

# Ras al-Shagry tomb update: North Phoenician territory in the second half of the first millennium BC

Bashar Mustafa

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62614/3dbppb05>

**Abstract:** This paper describes the Ras al-Shagry tomb, located in the area of ancient Phoenicia on the Arwadian coast of Syria and discusses it in the context of previous research into the cemeteries of the region. It draws attention to the differences between the sarcophagus-containing tomb of Ras al Shagry and the nearby tower tombs, which do not contain sarcophagi. These differences may be related to particular religious practices and/or socio-political influences. This study develops an iconographic relationship between the sarcophagus itself and the artefacts found within the hypogeal tomb to establish its earliest chronology. Historical events are also discussed in relation to the last period of original use of the Ras al-Shagry tomb. The paper offers new insights into the architectural and cultural context of the territory of *Arados/Amrīt* during the Achaemenid Empire (sixth to third centuries BC).

## Introduction

The only inhabited island found close to the Mediterranean shore of present-day Syria is Arwad (Phoenician *Qrn*, *'rwd*, (refuge), Greek *Arados*) (Figure 1). According to the fourth-century BC Pseudo-Scylax the island's distance from the mainland was eighteen stadia or 3,330 meters. The Phoenician history of the emporium island is, for the most part, unknown because excavations have started only recently. However, many historians describe how it was continuously inhabited from at least the third millennium BC (Yon and Caubet 1993: 60; Besancon *et al.*, 1994; Al Maqdissi and Benech 2009: 209; Al Maqdissi 1993; 2010). According to ancient records, its position near the coast, with its two ports, made it an important centre for trade and cultural exchange during its zenith. One port was on the east, the other on the north, making the island a strategic trading hub and promoting widely varying cultural contacts in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Arwad's geographical position and cultural diversity meant that it became a focal point of state power enabling it to have its own cemetery on the mainland. Opposite the island on mainland is the ancient ruin of Amrīt (ancient *K-r-t M-r-t*, Greek Marathus), which is about 6 kilometres to the south of Tartus (Greek *Antarados*). The archaeological site of Amrīt occupies an area of six square km and its shape is both insular and peninsular, giving it a dual urban layout much like Tyre, Byblos, and Sidon (Rey-Coquais 1979; Aubet 1987, 2001). Archaeological research indicates that the first occupation of the settlement was in the area of the Acropolis at about 2100 BC. Amrit itself prospered during the first millennium BC, serving as a mainland base for the island of Arados. The material culture in the area indicates that there was a great expansion of the settlement during the Persian and Hellenistic periods between 600-300 BC.



**Figure 1:** View from the Ras al-Shagry neighborhood toward Tartus city with Arados Island in the background.  
Image: the author.

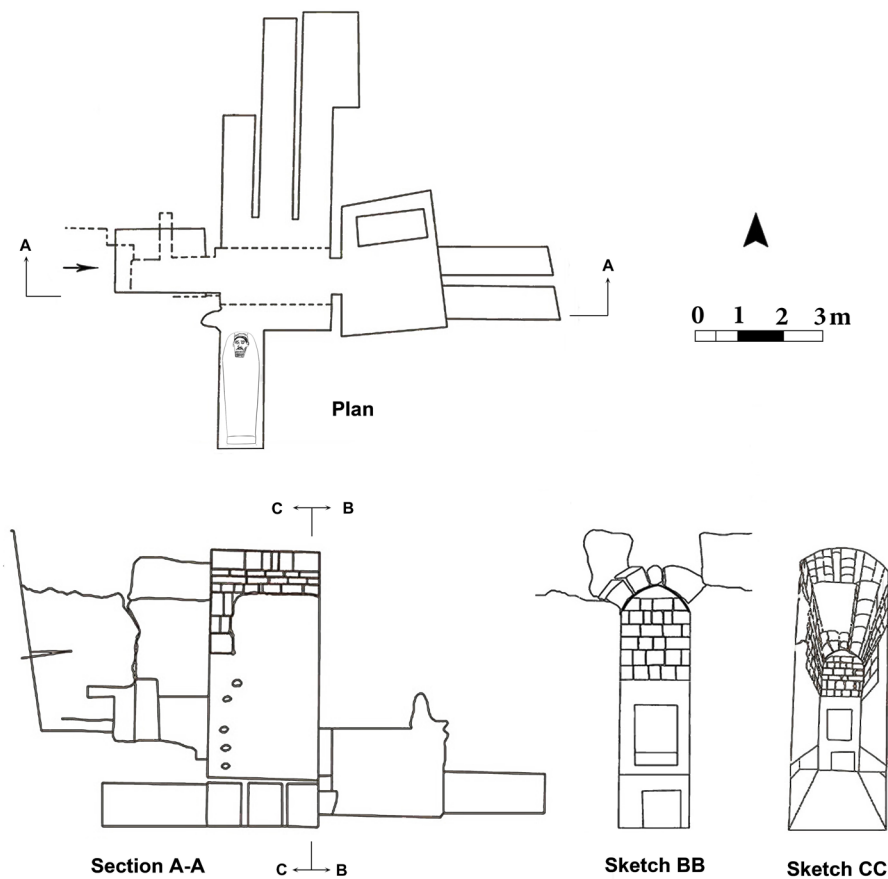


Figure 2: Plan, sections and elevations of the Ras al-Shagry tomb, after Mustafa (2013, fig. 9-10).

The Arwadian coastline, so-called ‘Northern Phoenicia’, (Sapin 1980; Elayi 1988), lies between ancient Byblos and the settlement of Amrīt (Maroke 2000). Haykal (1995: 24) suggests that the foundation of an actual city-state on the island of Arwad followed the arrival of a community that had fled from Sidon. From that uncertain moment, the island became the centre of a new territorial power, stretching through the territory of *Aradiense* (Lembke 2001).

The discovery of the Ras al-Shagry tomb in 2009 on this part of the Syrian coast provides an opportunity to further analyse and assess the funerary sites, especially in relation to their archaeology, chronology and socio-cultural characteristics, which may shed light on Canaanite/Phoenician culture. Recent discoveries in this region lead to a greater understanding of the geographical distribution of cemeteries in the Aradus/Amrit territory, which until now has been an aspect of field of study that has been largely neglected.

It should be noted that the use of the term *Phoenician culture* can be controversial. As a result the term *Canaanite/Phoenician culture* is used in this paper to recognise that in this geographical area of the Levantine coast precise cultural attributions are still unclear.

### Ras al-Shagry tomb

The massive hypogeal tomb was discovered by chance in 2009 by the Director General of Antiquities and the Museum, DGAM Syria (Mustafa 2013). It is located in the demarcated zones neighbouring *Enhydra* (Al Maqdissi 2008), identified by E Renan as Tell Gamqe (1864: 19), and the Gamqe *Kārumor* or River with its mouth opposite the island of Arwad.

### Architecture

The Ras al-Shagry tomb is subterranean, hewn out of the limestone bedrock to form a *dromos*, chambers and *loculi*, which remained partly exposed at ground level (Figure 2). Overall dimensions are 11m x 12m. The southern part of the mausoleum was dug into the natural terrain consisting of stones and earth fill in decomposed limestone. **This material could be easily excavated enabling the massive sarcophagus to be removed from the tomb** (Mustafa 2015b).

The tomb consists of a rectangular pit with a 1.6m wide western entrance with a lateral notch for a closure slab, the fragmented remains of which were found around the entryway. The entrance to the first chamber has two carved steps after a one meter-long *dromos*, or short corridor, with inclined walls ending with a recess in the rock (Mustafa 2013: 118).



**Figure 3:** The relief on the sarcophagus found in the Ras al-Shagry tomb. Image: the author.

Along the north wall of the first chamber there are three loculi, while on the southern side there is a large fronted loculus, 3m long, 1m wide, and 1m high, containing the sarcophagus. The roof of this loculus was partially collapsed. In the west wall of the first chamber is a shallow recess.

The first chamber was enclosed by a barrel vault seven meters above the floor. The vault was constructed with limestone blocks with small ashlar blocks serving as keystones. The entire chamber, except for the uppermost two meters, was excavated in the bedrock. The final two meters was constructed from ashlar with interspersed blocks and mixed stones. The west-side of the vault above the entrance to the first chamber had four or five courses, while the vault rests directly on the excavated rock. In the eastern wall of the first chamber, a door provided access by two steps to the second chamber, the east wall of which

opened to two more loculi. A rectangular pit, 2m x 0.80m was in the north part of the second chamber. It was partially covered by stones and embedded in a step over the pit (Mustafa 2013: 119). No above-ground monument of any kind to indicate the location of the tomb was documented.

**The Sarcophagus**

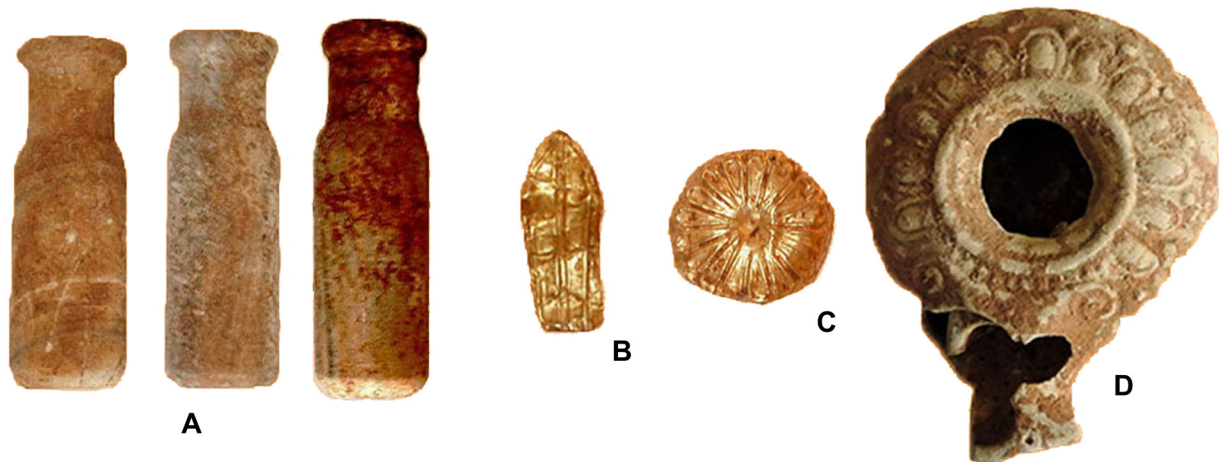
The sarcophagus was made from basalt and consists of two separate parts as is usual in these types of burials, a box and lid, forming the outline of a human body, Phoenician in style. Carved in relief on the lid is the head of an individual male, being of mature age, bearded and covered with a headdress or turban, making this coffin iconographically significant (Figure 3). Visual inspection revealed no trace of pigment on the head or the body of the sarcophagus, which was devoid of any sculptural representation, clothing or any other object or symbol. Anthropomorphic sarcophagi in this area have traditionally been described as Phoenician however that may not necessarily be the case here.

**The Objects**

All documented objects were found in the rectangular pit in the north part of the second chamber, not in the sarcophagus.

**Three alabaster:** The three vases of the same shape were found: each consisted of a cylindrical body, flat base, slightly narrower cylindrical neck and a round-sectioned lip having the same diameter as the body (Mustafa 2015a). Their lengths vary slightly between 8cm and 9cm, and one neck is somewhat throttled. The surface of one of them is well polished, while the other two have strong calcareous concretions creating a rough surface (Figure 4 A) (Mustafa 2015c).

**Golden leaves:** The first gold foil has a lanceolate leaf shape similar to an olive leaf (Figure 4 B). The second



**Figure 4:** Objects found in the Ras al-Shagry tomb, A, Alabaster 9x3cm, B, Gold foil 4x2cm, C, Gold foil 2.5cm dia, and D, a lamp 7x10cm. Image: the author.

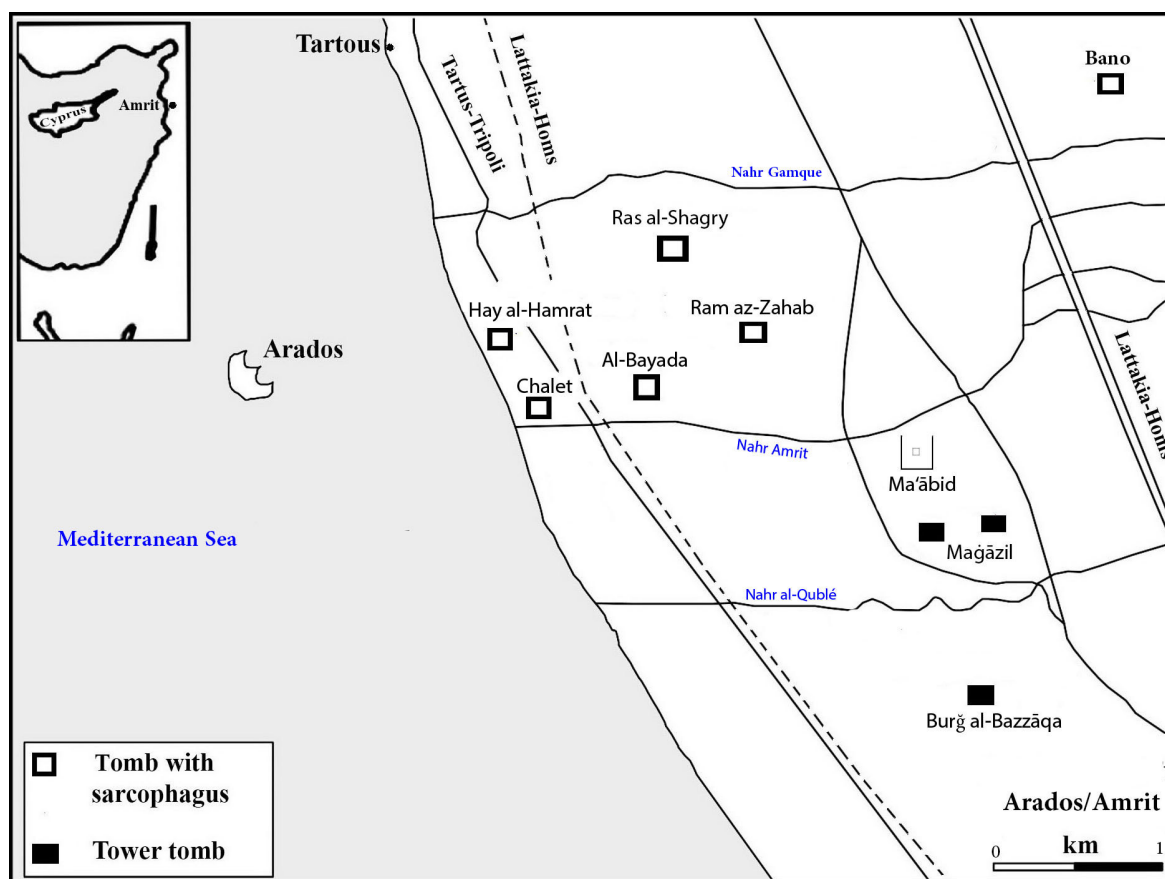


Figure 5: A map of the tombs and cemeteries in the Amrit area and Arados Island.

piece of gold foil is circular having low relief decoration in the shape of a corolla flower with 16 radial petals converging toward the centre, which is formed by a slight umbo representing a flower bud. Diagonally opposite each other on the circumference between two ‘petals’ are two small perforations, presumably for fixing the object into surface (Figure 4 C). It is catalogued Register No. 3856 in the Museum of Tartus (Mustafa 2014).

**Lamp:** The terracotta lamp has a large pouring hole with a slightly larger discus, a single hole for the wick and shoulder decoration featuring 14 ‘eggs’ around the discus. Its nozzle is partially preserved and there is no handle. The body has strong calcareous concretions that create a rougher layer (Figure 4 D).

The lamp belongs to the early Roman period and may have been used during a later visit to the tomb. The alabastra or ungentaria are significant because other examples have been documented with marble sarcophagi throughout the so-called Phoenician coast. They may have been used to deposit perfume during the burial ritual.

### Cemeteries in the Amrīt territory

The study of funeral architecture remains a complicated and difficult task in the region of Amrīt because of the paucity of data. We find that most of the cemeteries, even up to the present, have not been excavated systematically.

In fact, the vast majority of cemeteries that contained anthropomorphic sarcophagi in the territory of Amrīt have been discovered serendipitously during civil construction or road improvement. Analysis of these cemeteries’ origins is further complicated by the fact that they were frequently reused in Hellenistic and Roman periods during which time alterations were made. However, the construction methods of hypogeal tombs, whether simply excavated, painstakingly built, or a combination of the two, developed immensely during the first millennium BC (Colvin 1991). Even though the tombs were originally hidden from view, the construction techniques used were the best available at the time.

The territory of Amrīt is rich in archaeological sites and related funerary attributes (Figure 5). It has yielded a host of sophisticated artistic and architectural relics providing a wealth of information about the ethnic and social make-up of the communities of the ancient Syrian coast (Renan 1864; Dunand & Saliby 1956; 1961; 1985; Badre 1997; Lipinski 2004). The area is known to have a high concentration of hypogeal tombs containing anthropoid sarcophagi (Buhl 1983a; 1988; Elayi and Haykal 1996; Lembke 1998; Hermary and Mertens 2014: 374). In all thirty sarcophagi, providing a vital source of information regarding funeral rites during the Iron Age III (c. 600-300 BC) or the Persian period, have been catalogued. About half the sarcophagi discovered in the Amrīt area are now

preserved in western museums (France, Germany), where they have been decontextualized (Renan 1864; Kukhan 1955; 1958: 459). Nonetheless, they paved the way for some nascent publications about the subject.

It is important to divide cemeteries in the area of study into three groups in order to trace chronological data:

**Isolated tomb:** These tombs are *isolated* because no other funerary architecture has been found in the area of discovery. Among the most notable in the study area are Bano, discovered in 1988 by Haykal, and located slightly less than 4km to the north of the Amrīt ruins (1996). The simple *cist* sandstone contained one sarcophagus (Dixon 2013: 471) and according to S. Frede it is to be dated to between the fifth- and fourth-centuries BC (2000: 118). A hypogeal tomb of *Chalet*, was discovered in March 1996 situated to the north of the sanctuary of Amrīt. It is formed by a *dromos* chamber and *loculi* and is covered by a *lintel* type construction system developed using five stone slabs, coupled and exposed. Five clay coffins were found inside. Elayi and Haykal date this mausoleum to the fifth-century BC (1996).

The Ras al-Shagry tomb is considered to be an Isolated Tomb because no other tomb has been found in the neighbouring area (approx. one kilometres square).

**Necropoleis:** Many burial groups have been documented in the territory of *Amrīt*. Ram az-Zahab, northwest of Amrīt, was discovered by Haykal in 1989 (1996b). There were four sarcophagi recorded in the *cist ramleh* stone — three anthropomorphic and one *teke* — dating to the fifth-century BC (Elayi and Haykal 1996: 53; Dixon 2013; Mustafa 2014). In the Hay al-Hamrat neighbourhood south of Tartus city, two sarcophagi were uncovered, the first in 1988 by Haykal; it was protected by simple slab stones (1996b). This sarcophagus was dated to c. 360-340 BC (Lembke 1998: 119; Frede 2000: 118). It was not until eleven years later that a second was excavated. In Ard al-Bayada, about 500m from the ancient Ma‘ābid, a porticoed temple datable to the Persian and early Hellenistic periods (sixth- to third-centuries BC) (Dunand 1944/45), a sarcophagus was discovered in 2004 preserved under stone slabs (Mustafa and Abbas 2015). The necropolis of *Azar* (Elayi and Haykal 1996: 35), situated about 1km to the north of an ancient temple, was documented by N. Saliby (1970-1971). This discovery included a *dromos* chamber and *loculi* covered by a *dome* type structure, which may signify that it was related to Ras al-Shagry with its ‘barrel vault’ roof. However, chronological data indicate that it may belong to a later stage of the third century AD (Elayi and Haykal 1996: 36). One pyramidal or *teke* sarcophagus was uncovered inside this tomb (Saliby, 1984). These tombs may once have been marked by monuments above them, which have perished.

**Funerary towers:** Tower tombs in the territory of Amrīt are all found south of ancient *Ma‘ābid* and these attracted attention from afar. Several towers in this region should

be highlighted. The first is the tomb of Maḡāzil, meaning ‘Spindles’ in Arabic, it is located just 500m from the coast (Harden 1963: 106; Dunand and Saliby 1985: 10; Krings 1995: 131; Elayi and Haykal 1996: 24-6; Akkermans and Schwartz 2003). It was erected on a rectangular pedestal standing 7.5m above the hill. It was composed of a *dromos*, chamber, *loculi*, and a huge monument outside (Elayi and Haykal 1996). Some scholars have dated this impressive tomb to the fourth-century BC (Dunand and Saliby 1985: 11; Markoe 2000: 142).

The second monumental tomb has a feature resembling the Maḡāzil tomb just a few meters from it. This massive tomb, however, is termed ‘pyramidal’ (Saliby 1989; Maroke 2000: 141). It has a circular base, formed by the same features of the Maḡāzil tomb (Elayi and Haykal 1996; Markoe 2000). The information about the materials from both tombs that indicates they were in use between the fifth- and first-centuries BC (Saliby 1984: 30; 1997; Haykal 1996a). To the west of the more recent tomb is situated another monumental tomb, termed ‘Cubic’, dating to the same period (Saliby 1984: 36).

Finally, there is Burḡ al-Bazzāqa, or ‘snail’ tower, in the vicinity of the *Maḡāzil*. It is 5m high, is constructed from precisely-cut ashlar blocks and includes a *dromos*, chamber and *loculi* (Saliby 1984: 37). It is considered to be of approximately the same age as another monumental tomb in the area of study, dating to the fifth-century BC (Saliby 1984: 38). Both have architectural details suggesting Persian affinity. Significantly, these tower tombs are located south of the sanctuary and were probably all erected at around the same time—a period of prosperity at *Ma‘ābid* (Markoe 2000: 141, 206). It is important to note that no anthropomorphic sarcophagi were found inside them. It is safe to surmise that all these monumental above-ground tombs belong to the Persian period based on their architectural features (Renan 1878; Saliby and Dunand 1986; Elayi and Haykal 1996; Lipinski 2004: 287). As such they originate from a time later than the period under discussion.

Tower tombs have been given Persian affiliation in this area of the Syrian coast and their visible presence may have been significant for that society. It is possible that hypogeal tombs may have had monuments above them, which have subsequently been removed for one reason or another.

An examination of the hypogeal tombs building structure and physical distribution in the region of the Ras al-Shagry tomb leads one to conclude that the design and execution of the structure appears similar and that they are probably related. Further, they demonstrate an innovation in the manner in which the main chamber is covered with the application of barrel vaulting.

In the past the chronological interpretations concerning the sarcophagi discussed above were based on an artistic viewpoint (Lembke 1998; Frede 2002). It is suggested that a more reliable method is required in order to accurately

date them. Additionally, spatial analysis of the tombs throughout the region may provide valuable contextual information and aid chronological assignment. This paper will endeavour to establish a link between these monumental tombs, the ancient temple of Amrīt, and those tombs in which sarcophagi have been found on the island of Arwad (Figure 3).

### Differences and similarities

It is important to recognize that the study of the tombs is not an end in itself: their contents and other characteristics, such as the location within the *urban centre*, can provide key information about late Phoenician society during the Achaemenid period. Hopefully, the identities of the tomb owners and their religious affiliations can be gleaned from the tombs which will help to construct a picture of those ancient cultures. Of course, it cannot be determined which of these—contents, design, or physical layout—was most important to the ancient society, so our interpretation can be, at best, only hypothetical.

### Architecture

In the belief system of the ancient culture under discussion, a tomb allowed the spirit of the deceased to have a place to rest for eternity (Aubert 2013). Inclusion with the interred body of the accumulated possessions and other objects would be essential to express the social role and level of social and/or political power held by the deceased in their animate life.

The close relationship between Phoenicia and Egypt over many centuries made possible the importation and development of significant social and political ideas and beliefs within the populace in the territory of *Arados / Amrīt* (Dunand and Saliby 1955; Buhl 1991: 675; Markoe 2000: 151; Aubert 2001). Among these were ideas related to death and the afterlife, giving importance to the burial chamber and sarcophagus. One of the oldest texts about relations between Egypt and the civilizations of the Mediterranean coast dates to the second millennium BC and narrates the Egyptian-oriental relationship especially the relationship with that of the Phoenician settlement of the Levantine coast (Claude and Bonnet 1992: 59).

The construction method of the tomb, partially an excavation and partially stone built, seems to be very common in the Amrīt area, but the use of a barrel vault for the roof is not; barrel vaulting is known from much earlier times in Egypt and Mesopotamia (Potts 1997: 203-5; Wildung 2001; Woolmer 2011). The use of this technique in hypogeal tombs in the territory of Amrīt in the second half of first millennium BC may be the result of cultural interaction.

The design and construction this massive tomb and fabrication of the sarcophagus required many labourers supervised by skilled overseers. The quality of their work is demonstrated by the well-made, tightly-fitting bricks, for a tomb designed to hold just one sarcophagus. Unfortunately, there is no direct source of information about the

cost of the tomb and sarcophagus. Nonetheless, it is clear that the owner of this top-quality tomb and sarcophagus must have been prosperous, though by no means belonging to a family of great wealth—who needed to use this funerary monument as an instrument of self-glorification. The tomb, of a complex construction probably belonged to a person of high social status (Lopez Castro 2006: 77) and with sufficient resources to allow the building of a mausoleum and the acquisition of the sarcophagus.

Elayi and Haykal (1996) have documented many tombs with *dromos* on the north coast of Syria at Ugarit (modern-day Ras Shamra) during Iron Ages I-II (1200-600 BC). Many Mycenaean ceramics were also found there having been used in funeral contexts (Badre and Gubel 1999-2000: 441). The *dromos* funerary structure therefore already existed in the extreme north of Syria in the area of *Arados/Amrīt*. During this time and before there was a close trading relationship between the Greeks and Phoenicians, a relationship which may have flourished and even grown in importance between 600-300 BC.

What characteristics of the tomb itself make it so unique in the area? No well-documented tomb on the Syrian coast has contained a basalt sarcophagus with the characteristics of that found in the Ras al-Shagry tomb. Of particular note are its unique design and finely-crafted, skilful implementation of the sculpted human form in the top of sarcophagus. To ensure immortality and to facilitate the passage to the afterlife of these wealthy people, highly qualified artists were utilized in ancient societies, even when they had to be brought in from distant locations, to provide the accoutrements of funeral rituals for the social elites. Outside of the sarcophagus, we note the skilful and advanced architectural techniques used to shape the burial chamber. As we have mentioned, to date no one has documented a hypogeal tomb enclosed with a barrel vault containing a single, well-crafted basalt sarcophagus in this area of the Syrian coast. This is indeed a remarkable discovery.

Is there significance in the siting of the grave with respect to its surroundings? All hypogeal tombs in the area of Amrīt have several characteristics. First, the tomb is remote and isolated, separated from the ancient settlement of Amrīt by a distance that seems unusual when compared with tombs in other Phoenician cities where the distance from the city is usually less than 1km, i.e. *Azar* and *Chalets* tombs (Maroke 2000: 142). Secondly, other monumental tombs are always situated on the south of the main two temples i.e. Magāzil and Burğ al-Bazzāqa. The Ras al-Shagry tomb is unique in that it was to the north of Amrīt, facing the island of Arwad, and separated from any other structures. Other tombs containing sarcophagi are always found facing the island of Arwad, but the tomb of Ras al-Shagry is considerably farther from the main settlement and other scattered graves, unique among tombs in this area of northern Phoenicia.

This distribution could have archaeological significance and give insight toward a better interpretation of the social

significance of the burial practice of using *sarcophagi*. The Ras al-Shagry tomb was located a large distance from the site of Amrīt and far away from other funerary structures, and no other tombs have been discovered with these characteristics. It seems reasonable to speculate that the person buried at Ras al-Shagry was probably from *Arados*.

Among the Phoenician society during the Achaemenid, or Persian, Empire was a social class close to power who were members of the court and close to royalty. They were of clear Phoenician origin (Elayi 2013). Their tombs are in step with those of the prototypical class in the territory of other Phoenician tombs, but built in isolated parts of the territory on the mainland and on the island of Arwad which faces the mainland, offering a privileged view of the city-state of Arwad.

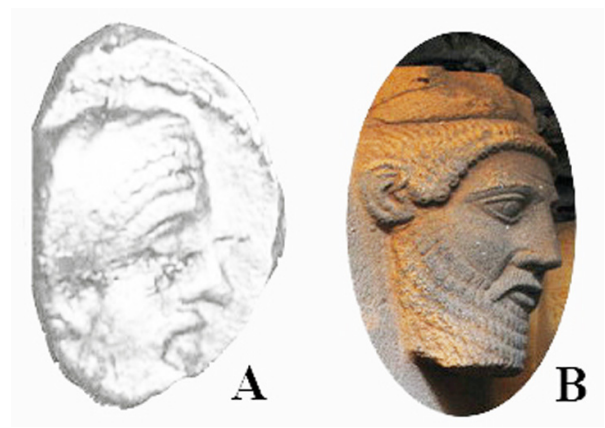
What is indisputable is that the tomb of Ras al-Shagry was not available to just anyone; it was designed to be the burial place for an upper class community within the social strata of the territory of *Arados/Amrīt*. It may have belonged to an aristocratic family of the city who occupied a very prominent position among the rest of their fellow citizens.

The size and complexity are extremely important clues in determining the status of its occupants. Ras al-Shagry was designed and built to be collective, evidenced by a variety of sizes and shapes of *loculi*. Even so, only one sarcophagus has been unearthed, unlike other similar tombs, where several sarcophagi have been found. This collective tomb was designed to preserve several members of a social unit without regard to age or sex of the deceased. However, having been discovered and excavated only recently under carefully controlled conditions and techniques, we can be sure of what it contained in antiquity and that it was only used once to deposit one sarcophagus. This makes it exceptional for the archaeological record.

### **Material**

Dating of sarcophagi has been the subject of robust debate among scholars. It is normal to establish chronology of a find by comparison with other material culture discovered in the area whose dates of origin are better known (Buhl 1983a; Lembke 1998; Frede 2002). The Ras al-Shagry tomb sarcophagus may be compared with other objects some of which were found inside it. The Ras al-Shagry tomb sarcophagus may be compared with other objects some of which were found in the vicinity area under study.

The Ras al-Shagry tomb anthropomorphic sarcophagus was made from basalt. Four other sarcophagi found in the territory of Amrīt were also made from basalt and are estimated to have been made between c. 500-400 BC (Buhl 1959; 1983b; Kukhan 1955: 82; Lembke 1998: 122; Frede 2000: 112). This raw material was probably locally sourced; basalt quarries have been documented in Safita province, a city located a few kilometres from the site of the discovery (Buhl 1983a; Riis 1991: 206). It has been argued that all basalt sarcophagi were produced



**Figure 6:** A. Obverse of a coin, from Elayi (1987, cat. IV, 18). B. Detail of sarcophagus head. Image: the author.

locally (Elayi and Haykal 1996; Lembke 1998). It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that Ras al-Shagry sarcophagus was prepared and finished in the territory of Amrīt.

Scholarly opinion has established three phases of sarcophagi production or influence according to stylistic features (Stern 1982; Frede 2000): the archaic phase (Elayi and Haykal 1996), the Persian phase (Richter Augusta, 1970: 182), and the Hellenistic phase (Lembke 1998). Based on its stylistic features, particularly the head, moustache, and beard, the sarcophagus from the Ras al-Shagry tomb probably belongs to the second, or Persian phase.

However, a cache of coins found in 1983 by local citizens, and published by Elayi and Elayi (1986), could be significant for the understanding of the sarcophagus and the political structure of the territory of *Arados/Amrīt*. These coins have been dated to the fourth-century BC. Most of the coins have an image of a male head with a long, bearded face, closely resembling the head of the sarcophagus (Figure 6). It is known that *Ger'aštar* was the king of *Arados* during the pre-Alexandrian period (Lipinski 2004: 279), and that *Arados* issued its coins at that time according to the Persian standard (Markoe 2000: 101). Numismatic study of coins from Amrīt has confirmed that Amrīt itself was independent of the island during the time that Alexander the Great encamped his army at *Marathus* (Lipinski 2004: 279).

While it is uncertain that the sarcophagus contained the body of king *Ger'aštar* there is clear affiliation of the tomb with *Arados*. The coin cache has no known context limiting any further analysis. This is the only basalt sarcophagus found in this area, others come from northern Phoenicia. The iconography of the sarcophagus is remarkable in an area that was always influenced by Greek or Egyptian culture. The sarcophagus represents a breakthrough for those interested in what has been called Phoenicia culture. It also demonstrates the deep influence of Persian culture into the local community.

Given the lack of solid information about this period in general and this tomb in specific, we have more questions than answers at this time. But the discovery of the coins is significant in forming hypotheses concerning the origin and use of the tomb. Even though we may not be able to definitively relate the treasure of the coins to a specific time or episode, this finding allows us to propose some answers and form some conclusions regarding Ras al-Shagry.

## Conclusions

If we may infer social organization and religious beliefs from tomb architecture and the character of the various artefacts contained within the tombs of this region, then it may be concluded that the Ras el-Shagry tomb occupant had significant wealth, particular religious beliefs and that he lived in a society organized in a specific way. The abundance of hypogeal tombs with sarcophagi and the presence of funerary towers is clear evidence of the interaction between two different cultural identities: Persian and what we term Phoenician. This was not a process of acculturation or 'de-culturation'—the loss of local identity—but evidence of two cultures striving to enthusiastically redefine themselves with respect to their sameness.

The actual concept of identity is ambiguous at best because the Phoenician culture in particular was not pure, being formed from elements with diverse origins. There was certainly more than one burial typology with distinct architecture and religious practices in this area. While it is possible that the two cultures co-existed and shared many religious beliefs, the socio-political circumstances influenced the distribution of cemeteries.

Clearly, there were two different, well-differentiated cemeteries in the territory of *Arados*. One may have belonged to the elite of the island of Arwad, who normally used *hypogea* and sarcophagi. The other may have been Amrīt aristocracies during the Persian period that used huge towers to memorialize their families' elites. The Ras al-Shagry tomb may therefore belong to a member of the Arwadian 'merchant aristocracy' who lived on the island and was buried in his *own* land to establish divine legitimacy. In light of the available data, we may deduce from the burial practices of the two societies that inhabited the same region that there was a clear differentiation between those societies in the second half of the first millennium BC.

In the absence of chronological data from C<sup>14</sup> or other scientific methods, it is difficult to precisely date the tomb. Instead historical events and extant material culture must be relied upon. Although there was space available in the Ras al-Shagry tomb, it was not used to inter additional members of the family. This may have been the result of the arrival of Alexander's army and the subsequent transitional period on the Arwadian coastal. Based on this hypothesis the tomb could be dated to the first two

thirds of the fourth century BC. This is also known to be a period when the use of anthropomorphic sarcophagi comes to an end (Elayi and Haykal 1996).

Until such time that the cadaver inside the sarcophagus can be analysed, his place in society may be presumed from the material culture, the tomb and the artefacts within the tomb. The person interred appears to be the owner of the property on which the tomb was located, but not a citizen of the region. The sarcophagus lid and its similarity with the coins from *Arados* indicate an affiliation with the political power of the era. Because the Phoenician monarchs during the Persian period created a symbolic relationship with religion to secure the support of their society, all evidence would indicate that the ruler's influence was apparent, not just with trading activities, but also in the funerary practices of their subjects. The similarity of the figure sculptured on the top of the sarcophagus with the coins dated to the latest monarch of Arwad makes a strong case that there is a link between both findings.

This brief survey of the historical evolution of the observance of death in the territory of *Arados*/Amrīt when Phoenician and Persian cultures co-existed leaves many aspects unanalysed or only touched only tangentially. This challenges future inquiry to pursue a number of issues and questions that could only be outlined in this discussion of the Ras al-Shagry tomb.

Bashar Mustafa,  
Department of Prehistory and Archaeology,  
University of Granada,  
University Campus of Cartuja s/n,  
Box code, 18071 Granada, Spain.  
E-mail. bbmusta@ugr.es

## Bibliography

- Akkermans, P.M. & G. M. Schwartz 2003 *The Archaeology of Syria: From Complex Hunter-gatherers to Early Urban Societies (c. 16,000-300 BC)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Al maqdissi, M. 1993 Chronique des activités archéologiques en Syrie 1, *Syria*, 70 (3-4), 443-560.
- Al maqdissi, M. 2008 Notes d'archéologie levantine IX. Travaux archéologiques à tell Ghamqa au sud de Tartous, *Al-Rafidan*, 29, 95-104.
- Al maqdissi, M. 2010 Notes d'archéologie levantine XXI. Travaux archéologiques à tell Ghamqa au sud de Tartous 1926, *Al-Rafidan*, 31, 85-9.
- Al maqdissi, M. & C. Benech 2009 The spatial organization of the Phoenician city of Amrith (Syria), *Archéo Sciences*, 33 (suppl.) 209-11.
- Aubet, M.E. 1987 *Tiro y las colonias fenicias de Occidente*, Barcelona: Bellaterra.



- Aubet, M.E. 2001 *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies and Trade*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aubet, M.E. 2013 Cremation and social memory in Iron Age Phoenicia, in O. Loretz, S. Ribichini, E. Watson and J. Zamora (eds.), *Ritual, religion and reason: studies in the ancient world in honour of Paolo Xella*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 77-87.
- Badre, L. 1997 Arados, in E. Meyers (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1, 218-191.
- Badre L. & E. Gubel 1999-2000, Tell Kazel (Syria): Excavations of the AUB Museum, 1993-1998, Third Preliminary Report, *Berytus*, 44, 123-204.
- Besancon, J., L. Copel, S. Muhsen & P. Sanlaville 1994 Prospection géomorphologique et préhistorique dans la région de Tartous (Syrie), *Paléorient*, 20 (1), 5-19.
- Buhl, M.L. 1959: *The late Egyptian Anthropoid Stone Sarcophagi*, Doctoral Thesis, Uni. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Nationalmuseet.
- Buhl, M.L. 1983a *Sukas VII, the Near Eastern Pottery and Objects of other Material from the Upper Strata*, Copenhagen: Regia Academia Scientiarum Dánica.
- Buhl, M.L. 1983b L'origine des sarcophages anthropoïdes Phéniciens en Pierre, in *Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici* (Roma, 5-10 Novembre 1979), Roma, 1, 199-202.
- Buhl, M.L. 1988 Les sarcophages anthropoïdes phéniciens en dehors de la Phénicie, *Acta Archéologique*, 58, 213-21.
- Buhl, M.L. 1991 Les sarcophages anthropoïdes phéniciens trouvés en dehors de la Phénicie, in *Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici* (Roma, 9-14 Novembre 1987), Roma, 2, 675-81.
- Dunand, M. 1944/45 Les sculptures de la favissa du temple d'Amrit, *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, 7, 82-107.
- Dunand, M. & N. Saliby 1956 Rapport préliminaire sur les fouilles d'Amrit 1955, *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes*, 6, 3-10.
- Dunand, M. & N. Saliby 1961 Le sanctuaire d'Amrit, Rapport préliminaire, *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes*, 11/12, 3-12.
- Dunand, M. & N. Saliby 1985 *Le temple d'Amrit dans la Pérée d'Arados*, Paris: Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique.
- Colvin, H. 1991 *Architecture and the after-life*, Yale: Yale University Press.
- Claude, B. & C. Bonnet 1992 *Les Phéniciens*. Paris: Marins des trois continents.
- Dixon, M.H. 2013 *Phoenician Mortuary Practice in the Iron Age I – III (ca. 1200 – ca. 300 BCE) Levantine 'Homeland'*, Doctoral Thesis, Michigan: University of Michigan.
- Elayi, J. 1982 Studies in Phoenician geography during the Persian period, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 41 (2), 83-110.
- Elayi, J. 2013 *Histoire de la Phénicie*, Paris: Perrin.
- Elayi, J. & A.G. Elayi 1986 A treasure of coins from Arados, *Journal Ancient Near Eastern Society*, 18, 6-7.
- Elayi, J. & A.G. Elayi 1990 Trésors d'époque perse de la région d'Arados, *Revue Numismatique*, 6 (32), 7-16.
- Elayi, J. & M. Haykal 1996 *Nouvelles découvertes sur les usages funéraires des Phéniciens d'Arados. Transeuphratène* (suppl. 4), Paris: Gabalda.
- Elayi, J. & Sapin, J. 1998 *Beyond the river: new perspectives on Transeuphratene* (Vol. 250) Sheffield: Continuum International Group.
- Frede, S. 2000 *Die phönizische anthropoiden Sarkophage I, Fundgruppen und Bestattungskontexte*, Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabren.
- Frede, S. 2002 *Die phönizische anthropoiden Sarkophage II*, Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabren.
- Haykal, M.R. 1995 *History of Arados*, Damascus: Cooperative Society, (Arabic Edition).
- Haykal, M.R. 1996a *Amrit and human occupation in Akar plain*, Damascus: Cooperative Society, (Arabic Edition).
- Haykal, M.R. 1996b: *Anthropoid sarcophagus*, Damascus: Cooperative Society, (Arabic Edition).
- Harden, D. 1963 *The Phoenicians: Ancient People and Places*, London: Thames and Hudson.
- Hermay, A. & J.R. Mertens 2014 *The Cesnola Collection of Cypriot Art*, New York: Yale University Press.
- Krings, V. 1995 *La civilisation phénicienne et punique*, New York: Leiden.
- Kukahn, E. 1951 El sarcófago Sidónio, de Cádiz, *Archivo Español de Arqueología*, 24, 23-32.
- Kukahn, E. 1955 *Anthropoide Sarkophage in Beyrouth und die Geschichte dieser Sidónischen Sarkophagkunst*, Berlin: Mann.
- Lembke, K. 1998 Die Phönizischen anthropoiden Sarkophage aus den Nekropolen der Insel Arados», *Damaszener Mitteilungen*, 10, 97-129.
- Lembke, K. 2001 Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi, in *Tartus and its hinterland. Archaeological Research in the Syrian coastal region from antiquity to the middle Age*, Damascus: German Archaeological Institute, 18-21, (Arabic Edition).

- Lipinski, E. 2004 *Itineraria Phoenicia* (Vol. 127), Paris: Peeters.
- Lopez Castro, J.L. 2006 Colonials, merchants and alabaster vases: the western Phoenician aristocracy, *Antiquity*, 307 (80), 75-88.
- Markoe, G. 2000 *Phoenicians* (Vol. 2), California: University of California Press.
- Mustafa, B. 2013 New Hypogeal Tomb with a 'Phoenician' anthropoid sarcophagi on Tartus, Syrian Coast, *Cuadernos de Prehistoria y Arqueología de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*, 39, 113-22.
- Mustafa, B. 2014 *La imagen de la realeza en la costa de levante en época persa. Arqueología de los sarcófagos antropomorfos fenicios*, Doctoral Thesis, Granada: University of Granada.
- Mustafa, B. 2015a Los ungüentarios de alabastro en el mediterráneo, I er milenio a.c., *Complutum*, 26 (1), 213-23.
- Mustafa, B. 2015b Nuevo sarcófago antropomorfo en la costa de Siria, *ArqueoWeb*, 21, 21-31.
- Mustafa, B. 2015c Alabastron as a symbol of divine protection, *Scientific Culture*, 1 (5), 39-41.
- Mustafa, B. & N. Abbas 2015 New marble sarcophagus from Syrian coast, *Scientific Culture*, 1 (1), 17-26.
- Potts, T.D. 1997 *Mesopotamian civilization: the material foundations*, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Renan, E. 1864 *Mission de Phénicie*, Paris: Imprimerie impériale.
- Renan, E. 1878 Sur un masque en terre cuite récemment acquis par le musée du Louvre, *Revue Archéologique*, 2 (36), 73-4.
- Rey-Coquais, J.P. 1974 *Arados et sa pérée aux époques grecque, romaine et byzantine: recueil des témoignages littéraires anciens, suivi de recherches sur les sites, l'histoire, la civilisation*, Paris: Geuthner.
- Rey-Coquais, J.P. 1979 Onomastique et histoire de la Syrie greco-romaine, in D. M. Pippidi (ed.), *actes du vii<sup>e</sup> congrès international d'épigraphie grecque et latine (Constantza, 9-15 Septembre 1977)*, Bucarest, 173-183.
- Saliby, N. 1970/71 Hypogée de la nécropole de Azar, *Mélanges de L'Université Saint-Joseph*, 46, 269-84.
- Saliby, N. 1984 Amrit and the south of Tartus, *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes*, 34, 1-40.
- Saliby, N. 1989 Amrit, in J.M. Dentzer and W. Orthmann (eds.), *Archéologie et Histoire de la Syrie, II, La Syrie de l'époque achéménide à l'avènement de l'Islam*, Schriften zur Vorderasiatischen Archäologie I, Saarbrücken, 19-30.
- Saliby, N. 1997 Amrit, in E.M. Meyers (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1, 111-3.
- Sapin, J. 1980 Peuplement et milieu de vie dans la vallée du Nahr el-Abrach, *Annales de Géographie de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 1, 39-58.
- Stern, E. 1982 *Material culture of the land of the Bible in the Persian period, 538- 332 B.C.*, Warminster: Aris and Phillips.
- Richter Augusta, G. M. 1970 *Kouroi. Archaic Greek Youths*, London: Phaidon.
- Woolmer, M. 2011 *Ancient Phoenicia: an introduction*, London: Bristol Classical Press.
- Wildung, D. 2001 *Egipto: de la prehistoria a los romanos*, Colonia: Taschen.
- Yon, M. & A. Caubet 1993 Aroud et Amrit, VIIIe-Ier siècles av J.C. Documents, *Transeuphratène*, 6, 60-2.