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The Phoenician *Marzeah* – New Evidence from Cyprus in the 4th Century BC

It is generally understood that the word mrzḥ, appearing in documents from the whole North-West Semitic area and dating from the Bronze Age until as late as the 6th century CE, denotes a feast and/or a group (often considered to be an institution) meeting on specific occasions celebrated with a feast (with possible cultic and even funeral nature). However, the word and its actual and specific uses during such a long span of time over such a wide region (certainly implying diverse historical developments in different cultural areas) are still not clearly understood. The aims of the present study are to review the existing evidence and to present a newly discovered Phoenician document from the ancient city of Idalion (Cyprus) dating to the late Persian or early Hellenistic period in order to contribute to a better knowledge of the meaning and uses of the word and of their historical variation.

1. The *marzeah* in North-West Semitic

The feast and association called *marzeah*¹ (according to the Hebrew vocalisation), is known by this name in two passages of the Hebrew Bible; over time its presence was also detected in documents dating from the Bronze Age (at Ebla, Emar and, especially, Ugarit) until as late as the first centuries CE (in Nabataean and Palmyrene inscriptions and in rabbinic literature), with several occurrences in the I millennium BCE (when it appears in Phoenician inscriptions); we even know of references to this term in the 6th century CE.²

The *marzeah* had always attracted interest from biblical and Hebrew scholars, but with the discovery of the Bronze Age occurrences (most of them undeniably instances of the term, but often in obscure or ambiguous contexts) such studies have increased and expanded,³ continuing to make the *marzeah* an attractive subject of research.⁴ However, the word and its uses during such a long span of time over such a wide

1 It is generally understood that this word defines a group meeting on specific occasions that are celebrated with a feast, as well as the feast itself. However, its etymology is not clear (cf. most the recent discussion by Del Olmo 2015: 223–224) and the specific meaning and uses of the word in time and space are still discussed.

2 A “house of the *marzeah*” appears written in Greek letters on a mosaic from Madaba, associated with a feast called Maioumas, see for instance Schorch 2003 and fn. 6 below. For the documentation concerning the *marzeah*, see for example Miralles 2007.

3 See for example Eissfeldt 1969; Greenfield 1974; Bryan 1979; Fabry 1986; McLaughlin 2001; Schorch 2003 and Miralles 2007, with additional references.

4 Cf. recently for example Criscuolo 2012 (with an anthropologic and sociologic approach) or Dvorjetski 2016. For Greece and the West, cf. Nijboer 2013 and Baslez 2001; 2013.

region (certainly implying diverse historical developments in different cultural areas)⁵ are still not clearly understood. The present study aims to contribute to the knowledge of the *marzeah* by presenting a newly discovered Phoenician document from Cyprus, dating to the late Persian or early Hellenistic period (a text from the archives of the ancient city of Idalion) after a brief review of the existing evidence.⁶

1.1. Hebrew Bible and Related Studies

The first discussions about the meaning and nature of the *marzeah* derive from the biblical passages Amos 6:7 and Jer. 16:5. The Amos passage (Samaria) refers to a banquet on ivory beds, with the consumption of meat, the drinking of wine from specific bowls, and the playing of music.⁷ The passage in Jer. 16:5 (Judah) cites a *byt mrzh* (translated θίασον in the LXX),⁸ in parallel to a *byt msth*, “the house of drinking”, in connection with mourning for the dead.⁹ Mainly with the support of Amos 6:7, but also of Jer. 16:5, allusions to the *marzeah* have been detected in several other biblical passages, where this term is not present.¹⁰ Furthermore, iconographic representations have been linked to a *marzeah* banquet, architectural structures have been identified as possible examples of the *b(y)t mrzh*, and it has also been proposed that some types of drinking vessels attested archaeologically were used during the *marzeah* feast.¹¹

1.2. The Bronze Age: Ebla, Emar, Ugarit

1.2.1. Ebla

The reading of the term *marzeah* has been proposed in several Eblaite texts (second half of the 3rd millennium). It seems to be connected with the king, because in some examples the feast is called “the *marzeah* of the king” and because all the texts come

5 Although this circumstance is often noted (cf. recently Na’aman 2015) and even taken to its extremes (cf. Pardee 1996) the scarcity of evidence on the *marzeah* frequently forces scholars to combine all the available information, irrespective of its historical and cultural milieu, into a single (re)construction as a unique and unchanging institution. Cf. the remarks in Zamora 2009.

6 The rabbinic attestations and the Maioumas question (cf. especially McLaughlin 2001: 61–64; Miralles 2007: 244–262, with bibliography) will not be treated in the present analysis, which focuses on inscriptions. The biblical passages concerning the *marzeah* will be cited because they are the first known and the only literary evidence.

7 Cf. particularly McLaughlin 2001: 80–109 (and bibliography); Greer 2007; Miralles 2007: 24–39; Na’aman 2015: 220.

8 The Greek version of Amos is different; cf. Miralles 2007: 37.

9 Cf. McLaughlin 2001: esp. 195; Miralles 2007: esp. 47–48. For the biblical passages and their exegesis, see for example Maier and Dörrfuss 1999 and especially Ravasco 2006; in connection with Ugarit, see for example Loretz 1982; 1993.

10 McLaughlin 2001: 80–212; Miralles 2007: 89–153; Na’aman 2015: 221–222.

11 Cf. for example King 1989; Greer 2007; 2010.

from the palace archive. In TM.75.G.1372 (*MEE* II 46)¹² the term *mar-za-u₉* seems to refer to a festive event (as the document records a series of multicoloured kilts for dancers, delivered “on the occasion of the *marzeah*”). In TM.75.G.1389, once again multicoloured kilts are given to dancers “for the *marzeah* of the king” and a man is mentioned acting as *ugula mar-za-u₉*, “superintendent of the *marzeah*”; we see him again in TM.75.G.1443 (= *ARET* I 3 [74]) receiving several garments.¹³ TM.75.G.2622 registers silver paid for a calf intended for the *marzeah* of the king (and silver registered in TM.75.G.2508 may have had the same purpose) probably indicating some conviviality. More silver is registered for a *marzeah* of the king, with no further explanation, in TM.75.G.2462. An offering list, TM.75.G.1782 (= *ARET* II 5 [39–41]), registers sheep, silver and goat-kids for a *marzeah* of the king, performed “at the palace”; another sheep is allocated for “the *marzeah* of the king (as) an offering” in TM.75.G.2398. Considering the small number of animals mentioned, it has been proposed that the *marzeah* involved a restricted group of participants.¹⁴ TM.75.G.10139 registers the work of a smith, connected with the *marzeah* in some way (involved in the preparations of the feast?). The texts are dated to different months.¹⁵ Therefore, in Ebla, the *marzeah* appears to be an event of a festive and convivial nature (possibly sacrificial?), led by a recognised chief and involving a small group of people; it included various kinds of activity; it was connected – at least in some cases – with the king and the palace. It took place in a specific span of time, several times a year.¹⁶ Perhaps there was also an association comprising the people participating in the feast; however, the name *marzeah* seems to be restricted to the actual feast itself.¹⁷

1.2.2. Emar

In Emar (in documents from the 2nd half of the second millennium) a “month of the *marzeah*” (*mar-za-ḥa-ni*) is cited in a ritual calendar (446)¹⁸ and perhaps in another text (467).¹⁹ In that calendar there is also a mention of the “men of the *marzeah*” (LÚ.MEŠ *mar-za-ḥu*), who, according to Fleming, bring bread to the gods. Thus, a specific time of year (the second month of the calendar, according to Fleming) was specifically linked with the feast (in contrast with the texts on the *marzeah* from

12 For the interpretation of this and the following texts see Archi 2005.

13 He probably acted as the overseer of the *marzeah* of the king for several years, see Archi 2005: 41.

14 Milano and Tonietti 2012: 50. Archi (2005: 41) notes that the documents “do not mention people admitted to the ceremony”.

15 See Archi 2005: 41.

16 Archi 2005; Milano and Tonietti 2012: 49–51; Criscuolo 2012: 316–318 (citing the texts TM.75.G.1372 and TM.75.G.1443.XI.1–3).

17 Milano and Tonietti 2012: 50; Na’aman 2015.

18 Arnaud 1986: 422–424; Fleming 1992: 269–270; 2000: 165–167 (on the month *Marzahāni*); McLaughlin 2001: 33–34; Miralles 2007: 55–56; Criscuolo 2012: 320.

19 Fleming (2000: 165) supposes that the feast could occur once a year.

Ebla). Moreover, several individuals participating in cultic activities are identified as “men of the *marzeah*”, indicating at least that the participants in the feast formed a group and possibly a recognised association (although not clearly given the name *marzeah*).

1.2.3. Ugarit

In Ugarit (second half of the 2nd millennium) the *marzeah* (and several related words) appears in both Ugaritic (as *mrzḥ*)²⁰ and Akkadian texts (as *ma-ar-zi-ḥi* or *mar-za/ze/zi-i*).²¹

The Ugaritic administrative text KTU 4.399, a fragmentary document dealing with various fields, includes the expression *bn mrzḥ*, which has been explained either as a reference to the members of the association or as a personal name. In KTU 4.642 the *marzeah* is named after a deity (Anat, appearing at least five times) also in connection with fields (*šd krm*, “vineyards”) in a formula that shows the possible use of the term *marzeah* for a group or association. A legal document, KTU 3.9, deals with a *marzeah* established by an individual (who is later called *rb*, “chief”, the person in charge) in his house; it seems to rent a room (called *ibsn*) to the participants in the feast or to the members of the group (cited in the legal formula as *mt mrzḥ*, “man of the *marzeah*”). The owner of the house is required to pay 50 shekels if he breaks the agreement established with the group; individual members, probably having paid for the house/room, cannot ask for their money back (probably meaning that they have to pay a fee/fine if they quit the *marzeah*).

On the other hand, the mythological text KTU 1.114 describes Ilu as inviting the gods to a banquet, in which he drinks until he falls drunk, mentioning the god as “seated at his *mrzḥ*” (*il yṯb b mrzḥh*). Therefore, in this passage, the *marzeah* must refer to the banquet itself or to the place where the banquet was held. The references in this text to the dead and to the netherworld and its relationship with other Ugaritic documents with funeral undertones²² have led scholars to propose the existence of a link between the Ugaritic *marzeah* and the cult of the dead.²³

The expression LÚ.MEŠ *ma-ar-zi-ḥi* / *mar-za/ze/zi-i* “the men of the *marzeah*” (probably corresponding to *mt mrzḥ* in the alphabetic texts) occurs four times in the syllabic texts. In RS 14.16 the men of the *marzeah* are listed in connection with silver, and in the royal legal document RS 15.88, a house is granted to them and their sons. In RS 15.70, also a royal legal text, a house (identified as “the house of the *marzeah*”

20 The title of Ilu, *mrz’y* (in KTU 1.21 II 1, 5), has been also interpreted as a cultic or divine title referring to the *marzeah*. For all the Ugaritic alphabetic attestations, see for example Del Olmo and Samartín 2015: 574 (with related bibliography).

21 For the syllabic documents, see Huehnergard 1987: 178; Van Soldt 1991: 305.

22 And with Jer. 16:5. For the relationships between the Ugaritic and biblical texts, see for example Loretz 1982; 1993.

23 Pope 1972; 1979–80; 1981; see also Xella 1977. Differently, Pardee 1996; Alavoine 2000. See the discussion in Zamora 2006 (especially 14–16, with bibliography).

of Shatrana”, a divine name) is taken over from the men of the *marzeah*, and another house (again for them and their sons) is received. In RS 18.01, apparently the resolution of a border dispute, certain vineyards (labelled “of Ishtar Hurri”) are divided between the men of the *marzeah* belonging to two different villages.

Therefore, in Ugarit the *marzeah* was a convivial feast (and, probably by metonymy, the place where the feast was held).²⁴ Its participants formed a group of people (identified by the expression “men of the *marzeah*” and possibly by the noun *marzeah* itself), an association that was recognised legally and administratively. The association could rent or own properties and transmit them to heirs (suggesting that the membership of the group was also hereditary, even if it is not possible to ascertain it). There were rules for leaving the association (entailing the payment of a fee) and probably for organizing it, considering that there were “chiefs”. The *marzeah* is also clearly linked to a divinity, whose name is used to identify it and the properties it owns. Some of these are vineyards, suggesting a link with the consumption of wine. There was more than one *marzeah*, even in adjacent towns; place names were also used to identify them.

1.3. From the Iron Age to the Roman Period: Canaanite and Aramaic Documents

1.3.1. Moab

In the epigraphic corpus of the first millennium BCE, the term *mrzḥ* appears in an inscription painted in ink on a papyrus, called the “*Marzeah* papyrus”, classified as Moabite, and dated to the beginning of the 6th century BCE. In this document, a “*marzeah*” is cited as part of a legacy, together with millstones and a house (perhaps the place where the feast was held). However, the document (which came from the antiquities market and was never examined in detail) is probably a forgery, considering the shape of some of the letters, the use of some words, and the type of personal names present.²⁵

1.3.2. Elephantine

In the 5th century BCE, the word *mrzḥ*’ is attested in standard Aramaic on one document from Elephantine,²⁶ mentioning a certain amount of “money of the *marzeah*”

24 There have been some attempts to locate the *marzeah* archaeologically, see Yon 1996; McGeough 2003.

25 Bordreuil and Pardee 1990, with doubts about its authenticity; Cross 1996; Bordreuil and Pardee, 2001, asserting its authenticity; doubts raised by Lemaire 1997: 181, fn. 22. Cf. McLaughlin 2001: 35–36; Miralles 2007: 159–161; reasons for the doubts concerning authenticity are put forward by Na’aman 2015: 220, fn. 9.

26 Sayce 1909; Lidzbarski 1915; Porten 1968 (funerary interpretation); Grelot 1972: 371–373, no. 92; McLaughlin 2001: 36–37; Miralles 2007: 161–162.

(lines 2–3, *ksp mrzḥ*’). Between the 1st and the 3rd centuries BCE, the *marzeah* is mentioned in several Nabataean inscriptions and in a group of Palmyrene documents (inscriptions and *tesserae*).²⁷

1.3.3. Nabataean kingdom

As for the Nabataean kingdom,²⁸ an inscription found in Petra, near ed-Deyr,²⁹ records an individual and “his companions”, referred as “the *marzeah* of Obodas, the God” (possibly king Obodas I, beginning of the 1st century BCE).³⁰ Also from Petra, a fragment of an inscribed marble slab, from the Chapel of Obodas in en-Numeyr, mentions a *marzeah* in a broken context.³¹ Finally, a *rb mrzḥ*’ is mentioned in a graffito from Beida (near Petra).³²

Mentions of the *marzeah* come from votive texts of Avdat, in connection with a word of uncertain meaning (*mdd/r*’³³) and with the possible presence of a *rb mrzḥ*’, “the chief/leader of the *marzeah*”.³⁴ In most of these examples, “companions”³⁵ of the donor are mentioned. A better-preserved text mentions an offering naming the *bny mrzḥ*’, “members of the *marzeah*”; later it is called the *mrzḥ dwšr*’ *lh g’y*’, “the *marzeah* of Dushara the god of Gaya”.³⁶

Finally, an inscription found in Wādī Mūsā (possibly the site of ancient Gaya) records a *rb mrzḥ’ dy bg* [y’], “chief/head of the *marzeah* who/which is in Gaya”,³⁷ perhaps a *marzeah* connected with Dushara, as in the case of the Avdat inscription.

Therefore, in Nabataean, the *marzeah* is found in votive contexts as linked to

- 27 For the *marzeah* both in the Nabataean kingdom and in Palmyra, and its connection with architectural structures (and religious and identity’s aspects) see Contini 2012: 336–341.
- 28 On the *marzeah* cf. in particular Healey 2001: 165–169. More recently, on Nabataean symposia, banquets, and (related) offerings, cf. Durand 2017; Monchot 2017; Renel and Monchot 2017 (with bibliography). For funerary meals as linked with the *marzeah*, but not epigraphically demonstrated, cf. Sachet 2010.
- 29 RES 1423, McLaughlin 2001: 45; Miralles 2007: 168–169 (not RES 1432). It records “Obaydū ... and his companions, the *mrzḥ* of Obodas”. Cf. particularly Nehmé 2012: 191, fig. 4. She notes: “Le texte mentionne en effet les membres d’une confrérie religieuse qui se réunissait, très probablement sur le plateau du Dayr, en l’honneur du dieu Obodas. Plusieurs chambres rupestres, dans les parages de l’inscription, pouvaient servir de lieu de réunion à ce thiasse, et nous ne disposons pas d’arguments décisifs pour affirmer qu’il s’agissait du Dayr lui-même”.
- 30 Cf. Nehmé 2012, presenting all the proposals made for the identification of a god Obodas.
- 31 Tholbecq and Durand 2005: 303; Nehmé 2012: 213, fig. 8.
- 32 Dvorjetski 2016: 28 (it is not CIS II 476 as cited there, fn. 42).
- 33 DNWSI: 599, s.v. *mdr₂*, with references.
- 34 Texts edited by Negev 1961 and 1963; see McLaughlin 2001: 45–48 and Miralles 2007: 169–171, with previous bibliography. Readings have been discussed, see Naveh 1967; also DNWSI, 692 s.v. *mrzḥ*.
- 35 Attested forms in DNWSI: 346, s.v. *ḥbr₂*.
- 36 Here the word *ḥbrwḥy*, “his companions” is restored. Negev 1963: 113–117 (reading corrected by Starcky 1966: 919, 1014 and Naveh 1967: 188); McLaughlin 2001: 45–46.
- 37 al-Salameen and Falahat 2012: 43–45. The inscription was found “within a collapsing room of the traditional village of Banī ‘Aṭā, located in the southern part of Wādī Mūsā” (Ibidem: 39).

different gods (Dushara and Obodas “the God”) and to specific places. A group of persons, sometimes referred to as *bny mrzh’* and called the “companions, colleagues” of a donor, with a chief or superintendent (*rb mrzh’*) also occurs. Here the noun *marzeah* sometimes refers directly to an association, but perhaps in other cases it also denotes a feast. It has been reconstructed how the members of the *marzeah* gathered in some of the chambers discovered in great number mainly in Petra. However, the differences between the *marzeah* feast and other kinds of banquet (e.g. corresponding to the noun *smk’*) are not clear. Again, the connection of this *marzeah* with mourning for the dead, while assumed, has not been demonstrated.³⁸

1.3.4. Palmyra

Palmyrene documents (comprising both inscriptions and *tesserae*) exhibit the same expressions related to the *marzeah* as the Nabataean texts. Of particular interest is the presence in Aramaic-Greek bilinguals of the abstract noun *mrzhwt* (constr. *mrzhwt*) denoting the office of the *marzeah*.³⁹ Furthermore, the *tesserae* not only mention this association/feast but also have images. All these texts are all transcribed in PAT, with bibliography.

The monumental inscriptions date between about the end of the 1st century BCE and the 3rd century CE. The most ancient text, PAT 0991,⁴⁰ is considered to be a sort of “law” concerning a *marzeah* connected with Bel. PAT 0326, dating to 34 CE, refers to the “members of the *marzeah*” (*bny mrzh’*), here dedicating an altar to the gods ‘Aglibol and Malakbel, perhaps the gods presiding over the *marzeah* in question.

Later, a group of texts (PAT 0265, 117 CE; PAT 1357, 193 CE; PAT 0316, 203 CE; PAT 2743, 243 CE; PAT 1358, 272 CE;⁴¹ PAT 2812, 273 CE⁴²) have the expression *brbnwt mrzhwt’lh*, “during the/his leadership of the *marzeah* office” of PN, serving as a chronological indication. Of these texts, PAT 1357 and PAT 0316 are bilingual and give the Greek equivalent of the Palmyrene office: in PAT 1357 (a very damaged text) *mrzhwth dy b [...]h byrh* etc. (reading by J. Cantineau⁴³) “his *marzeah* office of ... in the month ...”, corresponds to ἀρχιερέως κ[αί / σ]υμποσιάρχ[ης ἱερέων] μεγίστου θεοῦ / Διὸς βήλ[ου] in the Greek text.⁴⁴ From the Greek version

38 Healey 2001: 166. Cf. also Nehmé 1997.

39 Cf. DNWSI: 692, s.v. *mrzhw*.

40 See Teixidor 1981 (who dated the text to the end of the 1st century BCE).

41 Milik 1972: 270, no. 33.

42 Milik 1972: 271.

43 Cantineau 1931: 119–120, “Grande inscription bilingue gravée à une certaine hauteur sur la façade Est des propylées du Temple de Bel à droite de la porte”.

44 On the Greek base, the Aramaic text has been restored by J. Milik (1972: 254, no. 28) as *bmvrzhwth dy km[ry’ dy bl ’lh]h byrh*, etc. which should be translated “during his *marzeah* office of the priests of Bel his god, in the month ...” Later, this reading has been accepted by

it is thus possible to equate the *marzeah* with the Greek *symposion*, which seems to refer more to a feast than to an association. At least in some cases, the chief of the *marzeah* was a high priest. In PAT 0316,⁴⁵ (ten years after the preceding inscription) the dating formula is *brbnwt mrzhwt šlm' br mlkw* etc., “during the leadership of the *marzeah* office of Shalma' son of Maliku”.⁴⁶ Again, the chief of the *marzeah* is called ἀρχιερέυς καὶ συ[μποσιά]ρχος ἱερέων μεγίστου θεοῦ Διὸς βήλ[ου ... in Greek. Both bilingual texts show that the titles in Palmyrene and Greek are not entirely equivalent. Probably, as has already been concluded, the office of *rb mrzh'* corresponded to Greek *symposiarchos* and not necessarily to *archiereus*. On the other hand, both offices were often held by the same person. The link between the *marzeah* and the priesthood is reflected in the expression already cited: “the leadership of the *marzeah* office of the priests of Bel”. This link is not however obligatory, as is shown by other examples attributing the office of chief of the *marzeah* to persons who do not have the title of priest (PAT 1358 and 2812).

The inscriptions and the representations on the *tesserae* confirm that the chief of the *marzeah* was, however, usually a priest: PAT 2033 (R 27), 2036 (R 30), 2037 (R 31), 2038 (R 32), 2039 (R 33), 2041 (R 35) all these texts mention a *rb mrzh'* in association with representations of priests and/or of a priest banqueting.⁴⁷ Moreover, on PAT 2807 (Dunant 1959: no. 12) there is the unclear expression *mrzh b'ltk wtymw ywm 5*, which shows that the feast lasted at least five days.⁴⁸

Some kraters, found in various sites of the Palmyrene region, some inscribed, have been connected with the *marzeah* celebration, with the proposal that they contained the wine drunk during the banquet.⁴⁹

To conclude, the Palmyrene information concerning the *marzeah* presents it as an officially recognised association and celebration. The text from Palmyra shows that there was more than one *marzeah* in the city, the most cited one linked to Bel. These texts link the *marzeah* closely with an elite and a class of priests.⁵⁰ The

scholars, but with the correction of *kmry'* to *kmr'*, “of the priest”; see PAT 1357, McLaughlin 2001: 54, Miralles 2007: 173 (perhaps a mistake).

45 Milik 1972: 255, no. 29; McLaughlin 2001: 55; Miralles 2007: 174.

46 Probably the same individual as in the *tessera* R 821, as noted already in R 203 and Milik 1972: 254. The Palmyrene inscription is preceded by a long Greek text, dating to the time of Septimius Severus, with the names of his sons Geta and Caracalla and that of Julia Domna. The name of Geta has been erased, cf. RES 2152.

47 PAT 2040 (R 34) has on the obverse *brbnwt mrzh'* followed by the name Shalman, already known from PAT 2037 to be chief of the *marzeah* and a priest. On PAT 2040 he is represented as standing up and on PAT 2037 as lying down. Differently, in PAT 2279 (R 301), a text that is difficult to read, although it is possible to identify on the reverse the expression *bny mrzh'* and on the obverse the representation of a naked deity (identified as Apollon-Nebo).

48 It is a matter of dispute as to whether *b'ltk* and *tymw* are the names of two deities or of a goddess and an individual, cf. McLaughlin 2001: 49, no. 164. On *b'ltk*, cf. DNWSI, s.v. *b'1₂*, where it is explained as “probably” the noun “mistress, lady” + the suffix of the 2nd pers. sing.

49 Cf. especially Briquel-Chatonnet 1995 (and bibliography).

50 Cf. Tarrier 1995 and Contini 2012: 336–338, stressing the differences between the Palmyrene

bilinguals equate the *marzeah* with the Greek *symposion*, showing perhaps some relationship between two socio-cultural backgrounds in the late-Hellenistic/Roman period, as is also apparent from the representations on the *tesserae*, where the priests are dressed according to Greek fashion.⁵¹ The official character of the Palmyrene *marzeah* is also evident from the fact that the office of chief of the *marzeah* was used, in particular, as a chronological indication. However, it is not possible to determine for how long the office of “chief of the *marzeah*” lasted (one year?). As for the festivity, each celebration could last at least five days (PAT 2807), though it is not clear whether the members of the *marzeah* gathered only once a year or on several occasions. The *marzeah* is documented in Palmyra until the third quarter of the 3rd century BCE.

2. The *marzeah* in Phoenician

So far, there have been only three occurrences of the *marzeah* (*mrzḥ*) in Phoenician territories (east and west). However, the presence of the *marzeah* and its probable public character and widespread diffusion in the Phoenician world had already been demonstrated by the use of a personal name *Mrzḥy*, derived from the noun *mrzḥ* (with an adjectival ending).

The discovery of a new document from the administrative archive of Idalion (Cyprus) provides some more information. In order to contextualize the new document, the previous evidence will be analysed in some detail.

2.1. *Tariff*

The first inscription discovered mentioning the word *marzeah* is the famous “Marseille *Tariff*” (CIS I, 165 = KAI 69), found in 1845 near the cathedral “La Major” in Marseille.⁵² It is broken into two pieces, with part of its right lower side lacking. On palaeographic grounds, it is attributed to the 4th – beginning of the 3rd century BCE.⁵³ The text is a code of prescriptions regarding the sacrifices performed in the temple of Ba‘l Ṣaphon in Carthage. Neither its actual date nor how it reached Marseille is known, but its Carthaginian origin has been ascertained by the discovery in that Punic African city of a number of similar fragmentary tariffs (CIS I

and Nabataean *marzeah* (in Nabataea the *marzeah* seems to have had a more private and “popular” character than in Palmyra).

51 On the krater published by Briquel-Chatonnet 1995, that is thought to have been used during the *marzeah* banquets, there are reliefs that the editor connects with Dionysos.

52 This piece is now in the Musée d’Histoire de Marseille (inv. 83.7.142; previously in the Musée Borély, inv. 1522). Main bibliography: Dussaud 1941; Février 1958–59; van den Branden 1965; Xella 1983; 1984; Amadasi Guzzo 1988; Delcor 1990. On the *marzeah* in the tariff, cf. McLaughlin 2001: 38–42; Miralles 2007: 164–166.

53 For a palaeographical table, see Peckham 1968: Pl. XIII, 1 (dating the inscription to the second half of the 4th century).

167, 3915, 3916, 3917⁵⁴). In line 16, it mentions a *mzrh* 'lm as an entity sacrificing in the temple. The context where the expression recurs is as follows:

16. KL MZRḤ WKL ŠPH WKL MRZH 'LM WKL 'DMM 'Š YZBH[...]
 17. H'DMM HMT MŠ'T 'L ZBH 'ḤD KMDT ŠT BKT[B[T ...]

"Any *mzrh* or any family or any *marzeah* of the god⁵⁵ or all the persons who shall sacrifice ... these persons [shall pay] a payment for every sacrifice in the amount set down in the document ..."

The first part of the text (lines 1–15) lists the sacrifices that can be offered in the temple of Baʿl Šaphon according to the type of offering (animals, milk, cakes ...) and to the type of sacrifice, specifying what is reserved for the priests (money or meat) and what is retained for the offeror (either parts of the animal sacrificed or nothing); at the end (lines 16–21, incomplete) the document lists various categories (groups and individuals), who, when sacrificing in the temple, had to behave according to the prescriptions previously listed. The *marzeah* belongs to these categories and from the context of its mention in the inscription – even without comparing it to other documents – it is evident that the word clearly denotes an association, composed of a group of persons (not necessarily an elite)⁵⁶ as it is cited after the associations or groups called *mzrh* and *šph*.⁵⁷ The *mzrh* is a sort of association or sodality,⁵⁸ as is evident from some Neo-Punic inscriptions from Tunisia. A dedication to Baʿl Hamon found in Althiburos (KAI 159, 4)⁵⁹ lists individuals with their patronymics "and their colleagues, the *mzrh*" (*wḥbrnm hmzrh*). Two texts from Maktar (KAI 145 and 147)⁶⁰ mention the *mzrh*, which is also spelled *mzr'* in another architectural inscription from the same place.⁶¹ In these three cases, *mzrh* has been translated generically as "assembly"; KAI 159 mentions also a "chief of the assembly" (*rb mzrh*, line 16). Also, the word *šph* refers to a group, a clan or an extended family, and is attested already at Cebel Ireş Dağı (Anatolia) in the 7th century BCE⁶² and, later, in CIS I 6000bis, from Carthage.⁶³ In the tariff prescriptions, these associations (*mzrh*, *šph*, *mzrh*) are followed by the mention of

54 CIS 165 is not a tariff but a sort of list of offerings made during a series of days.

55 Or "*marzeah* of a god". The translation "the god" is more suitable if one supposes that the *marzeah* is related to Baʿl Šaphon.

56 Cf. the remarks by Naʿaman 2015: 120–121.

57 Thus, the word did not always denote a feast, as proposed by Naʿaman 2015. On Phoenician cultic associations, see for example Baslez 1991.

58 Cf. Lipiński 1992 (with bibliography); DNWSI: 609–610 s.v. *mzrh* (occurrences), Krahmalkov 2000: 274, sv. *mzrh*; already Clermont-Ganneau 1898.

59 Cf. Jongeling 2008: 155–157, Hr. Medeine 1 and Bron 2009, with full bibliography.

60 Cf. Jongeling 2008: 116–123, Hr. Maktar 64, 123–124, Hr. Maktar 66.

61 Février and Fantar 1965: 49–59; Jongeling 2008: 126–128, Hr. Maktar 76.

62 Mosca and Russell 1987; cf. Mosca 2013 for further references and a discussion of alternative interpretations; for a new lexical hypothesis, cf. Schmitz 2018.

63 Translated "family" or "clan" in DNWSI: 1181, s.v. *šph*1 and in Krahmalkov 2000: 476–477, s.v. *šph*.

“private” individuals, denoted by the expression *kl 'dmm*, “all the persons”, in a sequence that seems to run from specific groups to individual sacrificers.

Furthermore, the Marseille tariff shows – as was the case in other areas – that in Phoenicia too the *mrzḥ* was connected (at least on some occasions) with the religious sphere, not only because it used to bring sacrifices to a temple, but because it is called *mrzḥ 'lm* (in this case probably Ba‘l Ṣaphon),⁶⁴ differentiating it from the *mzrḥ* and *šph*.

2.2. *Phiale*

Again, the *mrzḥ* of a deity, Shamash, is cited on the inscription engraved on a bronze bowl (called *phiale* by the first editors) acquired in Switzerland and said to come from Lebanon. It was published in 1982 by N. Avigad and J.C. Greenfield, and restudied by A. Catastini, and then by M.G. Amadasi Guzzo, who proposed Cyprus as its place of origin, mainly because of the “western” formula and the shape of the letters.⁶⁵ The inscription dates to the 4th century BCE on the basis of its formula, the type of script and the typology of the bowl.⁶⁶ The reading is:

QB‘M ‘NHN // ‘RBT LMRZH ŠMŠ

“We 2 are the cups, ‘offerings’(?) for the *marzeah* of Shamash”

This translation supposes that the formula is a calque on a Greek model called “of the speaking object” (“oggetto parlante”). Instead, the interpretation by Avigad and Greenfield was: “We offer 2 cups to the *marzeah* of Shamash”, which seems less probable.⁶⁷ However, the analysis and meaning of *'rbt* remain disputed (it is either a verb or a noun, with an unclear meaning). The association of drinking vessels (*qb‘m*, “cups” in this inscription⁶⁸) with the *marzeah* of a god could indicate that the word *mrzḥ* was used here specifically to denote a feast. Furthermore, the

64 McLaughlin 2001: 42 supposes that *mrzḥ 'lm* refers to a group of nobles (*'lm* being a plural referring to the elite), but his arguments are not conclusive, especially as *'lm* is regularly used in Phoenician to denote a “deity”, already, probably, since the end of the 8th century BCE (Karatepe, KAI 26). Miralles 2007: 165–166 leaves open the possibility that *'lm* refers to: (a) Ba‘al Ṣaphon; (b) the patron deities of more than one institution; (c) various gods, differing from Ba‘al Ṣaphon (fn. 25).

65 Avigad and Greenfield 1982; Catastini 1985: 111–118, proposing to read *qb‘m 'nsk ...* “cups for libation” (“coppe per libazione”); Amadasi Guzzo 1987. See also McLaughlin 2001: 37–38; Miralles 2007: 162–163.

66 The dating was established on the basis of a similar *phiale* in silver found in Susa with coins of Aradus dated to about 350–332 BCE and parallels with Aramaic inscriptions dated between the 5th and the 4th centuries (particularly the Maskhuta bowls), see Avigad and Greenfield 1982: 119–120 (and pp. 120–121 for the typology of the script, also assigned to the 4th century).

67 The reading and interpretation by Krahmalkov 2000: 386, s.v. ‘rb 1 is: *qb‘m ‘n ḥn ‘rbt l mrzḥ šmš* “<This is> the goblet that I, Hanno, presented to the *marzeah*-sodality of Semes”, is not acceptable.

68 The kind of vessel analysed here has been identified with the Hebrew *mizrāq*, cf. Greer 2010.

inscription confirms that in the Phoenician world also, the *marzeah* was associated with the cult of different deities (here Shamash).

2.3. Piraeus

A third well-known inscription mentioning the *marzeah* is the decree from Piraeus (KAI 60 = TSSI III, 148–151, no. 41). Discovered in 1887, it is now in the Louvre (AO 4827). It is dated to the end of the 4th century BCE.⁶⁹ The *marzeah* is mentioned in the dating formula:

1. BYM 4 LMRZḤ BŠT 14 L‘M ŠDN ...

“On the 4th day of the *marzeah*, in the 14th year of the people of Sidon...”

The inscription is a Phoenician rendering of an Attic decree granting a golden crown to a man called Shama‘ba‘l, a member of the community of Sidonians residing in Piraeus,⁷⁰ as a reward for his works in the temple of the “deity” (*‘lm*, not named)⁷¹ and for having accomplished the requested services for the community. The Phoenician text is followed by a short summary in Greek, where Shama‘ba‘l (“Ba‘l listens”) has the Greek name Διοπεΐθης (“Obeying Zeus”).⁷²

Therefore, the Sidonian community (Phoenician *gw*, corresponding to Greek κοινὸν) celebrated a common feast, that they called *marzeah*, during a certain number of days. The use of the formula “the fourth day of the *marzeah*” for dating purposes, implies that in this milieu the feast was placed in a fixed period of time, well known by the community.⁷³ The *marzeah* was perhaps connected with the god whose temple is cited in the text. It is impossible to know whether here the word *marzeah* denoted the eastern Phoenician feast or a Greek festival (as supposed in particular by J.C.L. Gibson),⁷⁴ it is also plausible that the Sidonian community adopted in its Phoenician *marzeah* some features of the Greek θίασος.⁷⁵

69 For the chronology cf. Baslez and Briquel-Chatonnet 1991; cf. also Briquel-Chatonnet 2002 (complete bibliography), convincingly dating the text to 320/319 BCE; McLaughlin 2001: 42–44, who dates the inscription to the 3rd century BCE, following KAI II: 73; Teixidor 1980: 457; Ameling 1990: 190–192. See also Miralles 2007: 166–168 with additional references.

70 The specific function of Shama‘ba‘l in the community of the Sidonians cannot be established with certainty. The Phoenician text referring to him is as follows: (*šm ‘b ‘l*) ‘š nš‘ hgw ‘l bt ‘lm w‘l mbnt ḥsr bt ‘lm, “(Shama‘ba‘l), whom the community has placed over the temple of the deity and over the building of the temple court”; cf. McLaughlin 2001: 43–44, no. 137 (however, the expression does not indicate that he was a “leader of the community”).

71 The expression *b‘l šdn* in l. 6 can be understood either as “the (god) Ba‘l of Sidon” or as “the citizens of Sidon” (cf. for example, Briquel-Chatonnet 2002: 156).

72 Greek text: Τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Σιδωνιῶν Διοπεΐθ(η)ν Σιδώνιον.

73 McLaughlin (2001: 44) suggests that the feast was celebrated once a year.

74 In the context of this inscription Gibson (TSSI III, 149) proposed that *mrzh* “probably denotes an annual period of common meals like the Greek συσσιτία rather than a festival of Semitic origin”. However, this hypothesis cannot be proved.

75 On the θίασος and the development of this association cf. for example Lécivain, in Daremberg and Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, V: 257–266 s. v. *Thiasos*

2.4. Personal Names

Although the social role of the *marzeah* in Phoenicia is not well known, it was certainly not secondary, also because, as noted above, *Mrzhy*, a personal name derived from it, occurs more than once: twice on Cyprus, in Kition in CIS I, 60 (Yon 2004: n° 1035, cf. p. 79, fn. 9, an inscription copied by R. Pococke and now lost); and in CIS I, 93, a dedication from Idalion dated to 254 BCE according to the date formula used (year 31 of Ptolemy II). In this inscription, two individuals of the same family have the name *Mrzhy*. They are the father and son of Batshalom,⁷⁶ the woman who dedicated the statues (*smlm*), commemorated in the inscription, to Reshep-MKL.⁷⁷ Moreover, in CIS I 5089 (from Carthage) – a dedication in the local *tophet* – the offeror was ‘Abdmelqart son of *Mrzhy* (vocalized *Marzehay* in the CIS), son of ‘Abdmelqart.⁷⁸

As for the origin of the use of this name, it is possible to suggest that originally it was related to a child’s day of birth, which coincided with the feast (very much like the Italian names “Pasquale” or “Natale”); afterwards, it became a name used in the family, as the inscription CIS I, 93 shows.⁷⁹

3. A New Document

In 2001 a new mention of the *marzeah* (but identified only recently) came to light in Cyprus (where the personal name *Mrzhy* was in use) among the documents of a Phoenician archive dependent on the palace administration, dating to the 4th century, and discovered on the Ampileri acropolis of Idalion in the course of the excavations directed by M. Hadjicosti (1991–2012).⁸⁰ We are indebted to Dr Hadjicosti for permission to present this document as an addition to the *marzeah* dossier.

(often also including foreign members). The relations between *marzeah* and *thiasos* have been examined in the work by Miralles 2007 (cf. the review by Zamora 2009). For a proposal of crossing of influences between the *marzeah* and the local banquets mainly in the Orientalising period in Greece and Italy, cf. Nijboer 2013. For the Hellenistic period cf. Baslez 2013.

76 A pronunciation *bat-* of the first element is suggested by the late-Punic orthography *b’t*; however a shortening of the first vowel is shown by the rendering *byt* in IRT 901, 3; cf. Friedrich, Röllig and Amadasi Guzzo 1999: § 240, 10.

77 Cooke 1903: 77–79, no. 26; KAI 40; Magnanini 1973: 120–121, no. 8; Yon 2004: 82. Commentary in Amadasi Guzzo in press.

78 For the Carthaginian example see Benz 1972: 143, 354. In CIS I 93 the name was previously read *Mryhy*; the present reading was proposed by Briquel-Chatonnet and Bron and accepted in Yon 2004: 88. Cf. also Briquel-Chatonnet, Daccache and Hawley 2015: 247. The reading *Mrzhy* had already been proposed in the CIS (Chabot’s reading) for nos 60 and 5089.

79 It is possible to suppose also that the family had some specific link with the association.

80 Hadjicosti 1995; 1997; 2000; 2017; Szyner 2004; Amadasi Guzzo and Zamora 2016; 2018; Amadasi Guzzo 2017. The inscriptions are at present being studied in view of a comprehensive publication.

The inscription (IDA 974 [2001]) consists of three lines painted in black ink on a fragment of pottery (its shape has not been identified) (Fig. 1). The proposed reading and translation of the text (which will be analysed in more detail in the comprehensive edition) are:

1) – TN . LŠTRT . WM

2) – LQRT . BMRZH . ’

3) – KL SP/R 1 . ’

“Give to Ashtart and Me/lqart in the *marzeah*: fo/od(?) SP/R 1 ’ ”

The script (Fig. 2) has been executed with quite a thick instrument. The general *ductus* of the letters, although cursive, is not as developed as in other cases.⁸¹ An oblique stroke seems to have been added at the beginning of each line of the text. The words are divided by dots, according to a practice that is rarely found in the Idalion corpus, although it is present on some Phoenician stone inscriptions from Cyprus.⁸² At the end of the third line, the scribe has painted a larger letter (here an *alef*) with a more formal shape than the others (a feature seen in other documents from this archive). It must have had a specific meaning, as yet unclear. At the left side end of the sherd, two isolated letters, possibly ŠŠ, are painted. Their meaning and relationship to the main inscription are also unclear.

The letters are regularly traced and their reading is generally certain (Fig. 3). A large letter *zain*, of a shape not commonly used on the engraved inscriptions of Cyprus should be noted, as it occurs later in the Neo-Punic variant of the script. The *het* is particularly large, probably due to the thickness of the writing instrument. The *mem* too has a shape that anticipates the later cursive script. The *nun* and *lamed* are similar, the *lamed* having a short upper shaft and quite a large foot, a variant common on stone inscriptions, but rare in the cursive script. The *ain* is completely open, with a right downward tick. The only uncertainties concern the possible *samek*, of a type that seems specific to the script of the Idalion archive,⁸³ and the *pe/resh*⁸⁴ in the third line. On the whole, the letters can be compared with those present on some ostraca already known from Kition, Sidon and Elephantine,⁸⁵ dated between the 5th and the 4th centuries BCE. A date in the 4th century is more in agreement with the general chronology of the archive.

81 Cf. Peckham 1968: Pls I–III; only Pl. I,1–2 (CIS I 86 A–B) are examples written in ink, but they are probably earlier than our ostrakon.

82 Cfr. for ex. Amadasi Guzzo and Karageorghis 1977: 49 and Pl. IX,1 (B1).

83 Compare the *samekh* on the ostrakon published by Amadasi Guzzo and Zamora 2018: 86, line 1 (names *ntgns* and *dmtrys*) and fig. 5 (Ibidem: 92).

84 This last sign is probably a *pe*; however, it can also be identified with a *resh*, although the two other *resh* of this inscription have a more oblique shaft and a larger upper end.

85 Cf. Friedrich, Röllig and Amadasi Guzzo 1999: Taf. III (kursiv-Phönizisch).

The formula “give to” (*tn l-*), consisting of the imperative of *ytn*, had not occurred previously in the Phoenician corpus.⁸⁶ It is however well attested, epigraphically, on Hebrew ostraca from Lachish and Arad;⁸⁷ these Hebrew inscriptions are letters addressed to specific persons: generally, the verb has a subject and is followed, as here, by the preposition *l-* and a personal name or the name of a group of persons receiving goods. Here, as in other Idalion ostraca of an administrative type, the subject of the verb is not expressed. These kinds of formula are probably to be understood as instructions addressed to an unnamed person, in charge of the administration, who had to deliver specified amounts of goods/commodities to individuals or groups. However, the present text is exceptional: the administration was required to give a quantity of a certain commodity not to the *marzeah* of two gods but directly to two gods, Ashtart and Melqart, connected with the *marzeah* (see below).

The root *'kl* occurs in Phoenician only as a verb, with the meaning “to eat”.⁸⁸ As a noun, the word occurs in administrative documents from Ugarit meaning “grain”, “fodder” (perhaps “barley”);⁸⁹ and in the 1st millennium, with the generic meaning of “food”, in Ammonite, Edomite and in Judaeo-Aramaic; it also occurs, in the feminine, in Nabataean.⁹⁰ Perhaps this is the first occurrence of the Phoenician noun with the same meaning of “food”. If the proposed reading of the third line is correct, then we can identify the word *sp*, already attested in two inscriptions, one from Tyre (RES 1204),⁹¹ the other from Bir bou Rekba (Thinissut, in Tunisia; KAI 137),⁹² where it denotes a container of a type that is not clearly defined, and translated as a metal “basin” or “bowl” in KAI 137.⁹³ Considering that the word is followed by a number (quite certainly 1), *sp* is probably a unit of measurement here. If that is the case, the quantity of food delivered was probably small.

Regarding the general meaning of the text, as already noted, the “food” or commodity cited was to be given, not to persons, but to gods, Ashtart and Melqart. The whole expression could simply indicate that the *marzeah* of both divinities would receive this amount of food,⁹⁴ thus indicating that, most probably, here

86 DNWSI: 478–479, s.v. *ytn*1.

87 For ex. Lachish 9, cf. Ahituv 2008: 84, l. 3; Arad 3, Ibidem: 98, l. 2; Arad 4, Ibidem: 102, ls 1, 3; Arad 12, ls 2, 5, cf. Davies 1991: 15, no. 2012; Arad 18, l. 4, cf. Ahituv 2008: 119, l. 4; Arad 60, cf. Davies 1991: 29, no. 2.060, l. 4; Arad 71, Ibidem: 32, no. 2071, l. 1.

88 DNWSI: 51–52, s.v. *'kl*₁, normally used in the Semitic languages.

89 Del Olmo and Samartín 2015: 42, s.v. *'akl* (II).

90 DNWSI: 52, s.v. *'kl*₂ and *'klh*.

91 Clermont-Ganneau 1988: 87–93; Briquel-Chatonnet, Daccache and Hawley 2014: 187–189 (and bibliography).

92 RES 942 and 1858; Jongeling 2008: 65–66, Buir bou Rekba N. 1 (and bibliography).

93 In the Tyre inscription the *sp* is certainly large; in Bir Bou Rekba two *spm* were made for two sanctuaries (*mqdšm šnm*), together with two *zbrm*, another kind of vessel of unknown type. In Hebrew, *sap* in some examples denotes containers of precious metal used in the temple (cf. Koehler and Baumgartner 1958: 663, s.v. *sap* I).

94 Note that in Ugarit certain vineyards are called “of Ishtar Ḥurri” (RS 18.01) but are divided

marzeah denotes the association. However, the expression used is not the one expected: it is said that the commodity in question has to be given directly to the deities *bmrzh*, “in the *marzeah*”. In this expression, the function of the preposition *b-* is not completely clear. As a parallel one might cite an expression used in the so called Kition-Bamboula tariff KAI 37 A-B 9 (CIS I 86 A–B),⁹⁵ a list of expenses and payments to individuals or groups connected with a temple, during two specific months. In B 9 we find the registration of a payment that was given *l'łmt 22 bzbh*, “to the 22 girls (employed) at the sacrifice” (literally “in the sacrifice”, as a reward for their service in the ritual).⁹⁶ Similarly, the expression *l'štrt wlmqlrt bmrzh*, could indicate that the *'kl* is a portion of food reserved to Ashtart and Melqart, as they are connected with this particular *marzeah* feast.

Consequently, it is possible that the text registered the delivery either of a commodity to the *marzeah* association of Ashtart and Melqart or of a commodity intended for the gods on the occasion of the *marzeah* celebration.⁹⁷

In any case, here again, the religious connotation of the *marzeah* is certain. Moreover, the “provisions” needed for the gods depended on the royal administration, indicating how cultic practices and administration were closely linked. On this issue, it is interesting to note that A. Hermary has proposed, with convincing arguments, that the temple tariff from Kition-Bamboula KAI 37 was not, as supposed until now, an internal accounting document written in the sanctuary, but a list of remunerations compiled by the central Kition administration, similar to the documents found in Idalion.⁹⁸

In terms of the history of religions, the link between a *marzeah* and two deities (the first occurrence in Phoenician) should be noted. Furthermore, these two are a goddess and a god who can be considered as a divine couple. Neither of them was attested before connected with the Phoenician *marzeah*: Ashtart was already connected with the *marzeah* in Ugarit, but Melqart, who was so important in the Phoenician world, had not previously been linked with this specific association and celebration.

Moreover, neither Ashtart nor Melqart occurs with certainty in the Idalion inscriptions, where Anat and Reshep were the protagonists of most of the documents. Only a fragmentary marble stela, dating to the 5th century, may mention a “statue of Ashtart”.⁹⁹ Similarly, there is no evidence of Melqart (with the exception

between the men of the *marzeah* of two different villages; see above.

95 Yon 2004: 184–185, no. 1078, 209–211.

96 According to the translation by Gibson in TSSI III: 127. See also Friedrich, Röllig and Amadasi Guzzo 1999: § 283,5 (“für die 22 jungen Frauen beim Opfer”).

97 According to this last explanation, it is supposed that the banquet included some specific cultic acts in relation to the gods that gave the name to (protected) the *marzeah*. The *'kl* given was perhaps reserved to this purpose.

98 Hermary 2014: 251–253.

99 Yon 2004: 62, no. 46 (Honeyman 1939: 106, no. 7). M. Yon notes: “Provenance inconnue (Idalion? Kition?)”; the document is edited as coming from Idalion by Bonnet 1996: 158 (cf.

of the possible identification with this god of the statues representing Heracles).¹⁰⁰ On the contrary, the cult of both deities is well documented in Kition (where there is in particular a cult of Eshmun-Melqart).¹⁰¹ In the period of the archive – the 4th century BCE – Idalion was under the authority of the kings of Kition: several as yet unpublished ostraca mention king Milkyaton, and even the Ba’l of Kition and “the gods of Kition” are cited. In the present case, one may suppose either that the *marzeah* mentioned was related to Kition, or that the cult of both Ashtart and Melqart, in this case related to a *marzeah*, was brought to Idalion together with Kition’s rule.

4. Conclusions

The noun *marzeah* (to use the conventional vocalization) recurs in many, but scattered, Semitic texts in various groups and from various periods. It already occurs in the Syrian Bronze Age and later, during the 1st millennium BCE, mainly in Palestine until the 6th century CE, in the Nabataean and Palmyrene kingdoms, and in the Mediterranean Phoenician and Punic world. Analyses concerning the *marzeah* are so numerous, that here it is not possible to attempt yet again to draw general conclusions about its nature, possible common characters, parallels, and specific or divergent traits and developments. Some conclusions drawn from consistent groups of written documents follow here in order to draw attention to several elements specific to each time and place and to suggesting some historical dynamics.

In the Bronze Age, in documents from the palace of Ebla and later from Emar, the *marzeah* appears to be a feast of a convivial nature (involving, at least in some situations, the king and the palace, possibly but not clearly, also cultic), with a leader, which took place several times a year in Ebla or only once in Emar. In Ugarit, where documents provide more detail, the noun denoted the feast celebrated by a hierarchical group of persons (called the “men of *marzeah*”) and possibly in some documents the group itself. It also indicated the place where the feast was held (and where the association gathered). Evidence indicates the consumption of wine during the festivity. The group of participants was legally recognised by the royal administration and followed fixed rules (for taking part in it or resigning). It could own properties, which it could rent and even transmit to heirs (proof of it being officially recognised). The *marzeah* was present in several places. It was also clearly linked to a divinity, certainly Ashtart, but male

also p. 85 on possible Aphrodite-Ashtart sanctuaries in this town).

100 The inscription dedicated to Melqart Yon 2004: 191, no. 1125 (= CIS I, 88), coming from Idalion according to the CIS, is most probably from Kition.

101 For inscriptions naming Ashtart at Kition, Yon 2004: 174, no. 1001, 184–185, no. 1078 (cf. Bonnet 1996: 70–72, 158–159, E9–E10). For Melqart, cf. Yon 2004: 190, no. 1113 (perhaps, however, a personal name composed with Melqart); for Eshmun-Melqart cf. particularly Teixidor 1976 and Lipiński 1995 (the texts are reedited in Yon 2004).

deities too, whose names were used to identify the association and probably its properties. It has been proposed, but not directly substantiated, that it had a funerary connection.

The later biblical passages show clearly that the noun *marzeah* denoted a festive banquet, with the consumption of meat and wine, which took place in specific places (*byt mrzh*), using apposite drinking vessels (proposed to be identified as such in Phoenician, Palestinian and Palmyrene territories), and possibly connected with mourning for the dead.

While we cannot draw conclusions from the possibly fake Moabite papyrus, we have a good number of Aramaic documents concerning the *marzeah*, clearly denoting an association and the celebrations connected with it. The only mention of this term in Elephantine (5th century BCE) is interesting because it uses the expression “money of the *marzeah*”. The use of money belonging to the group proves that the association probably had common rules with common expenses (and properties?), perhaps in a similar way to the Ugaritian case.

The Nabataean and Palmyrenian realms show a large diffusion of the *marzeah* associations and gatherings, having a clear cultic involvement regarding several gods (not, however, until now goddesses). The Nabataean attestations seem to show a large diffusion of the *marzeah* in several milieus, not specifically elitist. In Palmyra, on the contrary, the *marzeah* appears to be more bound to an official milieu, being perhaps a public institution, as the charge of its chief, mostly a priest, was used on several inscriptions in dating formularies. Here again, a funerary connotation, at least in some cases, has been proposed. Some bilingual inscriptions (Palmyrene and Greek) equate the *marzeah* with the Greek *symposion*, showing a relation – one could suppose in the rules of the feast too – with the late-Hellenistic culture of banquets, as is also apparent from the representations of the *tesserae*. It is not clear whether the *marzeah* feast, lasting more than one day, was celebrated only once a year or on several occasions (the dating formulary used in Palmyra points, at least there, to the first possibility).

The Phoenician material adds the westernmost occurrences of the *marzeah*. The word clearly denotes a feast in the Piraeus inscription and an association in the Marseille Tariff. It is related to gods (directly and indirectly in the Marseille Tariff and directly in the inscriptions on the *phiale* and from Idalion), to one or more divinities (*mrzh 'lm*, *mrzh šmš*). In the Idalion ostrakon, the *marzeah* was bound to the central administration, at least for its celebration, as it received food from the palace. Its role in the society is well demonstrated by the use of the adjectival form *mrzhy* as a personal name in Cyprus and Carthage. We learn from the Idalion document the connexion of the *marzeah* to a divine couple (Ashtart and Melqart). However, the role of the deities in the feast is nowhere clear. As an association, the *marzeah* used to offer common sacrifices in Carthaginian temples (Marseille Tariff). As a feast, at least in the Piraeus (where it has been proposed, however without real proofs, that it could have corresponded to a Greek festival

or incorporated features from similar Greek feasts), it could last several days and had a public character (as it is used for a date formulary) as in Palmyra. It implied, as almost everywhere, the important role of drinking (as shown by the bronze bowl from the antiquity market).

The preceding remarks show that tracing a coherent history of the *marzeah* is complicated. It comes in a range of different guises, over a very long span of time, corresponding to different societies and cultures, often with common backgrounds and interactions. Moreover, almost everywhere convivial occasions or feasts have common features and the meanings of words are flexible and can even denote opposites. However, every document adds more details to our knowledge of the *marzeah* feast and association in their own place and time (as the new ostrakon from Idalion does for the Phoenician *marzeah* in 4th century Cyprus), allowing us also, by connecting together all the evidence, to perceive certain historical trends and cultural links.

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Fig. 1. Ostracon from Idalion IDA 974 [2001] (Photo Department of Antiquities).

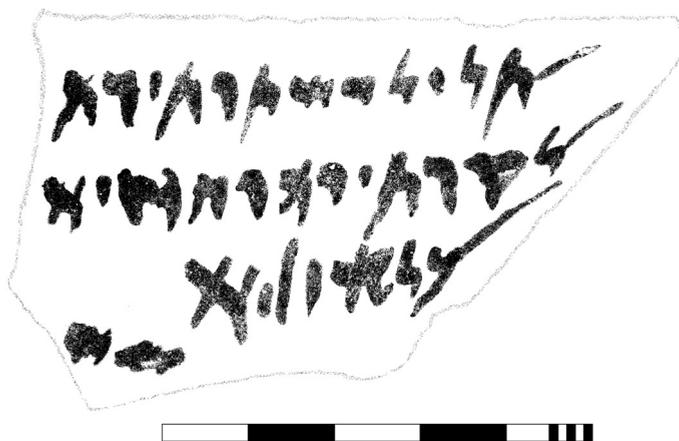


Fig. 2. Ostracon from Idalion IDA 974 [2001], (Drawing J.Á.Z).

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Fig. 3. Ostracon from Idalion IDA 974 [2001], table of signs.