

## FORGOTTEN EPIGRAPHS, REVEALED HISTORIES: RESHAPING THE NARRATIVE OF PHOENICIAN AND PUNIC WOMEN

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*The analysis of specific epigraphic evidence, distributed across a wide territory from Upper Mesopotamia (Nimrud) to the central Mediterranean (Carthage, Sardinia) and extending to Egypt (Saqqara, Daphnae), reveals the role played by certain women in broader contexts of social, economic, and political mobility characterizing the Levant and the area of Phoenician and Punic culture diffusion between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC. By integrating a critical examination of available data with methodological reflections underlying the research, the potential of a renewed multidisciplinary approach in studying Phoenician and Punic women becomes evident.*

Keywords: inscriptions; women's affairs; mobility; royal women; matrimonial politics

### 1. BEYOND THE HORIZON. UNRAVELLING PHOENICIAN WOMEN'S LEGACY

Over the past two decades, research on Phoenician and Punic women has experienced significant growth, resulting in a more extensive bibliography now readily accessible to scholars.<sup>1</sup> The advancement in Phoenician and Punic archaeology, fuelled by a deeper understanding of material culture and the diverse settlement patterns in the Western Mediterranean, has sparked a rekindled interest, particularly within the Spanish academic community. This growing interest goes beyond the examination of women's roles in family, economic, and cultural contexts. It delves into the intricate structures of social organization and their connection to the «construcción y representación de identidades, roles e ideologías de género».<sup>2</sup>

The application of innovative analytical methodologies and interpretative frameworks, stemming from post-colonial and Gender Studies paradigms, as well as the adoption of new theoretical approaches for studying diverse social actors, especially women and children, has yielded fresh and pertinent data concerning mobility, lifestyles, division of labor, and the processes involved in constructing social identities.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of material culture from daily life and burial sites has played a pivotal role in elucidating broader social phenomena. This includes understanding the interactions between Eastern Phoenician populations and the diverse human communities of the Western Mediterranean. Additionally, it has underscored the significance of women's agency, whether of Phoenician or indigenous origin, in the emerging settlement patterns of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the most recent studies: Pla Orquín 2021a; Fariselli 2022; Guirguis - Pla Orquín 2022; Jiménez Vialás 2022; Martín Ruiz 2022; Niveau de Villedary y Mariñas 2022; Pompianu 2022; Rivera Hernández 2023; Spatafora 2016; Ferrer Martín - López-Bertran - Rivera Hernández 2023. For a more comprehensive history of the studies on Phoenician and Punic women, see: Morstadt 2017-2019; Pla Orquín 2019, 9-10; 2021b.

<sup>2</sup> Delgado Hervás 2016a, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Delgado Hervás - Ferrer Martín 2007; 2011; 2012; Delgado Hervás 2016a; Ferrer Martín - Lafrenz Samuels 2016; Ferrer Martín - López-Bertran 2017-2019; Delgado Hervás - Rivera Hernández 2018; Marín Muñoz - Rivera Hernández 2019; 2021.

In this context, one aspect that remains relatively unexplored from the perspective of gender studies is the realm of epigraphic documentation, which stands as the sole direct Phoenician-Punic source at our disposal. Notably, the city of Carthage represents, as is well known, a privileged *scenario* in several respects, starting with the quantity, completeness, and variety of the known texts. These inscriptions have yielded valuable insights into social and legal statuses, as they encompass a wide array of information related to origins, social categories, and priestly roles. Although earlier studies by M.G. Amadasi and A. Ferjaoui, as well as recent research by L.A. Ruiz Cabrero,<sup>4</sup> have provided insights into these topics, there is a compelling need for more extensive and in-depth exploration.

With this objective in mind the University of Sassari's research unit has undertaken the cataloguing and examination of female inscriptions since 2021, as part of the PRIN 2017 Project - Peoples of the Middle Sea: Innovation and Integration in the Ancient Mediterranean (1600-500 BC).<sup>5</sup> This ongoing effort has amassed a collection of more than 800 inscriptions, covering a chronological range from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.<sup>6</sup> The majority of these inscriptions have their origins in the city of Carthage, with limited examples from Sardinia, and additional inscriptions from Phoenician and other Eastern Mediterranean regions, including Egypt (fig. 1). In this contribution, our intention is to highlight certain epigraphic documents that, while not entirely unpublished, have yet to be integrated into the standard bibliography or discussions related to Phoenician and Punic women.

## 2. ENDURING STORIES: TRACING THE FOOTSTEPS OF PHOENICIAN WOMEN

The first noteworthy document is a letter (fig. 2) written in the Phoenician language<sup>7</sup> on papyrus,<sup>8</sup> which was found in the fill of a mastaba at Saqqara, alongside other Demotic papyri. It is possibly associated with the reign of Amasis.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the dating of this papyrus can be attributed to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC or the early part of the following century. This document is remarkable within its category and carries significant importance as one of the rare ancient West Semitic texts that concerns Phoenician women and their affairs.

The handwritten letter includes information about the recipient, whose name is inscribed on the *recto* of the document:<sup>10</sup> «To 'RŠT, daughter of 'ŠMNYTN». In the main text on the

<sup>4</sup> Amadasi 1988; 2017-2019; Ferjaoui 1999; Ruiz Cabrero 2008; 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Research lines A.1 and C.3.

<sup>6</sup> Some results of the study have already been published: Pla Orquín 2021b; Guirguis - Pla Orquín 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Katzenstein (1979, 30) asserts that the letter from Saqqara is composed in the southern Phoenician dialect of Tyre and Sidon, while Krahmalkov (2001) contends that the dialect employed in the letter KAI 50, which the author refers to as the «Daphnae dialect», is more closely aligned grammatically with Punic.

<sup>8</sup> KAI 50. For the various editions and translation of the papyrus, see: Aimé-Giron 1940; Dupont-Sommer 1949; van den Branden 1970; Delekat 1971; Magnanini 1973, 8; Pardee ed. 1982, 165-168; Greenfield 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Aimé-Giron 1940, 434.

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the papyrus handwriting, the first publisher wrote: «l'écriture est élégante, presque jusqu'à la fin de la quatrième ligne et donne l'impression que l'auteur a calligraphié son texte à loisir avec un calame bien taillé. La cinquième ligne et l'adresse au verso laissent au contraire nettement deviner l'emploi d'un calame usagé et trahissent une certaine hâte, confirmée par l'absence de points de séparation. On a l'impression que l'expéditeur a tracé ces dernières avec un roseau de fortune au moment de confier sa lettre au messager et peut-être même hors de chez lui. Les traces d'encre, au coin gauche de la margé inférieure, confirment ce diagnostic: elles sont en effet le décalque des deux derniers signes (ⲱ) de la ligne 4 et prouvent que le

front side of the papyrus, which has some minor gaps, the sender's name (BŠ') is provided. The letter primarily deals with a silver loan<sup>11</sup> that was arranged between these two women. It delves into the loan's terms, including details about repayment, interest rates, and the procedures for returning the loan. The epistle commences with a distinctive opening greeting: «Say to my sister 'RŠT, your sister BŠ' said: Are you in good health? I, too, am in good health! I bless you to Baal-Šaphon and all the gods of THPNHS. May they keep you to be in good health!».

This epistolary greeting in this letter reveals it to be a personal letter between two equals. The sender BŠ', addresses the recipient, 'RŠT, as "sister" (L'HTY), a term denoting respect rather than a literal blood relation. The greeting formula of this letter must be assumed to represent the Phoenician tradition since in several respects they reflect Ugaritic practice.<sup>12</sup> A comparable case can be found in a letter addressed to the queen of Ugarit,<sup>13</sup> likely sent by another queen, potentially from the Hittite kingdom, who also addresses her as "sister". The content of this letter exhibits similarities to the Saqqara document. According to the interpretation by H.J. Marsman, it appears that the queen of Ugarit borrowed money from another queen and, for some reason, was either unwilling or unable to repay this debt. As a result, the foreign queen exerted pressure on her.<sup>14</sup>

We have limited information about the two women involved in this financial transaction. We only possess their names and places of residence. The name 'RŠT, also recorded in the form 'RŠT, is a common female name within the city of Carthage and other North African settlements,<sup>15</sup> but is not attested in the Phoenician homeland. As for BŠ', the meaning of the name remains unknown, and F. Benz<sup>16</sup> suggests that it might possibly be of Egyptian origin.<sup>17</sup>

The letter was presumably written in THPNHS (ancient *Daphnae*, now Tell Dafana), a fortified site that prospered from the XXV Dynasty onwards, situated in the eastern part of the Delta. This site housed a community of foreigners, including Phoenicians, and a temple dedicated to the god Baal-Saphon. The letter was received in Memphis,<sup>18</sup> a center that, according to historical sources, hosted the largest and most significant Phoenician community in Egypt. According to the famous passage by the Greek historian Herodotus<sup>19</sup>, people originally from Tyre inhabited the Τυρίων στρατόπεδον, a neighbourhood that

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document fut plié alors que l'encre était encore fraîche en ce point. L'adresse a dû être mise une fois la lettre terminée; son *ductus* est analogue à celui de la dernière ligne du recto» (Aimé-Giron 1940, 435).

<sup>11</sup> According to Dupont-Sommer's translation (1949, 53), it would amount to 320 shekels and a quarter.

<sup>12</sup> Pardee ed. 1982, 167-168. For the correspondence of Ugarit see: Cunchillos 1999.

<sup>13</sup> KTU 2.21 = RS 15.174.

<sup>14</sup> Marsman 2003, 632-634.

<sup>15</sup> Benz 1972, 69, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Benz 1972, 293.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the name, see also: Aimé-Giron 1940, 438.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the Phoenician communities in Egypt, refer to: Bresciani 1987; 1988; Chiera 1987; Bonadies 2017; 2021a; 2021b.

<sup>19</sup> *Herodotus* II, 112.

developed around the *Serapeum*, which housed an important sanctuary dedicated to Astarte, referred to by Herodotus as a foreign Aphrodite.<sup>20</sup>

It remains unclear whether these women were temporary residents or permanent settlers, whether recent immigrants or descendants of past generations. Different residency situations of people of Phoenician origin in Egypt are documented through Phoenician inscriptions found in various locations.<sup>21</sup> These situations are succinctly summarized in one of the Phoenician graffiti from Abydos,<sup>22</sup> which includes the text: «io sono P'L'BST figlio di ŠDYTN figlio di GRŠD, il tirio abitante attualmente (?) in Eliopoli d'Egitto, nel quartiere di 'BDMLQRT l'elipolitano».<sup>23</sup>

The existence of stable communities and individuals of Phoenician origin, as well as those from Phoenician colonies in the Western Mediterranean, is supported by various epigraphic records found in Memphis. One notable example is an inscription engraved on the back of one of the 600 sphinxes that adorned the avenue connecting the city to the *Serapeum*, a structure built during the reign of the 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty pharaoh Nectanebo I (ca. 379/8-361/0 BC). The sphinx, discovered by F.A.F. Mariette and currently on display in the Louvre Museum,<sup>24</sup> bears four inscriptions of particular significance, written «peregrina manu negligentius exaritus»<sup>25</sup> in Phoenician and Neo-Punic languages, and inscribed at different times (fig. 3). Of particular significance is the second line, which features inscriptions of two female names, 'RKRḤ and ZYBQT, rendered in irregular characters. Paleographic analysis has led scholars to conclude that the characters are of Punic origin, as suggested by A. Ferjaoui.<sup>26</sup> The probable Central Mediterranean origin of 'RKRḤ and ZYBQT is supported by onomastics. The first name, with a complex interpretation, is attested in Carthage on a stela from the Tophet<sup>27</sup> and in an inscription in Neo-Punic characters scratched on a black-glazed cup from Tharros, Sardinia (fig. 4).<sup>28</sup> More significantly, the second name of Libyan origin is documented in several Carthaginian inscriptions<sup>29</sup> and in the well-known funerary inscription of the priestess from Avignon<sup>30</sup>.

Carthage served a significant role as a departure point for Carthaginian families and a destination for individuals and families<sup>31</sup> from the Levant and other Mediterranean regions. Alongside women of possible Carthaginian origin who inscribed their names on the Memphis sphinx during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, there are well-documented inscriptions, mainly dating from the late 5<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, pertaining to women with experiences of

<sup>20</sup> The priests of this sanctuary of Astarte in Memphis, referred to as «Φοινικαίγυπτοι», were documented in a papyrus from Zenon's archive: De Simone 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Several cases are presented in Bresciani 1987.

<sup>22</sup> CIS I, 102a = KAI 49.34.

<sup>23</sup> Bresciani 1987, 71-72.

<sup>24</sup> <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010009176>.

<sup>25</sup> CIS I, 97a, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> Ferjaoui 1988, 241-242; 1992, 181-182.

<sup>27</sup> CIS I, 2434.

<sup>28</sup> ICO Sard Npu 9, 136, tab. LVI.

<sup>29</sup> CIS I, 3800; 4676; 4677.

<sup>30</sup> KAI 70 = RÉŠ 360; Ferron 1968.

<sup>31</sup> For epigraphic evidence documenting the presence of Punic, primarily males, in the East, and for insights into the relations between Tyre and Carthage: Bordreuil - Ferjaoui 1988; Ferjaoui 1992, 180-184; 2008; Amadasi 2012; Guirguis 2016.

mobility, and in some instances, perhaps even permanent migration (fig. 5). For example, a votive dedication on a stela from North African metropolis mentions 'RŠT BT 'BS HŠDNY, belonging to a family originally from Sidon but residing in Carthage.<sup>32</sup> Another noteworthy inscription from the Rabs necropolis<sup>33</sup> is dedicated in memory of a husband by KBD'ŠTRT, a native of the city-state of Arwad. As suggested by Ferjaoui,<sup>34</sup> this inscription follows an Arwadian tradition, distinct from Carthaginian inscriptions, as it mentions the person who commissioned the construction of the tomb.

Beyond the strictly Phoenician context, it is possible to identify individuals residing in Carthage, such as 'RŠT of Erice (B'LT 'RK),<sup>35</sup> and undoubtedly, EYKAEA,<sup>36</sup> whose name appears in Greek characters within a customary Punic invocation, dedicated to the goddess Tanit and the god Baal Hammon.

Another indirect indicator of female mobility and family group movement is the presence of names derived from various ethnic backgrounds, implying the existence of non-native women in Carthage, potentially with connections to regions like Sardinia or Libya at some point in their lives.<sup>37</sup> Examples of these names include ŠRDNT<sup>38</sup> (fig. 6), among whom some were women of servile condition later emancipated (CIS I, 280),<sup>39</sup> and LBT<sup>40</sup> or LBTN.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the female anthroponym MŠRT,<sup>42</sup> derived from the ethnic MŠRY, meaning "Egyptian".<sup>43</sup> In this context, it's worth highlighting that names given to individuals who were not originally from Carthage or to the daughters of families with at least a paternal Phoenician heritage may have been transmitted to Carthage through the relationships between their families and Egypt, as well as the communities living in the Nile region.<sup>44</sup>

In the context of inscriptions from Egypt, we find tangible evidence of female mobility towards Egypt. Notably, the papyrus discovered at Saqqara is a rare document that provides valuable insights into the multifaceted involvement of certain women in various aspects of

<sup>32</sup> CIS I, 308.

<sup>33</sup> CIS I, 5945 = RÉŠ 1226.

<sup>34</sup> Ferjaoui 1992, 177.

<sup>35</sup> CIS I, 4910. For this inscription, Ruiz Cabrero (2008, 53) suggests: «Parece razonable que esta persona (...) mientras visitaba la metrópoli de Cartago, simplemente sintió la necesidad de pagar un homenaje a los dioses púnicos o pronunciar un voto o hacer una petición. Sin embargo, se puede considerar esta importancia del santuario a nivel extracomunitario, no solo territorial en el territorio circundante africano, sino en otros lugares de ámbito púnico, bien pudiera dar una segunda interpretación, aquella de la necesidad de deponer y ejercitar el ritual propio del área sagrada como significación religiosa».

<sup>36</sup> CIS I, 191.

<sup>37</sup> Ruiz Cabrero 2009, 57-58.

<sup>38</sup> The inscriptions CIS I, 879, 4771, 4772, 5521 have been compiled and analysed in Ferjaoui 1999, 79-80, and Pisanu 2021, with an additional reference to CIS I 2030 as discussed in Ruiz Cabrero 2009, 58.

<sup>39</sup> In this specific case, it could be a woman of Sardinian origins who arrived in Carthage as a slave in the service of a woman or men named HMLKT. In regard to the non-free population in Carthage: Ruiz Cabrero 2008, 138-142; Amadasi 2020.

<sup>40</sup> CIS I, 470, 1118, 1480, 2074, 2181, 3833, 3834, 4714-4721, 5822.

<sup>41</sup> CIS I, 4722, 5586.

<sup>42</sup> CIS I, 3839; 4723; 4724.

<sup>43</sup> Ferjaoui 1999, 81.

<sup>44</sup> Fantar 1994, 207-208; Ruiz Cabrero 2009, 60-61.

economic life, even on an international scale, beyond their local participation in sectors like textile production, ceramics, and related activities.<sup>45</sup>

Additionally, one of the few documents related to Punic businesswomen is the concise funerary inscription of ŠBLT (fig. 4), described as a “merchant of the city”.<sup>46</sup> This Carthaginian woman likely belonged to one of the merchant guilds involved in extensive commercial activities, with a focus on the Š B' MQ QRT “plain of the city”, as indicated in the well-known Punic inscription referred to as the “urbanistique”.<sup>47</sup>

The inscription CIS I, 5948 has generated diverse opinions and reservations regarding ŠBLT’s actual entrepreneurial role, epitomized in the initial translation by Ph. Berger: «Je sais toutefois les objections que l’on peut faire à cette traduction, et je ne la propose qu’avec une certaine réserve». <sup>48</sup> The term SHRT,<sup>49</sup> used to describe her, goes beyond a generic merchant or seller of specific goods, as suggested by the Punic term MKR,<sup>50</sup> and denotes a merchant engaged in both import and export activities.<sup>51</sup>

### 3. THROUGH THE ENGRAVED LENS: UNMASKING PHOENICIAN WOMEN’S LEGACY

In the Neo-Assyrian city of Nimrud, historical records shed light on the influential roles of Phoenician women in the upper echelons of palace administration. One prominent figure among them is Amat-aštar, who held the esteemed title of šakintu in the new palace of Kalḫu.<sup>52</sup> Her name is preserved in a marriage contract<sup>53</sup> inscribed in cuneiform script and Akkadian language. This document, discovered in 1952 within the North-West Palace Archive of Kalḫu, was found in a room<sup>54</sup> predominantly associated with documents related to women,<sup>55</sup> particularly those linked to šakintus.<sup>56</sup> The marriage contract likely dates to

<sup>45</sup> Delgado Hervás 2016b.

<sup>46</sup> CIS I, 5948 = RÉŠ 768 = KAI 92.

<sup>47</sup> Mahjoubi - Fantar 1966; Dupont-Sommer 1968; Ferron 1985; Szyner 2001. Following A. Dupont-Sommer (1968, 128), this referred to the plain of the city of Carthage that extended from the hill of Byrsa toward the coast, where commercial houses and artisan workshops were situated.

<sup>48</sup> Berger 1903, 97. Ch. Clermont-Ganneau (1903, 313-322) acknowledges ŠBLT’s role as a businesswoman but notes her relatively low social standing, as she does not provide her father’s or husband’s name. M. Lidzarski (1908, 174-175) suggests that ŠBLT’s occupation was not necessarily commercial but rather itinerant and related to sacred activities; J. Ferron (1966) proposes the interpretation that she might have been a «magicienne de Carthage». In more recent scholarship, M.H. Fantar (1970, 102) distinguishes ŠBLT’s role from other women who engaged in smaller-scale door-to-door businesses. For further insights into the inscription: Ferjaoui 1991, 79; 1999, 85; Yazidi Zeghal 1995, 210; Ruiz Cabrero 2009, 47-48; Pla Orquín 2021b, 23.

<sup>49</sup> Documented in the masculine form SHR in: CIS I, 5967 = RÉŠ 1229 and RÉŠ 1575.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. for example CIS I, 333 “the gold seller”; 334 “the incense-seller”; 335 “the iron seller”; 3885 “the seller of broad beans”; 4874 “the seller of flax/linen”. Additional examples, not only from Carthage, are compiled in: Ruiz Cabrero 2009, 46-47.

<sup>51</sup> Ferjaoui 1999, 85.

<sup>52</sup> The Phoenicians settled or deported to Assyria, along with their descendants, held significant roles in both the Assyrian administration and the army (Lipiński 1975; 1983; 1985; 1991; Zadok 1978, 57-59).

<sup>53</sup> ND 2307.

<sup>54</sup> ZT 16.

<sup>55</sup> Postgate 1979, 99-100.

<sup>56</sup> Parker 1954; 1955, 125; Postgate 1976, 103-107, n. 14; 1979, 89-103.

around 625 BC<sup>57</sup> and meticulously records the terms and bridal gifts (*nudunnū*) offered by a mother for the marriage of her daughter, Šubētu, to Milkiram, the son of Abdi-Azuz, who was also presumed to be of Phoenician origin.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, three more documents<sup>59</sup> are likely connected to the marriage of Amat-aštar's daughter, primarily consisting of a detailed breakdown of expenses to be covered by the bride's mother.<sup>60</sup>

The Assyrian monarchs pursued a well-defined political and military strategy, characterized by the extensive deportation of populations from besieged and conquered cities. A significant aspect of this strategy involved the forced relocation of families of defeated enemy kings, a practice that gained prominence during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 BC).<sup>61</sup> This phenomenon is well-documented in various sources, including iconographic representations<sup>62</sup> and epigraphic records, which describe the compulsory transfer of foreign women, notably Phoenician women, under the orders of different Assyrian rulers. The female component of the Assyrian court, including concubines, singers, musicians, and others, represented a heterogeneous reality. As per S. Melville<sup>63</sup> «concubines in Assyrian palaces represented a variety of individual circumstances and relationships, including aging women who had lived with the previous king, women related to the king but without another male protector (aunts or widowed sisters-in-law, for example), women from the household of a defeated king, women who belonged to the entourage of some foreign princess sent to Assyria for diplomatic marriage, foreign hostages and their companions, and women who were sent to live at the palace by their families in hopes of achieving advancement».

References to women of Phoenician origin can be also found in Assyrian Annals, often in the context of war spoils and the capture of prisoners.<sup>64</sup> For instance, Hiram II of Tyre (circa 739-730 BC) presented a substantial tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III after his defeat, which included female singers.<sup>65</sup> There is also a distinct case involving 13 musicians from Tyre mentioned in a Neo-Assyrian document dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>66</sup>

In the ancient Near East, it was common to include women from royal households and the offspring of defeated monarchs as part of tributes or war booty.<sup>67</sup> King Asarhaddon

<sup>57</sup> Lipiński 1991, 152; Teppo 2007, 269; Svärd 2012, 513.

<sup>58</sup> About the Phoenician origin of Amat-aštar (MT'ŠTRT), Milkiram (MLKRM), and Abdi-azūzi: Zadok 1978, 57-59; Lipiński 1991; Radner ed. 1998, 5, 98.

<sup>59</sup> ND 2310-2312.

<sup>60</sup> Postgate 1976, 103-107; 1979, 100-107.

<sup>61</sup> On the policies of massive deportations by the Assyrian kings, for example: Oded 1979; Fales 2001, 73-76; 2006; Luukko ed. 2012, XXXVI-XXXIX.

<sup>62</sup> For the analysis of images depicting deported women in the Assyrian figurative *corpus*, see: Wäfler 1975, 55, 112, 154-155, 165, 199, 202-203, 245-246; Albenda 1987; Ciafarelli 1998, 220-223; Pinnock 2001-2003.

<sup>63</sup> Melville 2004, 40.

<sup>64</sup> In terms of the conflicting or vassalage relationships between the kings of Phoenician cities and the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the situation starts to take shape from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III: Cogan 1973; Oded 1974; Pettinato 1975; Elayi 1983; 1985; 2013, 156-195; Botto 1990, 21-107; Briquel-Chatonnet 1997, 63-65; Salamé-Sarkis 2005; Aubet 2008; Fales 2017, 230-247.

<sup>65</sup> RINAP I, Tiglath-pileser III n. 49, r5-r6.

<sup>66</sup> Fales - Postgate 1992, n. 24, ll. 20-23, 26-27.

<sup>67</sup> From this perspective, some passages from the 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Kings (20:1-8) are of interest. These passages recount the embassies sent by the king of Aram to Ahab during the siege of Samaria. The Syrian king

(680-669 BC), after defeating King Abdi-milkūti ('BDMLKT) of Sidon,<sup>68</sup> reported capturing not only his wife, sons, daughters, his palace retainers, but also «gold, silver, goods, property, precious stones, garments with trimming and linen(s), elephant hide(s), ivory, ebony, boxwood, everything of value from his palace in huge quantities, (and) took away his far-flung people who were beyond counting, oxen, sheep, goats, and donkeys in massive numbers taking away a multitude of people, livestock, and goods»<sup>69</sup> to Assyria. A similar situation occurred when King Asarhaddon conquered Tyre and subjugated Baal I (677-671 BC), where the tribute included both the Phoenician monarch's daughters and their dowries.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, during the rule of Assurbanipal (668-627 BC), the King of Tyre sent one of his daughters, along with the daughters of his brothers, to the Assyrian court. These royal women were accompanied by substantial dowries and were intended to serve as court attendants in Assyria.<sup>71</sup> A parallel action was taken by Yakinlu, the King of Arwad (circa 670-660 BC), who dispatched one of his daughters to the court of Nineveh, accompanied by a generous dowry.<sup>72</sup>

As proposed by J. Elayi,<sup>73</sup> the specific reference to dowries implies that this exchange of women bore a closer resemblance to a matrimonial agreement rather than a capture of hostages. It is essential to consider F. Pinnock's insights regarding the depiction of women and their dowries in Assyrian reliefs,<sup>74</sup> which can be applied to the written evidence discussed *supra*. The dowry not only contributed to the wealth of Assyrian kings but also carried a symbolic dimension. As Pinnock notes, «appare, pertanto, significativo non tanto il fatto che la dote accresca il patrimonio incamerato dai vincitori, quanto il fatto che la donna la porti con sé, ad indicare, forse, il suo passaggio nelle mani del re vittorioso, in una sorta di nuovo matrimonio, quindi, seppure in forma dimessa, perché comunque preda di guerra, portando con sé i suoi beni dotali. Da un lato, quindi, essa andrà a ricoprire un ruolo in qualche misura "garantito", tanto che non viene mai neppure ammanettata e, dall'altro, le è preclusa ogni possibilità di tornare nella città di origine».<sup>75</sup>

Given the historical context of Phoenician women's deportations and the chronological alignment with the marriage contract of Subetu and Milkiram, it is plausible to speculate that Amat-aštar, holding the position of šakintu at the New Palace of Nimrud, might have

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demanded not only material wealth, such as silver and gold but also the women and children of the king of Samaria.

<sup>68</sup> King 'BDMLKT had allied himself with the Cilician king of Kundu and Sissû in an anti-Assyrian capacity. Asarhaddon captured Sidon in 677 BC. The following year, during an escape attempt, the Sidonian king was captured and subsequently beheaded (ANET, 290-291; Lipiński 1992a; Elayi 2013, 179-181).

<sup>69</sup> RINAP 4, n. 1, ii 65'-80'; n. 6, ii 16'; ANET, 291.

<sup>70</sup> Pettinato 1975, 149; ANET, 291; RINAP 4, n. 30, r1.

<sup>71</sup> ANET, 295-296.

<sup>72</sup> ANET, 296; RINAP 5/I, n. 4, ii 45'-48'. After the killing of Yakinlu, his ten sons paid homage to the Assyrian ruler. Azzibaal succeeded his father to the throne of Arwad, while the other sons assumed various positions within the Assyrian administration: Lipiński 1992b; Elayi 2013, 187-188; ANET, 296-297; RINAP 5/I n. 4, ii 49'-59'.

<sup>73</sup> Elayi 2013, 184.

<sup>74</sup> In some depictions of deportations, women are shown carrying or standing beside sacks, bags, and situlae, which are sometimes interpreted as dowry items of foreign princesses: Pinnock 2001-2003, 135-137.

<sup>75</sup> Pinnock 2001-2003, 137.



belonged to the ranks of women originating from Phoenician royal lineages. The marriage agreement for Amat-aštar's daughter, dated to the latter half of Assurbanipal's reign (668-627 BC) or shortly thereafter, suggests that this Phoenician woman became integrated into the Assyrian court during Assurbanipal's rule over Tyre. This opens up the possibility that she could have been one of the daughters of King Baal of Tyre or one of his brothers, who arrived at the Assyrian court accompanied by their dowries.

The document ND 2307 highlights Amat-aštar's significant role in the Neo-Assyrian court as a member of the *šakintus*, a distinguished group of women responsible for overseeing financial and administrative affairs for the "House of the Queen" across various royal residences. Preserved records<sup>76</sup> offer valuable insights into the substantial personal wealth of the *šakintus* and their dedicated entourage, including scribes, aides, and support staff. These women actively participated in diverse legal and financial activities, engaging in transactions like the acquisition and sale of slaves and land, extending loans, and even manumitting slaves, among other duties. Their elevated status in the Assyrian court not only highlights their proactive involvement in administrative and economic matters but also emphasizes the pivotal role of women within the intricate framework of power and social organization. As S. Svärd<sup>77</sup> suggests, «the evidence indicates that in many Neo-Assyrian palaces there were households of the queen which were headed by a *šakintu* and employed hundreds of people, probably in textile production. My suggestion is that the *šakintus* were key agents in managing the immense fortune and vast household of the queen».

The family structures of the *šakintus*, exemplified in the case of Amat-aštar, reveal a distinctive societal role. Although they have children, there is a notable absence of information regarding their husbands. The document highlights that these women wielded full authority over their offspring. This is evident in Amat-aštar's active involvement in her daughter's marriage contract,<sup>78</sup> a privilege usually reserved for the male head of the family according to scholarly literature.<sup>79</sup> The available information about Amat-aštar's daughter, Šubetu, and her prospective husband, Milkiram, the son of Abdi-Azuz, is limited. Some scholars suggest that the likely identification of Šubetu's future husband is the renowned Milkiram, the chief tailor of the Assyrian court. He held a prominent position, actively participated in wars against Elam, and served as the eponym in the year 656/5 BC.<sup>80</sup> However, it's crucial to acknowledge a significant chronological gap between the year 656/5 BC and the document's dating, which falls between 625 and 622 BC. If this

<sup>76</sup> The title of *šakintu*, traditionally interpreted as "head of the harem", is now more accurately translated as "administrators". There are 54 documents from various Assyrian cities, such as Assur, Nineveh, Kalḫu, Tušhan, and Til-Barsip, that refer to women holding this title. These tablets, dating from 788 to 612 BC, shed light on the administrative role of *šakintu* within the Assyrian court, where they served the queen. For further insights: Heltzer 1987; Teppo 2007; Villard 2009, 306-310; Svärd 2015, 91-105; 2016a, 451-456; 2016b; Joannès 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Svärd 2016a, 454.

<sup>78</sup> E. Lipiński (1991, 153) proposes that the absence of the father's mention might indicate Amat-aštar's potential role as a high-ranking hierodule, separate from her position as the superintendent of the New Palace in Kalḫu. However, it's important to note that this hypothesis lacks concrete evidence beyond the omission of the father's mention.

<sup>79</sup> Teppo 2007, 264; Svärd 2015, 165.

<sup>80</sup> Parker 1954, 30; Lipiński 1991, 151-152; Svärd 2015, 104-105.

hypothesis proves accurate, it suggests that the groom was of an advanced age, approximately 55 years old.<sup>81</sup>

In delving into the specifics of document ND 2307, a comprehensive inventory of Šubetu's dowry takes precedence in the initial segment. This dowry, characterized by its opulence, encompasses a diverse range of prized items, including gold and gemstone-adorned sandals, golden drinking cups, silver jewellery, garments made of wool and linen, bronze and copper furniture, household items crafted from wood and stone, as well as various commodities such as rock alum, beryl, and spice jars. The second part of the document delineates contractual terms that notably favour the bride, especially in the context of potential divorce. It stipulates that if Šubetu fails to conceive and bear children, she is entitled to acquire a slave-girl as a surrogate to bear sons. These sons are then considered legally hers. The document further addresses the scenario where Šubetu may develop a dislike for Milki-ramu, allowing her to leave him, and in the event of Milki-ramu harboring animosity towards his wife, he is obliged to reimburse the dowry in double. This legal provision is highlighted in the words of the document: «If she loves the slave-girl she shall keep her, if she hates her, she shall sell her. If Šubetu hates Milki-ramu she shall leave him, if Milki-ramu hates his wife (?) he shall pay back the dowry to her two-fold».<sup>82</sup>

The marriage contract between Amat-aštar and Milkiram stands out as a remarkable exception within the intricate fabric of Neo-Assyrian documentation, capturing scholarly attention for several intrinsic reasons.<sup>83</sup> Secondly, the meticulous and considerate formulation of the marriage agreement, featuring notably favourable clauses for the bride in instances of infertility or divorce, adds to its uniqueness. Various interpretations have been proposed to comprehend these distinctive provisions, ranging from Amat-aštar's influential position within the Assyrian court to the potential advanced age of the prospective groom, which could justify the adoption of such precautionary measures.<sup>84</sup> Alternatively, some scholars posit that the marriage laws and traditions evident in this contract, while influenced by the Neo-Assyrian context, might more plausibly trace their roots to Phoenician customs. This perspective gains support, especially considering the likely Phoenician origin of the two families involved.<sup>85</sup>

Although at the moment no other documents of this kind are known in the Phoenician and Punic context, a comparable situation regarding the authority exercised by Amat-aštar over her daughter, evident in the marriage contract ND2307, could be found in Carthage and other centres in North Africa. Within the extensive corpus of votive inscriptions recovered in the Tophet sanctuary, mostly dated between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC, there are about twenty votive inscriptions in which women appear in genealogies following the names of male or female offerers.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Lipiński 1991, 152.

<sup>82</sup> Postgate 1976, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Svärd 2015, 98.

<sup>84</sup> Svärd 2015, 105.

<sup>85</sup> Zadok 1978, 58; Joannès 2016, 40.

<sup>86</sup> A preliminary collection is published in Pla Orquín 2021b, fig. 6.

In numerous cases, it is the mother of the offerer who is mentioned,<sup>87</sup> while in others, it is the paternal grandmother<sup>88</sup>; in the stele CIS I, 902, however, a certain 'RS expresses his genealogy entirely through the female line, as the names of the mother GDNM and the maternal grandmother 'LŠT appear.

The inclusion of matronyms in the Punic onomastic system has prompted various explanations, previously explored and debated.<sup>89</sup> One of the proposed theories suggests the potential absence of a legitimate father or the occurrence of births outside the confines of matrimony.<sup>90</sup> While not dismissing this possibility, it is theorized that matronyms may signify a distinct and independent legal status held by these mothers or grandmothers concerning their offspring, encompassing hereditary rights that, in certain instances, may be transmitted through the maternal lineage. Alternatively, the presence of matronyms might underscore the prominence of the maternal family, surpassing that of a prospective husband.<sup>91</sup>

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- ANET* J.B. PRITCHARD (ed.), *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton - New Jersey 1969<sup>3</sup>.
- CIS I* *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum ab Academia Inscriptionum et Litterarum Humaniorum conditum atque digestum. Pars prima: Inscriptiones phoenicias continens*, Paris 1881-1962.
- ICO SARD* M.G. AMADASI, *Le iscrizioni fenicie e puniche delle colonie in Occidente* (Studi Semitici 28), Roma 1967.
- KAI* H. DONNER - W. RÖLLIG (Hrsg.), *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften I-III*, Wiesbaden 1966-1969.
- RÉS* *Répertoire d'Épigraphie Sémitique* I-II, Paris 1900-1914.
- RINAP I* H. TADMOR - S. YAMADA, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC), Kings of Assyria* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 1), Winona Lake 2011.
- RINAP 4* E. LEICHTY, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4), Winona Lake 2011.
- RINAP 5* J. NOVOTNY - J. JEFFERS, *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal, Aššur-etel-ilāni, and Sîn-šarra-iškun*, Winona Lake 2018.

<sup>87</sup> CIS I, 253, 256, 378, 383, 1407, 1543, 1575, 2798, 3347, 3776, 3830, 3840, 4621, 4627, 4758, 5007, 5779, 5947. There is uncertainty in the case of CIS I 406 and CIS I 3133, where the name of the only mentioned ancestor, MTNB'L, is documented as both a feminine and masculine name (Benz 1972, 145; Pla Orquín 2021b, 17-18). However, it is worth noting that MTNB'L it is among the most documented names among Carthaginian women. In the funerary inscription CIS I 5947 = RES 509, the title HKHNT follows the only mentioned ancestor, but possibly is referred to the deceased 'M'ŠTRT.

<sup>88</sup> CIS I 1024, to which should be added CIS I 2222 e 5148, both of which mention the name 'RT as the last cited ancestor, attested certainly as a female name in CIS I 713 and 4648.

<sup>89</sup> Pla Orquín 2021b, 21-23.

<sup>90</sup> Yazidi Zeghal 1995, 209; Ferjaoui 1999, 84; Lancellotti 2003, 195; Amadasi 2017-2019, 184.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Pla Orquín 2021b, 20, fig. 5.

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Fig. 1 - Map of Mediterranean indicating the sites mentioned in the text.

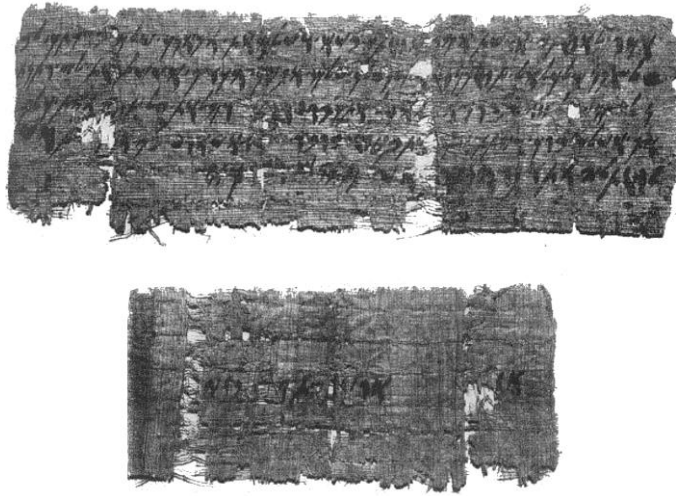


Fig. 2 - Phoenician papyrus (KAI 50) from Saqqara (Aimé-Giron 1940, pl. XL).



Fig. 3 - Sphinx from the *Serapeum* of Memphis bearing the inscription CIS I 97a-b (CIS I, pl. XV).





ICO Sard. Npu. 9

Š ʾRKRḤ



CIS I, 5948

QBR ŠBLT ŠḤRT HQRT

Fig. 4 - In the upper part, a fragment of a black-figured cup from Tharros with a Neo-Punic inscription bearing the name of the owner (ICO Sard. pl. LVI); in the lower part, a funerary inscription from Carthage, Necropolis des Rabs.



CIS I, 4910



CIS I, 5945

CIS I, 308: LRBT LTNT P[N  
BʼL WLʼDN LBʼ[ L Ḥ]MN ʾŠ  
NDR ʾR[ŠT] BT ʼBS ḤSDNY

CIS I, 5945: QBR ʼMRN BN  
GR[ʼŠT]R[T] HQBR Z ʾŠ PʼL  
ʾŠTʾ KBDʼŠTRT HʾRWDT



CIS I, 191

CIS I, 4910: LRBT LTNT PN  
BʼL WLʼDN LBʼL HMN ʾŠ  
NDR ʾRŠT BʼLT ʾRK BT ʼZMLK

CIS I, 191: [LRBT LTNT PN  
BʼL WLʼDN LBʼ]L Ḥ[M]N ʾŠ  
NDR EYKLEA

Fig. 5 - Inscriptions from Carthage mentioning women of foreign origin.



CIS I, 879

CIS I, 280

LRBT LTNT PN B'L WL'DN LB'L ḤMN 'Š NDR ŠRDNT  
'[Š ŠD]N BD 'DNY BD ḤM[L]KT B[T .....] BRK .....

CIS I, 879

LRBT LTNT PN B'L WL'DN LB'L ḤMN 'Š NDR ŠRDNT  
BT ḤLŠB'L BN [B]D'ŠTRT BN 'BD[ML]QRT

CIS I, 2030

LRBT LTNT PN B'L WL'DN LB'L ḤMN 'Š NDR ŠRD[NT  
B]T 'BDŠPN

CIS I, 4771

LRBT LTNT PN B'L WL'DN LB'L ḤMN 'Š NDR ŠRDNT  
BT ḤMLKT BN MLQRTḤLS

CIS I, 4772

LRBT LTNT PN B'L WL'DN LB'L ḤMN 'Š NDR ŠRDNT  
BT BDMLQRT BN ḤN' BN 'BD'ŠMN

CIS I, 5521

[..... 'Š NDR ŠRDN[T] BT ML[QRT.....]

Fig. 6 - Inscriptions from the Tophet sanctuary of Carthage featuring the name of the offerers ŠRDNT.