DIVINE ROAMING: DEITIES ON THE MOVE BETWEEN PHOENICIAN, ARAMAIC AND LUWIAN CONTEXTS

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Abstract: From about the second half of the 9th century BCE, Phoenician, Aramaic and Luwian communities began to experience a phase of intensive contacts. Among the most representative expressions of the interrelations were the religious traditions and, in particular, the presence in some western Syrian and south-eastern Anatolian contexts of divine figures (such as Pahalatis/Baalat [?], Baal Hammon, Melqart, Baal Shamem and Eshmun) who for the most part – according to some widely accepted readings – probably originated in Phoenician territories. The aims of the present observations are to revisit the available data and to attempt to understand the possible position occupied by those gods and goddesses in the framework of cultural relations, being their cult diffused, and shared, among the above-mentioned communities.

Keywords: Phoenicians; Aramaeans; Luwians; Cult; Cultural Interactions.

1. Introduction: A World of Connections

The period spanning the 9th and 8th centuries BCE represented a crucial phase for the Near East and, in particular, for the Levantine area. With the crisis of the Late Bronze Age overcome, and with the completion of the process of political reorganization that involved a large part of the communities inhabiting south-eastern Anatolia and Syria-Palestine, the Levant at the beginning of the 1st millennium became the site of a dynamic and heterogeneous world: from north to south, culturally differentiated entities – Luwian, Aramaic, Phoenician, Israelite, Philistine, etc. – were established or consolidated.[1] The resulting cultural panorama, however, did not represent a mosaic of distinct and crystallized "ethnic" components, with defined and rigid boundaries;[2] rather, it took the form of «a land where many regional variations were determined by contacts among all these local realities».[3] It was a strongly interconnected world, the various elements of which – its different communities – participated in the construction of shared traditions.

In a climate of profound interrelation, contacts of particular intensity occurred in south-eastern Anatolia and in the central and northern lands of western Syria. From the 9th century BCE, and especially from the middle of that century onwards, the region became a privileged theatre of relations between the Aramaic

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1 See Liverani 1991, pp. 629-773; Mazzoni – Merlo 2006, pp. 439-446; Sader 2014, pp. 16-36; Oggiano 2016 (all with bibliographic references).

2 For a critique of the expression "mosaic of cultures" see Fabietti 2016, pp. 55-59 and, most recently, Porzia 2018.

3 And then «the Levantine coast (…) must be analyzed according to a contextual approach and taking into account regional differences. We have, in fact, to consider that the geographical, political and cultural borders of the lands defined in our studies as Syria, Phoenicia (…), Philistia, Israel and Juda (…) were different depending on the type of "borders" (geographical, political or, more generally, "cultural") used as reference»; both the citations – in the text and footnote – are from Oggiano 2016 (p. 89 and p. 90 respectively). On different types of borders, see Fabietti 2005.

and Luwian communities, that had settled in the area in the immediately preceding centuries, and those that lived in the central and southern territories of the coast, commonly referred to as "Phoenician";[4] the latter, who were direct heirs of the Bronze Age tradition and were undergoing a full economic expansion at that time, were attracted to the north in particular by the rich mining areas of the Amanus and Taurus.[5] One striking example of such a system of relations was the diffusion of the Phoenician language and writing:[6] during the 8th century BCE the phenomenon became quite extensive – so much so that «nowhere else in the Levant, except for Phoenicia itself, were so many inscriptions found as in Cilicia and in the area of Zincirli».[7] Phoenician therefore probably took on a transregional character, becoming an example of a «linguistic intermixing that defies the establishment of clear cultural boundaries».[8]

The adoption of language and script, however, was certainly not the only way in which the dynamics of contact between the Phoenician peoples and the Aramaic and Luwian groups found their expression. Alongside it, an important position in the network of relationships was occupied by the religious dimension and, in particular, by the presence in various Aramaic and Luwian contexts of the cult of some divinities closely linked – perhaps original or in any case traditional – to the Phoenician territories. Based on the data, and according to the most accepted reconstructions to date, the phenomenon concerned above all centres located in the region between the ancient cities of Hamath, Hazrak, Arpad and Sam'al (Fig. 1); the protagonists, among the deities, were some important male and female figures widely diffused in the Phoenician context (both eastern and western) – namely the gods Baal Hammon, Melqart, Baal Shamem, the pair formed by Eshmun and (again) Melqart, and the goddess Baalat (/Pahalatis?), all cited in texts from royal contexts.[9] These deities emerged in the wake of the Bronze Age tradition, though representing, with the exception of the Baalat (known since the 3rd millennium), new characters in the Syria-Palestine and Anatolia pantheons; to a large extent, they can be understood as the 1st-millennium expressions, with their own features, of previous divine typologies. Their adoption in Aramaic and Luwian contexts specifically characterized the period from the mid 9th to the mid 8th century BCE.[10]

4 The use of the term "Phoenician" is at the centre of an intense debate; see recently on this theme Ercolani 2015.

5 Niehr 2014b; Peckham 2014; most recently, Amadasi Guzzo 2019. It is in the same period, not surprisingly, that the settlement of Al Mina arose as the unavoidable harbour for all the imports that reached Mesopotamia through northern Syria. From its beginnings (around 800 BCE), it was the destination (also) of Phoenician merchants (Lehmann 2005).

6 According to M.G. Amadasi Guzzo (2018), Phoenician script was adopted by the Aramaeans around the 11th-10th centuries. It is possible to ascribe to this period the diffusion in the north-eastern territories of a writing model that can be considered the most ancient one used by local communities (although it was abandoned at the end of the 9th century). Another tradition, inspired by a Tyrian model, is affirmed around 800 BCE in the north-west (in the Syro-Anatolic regions).

7 Lehmann 2008, p. 151. The documentation, for the period between the 9th and 8th centuries BCE, consists of a dozen epigraphs, some of which are written in two languages (as in the case of the inscription, in Luwian and Phoenician, by Azatiwada of Karatepe; KAI 26). To these data we must add the possible presence in the region of Phoenician scribes, as in the case of Abdilim at Guzana (Tell Halaf), and the knowledge of Tyrian writing by important local characters, as in the case of Yariri of Carchemish. On the data cfr. Hawkins 2000, pp. 130-133; Lipiński 2000, pp. 215-216; Lemaire 2001; Lipiński 2004; Lehmann 2008, pp. 151-153; Amadasi Guzzo 2014; Feldman 2014, pp. 35-36; Younger 2014; Younger 2016, p. 535; Amadasi Guzzo 2018; Amadasi Guzzo 2019.

8 Feldman 2014, p. 36 (cfr. also p. 178). From the end of the 9th century BCE, the presence in the north Syrian area and in Cilicia of ceramics attributable to Phoenician production is also evident: Lehmann 2008. Moreover, emblematic of the relations and cultural connections of the period was the enormous circulation of luxury goods throughout the Levant. These objects were the vehicle of signs and symbologies that must have been widely recognized, especially at the elite level, and were therefore part of a common language (Oggiano 2016, in particular pp. 93-97). The formation of a shared language contributed to the construction of «communities of shared practices», beyond boundaries or "ethnic" differences (Feldman 2014, p. 40).

9 On these deities see the fundamental Lipiński 1973 (Eshmun), Bonnet 1988 (Melqart), Xella 1991 (Baal Hammon) and Niehr 2003 (Baal Shamem); on the Baalat (of Byblos) see Bonnet 1996, pp. 19-30. On Melqart and Baal Hammon, cfr. Garbati 2015.

10 Only in one case – that of Baal Shamem – did the adoption of the cult by Aramaic communities extend far beyond the period indicated.

Fig. 1. Map of the Levant with the indication of the sites mentioned in the text (author's elaboration, partially based on Younger 2016, fig. 7.1).

As mentioned, the presence of the five gods in the cited territories has been interpreted in the history of studies as an expression of the profound contacts that developed between Phoenician and Aramaic-Luwian communities. More specifically, the cults of figures such as Melqart, Eshmun, Baal Shamem and perhaps also the Baalat (to be understood as the main Byblos goddess) would have "moved" from the Phoenician environment to the Luwian and Aramaic centres, whereas a character such as Baal Hammon, considered by some to be Phoenician as well, would have had, according to others, Aramaic origins; only later would he have been adopted in the coastal area of the Levant.[11] Now, beyond the possibility, which is no doubt quite acceptable, of looking at the five divinities as evidence of cultural contacts, the readings of the documents in which they are cited have generally been based on assigning to the divine protagonists some sort of ethnic label – such as Phoenician, Aramaic or Luwian deities – which then formed the basis of the reconstruction of the direction taken by cultural exchanges. Less attention, on the other hand, has been paid to understanding the role played by the deities in their specific contexts of attestation and, together with that, the functions they served within the climate of interrelations that characterized the Levant of the time. In the notes that follow, then, I will try to retrace the available data in order to reconstruct some of the main distinctive features of each god (in chronological order: Pahalatis, Baal Hammon, Melqart, Baal Shamem and Melqart again together with Eshmun) in the documents in which they are mentioned, and certain aspects of their cult in the corresponding historical frame. The primary aim will be to verify, where possible, how and at what level the characters in question were actually the expression of those processes of cultural interaction which, at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, involved Phoenicians, Aramaeans and Luwians, and represented one of the segments of the network of connections that crossed the entire Near East.

2. Gods and Contexts

2.1. *The Lady of Hamath*

The goddess Pahalatis is known to us through some inscriptions in Hieroglyphic Luwian that come from Hamath (now Hama) and its surroundings, almost all commissioned by King Urhilina, son of Parita, who reigned around the middle of the 9th century BCE (ca 860-840).[12] The texts, as a whole, record the building works that the sovereign carried out, or took care of, in honour of the goddess in the city of Hamath itself and in other settlements. Following J.D. Hawkins's *Corpus*, the Hama 4 inscription (Fig. 2a),

11 Niehr 2014b and Xella 1991, pp. 34-35; cfr. also Kestemont 1985, pp. 136-137. A possible Phoenician influence has been suggested also for the god El (especially in Sam'al); however, the wide diffusion of this deity and most of all his earlier presence in Ugarit speak in favour of a cult that cannot be attributed, specifically, to one of the two cultures; cfr. Niehr 2014c, p. 161.

12 Younger 2016, pp. 448-449.

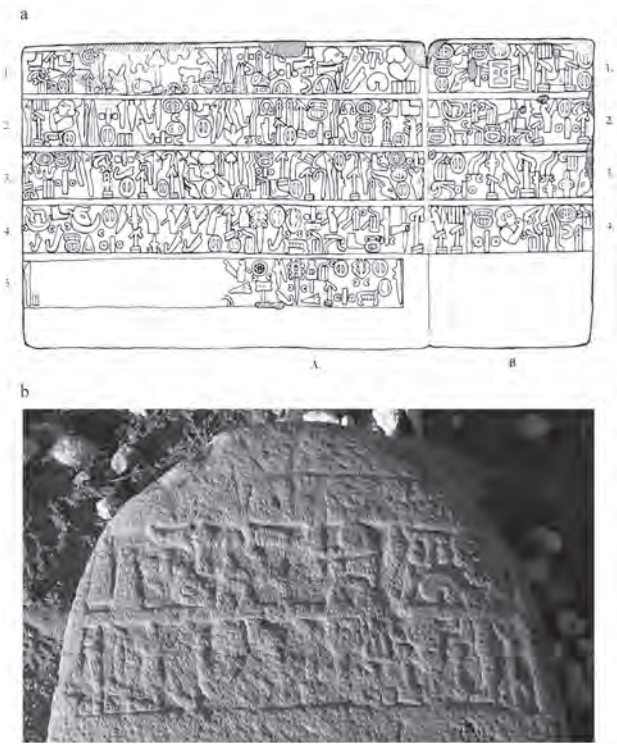

Fig. 2. a: drawing of Hama 4 inscription (after Hawkins 2000, pl. 213); b: upper part of the Tall Šṭib stele (after Gonnet 2010, p. 99, fig. 2).

for example, written on an orthostat that was to serve as the right jamb of a temple door, speaks about the creation of the "seat" of the deity and the king's care for the income of the sanctuary; in Hama 8, an unfinished inscription engraved on a stele, the same sovereign dedicates a granary to the "Lady".[13] Pahalatis is again mentioned in a fragmentary epigraph, also from Hamath, in which the name of the regent is not reported, but which has been dated to the 9th century BCE; carved on the corner fragment of a base, the text records the name of the god Tarḫunzas next to that of the goddess.[14] In honour of the female divinity, Urhilina also erects two foundation steles, one found near Restan and the other in Ni'u, to the south and north-west of Hamath respectively.[15] More recently (2002), a further basalt foundation stele, again built by Urhilina and dedicated to Pahalatis, was found at Tall Šṭib, 41 km north-north-east of Hamath (Fig. 2b): a duplicate of the Restan stele (and of that from Ni'u), it clearly documents that Urhilina's reign «was not concentrated simply along the Orontes, but was, in fact, spread into the hinterland».[16] In addition to the epigraphs in Hieroglyphic Luwian, the cult of the goddess is possibly attested in Hamath by the use of the word *b'lt* in local Aramaic anthroponyms (*e.g.* KAI 204).[17]

According to the epigraphic data, therefore, the goddess Pahalatis certainly represented the main female divinity of the kingdom of Hamath at least around the middle of the 9th century BCE. A companion of the storm god Tarḫunzas, she followed and protected the activities of King Urhilina even beyond the borders of Hamath itself; moreover, she must have been configured as a family and dynastic goddess, since in Hamat 4 the sovereign mentions the existence of her temple already at the time of his father (Parita) and his grandfather, although both relatives are remembered in the text for their lack of regard for the sacred building (unlike, of course, Urhilina himself).[18] For some scholars, moreover, the goddess might be identified with the "Divine Queen of the Land" of two epigraphs (older than those mentioned above) found respectively in the village of Meharde and in the neighbouring castle of Sheizar, situated just north-east of Hamath.[19] The first records an

13 Hawkins 2000, pp. 403-406 (Hama 4); 409-410 (Hama 8); see also Hawkins 2016.

14 Hawkins 2000, p. 419.

15 Hawkins 2000, pp. 407-408 (Restan and Qal'at el-Mudîq); the specific names of the cities are not written in the texts.

16 Younger 2016, p. 145. On the Tall Šṭib stele: Gonnet 2010 and Rousset 2010. Another duplicate, however, lacking the name of the goddess, comes from Hines in northern Iraq (Hawkins 2000, pp. 408-409).

17 Otzen 1990, p. 278, n. 2.

18 On the search for consensus and the reason for the denigration of the previous kings see Green 2010, pp. 298-301 and Kühn 2014, p. 49 (but specifically for Aramaic inscriptions).

19 Hawkins 2000, pp. 416-417. The correspondence between the two goddesses is proposed, for instance, in Biga – Capomacchia 2008, p. 370; according to Niehr 2014a, p. 336 (and 2014c, p. 167), on the other hand, the "Queen of the Land" is to be identified with Kubaba.

offering by Taita, "king of Walastin", for the deity, while the second is the funerary inscription of Kupapiya, Taita's wife.[20]

The reasons for the presence of Pahalatis in central-western Syria, as briefly stated above, have often been ascribed to dynamics of cultural influence that the Phoenicians, and particularly the Phoenicians of Byblos, would have exercised in the area.[21] As a Luwian form of the Semitic term "Baalat" ("Lady"), the name of Pahalatis, in fact, has been associated in some studies with that of the main female deity of Byblos, the *b'lt gbl*, known in the Phoenician epigraphy of the coastal city from the beginning of the 1st millennium.[22] Such a reading is undoubtedly very appealing and in some ways plausible; specifically, the possible identification of the Hamath goddess with the Baalat Gubal could be suggested by the use as a theonym, in the Luwian language, of a noun most often used in Phoenician as a common name (Pahalatis/*b'lt*); it is in Byblos, in fact, that the term – combined with the toponym *gbl* – actually becomes a proper name, assigned to the major female divinity of the urban pantheon.[23] In the documentation from the city, the Phoenician expression *b'lt gbl*, as a divine name, begins to appear, as mentioned, at the outset of the 1st millennium (the most ancient and reliable attestation dates from the end of the 10th century BCE);[24] from this moment, and at least until the mid 4th century BCE, it is constantly used to describe the polyadic goddess, patron of the city sovereigns. However, a long time before its presence in Phoenician texts, the expression "Lady of Byblos" was used in Egypt, from the 3rd millennium, as an epithet (in the form *Nbt kb/pn*) of the goddess Hathor; this use is clearly attested also by some Egyptian documents found in Byblos itself, clearly showing the close relationship – if not the superimposition – between the Gublite and the Egyptian figures.[25]

Currently, the reasons underlying the process that may have led to (what seems) a title becoming the proper name of a Phoenician goddess remain unknown. Nonetheless, it seems evident that the phenomenon – if admissible – was characteristic of the Byblos religious culture, at least based on its constancy of use and attestations.[26] For this reason, as we said, one cannot completely exclude the possibility that the first reference point for Hamath's Pahalatis should be sought in the *b'lt gbl*, whose cult would have been widely known and seen as prestigious, thanks to its long tradition. It is true, though, that even in the likelihood of such a reading, at the moment there are no certainties and many questions remain open. Beyond the nominal similarity, no further elements help us to understand whether the two deities actually had a direct and

20 The character mentioned has been identified with Taita II, who reigned in the early 10th century and whose kingdom was centred on the Amuq; on the sovereign and the discussion concerning this character's identity and kingdom see, recently, Hawkins 2016, in particular p. 190; Younger 2016, pp. 123-135 and 144-147.

21 See, for instance, Lipiński 2000, p. 252; Peckham 2001, pp. 28-29; Niehr 2014b, p. 335 and Niehr 2014c, pp. 166-167.

22 The possibility of such a cultural interaction would be corroborated, moreover, by the subsequent diffusion, in the kingdom of Hamath, of the cult of Baal Shamem, a deity attested at Hazrak (Tell Afis) in the inscription of the Aramaic king Zakkur, and also a central figure, first of all, in the Gublite pantheon (where he appears around the middle of the 10th century BCE); Lipiński 2000, pp. 252-253. See paragraph 2.4 below, dedicated to Baal Shamem.

23 On the expression *b'lt gbl* as a proper name, see Zernecke 2013; on the relation between proper divine names and epithets see Bonnet *et al.* 2018, coming from the ERC project "Mapping Ancient Polytheisms. Cult Epithets as an Interface between Religious Systems and Human Agency", leaded by C. Bonnet (Université de Toulouse – Jean Jaurès).

24 The mention of the *b'lt gbl* in the inscription of King Yehimilk, dated between ca 950 and 940 BCE (KAI 4), is debated; the reference to the divinity is certain, on the other hand, in a short text dated to 925 BCE which comes from the surroundings of Byblos: Bonnet 1996, pp. 23-27 (with correlated bibliography).

25 Scandone Matthiae 1991; Bonnet 1996, pp. 20-22.

26 The explanation of the phenomenon could be found in the close relationship that developed between the Levantine divinity and Hathor; such a relationship could have led to the abandonment of the original name of the goddess in favour of the epithet "Lady of Byblos", conferred precisely on Hathor (Stadelmann 1967, pp. 1-8, 10-11; see also Scandone Matthiae 1981, pp. 63-66). However, A.E. Zernecke has also stated that «the search for the "true name" of the Byblian goddess is based on an unnecessary assumption. The presupposition that *b'ltgbl* cannot be a name is caused by its linguistic transparency and motivation as a divine title. But apparently, the ancient Byblians regarded *b'ltgbl* as a name, at least in some of their inscriptions» (Zernecke 2013, p. 242).

close relationship, morphologically and functionally, or even overlapped or represented two versions of the same divine entity (of Semitic and particularly Phoenician origin?). Moreover, it is rather difficult to accept that the Gublite goddess was concealed *sic et simpliciter* under the name of Pahalatis. One must bear in mind that the very name of the Phoenician divinity – which was certainly not limited to the Baalat component alone, consisting of the latter and the toponym *gbl* – sanctioned the inescapable and indissoluble link with a particular urban centre (*gbl* – Byblos);[27] similarly, for that matter, the relationship with Tarḫunzas, the local storm god, marks out the goddess of Hamath as a figure fully embedded in the traditions of the region. Not least, we have yet to understand if – and according to what mechanisms – the Pahalatis (and the Baalat?) had some connection also with the Luwian "Divine Queen of the Land", cited in the inscriptions of Meharde and Sheizar and possessing a name/epiclesis linked to the territory.[28] In essence, the possibility of hypothesizing and reconstructing any dynamics of Phoenician influence in the Hamath region through the observation of the cult of Pahalatis remains an open, and perhaps promising, prospect. At present, however, it cannot be based on certain or reliable data; the most evident aspect is rather represented by the presence on the Phoenician coast and in the Syrian interior of traditions that possibly had some features in common.

2.2. *A King, a God … Many Cultures*

Turning to Baal Hammon, the god's name appears in the inscription of King Kulamuwa (KAI 24; ca 830-825 BCE), recorded on a basalt orthostat originally located on the northern side of the entrance to Building J in the citadel of Sam'al (capital of the Yadiya kingdom and present-day Zincirli; Fig. 3).[29] The text represents the most ancient attestation of the Baal Hammon cult known so far; in the Phoenician language, it uses a type of writing that has been traced back to a model elaborated much further south, probably in Tyre during the 9th century BCE;[30] the signs, however, are worked in relief, respecting the tradition of the region, specifically Luwian.[31] On the left side of the stele, the epigraph partly frames the figure of the sovereign, represented in profile and placed in front of some symbolic elements, including a winged solar disc. In the first part of the inscription, the king, following a literary topos, mentions his predecessors, who – he explicitly states – accomplished nothing during their reigns: it is rather Kulamuwa himself who has achieved what his ancestors did not.[32] Below, the sovereign cites the help received from an Assyrian king against the Danunians and, immediately afterwards, boasts of his gifts of generosity, goodness and justice, which he has shown towards those who are discriminated against and the poor. In this respect, Kulamuwa refers specifi-

27 From this viewpoint, it is useful to underline that A.E. Zernecke has rightly pointed out that even if the expression *b'lt gbl* was conceived as a proper name, it kept its semantic value, as indicated by the El Amarna letters in which the Byblos deity «appears as *bēltu ša Gubla* (^{d}NIN *ša* ^{uru}*Gub-la*), "Lady of Byblos" translated into Akkadian»: Zernecke 2013, p. 241. Besides, a 4th century BCE inscription from Lapethos (Cyprus) attests to the local presence of a cult addressed to the "gods of Byblos who are in Lapethos" (in association with other deities, as Melqart "of Narnaka"). In this case, the direct link between those gods and the Levantine city is clearly maintained and declared (references in Bonnet 1988, pp. 333-334).

28 It is suggestive that on the stele of Meharde, the "Queen" is depicted with Hathoric hair; as we have seen, the Baalat of Byblos is deeply linked to Hathor (including from an iconographic viewpoint).

29 Cfr., among others, Sader 1987, pp. 172-175; Tropper 1993; Dion 1997, pp. 99-101; Brown 2008; Green 2010, pp. 136-156; Gilibert 2011, pp. 79-84; cfr. also Niehr 2013b and Niehr 2018b, with references.

30 In the absence of specific elements of comparison from the Phoenician city, the support for this hypothesis comes, for instance, from the Cypriot text dedicated to Baal of Lebanon, made by a governor of Baal of Tyre, the script of which is close to that of the Kulamuwa stele (and to other inscriptions, such as those of Melqart and Zakkur; cfr. *infra*); Amadasi Guzzo 2018, pp. 132-134.

31 Amadasi Guzzo 2018, pp. 128-129. Brown 2008, p. 342, note 14, who cites Peckham 2001, p. 32, defines the script as Aramaic, as does Gilibert 2011, p. 79; but see Amadasi Guzzo 2019, p. 158, according to whom «the shape of the letters cannot be distinguished from the Phoenician shapes of the same period and could even be linked with Tyre». See the summary in this regard in the aforementioned Amadasi Guzzo 2018, p. 129; cfr. also Niehr 2016.

32 Cfr. Kühn 2014, p. 49. On the formularies and structure of royal inscriptions, and on the ideologies on which they were based, see Green 2010.

cally to a particular group, the *mškbm*, who "lived like dogs" before him. The text closes with a curse formula in which Kulamuwa rails against those who will dare to harm the inscription; here he tells of a conflict between the *mškbm* and another group, the *b'rrm*, which will not find balance or peace if the epigraph will be damaged or the throne usurped;[33] so, he invokes three divinities who will have to intervene by breaking the heads of the possible culprits: *b'lṣmd* of Gabbar, *b'lḥmn* of Banah (/Bamah) and *rkb'l*, lord of the house/dynasty (*b'l bt*). The link between Banah/Bamah and Kulamuwa (who is "son of Hayya") remains uncertain, to the extent that one cannot exclude the possibility that they were members of different dynasties.[34]

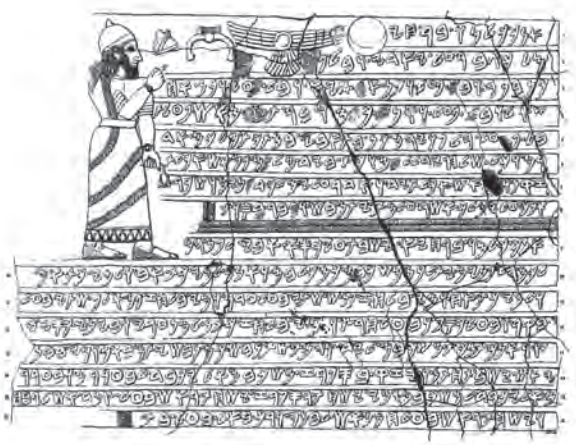

Fig. 3. Drawing of the Kulamuwa stele (after Niehr 2018b, p. 143, fig. 41).

As has long been recognized, the stele was made and erected in a profoundly intercultural atmosphere, recognizable both in the inscription and in the figurative apparatus. Although the epigraph is written in Phoenician, for example, the graphic signs are carved in relief, in the style of contemporary Luwian texts in hieroglyphics (the name Kulamuwa itself is of Luwian origin).[35] The image of the sovereign, in turn, appears to be markedly influenced by the Assyrian tradition;[36] the latter, however, is associated with Levantine details, as in the case of the lotus flower, turned upside down and held in the king's left hand. Recently, this combination of elements has been read as the result of a complicated process of political redefinition that, in the last thirty years of the 9th century BCE, was begun by the ruling class of Sam'al with the aim of affirming new social identities; in carrying out this process, a significant part was played by the adoption of "external" cultural and figurative trends (*e.g.* Phoenician and Assyrian).[37] In this context, the use of the Phoenician language, generally ascribed to its cultural prestige or to its vehicular character (or also to the possible presence of Phoenician groups that settled in the area), could actually be the result – as has been proposed – of a choice dictated by the idiom's neutrality for the Luwian and the Aramaic peoples distributed across the region.[38]

33 On the interpretation of the *mškbm* and *b'rrm* there is a lively debate; they may possibly be read, respectively, as sedentary (Luwians) and mobile peoples (Aramaeans); see Younger 2016, pp. 390-394; cfr. also Schmitz 2013.

34 On these problems see Younger 2016, pp. 388-400.

35 The names of his relatives are however of Semitic origin.

36 Cfr. Orthmann 1971, p. 66; Genge 1979, p. 41. Recently on these issues: Brown 2008; Gilibert 2011, pp. 82-84; Oggiano 2016, pp. 94-95.

37 As well as through elements of rupture with the past, as stated, for example, in the inscription, where Kulamuwa mentions the faults of his predecessors. Even the positioning of the stele, in a royal monumental building, constitutes an element of affinity with the Assyrian custom rather than the north Syrian, which preferred to place the reliefs in the temples, in the open areas and near the doors. Cfr. Brown 2008, pp. 344-349 and Gilibert 2011, pp. 82-84. Brown, in particular, states that «the Kilamuwa relief is not simply an opportunistic combination of various symbolic elements to provide a visual statement of political policies, it is also an index of group identity creation, in this case of one understanding of "Aramaean-ness" on the part of the ruling class of Sam'al» (p. 346). On the use of the term "Aramaic" in relation to a particular style (referring to Zincirli), in turn linked to ethnic definitions, see the recent critique in Tamur 2017.

38 Brown 2008, pp. 345-346; see recently Amadasi Guzzo 2018, p. 129. According to Brown, the use of Phoenician in the stele as a neutral language was related to the conflict, reported in the monument, between the *mškbm* and *b'rrm*; it would also serve to mitigate the proximity of the monument – and of Kulamuwa – to the Assyrians, looking towards the Phoenician cities, that at the time were still independent.

Even the mention of Baal Hammon, conceived in the stele as a dynastic divinity, has been understood by some scholars to be an indication of the cultural interactions that involved the region of Sam'al and the dynasty of Yadiya, so well expressed in the relief. In this case, it has been suggested in some studies that the presence of the god might be explained as an effect of the profound influence that the Phoenicians – specifically the Phoenicians of Tyre – exercised in Sam'al and the surrounding territories around the end of the 9th century BCE; such an influence would be attested by the language used in the inscription and could be linked to the interest of the coastal settlements in the mineral resources of the northern regions.[39] Although this is a likely reading, it is not the only possibility proposed. According to other interpretations, the origin of the deity can instead be found in the Aramaic environment, from which the cult was later adopted in the Phoenician context;[40] according to this second view, therefore, the mention of the divinity in the stele would not have been an element to be ascribed to cultural contacts, but by contrast would have been an indication of that Baal's "Aramaean-ness".

At present, choosing between the two perspectives is rather complicated, and perhaps also unnecessary. The attempt to reconstruct the possible stages of the "mobility" of Baal Hammon's cult at the beginning of the 1st millennium, in fact, is undermined by the evident scarcity of the available documentation: apart from the mention on the stele, which represents the most ancient direct testimony of the cult, in the East we currently know of only one other document – a more recent one (6th century BCE) from Tyre – that quotes the theonym *b'l ḥmn*.[41] Of course, it is suggestive that the god, after the mention in the Kulamuwa inscription, apparently disappears from the Aramaic centres,[42] while meeting with great success, by contrast, in some Phoenician settlements of the West from their early stages, thanks above all to the link with the *tophet*; such a contrast could be read, without any certainty, as an indicator of the greater (original?) adherence of the divinity to the Phoenician sphere.[43] Moreover, between the two hypotheses – which theoretically make this particular Baal an alternately Phoenician and Aramaic character – a third option cannot be excluded, that is to say, the possibility of a transregional connotation to the cult and the divine morphology, which allowed the god to participate, in the same period and each time with specific features and local solutions, in the religious dimension of multiple and diverse cultural environments.[44]

2.3. *A Human and a Divine King*

The third deity in question, Melqart, is the recipient of the dedication by King Bar-Hadad, which was probably elaborated around the same time as, or a little after, the Kulamuwa inscription (KAI 201; around

39 Xella 1991, pp. 34-36.

40 Niehr 2014a, pp. 306-307.

41 The term *ḥmn*, however, was already quite widespread in the 2nd millennium, as attested, for example, by the Ugaritic documentation, both in the cultic context and in the anthroponomy. The term, according to P. Xella's reading, indicates «une sorte de tabernacle ou de chapelle, la demeure la plus retirée et la plus sacrée de la divinité» (Xella 1991, p. 177; cfr. also Xella 2010). According to other (perhaps less convincing) readings, the word should rather be related to altars or incense burners, or to the name of Mount Amanus (Niehr 2014c, p. 158). In addition to the cited contributions, on the data relating to the cult of Baal Hammon see Bordreuil 1986 and Garbati 2013.

42 Baal Hammon (together with Baal Samed) is not cited in the other royal Aramaic inscriptions; it is possible that he was ousted from his eminent position following dynastic changes after the reigns of Gabbar and Banah (Niehr 2014a, p. 307).

43 The conception of Baal Hammon as the tutelary god of the *tophet* – which must have characterized those sanctuaries from the origins of some western settlements – would seem to speak in favour of the presence of the god in ancient phases even in the history of the Phoenician cities of the motherland. On the *tophet* see Xella 2013 and, more recently, D'Andrea 2018.

44 Ascribing an ethnic label to the god, moreover, raises several problems of interpretation: regarding Baal Hammon as an originally "Aramaic" character, for example, does not help us to understand the success that his cult achieved in a part of the Mediterranean West; on the other hand, viewing the god as a figure of "Phoenician" tradition risks neglecting the role he played locally, in Sam'al, as protector of Banah, as a character linked to the family – as a figure that is, in some senses, traditional.

800 BCE; Fig. 4).[45] To date, the original context of the epigraph, recorded again on a basalt stele, remains unknown: the find was uncovered in Breğ, about seven kilometres north of Aleppo, where it had been reused in a Roman wall;[46] we cannot exclude the possibility, therefore, that the artefact originates from Aleppo itself[47] or from another site not far from the area, such as ʿAyn at-Tell.[48] Composed in Aramaic, the epigraph, as mentioned, tells of a vow addressed to the god Melqart – the god of Tyre, conceived as the founder and first king of the city[49] – by Bar-Hadad, who describes himself, according to some readings, as "son of Attarsumki, king of Aram";[50] to be offered is the stele itself, since the god "has heard the voice" of the king. The identity of the sovereign is still debated: it is possible that the character should be identified with a regent of Arpad, in the kingdom of Bit Agusi, who came to power in the first half of the 8th century BCE.[51]

Fig. 4. The Bar-Hadad stele (after Niehr 2018a, p. 52, fig. 24).

Like the mention of Baal Hammon in the relief of Kulamuwa, the stele of Breğ represents the most ancient document that cites Melqart; it also preserves the first known representation of the deity.[52] Viewed as a whole, regardless of the language used (Aramaic), in terms of its inspiration the object seems to look towards the southern coastal environment (Phoenicia), as various authors have observed. Firstly, in addition to the involvement of Melqart, tutelary god of Tyre, the Phoenician component in the stele has been recognized in the inspiration of its graphic signs, which has been linked to a model elaborated in the south, specifically in Tyre (as with the Kulamuwa stele).[53] Secondly, besides the script model, the same cultural tradition has been recognized in the stylistic features of the god's image; it has been recently proposed, indeed, that the depiction should be attributed to «una scuola di cultura damascena tra gli ultimi anni del IX e gli inizi dell'VIII sec. a.C.» and ascribed to a «stile siriano meridionale, a un modello ben preciso, probabilmente tirio».[54] The main comparative elements have been found in some ivories from Arslan Tash, bearing figures characterized by general settings and some details (*e.g.* the beard of one figure) similar to those of Melqart's image.[55]

With respect to the preceding finds (related to Baal Hammon and Pahalatis), it seems evident, then, that the Bar-Hadad stele may speak in favour of a significant Phoenician influence in the northern areas, with Tyre

45 In addition to the bibliography cited below, on the stele see Bordreuil – Teixidor 1983; Pitard 1988; Puech 1992; Niehr 2014c, p. 152.

46 Matthers *et al.* 1978, p. 416.

47 See for instance Niehr 2014a, p. 279; Bonnet 1988, pp. 132-136.

48 Lipiński 2000, p. 211.

49 As indicated by the name itself, from *mlk*, "king", and *qrt*, "city". The deity represents one of the heirs of Late Bronze Age ideologies and cults, specifically linked – as is well known – to the figures of the Ugaritic Baal and royal ancestors (Bonnet 1988, *passim*; Xella 2001).

50 Younger 2016, pp. 533-536.

51 See a recent summary of the subject, with reflections that can be widely shared, in Younger 2016, pp. 533-536. See also Lehmann 2008, p. 153 (with previous bibliography) and, more recently, Niehr 2018a.

52 Melqart is depicted immediately above the inscription; he is bearded and moving to the left.

53 Amadasi Guzzo 2018, pp. 131-132.

54 Cecchini 2013, p. 282, where the absence of Luwian and Neo-Hittite elements is remarked (cfr. p. 275).

55 Cecchini 2013, pp. 281-282.

as one of the main protagonists. At the moment, however, some elements are still not completely clear. On the one hand, although it is likely that Tyrian culture provided some inspiration models for the stele (especially considering that Melqart was that city's god), there are currently very few data available to support this reading, since Tyrian artistic and script production of the time is really scarcely known.[56] Furthermore, specifically regarding the representation of Melqart, recent studies have pointed out the difficulty in classifying artefacts' stylistic features according to geographical criteria, and in therefore linking those features to specific places (regions or even cities) and "ethnic" entities; just such a difficulty has been noted in respect of luxury Levantine productions, such as that of ivories (used, as we have seen, as comparative elements to contextualize the style of the Bar-Hadad stele).[57] On the other hand, it is hard to reconstruct the reasons that led a ruler, probably of Arpad, to worship a god that, at the time, must have assumed a prominent role in the great Phoenician city of the south.[58] It is certainly possible, as suggested by C. Bonnet, that the Bar-Hadad vow should be considered a «manifestation isolée d'un acte de dévotion»[59] – an act, therefore, that is personal and circumscribed. According to some hypotheses, such an act of devotion should be connected to the likely construction in the region of a Melqart temple and «to the presence of Phoenicians here, perhaps traders conducting business with destinations further east in the direction of the Euphrates and Mesopotamia».[60] Actually, on the basis of the available data, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the Breğ dedication represented something isolated or something that was part of a more complex and diffused ideology. The adoption of the cult could have been intended, for example, as an instrument through which the king could affirm his power strategies and legitimize them through divine support:[61] the god may have been, as it were, the manifestation of something prestigious, given his intimate relationship with Tyre (a powerful city in that period), and could represent one of the clearest symbols – not least through his name – of the urban royal ideology.[62]

2.4. *A Baal between Heaven, Cities and Territories*

Baal Shamem, the fourth of our protagonists, is mentioned several times in a text recorded once again on a basalt stele, which represents the first attestation of the god's cult in the Aramaic environment. Commissioned by King Zakkur and found at Tell Afis (ancient Hazrak, kingdom of Hamath), it was recovered outside its original context of use, which may possibly have been the city acropolis (KAI 202; Fig. 5).[63] The inscription, written

56 Cfr. note 30.

57 Feldman 2014; Suter 2015.

58 According to Flavius Josephus, the cult of Melqart was introduced to Tyre by King Hiram I in the 10th century BCE; the sovereign built new temples to the deity and Astarte, and celebrated for the first time the *egersis* of the god (*Contra Apionem* I 117-119); see Bonnet 1988, pp. 33-40. On the chronological problems of Hiram's kingdom see Oggiano 2016, pp. 92-93 with previous and specific references.

59 Bonnet 1988, p. 134.

60 Lehmann 2008, p. 153; cfr. Kestemont 1985, p. 137. H. Niehr has also suggested the possibility that a colony of Tyrians existed in the Aleppo area, which formed the basis for the local spread of the cult of Melqart: Niehr 2014a, pp. 279-280.

61 According to E. Lipiński, the vow indicated in the stele would have been motivated by a very specific episode and, in particular, by a victory won by the sovereign over Zakkur of Hamath: in the stele from Tell Afis (see below) a "son of Gūš" is mentioned, who, according to the scholar, should be identified precisely with Bar-Hadad; the latter would not have been indicated with his name to avoid confusion with the king of Damascus, head of the coalition against Zakkur; Lipiński 2000, p. 216.

62 As indicated by S.M. Cecchini, the image of Melqart on the stele carries some attributes, such as the axe or the headgear, that testify to the «trasformazione in iconografia divina di una iconografia originariamente regale, ma che già dalle prime attestazioni nel Bronzo Medio siriano sembra strettamente legata alla divinizzazione dei sovrani defunti. Si tratta di un vero "re della città" divinizzato»; Melqart «è dunque nello stesso tempo un re-dio e un dio-re» (Cecchini 2013, p. 282).

63 See, among the most recent publications, Millard 1990; Lipiński 2000, pp. 254-255; Millard 2000; Schwiderski 2004, p. 422; Noegel 2006; Green 2010, pp. 157-174; Younger 2016, pp. 476-481. The fragments that make up the part preserved nowadays come from a pit and the wall of a building (Mazzoni 2013, p. 204).

in Aramaic but with a type of writing still inspired by the Tyrian model attested in the preceding epigraphs,[64] is engraved on the frontal and lateral sides of the stele base; above the text, there is the lower portion of an anthropomorphic figure standing on a stool, identifiable as the sovereign.

Dated to the years shortly after 800 BCE, the text opens with the registration of the vow made to the god Iluwer by Zakkur, the first Aramaic ruler over Hamath; again the stele itself is the offering. Immediately afterwards, the king, who describes himself as "sovereign of Hamath and Luʿaš", claims to have been placed on the throne of the city of Hazrak at the behest of Baal Shamem, "the lord of heaven", the other true protagonist, together with the sovereign, of the epigraph.[65] In fact, as is specified further on in the document, the same god protected the king from a coalition of perhaps 17 city-states, led by Bar-Hadad of Damascus (son of Hazael), that aimed to besiege Hazrak, which had been annexed by Zakkur. Thanks to the intervention of Baal Shamem (and probably with the help of the Assyrians), the sovereign emerges victorious from the battle and, as he is pleased to recall, he has been able to start and complete some important reconstruction works in Hazrak. The text concludes with a curse addressed to those who will dare to cancel the epigraph or remove the stele; in that event the deities are called upon to intervene, beginning with Baal Shamem and Iluwer, followed by Shamash, Shahar and the gods of heaven and earth.

Fig. 5. The Zakkur stele (after Younger 2016, p. 479, fig. 7.9).

To understand the role entrusted to Baal Shamem in the inscription, one must bear in mind, first of all, that the text appears to aim, in its formulation, at creating an ideal portrait of Zakkur; repeating a topos (seen already, though with differences, in the Urhilina and Kulamuwa inscriptions), it depicts the ruler as a pious and just king, a man chosen and protected by the gods.[66] In the construction of this image, the legitimacy of the sovereign's actions is guaranteed precisely by the protection granted by Baal Shamem; indeed, it is the god who allowed Zakkur to sit on the throne of Hazrak, who reassured him in the face of a crisis and saved him from the enemies who tried to besiege "his" city. In the epigraph, therefore, the deity is presented as a figure intimately bound to the king and to the power he obtained, and linked to the city and the territory.[67] Not surprisingly, a similar function – which makes him a character strongly connected to the

64 Amadasi Guzzo 2018, p. 132.

65 On the god see Niehr 2003 and Niehr 2013a; cfr. also Lipiński 1995, pp. 84-88 and Röllig 1999.

66 «… so that the real figure of the king is regularly replaced by a fictional representation presenting an ideal image to the reader» (Merlo 2014, p. 112). In this specific case, the construction of such an image must have depended partly on the fact that Zakkur was a usurper. The king, originally from ʿAnah on the Euphrates, was the founder of the Aramaic dynasty of Hamath (in the 9th century, as we have seen before in the case of Pahalatis, the local sovereigns bore Luwian names instead); in his epigraph, however, he does not mention his ancestors (unlike Kulamuwa). On these issues see Noegel 2006.

67 Nocquet 2004, p. 356: «Baal Shamem a donc en premier une fonction locale, territoriale et citadine, qui semble être la garantie d'un ordre et d'une stabilité de la ville où il est vénéré». Cfr. Katzenstein 1991, p. 374; Niehr 2014a, p. 339 and Noegel 2006, p. 308. See also Kühn 2014, p. 48, according to which «The usurper king Zakkur of Hamath and Luʿaš was supposedly appointed

urban monarchy – is attributed to Baal Shamem in the Phoenician version of the bilingual epigraph of King Azatiwada of Karatepe (KAI 26; about 720 BCE): in the text, the god is called upon to intervene, along with other figures (*e.g.* El), against those who will dare to destroy and replace the works made by the sovereign and attempt to gain power over the city.

As was proposed for the Breğ relief and inscription, also in the case of the Zakkur stele a Phoenician influence has been suggested: in this particular document, such an influence would be indicated by the presence of Baal Shamem, understood by some scholars to be a divinity originating from Byblos (a question possibly connected to the cult of Pahalatis/Baalat at the time of Urhilina).[68] Indeed, although the spread of deities conceived or titled as sky-gods precedes the 1st millennium BCE, extending beyond the borders of Syria-Palestine,[69] the earliest direct mention of a character with the proper name *bʿl šmm* can be dated to the mid 10th century BCE and is included in the inscription of King Yehimilk of Byblos (KAI 4). In the text, Baal Shamem is called upon, together with other gods, to prolong the days of the king over the city. In the Phoenician context, the cult of the god experienced a certain success, spreading both in the Levantine and in the western settlements; for the East it could be enough to mention the treaty drawn up around 671 BCE by Baal of Tyre and Esarhaddon of Assyria, in which the deity appears as one of the divine guarantors of the pact, together with Baal Saphon and Baal Malage (and immediately before Melqart, Eshmun and Astarte).[70]

Despite his popularity within the framework of the Phoenician religion, however, a certain caution must be exercised when attempting to read the possible (but still unproven) Gublite origin of the divinity as an indication of some influence exerted by the Phoenicians (of Byblos in this case): as mentioned, this Baal belonged to a divine typology – that of the "god of heaven storm" – which was widespread in the ancient Near East and acquired, from time to time, local formulations; in addition to the Zakkur inscription, in the 1st-millennium Baal Shamem is evoked, for instance, in the aforementioned epigraph of Azatiwada; in the text the name of the deity corresponds, in the Hieroglyphic Luwian version, to the "god of heaven storm" (Tarḫunzas).[71] The cult of the divinity, in essence, must have been characterized by "transregional" qualities, regardless of the specific context in which the origins of the cult itself are to be sought; in the Zakkur stele, moreover, it is the god's bond with a particular city that is to be emphasized, as are, therefore, the local connotations of the divine personality.[72]

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as king not by the family god Iluwer but by the principal deity Baʿalšamayin, who stood by the king in his political and military affairs (…). This reference to the local and national gods of the conquered territories mirrors the growing political self-confidence of the Aramaean kings». On the close relation between Baal Shamem and regality, that seems central in the Zakkur inscription, see Bonnet *et al.* 2018, pp. 579-582.

68 On these suggestions: Niehr 2014a, pp. 336-337 and Niehr 2014b, p. 336.

69 The title "lord of heaven" «fut appliqué dès le IIe mill. aux divinités suprêmes des panthéons syro-palestiniens, anatoliens ou sumséro-akkadiens» (Bonnet 1992, p. 61; see also Röllig 1999). For instance, the most important manifestation of the Hittite Tarḫun(t) was described as "storm-god of heaven"; the epithet "of heaven", moreover, is attested for Haddu or Adad (and other gods) in the Middle Euphrates and in the Upper Mesopotamian-Assyrian area: Schwemer 2008, pp. 15-16. On the topic, see the recent Bonnet *et al.* 2018, pp. 578-585; furthermore, on the 1st millennium Baals, see Allen 2015, pp. 221-232.

70 Parpola – Watanabe 1988, pp. 24-27; Katzenstein 1991.

71 Bunnens 2004, p. 61. According to D. Schwemer, the Luwian Tarhunzas, described as *tipasasis* ("of heaven"), should be viewed as «*one* of the points of departure for the later independent development of the deity Baʿalšamêm within Phoenician religion» (Schwemer 2008, p. 16).

72 Xella 2007, p. 73: «Del resto Baalshamim è una figura il cui culto è attestato, per così dire, in forma transregionale in tutto il mondo aramaico attraverso una documentazione relativamente abbondante».

2.5. *A Couple for Many Occasions*

Finally, the gods Melqart and Eshmun are mentioned next to each other in a source of a different nature from those presented so far. I refer specifically to the treaty signed by Mati'el of Arpad and Ashur-ninari V of Assyria around the middle of the 8th century BCE (754-753 BCE).[73] Of the pact – which was probably drawn up in order to avoid conflicts, at least on the Aramaic side[74] – the only portion that is preserved relates to the curses hurled against the sovereign of Arpad in the event of his possible failure to comply with the clauses. In the final section, a series of divinities is listed to guarantee the agreement; there appear, first of all, the Assyrian deities (6-17) and, later, the gods of Arpad (18-26), the latter represented by Hadad of Aleppo, Palil, the Sebettis (the Pleiades), Dagan and Muṣuruna, Melqart and Eshmun, Kubaba and Karhuha, and Hadad and Ramman of Damascus.[75]

In a comparable way to what was attested for Baal Hammon and Melqart, in the steles of Kulamuwa and Bar-Hadad respectively, the pact constitutes the most ancient testimony of the cult of Eshmun, a figure conceived as a divine healer who will be prominent in Phoenicia (for instance, he will be the polyadic god of Sidon), as well as in the settlements of the West.[76] Again paired with Melqart, the god will return about seventy years later to be the protagonist of another political document and, specifically, of the above-mentioned treaty signed by Baal of Tyre and Esarhaddon. As is well known, the Sidonian and the Tyrian divinities – both conceived as powerful polyadic Baals, whose personalities owed much to the great Baal of Ugarit – were felt in the Phoenician context to be very close on the morphological level, so much so that they were also united, on certain occasions, in functions and worship.[77] In addition to the treaty just mentioned, this affinity is clearly attested by the spread of the double theonym Eshmun-Melqart, known from a dedication of the first half of the 7th century BCE found in Ibiza[78] and from various Cypriot inscriptions from Batsalos (Kition), dated around the mid 4th century BCE.[79] The fact that the two gods are mentioned in pairs in the 8th-century treaty, therefore, seems to reflect the way in which they must have been actually perceived already in the environment that hosted their cults more than any other (*i.e.* the Phoenician sites).

As a whole, the divinities presented in the document would seem to show a high level of interaction and cultural fluidity, encompassing different communities in the Levant: the list of gods includes characters that seem to belong not only to traditions that oscillate between various Aramaic kingdoms, but also between cities or groups normally regarded as belonging to different "ethnic" entities. Along with the Phoenician Melqart and Eshmun, one can think, for example, of the two Hadads mentioned above – of Aleppo and Damascus respectively (in the second case paired with Ramman) – or even of figures such as Kubaba and Karhuha, who were widespread in Neo-Hittite contexts (in Carchemish in this case); the case of Dagan is also highly significant, a cross-cultural divinity of the Semitic world whose cult extended from Mesopotamia to the Levantine coast.[80]

Together with the Assyrian and Aramaic gods, therefore, the protagonists of the document are also deities who are (seemingly, at least) "foreigners" with respect to the context in which the treaty is set. On

73 Parpola – Watanabe 1988, pp. 8-13. For Kahn 2007, p. 76, the treaty should be dated to 746 BCE.

74 Younger 2016, p. 537.

75 Niehr 2014c, pp. 150-151.

76 Actually, it is difficult to say when the deity started to play the polyadic role in Sidon; almost certainly he served this function as early as the Persian period, when he is probably referred to as *b'l ṣdn* in the Eshmunazor II inscription (KAI 14); see Garbati – Xella 2011 and Garbati 2018, pp. 142-145.

77 On the specific aspects of this commonality of attributes see Xella 2001 and Garbati 2018.

78 Amadasi Guzzo – Xella 2005.

79 Guzzo Amadasi – Karageorghis 1977, A 3; A 5 (B); A10-A15; A 25 (?); D 10 (?).

80 On the group of deities of the treaty, see the notations in Niehr 2014c, p. 151; Fales 2017, p. 195, note 56.

closer inspection, however, this strangeness is only apparent: their participation in a diplomatic, public and official act, headed by a specific kingdom (Bit Agusi with Arpad) and a specific regent (Mati'el) in the context of complicated international relations, must have meant that those same divinities were part of a precise political and social environment. It is difficult to believe, from this point of view, that Mati'el considered those superhuman characters, invoked to guarantee the pact, to be "foreigners" ("Phoenician"/Tyrian, for instance) or that, on the other hand, the Assyrian king recognized them as "extraneous" to the world of his interlocutor; from this perspective, it is also useful to bear in mind that at least the god Melqart had already been circulating for fifty years in the Aramaic areas (and most probably in Arpad itself), as indicated by the Bar-Hadad stele. At least from the religious perspective, then, the pact seems to show that the local culture was permeable and cosmopolitan, able to include and embrace some protagonists (some gods) of the different traditions that populated the Syro-Palestinian region of the time;[81] such an aspect includes and at the same time transcends what may have been a Phoenician influence on local traditions.

3. Common Traditions, Shared Languages

The case studies examined so far, which from the chronological viewpoint cover about a century in total, form a richly nuanced picture. The messages conveyed by the documents – the royal inscriptions and the treaty – outline various levels on which the cultural relationships between Phoenician, Aramaic and Luwian communities can be placed, through the prism of the religious dimension and as part of the wider and variegated landscape of interactions that characterized the Levant at the beginning of the 1st millennium.

First of all, at what appears to be the highest level of the contacts, characterized by the greater intensity (recognizability?) of the relations, can be placed the Breğ stele. In this find, the connection with the coastal cities – Tyre in this case – seems to be theoretically identifiable in multiple elements, from the graphic signs and the divinity invoked by the king to the image with which the divinity himself is portrayed. However, there are more than a few open questions, especially in relation to the style of the image and the reasons that led Bar-Hadad to adopt the cult of Melqart, albeit occasionally. As for the Assyrian treaty, which attest to a sort of second – lower – level, the situation recorded by the final curse describes very fluid circumstances. The pact mentions two of the deities – Melqart and Eshmun – who, over the centuries, enjoy a constant and very broad priority in the Phoenician centres, in the East as well as in the West. In this case, however, it should be remembered that the cult of the Tyrian god, at least, had already been known for fifty years in the area of Arpad; moreover, the possible contact with the Phoenicians, which perhaps contributed to the inclusion of the two deities in the treaty (paired together not by chance), was part of a much broader framework of relations, which went far beyond the Aramaic and Phoenician environments; indeed, as we have seen, the pact was an expression of a cosmopolitan culture. Moving on to the Kulamuwa stele, the Phoenician component is again part of a fluid context (third level): although it emerges strongly in the use of the language, the find is actually inspired by multiple traditions, ranging from the local to the Assyrian. From this perspective, the figure of Baal Hammon remains ambiguous: his connection with Banah makes him a figure bound to tradition and to royal ideology; at the same time, the attestation at Tyre in the 6th century BCE and the success that the cult enjoyed in the Phoenician West from the most ancient phases could imply some anchorage of the god, first of all, to the religious dimension of the motherland's centres (once again to Tyre?). Essentially, at present there is little certainty about the possible role played by the divinity in the context of contacts between Phoenicians and Aramaeans; rather, what emerges clearly is that the god's cult belonged, in certain moments of its history and with specific aspects depending on the contexts, to both cultural spheres. Baal

81 An analogous situation characterizes the treaty between Baal of Tyre and Esarhaddon: Niehr 2014c, p. 153.

Shamem in the Zakkur stele (fourth level), in turn, seems to have a marked "local" character: although the cult of the "lord of heaven" is well attested in the Phoenician territories, it is not necessary to trace back the Aramaic testimony to the Phoenicians' influence, since that Baal was part of a wider tradition. Finally, as regards Pahalatis (fourth level again or fifth), the goddess's name certainly attests to some Semitic traits in her character;[82] however, her direct relation to a Phoenician (Gublite?) Baalat remains doubtful.

From the data described above, it would appear quite evident that the presence of certain divine characters in the Aramaic-Luwian area – characters who had "success" in the Phoenician context – points to a very fluid cultural landscape and cannot be directly attributed to a same, uniform, historical phenomenon. On the one hand, the documentation seems to indicate a strong commonality of traditions between some Phoenician sites and Aramaic and Luwian centres; the most significant role in these dynamics of sharing should perhaps be attributed to Tyre and to the area around Aleppo (probably including Arpad and the kingdom of Bit Agusi). On the other hand, the analysis of the documents suggests that the phenomenon should not be ascribed simply and generally, in all the cases, to the action or contribution of one component (Phoenician) over the other (Luwian and Aramaic – or vice versa, as in the case of Baal Hammon according to some readings). Moreover, although one may wish to point to provenances or origins in "Phoenicia" for at least some of the gods in question, those same gods, once adopted, became part of local traditions and assumed contextual features, as is clear especially from the Zakkur stele and from the treaty of Mati'el.

At this point, what emerges is not – or not only – the possibility of recognizing the degrees and ways in which a Phoenician influence might have been expressed – or not – in certain territories, but rather the ability of some divine personalities to "move" between different cultural contexts, assuming more or less primary positions, more or less evident roles, on the basis of the devotional interests to which they were called to respond from time to time; such capacities found a sort of fertile ground, in some circumstances, in the porosity and cosmopolitan character of the religious culture of the Aramaic centres. So, at least in the context of the period running from the kingdom of Urhilina to that of Mati'el, the cults of the gods under examination were not rigidly linked to a given cultural or ethnic (?) group; rather, they were elements that – albeit on specific occasions – turned out to be common to different areas. It seems therefore that (divine names and personalities as those of) Baal Hammon, Melqart, Eshmun and Baal Shamem, and probably the Baalat (/Pahalatis), acquired a sort of transregional value – to propose again a term used in the case of the diffusion of the Phoenician language[83] – which went beyond the rigid definition of the territorial and political limits of the communities affected by the presence of their cult. Such a phenomenon was certainly not unique to the ancient Near East or to the Levantine area in particular, as shown by figures such as Dagan (mentioned above) and Reshef, whose cults spread widely over time and space.[84] However, for the gods we have been considering here, this same phenomenon remained rather circumscribed, according to the data: firstly, at the moment there is no evidence that goes beyond the mid 8th century BCE (with the exception of Baal Shamem); secondly (and including Baal Shamem this time), the presence of the deities in Aramaic-Luwian territories seems to have principally involved royal contexts, mostly characterized by official activities or documents, and therefore belonging first of all to the sphere of courts and royal dynasties.[85]

Besides the transregional value of their cults, it is possible that the figures in question were also linked – originally? – to specific territories and urban centres (although this does not necessarily imply the connection with a specific "culture"). It is very likely, for example, that the tutelary role of Melqart and Eshmun, the protector gods of Tyre and Sidon, emerged rather early, as did Baal Hammon's link with a given

82 Cfr. Kottsieper 2009, p. 395.

83 Cfr. *supra*.

84 Feliu 2003 (Dagan); Lipiński 2009 and Münnich 2013 (Resheph).

85 It is difficult to say how widely diffused the cults were among the population.

Aramaic dynasty (and with a specific sovereign), and that of Baal Shamem – and Pahalatis (/Baalat)? – with Byblos. Nevertheless, the relationship with a certain environment did not prevent those figures – their cults – from overcoming those environmental boundaries, or from making themselves recognizable and being recognized in other contexts. All the deities, after all, must have been experienced in some respects as "familiar" in culturally differentiated contexts: while representing "new" divinities (with the exception of the Baalat), in the sense of entities that seem to fully emerge in features and functions at the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, they were known "typologically" since they were more or less directly related to wider and older Syrian traditions.[86]

Thus, in a landscape that was marked by the establishment of profound relationships between communities of different traditions, as the Levant was in the 9th-8th centuries, the deities in question – Baal Hammon and Baal Shamem, Pahalatis, Melqart and Eshmun – were most likely parts of shared traditions, albeit on the basis of some (possible) initial influence and although the divine personalities could be modelled locally in response to contextual needs and conditions. Here, then, are the reasons behind the choice of the title which was given to these notes: the term "roaming" – as well as the expression "deities on the move" – does not simply refer to the wandering of gods who "move" among different contexts, maintaining rigidly their morphologies and functions; rather, its use is based on the idea of cults and characters that, in their distribution, put in communication different areas, assuming time to time contextual features[87] but also configuring themselves as components of phenomena of cultural sharing: for a certain period of their history, indeed, those cults and characters participated in the composition of a common (court?) language, as recognizable elements in different environments. Looking therefore at the network of connections that, as repeatedly emphasized, crossed the Levantine regions at the beginning of the 1st millennium, the cults of the five gods represented aspects of continuity and contiguity through different communities (especially those grouped in and around the royal courts), quite apart from any ethnic labels that one might apply to those deities, rightly or not.

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86 It may be worth repeating here that the Baalat Gubal had been known since the third millennium; Melqart and Eshmun, in turn, were heavily indebted in their functions to the cult of royal ancestors of the Bronze Age and, even more specifically, to the imagery surrounding the Baal of Ugarit (Bonnet 1988, pp. 432-433; Xella 1995; Xella 2001; cfr. also Garbati 2018). Their morphology, moreover, could not have been too different from that of some Aramaic gods, as in the case of the Hadad of Damascus, whose figure – like those of Melqart and Eshmun (and of the Ugaritic Baal) – was characterized by a path of "death and resurrection" (cfr. Xella 2007, p. 74). Baal Hammon, then, conceived as the protector of the dynasty, of the origins and of the family traditions, had parallels and antecedents again in Ugarit. In the case of Baal Shamem, finally, we have already noted the relevance of the divinity to a divine typology widely diffused in Syria-Palestine, that of the "god of the heaven storm".

87 It is not always easy to discern the differences and similarities between the various Melqart(s), Eshmun(s) and Baal(s) attested in the different contexts (Phoenician, Aramaic, Luwian), given the constantly cryptic nature of the documentation. In some cases, however, specific roles and connections were maintained over time, as in the case of Melqart and Eshmun presence, one next to the other, in the Arpad and Tyre treaties (see Garbati 2018).

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