



**HAL**  
open science

# On Gods and Earth: The Tophet and the Construction of a New identity in Punic Carthage

Corinne Bonnet

► **To cite this version:**

Corinne Bonnet. On Gods and Earth: The Tophet and the Construction of a New identity in Punic Carthage. Gruen, Erich Stephen. Cultural identity in the ancient Mediterranean, pp.373-387, 2011, 978-0-89236-969-0. hal-02009917

**HAL Id: hal-02009917**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02009917v1>**

Submitted on 6 Feb 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

CORINNE BONNET

## ON GODS AND EARTH

### The Tophet and the Construction of a New Identity in Punic Carthage

Most ancient and modern authors consider the tophet as one distinctive element of the Punic culture and identity. This name, borrowed from the biblical tradition, is commonly referred to as an archaeological reality attested in the central and western Mediterranean (with the exception of Spain), namely, a sacred place located *intra muros*, often close to city walls and dedicated to the Phoenician god Baal Hammon, with or without the goddess Tinnit. The tophet area contains a small chapel for the cult and a great number of pottery urns, buried on several chronological levels and generally surmounted by a stele that sometimes bears figures or inscriptions. The urns contain human or animal ashes, especially of very young children.

The function and meaning of the tophet is ever and ever a debated issue in Phoenician and Punic studies.<sup>1</sup> My aim in this paper is not to establish whether this special place was dedicated to human sacrifices or used as a children's necropolis. I fear that these two alternatives are somehow a trap, because they are based on modern categories which do not exactly fit the fluid religious practices of ancient polytheisms. I prefer to explore here the Carthaginian tophet (fig. 1) and the complex reality it represents, as it reflects the construction of social and cultural identities in a colonial context, especially the relationship between past, present, and future and between the community's roots, its memory, and its development and prosperity. My main hypothesis is that the tophet is a key place for negotiating individual and collective identity with the gods as well as welfare and continuity and for displaying social values and hierarchy.

In her essay<sup>2</sup> Josephine Crawley Quinn emphasizes that it is impossible to distinguish clear-cut territories and identities in ancient North Africa because of the great amount of economic, cultural, and religious interaction between the different ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> In other words, can we use the tophet, its rites, its inscriptions, or its material culture as a "marker" to define ethnic groups such as Carthaginians, Punic, Numidians, and Romans? In such a situation, we have to pose different questions, in particular, whether the tophet is actually a homogeneous archaeological and religious reality that is able to function as a cultural sign of Carthaginian or Punic ethnicity. For many ancient authors (writing in Greek, Latin, and maybe Hebrew) and modern ones as well, "human sacrifices" are considered typically Punic, but this is a non-native (etic) construction because nothing survived from the Punic literature that would have enabled us to understand the emic perception of the tophet rituals. So we must be careful in adopting labeled categories and, on the contrary, try to grasp the tophet's nature from a native point of view, avoiding modern lines of demarcation.

Fig. 1  
View of the tophet, Carthage  
(Tunisia)





Quinn's paper demonstrates that there are several kinds of tophet: inscriptions, images, objects, gods, behaviors, and beliefs, which seem to vary considerably from place to place in North Africa. A comparison between the Sicilian and the Sardinian tophets leads to the same conclusions. We can surely agree, considering that the tophet is a general label for different archaeological and conceptual realities. The word itself never appears in the Phoenician and Punic documentation. It is a Hebrew word used in a polemical context<sup>4</sup> to describe a place where Canaanite people passed their sons and daughters through the fire. Nothing supports the use of such a terminology in Punic contexts. On the contrary, when inscriptions refer to the place where the ritual takes place, we always find the word *bt* (temple/sanctuary). For example, in an inscription from the tophet of El-Hofra in Constantine, Algeria, the offering invokes Baal Hammon because he is Baal of the *bt*, "lord of the temple."<sup>5</sup> This is worth noting because it means that, for the Punic population, the tophet was not a radically different place but a sanctuary like others, with its own purposes and rituals. It was fundamentally a "divine home" where people could have transactions with the gods.

The various social and political contexts in North Africa and elsewhere, the networks of connectivity, and also the chronological evolution produce different case studies of tophets within this common framework, studies in which the Phoenician and Punic elements are clearly embedded in local traditions and dynamics.<sup>6</sup> This diversity avoids any generalization and requires a contextualized approach, because what a tophet means and what happens within it surely differs according to the context and the period.

Whereas Carthage is my main focus, Quinn's paper explores some "peripheral" tophets and their configurations in space and time, leading to the conclusion that it would be reductive to assimilate tophet and "Punicity." Before delving more deeply in the Carthaginian dossier, let me formulate some preliminary considerations about cultural identities and self-representation in ancient societies, especially of and by the Phoenician and Punic people.

#### **Preliminary Considerations on Cultural Identities in the Mediterranean**

Nineteenth-century German historiography, with its notion of *Geist* (spirit), developed an essentialist perception of identity as linked with language, territory, and the nation. Each nation was meant to have a specific identity, eternal and immutable, expressed in arts, politics, religion, and so on. New approaches, mainly relativism and constructivism, have contributed to changing our perception of identities and to underlining the impact of history on them. Jean-Paul Sartre rightly affirms in *L'Être et le Néant*: "for-itself can not *be* anything. For-myself I am not a professor or a waiter in a café, nor am I handsome or ugly, Jew or Aryan, spiritual, vulgar, or distinguished."<sup>7</sup>

Collective self-representations (the *Wir Gefühl*) are the result of complex processes of differentiation between "our" identity and "their" alterity. As contacts, exchanges, connectivity, acculturation, and multicultural contexts are present everywhere and on different scales in the Mediterranean space, elements of material



culture are used by historians and archaeologists to illustrate the diversity of cultural status and identities. This is not an easy operation, but important progress has been made recently in this direction.<sup>8</sup>

Is a similar approach possible for religious behaviors? Is there a *specific* way to create, define, transform, and live *religious* identities? Can we study material and immaterial culture with the same hermeneutic tools? To be sure, it is easier to recognize a Greek ceramic or an Egyptian scarab than to identify Phoenician sacrifices or Punic eschatology, especially without having religious texts to help us. The construction of religious identities—for example, Herodotus underlines the difference between Greek and Persian sacrificial practice (1.132)—cannot be separated from other aspects of life and self-representation, because “religion” is not, in ancient polytheisms, an autonomous category. Religion is deeply embedded in politics, social and economic life, artistic productions, and material culture. Religion is a matter not only of spirituality but of rituals, objects, places, people, flesh, and blood. Hence, it is impossible to define clear-cut religious identities or territories.

Historical factors have a deep influence on religious behaviors and identities. In the case of Phoenician and Punic societies, one main point to investigate is the large-scale diffusion of gods and rituals and the diasporic dimension of these religious practices. In fact, we deal with a network in which identities are at the same time both shared and different. How can we make sense of such a system?

Years ago, Jonathan Z. Smith published a beautiful essay, “Earth and Gods,”<sup>9</sup> in which he investigates the diasporic dimension tied to an exile experience:

Rather than a god who dwelt in his temple or would regularly manifest himself in a cult house, the diaspora evolved complicated techniques for achieving visions, epiphanies or heavenly journeys. That is to say, they evolved modes of access to the deity which transcended any particular place. [...] To the new immigrant in the diaspora, nostalgia for homeplace and cultic substitutes for the old, sacred center were central religious values.<sup>10</sup>

He also stresses the important impact of the cessation of native kingship and sovereignty, a phenomenon that is not completely clear for Carthage but leads in any case to a new social order.<sup>11</sup>

More recently, some historians of religions such as Jörg Rüpke, leader of the research project “Reichs- und Provinzreligion im römischen Reich,”<sup>12</sup> have proposed the use of the sociological concepts of *globalization* and *glocalization* to emphasize the fact that integration into broad cultural horizons does not exclude vivid local phenomena. Rather, a productive and creative tension exists between these two levels of reality. Turning to the tophet, it could be at the same time a common feature of Punic religiosity and a local manifestation of a specific mixed community (Punic, Numidian, Greek, and Roman, as in the El-Hofra tophet). Any interpretation of this cultic place has to take into account the complexity of such a religious landscape. Cultural identities are fundamentally dynamic; they involved constant negotiations for space, time, actions, visibility, and appeal. Domination and resistance are the strongest expressions of such a process, which are always



renewed and rebalanced. Pierre Bourdieu explains this phenomenon in a sophisticated way in his *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*: "la pratique sociale, notamment rituelle, se trouve dans un rapport dialectique avec la situation ponctuelle, la contingence, et l'*habitus*, en tant que système de dispositions durables et transposables qui, intégrant toutes les expériences passées, fonctionne à chaque moment comme une *matrice de perceptions, d'appréciations et d'actions*."<sup>13</sup>

The paradigm of clear-cut and static cultural identities is thus very questionable today. The "parting of the ways," according to an expression forged to describe the progressive differentiation between Jews and Christians, is a subjective and incomplete process based on self-representation,<sup>14</sup> whereas the dominating pattern in ancient sources regarding the ethnic origin and identity is that of pureness and autochthony, *sub specie aeternitatis* (forever, eternally). The different historical contexts reveal hybrid cultures and identities, situations of *poikilia* in Greek,<sup>15</sup> that is, a colorful but chaotic diversity of status and experiences, exposed to the pernicious effects of time. Consequently, it is extremely important to maintain and transmit the ancestral customs, *kata ta patria* (according to the ancestral traditions). And the more a society is situated in a mixed environment open to contaminations, the more it pretends to remain "always the same" since the time of its foundation.

Regarding Carthage, which was founded on the North African coast far away from the Phoenician metropolis Tyre, several Greek and Latin texts reveal how strong the connection was between the colonial settlement and its "daughter."<sup>16</sup> The Carthaginians paid much attention to the protection of their ancestral Tyrian identity, which was threatened by a Lybic environment. Carthage's foundation myth—known through a classical prism but probably dating back to a local tradition—delivers a strong endogamic message: for Elissa, the first Carthaginian "queen," it is better to commit suicide than to mix with the local population and to marry the Libyan prince.<sup>17</sup> This motif, which could reflect a Punic cautious attitude toward the indigenous environment, is negatively interpreted by the Greek and Latin authors: different from Rome, the successful Mediterranean metropolis that promoted a strongly exogamic attitude toward other people (since the Sabines' kidnapping), Carthage is presented as an extremely endogamic society, designed to fail in its imperial ambitions.

Beyond these traces of ideological constructions based on the concepts of identity and alterity, Carthage is indeed a mixed city, a great harbor open to Mediterranean connectivity and also a powerful agrarian state with a far-reaching hinterland. The interactions between Punic, African, Greek, and Italic elements consequently created a heterogeneous community with fluid identities. From the religious point of view, Carthage's inhabitants from every origin formed a *hieron sōma*, a "sacred body," that shared holy places, festivals, religious symbols, and ritual codification in order to ensure a fruitful communication with the gods. The religious practices are meant both to unify the community and to make clear its intrinsic diversity. The different ethnic and social identities create a framework, a connective tissue and a social *system*, as proposed by Niklas Luhmann, and not a simple pyramidal structure.<sup>18</sup>

## Carthage: Betwe

The Roman histo  
(18.4–5; second ce  
the king fled from  
a kind of relic of  
and the "king of  
has a very clear n  
Continuity with t  
identity and self-r  
used to display th  
and the colonies.<sup>2</sup>

Some element  
clear a "theologic  
tern. In a bilingu  
tury B.C.E.—whic  
1758—Melqart is  
is, "founder," in G  
is followed by an  
rock / who takes  
but also the name  
Melqart refers to t  
otic rock moving  
enterprise. Afterw  
community's protecto  
human occupation

In Western cor  
as a sophisticated  
nies—often establ  
original Tyrian en  
lent, *archegetes*, at  
the substantive *ar*  
in both its meanin  
languages the com  
Phoenicia, is the  
These elements rev  
clearly connected  
traditions and in a  
"city" as a paradigm  
to the Rock.

However, diffe  
"talig" creation bu  
with great ambitio  
the very heart of t  
with a couple of su



### Carthage: Between Ancestral Roots and New Identity

The Roman historian Justin preserved the (or a) story of Carthage's foundation (18.4–5; second century C.E.?). Together with Elissa, a group of Tyrian opponents to the king fled from the city carrying away the *sacra Herculis*, which must have been a kind of relic of Melqart's cult, the Tyrian Heracles, the local god (Baal of Tyre), and the "king of the city," *milk qart*.<sup>19</sup> Carthage's Punic name, *Qart hadasht*, thus has a very clear meaning: Carthage is a new Tyre, a Tyrian clone on African soil. Continuity with the Phoenician origin is a constituent element of the Carthaginian identity and self-representation. Melqart's devotion is one of the favorite channels used to display the connection between past and present and between the homeland and the colonies.<sup>20</sup>

Some elements in Melqart's cult in the western Phoenician/Punic colonies make clear a "theological" background of rituals meant to underline an ancestral pattern. In a bilingual Greek-Phoenician inscription from Malta of the second century B.C.E.—which enabled J.-J. Barthélemy to decipher the Phoenician alphabet in 1758—Melqart is called "Baal of Tyre" in Phoenician and Heracles *archegetes*, that is, "founder," in Greek. In four Punic inscriptions from Sardinia and Ibiza, Melqart is followed by an original epiclesis: 'L HŞR, which means "the one who is 'on' the rock / who takes care of the rock." Now, ŞR is not only the substantive for "rock" but also the name of Tyre, which is the "rock" par excellence.<sup>21</sup> The title given to Melqart refers to the local myth about Tyre's foundation. Originally, Tyre was a chaotic rock moving in cosmic space and was fixed where it is now through Melqart's enterprise. Afterward he was called the Baal ŞR (Baal of Tyre/Rock) and the community's protector. He transformed a chaotic place into a secure space devoted to human occupation.<sup>22</sup>

In Western contexts, Melqart's title "the one who takes care of the Rock" appears as a sophisticated way to connect different spaces and times: motherland and colonies—often established on promontories or capes and in landscapes that echo the original Tyrian environment, myth and history, chaos and order. The Greek equivalent, *archegetes*, attested in the Maltese inscription and also in Delos,<sup>23</sup> is related to the substantive *arché*, which means simultaneously "beginning" and "foundation" in both its meanings (a building's foundation or a colony's settlement).<sup>24</sup> In both languages the concepts are the same, and the message is incredibly similar: Tyre, Phoenicia, is the base, the mold, and the model for every Western development. These elements reveal that Melqart's cultic configuration in the diasporic contexts is clearly connected to the construction of a new identity well rooted in the ancestral traditions and in a dialectic relationship between past and present, taking Tyre the "city" as a paradigm of the colonial process from savagery to civilization, from a rock to the Rock.

However, different elements make it clear that Carthage was not only a "nostalgic" creation but also, since the time of its foundation, an innovative settlement with great ambitions. Politically, it is worth noting that Carthage rejected kingship, the very heart of the Phoenician sociopolitical structure, and preferred a republic with a couple of sufets at the head of the state.<sup>25</sup> The internal balance of power was



surely different in Carthage than in Tyre. We can imagine a more collegial organization, where the major aristocratic families played an important role because of their active participation in economic activities, such as exchange and extensive agriculture. The symbolic framework and the cultic practices have surely improved the effects of such an evolution. Even if Melqart's cult reveals a strong conservative tendency, other elements indicate deep changes in the religious behaviors and practices. The tophet is one of the major innovative elements in the Punic religion. For now, no tophet is known (except the Jerusalem tophet in the Old Testament) in the East. Innovation also appears in the cultic sphere with the increasing presence of Baal Hammon and Tinnit, already venerated in the Near East<sup>26</sup> but much more important in Carthage and in the whole Punic world. Their massive presence in the Western sanctuaries, especially in the tophet areas, is probably motivated by the fact that, from the time of their Eastern origins, they played a considerable role in the communities' social life and at the same time could appear as traditional gods and typical Punic deities.

That is the reason why this cultic space, with its specific nature and functions, could be a Western invention, related to the colonial experience and its specific imaginary world of the origins. An important element in this perspective is that the Carthaginian tophet seems to exist since the very beginning, whereas the Greek and Roman sources present human sacrifices in Carthage as an ancestral custom borrowed from Phoenicia. Can we shed new light on this intricate question?

### **The Tophet: A Reassessment of Its Nature and Functions**

The modern historiography is used to emphasize the tophet's function as a singular place devoted to children's sacrifices. Such a monolithic interpretation is due to a unilateral use and abuse of external evidence from the Old Testament and the Greek or Latin corpus. Looking carefully at these texts, one must admit that they carry different stereotypical images and present many differences and discrepancies about what exactly happened in a tophet: when, why, who. Having recourse to the internal evidence—the thousands of Punic-inscribed stelai from the tophet—a scholar immediately perceives that any monolithic approach has to be rejected in favor of recognizing that the tophet was a complex cultic space, surely with some standard codified practice but also with a large range of possibilities and variants.

On the one hand, the objects found in the sacred area (jars and stelai) and the inscriptions reveal an extremely repetitive behavior, with an accumulation and nauseam of Baal Hammon and Tinnit's dedications, which are almost always expressed with the same formulary text. On the other hand, the exceptions appear to be so interesting and meaningful that we cannot ignore them. Which model fits all these elements?

Let us begin with the standard practice as it appears from the excavations conducted in the Carthaginian tophet. We are able to describe the sequence of events but cannot grasp completely the very logic of the offering process. For the overwhelming number of the inscriptions, Punic male citizens put in the earth a pottery jar or urn, which contained small children's ashes, eventually mixed with or



replaced by animals' ashes. Above this deposit, the citizens erect a stele, with or without an image, with or without an inscription, to commemorate the gift made to the god(s), generally Baal Hammon and Tinnit (figs. 2, 3).<sup>27</sup> In some cases, a kind of chapel is placed on top of the deposit and evinces the high social status of the devotee's family. It is worth noting that all the inscriptions are clearly dedicatory and not funerary. Here we deal with gifts to the gods and not with eschatological messages.

Having described the normative behavior in the tophet, we must assume, as Quinn's essay shows, that many factors contributed to create exceptions or variants, such as aesthetic preferences, social strategies, moral considerations, economic problems, concurrency between sanctuaries, integration or exclusion of external elements, and so on. A cult place is always shared in the polytheistic systems and not used exclusively for a single god and set of practices. The Carthaginian inscription KAI 48, the so-called Tarif de Marseille that was originally publicized in Baal Saphon's sanctuary, lists a wide range of sacrifices practiced in this cult place. It mentions different types of animals, destruction or consumption of the victims, several cultic actors, different fares to be paid, and so on. It reveals a very rich cultic landscape and invites us to wonder if a similar diversification also existed in the tophet practices.

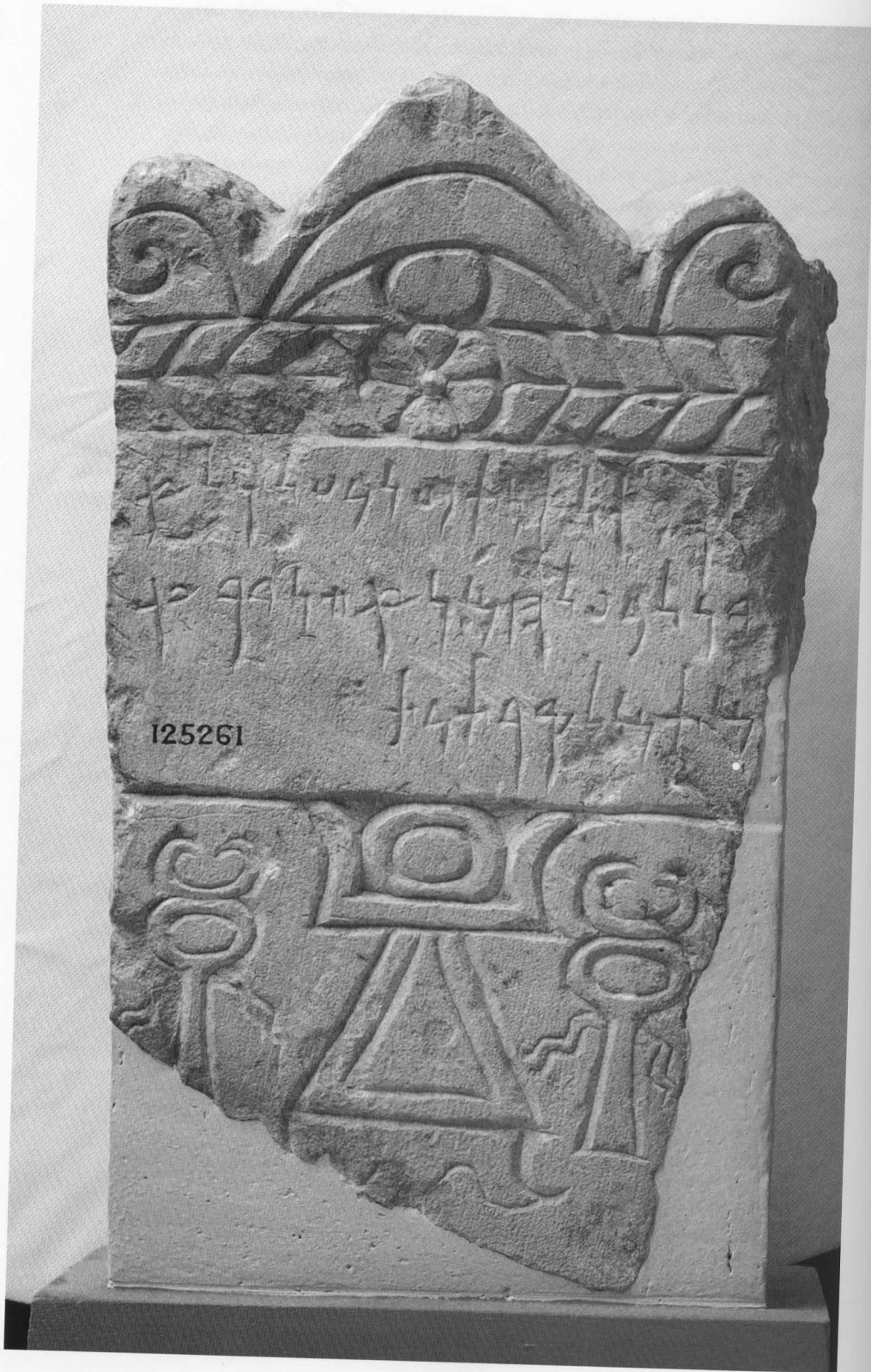
In fact, an accurate reassessment of the tophet evidence supports the hypothesis of a more polyvalent place than what we are used to considering. For example, in the Carthaginian and North African tophet we can point out a large diversity of situations: one stele upon many urns; one stele and no urn; urns without stelai; urns containing several children of different ages; double urns: one with bones, one with ashes; in later times, funerary stelai mixed with commemorative ones; offerings made by strangers; offerings made by noncitizens; offerings made by women; offerings to gods other than Baal Hammon and Tinnit; and so on.

This casuistry is surely not exhaustive, but it is sufficient to invalidate any monolithic analysis of the tophet practices and functions. In order to understand the tophet's nature and meaning, I propose to consider it as a place where the link between past and present is elaborated through cultic strategies. Closely associated with the time of foundation—in Carthage, the tophet even seems to go back to the end of the ninth century B.C.E. and to survive some decades at least after Carthage's destruction in 146<sup>28</sup>—the tophet is connected with the roots, with the ancestral heritage, and with the construction of a specific identity between tradition and innovation. The remarkable continuity between the Baal Hammon's cultic places and the Saturn's temples confirms the prominent cultural role of such a devotion and sanctuary.

If the very early appearance of the tophet on Carthaginian soil suggests that it represents a strong ancestral tradition, related to the homeland, the lack of evidence concerning the tophet area from the Phoenician cities seems extremely astonishing. How did the Carthaginians invent the tophet as a tradition? This paradoxical admission is extremely stimulating from a constructivist perspective of cultural history. Can some contribution to our subject come from the ethnological and anthropological studies, especially those devoted to diasporic, mixed, or hybrid contexts?

A comparative approach should be attempted in order to better understand the meaning and logic of the tophet's practices. Let us leave temporarily the









**Fig. 2**  
Punic stele from the tophet,  
Carthage, with the Sign of  
Tanit, two incense burners,  
and a dedicatory inscription  
to Tinnit and Baal Hammon  
London, British Museum,  
BM 125261

**Fig. 3**  
Punic stele from the tophet,  
Carthage, with the Sign of  
Tanit and a dedicatory  
inscription to Tinnit and  
Baal Hammon  
London, British Museum,  
BM 125260



Carthaginian shore and go to the Brazilian coast, more precisely the Bahia area, where many African slaves settled and were immersed in a completely different context by the Portuguese conquistadores. The huge distance from the homeland, the life of suffering in the plantations, and deep nostalgic feelings stimulated the production of a new and original symbolic world and the imaginary, which were reflected in the cultic life. Roger Bastide, in his important work of 1958 on the Bahia's *candomblé*,<sup>29</sup> analyzes the imaginary or utopian "ancient world" produced by the emigrants to record and maintain their African roots. To make it present and real, the Bahia's inhabitants performed ecstatic rites, which exhibited and renewed the link between the original time and space and the "lost" community, which was settled in a foreign place, in exile. This was exactly the function of the complex religious practices called *candomblé*, which involved several gods related to natural elements (such as earth, water, and fire) or to African tribes, even if a monotheistic shape overlies the divine variety.

Through these rites—language without scripture—and within a quite complex social classification, the community endeavored to preserve an African identity. The dances, musical performances, offerings, and sacrifices expressed the need for Africa, which shaped the social tissue, the common historical background, and the native identity. Close to the cultic places where the *candomblé* was performed, special necropoleis were located where dead people were able to join their African ancestors as soon as they had finished their earth exile.

Such a comparison cannot be applied *sic* and *simpliciter* to the tophet case, but it can shed light on how Punic people have elaborated, in their exile from Phoenicia, some specific rituals in specific places—and also gods' designations, as we have seen above—to express Punic people's bond to the ancestral homeland. The aim was not only to express nostalgic ties but also to weave a network between past and present in order to guarantee the community's future. The devotion ostensibly expressed by the offerings and sacrifices to the gods especially chosen for their expertise in the social dimension was, for the whole group and for every individual as well, the point of departure for any hope of supporting the exile and growing in harmony.

I wonder if the so-called chapelle Cintas deposit, discovered in 1947 in the very heart of the Carthaginian tophet,<sup>30</sup> should not be reconsidered from such a perspective as a foundation deposit, akin to the *herōon* (sanctuary dedicated to the local hero) of a Greek polis. The meaning of this very special deposit is debated (it is a kind of *crux* for the Punic archaeology!), but Hélène Bénichou-Safar has recently confirmed that the exceptionally rich archaic pottery was placed directly in or on the earth soil, next to a funerary deposit and protected by a small ritual room that received several rich offerings.

Furthermore, we can tackle the singular case represented by an inscription from the Carthaginian tophet, CIS I, 5510, which contains a dedication to Melqart, whereas the traditional gods of the tophet are Baal Hammon and Tinnit. This exception is very meaningful because the choice of the Tyrian god, the Baal of Tyre, seems completely coherent with the devotional background we have just suggested, even though it is a *unicum*. Melqart, whose *sacra* was in exile with the first settlers, is particularly competent at protecting and giving support to the colonial

society. Diodorus, "people" (20.14).

What emerges where children were What appears is a p of loss of identity a institution invented the future, and to p

Looking at the observe that in the deposits. Then, sl changes into a fore gious practices loca not chaos. The stela is more and more e to the richest com tophet is the society and symbolic levels secure the god's ben

According to th the offerer's position inscription KAI 78 fewer than sixteen name that means t Carthaginian famil bers who were, at C office). Baaly's high divine group to rec Tinnit, like everybe Baal MGNM, whose different aims: respe desire for social pro

Far from any mo tural, and social strat tractual matter betw for both individual ar The tophet's gods we very beginning of the diligent protectors.

It is worth noting were never mentione title(s), and genealog expressed. The burne longer as individuals ing was said of the ch



society. Diodorus, indeed, calls him the god *para apoikois*, "attendant to the colonial people" (20.14).

What emerges from our analysis is not the scenario of cruel and primitive rites where children were thrown in the fire, and parents laughed at this terrible practice. What appears is a place where a social group that was confronted with exile, the risk of loss of identity and cultural hybridation, and the disappearance of the kingship's institution invented new religious strategies to obtain the gods' protection, to secure the future, and to preserve the native "imaginary" identity.

Looking at the archaeological evidence in the Carthaginian tophet, we can observe that in the deepest level, there is a distance of one or two meters between deposits. Then, slowly, the deposits become more numerous, and the tophet changes into a forest of stelai, with two main "streets," two meters wide. The religious practices located in the tophet become more codified; promiscuity is the rule, not chaos. The stelai are all oriented toward the east, but the devotees' social status is more and more exhibited, with a wide range of structures, from the most simple to the richest commemorative monuments. The social prestige is underlined. The tophet is the society's mirror, a place where the social markers, on both the concrete and symbolic levels, genuinely underline a network of religious behaviors meant to secure the god's benevolence.

According to this logic, the tophet's inscriptions often give several details on the offerer's position in society such as profession, public charge, and lineage. The inscription KAI 78 presents an interesting case. Baaly, the offerer, mentions no fewer than sixteen ancestors, the last one called Msry, a well-known personal name that means the "Egyptian." We are probably dealing with a prestigious Carthaginian family, proud of its Egyptian roots and of its eminent family members who were, at Carthage, *rab* (noble) and *sufet* (the most prominent public office). Baaly's high social rank presumably allows him to choose a very singular divine group to receive his offering in the tophet: not only Baal Hammon and Tinnit, like everybody did, but also Baal Shamem, the lord of the heaven, and Baal MGNM, whose identity remains obscure. Baaly's stele simultaneously fulfills different aims: respect for the ancestral tradition, capacity of innovation, and the desire for social promotion.

Far from any monolithic analysis, the tophet is a central place for religious, cultural, and social strategies, which transformed the small children's ashes into a contractual matter between men and gods. The urns' contents were offered to the gods for both individual and common purposes that were tied to survival and prosperity. The tophet's gods were not bloodthirsty monsters but, on the contrary, since the very beginning of the Punic history, the Carthaginians' benevolent, merciful, and diligent protectors.

It is worth noting the fact that, in this religious "business," the dead children were never mentioned by name. The inscriptions bear only the devotee's name(s), title(s), and genealogy, but very rarely is their relationship to the urns' contents expressed. The burned babies were treated as *objects* devoted to the gods and no longer as individuals or human beings. Nothing was ever asked for him/her, nothing was said of the child's destiny after death. What was important and was always







1. In alphabetical order: Hélène Bénichou-Safar, "Le rite d'entrée sous le joug: Des stèles de Carthage à l'Ancien Testament," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 210 (1993): 131–43; Hélène Bénichou-Safar, *Le tophet de Salammbô à Carthage: Essai de reconstitution* (Rome: De Boccard, 2004); Shelby Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments in Their Mediterranean Context* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991); Antonia Ciasca, "Moza: Sguario d'insieme sul tofet," *Vicino Oriente* 8, no. 2 (1992): 113–55; Ahmed Ferjaoui et al., *Le sanctuaire de Henchir el-Hami: De Ba'al Hammon au Saturne africain, Ier s. av. J.-C.—IVe s. ap. J.-C.* (Tunis: Ministère de la Culture & de la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine, Institut National du Patrimoine, & De Boccard, 2007); Cristiano Grottanelli, "Ideologie del sacrificio umano: Roma e Cartagine," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1 (1999): 41–59; Serge Lancel, *Carthage* (Paris: Fayard, 1992): 247–56; Edward Lipinski, *Dieux et déesses de l'univers phénicien et punique* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 438–50, 476–83; Sabatino Moscati, "Nuovi contributi sul 'sacrificio dei bambini,'" *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 9, no. 7 (1996): 499–504; Sabatino Moscati and Sergio Ribichini, *Il sacrificio punico dei bambini: Un aggiornamento* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1991); Sergio Ribichini, *Il tofet e il sacrificio dei bambini* (Sassari: Chiarella, 1987); Sergio Ribichini, "Tophet und das punische Kinderopfer," in M. Maas et al., eds., *Hannibal ad portas: Macht und Reichtum Karthagos* (Karlsruhe: Badisches Landesmuseum, 2004), 247–61; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and the Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); Carlos González Wagner, "El sacrificio del moloch en Fenicia: Una respuesta cultural adaptativa a la presión demográfica," in *Atti del congresso internazionale di studi Fenici e Punici* (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1991), 411–16; and Carlos González Wagner and Luis Alberto Ruiz Cabrero, eds., *Otto Eissfeldt: El molk como concepto del sacrificio púnico hebreo y el final del dios Moloch* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Fenicios & Púnicos, 2002). See also Luis Alberto Ruiz Cabrero, "El sacrificio Molk entre los fenicio-punicos: Cuestiones demograficas y ecológicas" (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2007), available online at <http://www.ucm.es/BUCM/tesis/ghi/ucm-t30061.pdf>.
2. See Josephine Crawley Quinn's essay, this volume, pp. 388–413.
3. For a demonstration of this intercultural dynamic in the funerary field, see David L. Stone and Lea M. Stirling, eds., *Mortuary Landscape of North Africa* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007).
4. For example, Jr 7, 31–32:
 

They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.
5. André Berthier and René Charlier, *Le sanctuaire punique d'El-Hofra à Constantine* (Paris: Arts & Métiers Graphiques, 1952). For the Baal bt, cf. Berthier and Charlier, *Le sanctuaire punique*, 25. This title could also be understood as "lord of the house," that is, the "family," which is the core issue in the tophet ritual.
6. Cf. Brent Shaw, *At the Edge of the Corrupting Sea* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press,



- 2006); and Brent Shaw, "Cult and Belief in Punic and Roman Africa" (working paper, version 1.2, Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics, 2007), available online at <http://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/shaw/090705.pdf>, which alludes to "a double heritage of relative isolation and internalized intensity" (p. 2). However, I do not agree with his "henotheistic" interpretation of the Punic religion.
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 527 = Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 572: "le pour-soi ne peut rien être. Pour-moi, je ne suis pas plus professeur ou garçon de café que beau ou laid, Juif ou Aryen, spirituel, vulgaire ou distingué."
  8. Cf. Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997); Erich S. Gruen, *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2005); and J.-M. Luce, ed., "Les identités ethniques dans le monde grec antique," *Pallas* 73 (2007). For more recent periods, see Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1999); and Hinnerk Bruhns and André Burguière, eds., "Imaginaires nationaux: Origines, usages, figures," special issue, *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 (2003): 37-133.
  9. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Earth and Gods," in idem, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 104-28. His main interest is obviously in the Jewish diaspora.
  10. Smith, "Earth and Gods," xiv.
  11. I find an interesting suggestion in Shaw's article, "Cult and Belief," 27, about the special reward that the African social system attributes to old age. In fact, Baal Hammon is always represented as an old god, seated on a throne. Because of the absence of any royal figure, the "Ancient" (the "Fathers" in Phoenician) has maybe played a crucial role in the first steps of Carthage's history.
  12. See especially Jörg Rüpke, ed., *Antike Religionsgeschichte im räumlicher Perspektive* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).
  13. Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 261.
  14. James D. G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); echoed in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).
  15. Plato *Republic* 557c-558c. For an analysis of this motif, Noémie Villacèque, "Histoire de la *poikilia*, un marqueur de supériorité sociale," *Revue des Études Anciennes* 110, no. 2 (2008): 443-59.
  16. Ahmed Ferjaoui, *Recherches sur les relations entre l'Orient phénicien et Carthage*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 124 (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).
  17. On this foundation myth, see John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro, "Byrsa: La ruse d'Elissa et la fondation de Carthage," *Annales Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* (1985): 328-42.
  18. For example, see Andreas Bendlin, "Gemeinschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Identität: Forschungsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zu den Mustern sozialer Ordnung in

- Rom," in Ulrike  
*der römischen A*  
 (Tübingen: Mo  
 19. Corinne Bonne  
 (Leuven: Peeter  
 20. Cf. Smith, "Ear  
 blessing, from t  
 from the deity.  
 which has been  
 21. Tyre is placed o  
 22. Cf. Bonnet, *Me*  
*Recherches sur l*  
 224-54. The my  
 Eusebius *Praep*  
 "Planesiaï, îles e  
 25-56.  
 23. *Inscriptions de l*  
 Tyrian merchan  
 is, Melqart's dev  
 24. See Irad Malkin  
 Detienne, "Man  
*gies: Tradition, e*  
*archegetes* is als  
 tion is very well  
 Gallimard, 1998  
 25. Werner Huss, G  
 26. Paolo Xella, *Ba*  
*punique* (Rome:  
 "Tanit du Liban,"  
*East Mediterran*  
 27. Outside of Carth  
 28. Bénichou-Safar,  
 29. Roger Bastide, *L*  
 lished in 1999.  
 30. Bénichou-Safar,  
 31. The name is a fu  
 thing makes him  
 Mettinger, *The D*  
 (Lund: CWK Gl  
 par un lion: Con  
*Semitica* 38 (199  
 contained a viati  
 great numbers in  
 32. The same pattern  
 in Spain!



- Rom," in Ulrike Egelhaaf Gaiser and Alfred Schäfer, eds., *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike: Untersuchungen zu Organisatio, Ritual und Raumordnung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 9–41, based on Niklas Luhmann's *Systemtheorie*.
19. Corinne Bonnet, *Melqart: Cultes et mythes de l'Héraclès tyrien en Méditerranée* (Leuven: Peeters, 1988).
  20. Cf. Smith, "Earth and Gods," 120: "To be exiled is to be cut off from land, from the blessing, from the ancestors, from history, from life, from creation, from reality, from the deity. It is to enter into a new temporal period, palpably different from that which has been before. It is to descend into chaos."
  21. Tyre is placed on a small rocky island, near the continent.
  22. Cf. Bonnet, *Melqart*, 27–33; Pierre Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie dionysiaques: Recherches sur l'oeuvre de Nonnos de Panopolis* (Clermont-Ferrand: Adosa, 1991), 224–54. The myth is told by two late authors: Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 40.465–500; and Eusebius *Praeparatio evangelica* 1.10, 1.10–11. On the moving islands, Pierre Moret, "Planesiai, îles erratiques de l'Occident grec," *Revue des études grecques* 110 (1997): 25–56.
  23. *Inscriptions de Délos* 1519. This is an honorific decree for Patron, *euergetes* of the Tyrian merchants' corporation established in Delos and called the *Herakleistai*, that is, Melqart's devotees.
  24. See Irad Malkin, *Religion and Colonization* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 241–49; Marcel Detienne, "Manières grecques de commencer," in idem, ed., *Transcrire les mythologies: Tradition, écriture, historicité* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 164–79. The epiklesis *archegetes* is also attributed to Apollo in Delphi, whose role in the Greek colonization is very well known; cf. Marcel Detienne, *Apollon, le couteau à la main* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).
  25. Werner Huss, *Geschichte der Karthager* (Munich: Beck, 1985).
  26. Paolo Xella, *Baal Hammon: Recherches sur l'identité et l'histoire d'un dieu phénico-punique* (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1991); and Pierre Bordreuil, "Tanit du Liban," in Edward Lipinski, ed., *Studia Phoenicia*, vol. 5, *Phoenicia and the East Mediterranean in the First Millennium B.C.* (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 79–86.
  27. Outside of Carthage, it is often Baal Hammon alone.
  28. Bénichou-Safar, *Le tophet*.
  29. Roger Bastide, *Le candomblé de Bahia* (Paris: Plon, 1958). A new edition was published in 1999.
  30. Bénichou-Safar, *Le tophet*, 59–63.
  31. The name is a fundamental element of his existence. Naming someone or something makes him or it a reality. About this "name's theology," see Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1982); and Corinne Bonnet, "Antipatros l'Ascalonite dévoré par un lion: Commentaire à CIS I, 115," in "Mélanges Maurice Sznycer," special issue, *Semitica* 38 (1990): 39–47. Let us also emphasize the fact that the tophet urns never contained a viaticum and that the scarabs, symbols of life after death, present in great numbers in the tombs, were absent in the tophet.
  32. The same pattern appears in most of the Sardinian and Sicilian colonies, but not in Spain!