

The Epigraphy of the Tophet

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Abstract

The present contribution reassesses the main aspects of the epigraphic sources found in the so-called *tophet* in order to demonstrate how they are significant and how they undermine the funerary interpretations of these precincts. The inscriptions decisively define the *tophet* as a place of worship, a sanctuary where sacrifices were made to specific deities in specific rites. The epigraphic evidence combined with literary and archaeological data show how these sacrifices consisted of infants and small animals (either as substitutes or interred together), sometimes commemorated by the inscriptions themselves.

Keywords

History of Religions, Child Sacrifice, Northwest Semitic Epigraphy, Mediterranean History, Phoenician & Punic World.

1. Introduction

Our basic knowledge of the special type of Phoenician and Punic sanctuaries called *tophet* (a conventional term taken from the Hebrew Bible) seems to be based on wide variety of sources that can be combined to provide an overall interpretation.

In fact, archaeological research now provides us with relatively substantial knowledge of the geographical and chronological distribution of these sacred sites and of their structure. Present in some central Mediterranean Phoenician settlements (including on Sardinia) from their foundation, or shortly after, they persist and multiply in North Africa at a later period, generally after the destruction of Carthage¹. Archaeology, also, enables us to formulate a “material” definition of these places: they are always— essentially – open-air sites constantly located on the margins of towns, where pottery containers are buried in which the burnt remains of babies and/or baby

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¹ As is known, we have no firm archaeological evidence of any *tophet* in the Mediterranean Levant or the Near East. This absence has been variously interpreted as can be seen in the related bibliography. See now the contributions in this volume of Bernardini, Quinn and especially Xella. See also some recent works about the identitarian role of these western sanctuaries, for ex. QUINN 2011; BONNET 2011. Cf. also D’ANDREA – GIARDINO 2011; 2013.

animals, mostly sheep, are deposited². The data from material culture can be combined with textual sources: classical writers speak of bloody sacrificial practices typical of the Phoenician-Punic world (whose victims would indeed be very young infants)³, information that seems to agree, at least partially, with the archaeological evidence. Biblical texts seem to reveal the ideological background and the ancient Near Eastern manifestations of this practice⁴. In addition to archaeological and textual data (each analysed by means of their own specific methodology), Phoenician-Punic epigraphic sources furnish direct evidence of a very large number of inscriptions found in the tophets: as these are all votive in nature – i. e. dedications to specific deities – they provide consistent proof that the archaeological areas called tophet were sanctuaries and that the rites performed in them were sacrifices⁵.

As a result, the evidence as a whole seems to indicate that the tophet is to be interpreted as a special sacred area, dedicated to the offering of new-born babies or infants of various ages (or of animals as substitutes) as a sacrifice to the deity. This practice would thus appear a particular development of ancient Near Eastern customs recorded in some central Mediterranean Phoenician colonial settlements. These were in contact with each other, and would therefore have been linked by specific social and cultural characteristics relating to their particular identity and demographic needs as manifested in the course of their history.

However, this interpretation has been and still is intensely debated, some scholars favouring, instead, an explanation that sees the tophet as a necropolis (for cremation) reserved for foetuses, new-born babies or infants who died of natural causes; in brief, those still without social status. The defenders of this thesis base their arguments on their reading of archaeological remains and on a critical analysis of the information provided by classical sources which, in their opinion, would have been conditioned by disinformation and by preconceived negative judgments. However, the challenge of reconciling this interpretation with the votive and non-funerary nature of the epigraphic evidence persists.

² The open-air spaces are usually enclosed and contain a few small buildings, as well as cultic installations. They are generally located on the edges of settlements, and often on a hill or low rise. For a more detailed summary of the archaeology of the tophet a good source is still CIASCA 2002.

³ On classical sources and the tophet, see, for example, MOSCATI 1991b: 56-60; more recently, GARNAND 2006, XELLA 2009. Here, in brief, we recall that numerous Greek and Latin texts, though not particularly early, speak of a Punic custom (but related also to the inhabitants of Phoenicia) which involved the offering of their children to the gods through varying forms of sacrifice. The deity to whom such offerings were made was mainly, though not always, Kronos/Saturn, the equivalent of the Phoenician Baʿl Hamon). Such offerings were made in moments of crisis such as revolts, epidemics, military defeats, though not exclusively. This custom, which appears to already have been abolished in Phoenicia by the 4th century BCE, as suggested by a passage by Curtius Rufus (*Hist.*, 4, 3, 23), was kept alive in Africa and was said to still be practiced in secret at the time of Tertullian (*Apolog.*, 9, 2-4) despite being prohibited by the Roman authorities.

⁴ This practice was condemned as Canaanite by the writers of the Bible, but was also used near Jerusalem (in the so-called tophet where the Hebrews “passed” their sons through fire). On this question, see now the chapter by Stavropoulou in this volume (stressing the role of Yahweh as a divinity linked to the tophet of Jerusalem) with necessary references.

⁵ See AMADASI GUZZO 2002 and AMADASI GUZZO 2007-2008.

Here, we intend to reassess the main aspects of the epigraphic documentation from these sanctuaries, to demonstrate their importance and to show how the information that it provides not only goes against (even the most sophisticated) funerary interpretations, but decisively supports the definition of the tophet as a place of worship. It was an urban sanctuary⁶, where infants and small animals, sometimes as substitutes, were sacrificed to specific deities (in the West: Ba‘l Hamon or Ba‘l Hamon and Tinnit, as we shall see); their burnt remains were then preserved in pottery containers, *in situ*, after specific rites. These sacrifices were sometimes commemorated by an inscription.

2. History of research: the sources, their interpretation and the role of epigraphy

2.1 The first discoveries and the central role of classical and biblical written sources

On the basis of the above, it is advisable to re-examine the history of the interpretation of the tophet⁷ also on the basis of epigraphic finds, which especially in recent years have not always been considered in relation to all the other available sources. However, it should be said that, at the very start, not even the archaeological data were related to the indirect (classic or biblical) textual evidence. The first tophet to be brought to light, although at first not identified as such, was at Nora in 1885. At that time, since there were no inscriptions and the buried remains were not identified as belonging to infants, it was interpreted (by G. Patroni) as a necropolis for cremation⁸. It was only in 1919 that J. Whitaker proposed connecting the area he had excavated in Mozia (later called a tophet) with the references in classical sources to sacrifices of children practised by the Phoenicians and Carthaginians⁹. Shortly afterwards, and independently, the same connection of the archaeological data with literary sources was made during the first systematic excavations carried out in a small sector of the tophet of Carthage, begun in 1922 by François Icard and Paul Gielly. In the course of these excavations a large number of vases containing burnt bones were brought to light and a provisional stratigraphy was then established for the first time. The initial analyses of the cremated remains, made by P. Pallary in 1922, showed that the urns/vases contained remains of new-born infants and/or of small animals, usually sheep, and opened up the discussion on the nature of the place discovered. Several decades later, J. Richard made further analyses of burnt remains from Carthage and Sousse (Hadrumetum), with similar results¹⁰. This seemed to confirm the connection between these remains and the information provided by classical sources and biblical passages, from which the name tophet was taken¹¹. Later on, this connection seemed to be confirmed by iconography:

⁶ On the tophet as a city sanctuary, cf. for example BONDÌ 1979 or ACQUARO 1993.

⁷ Here we present a brief outline of the history of the studies (not exhaustive by any means) from the point of view of the topics that will be covered later.

⁸ VIVANET 1891, quoted by MOSCATI 1982; cf. GRAS – ROUILLARD – TEIXIDOR 1989: 194, n. 33.

⁹ WHITAKER 1921: 257-260.

¹⁰ PALLARY 1922; RICHARD 1961. For Carthage, cf. BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2004, *passim*. See now the contribution by Melchiorri in this volume, with references.

¹¹ It is to be noted that the vocalisation *tōpheth* is a late and deformed version (adapted from that of the word *bōšeth* “shame”) employed by the Massorettes, the grammarians who produced the text which we normally use today. The etymology and, consequently, the meaning of the term, which

on a stela found in Carthage a male person – identified as a priest – was depicted holding a baby, considered to be the sacrificial victim¹².

2.2 The inclusion of epigraphic evidence

Greek, Latin and biblical sources (which are considered in other contributions to this volume) are therefore at the root of the particular history of the tophet as a place of infant sacrifice (and also at the root of its earliest impact on the modern collective imagination)¹³. For these reasons, they have also been the first to be reconsidered in the most recent attempts at reinterpretation. However, the finds at Carthage added the epigraphic sources to the discussion, which were studied principally between the 1920s and the 1960s.

Systematic excavation at Carthage began only after a large number of stelae of uncertain provenance – inscribed and not – had been sold to individuals or institutions. During the excavations in the area then identified as a tophet, it was confirmed that memorial stones and, later, stelae (the monuments that had attracted the attention of scholars and collectors) were placed on top of the urns containing the cremated remains. These monuments, when inscribed, provided most of the material for the publication of the first part of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum (CIS)*, which was devoted to Phoenician inscriptions. Initiated by Ernest Renan in 1868, the *CIS* concentrated almost exclusively on the publication of finds from the area of the Carthage tophet from the third *fasciculus* of the first volume (published in 1885) on.

As a result, epigraphy became a basic resource, given not only the abundance of the evidence but also its direct and explicit nature, in attempts to interpret the tophet. In fact, the memorial stones and stelae found in these sanctuaries bore texts from their earliest phases, but the number of inscriptions increased over time and especially during the final centuries of Carthage. As we shall see, the inscriptions of the tophet have remarkably stereotyped formulae that, in spite of some specific difficulties, enabled experts in Semitic to determine immediately that they were votive. They were dedications addressed to the god Ba‘l Hamon and from around the 5th century at Carthage, to the goddess Tinnit, invoked (in first position) together with him. Like many other Phoenician-Punic votive inscriptions, the dedications included the formula indicating that the vow had been made because the god(s) had heard the prayer of the

could be a toponym, are still unknown, cf. LIPÍŃSKI 1995: 438 and now in this volume Stavrakopoulou’s article.

¹² Cf. *inter alia* LANCEL 1992: 249-250, fig. 122. The stela had been sold to Icard and Gielly clandestinely and it was one of the finds which, together with other objects trafficked illegally, led them to conduct their excavations. On the stela and its interpretation cf. BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2007: 15-16 (who concludes that: “Sans doute cet ‘instantané’ – au sens photographique du terme – correspond-il au moment fort d’une cérémonie d’importance majeure”).

¹³ Cf. most recently RIBICHINI 2013. This impact preceded the first identification and archaeological examination of these sanctuaries, and immediately became imbued with moral questions. Of the horror which Punic infant sacrifice provoked in modern society, as early as the nineteenth century, and the morbid use to which ancient texts have been put, a paradigmatic example – and great populariser of the topic — is Gustave Flaubert’s novel, *Salammbô*. The moral condemnation expressed therein (without doubt, a projection of contemporary moral values) has, unfortunately, contaminated current research to a certain degree. See below.

dedicator or so that he would be heard. Even if the offering was not usually specifically defined in the later and more numerous stelae, it was stated explicitly in the oldest inscriptions (found as early as the 7th century BCE, on monuments from Carthage and Malta). These show that the expressions used in archaic times persisted, to some extent – with some variants and peculiarities in individual centres – until about the 1st century BCE – 1st century AD (at Guelma, ancient Calama, in Algeria). In particular, what was donated was given a specific name: *mlk*. This term – with certain complements, as we shall see – was immediately connected with a similar Hebrew word mentioned in biblical passages concerning the tophet of Jerusalem, considered up to that time (and still now by several scholars) to be the name of a specific god: Molok (a name transmitted by the texts with various Masoretic vocalisations).

Instantly there was great interest in this epigraphic information, especially regarding its range of “sacrificial” terminology. As a result, the attempts at analysis and interpretation of the tophet had to take special account of the contribution of the inscriptions, in spite of the various problems of interpretation presented by these texts (especially in relation to the meanings to be assigned to certain terms and expressions).

2.3 The votive terminology of the inscriptions and the tophet as a sanctuary

The first systematic attempt at an epigraphic analysis, as part of an overall interpretation of the nature of the tophet, was made by Otto Eissfeldt. In 1935 this scholar published a monograph that remained fundamental into the 1980s¹⁴. In fact, it seemed to provide definitive proof for the interpretation of the tophet as a sanctuary where infants and then animals as their substitutes were sacrificed. Eissfeldt based his analysis principally on literary (especially biblical) sources, but the Punic inscriptions had a fundamental role in his reconstruction of the phenomenon.

Starting from five Latin dedications to Saturn, from N’gaus in Algeria (2nd – 3rd centuries CE, circa), discovered in the early 1930’s, which contained the expressions *mor[c]homor*, *mochomor*, *[m]orcomor*, *molc[ho]mor*¹⁵ in connection with the sacrifice of a lamb and with the life/health of human beings (see fig. 1), Eissfeldt was the first to propose that, in Phoenician, *mlk* – to be vocalised as *molc* on the base of Latin equivalents – indicates the specific type of offering made in a tophet. According to him, this offering was, depending on the case, a lamb (*'mr*) or a human being (*b'l*, *'dm*). The lamb was understood to be a substitution sacrifice: *mlk 'mr = molchomor*. The human sacrifices were defined by the syntagms *mlk b'l* and *mlk 'dm*. Over time, according to Eissfeldt, there was a gradual shift from human offerings to substitution sacrifices. In the Hebrew Bible, the name of the offering would have become confused, again over a period of time, with the name of a deity, the notorious Molok, for whom Eissfeldt, therefore, decreed “the end”.

Subsequently, some aspects of Eissfeldt’s thesis were criticised or revised. In particular, “das Ende des Gottes Moloch” was rejected, with the argument that divine names with the three radicals *mlk* (the same as for the word “king”, Heb. *melekh*) were well-known in the Syrian region from the 3rd millennium BCE¹⁶. In any case, the

¹⁴ EISSFELDT 1935. Reprint and Spanish translation in GONZÁLEZ WAGNER – RUIZ CABRERO 2002: 1-86.

¹⁵ ALQUIER – ALQUIER 1931; see also FÉVRIER 1962. The texts are reproduced also in LE GLAY 1966: 69-75. See now LAPORTE 2006.

¹⁶ Cf. in particular HEIDER 1985; DAY 1989; ISRAEL 1990. Cf. now Stavrakopoulou in this volume.

meaning and etymology of the term *mlk* (and of its complements?)¹⁷ have continued to be discussed. Debate also continues on the interpretation of the sacrificial rite, with reconstructions, such as the one by J.-G. Février which evoked in academic circles the “bloody” nature of the rite (also present in popular imagination because of Flaubert’s literary description)¹⁸. In conclusion, in regard to epigraphy and philology, terminological discussions and attempts at interpretation have continued up to the present day¹⁹. However, thanks to information provided by the inscriptions, the general understanding of the tophet as a sacred space that should be related with the literary evidence for the Phoenician and Punic sacrifice of infants (to Ba‘l Hamon and Tinnit²⁰) has been maintained and reinforced for over half a century.

2.4 A new phase in the interpretation of archaeological and textual data: the funerary hypothesis

The most decisive criticism and the most radical opinion in respect of the sacrificial interpretation were made public in 1987. In that year, during an important conference held at the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, S. Moscati revised his previous interpretations of the tophet, and refuted O. Eissfeldt’s thesis. Instead, he proposed that the tophet be interpreted as a necropolis reserved for premature or very small and stillborn babies. They lacked the social identity that would allow them to be buried following the customary burial rites²¹ – prevalent in Carthage up to circa the 4th century BCE – in the common necropoleis reserved for adults. Moscati’s thesis was based not so much on textual evidence (literary texts or inscriptions), as primarily on one (indirect) archaeological datum: a remark by H. Bénichou-Safar who, several years earlier²², had noted that the necropoleis of Carthage (excavated extensively, especially between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century) had revealed very few remains of infants. In addition, Moscati based his argument – from the perspective of the history of religions – on some comments by A. Simonetti

¹⁷ See §3.2, 3.4, 3.6 below.

¹⁸ FÉVRIER 1953a; FÉVRIER 1960. Février’s reconstruction was mainly based on a passage from Plutarch (*De superstitione*, 13) which takes up the events narrated by Diodorus (20, 14; see n. 97 below) regarding the sacrifice at Carthage of two hundred children of noble families, to whom a further 100 were added, when the city was besieged by Agathocles, a colourful passage that became famous: placed in the arms of a bronze statue of Kronos, the infants then rolled from there into the fire. There is, of course, no trace of this statue in any archaeological records. On rites actually attested in the tophet of Carthage, see BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2004: 149-166; on the fire, BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 1988.

¹⁹ See again varying proposals, for example in SMELIK 1995 or LIPINŃSKI 2002, especially pp. 141-142.

²⁰ In the meantime, archaeology had shown how, in Roman Africa, the tophets were replaced by sanctuaries dedicated to Saturn and Juno Coelestis (undoubtedly, the heirs of Ba‘l Hamon and Tinnit), cf. LE GLAY 1966 and LE GLAY 1988. Cf. in this volume the paper by McCarty; for the two gods, see that by Garbati.

²¹ MOSCATI 1987; see also MOSCATI 1991a; MOSCATI – RIBICHINI 1991; MOSCATI 1991b; 1996. For his earlier views, see MOSCATI 1965-1966.

²² BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 1981. The writer had studied every aspect of the Punic tombs at Carthage, cf. BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 1982. Understandably, she almost immediately supported Moscati’s points of view; see BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 1988; 1989; 1993; 1995a. Cf. also BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2000-2001.

regarding passages from Greek and Latin writers on sacrifices of infants²³. In particular, Simonetti stated that the classical authors who mention the Punic practice of sacrificing their own children to Kronos/Saturn, had mainly described killings carried out in different places and on exceptional occasions. Therefore, they would have been ritual acts connected with specific situations and not “regular” offerings of individuals in a specific sanctuary (i. e. “sacrifices” proper), as seems to be documented by the archaeological remains. Therefore, the passages from classical writers do not refer to remains deposited in a tophet. This meant that they had to be understood differently²⁴.

The “funerary” option, clearly formulated at the time by Sabatino Moscati, was accepted, without substantial criticism, by later scholars²⁵ (although dissenting voices were not lacking²⁶) and re-affirmed in various forms in a whole series of studies that continued in more or less the same vein. These proposed further new interpretations of the archaeological evidence and tended to disparage the information provided by Greek and Latin writers²⁷. It is significant that the epigraphic sources were not re-examined in the same way.

2.5 Critique, nuances and the vindication of previous interpretations

Following the studies mentioned above, the “funerary” interpretation seemed to prevail²⁸ and it is still now considered by some scholars to be an increasingly popular

²³ SIMONETTI 1983; she in turn derived the occasional killing / regular sacrifice distinction from BRELICH 1967. See now XELLA 2010a.

²⁴ The scholar who has made the greatest contribution to a reinterpretation of the classical sources in relation to the tophet is Sergio Ribichini, who was from the outset in full agreement with the theories proposed by Moscati (see RIBICHINI 1987; 1990) and co-author, together with the latter, of a number of articles on the subject (see for ex. the already mentioned MOSCATI – RIBICHINI 1991).

²⁵ See, for example, FANTAR 1993a: 251-285; 300-303 (and already FANTAR 1990); GRAS *et al.* 1989: 170-191; GRAS *et al.* 1991. Note the synthetic (and successful) nature of some of the works cited. Cf. other contemporary synthetic presentations like GARBINI 1994: 67-68.

²⁶ Cf. for example the several treatments of the subject in a well-known reference work published some years later: *DCPP*, s. v. “Molk”, “Sacrifices”, “Tophet”; cf. also LANCEL 1992: 268-276; 1995; LPIŃSKI 1995: 438-450, 476-483. It is worth noting that some of these opinions were held in the same milieu where the funerary hypothesis had prevailed – in some Italian and francophone circles. The funerary hypothesis was not equally successful outside: cf. for ex. the works of González Wagner and Ruiz Cabrero referred to in GONZÁLEZ WAGNER – RUIZ CABRERO 2007 (for ex. GONZÁLEZ WAGNER 1993, contemporary with the earlier cited works; these authors developed the ideas of Stager about the population control function of the tophet rites, cf. STAGER 1980; STAGER - WOLFF 1980). See also for ex. MÜLLER 1997 (cf. MÜLLER 1998 too) or the later (geographically) antipodal perspective of AZIZE 2007 on the discussion.

²⁷ According to these scholars, the information from classical writers, biased by prejudices against the “barbarians” and against their enemy Carthage, would have been accepted by modern scholars without paying enough attention to the intertextual relationships of the ancient texts and to the function – within the respective cultures – of the internal *topoi* about other cultures that these texts presented. See in this sense the several works of Ribichini, for example those gathered in RIBICHINI 2000; 2013.

²⁸ With the wind of the general historiographical trends apparently blowing in favour of the hypothesis; see for example a particular view of the historiographical context at that time in GARNAND 2002; see also GROTTANELLI 1999 (note that these authors didn’t support the funerary hypothesis). Cf. the point of view of RIBICHINI 2000 or BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2004.

opinion²⁹, although, over the years, a series of critical comments has made the overall question more complex. Some scholars have been perplexed by the possibility of understanding the archaeological features of a tophet as indicative of a necropolis. Others have not accepted that all the heterogeneous information from classical writers is tendentious. Others still have pointed out the contradictions inherent in the funerary hypothesis, particularly in the light of epigraphic data³⁰.

In fact, the blunt refusal to accept the tophet as a sanctuary proper, and to see the human remains contained in the urns as the result of real infant sacrifices, had already been somewhat nuanced, particularly after S. Moscati's death³¹, by even the most well-known supporters of his hypothesis. S. Ribichini continues to maintain that the area is a place for burying infants who died from natural causes. However, he also accepts that the burials could in some cases be the result of specific rites, even bloody, that could have included functions belonging to the mechanism of a vow³². For her part, H. Bénichou-Safar has nuanced her opinion too. She still understands the tophet as a place where babies born dead or who had died at a very early age were buried, but she interprets the place as a sacred area where complex rites connected with infancy were performed. These rites included the offering of small animals, and even rare genuine infant sacrifices³³. She tends, therefore, to revise the funerary interpretation by formulating an intermediate proposal that sees the tophet as a sort of sacred place, between sanctuary and necropolis. Even these intermediate positions have not persuaded scholars convinced of the sacrificial interpretation, who have vigorously reopened the debate³⁴.

In our view and as already noted, one of the pivotal arguments in this debate is provided by the epigraphic evidence. However, the debate has shifted to the critique of literary sources and the analysis of the burnt remains³⁵, whereas epigraphic

²⁹ See for example RIBICHINI 2013, p. 223, n. 50 who thinks that “les partisans de cette nouvelle interprétation” are “de plus en plus nombreux”.

³⁰ See for example MOSCA 1975; CIASCA 1992; 2002; AMADASI GUZZO 2002; 2007-2008. There have also been methodological considerations; see for example XELLA 2006: 56-57 e LANCELLOTTI 2006: 67-69; cf. also XELLA 2010a.

³¹ On the weight of Moscati's influence in the studies, see XELLA 2010c.

³² In his words, the tophet was a place set apart for offerings of “infants who died at birth or shortly afterwards of natural causes, since they were weak or premature, buried for this reason in particular areas and with specific rites. It is also plausible that, in some cases, they were ill or deformed, in a certain sense ‘given back’ to the gods because substituted by healthy children or with a view to having further offspring without defects”, RIBICHINI 2000: 302. Cf. now RIBICHINI 2013.

³³ BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2004: 170-72, in particular 171: “S’agissant du sacrifice humain et de sa relation avec le tophet, nous considérons que s’il a été sans doute occasionnellement pratiqué par les Carthaginois, le sacrifice des enfants doit être décorrélié du tophet, sanctuaire-nécropole qui a pu en abriter les rares vestiges mais qui est par essence le lieu d’ensevelissement des très jeunes enfants décédés naturellement”. Cf. also, almost immediately after this work, DRIDI 2006: 189-193.

³⁴ See for ex. XELLA 2009; 2010b; 2012; XELLA *et al.* 2013 and Xella's contribution in this volume.

³⁵ For the debate on literary sources, see again GARNAND 2006; XELLA 2009. For the discussion on osteological analysis (and the recent polemic between the teams of Smith and Schwartz) see XELLA *et al.* 2013 and now specially the contribution of Garnand – Stager – Greene in this volume, as well as the article of Melchiorri (all of them with references). It is to be noted, however, that the starting point for the funerary hypothesis was the absence of infants in the Carthaginian necropoleis (a consideration that had led the tophet to be interpreted as a place for infant burial). Now, instead, some

information has only been considered in a limited way³⁶, making it necessary to re-examine it as a whole.

3. The inscriptions of the tophet

All the information provided by the inscriptions obliges us to interpret the tophet as a special sacrificial sanctuary throughout the whole of its history (beyond undeniable developments over space and time).

As is well known, almost all ancient texts obey a set of rules linked closely with traditional structures and formulae, that change only slowly in each location and mirror for future use the practices recorded in the text (well-known to contemporaries and therefore referred to elliptically). As in every society, such practices – especially religious practises – were also subject to strict rules and regulations, approved by a long tradition whose function served the survival and prosperity of the community (to which it also gave unity and identity). In funerary contexts, the formulae and vocabulary of the inscriptions are, obviously, related to the burial rituals for members of the group. Similarly, in votive contexts, the texts are connected with cultic practices intended to honour the gods of various communities with formulae and a lexicon that are specific and not interchangeable.

Usually, Phoenician funerary inscriptions indicate the name of the deceased to whom the tomb belongs and to whom the inscription relates. Often, the name is preceded by the word that indicates the place where the person rests and therefore to whom it belongs (“tomb of Magon”, “sarcophagus of ’Aḥirōm”), possibly with additional information on the deceased³⁷ and, very rarely, curses against violators of the tomb. Accordingly, they repeat the pattern of the inscriptions of ownership (“(object) of PN”)³⁸.

Inscriptions on gifts or votive inscriptions, on the other hand, mention directly (or indirectly, with a pronoun) the object made/offered and the name of the offerer. However, these are usually more complex and, in any case, have their own specific vocabulary. The objects mentioned are altars, statues, images, architectural elements,

defenders of the funerary hypothesis support the prenatal or newborn status of most of the infants buried in the tophet, thus causing the deceased children to disappear again almost completely from the archaeological record and, consequently, weakening the starting point of their argument.

³⁶ If one excludes rare marginal considerations: attention is usually concentrated on the rarity with which the term *mlk* is employed (which is, however, almost always found in the formulas of the earlier inscriptions, see §3.2 below; see also figs. 4-7) and on its reinterpretation as not relating to sacrifice (cf. e. g. BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2004, p. 153 — also BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 1993; BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 1995a — who interprets *mlk* as “passing under the yoke”, that is to say, an initiation rite). For the term and its most probable meaning, see again §3.2 below.

³⁷ The name of the deceased may be accompanied by mention of his family (usually the patronymic or even a longer genealogy, rarely with the presence of spouse or mother) and also of his role or position, and sometimes of his profession. In a few very rare inscriptions there is also information regarding his life and merits, including the use of formulae and *topoi* pertaining to other kinds of texts. These are, however, extremely rare and relate to the highest ranks of society; the best-known example is, in fact, almost unique: the inscription of king ’Eshmun’azor of Sidon, *KAI* 14.

³⁸ The seminal nature of this basic pattern is already visible in the alphabetic inscriptions of the second millennium BCE; see ZAMORA 2006; 2007. Note that PN = Personal Name; this abbreviation will be used throughout the rest of the text, tables and figure captions.

even complete buildings. Verbs are used that stress completion, donation, dedication or sacrifice, but the decisive element is the presence of specific deities, to whom the dedication of objects or the commemoration of votive acts are addressed. The formula of such inscriptions can include expressions of thanksgiving or requests for a favour. Moreover, they can refer to the motive and details of a vow³⁹. Right from the earliest Phoenician evidence, the funerary and votive inscriptions were clearly dissimilar, as in fact were the practices they commemorated.

The short presentation that follows shows that the inscriptions from the tophets were votive in character and therefore that the practices they record were gifts, offerings or sacrifices, but not ritual burials.

3.1 The votive character of the inscriptions and the specific nature of the votive act

The inscriptions of the tophet always commemorate something that has been “done” or “made” (*p'l*), “given” (*ytn*), “placed” (*šm*), “dedicated” (*ndr*) or “sacrificed” (*zbh*) for the gods, as can be read explicitly in most of the documents⁴⁰. This vocabulary occurs consistently in Phoenician and Punic inscriptions from various places and periods linked to obvious sacrifices or offerings. However, the epigraphy of the tophet has special features within Phoenician votive epigraphy, showing its connection with a specific votive and well-defined act, exclusive to this sacred space.

In fact, the inscriptions found in sanctuaries, whether or not connected with a city, show the same votive formulae as the inscriptions of a tophet. However, as noted above, the objects or items normally dedicated in sanctuaries are generally cultic objects, architectural works or sculptures. In the earliest dedications, the verbs have the concrete meanings: “to make”, “to give”, “to build”, later often replaced by *ndr* “to dedicate”, following the same evolution that is found, as we shall see, in the inscriptions of tophet-sanctuaries. In the tophet inscriptions, however, within the same general scheme, the category of the offering changes completely. Where indicated, it comprises the noun *mlk* (in the earlier period preceded by the noun *nšb*, “stela”, in the construct state), further explained by expressions that specify its nature. The term *mlk* – together with other expressions that we shall examine – is never used in other types of sanctuary, not even when animal sacrifices were offered, whose categories are listed in the so-called “sacrificial tariffs”⁴¹. The complements of the word *mlk* – parallel to the objects offered in “common” sanctuaries – refer, not to objects or buildings but in all likelihood to human beings or animals.

³⁹ On the chronological and, in part, regional development of the generic formulae of the dedications, see AMADASI GUZZO 1989-90, with preceding bibliography.

⁴⁰ Only those rare inscriptions in which personal names alone appear could be confused with funerary inscriptions (see above). However, the parallels enable us to interpret these exceptional cases as short forms of more common texts, where the other formulaic elements are elliptic and taken as understood.

⁴¹ For example, the “Tariff of Marseille”, *KAI* 69 (= *CIS* I 165), lists, for animal offerings, the sacrificial categories *kll*, *šw't* and *šlm kll*. The comment in *KAI* attempts to explain the nature of these offerings (related to the kinds of sacrifices listed in the Hebrew Bible), which are characterised particularly in terms of the different treatment of the meat, which was either entirely burnt or divided variously between the offerers and priests (who were also, in certain cases, paid). See also AMADASI GUZZO 1993.

3.2 The name and interpretation of the votive act: *mlk*

The name of the specific act of offering or sacrifice in the tophet was therefore *mlk*. O. Eissfeldt, followed by J.-G. Février⁴², had connected the noun with the verbal root that, in the simple form, means “to go” (*yłk*, in Phoenician). In the causative (“to cause to go”), it would have taken on the meaning of “to offer in sacrifice”. Février made a comparison with Hebrew, in which the noun *’ôlāh*, “holocaust”, is derived from *’lh*, “to go up”.

This explanation – initially considered by many scholars as very uncertain – has since been confirmed, as Février has shown, by the use of the verb *yłk* in the causative in the famous bilingual inscription in Phoenician and Hieroglyphic Luwian from Karatepe (Turkey, *KAI* 26). Sections A II 19-III 1 (lower gate) and C IV 2-3 (statue), celebrate the building of a new capital (Azatiwataya) through the institution of seasonal sacrifices (with animal victims), using the expression *yłk zbh*, “(all the ‘territory’) shall/should offer a sacrifice...” (see fig. 3)⁴³.

Therefore, *mlk* is almost certainly a noun with the prefix *m-*, from the root *yłk*, with the meaning “sacrificial offering” (a similar formation is found in *mtnt*, “gift” from *ytn*, “to give”), the use of which – as far as is known – has become specific for the offerings carried out in a tophet. It is also probable that this term underlies the biblical Molok, (con)fused perhaps with the divine name *Mlk* (*Milk*), formed from the same consonants – but related to the root *mlk*, “to be king”.

Usually, the term *mlk* appears on the oldest inscribed stelae (and as we shall see, already in the 6th century it also occurs in the feminine form *mlkt*). In the inscriptions from this initial phase (see figs. 4, 5 and 6) the term occurs right at the beginning of the text, according to the following pattern⁴⁴:

<i>nšb mlk</i>	<i>b’l</i> <i>’mr</i>	<i>’š ytn</i> ⁴⁵ + PN	<i>lb’l ḥmn ’dn</i>
“Stela of a <i>mlk</i>	of <i>b’l</i> of a lamb	that X gave	to Ba’l Hamon, the Lord”

Therefore, the formula⁴⁶ was initially made up of clear elements in succession: mention of the inscribed object (the memorial stela, which is not the gift itself, but the witness and symbol of the actual gift and its permanence⁴⁷); mention of a certain type of

⁴² EISSFELDT 1935; FÉVRIER 1953. On the etymology cf. also particularly ISRAEL 1990.

⁴³ The sequence of terms is slightly different in the two versions, cf. the recent edition of Röllig in ÇAMBEL 1998. On these passages see also Hawkins in MORPURGO DAVIES – HAWKINS 1987; RÖLLIG 1995; cf. also AMADASI GUZZO 2000.

⁴⁴ Cf. *CIS* I 123 a-b (from Malta; see fig. 4 below) and *CIS* I 5684-5685 (from Carthage; see fig. 5 below).

⁴⁵ The verb can also be *p’l* “to make”; slightly later we find *šm* “to place” (with the god’s name already placed at the beginning of the text; see §3.5 below).

⁴⁶ More detailed analyses of the formulae used in tophet inscriptions can be found in MOSCA 1975; AMADASI GUZZO 1986a or AMADASI GUZZO 2002.

⁴⁷ Although this has been suggested, the stela cannot be the object of the offering: unlike the urns, it is not always present (and not always inscribed). When there is a stela, it serves a function similar to that of funerary stelae (where the task of preserving the memory of the deceased, and his presence amongst the living, is clearly stated): to commemorate and identify that which has been given. Like

act (*mlk* + complement); the formula indicating that the act was a gift and the name of the offerer (verb + subject); the syntagm that presents the deity for whom it is intended. However, although the expression denoting the offering is not completely clear, its general interpretation is as follows: a person – the offerer – has placed a stela that commemorates a *mlk*, “sacrifice” consisting either of a *b'l* (as we shall see, a disputed term) or of a lamb (*'mr*), the victims that were to be offered to the deity.

3.3 The deities to whom offerings were made and the men who made these offerings

From the very earliest examples, the deity present in the formulae is Ba‘l Hamon. Tinnit accompanies the god in most of the documentation, but her presence is quite limited in time and space: the goddess appears regularly in the dedications almost exclusively at Carthage from circa the 5th century. Note also that some African stelae call the god receiving the offerings Ba‘l or Ba‘l Addir (= “powerful”, “great”). It should also be recalled that a dedication of this type to Eshmun was found in Phoenicia (see fig. 2). This inscription would prove – with some uncertainty, however – the existence also in the East of a rite similar to the one attested in the tophet, and the non-exclusive nature of the god to whom the offering was dedicated⁴⁸.

The offerer is generally a man. However, in Carthage there is no lack of dedications by women who, in some cases, give female ancestry⁴⁹. There are even rare cases in which there are two donors, possibly connected by family relationships (see fig. 8a-b)⁵⁰. In extremely rare examples, the offering is made “for” (*l*, “in favour of”? “on behalf of”?) another person (see fig. 8c-d)⁵¹. The genealogies and the names of officials and professions mentioned show the presence of differentiated social classes, from aristocrats (*sufetes*, *rab*, priests) to craftsmen, dependents and even foreigners (see for example the dedications in Greek from Constantine, ancient Cirta Regia).

3.4 The offering: *b'l* / *'dm* and *'mr*

The exact meaning of the name of the offering seems to be more uncertain. In the same place as the expression *mlk b'l*, one finds *mlk 'dm*, which seems to have had a similar meaning. In fact, in almost all the sites the expression *mlk 'mr* appears, whereas, if *mlk b'l* does occur (as it already does in the 7th century BCE, on Malta, see fig. 4), *mlk 'dm* is not present and of course vice versa. In any case, *mlk 'dm* does not occur in the archaic period. In other words, the following opposition seems to apply:

the imprecations that appear in the funerary texts against potential violators of the tomb, even just by eliminating the inscription, some texts from the tophet prohibit the stela and text from being removed and, consequently the memory of the gift – and, therefore, its very existence – expunged.

⁴⁸ The inscription is that from Nebi Yunis (long thought to be a fake, following an evaluation by LIDZBARSKI 1898: 131-132; 1902: 285-287); cf. DELAVAUULT – LEMAIRE 1976; PICARD 1976; GIANTO 1987. See now also XELLA in press.

⁴⁹ AMADASI GUZZO 1988.

⁵⁰ Two brothers at Mozia, see AMADASI GUZZO 1986b: 29-30, n. 22; a father and daughter at Carthage in CIS I 5702 (see fig. 8b); also CIS I 384 (father and son; see fig. 8a), 382 (a woman and a man), 383 (a woman and a man), 385 (two women), 386 (a woman and a man), 4596 (brother and sister).

⁵¹ For example CIS I 198, CIS I 5939 (see fig. 8c).

<i>mlk b'l</i>	<i>mlk 'mr</i>
“ <i>mlk</i> of a person (?)”	
<i>mlk 'dm</i>	“ <i>mlk</i> of a lamb”
“ <i>mlk</i> of an individual (?)”	

There seems to be little doubt about the meaning of *'mr* as “lamb”⁵². The semantic field of *b'l* is wide, ranging from “lord” and “citizen” to a more generic meaning⁵³: e. g. *b'l zbh*, which occurs in several inscriptions, is not “the lord of sacrifice”, but simply “he who sacrifices” (the one who offers the sacrifice, not the one who performs it, who instead is called *zbh*, a participle). Therefore, the noun *b'l* could have a meaning such as “person”⁵⁴. The most usual meaning of *'dm* is “individual, human being”⁵⁵. We may therefore conclude that what was offered was either a lamb or a human being. Even though various alternative meanings have been proposed for these expressions, none of them are incontrovertible⁵⁶.

3.5 The development of the formula and the sacrificial nature of the offering: *mtnt* and *ndr*, *zbh* and *nš'*

As early as the end of the archaic period (6th century BCE) the formula changes. As noted before, instead of *mlk* it is possible to find the feminine term *mlkt* (with the same meaning?⁵⁷). This form is the only one present at Mozia (see fig. 7), whereas elsewhere, for example in Carthage, it occurs together with *mlk*⁵⁸ (see already fig. 5a-b). The main change, however, is the presence of the name of the god at the beginning of the inscription, according to the following pattern:

<i>l'dn lb'l ḥmn</i>	<i>mlk</i>	<i>b'l / 'dm</i> ⁵⁹ <i>'mr</i>	('z)	<i>'š ytn / ndr + PN</i>
“to the Lord Ba'l Hamon	(this is a) <i>mlk</i>	of <i>b'l / 'dm</i> of a lamb		who X gave/vowed”

From this period on, instead of the expression *mlk* + complement, in several examples the term *mtnt*, “gift”, appears: and so the *mlk* is clearly a gift made to the god(s). Later, the term *mlk* is used more rarely (but does not disappear): what is offered

⁵² This has, however, been placed in doubt. See, in particular, FÉVRIER 1955: 53 and, amongst more recent works, LIPÍŃSKI 2002: 143. Lipiński interprets *mlk 'mr* as sacrifice molk of “that which has been promised”; he translates *mlk b'l* as “le sacrifice molk (offert par) le maître de la victime immolée”; he does not translate *mlk 'dm*.

⁵³ HOFTIJZER - JONGELING 1995: 182-184, s. v. *b'l*₂ (esp. p. 184, n. 5).

⁵⁴ Cf. the latino-punic inscription *IRT* 827, where *bal ysrim* (l. 2) probably means “a person of twenty years”.

⁵⁵ HOFTIJZER - JONGELING 1995: 13-14, s. v. *'dm*₁.

⁵⁶ See again, the previously cited FÉVRIER 1955; MOSCA 1975: 56-77; AMADASI GUZZO 1986a; LIPÍŃSKI 1988; 1993; 2002; AMADASI GUZZO 2002; 2007-2008.

⁵⁷ See also the rare *mtn* compared to the usual *mtnt*.

⁵⁸ See references in HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 640, s. v. *mlk*_s.

⁵⁹ The noun *'dm* is not attested in the 6th century. It is not possible to establish the date of its first use, as the chronology of the Carthaginian inscribed stelae is not precise.

is often a *ndr*, “vow”, that (someone) “vowed” (*’š ndr*) – and perhaps the recurrence of this non-specific expression is an indication of a wider distribution of the offerings than in the earlier period⁶⁰; as usual, a personal name follows:

<i>l’dn lb’l hmn</i>	<i>ndr</i>	<i>’š ndr + PN</i>
“to the Lord Ba’l Hamon	vow	that X vowed”

In several cases, the noun *ndr* is understood and, after the name of the god(s) only the expression *’š ndr*, “(to the Lord Ba’l Hamon), this is what X has vowed” occurs.

Most of the inscriptions later than the 5th century BCE come from the tophet of Carthage. Their number increases considerably, especially in the final centuries of the life of that Punic city (4th-2nd centuries BCE)⁶¹. It is in this impressive set of documents that expressions of the type (*ndr*) *’š ndr* become the most common and it is here that the recipient god is combined with the goddess Tinnit, in a well-known customary expression: *lrbt ltnt pn b’l wl’dn lb’l hmn*, “To the lady, to Tinnit, ‘face of Ba’l’, and to the lord, Ba’l Hamon” (see figs. 8-9). These are the best known documents, which is why their structure and their most common formulae (which however are not necessarily the most “eloquent”) have become almost paradigmatic. However, in Carthage alone, the documentary evidence is richer. Therefore, the customs of the Carthaginian tophet must also be understood in relation to the variants that, to some extent, show how much is implicit in the more generic formulae. It should also be noted that, given the importance of the city, what is found in Carthage would probably have been spread to smaller centres. These, in turn, expressed themselves perhaps more freely in respect of tradition, particularly as the metropolis became weaker and eventually fell.

On the whole, in fact, the same expressions and the same terms recur in many places in North Africa, but sometimes in different combinations and in some tophet-sanctuaries there is a preference for certain types of formula. Local usage occurs especially in more recent periods in which, moreover, a greater variety of patterns seems to be used contemporaneously, although occasionally. Undoubtedly this depends, to some extent, on customs peculiar to certain sanctuaries and is, furthermore, also probably due to the fragmentation of traditions after the destruction of Carthage. However, it should be noted that the uneven distribution of the documentation, which is rare in the earlier period, combined with a greater rigidity of formulae at that time, makes it difficult to identify differences of rite and/or ideology in the various periods within the various settlements.

⁶⁰ In reality, since the inscribed stelae have never been examined in concomitance with any certain relationship to the urns or their contents, we cannot determine whether the differences found in the formulae reflect differences in the offerings made, or whether the same “offering” *molck* – no longer specifically mentioned, but implicit in the use of various generic terms – could have consisted of other kind of gifts.

⁶¹ Inscriptions from the tophet of Carthage dated with certainty to the 5th century are rare and hard to identify with any precision. *CIS* I 5510, found at Salammbô in 1937 and which presumably commemorated a ceremony (or construction?) in the tophet, is attributed to the end of the 5th century BCE, see KRAHMALKOV 1974 (cf. GARBINI 1986: 24-25 but also SCHMITZ 1990: 39-142; 1994).

Expressions and terms from more recent periods are particularly important for the whole interpretation of the tophet. For example, in a group of Neopunic inscriptions, from the site of Guelma (ancient Calama, in Algeria), a verb and a noun commonly used in these contexts is *zbh*, “to offer in sacrifice”, “sacrifice”. Sometimes *nš*’, “to offer” (literally, “to raise”) is used⁶² (see already the verb in Carthage, fig. 9a-b). The canonical expression used in these dedications – in later and untraditional spellings – is *zbh bmlk*, “he has sacrificed/offered in *mlk*”, which is accompanied by the expression *'zrm š* or *'št* (see fig. 11)⁶³. Such formulae show the uninterrupted perception of the offerings as “sacrificial” in nature and their identification as *mlk* offerings.

3.6 The offering qualified, specified or justified: *'zrm š* / *'št*, *(b)šrm* / *(b)šry*, *bty* / *btm* / *bnty* / *bntm* and *bmšrm*

Therefore, over time, as we have seen, the formulae become less uniform and to some extent more fluid. Other expressions accompany the noun *mlk* and any complement it may have, or occur alone, providing new information. Often they are *'zrm š* and/or *'zrm 'št*, the meaning of which is very uncertain, but which undeniably specify the offering (see figs. 8b, 9a-b and g, 11)⁶⁴. Most probably, the nouns *š* and *'št* should be connected with the terms that mean “man” and “woman”. The first term, *'zrm*, occurs, outside the context of the tophet, only in the greatly discussed inscription from Sidon of king Eshmun'azor (*KAI* 14)⁶⁵. As P. Xella has noted, in the text the term *'zrm* follows an expression that denotes Eshmun'azor's short life (in parallel to it) and precedes the two words that describe him as “orphan, son of a widow”. It seems to denote a premature death, in a context that emphasises his death at a young age (he must have been 14 years old) and his being “worthy of mourning”⁶⁶. Therefore it is difficult not to interpret the formulae of the tophet as referring to victims/beings, male or female, young (whose life was cut short prematurely). Although neither the nature of these victims nor the etymology of the term *'zrm* is clear, the expressions used probably refer to human beings (excluding other proposals, as the one which sees in *'zrm* a kind of animal, perhaps a lamb)⁶⁷.

⁶² CHABOT 1916: 498-520 = CHABOT 1948: 72-94. For most recent commentary on the orthography of the Guelma stelae, see KERR 2013.

⁶³ The expression, that we shall study later, was also written with spellings that reflect a significant phonetic and phonological change in the language.

⁶⁴ The expression recurs a number of times at Carthage and is attested down to Roman times in various writings (see, in particular, FÉVRIER 1955: 57-63 and MOSCA 1975: 78-85). See, for example, *CIS* I 3781 (= 5550; see fig. 9a), 3783 (see fig. 9b), 5702 (see fig. 8b), 5741 (see fig. 9g).

⁶⁵ On the various interpretations see HOFTIJZER - JONGELING 1995: 26-27, s. v. 'zr₂. For *'zrm š* and *'št*, see pp. 642-643, s. v. *mlk₅*.

⁶⁶ XELLA 2007.

⁶⁷ P. Xella, by contrast, proposed for this term a meaning similar to “premature”, “untimely” (human being), a meaning that he has compared especially with the adjective *áhōros* present in some Greek funerary epigraphs found in Phoenicia. See again XELLA 2007.

Occasionally another expression, *(b)šrm* or *(b)šry*, is found either alone or together with the previous expressions, and is often followed by *btm* or *bntm* (or *bty* or *bnty*)⁶⁸. Even in these cases, such expressions can accompany the mention of *mlk* or may, instead, be found alone or together with a different formula (such as *'zrm 'š* or *'zrm 'št*). The first term is also written *(b)š'rm* (*bš'ry* and *bš'ry/m*)⁶⁹, a variant that makes the interpretation more uncertain (see figs. 9c-g, 10). The identification in this expression of the noun *š'r*, which means “flesh”, found only in sacrificial tariffs⁷⁰, preceded by the preposition *b-*, “in”, is conjectural, but possible. In one case at least, *š'r* occurs without *b-*⁷¹, supporting the hypothesis that this element is the preposition. However, completely convincing interpretations have not been proposed⁷². For *b(n)tm/ty* discussion is even more open⁷³, but in a Latin Neo-Punic bilingual from Leptis Magna (*IP*T 27.8 = Trip. 32) the expression corresponds to Latin *ipsius*. Even though the etymology of the term cannot be found, a meaning equivalent to Latin *ipse* is likely, on the basis of other contexts as well⁷⁴. Therefore it seems possible to propose for these

⁶⁸ HOFTIJZER - JONGELING 1995: 204, s. v. bšr₂ e pp. 1216-1217, s. v. tm₁. See in particular SZNYCER 1966-67.

⁶⁹ *bšr* is found alone in various inscriptions, after the name and genealogy of the offerer, in *CIS* I 301 (see fig. 9c), 4894 (*bš'r*); 302-305 (see fig. 9e), 2678, 2909, 3750 (*bšr*); 299, 300 (*bš'r*; see fig. 9d); in the same context 3886 has [*b*]š'r't, apparently a plural (HOFTIJZER – JONGELING 1995: 204 proposed “reading [*b*]š'r'm preferable?”, but the reproduction of the *CIS* would not appear to support this hypothesis); *bšr* (in different writings) + suffix -y(ʿ) is attested in the same position in *CIS* I 296 (*bš'ry*); 3822 (*bš'ry*); 3785 = KAI 75 (*bšry*); *bšrm* (in different writings), plural form or with suffix of the 3rd person singular -m, is attested in the same position in *CIS* I 3731, 4872 (*bš'rm*), 297, 298, 2441, 3737 (*bšrm*; see fig. 9f); 294 (*bš'rm*). For *mlk bšr* at the end of the text (after the offerer), see *CIS* I 306 (fragmentary).

⁷⁰ HOFTIJZER - JONGELING 1995: 1099, s. v. š'r₃.

⁷¹ *CIS* I 5928 (= 5871). There is also, not attested elsewhere in Phoenician but well-known in Hebrew and Aramaic, the substantive *bšr* / *bšr*, also meaning “flesh”.

⁷² Typology of the forms and history of the interpretations in MOSCA 1975: 85-97 (with the suggestion that the expression was equivalent to *bmšrm*). The hypothesis that *bšr* is formed from *b-* + *š'r*, proposed by FÉVRIER, 1953: 10-15 and FÉVRIER 1960: 172, appears to be supported by *CIS* I 295 and 5685. The greater frequency of the writing *bšr* compared to *bš'r* does not seem to be particularly significant given the early loss of ' in pronunciation. The most commonly accepted interpretation of the expression *bšr* was, in fact, “in the place of (his) flesh” = “(his) son”, see the already mentioned works of Février. This interpretation is uncertain, especially given the difficulty posed by the frequent absence of the suffix. It should also be noted that *š'r* in the *KAI* 69 and *CIS* I 170 tariffs means “meat” in the concrete sense of part of a butchered animal whereas, in the texts listed here, it is used as an equivalent of “descendant”, “son”. However, the meaning “descendant” is supported by the presence of *(b)š'rm* alongside *šmh* “sprout”, thus “progeny” or “offspring” in *KAI* 162 and 163 (Constantine) although the two inscriptions, read and interpreted by FÉVRIER 1953b: 161-171, are quite uncertain (including their reading).

⁷³ *bšry bnty* recurs in *CIS* I 5507 (where the final *bn* may be a mistake), 5695, possibly 5111 (*bšry bn...*); *bšrm bntm* occurs in *CIS* I 3746; *bšry bntm* in *CIS* I 4929. Elsewhere (see below) the second term appears almost always with the writing *btm*; it has therefore been identified with the expression *btm* which, in Punic inscriptions, equates to “de sua pecunia” and has been linked to *tm* “complete” (*tmm*, see HOFTIJZER - JONGELING 1995: 1216-1217, s. v. tm₁). The Carthaginian examples, however, cast doubt on the usual explanation. The example of *CIS* I 4929 *bšry btm* is noteworthy given the differences in the word-endings, which suggest that *btm* does not have the pronominal suffix.

⁷⁴ See KRAHMALKOV 2000: 129-130, s. v. bt iii.

expressions a meaning such as “consisting of / as his own flesh”⁷⁵ or “at the price of his own flesh” (see fig. 9g). When the preposition *b-* is missing there would be apposition: “(i. e.) his own flesh”. When *b(n)tm/y* is not present, the meaning of the expression would simply be “his flesh”, perhaps meaning his offspring (see figs. 9c-f; 10).

Finally, in only one case, the expression *bmsrm*⁷⁶ occurs, which is also debated, but probably means “in his need” / “in his affliction” (see fig. 8d). This would then be the motivation for the gift. Other expressions occur in isolated and/or uncertain cases⁷⁷ (such as those that may include the term *šmh*, “sprout”, used in Phoenician to denote offspring⁷⁸) and are even more obscure and subject to debate. In some cases, they seem to be dictated by special circumstances⁷⁹.

As a whole, all these expressions, though not frequent, are neither isolated nor heterogenous. They always refer back to the same terms and seem to be connected with the same type of offerings (which must have had a limited typology). Even if the term denoting the rite of the offering (*mlk / mlkt*) could have had or have assumed, over time, a wider or more generic meaning than the presumed meaning of the “(holocaust) offering” of a baby or of a substitute, it always denoted the particular rite performed only in the tophet.

3.7 The formula of thanksgiving and the curses

After the formula of offering to the god(s), the texts sometimes – as already mentioned – have an expression of thanksgiving because the deity had listened to the donor’s prayer: *k šm ‘ ql dbry*, “indeed [the god] has heard the voice of his words”, in inscriptions up to the 5th century. Over time, various types of conclusion are found, often simpler and always very generic: the believer thanks the god or gods because

⁷⁵ KRAHMALKOV 2000: 452-453, s. v. š’r; translates *mlk ‘dm bš’rm btm* in *KAI* 105 (see fig. 10) as “a *molk*-sacrifice of a human being of his own flesh”.

⁷⁶ *CIS* I 198 (see fig. 8d).

⁷⁷ Expressions related to *bšr* or *btm* but found in isolation are: *CIS* I 295: 5-6 with the formula partially reconstructed: [*š*]’*r š bš[’rm b]m* (or *bnt]m*); note that *bš’rm* can be reconstructed, but not with certainty, also in *CIS* I 294: 4); *bšrtqht kblm* in *CIS* I 5600 (*bšr tqh t kblm* according to Février (quoted in *CIS*), who gives the translation: “pro carne (id est pro infante) accipies oblationem ejus”. It would seem possible that the offering expression ended, as elsewhere, with *bšr*, and that *tqh t kblm* was a final formula in the place of the more usual thanks and blessings – with, however, the meaning of “offering” for the term *kbl* being entirely conjectural. In *CIS* I 5689 the text ends with the expression *’ršt šry* (the (part) chosen?? / requested?? of his flesh? See AMADASI GUZZO 2002: 104, n. 28); *CIS* I 5928 (= 5871 = Cb 738) has *m’zrt ’ršty bntm*, which, according to the *CIS* is to be related to the family of the offerer, “(coming) from the family (or clientele) of *’ršty*” (see also AMADASI GUZZO 2002: 104) which could exemplify a use of *b(n)tm* in contexts not exclusively connected with offerings. The relation with Neo-Punic commemorative inscriptions containing *btm* remains unclear; there the meaning generally ascribed to it is “in all” or “at his expenses” (but see the expression as used at Constantine).

⁷⁸ The term may appear in inscriptions from Constantine, of very uncertain reading and interpretation, see n. 72 above.

⁷⁹ For example, the inscription *CIS* I 3778 = *KAI* 78, found in the area of the tophet, is a dedication to a number of gods, in the following order: Ba’l Šamēm, Tinnit, Ba’l Ḥamōn and Ba’l *mgnm*; it commemorates the erection of a building and appears to mention the “place sacred (to)” Ba’l Ḥamōn as its site (*bkdš* (sic!) *b’l ḥmn*).

he/they have “heard” (*k šm‘ ql’*, “indeed he/they heard his voice”⁸⁰), with the possible addition of the clause “he/they blessed him” (*brk’*)⁸¹; or else the dedicator asks to be listened to (*yšm‘ ql’*, “listen to his voice”) and – possibly – to be blessed (*ybrk’*, “bless him”)⁸². The formulae are so generic that they do not allow us to determine the reasons for the offering (and in any case, in the documentation as a whole, these formulae are not that frequent). However, they are identical in the votive inscriptions from all the Phoenician and Punic sanctuaries.

An inscription from Constantine ends with a slightly more explicit expression: *‘zr’ ytn l’ n‘m*, “(the deity) helped him, did him good” (lit., “gave him goodness”)⁸³. In some cases, in the later period, the day of sacrifice is defined as *ym n‘m wym brk*, “a good day and a blessed day”⁸⁴. However, these are isolated developments and in any case they are linked, in meaning and function, to the formulae which occurs most often.

Finally, the closing curses that occur in some texts from the tophets belong to a more general context: they are curses against whoever will “rob” (*gnb*) or in any case will tamper with the gift (*mtnt*) or the stone (*‘bn*)⁸⁵. Outside the tophet, these formulae occur both in funerary inscriptions and in votive texts. In both cases, examples are rare (in fact these formulae are extremely rare in the various tophet-sanctuaries) and use a range of different expressions. Once again, these rare expressions from the tophet are distinct from those used in funerary epigraphs because they refer to the stela or “gift” and invoke the specific deities of the tophet against anyone daring to violate the monument (see fig. 9b).

3.8 The name for the sanctuary

The term that in Phoenician denoted the place we call a tophet does not seem to be a specific noun but simply *bt*, “sanctuary, temple”⁸⁶; the expression (*‘šr*) *qdš*, “sacred (place)” may also occur⁸⁷, possibly referring to a building inside the wider area of the tophet. These are, therefore, generic terms. The word *hmn*, a kind of “baldachin” or small chapel (the derivation for the epithet of the god Ba‘l Hamon?) could be present in a defective spelling (*‘mn*) on a stela from Constantine⁸⁸. In other words, in this case the

⁸⁰ In these formulae, the verbs remain fixed in the singular, even though there may be two divinities, as is the norm at Carthage for most of the documents. This appears to be due to the strength of tradition formats, which led to continuity—at least in the orthography—at the expense of the morpho-syntactic correctness. In regards to the translation *k* = “indeed”, see *PPG*³ §257.1.

⁸¹ The “blessing” from a god (accorded or requested) never appears on the earliest stelae, as is also the case for dedicatory inscriptions in other kinds of sanctuaries than the tophets.

⁸² The verbs can, in fact, be in the suffixed or prefixed form or one can be in the prefixed form and the other in the suffixed (of the type *yšm‘ ql’ brk’*). More rarely, a single verb is present (usually *šm’*); the order of the two verbs can also be inverted.

⁸³ BERTRANDY – SZNYCER 1987: n. 129.

⁸⁴ This expression presents another series of problems: see, in particular, amongst others, FANTAR 1993B: 125-133; FERJAOUI 1994: 9-12.

⁸⁵ See *CIS* I 3783 (see fig. 9b), 3784, 4945; 5510 is of a more complex type.

⁸⁶ *Bt b‘l ‘dr* “sanctuary of Ba‘l Addir”, in BERTHIER - CHARLIER 1952-55: n. 27 (= *KAI* 115).

⁸⁷ *‘šr qdš* in *CIS* I 3779; *kdš* perhaps for *qdš* in *KAI* 78 (= *CIS* I 3778).

⁸⁸ BERTHIER – CHARLIER 1952-55, n. 106; see XELLA 1991: 69-70.

lexicon does not seem to be different from that used for other places of worship. However, it is not the same as the lexicon used in funerary contexts⁸⁹.

4. Epigraphic information and other sources: the tophet as a specific type of sanctuary

The inscriptions examined so far are thus clearly and exclusively votive, and so specify the tophet as a sanctuary. Any characteristic that may have funerary connections (in this case, with a necropolis) is completely excluded from the texts. These record, as a whole, a dedication to Ba‘l (or to Tinnit and Ba‘l) by the offerer (who may also thank the deity for having been heard – or in some cases can ask to be heard), in a place called “temple” or “sanctuary”, of a specific type of offering called *mlk*. The offering must have consisted of living beings, human or animals (in the second case, mostly sheep). This conclusion – although generic – can reliably be combined with the information provided by biblical passages and by classical sources (and with the data from inscriptions in Greek, from Constantine, or, later, in Latin, from N’gaus) and with the archaeological remains.

On the basis of archaeological remains, and in connection with epigraphic data, it can be stated – although this has once again been denied or, at least, doubted recently – that the offering to the deities consisted in the cremated contents of the urns. In fact, the urns comprise the essential, immovable furniture of the tophet: they are never absent whereas the stelae can be missing (at least before Roman times). To make room for other incinerations, since space was restricted, very often stelae were removed⁹⁰ to provide new ground in which to place additional urns – on top of which there may or may not have been new cippi or stelae. But the vases with the ashes remained in position, through piety and sacredness and, therefore, must have contained the real offering to the deities.

The contents of the urns, the subject of fierce debate both today and in the past, is clear as a whole, irrespective of discussions old and new. Generally the contents were the incinerated remains of very small infants (their age and health condition are debated, just as it is debated whether they had come to term, or at what development stage they were offered). Together with babies or in their place, small animals (normally lambs or kids) were also burned. This practice has been interpreted as a substitution sacrifice. Sheep and various animals, sometimes not complete, are also present, at least in Carthage; all these victims can be understood as offerings connected with the principal sacrifice⁹¹. As the animals were certainly sacrificial victims and as they appear together with or instead of human remains, it seems clear that also these human remains were (at least conceptually) sacrificial offerings.

⁸⁹ In the funerary inscriptions the word for tomb is usually *qbr*; in the rare cases where *bt* appears, the word is connected with the concept of “eternity”: the expression used is in fact *bt ‘lm*, “house of eternity”.

⁹⁰ Despite the prohibitions included in a few inscriptions, as we have seen (see §3.7 above).

⁹¹ BÉNICHOU-SAFAR 2004, in particular pp. 51-52. On anthropological analysis of the remains contained within the urns of the various tophets, see again in this volume the contributions of Garnand – Stager – Greene and that by Melchiorri, with references.

Archaeological analysis of the sanctuaries called tophets also shows the differences that existed from place to place. It also shows structures, other than the field of urns: chapels which may have had divine images, small buildings for uncertain purposes, altars, possible thrones, and wells. The differences between the various sanctuaries and between the rites that may be reconstructed at each site have often been emphasised⁹². This variety, over time and space, can be connected with the variety shown by the inscriptions: each place tends to use particular types of expression. Over time, there is a preference for certain structures or for particular terms differing from the vocabulary of earlier periods used in various places⁹³ (presumably in connection with parallel changes in the rites and therefore in their material appearance).

With the passage of time, the so-called tophet, when it persists, always remains a “sanctuary” or becomes a “temple”. In Africa, the sanctuaries/temples that continue the old tophet-sanctuaries are dedicated to Saturn and perhaps to his companion Juno Coelestis, in perfect agreement with the Punic deities that were once lords of these places, as the inscriptions show. The connection with infants (or in any case with offspring), even if no longer exclusive, is still attested in the imperial period, especially by the stelae from N’gaus.

5. Sanctuaries and necropoleis

The interpretation of the tophets as “special necropolis” is not compatible with the evidence of continuous worship of specific deities in these places. It is possible to remember the “sacred” nature of the necropoleis, given that they were also places where various kinds of rituals and cultic practices took place⁹⁴. However, they were never confused with places of worship where divine beings received offerings. In a necropolis, in contrast to a sanctuary, the dead were the intended recipients of the offerings and certainly not their object. There was no confusion between necropoleis and sanctuaries (and their specific practices) either in function or in name.

It seems even more difficult to sustain the thesis of a dedication (or “restitution”) to the gods of infants born dead or deformed. This would be contrary to the care that in sacrificial practices (and more generally, cultic uses) was characteristic of ancient religions. As shown in our case by different Near Eastern sources, only what was most perfect and precious was offered to the gods. More compatible with this well-attested principle is instead the offering of one’s own offspring. Thanks to various sources, the traditions of the ancient Syro-Palestinian religions show that this type of offering is proof of the highest degree of devotion⁹⁵, sublimated or replaced only over time – though always remembered⁹⁶ – in actual cultic practice. Even if common practice could

⁹² See for example CIASCA 2002.

⁹³ See again AMADASI GUZZO 2002.

⁹⁴ See GRAS *et al.* 1991: 138-141 (in a text where the authors defend the interpretation of the tophet as a necropolis for infants who did not yet have any clear social status).

⁹⁵ Here we cannot but recall the biblical story of Abraham (the most pious of the patriarchs), who was ready to sacrifice, upon being requested to do so by Yahweh, his only son, Isaac (who was to be slaughtered and then burnt on a pyre) as a sign of the most profound piety, an offering spared by divine intervention.

⁹⁶ Q. Curtius Rufus, *Hist.*, 4, 3; see n. 3 above.

be different in real life, the original precept remained in force⁹⁷. The Phoenicians and Carthaginians, famous not only for their “cunning”, but also for their piety, probably remained for a long time attached to the tradition of giving the god whatever they themselves held most dear: “their own flesh”, as the inscriptions say. The fact that these precious offerings seem to have been relatively rare (according to the calculations made on the remains of some tophet-sanctuaries)⁹⁸ also fits in with the whole picture.

6. Conclusions

Therefore, considering the various sources (including the evidence from the inscriptions) it is possible to reach the following reconstruction: in rare – probably exceptional – situations, the Phoenicians / Carthaginians offered to Ba‘l Hamon (and eventually also to Tinnit) a tiny member of their family in a sanctuary located on the margins of the town centre. They followed specific rites, which correspond to the mechanism of a vow and to the general *do ut des* implicit in the sacrifice practices. In the texts, either the offerers asked to be heard or were grateful for having been heard by the deity (i. e. for having been granted the favour requested). In some cases, as various indications show, they could return to the sanctuary after the offering to “give thanks”.

From the information available, it is not at present possible to determine and reconstruct in detail how the ceremonies were performed. We don’t know what was the mother’s role, why occasionally women could perform this rite, why sometimes it was performed on behalf of someone else. We are ignorant of many other details for which we do not have any evidence. However, we know that the rites performed were intended for the preservation of life: *anima pro anima, sanguine pro sanguine, vita pro vita, pro Concessae salutem ex viso et voto sacrum reddiderunt molchomor*, as it is written in the sanctuary of Saturn in N’gaus (see fig. 1)⁹⁹. Originally at least, life could have been understood in a wide sense – fertility, well-being, escape from danger, as the literary sources show – not only or exclusively concerning the health of a single individual.

Archaeology, epigraphy, literature... each of these disciplines provides its own evidence, allowing us to combine all the data: this is rare in antiquity. Such an integration requires bringing together the different types of information, and evaluating them with the methods specific to each discipline. They must be put together following a strict methodology (where special attention is necessary to avoid implicit assumptions

⁹⁷ The story as told by Diodorus can be interpreted thus (20, 14, 4-7): in 310 BCE the Carthaginians, besieged by the troops of Agathocles, thought that Kronos was hostile to them. “In fact, whereas in former times they had been accustomed to sacrifice the best of their sons to this god, they had more recently begun to send children, acquired and nourished in secret. Once the matter had been investigated, it was discovered that some children had been sacrificed in the place of others...” (20, 14, 4). This was an “expedient” that probably was adopted in social and cultural situations that differed somewhat from those in which the rite had its origins.

⁹⁸ Whilst it is not possible to determine the exact number at Carthage, for Mozia, by relating the number of urns present to the number of years that the tophet was in use, A. Ciasca has calculated that no more than one or two urns containing human remains were interred each year, CIASCA *et al.* 1996: 319 and note 66.

⁹⁹ See again ALQUIER – ALQUIER 1931: 22; LE GLAY 1966: II 74, pl. XXXI, fig. 2. See now LAPORTE 2006: 97.

and unwitting conceptual predictions). The aim is to draw a plausible picture, conforming to all the information available, using well-founded (even if incomplete) reconstructions. And these hypothetical reconstructions have to be credible on the basis of what we know of the culture examined within its historical contexts. The final goal is to understand practices consistent with beliefs that seem foreign to us, specific cultural creations that cannot be interpreted on the basis of ideologies belonging to different historical contexts.

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Figures



Fig. 1: Votive dedication to Saturn, from Nicivibus (N'gaous, Algeria), 2nd – 3rd c. CE, mentioning *morchomor* (N'gaous no. 3; photo M. Le Glay, from *DCPP*: 314, fig. 246)

III 1-8: Q(uod) b(onum) f(austum) f(eliciter) f(actum) s(it). D(omino) s(ancto)
 S(aturno), sacrum m(agnum) nocturnum, anima pr[o] anima, sang(uine) pro sang(uine),
 vita pro vita, pro Con[ces]s(a)e salute<m> ex viso et voto [sa]crum reddiderunt
 molc[ho]mor Felix et Diodora li[b(entes)] animo agnum pro vika[rio]
 (from LAPORTE 2006: 97; cf. ALQUIER – ALQUIER 1931: 22;
 LE GLAY 1966: II 74, pl. XXXI, fig. 2)

“May what is good and favourable be happily done! To the holy lord Saturn, a lofty nocturnal sacrifice, soul for soul, blood for blood, life for life, for the sake of Concessa’s health after a vision and a vow, Felix and Diodora, well disposed, offered in sacrifice *morchomor* a surrogate lamb”



Fig. 2: Eastern inscription, with the expression *nsb mlk*, dedicated to Eshmun:
From Nebi Yunis (Jaffa, Israel), RÉS 367, 3rd-2nd c. BCE (drawing from LAGRANGE 1892: 277)

1-2: *[n]sb mlk 'š ndr wytn h 'rkt 'š PN bn PN [l]'dnnm l'šmn ...*
 “Stela of a *mlk* that the men of X son of X vowed and gave
 to their Lord Eshmun (as their) personal contribution ...”



Fig. 3: Phoenician text using the verb *ylk* with sacrificial meaning: An inscribed orthostat from Karatepe (Turkey)
KAI 26, 700 BCE ca (original photo and drawing from ÇAMBEL 1998: pl. 10-11)

A II 19: ... *wylk zbh* ...
 “and (all the ‘territory’) shall offer a sacrifice”



Fig. 4: Inscription from the oldest period presenting the term *nšb* and the expression *mlk b'l*: Stela from Malta *CIS I 123a*, 7th c. BCE (original photo and drawing from VELLA 2013: fig. 2-3)

1-6: *nšb mlk b'l š šm PN lb'l ḥmn 'dn kšm' ql dbry*
 “Stela of a *mlk* of a person that X set up for Ba'l Hamon, the Lord.
 Indeed he heard the voice of his words”

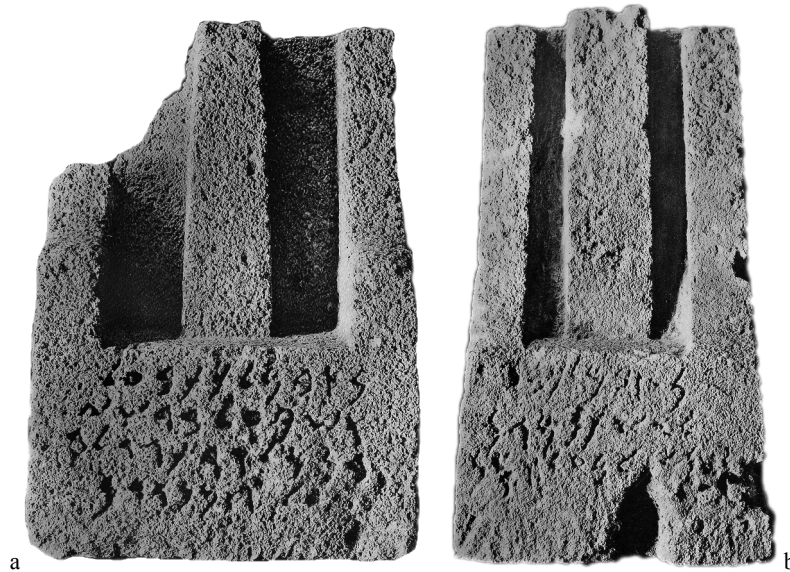


Fig. 5: Inscriptions from the archaic period with the term *nšb* and the expression *mlk(t) b'l*: a-b) Stelae from Carthage *CIS I 5684* and *5685*, early 6th c. BCE (photo from *CIS I/3*, Tab. XCVIII)

a) 1-4: *nšb mlkt b'l š p'l PN lb'l ḥmn 'dn*
 “Stela of a *mlkt* of a person that X made to Ba'l Hamon the Lord”

b) 1-3: *nšb mlk b'l š ytn PN lb'l ḥmn*
 “Stela of a *mlk* of a person that X gave to Ba'l Hamon”



Fig. 6: Inscription from the late archaic period, with the term *nšb* and the expression *mlk b'l*: Stela from Sant'Antioco (ancient Sulcis, Sardinia) 6th BCE (photo from AMADASI GUZZO 1967: tav. XXXIII)

a) 1-8: *[n]šb mlk b'l 'z l'd[n] lb'l ḥm[n 'š] ytn PN bn PN bn PN kšm' ql [db]r[y]*
 “This is a stela of a *mlk* of a person to the Lord Ba'l Hamon that X son of X son of X gave. Indeed, he heard the voice of his words”



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Fig. 7 – Inscription from the end of the archaic phase, mentioning Ba'l Hamon in first place, the expression *mlkt b'l* and the verb *ndr*: Stela from Mozia n. 31, S177, late 6th BCE (photo and drawing from AMADASI GUZZO 1986b: tav. XII.1; fig. 11.31)

1-3: *l'dn lb'l ḥmn mlkt b'l 'š ndr PN bn PN*
 “To the Lord, to Ba'l Hamon, *mlkt* of a person that X, son of X, vowed”



Fig. 8: Inscriptions from Carthage, “classic” period (4th-2nd c. BCE), mentioning two donors, presenting a votive act for another person and including added formulae:

- a) Stela CIS I 384 mentioning two donors (figure from CIS I/1, Tab. LVI);
 b) Stela CIS I 5702 presenting two donors and the formula *'zrm 'š / 'št* (figure from CIS I/3, Tab. XCIX);
 c) Stela CIS I 5939 presenting a votive act for another person (figure from CIS I/3, Tab. CXVI);
 d) Stela CIS I 198 with a votive act for another person and the formula *bmšrm* (figure from CIS I/1, Tab. XLV)

a) 1-5: *lrbt ltnt pn b'l wl'dn lb'l ḥmn 'š ndr PN bn PN w PN bn PN*
 “To the Lady, to Tinnit, ‘face of Ba‘l’, and to the Lord, Ba‘l Hamon,
 this is what X son of X and X son of X vowed”

b) 1-6: *lrbt ltnt pn b'l wl'dn lb'l ḥmn 'zrm 'š w 'zrm 'št*
'š ndr PN bn PN hrb bn PN wbt' PN kšm 'qlm ybrkm
 “To the Lady, to Tinnit, ‘face of Ba‘l’, and to the Lord, Ba‘l Hamon, *'zrm* male and
'zrm female, that X, son of X, the Rab, son of X, and his daughter X vowed.
 Indeed he heard their voice. May he bless them”

c) 1-2: *l'dn lb'l ḥmn 'š ndr PN 'l PN kšm 'ql'*
 “To the lord, Ba‘l Hamon, this is what X vowed for X.
 Indeed he heard his voice”

d) 1-5: *lrbt ltnt pn b'l wl'dn lb'l ḥmn 'š ndr PN 'l PN nšb mlkt bmšrm*
 “To the lady, to Tinnit, ‘face of Ba‘l’, and to the lord, Ba‘l Hamon,
 this is what X vowed for X, stela of a *mlkt*, in his need”



Fig. 10: Inscription from outside Carthage, 3rd-2nd century BCE, with formulae *mlk 'dm, bš'rm btm*: RÉS 334 = KAI 105 from Constantine, Algeria (photo from BERTRANDY – SZNYCER 1987: 126, N° 66)

1-4: *l'dn lb'l ḥmn wlrbt ltnt pn b'l ndr 'š ndr PN bn PN bn PN
mlk 'dm bš'rm btm kšm' ql' brky'*

“To the the Lord, to Ba‘l Hamon, and to the Lady, to Tinnit, ‘face of Ba‘l’,
vow that X, son of X, son of X, vowed, a *mlk* of a human being as his own flesh.
Indeed, they heard his voice. May they bless him”

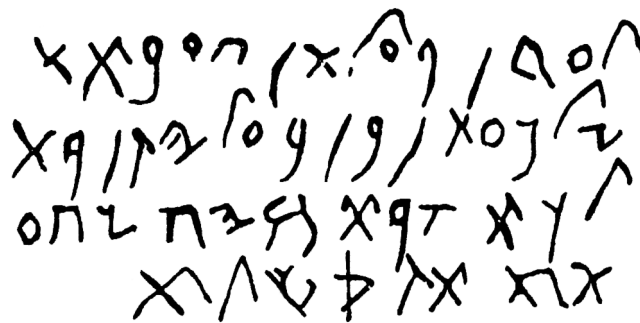


Fig. 11: Inscription from a later period (1st century BCE – 1st century AD):
Stela from Guelma, Algeria (drawing from R. M. KERR 2013: 14)

Guelma 19 (NP 18), l. 1-4: *l'dn b'lmn z'b' PN bn PN bmlk 'zrm hyš wš'm' 't qwl'*
“To the Lord, Balamun (Baal Hamon), X, son of X,
sacrificed in *mlk*, the '*zrm* male (?), and he heard his voice”