

THE MIQIM ELIM EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE FOR A SPECIALIST IN THE PHOENICIAN-PUNIC CULT

JOSÉ Á. ZAMORA*

Abstract: The aim of the present text is to re-examine the basic sources informing us about the miqim elim, a particular type of cult personnel mentioned in the Phoenician-Punic inscriptions. While there have been significant studies on the office or function, as it has been connected with some of the most appealing themes of the history of ancient Mediterranean religions, its nature is still a matter for discussion. The intention of this contribution, after briefly reviewing the internal and external available data, is to analyse in some depth the relevant epigraphic information coming from the culture under study, in an attempt to provide, confirm or refute any facts about its character and its possible position within Phoenician and Punic society in the period documented.

Keywords: Religion; Cult; Priesthood; Society; Epigraphy; Inscriptions.

In recent years, from various perspectives and differing aims, there has been an active methodological reflection on the study of cult personnel in the ancient civilizations of Syria-Palestine (as part of a renewed general interest in understanding this type of person better).¹ Specialists in the history of religions have paid renewed attention to those traditionally called “priests” and to the very concept of “priesthood” within the Semitic cultures of Syria and Palestine. In fact, they replace these titles (which frequently entailed or concealed schools of thought and ideological positions) with categories of a strictly functional nature in respect of research, such as “religious specialist” or “cultic operator”.² This attention has been accompanied by exhaustive re-appraisals of the sources in an attempt to understand, in its cultural and historical context, each of the objects under study in its own right, as an indispensable prerequisite for further attempts at integration or comparison.

The aim of the present text is precisely to re-examine the basic sources informing us about a particular type of cult personnel mentioned in the documentation from the region (in this case, Phoenician-Punic sources). We shall analyse the available textual evidence about an office or function on which there have been significant studies, as it has been connected with some of the most appealing themes of the history of ancient Mediterranean religions (themes such as the existence of deities involved in a possible cycle of death and resurrection and its potential relationship with the evolution of new beliefs, especially eschatological). The

* Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo, Madrid / Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología en Roma (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas); joseangel.zamora@csic.es.

1 A good example of this interest was the *Congreso Internacional sobre Historia de las Religiones* held in Palma de Mallorca from the 13th to the 15th October 2005, with the title “*Homo religiosus*. Mediadores con lo divino en el mundo mediterráneo antiguo”. Here we revisit the text presented for the proceedings of that congress (which remained unpublished) in this new English translation. I would like to thank Paolo Xella for his valuable suggestions and Wilfred G. E. Watson for reading the manuscript critically and for checking the English text.

2 On the problems of the methodological approaches to cultic personnel in Syria and Palestine their chief characteristics in the 2nd millennium BCE, see e.g. Xella 2002, pp. 406-426, with bibliography. On the Phoenician and Punic priesthood in particular, see e.g. Amadasi 2003, pp. 45-53. On the category of “cultic operator” (Italian *operatore cultuale*), see Rocchi – Xella – Zamora 2006, especially Xella 2006. See also e.g. Zamora 2006a; 2006b for an overall presentation of the problems and the data.

office or function in question is the *miqim elim*,³ possibly a type of Phoenician cult personnel the nature of which, in spite of its importance and the attention paid to it, is still a matter for discussion.⁴ The intention of this contribution, after briefly reviewing the fundamental data that we have about this particular person and his functions, is to analyse in some depth the relevant epigraphic information available, within the culture under study, in an attempt to provide, confirm or refute any facts about its character and its possible position within Phoenician and Punic society in the period documented.

1. THE *MQM 'LM*, A TYPE OF CULTIC PERSONNEL

As we shall see, the expression *mqm 'lm* appears in Phoenician and Punic inscriptions to indicate the function, office or title of certain individuals. The presence of *'lm*⁵ indicates a more than likely connection with the cult, while the meaning of *mqm*, although still under discussion, seems to point to a characteristic ritual practice. The most convincing interpretation explains the term from the root *qwm*,⁶ which in North-West Semitic has the basic meaning of “to get up, to rise”. The late graphic variant *myqm* suggests a noun in the construct state,⁷ originating in a causative participle of the root (the most probable vocalization of the whole expression being */mīqim 'ēlim/* or the like, here conventionally simplified as *miqim elim*). Therefore, it means “he who raises”, “the raiser” of the deity (in itself a meaning with possible ritual overtones).

Going further, it has been understood that the actual meaning of the expression in this case was “resurrector of the deity”. This interpretation can be supported by some uses of the root in the region,⁸ but it gathers momentum when this official is placed in connection with the cult of the god Melqart. For Melqart, the Tyrian Heracles of Greek and Latin writers, we know of a ritual of *égersis*, “awakening” or, in accordance

3 The first studies on this official, while chiefly concerned with explaining the initial occurrences in inscriptions, already included some proposals for interpreting it in terms of the history of religions (see e.g. Clermont-Ganneau 1920; see further references e.g. in the first volume of *CIS*, p. 332 – and in the editions presented in *CIS I* of the inscriptions that we shall discuss, see *infra*); see later references to this type of approach in Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, pp.1002ff. Wider studies began especially with the important work by Lipiński 1970, pp. 30-58 (the bases of which remain in his later work, see e.g. Lipiński 1995, pp. 238ff.); see later e.g. Bonnet 1986, pp. 215-216 or 1988, pp. 174-179 (or the short summary Bonnet – Lipiński 1992, pp. 294-295), all with additional references. See the following notes.

4 Against the line of interpretation represented by Lipiński or Bonnet (which partially goes back to Clermont-Ganneau) where the official's connection with Melqart is assumed and the existence of a “resurrection” of the god turns out to be central (see *infra*) contrary views (especially against this last aspect) or sceptical opinions are not rare, see e.g. Müller 1996; 1997, pp. 7-8; see also the opinions of M.S. Smith, as part of his critique of the use of the Frazerian category of the *dying and rising gods* for Ancient Near eastern gods, e.g. Smith 2001, pp. 104ff., esp. pp. 113-114; a recent critical re-appraisal of this category is available in Xella 2001, see esp. pp. 1-4, 5-13 (on the Frazerian category) and 73-96 (on Levantine deities).

5 As is well known, in Phoenician *'lm* refers to the deity not only as a strict plural of the generic singular “god”, but also as a singular referring to a specific deity who, as the inscriptions show, can be either masculine or feminine; see e.g. Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, pp. 53-55, with references, also, on the expression dealt with here (with discussion and alternatives, see e.g. Ferron 1964-1965).

6 On the epigraphic evidence for the root in North-West Semitic, and on the expression we are dealing with, see Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, pp. 997ff., esp. pp. 1002ff., with references (also to alternative interpretations, criticisms or nuances, see e.g. Amadasi 1967, pp. 183ff; later, esp. Müller 1996).

7 It always occurs in the inscriptions without the article that is usual with functions or names of an office, a guarantee that it is the *nomen regens* of a genitival relation (see below).

8 See e.g. in the Old Testament Hosea 6: 2 (for more detail see e.g. in Lipiński 1970, pp. 41-42). Against: e.g. Müller 1996 (esp. p. 116); see also Doehorn 1998 (see also the traditional interpretations of the root in biblical Hebrew, e.g. Koehler *et al.* 2004, pp. 1015-1018). Furthermore, of special interest is the evidence connected with *qwm* in Semitic personal names. Bonnet 1988, p. 176 made a first study of this, noting its heterogeneous nature, its difficulty and breadth in terms of time and space, which only allows general conclusions on the continuity of the root and its connotations among North-West Semites. Even so, this anthroponymical data has a relevance and meaning that are by no means banal. Some evidence is considered to be crucial by Lipiński 1995, pp. 230, 238.

with all the indicators, “resurrection”.⁹ In fact, some late eastern epigraphic evidence of a possible cultic figure – the *egerseitēs tou Hērakléous* – can only provide the direct equivalent in Greek of the Phoenician expression.¹⁰ The frequent occurrence after *mqm ’lm* of a second expression, *mtrh štrny*, has helped to add further details to the description of the operator. As the expression can be interpreted as “*astroneal* husband”, possibly referring to Astarte,¹¹ it has been proposed that, during these rituals, the miqim elim took part in a sacred marriage with the goddess.¹²

But let us now examine in detail the Phoenician and Punic epigraphic evidence of the function,¹³ studying not only the most relevant inscriptions but all of them, both individually and as a whole. We shall try to establish what can really be extracted from them and whether this information extends, confirms or disproves what has been proposed to date.

2. THE AVAILABLE INTERNAL SOURCES

The expression *m(y)qm ’lm* appears in a wide range of inscriptions in Phoenician, amounting to almost 30 examples, both eastern and western. Eastern texts, dated in Hellenistic times, come from Cyprus and Rhodes. The western documents, chronologically not very different from the eastern texts, come from Punic areas, chiefly from Carthage. One Neo-Punic inscription extends the evidence up to the beginnings of the Roman period, in North Africa.

2.1. Eastern Inscriptions

There are two eastern inscriptions. As mentioned, they do not come from the Phoenician “motherland”, but from Cyprus (with a large Phoenician population that had settled there since ancient times) and Rhodes (with a significant Phoenician presence too, but clearly of a different type and of less importance).

9 The existence and importance of the ritual are known from classical sources, chiefly Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* VIII, 145-6 and, slightly differently, *Contra Ap.*, I, pp. 118-119) although with a varied range of additional direct and indirect references (see e.g. Lipiński 1995, pp. 238ff.). With support from other (and more disputed) textual sources (either Phoenician – the Punic inscription from Pyrgi, *KAI 277* – or biblical – the sacrifice on Mt Carmel, I Kings 18) and the interpretation of some iconographic evidence (especially the depictions engraved on what is called the “vase of Sidon”) attempts have been made to reconstruct the ritual (see especially Lipiński 1970, pp. 30ff., with references and analysis; see also Bonnet 1988, pp. 36ff., 104ff.) with fairly speculative results. In any case, comparative study has resulted in robust defence of the character of Melqart as a god who dies and rises again, see Xella 2001. For a different position, see again Müller, esp. 1996; 1997. For a summary of our general knowledge concerning Melqart, see e.g. Ribichini 1995.

10 There are two inscriptions in Greek, found in Ramleh, near Jerusalem, and in Amman (ancient Philadelphia, centre of the cult of Heracles in the Greek and Roman period); on these documents and on the identification of the *egerseitēs tou Hērakléous* with the miqim elim (already proposed by Clermont-Ganneau 1924 and defended by De Vaux 1941) see Lipiński 1970, pp. 31ff.; 1995, pp. 238ff., with references. Note that, in any case, the Phoenician expression was not *mqm mlqrt*, see *infra* our concluding remarks.

11 Although proposals have varied in the course of time (see e.g. Honeyman 1940 and de Vaux 1941; Ferron 1972; van den Branden 1974) and the philological reconstruction is still not clear, the relationship of the first term with Astarte/Astronoe must be accepted in one way or another (see *KAI*, p. 62 [sub n. 44]; Lipiński 1970, pp. 32ff.; Bonnet 1988, p. 175). Instead, the second term, initially obscure (see e.g. Berger 1912) does not present linguistic problems as derived from a root *trh*, which therefore should lead to the interpretation we have mentioned. For a summary of the debate and further references see the more recent works cited here as well as Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, p. 710.

12 This interpretation requires the final expression, “husband...”, to be understood as referring not to the actual god (as already considered by de Vaux 1941, p. 18) but to the miqim elim himself, who had to perform in the ritual as a substitute for the deity; see Lipiński 1970, pp. 33-34; 1995, pp. 240ff., with references; see also Bonnet 1988, p. 176.

13 Beginning by checking the inscribed objects themselves (the material of which they were made, their decoration, etc.) and then their texts, which we have tried to collate from photographs (which, as we will see, has led to occasional corrections of readings).

- The inscription from Cyprus, the third Phoenician inscription found in Larnax tes Lapethou,¹⁴ is a long text, not preserved completely, dating to the end of the 4th cent. BCE (perhaps therefore the oldest document in the *dossier*). It was inscribed on a block of white marble, perhaps the base of a statue¹⁵ dedicated by a certain *prm*, son of *grštrt*. The latter, or the dedicator himself,¹⁶ is called *mqm 'lm*, in the typical way that, in many Phoenician-Punic inscriptions, a personal name is followed by a mention of his office, function or profession. It is followed by other offices, held with respect to Lapethos.¹⁷ This *miqim elim* is, therefore, an individual from a rich and important family, who seems to hold some civic responsibilities, perhaps some of them cultic. Furthermore, the family, over time, had made various costly offerings to Melqart (and, secondarily, to Astarte), which would bring in a first connection, even if circumstantial, of the *miqim elim* with that god and his consort.
- The text from Rhodes¹⁸ is a much shorter votive inscription (which does not allow us to know to which deity it was addressed), on a stela of white marble that also had a text in Greek, although it barely survives. Found in the temple complex, it can be dated to the 2nd cent. BCE (perhaps at the beginning, going back at most to the end of the 3rd cent. BCE). In the Phoenician text, an individual (who must have been the dedicator of the stela) called *b'lmk*, is said to be son of a certain *mlkytn*, who is called a *mqm 'lm*. There follow immediately (before the start of an incomplete filiation, which largely eliminates the ambiguity present in the previous inscription) the expression *mtrh štrny*. Exactly as we expected, this is by no means a casual combination, since, as we shall see, whenever *mtrh štrny* appears, it follows *mqm 'lm* (although *mqm 'lm* is not always followed by *mtrh štrny*). Therefore, it does not seem to be a chance accumulation of two different titles for a single individual but the complete name of a single office, post or function¹⁹. It is not possible to know whether the *mlkytn* in question really was an inhabitant of the Island of Rhodes. We must probably suppose that he was not (the more so as he is the father of the dedicator), in which case the place where this person performed his function would remain unknown. It has also been proposed that the inscription was dedicated to Melqart, but there is no direct support for that hypothesis.²⁰

14 Honeyman 1938, pp. 285-298. Here it is cited as Larnax-tes-L. 3.

15 The actual inscription mentions this image (*sml . mš z . bnḥšt*, a bronze cultic statue, if the reading is correct). The dedicator offers the statue to the god Melqart, also recording that previously he had dedicated other precious objects, including another bronze statue (*sml . n[ḥšt]*) to Astarte, for his father (*l'by*).

16 As we shall see in the western Punic inscriptions, after each individual mentioned in a sequence of filiations comes his function or office. However, in other inscriptions, in which an individual is named using a customary basic anthroponymic formula (PN *bn* PN), the presence of functions and offices at the end of this pattern introduces some ambiguity, since they could refer simply to the individual cited in this way. The absence of a longer chain of filiations in Larnax-tes-L. 3 points to this interpretation, the *miqim elim* thus being the man called *prm*. Instead, the parallels with longer chains of filiations and the importance given in the inscription to the dedicator's own father may perhaps suggest attributing the offices mentioned to the last cited person, *grštrt*.

17 The second function (*šw[?]*), after the conjunction *w*) is connected with the name of an offering, *šw't*, which would therefore provide an ulterior connection with cult (which the editor of the inscription, Honeyman, had already envisaged, see *supra*). Greenfield 1987, pp. 396-397 considered the reading as certain and its meaning to be "sacrificer". Szyner reconstructed *šw[y]*, also as a function, although not cultic: it would mean a "commander" or the like (note that Honeyman understood not this word but the following expression, *š' l lpš*, to mean a "mayor" or "governor" – as accepted by Lipiński 1970, p. 57; Bonnet 1988, p. 178, with references); see Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, p. 965, with references (see esp. Greenfield 1987).

18 *Editio princeps* by I. Guidi in Maiuri 1916, p. 269. It was included as no. 44 in *KAI* (to which we refer for further references; see later especially Greenfield 1987; also Bonnet 1988, p. 377).

19 The absence of the conjunction would not be surprising in a succession of different functions (cfr. the previous inscription or any of the Punic inscriptions that we shall see next) but the way in which the two repeated syntagms follow each other, in possible apposition, suggests that rather than an accumulation of two intimately connected offices, we have here the solemn and complete name of one single title (confirmed by the otherwise improbable appearance of individuals with both expressions as a title in other inscriptions, see *infra*). Note also that the final syntagm must also refer to the officiant – and not to the deity, see *supra*.

20 Bonnet 1988, p. 377 considered as possibly a cult of Melqart in Rhodes, documented indirectly in the late period.

2.2. Punic Inscriptions

2.2.1. Votive Inscriptions

The remaining texts are western. The first dossier comes from the so-called *tofet* of Carthage. The epigraphic finds from there, as is known, are votive stelae. Some of them are simple blocks of poorly prepared stone. Others, besides being inscribed, are richly sculpted and decorated. It is easy to propose (but not so easy to demonstrate) that this fact depended on the finances of the commissioner. In any case, it must be remembered that the very fact of taking on a vow and making use of the *tofet* already presupposes some kind of social standing. The documents are difficult to date individually and although some ancient stelae already belong to the 6th-5th cent. BCE, most of them must have been made, inscribed and erected between the 4th cent. and the first half of the 2nd cent. BCE.²¹ As is well known, they are dedicated to the lady, to Tinnit “face of Baal” and to the lord, to Baal Hamon, as shown by the commonest opening formula on the stelae that preserve it (*lrbt ltnt pn b'l wl' dn lb'l hmn*). Given the special characteristics of the rituals of the *tofet*, it seems better not to suppose by default a special relationship of the dedicators of these stelae with both deities (while noting, in any case, the delicate nature of this type of evaluation). The dedicator appears in the final part of the inscription (after the short textual indication that it is a vow or offering, ... 'š ndr ...) as the formulaic structure of the text requires. He is usually followed, as we saw in the previous inscriptions, by the name of one or more ancestors, providing the names of various individuals from the same family. Again, as an interesting addition, these names are occasionally followed by a title, function or profession. Almost a score of stelae, most of which can certainly be dated to the 3rd and 2nd cent. BCE, present individuals who were miqim elim.

- A very damaged fragment of a stela²² of good quality,²³ with a concise text. In the last line one can read *mqm 'lm*, as part of the titles or functions of one of the individuals cited originally. Due to the fragmentary nature of the text, it is not possible to say to whom it corresponds exactly: we do not know whether the first name that occurs (called [*d*]nb'l, [*yt*]nb'l or the like) was the dedicator of the inscription or one of his ancestors. He was or had been, in any case, very probably a suffete (*špt*, a reading that can be proposed and ascribed to him), one of the supreme magistrates of Carthage, appointed yearly.²⁴ His father must certainly have been a suffete (perhaps called [*h*]n'). The name of this last individual, or more probably of his father, is followed by the title of *mqm 'lm* (and the inscription does not seem to have been longer).²⁵ Therefore, this is an important family in which a son and a father are suffetes; the grandfather (who, if still alive, was obviously the oldest among those mentioned) was a miqim elim.

21 On the inscriptions from the *tofet* (from Carthage and other sites in the West) see Amadasi 2002, esp. pp. 99ff. See now Amadasi – Zamora 2015.

22 Catalogued in *CIS I* as n. 227; we refer to *CIS* for further information, including the initial bibliography for each of these inscriptions and their vicissitudes of conservation. This stela, for example, like many others from the *tofet*, belongs to the set that was loaded onto the French ironclad “Magenta”, which caught fire and sank with its cargo, having just arrived at Toulon from Tunis. This fragment was among those recovered and sent to Paris, to the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (see *CIS I* 279, p. 317).

23 In the preserved fragment one can see the sign of Tanit between two caduceus and the beginnings of three lines of text, with the upper and left hand sections missing. The area to be inscribed was previously recessed, but the complete text did not fit and the last line was written outside it, underneath.

24 On *špt*, see the references in Hofstijzer – Jongeling 1995, pp. 1182-1183; see also the various interpretations by e.g. Sznycer 1978, pp. 565-576; van den Branden 1977 (esp. pp. 143-144) and Teixidor 1979.

25 Although the break prevents complete certainty, there is no room for many more signs; note that the latter have been added, outside the cartouche of the epigraphic field, closing the inscription.

- Another severely damaged stela of which an inscribed fragment is preserved that is quite legible,²⁶ in which a certain *hmlkt* is said to be son of *hn'*, in turn the son of another *hmlkt*. This person is the one who has a twofold office: *hrb mqm 'lm*. That is: he was both a rab (lit. “great”, “chief”, a term that denotes a magistrate of Carthage, perhaps a member of the senate)²⁷ and a miqim elim.²⁸ This last mention is followed, as in the inscription from Rhodes, by the expression *mtrh 'strny*, giving possibly the fullest title of the function. It was held by the oldest of those mentioned, who was (or had been) a magistrate as well.
- An almost complete and richly decorated stela.²⁹ In it, a certain *mtnb'l* is said to be son of *b'lyhn, mqm 'lm mtrh 'strny*, providing additional confirmation of what we said about the title and probably showing once again the oldest mentioned individual holding (or having held) the office or function of miqim elim.
- On a stela of which only a small section has been preserved³⁰ one can read also *mqm 'lm*, without it being possible to say to which individual the title belongs (the dedicator or one of his ancestors?). He was a suffete. The person at the end of the text, a certain *hmlk* son of *'drb'l* (also a suffete), must be the father of that individual. The family, therefore, must be high-ranking, with both grandfather and nephew suffetes, the latter also being a miqim elim.
- On another stela, almost completely preserved, of good quality,³¹ it says that the offering was dedicated by *'dnb'l* son of *'bd' smn, mqm 'lm*, son of *'zrb'l, rb* and *mqm 'lm*.³² Thus, the dedicator ascribes the office or function to his father and to his grandfather, who was, furthermore, a “rab”, an important member of the institutions in Carthage. Once again, then, the function of the miqim elim appears as connected with senior members of families holding the highest offices.
- Another stela, originally well preserved, finely and unusually decorated,³³ was dedicated by *'dnb'l*, suffete. It says that he is the son of *'smnhls*, suffete and *mqm 'lm mtrh 'strny*. This high-ranking person is, in turn, the son of *'bdmlqrt*, a rab, also the son of *ssr*, who was likewise a rab. That is to say: in a family whose members were regularly among the highest-ranking magistrates in the Carthaginian state (both the great-grandfather and the grandfather held the title of rab; the father and the son, the office of suffete) one of the members (not the youngest, but his father) also held the office or function we are concerned with, spelled out with the complete formula.

26 *CIS I 260*. It preserves the central text of the inscription (at least two lines are missing in the upper part; at least one in the lower part). On the horizontal, in spite of the damage in the right part of the text, only a few signs, which can be reconstructed, have been lost. The stela is now housed in the Louvre, after the usual vicissitudes of such pieces, as coming from Utica.

27 On *rb*, see discussion and bibliography in Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, pp. 1045ff., esp. 1050; once again cfr. e.g. Szyner 1978, p. 585; van den Branden 1977, pp. 139-145 (esp. pp. 143-144); Teixidor 1979, pp. 9-17.

28 It cannot mean “the great one of the *mqm 'lm*” or “the supreme *mqm 'lm*”, due to the presence of the article in the first term of the construct chain; the syntax of the article in Phoenician does not allow other interpretations, see Friedrich *et al.* 1993, pp. 210ff., esp. 211; see also p. 240.

29 *CIS I 261*. It has bands of geometrical motifs, a hand between the “acroters” of its upper extremity and, in its lower section (the only part lost) a sign of Tinnit between caducei, traces of which can still be seen. After various mishaps, the stela, which definitely comes from Carthage, ended up in Avignon.

30 *CIS I 262*. On the fragment, only the last signs of three very carefully written lines can be seen.

31 *CIS I 377*. There is no decoration, but there is a careful layout and the text is well written.

32 Again, for him to be a “supreme miqim elim”, and therefore, chief of an organized and hierarchical group, the expression would have to begin without the article; see *supra* n. 28.

33 *CIS I 3351*. It shows a large sign of Tinnit, between columns with capitals, so that its upper part forms the typical combination, as a circular sun, with an inverted crescent. The text has been carefully executed.

- Another stela, of good quality,³⁴ also preserved almost complete when it was found, tells us that the dedicator, *hmlkt*, a suffete, was the son of *mšry*, also a suffete, in turn the son of *šdytn*, also a suffete, with the title *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. Once again, in a family of (at least three) suffetes, the oldest of those named was also a miqim elim, a function here written out in full.
- On another stela, originally preserved almost complete, curiously decorated³⁵ and carefully inscribed, the initial formula is inverted (*lb'l hmn wltnt pn b'l*) with respect to the majority of inscriptions from Carthage, although we cannot easily derive any specific information from it.³⁶ The dedicator, *ytnb'l*, is said to be the son of *'bdmlk*. Here the text is unusual in that, unless we correct the reading,³⁷ the sequence of filiations is interrupted by the insertion of another type of relationship (denoted by a preposed *š*)³⁸ between, in principle, *'bdmlk*, the father of the dedicator, and *špt*, an individual who was both a rab and a miqim elim, as well as the son of *mtn*, a rab. It is possible that this shows some kind of dependence (between client and patron?) which, although seeming to be a family succession (of four individuals), it could also be interpreted as the relationship between only two persons (named with their patronymic). In any case, the names placed in the most advantageous position are those holding the office of rab and, the youngest of the two (but perhaps not of all those mentioned) the function of miqim elim.
- More simply made,³⁹ but with a careful script, is another stela. After the standard initial formula and the indication that it is a vow, comes the name of the dedicator, *'bdmlqrt*,⁴⁰ son of *'bd'smn*, *mqm 'lm*. The title must refer to the father. It is one of the few cases in which the text does not unquestionably show a miqim elim as part of an important family (although we know little about it, given the – significant? – absence of additional relatives in the text).
- Equally simple,⁴¹ with lines of script that become increasingly larger, but with very precise and legible signs, is the stela dedicated by *bdmlqrt*, a suffete, son of *mlqrthš*,⁴² a suffete, son of *'bdmlqrt*, *hrb mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. Once again, all the males in this family were magistrates: the son and father both suffetes, the grandfather, a rab. Also, once again, it is the oldest member who acquires the magistrature and the full title of miqim elim.

34 *CIS* I 3352. It has a typical pointed finial (a “pediment”, between “acroters”) which is decorated with a hand, egg-shaped elements and friezes.

35 *CIS* I 3788. It shows a crescent above a solar disc, crowning a slightly anthropomorphic figure; the motif, which seems to be placed over a plate, is usually called “bottle-shaped idol”, after its appearance.

36 This precedence of Baal Hammon is usual in other North African sanctuaries (such as the Constantina sanctuary), at least in its earliest period (such as Hadrumetum), but within the *tofet* of Carthage, although an earlier date has been proposed, it does not provide directly any great chronological precision. See Amadasi 2002, pp. 107ff.

37 In the text one can clearly read *ššpt*. If corrected to *hšpt*, it would provide a chain of filiations like most of the parallels, making the person mentioned, *'bdmlk*, a suffete, a rab and a *mqm 'lm* (with one inconvenience, however, the unusual accumulation of functions) son of a certain *mtn*, also a rab. However, against this correction, which is bold enough, is the existence of other documents in which the relationship between the personal names cited, exactly as they occur in this text, is indicated not by means of the normal indication of filiation *bn*, but by the use of *š* (see below).

38 Although the simplest interpretation suggests the relative pronoun in Phoenician, which also occurs in this form in Punic (see Friedrich *et al.* 1993, pp. 72-73) here it undoubtedly forms a specific expression.

39 *CIS* I 4863. The only decoration preserved is its triangular finial.

40 In this case we follow the reading in *CIS*, although the initial *'ayin* is not evident in any of the reproductions of the inscription.

41 *CIS* I 4864. Its upper part is topped with a typical triangular shape, with small projections on each side, in the form of “acroters”, but with no other engraved decoration.

42 *CIS* interpreted the personal name correctly, although in fact the *taw* appears in line 4, not in line 3.

- Another stela, simple but well-made,⁴³ with a very well carved text, was dedicated by a certain *bdmlqrt*, son of *'dnb'l*, a suffete, son of *'šmnhls*, a suffete⁴⁴ and *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. Once again there are two suffetes among the family mentioned, the oldest or the furthest away in time, the grandfather of the dedicator, holding the title of miqim elim (written out in full).
- On another stela, in fairly bad condition,⁴⁵ it is possible to read or reconstruct an almost complete text, with both formula and dedicator. He is called *bd'[str]t*, and is the son of *hn'*, *mqm '[l]m mtrh 'štrny*, son of *'b[d]b'l*, a suffete. The grandfather of the dedicator, then, was or had been a suffete; his father, a miqim elim.
- Simple,⁴⁶ yet well-made and with a complete text, is the stela dedicated by a certain *b'l'zr*. He is said to be son of *grskn*, a suffete, *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. Once again, the father is both suffete and miqim elim (in its complete formulation).
- Very well made, carefully shaped and decorated,⁴⁷ is a very well-preserved stela dedicated by a certain *mgn*. He was the son of *'bdmlqrt*, suffete and *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*, in turn the son of *'dnb'l*, also *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. Two senior members of the family, then, held the title (complete, in a twofold occurrence which further supports the unity of the full expression), one of whom had been a suffete.
- Another stela, almost complete, simple yet well made,⁴⁸ was dedicated by *mgn*, son of *špt*, a suffete,⁴⁹ son of *mg[n]*, a rab, son of *'bd'š[m]n*, also a rab and *mqm '[l]m mtrh 'št[rn]y*. The father was a suffete, the grandfather and great-grandfather were rabs; the latter, once again the oldest member mentioned, was a miqim elim, written out in its complete formulation.
- Another stela, inscribed and both richly and delicately decorated,⁵⁰ includes among its formulas the closing words *kšm' ql'*, which explains that the vow was made because the deity “has heard the voice” of the dedicator, a certain *'bdmlqrt*, a suffete, son of *hnb'l*, a rab, son of *hn'*, son of *hmlk*, *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. In this case, once again it is a remote ancestor who holds the complete title that we are dealing with (but no other functions); his grandson was a rab and his great-grandson a suffete.
- On another stela, well made and well decorated,⁵¹ with a well written text (which once again includes the final formula *kšm' ql'*), one can read that the dedicator, *'zmlk*, was the son of *'zrb'l*, *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*, son of *'bdmlqrt*. In this case, there are no further titles adding anything to the family history and it is only significant that the father held the function of miqim elim.

43 *CIS* I 4865, ending in a simple triangular finial, with no further decoration.

44 *CIS* is mistaken in the reading and the interpretation of the passage, making the function a personal name, in the belief that it was preceded by *[b]n*. However, they are the traces, typically separated, of a cursive *b* (as would be common in Neo-Punic inscriptions).

45 *CIS* I 4866. Only the upper part, originally pointed, is preserved.

46 *CIS* I 4867. Again, it is only crowned with a triangular shape.

47 *CIS* I 4868. A caduceus in the lower part is joined to a sign of Tinnit, almost as a form of moulding, encased in the triangular finial, which is accompanied by small “acroters”.

48 *CIS* I 4869. Only a fragment in the right lower part is missing. It is crowned with a simple triangular shape, without any obvious incised decoration.

49 Note the homograph. The reading *mgn bn špt hšpt* is correct.

50 *CIS* I 4870. On top of the very carefully written text, framed by a moulding, is superimposed a strip of three large rosettes (in bas relief on a rectangular recessed field), over which a pointed finial crowns the piece, accompanied by real acroters and decorated, in half-relief, with several elements (the central element is a human figure with his right hand raised and his left hand, holding a flower, on his chest). Below the text, there was also a winged figure with the solar disc (a scarab), interrupted by the break.

51 *CIS* I 4871, crowned with the typical triangular finial (now broken, in which originally a hand had been sculpted) between small “acroters” and with the sign of Tinnit in the lower part, also damaged.

- Yet another stela, that looks simple,⁵² but is well hewn and with the text well incised and legible, provides somewhat more complex information. It is a slightly fuller text, with formulas providing less common details, both in the beginning (stating that an offering or gift, *mtnt*, is being dedicated) and in the closing section (as the form of the final clause, *tšm' ql tbrk*, may indicate that the vow was a request and not an act of thanksgiving). It was granted by a certain *'rs*, said to be son of *'kbr* (if the reading, as it would seem, is correct). Here the family succession probably ended, to introduce – using *š* (as we saw earlier) – the name of another individual, *'bdšmn*, *mqm 'lm bšrm*. This *'bdšmn* (who is therefore not the grandfather of the dedicator, but probably his patron or the like)⁵³ then holds the title or function that we are studying, with the addition of the expression *bšrm*. At first, the interpretation of this term was difficult (it was thought to be e.g. a place name, after a preposition) and even now it is disputed. For some scholars, it qualifies the deity, *'lm*, as “blessed” or “favoured”, a term that would be connected with the cult of Melqart and the god himself in other inscriptions.⁵⁴ However, the occurrence of various spellings of a single term *bšr*, *bš'r*, *bš'r* (also as plural and suffixed forms) in the formulas of the inscriptions from the *tofet* makes it more likely that the term occurring in this inscription refers to this same noun, alluding to the specific sacrifice commemorated by the stela.⁵⁵ Alongside all that, the individual holding the title is undoubtedly the only one of those mentioned who appears in an advantageous position (even if we know nothing about his general social standing).
- Finally, one stela, although somewhat deteriorated, has preserved a complete text, which, like the decoration, is of very high quality.⁵⁶ The text ends, as do some of the previous texts, with the formula *kšm' ql[']*. The dedicator, *'bdmlqrt*, was a suffete; his father, *mgn*, also; his grandfather *bdmlqrt*, also, and furthermore was, *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. Once again, we see three generations of suffetes in the same family, of whom the oldest or furthest back in time is called a miqim elim, with the full formula.

2.2.2. Funerary inscriptions

Other relevant Punic documents are not votive stelae, but funerary inscriptions. On these, filiations and titles can also be added to the dead person's name. A small group of funerary inscriptions mentioning individuals who also held the function of miqim elim (a group with much the same date as the previous stelae) was found in the Carthaginian necropolis of Santa Monica (or, rather, in the Santa Monica area of the great necropolis of Carthage).⁵⁷

52 *CIS* I 4872. It has a simple triangular finial, with no preserved incised decoration.

53 Understood as expressing some kind of dependence between a first individual, cited with his patronymic, and a second, cited without him, see *supra*; alternatively, the relationship could be between the father of the dedicator and the last person mentioned.

54 Lipiński 1970, pp. 32ff., esp. nn. 7ff. See also Bonnet 1986, p. 215, both with references (see esp. *CIS* I 4894, 5575, texts which would contain mentions of the “temple of Melqart, the *favoured*”).

55 The expression, altogether obscure (which has even been believed to allude to a substitute sacrifice), would then be interpreted as the noun *š'r*, “flesh”, with the suffix or the ending *-m* and preceded by the preposition *b*, see Amadasi 2002, pp. 102-103, 106, who there follows Ferron. Müller 1996, pp. 125-126 includes it in his critique.

56 *CIS* I 5903. The text is arranged with great regularity in six lines of signs notably formalized and aligned. The stela is crowned with a typical pointed finial, flanked by two small “acroters”. Within the “pediment”, a forearm shows an open hand, pointing upwards, the palm facing the reader, a motif that, although repeated on many other stelae, is presented here very realistically. However, if anything stands out on the stela it is the heavy moulding around it, within which lies the epigraphic field (under a circular moulding, which must have framed a motif that has been lost).

57 For a presentation of the topography of the Carthaginian necropolis, see Benichou-Safar 1982, pp. 13ff.

- A very well-made inscription that is also very well preserved⁵⁸ comes from the hill next to Santa Monica. Incised on a stone slab,⁵⁹ which must have been part of the cover of a tomb, marked the burial⁶⁰ of a woman called *špnb'l*, who is called, simply, priestess (*kbnt*). There follow her predecessors and her family relatives: she was the daughter of *'zrb'l*, son of *mgn*, in turn son of *bd'strt*; she was the wife of *hn'*, both suffete and high priest (*rb khmm*), who was the son of *'bdmlqrt*, also a suffete, high priest and *mqm 'lm mtrh 'štrny*. She was a priestess, since, with an outstanding social position, which she seems to have attained not through inheritance through the family (although she does mention her father or grandfather), but through marriage: her husband was both suffete and high priest; her father-in-law, suffete, high priest and miqim elim (with the complete expression). Here, unlike the votive inscriptions (which could be commissioned at any time in the life of dedicator) this is a funerary inscription, possibly (but not sure) for a woman of a certain age. Her husband, therefore, if he was still alive, could also have been a mature or older person. Furthermore, in this type of inscription the formula leaves no space for younger individuals (sons or grandsons). Even so, of the two members of the family of suffetes and high priests who appear in the inscription, dead or alive, the oldest is the one who holds the office or function of miqim elim.
- Another funerary inscription on a stone slab,⁶¹ from the same hill, has a text in the same genre, with the same formula, but simpler than the former: the tomb belongs to *b'lh'n'*, son of *bd'strt*, son of *grm-lqrt*, son of *bdmlqrt*, *mqm 'lm*. In this case, this expression of the office or function is short. Although it could be the title of the dead man, placed at the end of his filiation, the parallels indicate that it was his great-grandfather who was a miqim elim, and that after him nobody held that or any other office or function. Only the find-spot (known as the *secteur des rabs*) links the dead man to what is in every way a good social position.
- Another inscription,⁶² very carefully made, of the same type and found on the same hill, presents a fragmentary text. Despite this, it tells us that it marked the tomb of another woman called *[šp]nb'l*,⁶³ with more than interesting family connections. She was the daughter of *'bdmlqrt*, a rab, in turn the son of an individual, whose name has been lost, who may also have held the office of rab (if his name was short, it was certainly followed by a title in the lacuna) and who certainly was a *mqm 'lm* (a detail also lost in the same break in the text, but which is confirmed by the partial appearance of the end of the full expression, *mtrh 'štrny*). In turn, he was the son of a certain *mgn*, also a rab. On the other hand, the dead woman was the wife of *'dnb'l*, also both rab and *mqm '[lm m]trh 'štrny*, son of *'bdmlqrt*, a rab, son of *grskn*, also a rab (followed by a lacuna that may have included further titles – including miqim elim – or further ancestors). Therefore, she is a woman from a good family (the daughter, or perhaps granddaughter, and great-grandchild of a rab, the granddaughter of a miqim elim) who married another high-ranking individual (the husband, his father and his grandfather, all holding the title of rab). Here, the youngest member of this family, the husband himself, is the one who certainly holds the title of miqim elim, whereas his father-in-law's father held this title in his wife's family. Although it does not seem to be a hereditary office or title (and even less, transmitted to the husband of

58 It is *CIS* I 5950 (*KAI* 93; to which we refer for further references). See also Benichou-Safar 1982, p. 209, n. 12.

59 On these types of writing surfaces, see Benichou-Safar 1982, p. 175.

60 Indicated on the inscription in the form of *qb'r*, with a *mater lectionis* that indicates a somewhat later period. The name of the dead woman is, of course, a well-known Punic name: it is transcribed in Latin sources as Sophoniba (and variants).

61 *CIS* I 5953, *KAI* 90, editions to which we refer for further references. See also Benichou-Safar 1982, p. 210, n. 15.

62 *CIS* I 5979; Benichou-Safar 1982, pp. 214-215, n. 41. It is quite square, with a moulding, and a good layout of lines and signs.

63 The reconstruction of the personal name, given its obligatory feminine nature, is more than likely.

a possible heiress), we shall see below whether the office or function of miqim elim, like the offices of rab or suffete, recurred within some families.

- Another funerary inscription from the same region,⁶⁴ less carefully made, although its manufacture makes the text perfectly legible, informs us that the tomb⁶⁵ belonged to *mgn* (with no further filiations), *mqm 'lm mlt*. The characters are spread over two lines over the whole surface of the slab. It is impossible to know whether the stonemason fitted an originally short text into the available space or whether the commissioner and the epigraphic workshop jointly opted for a text with these characteristics. However, unusually, the personal name appears without any filiation, and the expression of the function, without its extension *mtrh 'štrny*. In this context, not surprisingly, it has been proposed that the last three letters (which have no obvious meaning) form an abbreviation: *mlt* for *mlqrt*.⁶⁶ Abbreviations of this type, common in the Punic world, usually shorten personal names, even if it is true that, very often such apocopated forms imply the abbreviation of their divine names.⁶⁷ Those who accept that, in fact, *mlt* conceals the divine name Melqart, understand that this indicates either that the priest was of that god (“miqim elim of Melqart”) or else that the deity was identified as him (“the raiser of the god Melqart”), which does imply the former. They also understand that, although the inscription implies a special differentiation (opening the possibility of having a miqim elim of other divinities) Melqart is behind all references to the function – but only because otherwise it would not fit its general reconstruction. The fact remains that in no other inscription does a divine name follow the mention of the office or function we are considering.
- Also from the same region seems to be a square plaque, with a moulding and inscribed with a careful and regular text.⁶⁸ Although different from the more usual texts, since its formulas depart from the concise pattern seen previously, with a second part using more complex and rich expressions, its purpose is also funerary. A certain *šsp* seems to dedicate it to *mlkpls*, son of *bdmlqrt*, son of *mlkpls*, son of an individual whose name is lost, the son (probably, assuming a short lacuna) in turn of a certain *mlkpls*, son of *mlqrtpls*, *mqm 'lm*, son of another individual whose name is lost, son (once again probably) of *mlkhrm*. This means that the dead man, his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, his great-great-grandfather, his great-great-great-great-grandfather (who was a miqim elim) and the latter’s father and grandfather are all mentioned! Neither more nor less than eight generations of a single family. In this case, only one relatively remote ancestor held the office or function. An attempt has been made⁶⁹ to see in this extended line of succession, the specific intention to demonstrate the

64 *CIS* I 5980; Benichou-Safar 1982, pp. 199ff., 215, n. 42. Very probably it was found in the *secteur des rabs*.

65 The initial word of the inscription, however, is not *qbr*, but *'lt* (clearly not *'lm*), an obscure term here that has been interpreted as referring to the incinerated remains of the dead woman (Ferron), as the preposition “for” (Bénichou-Safar) or as referring to the “cover” of the tomb (Février). See, e.g. *CIS* I 5980; Février 1955, p. 60; Bénichou-Safar 1982, pp. 199ff.; Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, p. 851, with further references.

66 Proposed by Lidzbarski and Clermont-Ganneau (who, as we have noted, introduced some of the fundamental ideas discussed today: Clermont-Ganneau 1920), see earlier references in *CIS* I, p. 516; more recent in Lipiński 1970, pp. 32ff. and Bonnet 1988, pp. 174ff. (who accept and develop the equivalence) or in Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, p. 1003 (lexicographical references; note especially the alternatives: e.g. already Février 1955, pp. 59-62 or Ferron 1971, pp. 225-230).

67 As noted by the proponents of the interpretation, some theophoric personal names of Melqart could abbreviate their theonymic element in the same way; see Benz 1972, p. 175 (cfr. 117, 349). Even though in the most certain cases, abbreviations of personal names engraved on stone follow somewhat different conventions from those used here (see Chabot 1951), it remains true that the conventions are close and that there is no lack of variety and exceptions (especially in graffiti or in amphoric stamps with inscriptions). On the other hand, if we accept the possibility of a theonym, only *mlk'štrt* could be a valid alternative to Melqart (see already Lipiński 1995, p. 241, n. 139), but due to its length and its lack of close parallels, this seems less likely.

68 *CIS* I 6000 bis; Benichou-Safar 1982, pp. 230-231, n. 84 («Inscription apposée sur monument mal défini»).

69 See already Ferron 1966, pp. 67-69.

existence of an ancestral *miqim elim*, which would prove the prestige of that honour. Note, however, that in this case it goes even further. The richness of the inscription and of the monument, as well as the added eulogy, leave no doubts about the dead man's position, even in the absence of titles.

- A funerary inscription found in Avignon, but most certainly also from Carthage,⁷⁰ states that the dead woman, a certain *zybqt*, priestess of a goddess whose name has been lost, was a daughter of *'bd'smn*, in turn the son of *b'lytn*, son of *'bd'smn*; she was also the wife of *b'lh'n' mīq[m] 'l[m]*, son of *'bdmlqrt*, son of *hmlkt*, son of *'bd'smn*. In this case, a dead woman with a certain cultic rank was married to an individual who held the function that we are studying, both citing their ancestors (all without titles) back to their great-grandfathers. Again, it is possible (but not certain) that both the woman and her husband (*miqim elim*) were of a certain age when the first of them died.

2.3. Neo-Punic Inscriptions

Also funerary, although very special, is the only⁷¹ Neo-Punic inscription in the dossier. It extends the chronological span and the geographical area covered by the preserved evidence to the end of the 2nd cent. BCE and to Algeria.

- The Neo-Punic evidence is provided by a famous inscription found in the vicinity of the Algerian city of Cherchel (ancient Iol, later Caesarea). It is dedicated to the deceased Numidian king Micipsa⁷² (written *mkwsn* in the text) allowing the inscription to be dated towards the end of the 2nd cent. BCE. Unlike the Carthaginian Punic epitaphs we have just seen, the inscription is formulated in a special way, as a sort of votive text. It calls the place not simply a tomb, *qbr*, but a sanctuary, *myqdš*, dedicated to the king, to whom are offered a statue and other constructional and decorative elements of his tomb (some mentioned, together with the name of someone who seems to be its author, in a sort of extension of the principal formula of the text). The dedicator presents himself as follows: *y'zm*, son of *yzzgsn*, son of *bg't*, son of *msnsn*, *myqm 'lm*.⁷³ Once again, the final position of the expression under study in the list of filiations opens up some ambiguity, since it could refer to the dedicator.⁷⁴ But going by previous parallels, it must refer in fact to his great-grandfather (whom some scholars identify directly with king Masinissa, father of Micipsa,⁷⁵ even though no titles of any kind are added). Associated with or part of the court circle, capable of paying the expenses of the offering, the dedicator is showing off his importance. It is worth remembering that we are now outside a strictly

70 *KAI* 70; see also e.g. Amadasi 1967, App. 4. The script has good parallels in Carthage towards the end of the 3rd cent. BCE and there the text follows the formulas of the commonest Punic funerary inscriptions. Petrographic analyses confirm its Carthaginian origin, see Ferron 1968; Benichou-Safar 1982. In this case, the first word is “tomb” (written as *qbr*, without *mater lectionis*); also, a short final formula is added against the tomb being opened: *'bl lpth*. All the personal names are North African: all the persons mentioned have Punic names, except for the dead woman, who has a well-documented name of Numidian origin (a feminine form of the name transcribed in Latin sources as Scyphax). If it reflects an ethnic component (which is not necessary) perhaps it came into the family from the distaff side.

71 The appearance of *hmqm 'lm* in the inscription from Leptis known as *Tripolitania* 1 (*IPT* 9) has been interpreted as a variant of the title we are dealing with (see Lipiński 1970, p. 37). However, it is much more likely that it is simply a mention of “place”, *mqm*, or in any case a sacred location; see e.g. Levi Della Vida – Amadasi 1987, pp. 33ff., already cited; see also Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, p. 1003, with additional references.

72 *KAI* 161 (with references to the abundant bibliography available, in which Février 1951, pp. 138-150 stands out; for later studies, see e.g. Garbini 1986, pp. 67ff.; more recently, see Jongeling 2008, pp. 195-196).

73 Note the typically Neo-Punic use of the *y* as a *mater lectionis*. See above on the vocalization of the expression.

74 Understood as the dedicator e.g. Bonnet 1988, pp. 196-197.

75 Lipiński 1970, p. 58, adds this fact to his arguments on the close connection of the *miqim elim* with the office of suffete and, here, with royalty. See *infra*.

Punic context. In fact, all the names of the members of this family are Numidian. Therefore, it is not too surprising that titles referring to the Carthaginian magistrature do not appear. Indeed, of great interest in this context is, instead, the actual mention of *miqim elim*, held by a “Punicized” Numidian (although, even if it is the title of a senior ancestor, his son, grandson and great-grandson continue to have indigenous names). The inscription itself, in late Punic, is reminiscent of the strong assimilation of important elements of Carthaginian culture by the ruling Numidian classes. One has to ask whether, in this place and period, the function of *miqim elim* was really the same as in Punic Carthage, since, although retaining similar prestige, it could by no means entail connections with the cult.⁷⁶ If it were, it would indicate either the incorporation into the cult of persons from these high Numidian classes in a strictly Punic setting, or the extension of this Punic type cult to Numidian areas, with local participation.

3. THE INFORMATION PROVIDED

As we have seen, the information provided by all these documents, then, is limited but interesting.

3.1. *Geographical and Chronological Presence of the miqim elim according to the Inscriptions*

To start with, the distribution of the documents in time and space provides us with late dates (probably not earlier than the second half of the 4th cent. BCE, but extended towards the beginnings of Roman domination) from various places in the Phoenician world (but not, strictly speaking, from Phoenicia).

Given the presumably somewhat heterogeneous original production of inscriptions, but especially the filtering resulting from their varying potential of conservation, finding and identification, the absence of references to the *miqim elim* is less significant than their presence. There were individuals who held that title in various Phoenician settlements in the east (there must certainly have been some *miqim elim* on Cyprus from the 4th cent. BCE and, a century later, perhaps elsewhere – or in the same place – in the area, since the son of another *miqim elim* was present in Rhodes at the beginning of the 2nd cent. BCE). Everything indicates that the lack of evidence, for example in the region around Tyre, is due to chance – or rather, to difficulties related with the potential production, conservation, recovery and study of significant documents in the area (in fact, the Phoenician inscriptions from Tyre are in general not very numerous and for some periods simply non-existent). In no way, therefore, can we state that these priests did not exist in the so-called “motherland”.

The same logic applies to chronology: we cannot state that no *miqim elim* existed before they are actually documented. Instead, it is simply the general abundance of Carthaginian documents that provides the wealth of information about the function in its time and place (especially during the 3rd-2nd cent. BCE), concentrating the evidence – particularly in the west. Therefore, the significance of this concentration of occurrences of *miqim elim*, in terms of space and time, to late Carthage should not be exaggerated (although it evidently proves the definite existence and importance of some specific ritual activity connected with the office or function at that moment, in that period)⁷⁷. Again, historically speaking, the sole North-African document from the close of the 2nd cent. BCE, from a region then no longer under Punic control, and produced by high class Numidian individuals, proves how the function transcended the Carthaginian nucleus.

⁷⁶ Already Bonnet 1988, pp. 196-197.

⁷⁷ Therefore, if we accept the connection of the *miqim elim* with the rituals of Melqart, we can assume that they were celebrated in Carthage (a celebration that some scholars reconstruct as exuberant, the source of a sacred base for the local magistrates). Note that we do know of an annual Carthaginian delegation to the Tyrian feast of Melqart (a “tradition” resumed with much pomp in a later period). This well documented fact has been used to support the interpretation of Melqart as a symbol of the Tyrian roots of Carthage and as pivotal in its relations with the metropolis, see Bonnet 1986, pp. 214-216; 1988, pp. 178-179.

It also shows that the function must have had such importance in Carthage that it was considered, perhaps without its original attributions, worthy to be displayed in the city's former area of influence.⁷⁸

Although the interval covered by the documentation is not excessive (about two hundred years), the latter arguments force us to consider a possible evolution of the function of the *miqim elim* or/and that it varied in certain times and places. The oriental inscriptions that seem to document the Greek translation of the Phoenician title can be understood better if in the Levant that title had preserved, at least, its cultic nature and, better still, the etymological connection of the function's name with its cultic actions. If so, the different evolution (from a cultic point of view) that could be proposed must perhaps be restricted to the West, perhaps only to those territories under Punic influence in the period of Carthaginian decline.

3.2. *Relationships of the miqim elim with Specific Cults or Deities according to the Inscriptions*

As for the type or "genre" of the documentation, although the abundance of votive documents in the dossier (all therefore related to a cultic act) could be considered relevant, it is rather misleading. This is because most of epigraphic lapidary Phoenician texts preserved are also largely votive, with a significantly minor number of funerary inscriptions – just like the group studied here – and only very few documents of a different type. Furthermore, there are hardly any Phoenician inscriptions in which a function of this kind is the main protagonist. Instead, these titles appear only marginally as the function or title of an individual mentioned in votive or, to a lesser extent, funerary inscriptions. The reverse also applies: although no *miqim elim* ever appears in the rare institutional or administrative documents in Phoenician connected with the practice of the cult (and still less is the function as such mentioned in them) this absence is once again not important, given the scarcity of evidence of this type and the kind of information it usually provides.

On the other hand, the fact that most of the *miqim elim* documents are votive in nature, connects the dedicators (as well as possibly their families) to cultic acts (not necessarily specialized) in honour of specific deities. The relationship with Melqart established in some of these inscriptions has been noted as significant. However, the link can be proposed only in the Cypriot inscription, which in effect seems to reflect the special veneration of the two individuals mentioned (father and son) for Melqart (and for Astarte, which is not inconsistent). The remaining votive inscriptions do not exhibit this type of relationship with Melqart by means of their own vow, as in fact most of the inscriptions are dedicated to Tinnit and Baal Hamon. Once again it is due to the fact that almost all the evidence to be discussed comes from the so-called *tofet*, so that this possible relationship of the dedicators with both deities loses significance. As we have said, all these facts go to show how delicate it is to evaluate this kind of "special relationship".

3.3. *Social and Economic Position of the miqim elim according to the Inscriptions*

The so-called *tofet* was a Carthaginian sacred area and therefore most of these *miqim elim* individuals must have belonged to the (wealthy) Punic society of Carthage. Funerary inscriptions from the rich Carthaginian necropolis shows that as well. However, evidence such as the Neo-Punic inscription from a Numidian area, obliges us to consider closely the social standing or economic position of those who held such titles.

Already the mere existence of the inscribed stones permits to suppose that the dedicator of a votive or funerary inscription had a certain status.⁷⁹ If this consideration is extended to the family, all the individuals

78 If instead we suppose that it always retained its original nature, or at least its cultic function, it is necessary to accept the incorporation to the properly Punic cult, through this official, of individuals culturally Punicized, but not Punic; or the extension of elements of the Punic cult, that included or required the *miqim elim*, to other regions.

79 As they are votive or funerary inscriptions, whoever commissioned the inscription (or, in any case, his family) was then the one who in principle bore the expenses of its manufacture and engraving (as well as those arising from the actual cultic act recorded on the inscription – beyond the mere erection of the stela, for example – or those required for the ceremonies and arrangements for burial).

whom we know to have held the title of *miqim elim* must be considered as having a good financial position. We do not know whether, instead, there were *miqim elim* who could not meet the expenses of an inscription (and of whose existence, therefore we know nothing). However, the evidence preserved does not provide much support for this possibility. If individuals holding the office or function that we are studying had a very different social or economic status, it would be expected that the documents might also exhibit a wider variety in their manufacture, being preserved monuments of every quality, with texts composed and incised in very different ways and referring to all kinds of people. Instead, although to a certain extent the evidence is varied, almost all the writing surfaces and texts are of very good and even quite high quality, some of them strikingly expensive. There are no equivalent examples that are really crudely made and coarsely inscribed, as those that would appear to be are simply badly preserved. The general impression is that the office or function had to be held in families that had or had reached a fairly high economic status, in some cases very high – even though there could be exceptions, as the information from the actual texts themselves confirms.

Before discussing the textual content of these documents, it is worth noting the scant relevant information that can be extracted from the analysis of the iconography of the decorated examples (beyond the possible wealth of their patrons/commissioners). It is not easy to see clear relationships between the often banal repetition of iconographic motifs and the repetitive formulaic nature of the texts.

3.4. *Power Relationships of the miqim elim and their Families according to the Inscriptions*

Moving on, then, to the main body of the information provided by the inscriptions, the actual texts, we can continue with these kinds of reflections. This is because, alongside the dignity or function of *miqim elim*, the individuals mentioned, or their families, frequently appear with other functions or offices.⁸⁰ Almost half of those who held the function of *miqim elim* also held other positions (corresponding to the higher ranks of civil authority and religious hierarchies) with which the function was therefore perfectly compatible. These offices always precede the function studied here, perhaps showing the *miqim elim* as having less relevance – or rather less practical power. In any case, the title of *miqim elim* seems to be clearly differentiated (and somehow independent) from them. What is evident is the intimate connection or correspondence of those holding the function of *miqim elim* with those holding the most relevant political/religious positions of the Carthaginian society.

It is certain that of the 31 individuals who call themselves *miqim elim*, at least 6 (if not 7) previously called themselves a *rab*;⁸¹ 7 are called *suffete* and *miqim elim*;⁸² some could hold another type of office⁸³ and in an exceptional case, an individual holds the titles of *suffete*, high priest and *miqim elim*.⁸⁴ Since not all those who held this title had other offices, it was clearly not required. However, it does seem that the *miqim elim* frequently came from the same families that provided high public offices.

In fact, if we extend the family circle under examination, the facts are also significant (even within the limits imposed by the small number of relatives that occur in some inscriptions): at least 16 of the families mentioned with *miqim elim* included other members who were magistrates⁸⁵ (in more than half the

80 For some scholars, this not only proved their high social standing but also that the function undoubtedly secured prestige, Bonnet 1986, pp. 215-216; 1988, p. 178. Lipiński 1970, pp. 57-58 went further and found that the function was connected in one way or another with high offices of magistrate and, especially, the office of *suffete* (although he largely based it on the “*Tripolitania 1*” inscription, see *supra*).

81 In *CIS I* 260; 377; 3788; 4864; 4869 and *CIS I* 5979 (perhaps two individuals).

82 In *CIS I* 262; 3351; 3352; 4865; 4867; 4868 and 5903.

83 In the inscription Larnax-tes-L. 3, as we have said, with a different formulation, see *supra*.

84 In *CIS I* 5950.

85 As in *CIS I* 227; 262; 377 (a relative who is both *rab* and *miqim elim*); 3351; 3352; 3788; 4864; 4865; 4866; 4868 (a relative who is both *suffete* and *miqim elim*); 4869; 4870; 5903; 5950; 5979 (two families).

inscriptions, regularly),⁸⁶ whereas only 7 clearly do not.⁸⁷ The most important of these last cases is the family in which up to eight generations, preceding and following the one holding the function of *miqim elim*, do not hold any kind of relevant title or function. It shows, therefore, how it was occasionally possible to attain to this priesthood without a special family tradition and without any obvious outstanding social position.⁸⁸ On the other hand, there are cases in which being a *miqim elim* seems to have favoured his descendants (and who knows, in some cases, even the *miqim elim* himself) as eligible to be magistrates.⁸⁹ However, in other cases this simply does not happen⁹⁰ and indeed some of the documents could show the opposite (i.e. the magistrates preceding the title of *miqim elim* in the sequence of generations of a family).⁹¹ Undoubtedly, it was not a hereditary title, although it does not seem to be an impediment that both a father and his son held it (even though we do not know whether simultaneously).⁹²

All this seems to indicate that one could acquire the function or office of a *miqim elim* without necessarily or primarily being connected with specific positions, families or offices. Similarly, its prestige also seems to be independent of any of these, even though it required a personal position (and perhaps even charisma or status), which colours the evidence affected by class distinctions.

3.5. *Gender, Age and Kinship of the miqim elim according to the Inscriptions*

All the *miqim elim* documented are males. There is not even one single case of a woman performing such a function, which does not seem to be mere chance (taking into account the already fairly representative number of documents attesting to the function and the appearance of women, some of them as priestesses, in some of the very same texts). This possible masculine exclusiveness would be in agreement with the added epithet “*astroneal* husband” of the title and with his possible ritual functions.

As for age, it is not easy to draw conclusions from the kind of inscriptions that we have: they very often mention family members who most probably were dead, and provide no clues about the youth or maturity of those who still were or could be alive. Only in a relative way does the chain of patronyms show some individual as necessarily older than others. Hence, as we anticipated, a possibly interesting fact

86 In fact there are cases where all the family members mentioned hold titles (one of them also being a *miqim elim*): two of the three members mentioned bear the title of *suffete* in *CIS I 227*; of the four present in *CIS I 3351*, two are *rabs* and two are *suffetes*; three out of three were *suffetes* in *CIS I 3352*; the two definite relatives in *CIS I 3788* the office of *rab*; in *CIS I 4864* two of a *suffete* and other of a *rab* (of the three present); three of the three held the office of *suffete* in *CIS I 5903*; two of the two the offices of *suffete* and high priest in *CIS I 5950*; and three out of the three males, in the two families mentioned in *CIS I 5979*, probably hold the title of *rab*.

87 Excluding the cases where the number of family members mentioned (one or two) is too small for conclusions to be drawn, there are no magistrates (beside what the *miqim elim* could hold) in the families mentioned in *KAI 44* (none of the three mentioned); *CIS I 260* (of three, only the *miqim elim*); *CIS I 4871* (none of the three); *CIS I 5953* (none of the four); *CIS I 6000bis* (none of the eight!); *KAI 70* (none of the four); *KAI 161* (none of the four).

88 *CIS I 6000bis*, see *supra*.

89 The sequence in *CIS I 227*; in *CIS I 3352* (with the oldest member, the *miqim elim*, already a *suffete*); in *CIS I 4864* (with the oldest member, the *miqim elim*, already a *rab*); in *CIS I 4865* (with the oldest member, the *miqim elim*, already a *suffete*); in *CIS I 4868*; *4869* (with the oldest member, the *miqim elim*, already a *rab*); in *CIS I 5903* (with the oldest member, the *miqim elim*, already a *suffete*). A different situation is presented by the exceptional text *CIS I 5950* or by cases such as *CIS I 4870*, where the *miqim elim* precedes a *rab* and a *suffete*, but with a gap of a generation.

90 Clearly: *KAI 44*; *CIS I 260*; *261*; *377*; *4863*; *4866*; *4867*; *4871*; *5953*; *6000bis*; *KAI 161*.

91 Clear cases are *CIS I 3351* (two *rabs* preceding a *miqim elim*, who is also a *suffete*); *CIS I 3788* (a *rab* preceding a *miqim elim*, who is also a *rab*); *CIS I 4866* (a *suffete* preceding a *miqim elim*); or *CIS I 5979* (a *rab* preceding a *rab* and a *miqim elim*, perhaps in two families). In *CIS I 377*, a *rab* (who is also a *miqim elim*) precedes the priest; in the family mentioned in *CIS I 262* a *suffete* precedes a *miqim elim* (who is also a *suffete*), although with a generation interposed.

92 Only in two cases (*CIS I 377* and *4868*) do a father and a son hold the title successively. Note that in neither of the two inscriptions, which mention three generations, is there any indication of a special family devotion for a specific deity (see *infra*).

emerges: in the succession of filiations appearing in the votive inscriptions, the individual who holds the function of miqim elim is the youngest only in 1 case;⁹³ he belongs to the previous generation in 10;⁹⁴ to the third mentioned generation in 8;⁹⁵ to the fourth in 2.⁹⁶ This means that, statistically, they tend to be older individuals when we know of them. However, it is difficult to extract solid conclusions, as in many cases these individuals must in fact be ancestors who were already dead at the time when the inscription was being made, so that we cannot say when they first assumed the function in question.

In the funerary inscriptions where greater age or antiquity can be hypothesized for all those cited in succession (since the youngest individuals, when the inscriptions were made, were in principle the deceased), the title of miqim elim was held by 3 dead men or members of his generation,⁹⁷ by 5 predecessors (1 individual of the previous generation;⁹⁸ 1 member of the third generation mentioned;⁹⁹ 2 of the fourth;¹⁰⁰ and there is even a case of a member of a sixth generation preceding the dead man's¹⁰¹), so that, although less clearly, the pattern is repeated.

One can ask whether these data were influenced by the possibility that the commissioners of the inscriptions extended the filiations so as to go back to an ancestor with that title. Although the longest succession documented does not support this fact, and nor do other outstanding inscriptions,¹⁰² it remains true that many family members successions mentioned in the inscriptions go right back to a miqim elim,¹⁰³ in what appears to indicate the prestige of the office or function. In any case, it seems that the function, which is not hereditary, was thus acquired at a certain age, which the texts at hand reasonably indicate (but do not prove) to be advanced.

Instead, it is difficult to conduct appropriate prosopographic analyses or studies of kinship among the families having members with this title. Interesting for the latter, perhaps, is the inscription that shows two different families united by marriage, both, in different generations, having had members who held the function of miqim elim.¹⁰⁴ Although it suggests wider and more detailed interpretations, it is more prudent simply to note the social uniformity of many of the families in which this function was held. Another inscription, which shows the marriage of two individuals, with no outstanding family ancestors, sees a miqim elim marrying a priestess.¹⁰⁵ Besides confirming the obvious fact that performing the function we are

93 He is the dedicator in *CIS* I 262.

94 He is the father of the dedicator in Larnax-tes-L. 3 (although he could be the son); *KAI* 44; *CIS* I 261; 377; 3351; 4863; 4866; 4867; 4868; 4871.

95 He is the grandfather of the dedicator in *CIS* I 227, 260; 377; 3352; 4864; 4865; 4868; 5903. Both *CIS* I 3788 and 4872, which could not indicate kinship, must be considered separately.

96 He is the great grandfather of the dedicator in *CIS* I 4869 and 4870.

97 Two miqim elim are husbands of the two dead women in respectively *CIS* I 5979 and *KAI* 70, and another is the dead person in 5980.

98 A miqim elim is father of the husband of the dead woman in *CIS* I 5950.

99 A miqim elim is grandfather of the dead woman in *CIS* I 5979.

100 A miqim elim is great-grandfather of the dead person in *CIS* I 5953 and *KAI* 161.

101 In *CIS* I 6000bis.

102 The proposal was made by Ferron 1966, based on *CIS* I 6000bis, already cited, which shows a miqim elim in the sixth generation. However, the inscription extends to two further generations, even though nothing in the titles of those two additional ancestors justifies it (since the presence of the father of the operator could be understood as his patronymic, but nothing justifies the presence of his grandfather). Nor does *KAI* 70, with two families naming four ancestors, present special reasons in their titles for so doing.

103 Considering only those with at least three members, there are a dozen: *CIS* I 227; 260; 377; 3352; 4864; 4865; 4868; 4869; 4870; 5903; 5953; *KAI* 161.

104 *CIS* I 5979, see *supra*.

105 *KAI* 74, see *supra*.

discussing did not preclude a normal marriage (just as it did not preclude normal offspring, as we have just seen) the inscription shows once again, probably, the common interests and the horizontal relationships of families from similar classes.

3.6. *Personal Names and Family Devotion of the miqim elim according to the Inscriptions*

The proper names present in the inscriptions studied here must be considered, since they have helped to support Melqart's connection with the miqim elim, as the presence of theophoric personal names referring to the god was considered significant.¹⁰⁶ However, it is necessary to put this connection in perspective.

In themselves, theophoric names with Melqart are very numerous in the Phoenician-Punic epigraphic corpus¹⁰⁷ and their use among those holding the title of miqim elim is not very different in this respect. They are in fact numerous, but not majoritarian. Only 6 individuals with the function of miqim elim bear a name connected with Melqart, as against 21 that do not (and two more whose name is unknown).¹⁰⁸ Compare, for example, the 6 miqim elim with theophoric names with Eshmun and at least 5 with Baal, matching or rivalling the supposed special relationship with Melqart of these individuals or their families.

Some have tried to see the significant relationship between the miqim elim and Melqart by extending the anthroponymic study to all the families holding the function, but if we take the full list of relatives (or clients) cited in the inscriptions into consideration the facts are hardly affected. Alongside the actual miqim elim, 14 more individuals mentioned in the inscriptions in connection with the function¹⁰⁹ bear a name connected with Melqart, as against 47 that do not. Compare these with at least 14 theophoric names with Baal.

It is only if we restrict the analysis to the personal names of the fathers of persons mentioned as miqim elim, that there would seem to be a noticeable connection with the god Melqart.¹¹⁰ But, once again, the importance of this connection is relative. It is certain that 4 individuals, fathers of a miqim elim, bore a theophoric name involving Melqart, against 7 who did not;¹¹¹ however, we do not know the names of at least

106 Lipiński 1970, p. 33; he is followed by Bonnet 1986, p. 215; 1988, p. 178, n. 69.

107 Numerous in both variety and occurrence, see Benz 1972, pp. 347-348 and e.g. pp. 75-81 ('*bdmlqrt* and variants), 104, 125, 140-141 or 155-162 (*bdmlqrt* and variants).

108 The following are not theophoric names with Melqart: *gr'strt* (or *prm*) in Larnax-tes-L. 3; *mlkytn* in KAI 44; *hmlkt* in CIS I 260; *zrb'l* and *bd'smn* in CIS I 377; *šmnhš* in CIS I 3351; *šdytn* in CIS I 3352; *bdmlk* in CIS I 3788; *špt* in CIS I 4863; *šmnhš* in CIS I 4865; *hn'* in CIS I 4866; *grskn* in CIS I 4867; *dnb'l* in CIS I 4868; *bd's[m]n* in CIS I 4869; *hmlk* in CIS I 4870; *zrb'l* in CIS I 4871; *bd'smn* in 4872; *dnb'l* in CIS I 5979; *mgn* in CIS I 5980; *b'lyn'* in KAI 70; *msnsn* in KAI 161. Portan a Melqart in his name '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4864; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4868; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 5903; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 5950; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 5953; '*mlqrtps* in CIS I 6000bis. It is unknown in CIS I 227; 262; 5979 (one of them).

109 To be added to the previous: 47 with no connection to Melqart, *prm* (or *gr'strt*) in Larnax-tes-L. 3; *h[...]* and *b'lmlk* in KAI 44; *[h]n'* and *[d]nb'l* in CIS I 227; *hn'*, *hmlkt* in CIS I 260; *mtnb'l* in CIS I 261; *'drb'l*, *hmlk* in CIS I 262; *'dnb'l* in CIS I 377; *šsr* and *'dnb'l* in CIS I 3351; *mšry* and *hmlkt* in CIS I 3352; *mtn*, *'bdmlk* and *ytnb'l* in CIS I 3788; *'dnb'l* in CIS I 4865; *'b[d]b'l* and *bd'[str]t* in CIS I 4866; *b'l'zr* in CIS I 4867; *mgn* in CIS I 4868; *mg[n]*, *špt*, *mgn* in CIS I 4869; *hn'* and *hnb'l* in CIS I 4870; *'zmlk* in CIS I 4871; *'kbr* and *'rs'* (who are not necessarily related, but they are clients or dependents of the *mqm 'lm*) in CIS I 4872; *mgn* in CIS I 5903; *hn'* in CIS I 5950; *bd'strt* and *b'lyn'* in CIS I 5953; *mgn* (and if one wishes, *[sp]nb'l*, the dead woman) and *grskn* in CIS I 5979; *mlkhrm*, *mlkpls*, *mlkpls* and *mlkpls* (two distinct individuals) in CIS I 6000bis; *bd'smn*, *hmlkt* in KAI 70; *bg't*, *yzggsn*, *y'zm* in KAI 161. Compare the 14 theophoric names with Melqart, '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 3351; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4863; '*mlqrthš* and '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4864; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4865; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4870; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4871; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 5903; '*grmlqrt* in CIS I 5953; '*bdmlqrt* and '*bdmlqrt* (two distinct individuals in principle) in CIS I 5979; '*mlqrtps* and '*bdmlqrt* in CIS 6000bis; '*bdmlqrt* in KAI 70. 10 can be left out: *bd'strt*, *mgn*, *'zrb'l* and *špnb'l* in CIS I 5950 and *bd'smn*, *b'lytn*, *bd'smn* and *zybqt* in KAI 70 (since they are a family of a *mqm 'lm* only after marriage) and the two individuals with unknown names in CIS 6000bis. Here we consider the 10 personal names with the element *mlk* independently.

110 Cfr. Lipiński 1970, p. 33; Bonnet 1986, p. 215; Bonnet 1988, p. 178, n. 69.

111 The following 4 fathers of *mqm 'lm* have theophoric names that include Melqart: '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 3351; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 4871; '*bdmlqrt* in CIS I 5979; and '*bdmlqrt* in KAI 70. 7 do not: *hmlk* in CIS I 262; *'zrb'l* in CIS I 377; *mtn* in CIS I 3788; *'b[d]b'l* in CIS I 4866; *'dnb'l* in CIS I 4868; *mgn* in CIS I 5979; *mlkhrm* in CIS I 6000bis.

19 of them. Also, if we analyse the names of the individuals appearing in the inscriptions as sons of a miqim elim (a type of situation that would be especially significant, as it would show a priest of Melqart giving his son a name possibly related with the god), the possible connection with Melqart is even less obvious. Against the 4 sons of a miqim elim with theophoric names containing Melqart, 19 have theophoric names of other deities.¹¹² The whole consideration is in any case flawed by our ignorance about the names of other possible sons of these cultic specialists.

To conclude, it seems that the choice of a personal name does not necessarily prove that the miqim elim or their families had a special devotion to the god Melqart. The evidence rather seems to show how papyonymy, family traditions and the particular devotion of the group could have had a role in the general giving of personal names, in favour of Melqart in some cases¹¹³ but also of different deities in others, with no noticeable distinctions in families with one or more individuals holding the function of miqim elim.

3.7. *Relationship with the Cult of Melqart of the miqim elim according to the Inscriptions*

In this way, the study of personal names neither supports nor rejects the relationship of the miqim elim with the god Melqart, nor generally do the dedications and the contextual information. So, this relationship with Melqart, in the Phoenician inscriptions, is reduced to a single possible direct occurrence:¹¹⁴ the funerary inscription in which the name of the god may appear in an abbreviated form. As we have said, this identification, although possible, must be considered hypothetical as it has no parallel. However, this absence of conclusive evidence is of course not evidence of an absence of relationship; it is, once again, a good example of the peculiarities and limits of the corpus of Phoenician texts.

In fact, the most solid epigraphic bases to confirm the connection of the miqim elim with the god Melqart would be, surprisingly, the Greek inscriptions in which *egerseitēs tou Hērakléous* is mentioned. Although indirect and external, it is difficult to lessen their importance and implications: even though they are inscriptions in Greek, they are still Levantine inscriptions. Even though strictly speaking they do not come from Phoenicia, they are from its immediate area of influence. And even though they are late, they are not very much later than the last Phoenician-Punic evidence, which they replace in the East.

Therefore, the connection with the cult of Melqart of the miqim elim, together with his main characteristics that we have mentioned as certain, derived from Phoenician epigraphy (such as his prestige, or how he functioned among the upper classes of society very close to positions of power) must have occurred throughout this late period (4th-2nd cent. BCE), according to the sources. Then, either they remained the same or were replaced by similar characteristics (with the common denominator of the prestige attached to the office) even in later periods (as the later evidence shows). These noticeable features of the late miqim elim undoubtedly have their roots in the role and characteristics of that function in earlier periods. Unfortunately, we know nothing about that role: we do not know when and where it began (or the specific cultic act peculiar to it) or even how the function became distinct and its name definitively fixed. Nor do we have any direct indications that would allow us to trace the trajectory of the miqim elim in space and time, from his origins up to the phases and places for which we have evidence. In any case, all this indicates that the role of miqim

112 The following have theophoric names that include Melqart: *bdmlqrt* in *CIS* I 4863; *mlqrthls* in *CIS* I 4864; *grmlqrt* in *CIS* I 5953; *'bdmlqrt* in *CIS* I 5979. The following do not include Melqart: *prm* (assuming him to be the son of a *mqm 'lm*) in the inscription Larnax-tes-L. 3; *b'mlk* in *KAI* 44; *[h]n'* in *CIS* I 227; *hn'* in *CIS* I 260; *mtnb'l* in *CIS* I 261; *'dnb'l* in *CIS* I 377; *'dnb'l* in *CIS* I 3351; *mšry* in *CIS* I 3352; *'dnb'l* in *CIS* I 4865; *bd[štr]t* in *CIS* I 4866; *b'lzr* in *CIS* I 4867; *mgn* in *CIS* I 4868; *mg[n]* in *CIS* I 4869; *hn'* in *CIS* I 4870; *'zmlk* in *CIS* I 4871; *mgn* in *CIS* I 5903; *hn'* in *CIS* I 5950; *mlkpls* in *CIS* I 6000bis; *bg't* in *KAI* 161.

113 See e.g. the families of the stelae *CIS* I 4864 and 5903.

114 *CIS* I 5980. As we have seen, *CIS* I 4872, the inscription of the *mqm 'lm bšrm*, indirect evidence in any case, probably should be interpreted without any connection to Melqart. And again, as we have seen, Larnax-tes-L. 3 should be considered as having only a circumstantial connection to that god.

elim had a long history which, like the history of the beliefs and religious practices of the Phoenicians, must have been rich and complex. This should help us to avoid not only excessive speculations but also excessive generalisations.

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