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# RIVISTA DI STUDI FENICI

LIII-2025



 Edizioni Quasar

Estratto

Rivista annuale  
fondata da Sabatino Moscati

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*Stampa e distribuzione / Printing and distribution*

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Via Ajaccio 41-43 – 00198 Roma  
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CONSIGLIO NAZIONALE DELLE RICERCHE  
ISTITUTO DI SCIENZE DEL PATRIMONIO CULTURALE

Estratto

RIVISTA DI STUDI FENICI  
FONDATA DA SABATINO MOSCATI

LIII-2025

ROMA  
EDIZIONI QUASAR

Estratto

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Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Roma  
n. 218 in data 31 maggio 2005 e n. 14468 in data 23 marzo 1972  
ISSN 0390-3877  
ISBN 978-88-5491-753-8  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19282/rsf.53.2025>  
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*ALASIŌTAS AND ELEWITAS: TWO DISTINCT EPITHETS OF APOLLO/  
RESHEPH IN THE GREEK-PHOENICIAN INSCRIPTIONS  
OF PHRANGISSA (CYPRUS)*

MARIA BIANCO\*

To Maria Giulia

*Abstract:* This contribution examines the onomastic attributes associated with Apollo/Resheph in the sanctuary of Phrangissa, as attested by two digraphic and bilingual inscriptions in Cypro-syllabic and Phoenician languages. These texts mention respectively the epithets *Ἰηϋτς/Ἀλασιώτας* and *Ἰηϋτς/Ἐλεφίτας*, which have often been interpreted as two graphic variants of a single divine qualifier. A linguistic analysis based specifically on the phono-morphological correspondences characteristic of Greek-Phoenician inscriptions, however, leads to the rejection of this hypothesis. The study shows that the two epithets are based on distinct lexical bases, refer to different semantic realities, and follow specific morphological processes. The inscriptions from Phrangissa thus attest to the coexistence of differentiated indigenous cult traditions, taken up and adapted by Phoenician dedicants during the Classical period.

*Keywords:* Phoenicians and Greeks; Cyprus; Bilingual Inscriptions; Cultic Epithets; Apollo/Resheph.

In 1885, M. Ohnefalsch-Richter began the exploration of the site of Tamassos and, in the same year, discovered the remains of the extra-urban sanctuary of Apollo located nearby in the valley of Phrangissa.<sup>1</sup> Excavations of this sanctuary brought to light two inscribed bases bearing bilingual inscriptions in Cypro-syllabic and Phoenician, mentioning the dedication of a statue which, in both cases, has been lost; this statue may have represented either the dedicant or the deity to whom the offering was made. The bilingual inscriptions from Phrangissa are currently the only Phoenician testimonies originating from the region of Tamassos and constitute epigraphic documents of exceptional interest for the study of linguistic and cultural contacts in Cyprus during the Classical period. In the present contribution, attention will focus on the divine attributes accompanying Apollo/Resheph in the Greek and Phoenician versions.

The two inscriptions are separated by an interval of approximately thirteen years and are dated, in their Phoenician versions, by reference to the regnal years of “Milkyatōn, king of Kition and Idalion”. The earlier of the two inscribed bases<sup>2</sup> dates to 375 BCE.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Masson 1964, pp. 232-236. In 2021 a team of researchers from the German universities of Frankfurt and Kiel successfully located the sanctuary of Apollo at Phrangissa near Pera Orinis, which had been known since 1885 but was considered lost. The work was carried out by the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt under the directorship of Prof. M. Recke.

2 The texts are presented here in their order on the support, with an added transcription in the Greek alphabet, absent from the originals.

3 ICS 216; Egetmeyer 2010, pp. 813-814. See also RÉŠ 1213; Yon 2004a, n. 70; Bianco – Bonnet 2018, p. 45; Bianco 2025, p. 45, n. 2.

*bymm 10+6 byrh p't bš[n]  
 t 10+7(?) lmlk mlky[tn mlk k]  
 ty w'dyl sml 'z 'š ytn 'b  
 dssm bn [...] l'dny lršp '  
 lhyts hndr 'š ndr kšm'  
 h' ql ybrk*

«On the 16th day of the month *p't*, in the seventeenth (?) year of the reign of *mlky[tn]*, king of Ki]tion and Idalion, this statue is what *'bdssm*, son of [...], gave to his lord Resheph *'lhyts*, a vow which he vowed because he heard his voice. May he bless him!»

*a-ti-ri-a-se || o-nu-to-ne-to  
 ke-ne | a-pa-sa-so-mo-se | o-sa  
 ma-wo-se | to-i-a-[•-•]-ni-to-i  
 a-la-si-o-ta-i | i-tu-ka-i*

(alphabetical transcription)

Ἀνδριάς ὄνου, τὸν ἔδω  
 κεν Ἀψασμος ὁ Σα  
 μάφος τῶι Ἀ[πόλ(λ)ω]νι τῶι  
 Ἀλασιώται ἰ(ν) τύχαι

«This statue is what Apsasmos, son of Samās, gave to Apollo “Alasiōtas (/of Alasia)”. To (Good) Fortune!»

The second inscribed base is dated to 362 BCE:<sup>4</sup>

*sm l 'z 'š ytn wytn  
 ' mnhm bn bnhdš bn mn  
 hm bn 'rq l'dny l[rš]p  
 'lyyt byrh 'tnm bšnt  
 ššm 20+10 lmlk mlkytn mlk  
 kty w'dyl kšm' ql ybrk*

«This statue is what *mnhm*, son of *bnhdš*, son of *mnhm*, “son” of ‘Arqa, gave and set up for his lord Resheph *'lyyt*, in the month of *'tnm*, in the thirtieth year of the reign of *mlkytn*, king of Kition and Idalion, because he heard his voice. May he bless him!»

*to-na-ti-ri-a-ta-ne || to-nu | e-to-ke-ne  
 ka-se | o-ne-te-ke-ne || ma-na-se-se  
 o-no-me-ni-o-ne || to-i-ti-o-i  
 to-i-a-pe-i-lo-ni || to-i-e-le-wi  
 ta-i || i-tu-ka-i*

(Alphabetical transcription)

Τὸν ἀ(ν)δριά(ν)ταν τόν(ν)υ ἔδωκεν  
 κὰς ὀνέθηκεν Μνάσης  
 ὁ Νωμηγίων τῶι θιῶι  
 τῶι Ἀπειλωνι τῶι Ἐλεφί  
 ται ἰ(ν) τύχαι

<sup>4</sup> ICS 215; KAI 41; Egetmeyer 2010, pp. 812-813. See also RÉŠ 1212; Yon 2004a, n. 71; Bianco – Bonnet 2018, p. 46; Bianco 2025, p. 45 n. 3.

«This statue Mnases, son of Nōmenios, gave and dedicated to the god Apollo “lord of the marsh”. To (Good) Fortune!»

Despite the chronological indications provided only by the Phoenician part of the texts and referring to the reign of Milkyatōn,<sup>5</sup> the socio-political and cultural reality of the Tamassos region during the Classical period appears to have been largely shaped by the Greek language, as evidenced by the syllabic and alphabetic inscriptions as well as by local coinage.<sup>6</sup> The dedicants of the two dedications, however, are Phoenicians subject to the political authority of the kingdom of Kition-Idalion,<sup>7</sup> who were present in the region of Tamassos before the city was sold by its king Pasikypros to Pumayyatōn, son of Milkyatōn.<sup>8</sup> Several elements confirm this situation: the priority given to the Phoenician text, which appears first on both monuments; the use of a dating formula referring to the reign of Milkyatōn, king of Kition and Idalion; the fact that the Phoenician texts are considerably more developed than their Greek counterparts; and the onomastic elements of the dedications, expressed through Phoenician anthroponyms that may extend back to the dedicant’s ancestor.

The earlier of the two dedications is addressed to Apollo *to-i a-la-si-o-ta-i* (τῶι Ἀλασιώται) by *ʿbdssml* Ἀψασμος. The Greek epiclesis is constructed as a denominal adjective, specifically an ethnic adjective, designating an Apollo “of Alasia”. Cuneiform documents from the second millennium BCE attest to a kingdom of Alashiya that maintained relations with Egypt, Ugarit, and the Hittites.<sup>9</sup> More specifically, Alashiya appears in diplomatic correspondence as early as the fourteenth century BCE, in the Amarna letters, when missives were sent to the pharaoh by a *wr* (“great one”) of Alashiya whose name remains unknown.<sup>10</sup> The identification of Alasia/Alashiya with the island of Cyprus, long debated, received decisive confirmation with the publication of an *ostrakon* from the site of Idalion referring «to the first year (of the reign) of Antigonos and Demetrios over Alashiya».<sup>11</sup> The epithet attached to the god thus immediately anchors him in the island’s earlier tradition, undoubtedly pre-Greek and indigenous, by honouring him as the god of a territorial entity that was once certainly also political in nature. This entity exceeded the geographical limits of the *chōra* of Tamassos and was preserved in the memory of a time when the god of Alasia/Alashiya/Cyprus guaranteed the island the prestige of a great power. Although the epithet is a *hapax* both in Greek and in Phoenician, in being a denominal ethnic adjective formed from the toponym Alasia, Ἀλασιώτας follows the morphological rules of the Greek language according to the model Σικελιώτης/Σικελία.<sup>12</sup> The Phoenician rendering is *ʿlhyts*, which represents a phonetic transcription of the Greek form Ἀλασιώτας. This transcription allows us to observe the extent to which the pronunciation of the sibilant in the Cypriot dialect had weakened, insofar as it is rendered in Phoenician by a laryngeal consonant rather than by a sibilant.<sup>13</sup> Additional specific features are noteworthy in the Phoenician version of the epithet. The initial *aleph* marking a vowel functions as a

5 Attention should also be drawn to another bilingual dedicatory inscription from Idalion in Cypro-syllabic and Phoenician (KAI 39), in which the dating formula referring to the reign of Milkyatōn appears in both versions, reflecting Idalion’s long-standing integration into the sphere of Kition’s power.

6 Egetmeyer 2010, pp. 812-815; Pestarino 2020, p. 65.

7 On the identity of the dedicants from Phrangissa, see Yon 2004b, p. 124; Vernet 2015, p. 188; Pestarino 2020, p. 70.

8 A fragment of Duris of Samos, preserved by Athenaeus, reports that Pasikypros sold a *chōrion* over which he ruled to Pymatōn (Πυμάτων) of Kition, ceding both the territory and the kingship for fifty talents (Ath. IV 167c-d).

9 For second-millennium sources mentioning a land called Alasia and its identification with Cyprus, see Amadasi Guzzo – Zamora 2018; see also Palaima 2005, pp. 29-33, and Himmelhoch 1990-1991, p. 92.

10 EA 33-40.

11 Amadasi Guzzo – Zamora 2018, p. 86.

12 Egetmeyer 2010, p. 283.

13 Morpurgo Davies 1988, pp. 113-124; Egetmeyer 2010, p. 182; Morpurgo Davies 2012. In the later inscription, the Phoenician version provides further evidence for the weakening of the sibilant in certain phonetic environments in the Cypriot dialect. Indeed, the Phoenician name of the dedicant, *mnḥm*, is rendered in Cypriot Greek as *ma-na-se-se* (see Bianco 2015, p. 56).

*mater lectionis*, a phenomenon rarely attested at this period, since the notation of vowels generally becomes more common only in the Punic phase of the language. In Cyprus, however, there are examples of *matres lectionis* used to mark vowels in foreign names.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the *yod* serves to note a semivowel, as frequently occurs in Phoenician transcriptions of Greek and Latin words containing the sound sequences *ia*, *ie*, *ileo*, *iu*.<sup>15</sup> The final sibilant clearly marks the nominative case, although Greek syntax here requires a dative, which is indeed the form present in the Greek version. The choice of a nominative form in the target language may be explained by the fact that the nominative was likely the most frequently used case, facilitating the recognition of the foreign word.

The second dedication dates to 362 BCE. In this case, another Phoenician dedicant, *mnḥm/Mνώσης*, sets up a statue for Resheph/Apollo, who is here qualified by the epiclesis Ἐλερίτας. This epithet is likewise a *hapax*. The nominal base is the Greek word ἔλος, “marsh” to which the suffix *-ī-tā-* has been added, resulting in an adjective meaning “lord of the marsh” or “marsh god”. This attribute once again appears to refer to an indigenous substratum and to an earlier phase in the history of the sanctuary. The *temenos* was established on the right bank of the Argaki tis Asproyis, in an area where marshy conditions may have been recurrent. It is therefore plausible that the sanctuary was placed under the protection of Apollo, who, by virtue of his powers as *archēgetēs*, may have been associated with the control or purification of the site.<sup>16</sup> From a designation referring to the specific geographical situation of the area where the sanctuary arose, a toponym – perhaps *Helos* or another form derived from ἔλος – may subsequently have developed.<sup>17</sup> There are, moreover, several known examples of epiclesis formed from the expression ἐν ἔλει,<sup>18</sup> describing a natural context of worship, namely marshland, which appears to have been a favoured setting for extra-urban sanctuaries.<sup>19</sup> These conditions correspond closely to the situation of the sanctuary of Apollo at Phrangissa and argue against interpreting Ἐλερίτας as an ethnic adjective.

In his 2010 collection of Cypriot syllabic inscriptions, M. Egetmeyer accepted the reading *e-le-wi-ta-i*, which had been suggested to him by J.-P. Olivier in a personal communication.<sup>20</sup> Palaeographic analysis thus supports the reading *e-le-wi-ta-i* rather than the traditional *e-le-i-ta-i*. This revised reading weakens the hypothesis, repeatedly advanced in earlier scholarship, that the two Greek epithets Ἀλασιώτας and Ἐλερίτας are in fact one and the same.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, it renders more transparent the component *\*selos/ \*seles* that served as the basis for the formation of *\*(h)elewi-ta-s*.

The reading *e-le-wi-ta-i* reveals the presence of a *digamma* that is not etymological but serves to mark a syllabic boundary, preventing the formation of a diphthong *-ei-*, which would otherwise have been rendered in Phoenician by a single grapheme *-y*. The Phoenician rendering *ʿlyt* displays a phenomenon of gemination (*-yy-*), which serves to transcribe a front vowel /e/ and a front vowel /i/ that must be considered as separated by the *digamma*, both in pronunciation and in writing. Examination of the corpus of Greek names transcribed into Phoenician, as collected in F. L. Benz’s repertory, shows that no diphthong with iota as its second element is ever rendered by two phonemes.<sup>22</sup> The Phoenician transcription there-

14 Harris 1936, p. 18; PPG<sup>3</sup> 102.

15 PPG<sup>3</sup> 62b.

16 See Vernet 2015, pp. 132-138.

17 See also the position of O. Masson (ICS 226), followed by M. Egetmeyer (Egetmeyer 2010, p. 283), according to which the epithet would refer to a toponym of an otherwise unknown Cypriot locality.

18 For instance, see ICS 215, p. 226.

19 Burkert 2003, pp. 194-195.

20 Egetmeyer 2010, pp. 282-283.

21 RÉS 1213 (Ph. Berger); Amadasi Guzzo 2021, pp. 10-11.

22 Benz 1972, pp. 193-195.

fore reflects a phonetic context that is not that of a diphthong and thus confirms the more recent reading *e-le-wi-ta-i*.

We thus find, in the Greek portions of the bilingual inscriptions from Phrangissa, two well-formed and clearly distinct onomastic attributes. The lexical bases underlying these formations – Alasia/Alashiya on the one hand and ἔλος on the other – are different, as are the suffixes used to construct the denominal adjectives in question (respectively *-o-ta-* and *-i-ta-*). The vocalism of *a-la-si-o-ta-i*, with a back and long vowel marking the junction between the base and the denominal suffix, could in no way have favoured an assimilation of the two epithets by assonance. Nor does it appear plausible that, within a span of some ten years, awareness of the meaning of Ἀλασιώτας would have been lost to the extent that it could be reshaped into Ἐλεφίτας.

In the edition of RÉS 1213, Ph. Berger wrote «*lhyts* doit être le même vocable écrit *lhyt* dans le texte précédent. La transcription donne là Ἐλεφίτας ici Ἀλασιώτας». This hypothesis, later taken up again by M.G. Amadasi Guzzo,<sup>23</sup> does not appear sustainable. On the one hand, the adaptation *lhyt* is clearly based on the Greek form *e-le-wi-ta-i* and cannot be understood as a development from *lhyts* or from its Greek counterpart Ἀλασιώτας. On the other hand, no credible phono-morphological pathway allows *lhyt* to be derived from *lhyts*. The phonetic developments invoked to justify a hypothetical evolution from *lhyts* to *lhyt*, such as secondary development of *h* in a phonetic environment involving *y*, belong to reconstructed scenarios that are not attested for the historical period under consideration.<sup>24</sup> Such phenomena as the loss, the palatalisation of *h* in specific phonetic contexts are neither documented in Phoenician nor supported by epigraphic evidence and therefore cannot account for the observed forms.

It is furthermore essential to consider each digraphic and bilingual inscription in its own terms and to situate it within its specific epigraphic and cultural ecosystem. In both cases, the composer of the Phoenician text appears to have taken the Greek epithet as a model. Whether transmitted orally or visually, the process involves the adaptation of *e-le-wi-ta-i* as *lhyt* and of *a-la-si-o-ta-i* as *lhyts*. A further difference between the two epithets, frequently noted in scholarship, concerns their morphological treatment: whereas *lhyts* clearly reflects an adaptation of a nominative form (Ἀλασιώτας), despite the presence of a dative in the Cypriot Greek text (*a-la-si-o-ta-i*), the form *lhyt* seems to correspond more closely to the dative *e-le-wi-ta-i*.

The inscriptions from the sanctuary of Apollo at Phrangissa appear to bear witness to indigenous cult traditions that persisted into the Classical period and were subsequently adopted by Phoenician dedicants. One dedication refers to an ancient memory of the island as a territorial power under the name Alasia/Alashiya, while the other reflects a distinctly local and topographic anchoring.

Linguistic and epigraphic analysis thus leads to the recognition of two independent epithets, Ἀλασιώτας and Ἐλεφίτας, founded on different lexical, morphological, and semantic bases. Any attempt to reduce them to a single epiclipsis fails to account for the complexity of the linguistic data and the contextual evidence. Rather than reflecting graphic or phonetic variation, the two epithets point to the coexistence of differentiated cultic traditions, each embedded in its own historical and spatial framework.

23 Cfr. note 21.

24 Cfr. PPG<sup>3</sup> § 18, 2-3, § 112, § 147.

## ADDENDA

In 2018, an *ostrakon* from the archives of Idalion, to which reference has already been made,<sup>25</sup> was published in a preliminary manner, as it contains an inscription expected to shed light on the complex question of the identity of Alasia/Alashiya/Cyprus.<sup>26</sup> The *ostrakon* is dated to 306/305 BCE and bears the following text:

*bšt 1 l'ntgns wdmtrys*  
 'l 'šy  
 B

«In the first year of Antigonos and Demetrios over Alasia/Alashiya. B»

The reading of the sequence 'šy was welcomed as the discovery of the Phoenician name of Alasia/Alashiya. Closer analysis, however, suggests that the sequence 'šy conceals a Greek phonetic reality, since it corresponds perfectly to the transcription of a toponym Ἀλάσια. Moreover, if this hypothesis is correct, Ἀλάσια, as an onomastic element for which Phoenician appears not to have had an equivalent, would simply have been transcribed into Phoenician, just like the royal anthroponyms Antigonos and Demetrios.

It has been shown that the adaptation of Ἀλασιώτας in the Cypriot Greek dialect resulted in the Phoenician form 'lhyts, an adaptation that clearly reflects the weakening of the voiceless sibilant /s/ characteristic of the Cypriot dialect.<sup>27</sup> This phenomenon did not, however, lead to a general disappearance of the consonant, which was later reintroduced under the influence of the *koinè*. At the time when the Idalion *ostrakon* was written, the sibilant in Alasia/Alashiya must therefore have been a well-pronounced sound, written in alphabetic Greek and consequently rendered in Phoenician as 'šy. The rendering with the Phoenician *shin* ('šy) is not surprising if one considers that in Cyprus the name Ptolemy displays oscillating spellings between *ptlmys* and *ptlmys*,<sup>28</sup> a variation likely due to differences in local pronunciation and to the difficulties inherent in phonetic adaptation between the two languages. At the same time, the form 'šy invites further reflection on the underlying Greek term. In scholarly literature, one finds both *Alasia* and *Alashiya*, with a distribution that appears to reflect disciplinary preferences: Hellenists tend to favour *Alasia*, while Semitists often adopt *Alashiya*.<sup>29</sup> If the choice of Alasia is based on the Cypro-syllabic form *to-i a-la-si-o-ta-i*, it must be recalled that the syllabic system has inherent limitations in rendering the plurality of sibilants in Semitic languages; as a result, the two Phoenician sibilants *samek* and *shin* are both represented by a single /s(V)/ series<sup>30</sup>. The attestation of 'šy at the end of the fourth century BCE, while not definitively resolving the issue, at least renders the two spellings *Alasia* and *Alashiya* concurrent and competitive.

The presence of the toponym 'šy in the region of Idalion thus constitutes further evidence for the persistence of the memory of Alasia/Alashiya within certain Cypriot milieus at the end of the fourth century BCE. It also corroborates the view that the ethnic adjective Ἀλασιώτας was perceived as such and understood in relation to Alasia/Alashiya, at least within the Greek-speaking milieu of Phrangissa and probably also within that of Idalion. Should further evidence confirm the presence of the notion of Alasia/Alashiya in the Greek–Phoenician milieu of Idalion, it might be possible to argue for an Idalion origin of the Phoenician

25 Cfr. *supra*.

26 This is a preliminary publication preceding the edition of approximately 700 documents from the archives of Idalion, the study of which was entrusted in 2010 to M.G. Amadasi Guzzo and J.A. Zamora López.

27 Egetmeyer 2010, p. 166.

28 PPG<sup>3</sup> § 47d.

29 See, for example, Palaima 2005 et Egetmeyer 2010 *vs* Amadasi Guzzo – Zamora 2018.

30 Egetmeyer 2010, p. 381.

dedicants at Phrangissa<sup>31</sup>. For the time being, it should be emphasised that the attestations of *ʾly* and of *ʾAlasīw̄tas/ʾlhyts* once again point to a pre-Greek dimension, aspects of which are known not only through Greek but also, albeit indirectly, through the Phoenician language.

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31 In a recent study, S. Fourrier has emphasized the plurality and contextual construction of Phoenician (or Cypro-Phoenician) identities actively engaged in the Cypriot religious and political spheres, highlighting strategies that combine continuity and innovation (see Fourrier 2021).

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