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Estratto

## THE PHOENICIAN CITY OF ATRI (TRIPOLI) IN LEBANON

JOSETTE ELAYI, ALAIN GÉRARD ELAYI\*

*Abstract:* The history of Tripoli (Lebanon) has been the subject of a few general works, spanning from Antiquity to the present day, in which little space is devoted to the Phoenician city. The only two specific articles that have been published are those we published on the city in the Persian period, which are already 35 years old. It therefore seems essential to update these two articles by integrating new discoveries and studies in the field, and to extend the study to the entire Phoenician period of the city. Tripoli has been neglected in academic research, but it deserves attention because it was an important and original Phoenician city.

*Keywords:* Tripoli (Lebanon); Phoenician Period; History of Tripoli (Lebanon); Coins of Tripoli (Lebanon).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The site of the Phoenician city of Atri (Tripoli) in Lebanon has been occupied for a very long time and continuously, like the sites of the other Phoenician cities. It was already occupied in prehistory, for example in the Middle Palaeolithic at the Abou Halka rock shelter,<sup>1</sup> and excavations carried out in the citadel of Saint-Gilles have revealed occupation as early as the Late Bronze Age, attested by the discovery of fragments of *milk bowls*.<sup>2</sup> In reality, the ancient site is entirely buried beneath the modern city and has never been excavated, apart from occasional and very limited rescue excavations. The history of Tripoli has been the subject of a few general works, which range from Antiquity to the present and devote little space to the Phoenician period.<sup>3</sup> The only two specific articles concerning this city in the Persian period are those we published, and they are already 35 years old.<sup>4</sup> It therefore seems essential to update these two articles by enlarging the study to the whole Phoenician period and by integrating the new discoveries and studies in this field. The Phoenician city of Tripoli has been neglected in academic research, but it deserves attention because it was a relatively important and original city. The aim of this article is therefore to retrace the history of Tripoli throughout the Phoenician period.

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1 Yazbeck 2004, pp. 111-126.

2 Salamé-Sarkis 1975-76, pp. 551-563.

3 Jidejian 1980.

4 Elayi 1990, pp. 59-71; Elayi – Elayi 1992, pp. 143-151.

## 2. THE PHOENICIAN PERIOD

The Phoenician period considered – at Tripoli as in all the Phoenician cities – extends from about 1200 to 333 BCE.<sup>5</sup> The great upheavals that occurred around 1200, notably the invasion of the Sea Peoples, triggered various population movements.<sup>6</sup> But there were also internal causes specific to the Late Bronze Age states, which were then undergoing a generalized acute crisis. The consequences of all these upheavals help to explain the emergence of Phoenicia: there was a re-composition of the urban landscape and a return to political, cultural, and economic independence. Owing to its limited involvement in the invasions and its concentration in the coastal zone of the eastern Mediterranean, Phoenicia then acquired its true identity.<sup>7</sup> That identity was based as much on continuity with the preceding period as on an ability to innovate.

The date 333 BCE marks the end of the Phoenician period with the arrival of Alexander the Great and his conquest of Phoenicia. Though there were elements of continuity, the Hellenistic period represents a clear break with the Phoenician period. This new period of foreign domination differs from the preceding Persian domination, notably because it is characterized by a modification of institutions and by a degree of Hellenization that varies from city to city.

## 3. THE PHOENICIAN NAME OF THE CITY

What was the Phoenician name of Tripoli? Three types of hypotheses have been proposed: Tripolis would be the Greek translation of the local name Wahlia or Mahallata,<sup>8</sup> or the city's real name,<sup>9</sup> or else the *interpraetatio graeca* of the Phoenician name that would be unknown.<sup>10</sup> From the Persian period onward, the name of this city appears in different languages in various forms: in Phoenician 'tr,<sup>11</sup> in Aramaic *ṭarp' lāyē'*,<sup>12</sup> *ṭrybwlyš*,<sup>13</sup> in Greek Τρίπολις, Τριοῖν and the ethnics Τριπολίται, Τριπολείται and Θρηπολε[ίτ]αι,<sup>14</sup> in Latin *Tripolis*, *Tribulis*, and *Tripulis*,<sup>15</sup> in Arabic *Āṭrāblus*, *Ṭrāblūs*, *Ṭrāblus* and *Turbul* (?),<sup>16</sup> and in Old French *Triple*.<sup>17</sup>

Two other names of Tripoli are known prior to the Phoenician name Atri: Wahlia, mentioned in the 2nd millennium in the Amarna letters, and Mahallata, mentioned in the 1st millennium in Assyrian inscriptions. Although K. Kopetszki proposed to locate Wahlia at Ullassa rather than at Tripoli,<sup>18</sup> H. Salamé-Sarkis' interpretation identifying Wahlia with Tripoli seems more convincing.<sup>19</sup> Mahallata is cited in the account

5 Elayi 2018, pp. 137-151.

6 Millek 2017, pp. 113-140.

7 Elayi 2018, pp. 146-151.

8 Delitzsch 1881, pp. 182-183; Maspéro 1897, p. 172, n. 6; Dussaud 1927, pp. 75-77; Salamé-Sarkis 1971-1972, pp. 89-102; 1975-1976, pp. 551-563.

9 Elayi 1990, p. 68.

10 Honigmann 1924, p. 49; PW, RE s.v. *Tripolis*; *Enzyklopaedie des Islams* 1924, s.v. *Tarabulus*; Galling 1954, pp. 418-422.

11 Elayi – Elayi 1992, pp. 144-145.

12 Galling 1954, pp. 418-422; Clines 1984, p. 79; *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la Bible* 1987, s.v. *Tripolis*.

13 *Talmud de Jérusalem* 1960, III, 6, p. 50,13; Neubauer 1868, p. 298.

14 J. *AJ* XIII 10,2; IG VII, n. 1776, 18; *CIG* III, n. 4216b; *CIG* IV, n. 9655a.

15 Dussaud 1927, Carte V, B2; Forrer 1921, p. 261; Wild 1973, p. 247, s.v. *Turbul*.

16 *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades* 1844, I, p. 441.

17 Kopetszki 2019, pp. 105-124.

18 Kopetszki 2019, pp. 105-124.

19 Salamé-Sarkis 1975-1976, pp. 551-563.

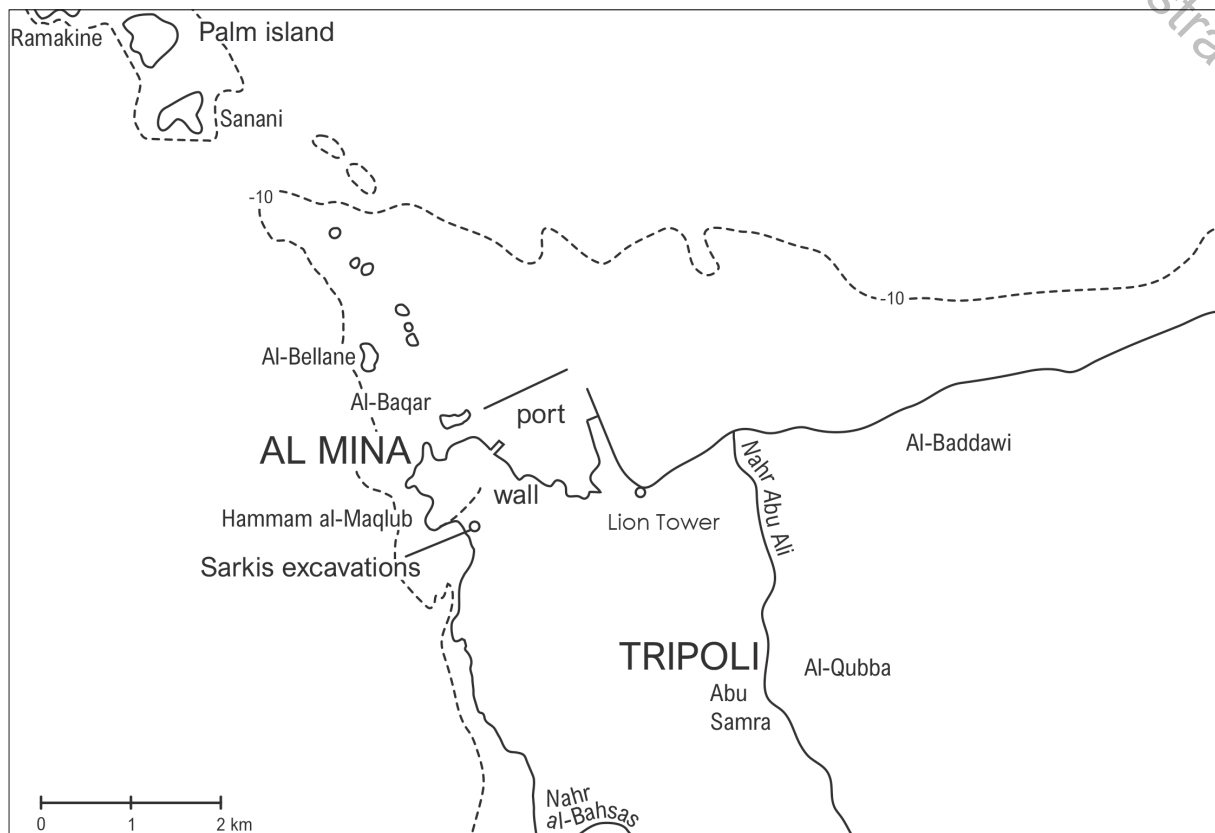


Fig. 1. Map of Tripoli.

of Ashurnasirpal II's campaign in Lebanon around 870 BCE. The Assyrian king lists cities that paid him a substantial tribute, apparently following a geographical order from south to north: Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, Mahallata, Maisa, Kaisa, Amurru, and Arwad. Maisa could correspond to Menjez and Kaisa to Qadesh according to H. Salamé-Sarkis.<sup>20</sup> If Mahallata did designate Tripoli, it is unlikely that the Greeks translated this toponym, meaning “the quarters”, as Tripolis, meaning “three cities”. Judging from other Phoenician toponyms, they did not translate them but chose Greek words that were phonetically close.<sup>21</sup>

As for Atri, we read the Phoenician name *'tr* on a silver coin of Tripoli from the Persian period.<sup>22</sup> This name also appears on two other bronze coins from the Hellenistic period: the first is dated, with due caution by G.F. Hill, to 189/8 BCE and attributed to the reign of Cleopatra I;<sup>23</sup> the second, from the series with a goddess's bust and the Dioscuri caps, is dated to year 134 of the Aradian era, i.e. ca. 136-135 BCE.<sup>24</sup> Two problems arise concerning this Phoenician name: does the initial *'* belong to the root? What is the meaning of the *t/ṭ* variation? On the basis of the coin inscriptions, the Talmudic form, and the earliest Arabic forms, one may say that the letter *alif* is part of the root. The *t/ṭ* variation seems to be a late phenomenon,

20 Salamé-Sarkis 1975-1976, pp. 555-556; 1980, pp. 88-91.

21 Elayi 1990, p. 10.

22 Naster 1959, p. 293, n. 1759; Elayi – Elayi 1992, pp. 144-145.

23 *BMC Phoenicia*, pp. CXIX, CXX and pl. XLIII, 9.

24 Duyrat 2002, p. 35, n. 316.

as it appears in late Greek, in Talmudic Aramaic, and in Arabic. Note that Turbul, the name of the mountain overlooking Tripoli, seems to have preserved the primitive *t*. The Phoenician name of Tripoli is clearly mentioned, with its pronunciation, in the inscription on the throne of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, probably dated to his eighteenth campaign (in 841): *ka-šid ištu tam-ti eliti a-di tam-ti šaplīti māt Hat-ti māt Lu-ḫu-ti māt At-ri māt Lab-na-na māt Ḳu-i māt Ta-ba(?)-li māt Me-li-di*, «I conquered from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea: the land of Hatti, Luhuti, Atri, Lebanon, Que, Tabal, and Melid». <sup>25</sup> The toponyms quoted form two groups: a northern group with Que (Cilicia Pedias), Tabal (north of the Taurus), and Melid (Melitene), and a southern group with the first four toponyms, perhaps listed in geographical order from north to south. As a matter of fact, Hatti, distinct from Amurru in the texts of Shalmaneser III, undoubtedly designates north-western Syria; <sup>26</sup> Luhuti seems to be situated south-west of Hamat, <sup>27</sup> judging from the description of a campaign by his predecessor Ashurnasirpal II; <sup>28</sup> Mount Lebanon lies to the south. If the four toponyms follow a geographical order, Atri would be located between the south-west of Hamat and Mount Lebanon: identification with Tripoli is therefore geographically possible. The Greeks transformed Atri (ʿ*tr*) into Τρίπολις because, as we proposed, they saw three cities from the sea. <sup>29</sup>

#### 4. THE SITE OF TRIPOLI

The Phoenician port city of Tripoli stood at the tip of a wide peninsula, now covered by part of the modern city of Al-Mina. In 1980, to the north of the rocky platform known as Hammam al-Maqlub, we collected a fragment of an Attic black-glaze cup, dated 400-325 BCE; <sup>30</sup> this is the first witness to occupation of the site toward the end of the Persian period or shortly thereafter. Sources have often mentioned its fortifications, emphasizing their height and thickness, and the fact that they protected the city on three sides from the sea and on the fourth from the land, where there was an entrance gate. The present name of the square El-Būabeh, “the gate”, at the outlet of the Tripoli road, could correspond to the ancient location of the gate. <sup>31</sup> The eastern wall still existed in the 19th century, for it is described by several travellers and can be located, <sup>32</sup> but successive reconstructions prevent us from knowing whether its location then was exactly the same as in Antiquity. H. Salamé-Sarkis uncovered part of this wall in 1975. <sup>33</sup> According to a common but mistaken view, the three cities would be Al-Mina, Abu Samra, and Al-Qubba. <sup>34</sup> The other two cities are hard to locate among the many sites in this region, densely populated owing to its fertility, <sup>35</sup> and its geographical position at the outlet of routes. We may first eliminate sites which, even if some of them were inhabited in the Persian period, were independent of the three fortified cities. Such is the case with Dēr ‘Ammār, which does not lie

25 Delitzsch – Haupt 1909, pp. 152-154; *ARAB* I, § 674; Parpola 1970, *s.v.* ATRI.

26 Elayi 1984, pp. 80-86.

27 Garelli – Nikiprowetzky 1974, pp. 82, 84.

28 *ARAB* I, § 478.

29 Elayi 1990, p. 70.

30 Elayi 1988a, pl. 2B.

31 Guillaume de Tyr 1844, I, p. 565; Joannes Phocas 1875, II, p. 531; Nassiri Khosrau 1881, pp. 40-42; Le Strange 1890, p. 348; Ibn Kuṭayr 1939, XIII, p. 313.

32 Pococke 1745, pp. 100-102; Renan 1864, p. 129; Lortet 1884, p. 57; Van Berchem 1914, p. 124, fig. 58; Vigouroux 1928, p. 2318.

33 Salamé-Sarkis 1980, p. 2, n. 2.

34 Jidejian 1980, *Préface*.

35 D.P. 878, I, 914; Burchard of Mont Zion 1707, p. 171; Nassiri Khosrau 1881, p. 40.

on the peninsula in the broad sense,<sup>36</sup> Al-Baddāwī, which has preserved a tradition of sacred fishes,<sup>37</sup> and Al-Qubba, called Qubbat an-Nāṣr, “Baldachin of Victory”, in memory of the tent from which Sultan Baybars in 1267 led the attack against the Castle of the Mount Pilgrim (Abu Samra hill).<sup>38</sup> One will also exclude the offshore islands, some of which preserve traces of past occupation, because they are never mentioned in ancient sources. Starting from the coast, these islands are: El-Baqar, Maksbi, Sanaïaa, El-Bellané, El-Mdoura, El-Rmaïle, Laoukas, El-Taouillé, Toûrouûs, Sanâni, Palms or Rabbits Island, and Ramkine. Moreover, had one of the three cities been an island, the Pseudo-Scylax, who described the Levantine coast, would not have failed to mention it. Medieval sources also allow us to eliminate the present-day lower town of Tripoli, which was a marshy, unhealthy area where Raymond of Saint-Gilles built a suburb in 1105 and which was essentially drained under the Mamluks.<sup>39</sup>

At the beginning of the 18th century R. Pococke, who searched in Tripoli for traces of the three ancient cities, proposed to place the second city to the left of the mouth of the Nahr Abu Ali:<sup>40</sup> this site, which indeed controlled the river route, could serve as a mooring for small crafts.<sup>41</sup> The proposal is not absurd but rests on neither texts nor archaeology. He proposed to locate the third city between the other two, in the area of the Tower of the Lions, where there was then a sort of harbour, and more recently a mooring for fishing boats. Finally, E. Renan and L.C.H. Lortet saw ancient cisterns and a necropolis at Kenz-Amour, near the mouth of the Nahr al-Bahsas, where Pococke had refused to locate one of the three cities; Renan also mentioned a great tomb in a cave at the foot of Mount Turbul, interpreted as that of Joshua.<sup>42</sup>

Archaeological discoveries show that, apart from the port site, two sites on the peninsula were inhabited in the Persian period: the hill of Abu Samra and the area south-east of Al-Mina, excavated by H. Salamé-Sarkis in 1970, 1971, and 1972. The latter area lies outside (more than 200 m) the eastern rampart of the ancient port city in its last state.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the abandonment of the site in the 9th century CE corresponds to the capture of Tripoli by Sufyân: perhaps it was the second city. It is unknown whether this site had a mooring on the beach, because sea level has risen since Antiquity<sup>44</sup> and the coastline seems to have changed. In any case, as we shall see, according to the accounts of Al-Balādury and Ibn al-Aṭīr, who lived in the 9th and 12th centuries respectively, two of the three cities had no harbour, since the Tripolitans were forced to gather in the port city to flee by sea.<sup>45</sup> The hill of Abu Samra, before becoming a Frankish property, was occupied in the Late Bronze Age and in the Persian, Roman, Byzantine, and Fatimid periods.<sup>46</sup> This site may be considered part of the Tripoli’s peninsula in the broad sense, as described by ancient sources. It was easy to defend and occupied a strategic position at the entrance to the Qadisha valley. The hill of Abu Samra shows no remains of fortifications, which is unsurprising since Crusader works thoroughly remodelled it.<sup>47</sup> Although occupation of the site in the Persian period seems certain, its distance from the port city (more than 3 km) does not allow identification as one of the three cities, assuming that the distance of one stade

36 Galling 1938, p. 63, n. 2.

37 Fiey 1984, p. 158-170; Jidejian 1980, fig. 212.

38 Salamé-Sarkis 1983, p. 141.

39 Abu-l-Fidā’ 1872, pp. 8-9; *Documents arméniens* 1906, II, p. 804; Ibn al-Aṭīr 1965, II, pp. 411-412; Elayi 1990, pp. 64-66.

40 Pococke 1745, pp. 100-1002.

41 Lortet 1884, gravure p. 63.

42 Lortet 1884, pp. 58-60; Renan 1864, pp. 129, 140; Pococke 1745, p. 100.

43 Salamé-Sarkis 1973, p. 93; 1980, p. 14, carte n. 6.

44 Salamé-Sarkis 1971, p. 100; 1973, p. 93.

45 Al-Balādury 1901, p. 133 ; Ibn al-Aṭīr 1965, p. 431.

46 Salamé-Sarkis 1973, pp. 94, 257; 1975-1976, pp. 551-553; 1980, pp. 13-15.

47 Salamé-Sarkis 1980, pp. 248-249.

(about 200 m) indicated by Diodorus and Pomponius Mela is accurate. However, this hill is clearly visible from the sea to a navigator coming from Arwad and may have given the illusion of being very close to the first city. The optical effect of the juxtaposition of the inland and maritime cities is clearly apparent in a 17th-century engraving.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, this interpretation remains a hypothesis, and another location, as yet unidentified, is not excluded for the third city.

## 5. THE PORT OF AL-MINA

The present agglomeration of Tripoli overlooks a fertile plain crossed by the Nahr Abu Ali, called Nahr Qadisha further upstream, which divides the city into two main districts: Al-Qubba on the right bank and Abu Samra on the left. The city's third district is the port area of Al-Mina, established at the tip of a wide rocky peninsula oriented westward, bounded by the mouth of the Nahr Abu Ali to the east and that of the Nahr Bahsas to the south. This peninsula is prolonged by a string of islands, islets, and reefs for some 7 km. The largest is Palms (Rabbits) Island, which shows traces of ancient occupation difficult to date.<sup>49</sup> Several fossil marine levels have been identified: one, located about 2.2 m above present sea level, dates to 1596-1220 BCE; another, about 0.6 m above present sea level, dates to 427-651 CE.<sup>50</sup> On Ramkine Island two marine levels have been identified: the first at  $+100 \pm 20$  cm dates to 403-265 BCE and the second at  $+110 \pm 20$  cm to 4514-4339.<sup>51</sup> The Tripoli region is episodically subject to earthquakes, as attested by textual sources, notably in the 6th century BCE.<sup>52</sup> Significant topographic changes have occurred there, notably at the string of islands, but they remain difficult to describe in the absence of appropriate studies. Nevertheless, several shoreline modifications have been noted through archaeological excavations and geomorphological studies. For example, south of the Tripoli peninsula, the silting up of a small bay is attested by the discovery of a quay dated to the 4th century CE, located about a hundred meters from the present shoreline.<sup>53</sup>

The port of Al-Mina has good natural conditions, thanks to the peninsula and the chain of islands and reefs, which provide effective shelter from dominant south-westerly winds and secondary northerly and north-easterly winds. Archaeologists have identified five harbours or natural moorings at Tripoli: one at the level of the reefs, three on the northern face of the peninsula, and the last along its southern face. (1) The chain of islands extending from the tip of the peninsula northwards acts as a natural breakwater. Ships could anchor there, especially to the north and north-east, being sheltered from the dominant winds. This is known from travellers' accounts of the 16th to 19th centuries but was doubtless already the case in Antiquity.<sup>54</sup> (2) The northern bay of Al-Mina is today partly occupied by the modern port. It is protected to the south and east by the peninsula and by the islet of El-Baqar; a breakwater borders it to the north and north-west, and a large mole closes it on the east side.<sup>55</sup> Originally, the mooring must have been near the islet, sheltered from north-westerly swell entrances, where a natural channel allowed passage to the southern bay and where outcrops of sandstone were quarried. This natural harbour, well protected from the dominant winds, was nevertheless wide open to the north-east.<sup>56</sup> (3) Another zone of port activity is mentioned in

48 *Exposition* 1982, p. 80.

49 Carayon 2012-2013, pp. 6-11.

50 Sanlaville 1970, pp. 6-11; 1997, pp. 385-396; Viret 1999-2000, p. 133.

51 Morhange *et al.* 2006, pp. 102, 99-114.

52 Brown 1969, pp.120-138.

53 Salamé-Sarkis 1973, p. 93; 1971, p. 99-100.

54 Carayon 2012-2013, p. 118, n. 38; Viret 1999-2000, p. 126 et n. 32-33.

55 Viret 1999-2000, pp. 117-138.

56 Viret 1999-2000, p. 127.

the 18th century by R. Pococke, as noted above, between the mouth of the Nahr Abu Ali and the centre of Al-Mina, at the medieval tower known as the Tower of the Lions, whose masonry reused ancient columns.<sup>57</sup> Fishing boats doubtless took shelter there, but today this shoreline is entirely within the modern port area. (4) It is also possible that the mouth of the Nahr Abu Ali, east of the Tower of the Lions, served as a shelter for small crafts. In the 18th century boats still took refuge there.<sup>58</sup> Today, however, the river mouth is embanked to protect the city from floods and has lost all port activity. (5) South of the Al-Mina peninsula, the discovery of a quay dated to the 4th century CE, repaired in the 6th century,<sup>59</sup> implies the existence of a basin, now silted up. This basin, of unknown nature, must have existed before the quay was built. A major shoreline modification occurred here, since, as noted, the quay lies about 100 m from the present shoreline. In any case, this southern port offered a particularly sheltered haven when the north wind rose but had the drawback of being small.

In fact, traces of three ancient harbour works have been identified. Re-examination of aerial photographs made by A. Poidebard revealed the existence of an ancient mole protecting the northern harbour to the north-east.<sup>60</sup> According to these images, it rests on a reef emerging east of the islet of El-Baqar and extends south-east for about 330 m in length and 25 m in width. It thus complemented the natural protection provided by the peninsula to the south and south-west, and by the islet of El-Baqar to the north-west. Quarrymen extracted Quaternary sandstone from this islet, so as to fashion a wall on the side exposed to the open-sea swell. On the sheltered side, toward the interior of the harbour basin, the rock was cut to form a flat, horizontal surface that could have been used as a quay, following the so-called *en digue* technique, but it is difficult to date.<sup>61</sup> On the south of the peninsula we have already mentioned the late quay uncovered by H. Salamé-Sarkis. But the main harbour is the northern one, known from the second millennium through the Amarna letters. In 335 BCE, after the battle of Issus, Amyntas embarked from Tripoli with his men for Cyprus and then Egypt. Diodorus indicates that the Persian fleet was then at Tripoli. There, Amyntas chose the vessels required to embark his 4,000 mercenaries and burned the rest of the fleet to avoid pursuit. Arrian adds that before embarking he set fire to the “arsenals” (*νεωρίοι*).<sup>62</sup> The port of Tripoli must then have been equipped with arsenals, which have not yet been found. One is tempted to place this episode at Tripoli in Lebanon. Yet the Pseudo-Scylax, contemporary with the event, mentions a first city named Tripolis and a second city named “Tripolis of the Phoenicians” (*Τρίπολις Φοινίκων*), located between the Amanus and Arwad.<sup>63</sup> According to M.C. Astour, this is the city to which Quintus Curtius, Diodorus, and Arrian refer.<sup>64</sup> It would have been constituted by the settlements of Ibn Hani, Minet el-Beida, and Ras Shamra. If this identification is correct, the presence of the Persian fleet at Tripolis of the Phoenicians is more logical, since the port of Tripoli in Lebanon seems far from the theatre of operations at Issus, located right next to the Amanus. However, there is no archaeological or epigraphic proof for the existence of this other Tripolis, whose importance would have sufficed for it to possess arsenals. Diodorus also notes that Antigonos, during the war he waged against Ptolemy at the end of the 4th century, established shipyards at Tripolis, Byblos, and Sidon, which have never been discovered.<sup>65</sup>

57 Pococke 1745, pp. 101-102.

58 Pococke 1745, p. 100.

59 Salamé-Sarkis 1973, p. 93; 1971, pp. 99-100.

60 Viret 1999-2000, pp. 126-127.

61 Viret 1999-2000, pp. 130-132; 2005, pp. 15-24.

62 D.S. XVII 48,2; Curt. IV 1,27; Arr. *An.* II 13,2-3.

63 Ps.-Scyl. 1870, I, p. 78, § 104.

64 Astour 1995, p. 68, n. 97; Rey-Coquais 1974, pp. 77-80.

65 D.S. XIX 58,4.

It was in the first millennium, during the Phoenician period, that the needs of commerce and politics compelled ancient mariners to protect themselves from storms, to ensure safe landings and moorings in the immediate vicinity of cities, in short to tame the sea in order to master it. Benefiting from good natural conditions, the port of Tripoli at Al-Mina played a leading role in the city's development in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times. The peninsula on which Al-Mina is built provides effective natural protection from winds. As we have seen, ancient harbour works have been identified. Their use is attested by the existence of the now-submerged mole in the north and the late quay uncovered by excavation to the south of the peninsula. The wind regime is dominated by south-westerlies for most of the year, especially in summer and spring. In autumn and winter, north-easterlies also blow fairly frequently.

How important was the port of Tripoli compared to other Phoenician ports? Curiously, the Pseudo-Scylax does not describe this port, whereas he describes those of Berytus, Sidon, and Tyre. This could mean that it was not important or original enough to merit description, or else that he preferred to focus on Tripoli's tripartite character, which represented a true originality. Ancient authors repeatedly mention the qualities and defects of the port of Tripoli for navigation. Thus, in a fragment of the pseudo-Aristotle concerning winds in the eastern Mediterranean, known in Latin as *Ventorum situ et nomina*, Tripoli, undoubtedly the city in Lebanon, is mentioned. The wind that blows in this port is an easterly called Ἀπηλιώτης: «it blows from a smooth plain, like a large threshing-floor that surrounds it, at the foot of the Lebanon and Bapylon (Βαπύρου) mountains: this is why it is called the river wind. It hinders the *Poseidoneion* (Ποσειδώνειον)». <sup>66</sup> It is thus a wind coming from the plain overlooked by Mount Lebanon and Mount Bapylon (unidentified). This wind causes inconvenience for (or during) the *Poseidoneion*, a difficult term to interpret: does it refer to a temple or cult place dedicated to Poseidon, otherwise unattested at Tripoli, or to a month when it blows? In any case, the port of Tripoli is exposed to this easterly, which can roughen its waters, compromising the protection of anchored vessels or making entry and exit more difficult, particularly under certain weather conditions. The pseudo-Aristotle text then mentions a wind called *Syriandos*, which blows in the Gulf of Issus, then a wind called *Marseos*, which blows in the "Tripolitan gulf", perhaps the "Tripolis of the Phoenicians". The *Stadiasmus Maris Magni*, a Roman periplus in Greek composed in the 3rd century CE by an anonymous author, describes the ports encountered by sailors on their coasting route, including the port of Tripoli: «From Arados to Tripoli, 150 stades. Tripolis, a city and a harbour (πόλις και λιμὴν), and there is fresh water inside; but the entrance is difficult because of submerged rocks; one must therefore sail with a pilot from the city» (*Stadiasmus Maris Magni* 1870, p. 467, § 156). Given the chain of reefs bordering the northern port and the rocky nature of the Tripoli peninsula, it is not surprising that submerged rocks in the harbour basin posed a danger to navigation.

## 6. HISTORY OF THE PHOENICIAN CITY OF TRIPOLI

The period following the invasion of the Sea Peoples, thus the first phase of Phoenician history, is considered obscure for Phoenicia because it is very poorly documented.<sup>67</sup> We know that certain sites, such as Tell Sukas in north-western Syria, suffered destructions at the hands of the invaders, but nothing is known of Tripoli. In any case, it was a period of independence and prosperity during which Phoenicia took shape. After the end of Mycenaean supremacy in the Mediterranean, Phoenician ships gradually took over maritime routes and set up a series of convenient way-stations.<sup>68</sup> Since Tripoli was a port city, one may think that its mariners took

<sup>66</sup> Ps.-Arist. fragment 238, in Bekker 1831, 973a, 15-19.

<sup>67</sup> Elayi 2018, pp. 138-141.

<sup>68</sup> Elayi 2018, p. 146.

part in this movement. Clashes nevertheless occurred during this period, as evidenced by the many inscribed Phoenician arrowheads, mostly from this region, for example those of King Zakerbaal, who was the king of Amurru or the king of Byblos then dominating Amurru.<sup>69</sup>

After this period of independence, Tripoli, like the other Phoenician cities, progressively passed under Assyrian domination. The first Assyrian raids were not yet a true conquest, being rapid incursions without sequel. The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I ascended the throne in 1114 BCE and rushed to the Mediterranean, which he calls the “Great Sea”, doubtless reaching it in the region of Arwad.<sup>70</sup> There he received tribute from Byblos, Sidon, and Arwad. The Phoenician kings were cautious, thinking themselves no match for the new rising power, and preferred to conciliate it by paying one-off tribute. Tripoli, though located between Byblos and Arwad, is not mentioned, as it was likely not yet an important city and probably not ruled by a king. It was a small city, as it had been already in the 2nd millennium, since it did not write to the pharaoh in the Amarna letters and is not mentioned in the correspondence of the kings of Ugarit with other rulers of the Levantine coast. From the accession of Ashurnasirpal II in 883 BCE, the long period of genuine independence ended. One-off tribute became more regular and led to a vassal relationship. Around 870 BCE, as we saw, this king received tribute from Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, Mahallata, Maisa, Kaisa, Amurru, and Arwad. If Mahallata is indeed Tripoli, from then on this city became tributary to the Assyrians. We also saw that the next king, Shalmaneser III, seized in 841 BCE, during his 18th campaign, Hatti, Luhuti, Atri, Lebanon, Que, Tabal, and Melid. Thus, within 30 years, Tripoli changed its name from Mahallata to Atri. Such changes are not rare in Antiquity, but it would be interesting to know the cause. What happened in this period to justify such a change, whether internal to the city or due to external causes? From the Akkadian inscriptions, we cannot see how Assyrian expansionism could have prompted such a change and, unfortunately, our ignorance of Tripoli’s history at that time prevents us from answering. Assyrian domination in northern Phoenicia truly began with Tiglath-pileser III, founder of the Assyrian Empire. In 738 BCE he conquered in the region of Tripoli the following cities: Gabala (Jableh), Ushnu (Tell Daruk), Siyannu east of Jableh, Simyra (perhaps Tell Kazel), Arqa, and Kashpuna (Kousba). If he does not mention Tripoli, it is likely because it was then a minor city. Nevertheless, it passed fully under Assyrian domination, since Tiglath-pileser installed in the coastal cities of this region six Assyrian officials in charge of military, political, fiscal, and customs control.<sup>71</sup>

The abrupt disappearance of the Assyrian Empire in 610 BCE inaugurated a period of respite for Tripoli as for the other Phoenician cities.<sup>72</sup> Before the Babylonian Empire took shape, Pharaoh Necho II extended his domination over the Phoenician cities and over the former Aramean provinces of Assyria as far as the Euphrates. Egyptian domination was light and short-lived. The Babylonian domination that followed was, by contrast, heavier. The stelae set up by King Nebuchadnezzar II in the mountains of northern Lebanon were intended to assert his majestic and dissuasive presence, to keep watch over mountain populations, and to give Babylonian troops rapid access to the coastal cities in the event of revolt.<sup>73</sup> Tripoli was necessarily affected by this close surveillance.

It is under Persian domination that the history of Tripoli becomes clearer through sources, at least for the last part of that domination. One then realizes that Tripoli was an original city from the Phoenician and more broadly Near Eastern perspective, compared with what is known of other states in the region; it was also original from the Greek standpoint, as shown by Greek authors’ comments and by the configuration of

69 Elayi 2005, pp. 35-45.

70 Grayson 1991, p. 37, A.O.87.3, ll. 19-21.

71 Elayi 2022, pp. 110-113.

72 Elayi 2021, pp. 255-268.

73 Elayi 2024, pp. 158-171.

contemporary Greek states.<sup>74</sup> However, this information is founded solely in non-Phoenician sources, which must therefore be analysed with caution. Tripolis consisted of three cities depending politically on Arwad, Sidon, and Tyre, which had re-founded it. It would have been the seat of a kind of federal council, occasionally holding general assemblies of all the allied Phoenician cities, represented by their king and a smaller political body. The existence of a military alliance could liken them to well-structured Greek *symmachiai*. The localization of a satrapal seat there cannot be excluded a priori, but it cannot rest on K. Gallings's hypothesis, which misreads a passage of Diodorus,<sup>75</sup> nor on the identification of the Tripolis *gentilicium* in Ezra 4.9.5 since, even if correct, it would suggest no more than the presence of a Persian administrative centre.<sup>76</sup>

Does source analysis allow us to conclude to the real existence of three cities, or to an aetiological explanation, after the fact, of the name Tripolis? There is no reason to suspect, first of all, the historical value, in uncorrupted passages, of the Pseudo-Scylax *Periplus*, which describes the city of Tripolis, for this is a nautical document dating to the reign of Philip II of Macedon (359-335 BCE) and provides precious indications on ports and coastal shelters during the second half of the 4th century BCE.<sup>77</sup> By contrast, the description of this city in other classical sources must be subjected to critical analysis. Around the turn of the Christian era, information on Tripoli reappears in Diodorus, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, and Pliny the Elder. As in the *Periplus*, Diodorus and Pomponius Mela mention Tripoli's tripartite character and its separate fortifications but using other sources.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Diodorus provides additional details concerning the distance separating the three cities, their respective names, and the political function of Tripoli. Although he mainly summarized the work of the Hellenistic author Clitarchus, we know that he also drew on his own reading, undoubtedly here Ephorus XXVI, as well as on an abundant oral tradition.<sup>79</sup> This means that Diodorus's detailed passage, which is purely descriptive, was not distorted by Clitarchus' apologetic views nor by his political morality: «There was in Phoenicia», he writes, «an important city named Tripolis, whose name befits its nature, for it consisted of three cities one stade apart from one another, and the names by which they were called were: the city of the Aradians, the city of the Sidonians, and the city of the Tyrians. This city enjoyed a high reputation among Phoenician cities, because on occasion the Phoenicians held there a common council (*συνέδριον*) and deliberated on matters of the greatest importance». Notably in the Sidonian revolt of 350, Tripoli seems to have played an exceptional role. As for Pomponius Mela, he does not use either the *Periplus* or Diodorus, but one of Diodorus' sources, which specifies the distance between the three cities. The attribution of the name Tripolis to only one of these cities could be due to the fact that sources mostly mention the port of Tripolis.<sup>80</sup> Strabo seems to have used neither Diodorus nor the *Periplus*, but a source that mentions the refoundation (*κτίσμα*) of Tripolis by the three principal Phoenician cities.<sup>81</sup> The mention of Tripolis in Pliny, very brief,<sup>82</sup> takes up the idea of possession by the three cities, already present in the *Periplus*. Julius Valerius attributes to Alexander the refoundation of the city by *synoecism* as well as the choice of its name: despite the legendary side of his account, he did not invent the idea that Tripolis consisted of three cities, which he calls *vicus*.<sup>83</sup> As for Stephen of Byzantium,<sup>84</sup> he perhaps

74 Elayi 1987.

75 D.S. XVI 41,1-24.

76 Elayi 1991, pp. 77-85.

77 Pereti 1979; Fabre 1965, pp. 353-356.

78 D.S. XVI 41,42, 45; Mela I 6779.

79 Hammond 1937, pp. 79-91; Momigliano 1975, pp. 683-706.

80 D.S. XVII 48,2; Curt. IV 1,27; 1 *Macc.* 14.1.81.

81 Str. XVI 2,15.

82 Plin. *Nat.* V 17.

83 Jul. Val. I 33.

84 St.Byz. *s.v.* Τρίπολις.

drew on Strabo, but with different terminology, later taken up by Eustathius in his Commentaries,<sup>85</sup> who cites Strabo among his sources.<sup>86</sup> Overall, one notes that the basic information, already present in the *Periplus*, recurs in most classical sources and may therefore be considered sound: Tripolis was formed by three united cities, related to Arwad, Sidon, and Tyre; each was fortified; one contained the harbour. The many details supplied by Diodorus are plausible but less solid, as they stem from a single source.

Except for the refoundation of Tripoli by Arwad, Sidon, and Tyre, this basic information from classical sources is confirmed by the two Arab historians Al-Balādury and Ibn al-Aṭīr when they recount the capture of Tripoli by Sufyān b. Muḡīb al-Azdy. This capture was ordered by Mu'āwiya I, who had received from Otmān the governorship of Syria in 641.<sup>87</sup> Al-Balādury, who died in 892, relates an event that took place two centuries earlier, whereas Ibn al-Aṭīr, who lived from 1160 to 1234, is much further removed from it;<sup>88</sup> however, he relies on Al-Balādury's account and on another source. According to these later sources, the Tripolitans, weary of the siege of their three fortified cities by Sufyān, gathered in the city containing the harbour in order to escape by sea with the help of the Byzantine emperor. The absence of any allusion to the three Phoenician "founder" cities of Tripolis shows clearly that the description rests solely on documents relating to the situation in the 7th century, without recollection of ancient sources. This means that Tripoli retained its ancient tripartite layout down to that time. However, the three fortified cities no longer existed as such in the time of Al-Ya'qūbī, for he mentions only the harbour,<sup>89</sup> as does the later literature. How can the disappearance of two of the three cities be explained? The one that possessed a harbour,<sup>90</sup> said by sources to be very large, seems already in Antiquity to have been predominant. If the accounts of Al-Balādury and Ibn al-Aṭīr are accurate, the two other fortified cities were abandoned by their inhabitants in the mid-7th century and were not repopulated by Mu'āwiya. Subsequently, two parallel phenomena most likely occurred: the two non-port cities suffered natural degradation and were eventually destroyed by the many attacks on the harbour and by successive earthquakes in 1063, 1157, and 1200.<sup>91</sup> As for the fortifications of the port city, they were often rebuilt and strengthened, in particular by 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān.<sup>92</sup>

We do not know the extent of Tripolis' territory in the Persian period, for no city is explicitly attributed to it, but its new role within the confederation of Phoenician cities probably enabled it to develop. Its territory may have extended from the Akkar plain to the boundary of the land of Byblos at the level of Chekka (Theouprosôpon).<sup>93</sup> If this reconstruction is correct, the territory of Tripolis, a triply Phoenician refoundation, would include the sites of Cheikh Zenad, Orthosia, Arqa, Enfe, and Chekka. The precise contours of its territory, however, remain obscure.

## 7. LIFE OF THE CITY

Although we have very little information on the Phoenician period of Tripoli for lack of excavations, a few elements nevertheless shed some light on the city's life. The silver coin of Tripoli published by P. Naster, even

85 Eust.Epiph. in *Geographi Graeci Minores* II 914.

86 Eust.Epiph. in *Geographi Graeci Minores* II 907, 912.

87 Al-Balādury 1901, p. 133.

88 Ibn al-Aṭīr 1965, p. 431.

89 Al-Ya'qūby 1937, p. 178; Le Strange 1890.

90 D.S. XVII 48,2; Curt. IV 1,27.

91 Ibn al-Aṭīr 1965, X, p. 30; XI, p. 218; XII, p. 170; Plassard 1968, pp. 10-20.

92 Salamé-Sarkis 1980, p. 18.

93 Sader 2015, p. 115.

though unique for now, is instructive.<sup>94</sup> The obverse motif, surrounded by a border of dots, is a galley to right over two wavy lines with four crests; in the exergue an eight-rayed star and a motif that seems to be a bow. The reverse bears a lion passant to right over a discontinuous ground line. Above are a Phoenician inscription and a sign wrongly interpreted as the *marru* of Marduk. It is more likely a *thymiaterion*, well represented in Phoenician glyptic: sometimes wreathed, it is usually topped by a triangle from which a flame may escape.<sup>95</sup> One may also think of the analogous motif on the Berlin vase VA 569, found at Sidon, which bears incised scenes interpreted as the burial and resurrection of Melqart. According to M. Delcor, this would be an incense altar, and according to C. Bonnet, a fire altar associated with the Tyrian cult of Melqart, as on that city's coinage.<sup>96</sup> The equilateral triangle motif exists in the repertoire of Phoenician art, for example associated with a lion on a seal,<sup>97</sup> but its meaning escapes us. In any case, the Tripolitan context is still too little known for a precise interpretation of the coin's motif, apart from the probable representation of a Phoenician *thymiaterion*.

The galley on the obverse belongs to the same iconographic repertoire as those on the coinages of Arwad, Byblos, and Sidon, dated to the Persian period. It faces right like that of Arwad, and the engraver has shown the oars for the sake of precision, as on Sidon's galley. A large, slanted eye is drawn on the prow, as on Arwad's galley. Nine oar-ports are represented, with small pellets at the top of the uprights that must depict shields hung on the bulwark. The stern differs from that of other Phoenician galleys: the apluster is slightly curved to the right and has no stylis, exactly like the galley on coins struck at Tripoli under Elagabalus.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the galley is accompanied by an eight-rayed star as on certain later Tripolitan coins such as tetradrachms.<sup>99</sup> The same star appears on the coins with the caps, heads, or figures of the Dioscuri and the temple of Zeus Hagios.<sup>100</sup> In other Phoenician coinages the star more often has six rays and is not associated with a galley.<sup>101</sup> It does not appear in pre-Alexandrian coinage, except in a Sidonian series of the mid-4th century, where, as here, it is associated with the galley and has eight rays.<sup>102</sup> The bow in the exergue does not occur as an isolated motif in Phoenician coinages but in the hands of a figure, such as the deity riding an hippocamp at Tyre and the bowman of several Sidonian series.<sup>103</sup> H. Salamé-Sarkis mentions the find, in his excavations at Al-Mina, of a silver coin that may have been struck by this city in the Persian period, with an archer on the obverse and a lion on the reverse in an incuse square, but gives no further details.<sup>104</sup> In short, the typology of the Tripoli coin is typical of Phoenician coins of the Persian period, with symbols expressing the city's military power (galley, bow, lion) and religious symbols (star, *thymiaterion*). The Hellenistic Tripolitan coinages attest that important temples had been built there. One recognizes, in particular, a temple of Ashtart consisting of a *peribolos* whose main entrance is adorned with the turreted goddess and containing two small temples.<sup>105</sup> One may suppose that one of these temples was dedicated to Ashtart and the other to the Dioscuri, whose cult enjoyed particular favour at Tripoli.<sup>106</sup>

94 Naster 1959, p. 293, n. 1759.

95 *I Fenici* 1988, p. 727, n. 842.

96 Elayi 1988b, pp. 546-547 and n. 10; Bonnet 1988, pp. 78, 87, 90.

97 Bordreuil 1986, n. 1.

98 *BMC Phoenicia*, pls. XXVIII, 8; XLIII, 13.

99 *BMC Phoenicia*, pls. XXVI, 12; XXVII, 5; Chéhab 1977, pl. LII, 1.

100 *BMC Phoenicia*, pls. XXVI, 4, 8, 11; XXVII, 7, 10-11, 14-16, 18; XLIII, 9, 12-13; Chéhab 1977, pls. LI, 2; LII, 3.

101 *BMC Phoenicia*, pls. XII, 13; XXXIII, 7.

102 *BMC Phoenicia*, pl. XX, 3.

103 *BMC Phoenicia*, pls. XXVIII, 16-17; XIX, 17.

104 Salamé-Sarkis 1971, p. 99.

105 Babelon 1893, pl. XXXIV, 22; *BMC Phoenicia*, pl. XXVIII, 1 and 5.

106 Chapouthier 1935; Gricourt 1994, pp. 189-224.

Phoenician cities expressed their power by building war fleets. These fleets varied in size, thus expressing the greater or lesser power of their cities, in order: Sidon, Tyre, and Arwad. Byblos equipped itself much later than the other three cities, around the mid-5th century, with a small fleet mentioned by classical authors.<sup>107</sup> As for Tripoli, only the coin testifies to the building of a fleet. But since this fleet is never mentioned alongside the four other Phoenician fleets in the sources, one tends to think that it consisted only of a few galleys and not a true war fleet. Even so, it represented an assertion of power in the 4th century, when Tripoli rose in importance as a kind of “federal capital of Phoenicia.” Several indications seem to confirm that this concerns the last part of the Persian period: the use of the Attic standard in parallel with its use in Tyrian coinage of the 4th century; the abandonment of the incuse square technique (if the coin found by H. Salamé-Sarkis is indeed Tripolitan); the flan diameter (21 mm), which widened and thinned at that time;<sup>108</sup> and the representation of the oars of the galley only from the early 4th century on Sidonian coins.<sup>109</sup> If this coin, the first known from the Tripoli mint, dates to the 4th century, the coin found by H. Salamé-Sarkis at Al-Mina would be earlier because of the incuse square technique, normally older. For the moment we have not managed to hear of other discoveries of the same type. Should one deduce that Tripoli struck very few coins? Certainly not, rather that they have not yet been discovered. As a matter of fact, Tripoli’s coins hardly circulated outside the city, unlike those of Sidon, Tyre, and Arwad. The situation is identical for the coins of Byblos, which did not circulate outside the city.<sup>110</sup> Yet a great many have been found, but only in the part of the city where excavations have been conducted. One may suppose that when excavations are carried out in Tripoli, many Tripolitan coins will be found.

This coin also yields some information on the religious beliefs of the inhabitants of Tripoli at the end of the Persian period. The lion may have a religious connotation, but it is difficult to use it to interpret their beliefs. It is a common numismatic motif, for example in the coinage of Mazday struck at Tarsus, in those of Gaza, of Hierapolis/Manbog/Membij, of Miletus, of Corinth, or in the Siculo-Punic coinages. The lion also appears, in various attitudes, in all pre-Alexandrian Phoenician coinages: a recumbent lion at Arwad; a lion overpowering a bull, a seated lion and a figurehead at Byblos; confronted lions, a lion passant, a figure confronting a lion at Sidon; a lion’s head in profile or facing at Tyre.<sup>111</sup> The lion is in fact a common Near-Eastern motif, notably in Phoenician art, glyptic or sculpture, for example.<sup>112</sup> The *thymiaterion* is a religious motif, sometimes associated with the lion as noted, but its precise meaning at Tripoli is unknown. Finally, the eight-rayed star appears on Hellenistic and Roman Tripolitan coins showing the caps, heads, or figures of the Dioscuri and the temple of Zeus Hagios, notably the tetradrachms.<sup>113</sup>

As for the local metrology, the Tripoli coin weighs 8.07 g; as P. Naster wrote,<sup>114</sup> it is at first sight a didrachm according to the Attic standard, but confirmation must await other specimens. In any case, use of this standard would be unsurprising, since it is also used in Tyrian series of the 4th century.<sup>115</sup> The three square lead weights discovered at Tripoli were originally in a private collection in Beirut, but two are now in

107 Elayi 2009, pp. 208-10.

108 Elayi – Elayi 1992, p. 148.

109 Elayi 1989, p. 212.

110 Elayi – Elayi 2014, p. 26.

111 Babelon 1893, pl. XXVI, 12-28; pl. XXIX, 19, 21-25; Elayi – Lemaire 1990, pp. 106-107.

112 Lemaire 1990, pp. 13-22.

113 Chéhab 1977, pls. LI, 2; LII, 3; De Callatay 1993, p. 111-126; Kovacs Numismatics, San Mateo California, Sale X, 19-6-1993, n. 415.

114 Naster 1959, p. 293, n. 1759.

115 Elayi – Elayi 2009, pp. 319-320.

the Louvre.<sup>116</sup> One bears a balance element, the sign of Tanit, and the number 36 written in Phoenician. The other two bear the type-B balance, the sign of Tanit, the letter š, and the number 5. The same weight system thus seems to have been used at the end of the Persian period and in the 3rd century at Tripoli, in the Amrit and Arwad region. Finally, Tripoli possessed in the 5th and 4th centuries workshops producing anthropoid sarcophagi analogous to those of the Sidonian workshops, as shown by the discovery of a sarcophagus in the surroundings of Tripoli.<sup>117</sup> It is of a fairly early type with a coiffure of curls and long locks, perhaps dated to the early 5th century.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Tripoli possessed many assets to develop and become an important city, even if it was less important than other Phoenician cities, Sidon, Tyre, Arwad, and Byblos. It had the resources of a fertile plain, which the German priest Brocard of Mount Sion, who visited it in the 13th century, described thus: «it may certainly be called a paradise because of its countless delightful vineyards, its olive groves, its fig orchards, and its sugar-cane plantations, which I do not recall having seen elsewhere».<sup>118</sup> It also offered abundant cedar and cypress forests on its mountains, fishery products, and exploitation of the murex for its textile industry. It benefited from a good harbour sheltered from the dominant winds. In addition, it lay on a route to the interior via the Homs Gap and near the island of Cyprus, which served as a convenient stopover on other Mediterranean voyages. Tripoli knew how to exploit this rich potential, especially from the 4th century BCE, to become a major port city after the Phoenician period. A targeted archaeological research programme on the Phoenician period should be set up in light of all the archaeological traces, elements, and clues available, as was done at Sidon and Tyre, two sites likewise buried beneath modern agglomerations but excavated punctually in a targeted way. It should be noted that a first survey was carried out in the Tripoli region and the Koura plain in 2019 by a team of archaeologists led by M. Iamoni and M. Haider.<sup>119</sup> One may hope that the Phoenician period will fully find its place in the rehabilitation of Tripoli's historical heritage.<sup>120</sup>

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