup> [Gordon Creighton points out that North Semitic is now regarded as probably the ancestor of not only the Greek and Latin and other Western alphabets, such as the Russian Cyrillic, but also of all other alphabets, including the Arabic, the Sanskrit and other Indian alphabets, the

Armenian, the Georgian, the Burmese, the Tibetan, etc.—EDITOR.]

<sup>3</sup> Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, Kt., M.A., Litt.D., D.Litt., D.Lit., F.S.A.: *Amulets and Superstitions*, Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, London, 1930; pp. 250-251. This great scholar, who lived from 1857 to 1934, was, from 1885 to 1924, Keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum.

<sup>4</sup> [Dr. Vallée has Sanchoniathon, which may possibly be the usual French form for this name. We have however rendered it as Sanchuniathon, which is the English form that we find used in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.—EDITOR.]

<sup>5</sup> Diodorus Siculus: XX, 14.

<sup>6</sup> I Kings XIV, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>8</sup> Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

<sup>9</sup> [For this classic case of "steer-rustling" by UFO occupants see Chapter 1 of Dr. Vallée's *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* (1965). At 10.30 p.m. on the night of April 19, 1897, at Le Roy, Kansas, Kansas State Representative Alexander Hamilton, his son Wall, and his tenant Gid Heslip, watched one of their two-year-old heifers hoisted out of the paddock by a rope dangling from a 300-foot-long cigar-shaped craft containing some "very hideous people" and hovering at a height of only 300ft. above the farm. Gordon Creighton's *New FSR Catalogue, On The Effects of UFOs on Animals, Birds, And Smaller Creatures*, of which thirteen instalments have recently appeared in FSR, beginning with the issue for January/February 1970, contains several other cases in which animals were allegedly carried off by entities from UFOs.—EDITOR.]

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# THE LITTLE SINGING CREATURES AT ARC-SOUS-CICON

*Joël Mesnard*

Here, to get the record straight, is a contribution from issue No. 13 of *Phénomènes Spatiaux* (September 1967). Translation by Gordon Creighton.

ON Wednesday, July 19, and Thursday, July 20, 1967, press and radio referred to a report that strange small beings had been seen by several children near a village in the Doubs Département, and by a fifteen-year-old girl named Joëlle Ravier.

As several of the details of the sighting were at variance in the separate reports, we accepted it with a certain degree of scepticism. It appears in fact that these differences which are to be seen in the various accounts are due to differences in the interpretations put upon Joëlle Ravier's declarations rather than to any contradictions on her part.

In the course of the enquiry which I carried out on the spot on Sunday, July 23, 1967, Joëlle Ravier gave a coherent description of the facts and explained the points that might have seemed suspect in the various published accounts.

The village of Arc-sous-Cicon, some 20 kilometres from Pontarlier, lies in the middle of an undulating plateau surrounded by hills covered with conifer forests. Almost the whole of the plateau is cow-pasturage.

Shortly after 3.00 p.m. on Monday, July 17, 1967, a group of young children left the village to go for a walk through fields which, dotted with bushes, lead upwards in a gentle slope to the pine forest that flanks the plateau on the north. A little girl aged five, Patricia Bépoix, who was a few score metres or so ahead of her companions, suddenly turned back, terrified, and made her way back home to her parents as fast as her feet could carry her. Sobbing, she told her mother that she had surprised several "little Chinamen" sitting behind a bramble-bush, and that one of them had stood up with the apparent intention of seizing her.

## INTRODUCTION: CRAZY EVENT ON A CRAZY NIGHT

On the morning after what was described as "the crazy night" of July 17-18, 1967, French and Swiss newspapers,<sup>1</sup> and also Radio-Luxemburg, carried a report about a strange incident that had happened at Arc-Sous-Cicon.<sup>2</sup> In this village in Doubs (adjoining Switzerland, in Eastern France), which has a total of 700 inhabitants, some children, of whom the eldest was Joëlle Ravier (15), daughter of the village carpenter, claimed that they had seen some mysterious beings that were rapidly labelled "Martians."

The versions of the affair as given by various newspapers were at times very different. In one the "Martians" had heads the size of a potato, and in another it would be heads shaped like a potato—which is not at all the same thing! According to certain of the press reports, Joëlle Ravier had said that she had seen either four or three beings, while other reports said she had only seen one.

*L'Est Républicain*, a paper which had published these contradictory figures on successive days and emphasised the discrepancies, seemed to be suggesting that the young girl's truthfulness was questionable, and Charles Garreau, who was aware of these contradictions about the number of beings, wrote to us saying that, in all probability, this was indeed a case of a piece of fancifulness conceived in the mind of an over-imaginative lass.

As several of the papers had said that Joëlle had seen her "Martians" on Tuesday, July 18, some people found it easy to believe that the story had sprung to birth in her mind after she had read, in the newspapers of that date (July 18) articles about UFO sightings during the previous night. But this argument is untenable. For, as various media attest (newspapers *L'Est Républicain* of July 19 and *La Suisse* of July 20, and the report broadcast on the *Europe-Midi* Service on July 19) the incident at Arc-sous-Cicon occurred on the afternoon of Monday, July 17, and, consequently, before the other sightings referred to.

It is however to be noted that, on Joëlle Ravier's own admission, in the recording made by *Radio-Europe No. 1*, it was only when she read the newspapers of the 18th, which spoke of "flying saucers," that she was led to think that the very strange being that she had seen the previous day might possibly be an extraterrestrial.

We ourselves had seen several articles about the case, and we were quite inclined to fall in with the sceptical view of Charles Garreau when our friend and collaborator Joël Mesnard informed us that he had been to Arc-sous-Cicon, had talked to Joëlle Ravier and the children who were with her on the day of the incident, and that he had made a tape-recording of the essential parts of his interview with the girl.

Joël Mesnard then sent us—and we thank him most warmly for it—a very sincere report. We can certify that this report agrees with the statements of Joëlle Ravier that were tape-recorded, as our fellow-investigator sent the tape to us and we have made our own copy of it.

Having thus taken a fair and honest note of what has been said in the press and on the radio about the incident at Arc-sous-Cicon, we shall now give below the full text of Joël Mesnard's account of it and leave it to our readers to form their own opinion about the case.

RENE FOUERE, Editor of *Phénomènes Spatiaux*.