# ICONOGRAPHIC AND FORMAL ANALYSIS OF MESOPOTAMIAN CYLINDER SEALS: SYSTEM RESCRIPTION

Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati

### 1. Introduction

In 1974 a project was on the analysis of the iconographic motifs, stylitic trait and epigraphic data from Mesopotamian and Cyrian cylinder seals.(1) Cylinder seals were chosen because of the large quantity of the data both from the seals themselves and from sealings; the sealings are especially valuable when they are rolled on dated tablets or when the inscriptions name historically known people. The iconographic motifs found on cylinder seals provide an excellent sample of the total iconographic inventory available to the Mesopotamian artist in any one period.

Thus cylinder seals give us a unique opportunity to combine quantitative analysis with iconographic, stylistic and textual evidence to focus on such problems as space-time distributions and their meaning.

# 2. Presentation of the System

The first cropus examined was that of the Old Babylonian period because of the large number of seals and sealings from this time range. However, the system is generalized enough to be applicable to other areas and periods. One of our current interests, for instance, is with mid-second millennium Syrian glyptics, since we have a large number of seal impressions from this period in Terqa. The pertinent material from Syria will thus be of great importance for a study of the specific role of our glyptics.

Our analysis concentrates on the identification of motifs on the basis of a precise attribute system developed during the course of the project. The attributes were taken from the seals themselves and tested constantly through repeated use and revised when necessary. At present we have analyzed over 500 seals according to our attribute system which includes over 750 items. Since this is an ongoing project, additional attributes can be added, or old ones refined, as the new items in our corpus dictate.

This project differs from the French one recently published by Digard in several ways.(2) Our focus is on specific cultural entities and our first results deal only with the

<sup>1 —</sup> The members of this project include Arlene Harris, Margaret Polinger, Eunice Saver and Stephanie Serlin. From 1974 through 1973, Bonnie Boehme also was a member of the team.

<sup>2 —</sup> Françoise Digard, **Répertiore Analytique des Cylindres Orientaux.** Paris : Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975.

Old Babylonian period in Mesopotamia. Besides, our aim is to publish the substantive results of the project more than to create a data bank where interaction is only possible throung a computer. We are in fact aiming to publish a large amount of the date base in the form of specialized retrieval formats, one of which in highlighted here in the form of a concordance.

In order to demonstrate this system, the dynastic seal found at Ugarit can be used first (III-1)3 Since this seal depicts a very common Old Babylonian scene, parallels to it are readily available with no need an elaborate methodology to find them. For example, this seal from the Morgan Library Collection is a god parallel for the Ugarit seal (III.2).4

Within the context of the system, the Ugarit seal would be analyzed starting with the main figures first and beginning from left to right. All the main figures ( called major compositional elements) are described in turn according to categories delineating what they are ( i. e., Interceding goddess, worshipper, god/king ). With each figure the attributes associated with it are described. Attribute are defined as items the figure is physically touching. In this case the only attribute is the cup. The Morgan Library example is also shown using the same pattern indications as the Ugarit example. If we look at both the Ugarit seal and the Morgan Library example we begin to see how the data base is built up. Minor compositional elements ( called also filler motifs ) are described and located with respect to their horizontal and vertical position. Here the star

disc and the crescent, monkey, and ball staff are all shown with the same graphic code.

The description of all these items can be found in the encoding manual, a page of which is shown here indicating the cup as an attribute (III. 3) The codes contained in the encoding manual for the various items found on the seal, for example the cup here, are entered on an encoding form. This same is true in the case of other seals with a cup in the same position. They will be encoded in the same manner so that comparisons can be readily determined.

In order to illustrate the purpose of the system it is interesting now to see some details of it. For this we need to examine more complicated seals to illustrate the inconographic and formal compositional analysis encompassed in the system. A seal from the Morgan Library, published by Porada, will serve as an example (III. 6).5 This seal has one composition with the major figures from left to right including an unidentified figure, a worshipper, and a god with two priests behind him.

Using the same graphic codes as were used for the Ugarit seal, the main figures, the attributes and the minor compositional elements or filler motifs can be distinguished.

In this system all the elements in the seals, both iconographic and composition are listed in the encoding manual (III. 4). All these elements have a number in the encoding manual and this number is listed on the enconding sheets. The first encoding sheet includes categories which describe the seal in general. These categories include

<sup>3 —</sup> Claude F. A. Schaeffer, Ugaritica III. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste, Paul Geuthner, 1956, figs. 92-99.

<sup>4 —</sup> Edith Porada, Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections. Vol. I The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library. New York: Pantheon Books 1948, Pl. XLVIII: 315.

<sup>5 —</sup> Porada, op cit., Pl · LV : 383.

external characteristics such as provenience, date, publication information, etc., after this come internal characteristics such as material, shape, etc. The analysis of the inscription in the case of inscribed seals and the overall composition complete the first descriptive code sheet. Remarks can be entered in the space to the right.

The second page of the encoding sheet is divided into three sets of boxes in which codes for as many as three compositions on one seal can be entered (III.5). The individual figures in each composition are analyzed by the general catagories of major compositional elements and secondary motifs with all the appropriate subcategories. The specific codes are taken, as indicated above, from the encoding manual.

#### 3. Presentation of the Concordance

The project will result in a variety of publications which will provide a primary elaboration of the data. That is, a large number of correlations would be provided in the form of concordances, indicies, statistical computations, etc. making it possible for the individual scholar to save time in the data gathering stage and to obtain correlations not othewise possible. While the process is computerized, this aspect of the project is incidental to the substantive results which are being discussed here. The rest of this paper will concentrate on the concordance of iconographic and formal characteristics.

The first printed pages of the concordance can be seen in relationship to the examples we have already looked at. The Ugarit seal and the other seals used were color coded in such a way as to reflect the main subdivisions of the publication. The relationship among the various parts is illustrated in the flow chart using these same graphic codes (III. 7). On the upper left is the seal to be analyzed; on the upper right, a page of the encoding manual refering to the attributes is shown. By applying the items in the encoding manual to the

seal we produce the encoded sheets seen in the center of the shart. In other words, the encoded sheet in the center is a translation by means of letters and numbers of the graphic and verbal representations of the top row. At the bottom of the flow chart there are printed pages of the concordance (III-8). When bound, these face each other and constitute a single entity to be read from the left to the right. The concordance sorts by one major compositional element in each seal, called the Key Figure, which is described in detail in this case, there are two identical key figures and hence they are listed together. The black arrow points to the specific example from the Morgan Library collection being used here as an example. The column in the center gives the bibliographical references. column on the right indicates the attributes of the key figure only. The left page describes the seal as a while with the left most column containing all the major compositional elments including the key figure. The next column indicates the minor compositional elements.

To illustrate the nature of the concordance the priest with pail and sprinkler has been selected from among the major figures as the key figure (III. 6). He is often wearing o kilt and sometimes has a curl. This figure then is described in detail in terms of his placement on the seal, his atributes including dress or what he is holding, and his position in regad to the other figures on the seal.

The concordance groups all seals with comparable motifs together, allowing the user to more easily cluster the data into meaningful classes (III. 8). In a large and complex data base this is essential in order to establish these classes. Although any of the items in the data bank can be grouped in this way the items which are neither rare nor very common are most suitable for a concordance of this nature, it would be useless to

publish classes which are so large that they are obvious to anyone working on the seals. In the same manner it is less necessary to publish single, unique items in a concordance, because these stand out more easily. Where a concordance of this nature is most useful is in helping to establish grouping among the items which recur in the medium frequency ranges. The number of occurrences for all seals in the data base can be established through a statistical count.

From the data base then, those items most suitable for presentation in the concordance are selected. Within those categories, however, an exhaustive presentation is given in the concordance. For instance, in the category of the so-called priest who is frequently holding a pail and a sprinkler, all the examples which occur in our data base are given.

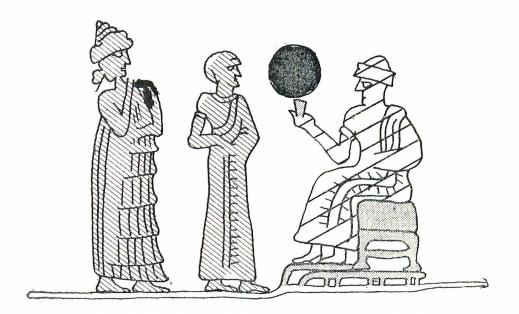
To a certain extent the information in the data base has been pre-digested. That is the attribute analysis and the encoding of this analysis predetermine many of the classes later made transparent in the concordance. To use the example of the priest again - he is called priest in the literature and thus is called so in the concordance; in addition, he has certain definite characteristics both physical, in terms of dress, and associated with him, in terms of attributes. Whether or not research based on the concordance will, substantiate this nomenclature, the attributes are still valid since they are intrinsic in the data and do not stem from a secondary interpretation of it. This preliminary analysis of the data (or predigestion) is necessary to maximize the efficeincy of the use of the data. However, since it is based on a precise and in the same time mutually exclusive set of attributes, we minimize as much as possbile subjective evaluations.

#### 4 Conclusions

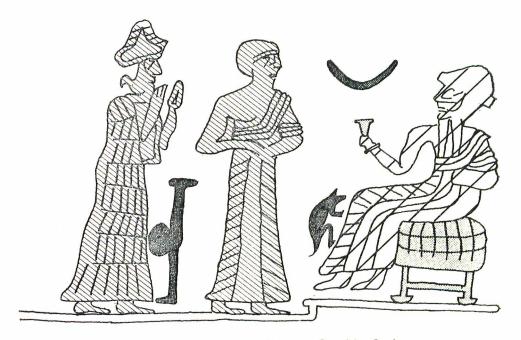
With a concordance such as the one introduced here, the scholar can study the subtle differences in the data, either within one corpus or among several corpora; whether an item is present or absent in a corpus can be verified, and distributional patterns can be established. These patterns in the data can lie on the level of a single iconographic item, a grouping of iconographic features or at the level of the formal composition. One of the main advantages of the publication of a concordance such as this is that the data is made available for the study of different styles and corpora without having to go through the computer each time a new item is needed.

A concordance such as this has wide implications; simple seals as we have in the two dynastic seals from Ugarit can be placed in the proper chronological and historical perspective within an overall scheme of Mesopotamian sphragistics during the first falf of the second millennium.

The concordance described in detail here is one part of the Planned publications of our project. The publication will have four main parts: (1) the encoding manual which wlll describe all the criteria used in identifying formal and iconographic elements in the seals; ((2) an index consisting in a drawing of the single entries in the encoding manual followed by a word definition and then by references to all the examples of this motif in the corpus; (3) the concordance will list motifs within their full context on the seal; and (4) an analytical elaboration of the data which will provide systematic insight into the correlation of categories of items. It is expected that this publication project will make available to all interested scholars enough material to use the data in a more powerful and flexible manner than possible before.



III. 1 Dynastic Seal from Ugarit : Graphic Codes



III. 2 Seal from Morgan Library : Graphic Codes

# III. 3 Page of Encoding Manual

### F. ATTRIBUTE DESCRIPTION: OBJECTS

- 1. Vessel
- 2. Flowing vase
- 3. Cup
- 4. Bell
- 5. Cross
- 6. Crescent
- 7. Star
- 8. Rod
- 9. Pointed Gatepost
- 10. Mountain (large natural elevation with rounded corners )
- 11. Knoll (small natural elevation, rounded corners, often one foot resting on)
- 12. Ring
- 13. Cross disc in crescent
- 14. Star disc in crescent
- 15. Chariot
- 16. Lightning fork
- 17. Lightning fork on bull
- 18. Trident
- 19. Altar
- 20. Pail
- 21. Sprinkler
- 22. Flowing sprinkler
- 23. Platform ( chair and feet usually resting on )
- 24. Rein.
- 25. Stool with upturned back (plain legs)
- 26. Temple facade stool ( space between legs filled with rectangles )
- 27. Patterned seat on legs stool
- 28. Mace
- 29. Omega
- 30. Star disc
- 31. Libra-scales
- 32. Disc
- 33. Ball and cross
- 34. Stool (tall with splayed legs)
- 35. Triangle
- 36. Double dias
- 37. Guilloche
- 38, Tambourine
- 39. Patterned stool (with square corners)
- 40. Other (object unknown)
- 41. Unclear

.. Date ....

# III. 4 First Page of Encoding Sheets

| MESOPOTAMIAN SEALS PROJECT — DESCRIPTIVE CODES  | Reference |
|---|-----------|
| Intls Date; Intls Date; I   | ntls Date |
| Code  | Remarks   |
| I. External Characteristics   |           |
| Provenience Date: general reign Publication Field No. Museum / Library No. Present Location Present Condition |           |
| II. Internal Characteristics  |           |
| Material  |           |
| III. Inscription  |           |
| None Personal Names Titles  |           |
| IV. Overall Composition   |           |

# III. 5 Second Page of Encoding Sheets

Other Role of Fig. in Composition General Description Physical Features Jewelry Attributes: Description Hat Posture: General Dress View Shown Arms and Legs Location

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# VII. Secondary Motifs

Location Description VI. Minor Compositional Elements

Major Compositional Elements: A Description

Minor Compositional Elements: 0 M Description Location

D. Location V. Major Compositional Elements

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

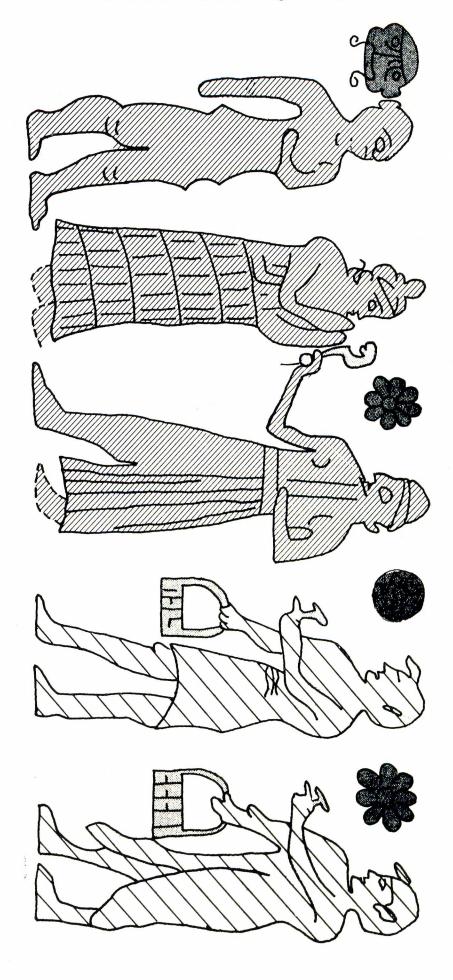
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Theme or Positional Relationship

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> Fig. 1 Fig. 2 Fig. 3º Fig. 4

III. 6 Coded Seal from Morgan Library



# III. 7 Flow Chart of the System

# PRIEST WITH PAIL AND SPRINKLER

| Reference    | Description of Key Figure   | Attributes of Key Figure   |
|--------------|---|--|
| Ashmol 480   | Standing facine right; kill   | Holding pail and sprinkler   |
| Ashmol 502   | Standing facing left, kill  | Holding pail and sprinkler, standing on platform, possible eye shade       |
| Ashmol 503   | Standing, faging right; Julit   | Holding pail and sprinkler, standing on platform                           |
| Ashmol 546   | Standing, facing right; Juli  | Holding pail and sprinkler, wearing eye shade                              |
| Diyala 919   | Standing, facing left, behind unidentified figure kilt (!)  | Holding pail and sprinkler, eye shade (?)                                  |
| Diyala 933   | Standing, facing left, behind god, kilt   | Holding sprinkler (see "Filler Motifs")                                    |
| Diyala 954   | Standing facing right, before Shampsh; kitt   | Holding pail and sprinkler   |
| Diyala 958   | Standing, Pacing right, belyind worshipper, kilt  | Holding pall and sprinkler   |
| Diyala 941   | Standing, facing left, beyind shamash; jult   | Holding sprinkler or saw, on elevation                                     |
| Diyala 934   | Standing, facing right, behind goddess; Juli  | Holding pall and sprinkler, on elevation                                   |
| Diyala 431   | Syanding, facing right, behind goodless, kilt   | Holding pail and sprinkler, eye shade (?)                                  |
| Diyala 1001  | Standing, facing left, behind Adad; kile  | Holding pail and sprinkler, eye shade (?)                                  |
| Moortgat 376 | Standing, sacing right, behind worshipper kilt (vertically pleated)                                     | Pail and sprinkler (latter elongated), eye shade (?)                       |
| Moortgat 377 | Standing, facing right, behind worshipper /kilt   | Holding pall and sprinkler (elongated)                                     |
| Moortgat 383 | Standing facing right, by ore god with somitter   | Holding pail and sprinkler, on a platform                                  |
| Moortgat 396 | Standing facing right, behind worshipper, kill  | Holding pail and aprinkler   |
| Moortgat 408 | Standing, facing left, bollind god; kilt  | Holding pail and sprinkler, eye shade (?)                                  |
| Porada 383   | (1) Standing, facing left, behind god; kilt (2) Standing, facing left, behind first priest; long mantle | (1) Holding pail and sprinkler (2) Holding pail and sprinkler              |
| Porada 386   | Standing, facing right facing god with scimitar; kilt   | Holding pail and sprinkler, eye shade (?)                                  |
| Porada 392   | Standing, facing left, behind god, kilt   | Holding pail and sprinkler   |
| Porada 395   | Standing, Pacing right, before god with scimitar, kill  | Holding pail and sprinkler, standing on platform                           |
| Porada 396   | Standing, Pacing right; kill  | Holding pail and sprinkler   |
| Porada 400   | Standing, facing left, behind Shamash   | Holding pail and sprinkler, elevated as on a platform                      |
| Porada 403   | Standing, facing right, behind goddess; Juli  | Holding pail and sprinkler, eye shade (?), standing on his own ground line |
| Porada 418   | Standing, faging right, before god, kilt  | Holding pail and sprinkler   |
| Porada 422   | Standing, faging left, behind goddess; left   | Holding pail and sprinkler   |
| Porada 528   | Standing, facing right, behind worshipper; Kilt   | Holding pail and sprinkler, eye shade (?)                                  |
| Porada 541   | Standing, facing right, behind worshipper; Kilt (2-unclear)   | Holding pail and sprinkler   |
|              |   |  |

## CONCORDANCE

| Main Figures   |
|--|
| Kongre no 1964 and and was Airs Heimade 1968 (1997)   Heiman Stard (Nasira)  |
| 1999) A MARINA, Assentia Robinski valetinisto worthing and Stanosta, priese proposal and priese prie |
| God with scimitar on platform, priest, suppliant goddess, male worshipper tholding kid, Shomarth that two signest could be taren auditions?  Priest, male worshipper, god with stig and one foot on shind  |
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| Priest, suppliant goddess, worethypet, Lynton  |
| Worehupper, Adad, priest   |
| Priest, maje Worshipper, Shamash   |
| Mash wafe mershipben sushaati  |
| Supplient goddess, mais worshipper, Shaman, priest, unidentified god with scholar (?)  |
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| Worstraper, poeer, Stepresh  |
| Sod with thise, Shamash, goddess, priest   |
| Assay, waxanigo pan paniring sibarian, good  |
|  |

#### Filler Motifs

Monkey/mongoose, dwark, disk, crescent standard Star disk in crescent

Dwarf, crescent, human head Crescent stand, rosette

Star, crescent, two unidentified objects Bearded face, crouching quadruped, fly, pad behind priest, inscription

Seated animal, bird Fish, stat, crook

Crouching quadruped, star, fish, libra, indistinct object (last two objects could be vessel and staff)
Monkey/Mongoose, crescent

Dog with crook, fish, indefinable object (vessel?) None

Crescent, reclining goat, standing goat under inscription Crescent, goat under inscription

Nude male, crescent standard Star disk in crescent

Crescent

Demonic mask, rosette, star disk, rosette

Fly, fish, lightning fork, vessel, ball staff, porcupine

Star disk in crescent

Lion cub, star disk in crescent Sun disk in crescent

Trident, nude female, star disk in crescent bird, crook

Star disk in crescent

Terminal: sign for god above lightning fork on bull

Porcupine, fish, human head Porcupine, lion-headed fish imonster, fly 3 drilling, fox

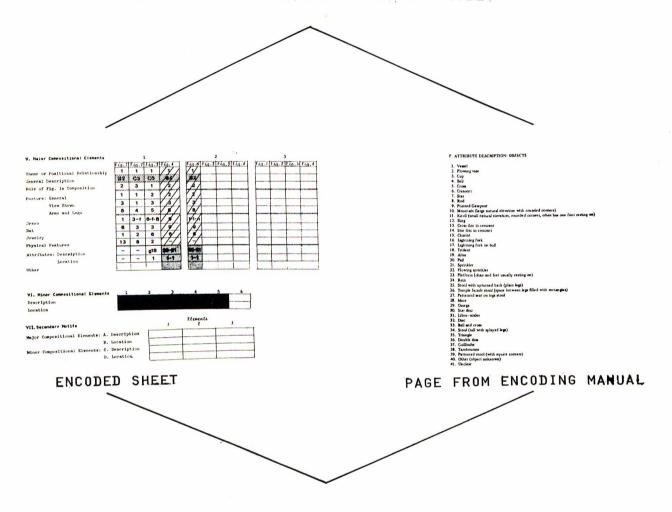
Secondary motif: sitting goat, lion (top) male figure, female figure

Four-pointed star, porcupine Monkey/mongoose, crescent

#### III. 8 Pages of the Concordance



# MORGAN LIBRARY SEAL WITH GRAPHIC CODES

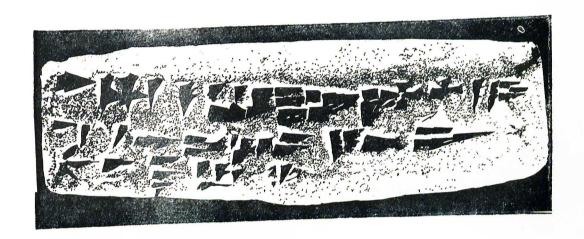


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| Reference    | Description of Key Figure                                | Attributes of Key Figure   |
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| Lahmol 302   | Supering house regions / / / / /                         | States pel and speaker, markes on photon,                                    |
| Salamot 101  | Type of type you you                                     | HolDing pail and sprinkler, monthly on platform                              |
| National 546 | sylvingt. 1.g/u ; yh. 1.yh.                              | Mobiling pail and sprinkler, woulding type shade                             |
| Drysla 919   | ghoust isting to string on from the string to            | Mobiling part and spelabler, upo shade (T)                                   |
| Diyele 933   | Johnson shought spring to street                         | Station sprinker (nos "Filter Mor(PA")                                       |
| Diyala 954   | freeze freeze rest refre strongth st                     | Heiding pail and sprinkler   |
| Diyala 958   | / furfurfurfurfurfurfurfurf                              | Modeling polit and application   |
| Diyala 941   | sylving traffe by righter theopher jobs                  | Madding sycholder as any, on shrouten  |
| Diyele 934   | /sighting/sight sight, sphingly-sights john              | . Metiling pull and spelatter, on elevation                                  |
| Diyate 431   | Joseph spine plant prosphage supresphant                 | Stoliding pail and aprinting, aye shade (7)                                  |
| Diyala 1001  | zahazak, i jelas jela zekazak, ref                       | Holding pell and sprinkler, aye shade (1)                                    |
| Mocetgat 376 | plangto strayburghorghe glangton has strongling          | Pull and sprinkles (Surter electrosis), eye shade (1)                        |
| Hoorigal 377 | phagha ghaghaghaghaghagha                                | Healthing gold aged aprintation (stangested)                                 |
| Hoorigat 383 | Sugar long to which of the glad you grant f              | Holding pull and sprinkter, on a platform                                    |
| Mooriget 396 | / freefreefreefreefreefreefreef                          | Statiling pall and sprinktur   |
| Moorigal 408 | syntage tople of interest of                             | Helding pall and sprinkley, eye shade (1)                                    |
| Porada (8)   |  | (1) Holding pall and sprinking<br>(2) Holding pall and sprinking             |
| Porede 384   | Though of for free free free the                         | Holding pull and syrickler, eye shade (1)                                    |
| Poreda 392   | zbazle, ybazla zbazlezosta///                            | Holding pad and syrinkler  |
| Porede 395   | hungers har for the glangh up and and                    | Stolding pall and sprinkler, standing on platform                            |
| Poreds 394   |  | Holding pall and sprinkler   |
| Porada 400   | Sugar glasse sylveglad planetes                          | Holding pall and sper his riseased as on a platfor                           |
| Porada 403   | / Sugary harps upla refrage right upla                   | Station put and speinbler, are shade (1), stands-<br>on his own present line |
| Poisds 411   | sycholyt lytes play stuy sign                            | Nobiling pall and sprinkles  |
| Priesda 422  | syntage type yet sylinge ig yet                          | Holding pall and sprinkler   |
| Forade 528   | Jangle staylinghosts who story to                        | Holding pail and spetchine, sys shade (7)                                    |
| Pessels 541  | glangle, zelang his zhen gla nghen zhon zhen zhen zhen z |  |

# LES ANNALES ARCHEOLOGIQUES ARABES SYRIENNES

REVUE D'ARCHEOLOGIE ET D'HISTOIRE



# NUMERO SPECIAL COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL

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