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SAIL, PRAY, STEER: ASPECTS OF THE SACRED BELIEFS AND RITUAL PRACTICES OF PHOENICIAN SEAFARERS

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Abstract

Ancient seafarers faced dangers and fears posed by the sea and hazards of sailing. Accordingly, specialized sacred beliefs and ritual practices developed among Phoenician mariners – the focus of this study – which were a subset of terrestrial religion. Sailors honored deities whose maritime, celestial, or meteorological attributes could either benefit or devastate a voyage. While on land, these divine patrons were worshipped in harbor temples and promontory shrines. While at sea, divine protection came from the ships themselves, which were considered to be imbued with a spirit of a deity; the vessels also contained sacred spaces that allowed for continued contact with the divine. Mariners performed religious ceremonies to enlist and ensure divine protection and success for their voyages. Maritime features were also part of the funerary practices and mortuary rituals of seafarers. These specialized sacred beliefs and ritual practices were generated by the liminality of the deep and the unique uncertainties and perils at sea, and aided in Phoenician maritime exploration, commercial exchanges, and settlement that eventually spread throughout the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic coasts of Iberia and Morocco.

Les marins de l'antiquité devaient affronter les dangers et les peurs liées à la mer et aux risques de la navigation. En conséquence, des croyances sacrées spécialisées et des rituels – des sous-ensembles de la religion terrestre – se sont développés auprès des marins phéniciens. Ces derniers seront au centre de cette étude. Les marins honoraient des déités dont les attributs maritimes, célestes ou météorologiques pouvaient favoriser ou au contraire mettre en péril un voyage. Sur la terre ferme, on rendait culte à ces bienfaiteurs divins dans des temples portuaires et des sanctuaires sur des promontoires. En mer, la protection divine provenait des navires eux-mêmes, qu'on pensait imprégnés de l'esprit de la déité. Les vaisseaux contenaient également des espaces sacrés qui permettaient un contact continu avec le divin. Les marins accomplissaient des cérémonies religieuses pour mobiliser et assurer la protection divine, et garantir le succès de leurs voyages. Des caractéristiques maritimes se retrouvaient également dans les pratiques funéraires et les rituels mortuaires des marins. Ces croyances sacrées spécialisées et ces pratiques rituelles étaient occasionnées par la liminalité des profondeurs, les incertitudes spécifiques et les périls rencontrés en mer. Elles ont contribué aux explorations maritimes des phéniciens, ainsi qu'aux échanges commerciaux et à l'établissement de populations qui s'étendront finalement sur le pourtour méditerranéen et sur les côtes atlantiques de l'Ibérie et du Maroc.

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Humans have been venturing out on the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, to forage, fish, trade, explore, raid, and migrate, from prehistoric times to the present. While the sea has always had great potential for opening up routes of contact and communication, sailors encountered uncertainties, challenges, and fears posed by the liminality of the waters, which posed both physical and psychological boundaries. The dangers of sailing and navigating on the Mediterranean Sea and the whimsy of its winds and currents generated sacral needs for seafarers that were not shared by members of society who never left dry land. These specialized religious beliefs and ritual practices of sailors were a subset of the religion practiced by the cultures from which the mariners hailed, which were uniquely maritime focused.

In order to identify varied aspects of the religion of Phoenician seafarers,[1] I have developed a framework that helps to better systematize the diverse data available (Brody 1998), based on comparative research on the maritime religions of classical Greek and Roman cultures (Wachsmuth 1967; Rougé 1975; Göttlicher 1992, 2006; Romero Recio 2000, 2008; Atkins 2009; Demetriou 2010; Tusa 2010; Eckert 2011; Ferrer Albelda, Marín Ceballos, and Pereira Delgada 2012; Irwin 2012–2013; Galili and Rosen 2015; Šešelj 2015; Higueras-Milena Castellano and Sáez Romero 2018; Tito 2018; Brown and Smith 2019; Bricault 2020) and on anthropological studies of the religions of modern traditional seafaring communities (Bassett 1885; Sébillot, 1968; McNiven 2003; Kennerley 2007; Rich 2012; Gambin 2014). While this study is focused on Phoenician maritime religion, I have found that the similarity of concerns posed by the sea and the dangers of sailing allows this framework, or model, to be critically applied to the study of the religious beliefs and ritual practices of most traditional seafaring groups. The classification has five interrelated parts: (1) patron deities

[1] Use of the term Phoenician has recently come under criticism by Quinn 2018 and Martin 2017, since it was a Greek (read outsider's) descriptor of the people that inhabited the littoral of the eastern Mediterranean from the plains of Amrith in the north (modern Syria) to the Carmel coast in the south (modern Israel), who traded and eventually established daughter cities throughout the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of Iberia and Morocco in the late Iron Age and Persian periods. While divided into at least four kingdoms, the people of this region shared a common northwest Semitic language, similar religious beliefs and practices, and material cultural expressions that testify to a diverse but related people group that their Greek neighbors called Phoenician, see Sader 2019 and Edrey 2019. Thus, I will follow Sader and Edrey and continue to use the term Phoenician in this study, despite its acknowledged limitations; see also Oggiano 2019 who proposes using "Phoenician" in quotation marks to acknowledge the problematic nature of the name while continuing its use. Descendants of the Phoenicians in the western Mediterranean are also referred to as Carthaginians or Punic, the Latinized version of Phoenician, in both a cultural and chronological sense. For the sake of consistency, I will use Phoenician as a blanket term for peoples of Levantine origin and heritage throughout the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts in the first millennium BCE.

with special maritime, celestial, or meteorological attributes that are important to the well-being of sailors or a ship's voyage; (2) seaside temples and shrines with special associations for mariners; (3) the concept of the ship itself possessing a divine spirit and sacred spaces on board the vessel; (4) religious ceremonies performed by seafarers in order to help ensure individual safety and the protection and success of the voyage; and (5) funerary practices and mortuary rituals with connections to the sea.

Phoenician sailors adopted certain gods and goddesses from their varied pantheon as divine benefactors, in order to provide sacred assistance and divine protection throughout a voyage. These patron deities were worshipped while on land, in varied locations dedicated to the divinities, typically before leaving on a journey and upon safe arrival in port. While at sea, the ship physically protected mariners from the deep while divine spirits imbued within the vessel also guarded the seafarers on board. Additionally, there were sacred spaces and shrines on ships that allowed for continued contact and communication with deities while away from land. A variety of religious rituals and ceremonies were performed by sailors in order to try and ensure the safety and success of a voyage; before, during, and after the completion of a journey, and in order to safeguard personal welfare. Thanks were given to protective gods and goddesses and sacred vows were fulfilled when mariners were saved from disaster. When death occurred at sea there appear to have been special mortuary rituals; and, on occasion, seafarers took symbols of their profession with them to the grave.

Utilizing this framework allows for a reconstruction of aspects of the religious beliefs and ritual practices of Phoenician seafarers based on fragmented data over a broad period of time, which demonstrates that a specialized religion existed among Levantine seafarers.[2]

[2] Textual, archaeological, and pictorial data are all utilized in this study because of a dearth of information from any one category of evidence related to the topic. Unfortunately I have also had to cover evidence from numerous time periods from a broad sweep of the second to first millennia for the same reason, a generally sparse set of data from any one historic period. I realize the differences

The success of maritime commercial exchange and settlement of the Phoenicians can be attributed not only to their impressive vessels that plied the waters and the knowledge and skill of the ships' crews, but also to their relationship to the divine. Both pragmatic and religious practices sustained the unprecedented maritime colonization and seaborne exchanges of the Phoenicians from the Levantine homeland throughout the Mediterranean, and beyond the Pillars of Herakles to the Atlantic coasts of the Iberian Peninsula and Morocco.

Patron deities

Because of the unusual physical and spiritual dangers of seafaring, Phoenician sailors took on patron gods and goddesses from their pantheon for divine aid support throughout a voyage. The sea itself posed the biggest threat and created the greatest trepidation for mariners, so it was crucial to be protected from the hazards of the waters and its guardian deities. The sacred patrons of sailors guarded them from the spiritual dangers of the depths while the presence of the hull of the ship provided physical safety and protection from the waters of the deep. Deities of two types were especially crucial to Phoenician mariners: gods and goddesses that controlled winds and storms, and those who could aid in the safety and success of navigation and the voyage itself.

The storm god Baʿal's importance to seafaring is distinctly recorded in a seventh-century BCE treaty between Assyria and its vassal territory, the Phoenician city-state of Tyre. The document's section of curses calls on three epithets of the Phoenician storm god, Baʿal Shamêm, Baʿal Malagê, and Baʿal Zaphon, to raise an "evil wind" that will cause the waves of the sea to sink Tyrian ships if there are any broaches of the agreements stipulated in the treaty (full text in Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 24–27; analysis in Brody 1998: 10–11; Lipiński 1995; Niehr 2003).

in beliefs and practices between Phoenician city-states and daughter colonies, which also developed and changed over this long stretch of time; however, these do not impact my overall thesis.

Centuries prior to this Assyrian treaty, Baʿal Zaphon was worshipped in one of the acropolis temples in Ugarit, the capital of a prominent maritime city-state located one kilometer inland from the north Syrian coast. The temple contained an inscribed stele dedicated to Baʿal Zaphon (Levy 2014) as well as numerous stone anchors, which were worked into the sacred building's foundations and were left as offerings by sailors inside and outside of the sanctuary. A vivid depiction of the storm god as a divine warrior was carved on another stele found just outside the temple, which may originally have been located within the temple precinct (Yon 2006: 106–108). The neighboring temple on Ugarit's acropolis dedicated to the god Dagan lacked any maritime votives, as did several other sacred buildings excavated at the site, such as the Temple of Rhytons and the Hurrian Temple (Yon 2006: 106–10).

The temple of Baʿal Zaphon may have acted as a navigational aid for ships leaving and entering port one kilometer west of Ugarit, given its reconstructed height and key position at the western part of the city's acropolis or high point easily visible from the sea (Yon 2006: 110). The nearby mountain of Jebel el-Aqra is known from texts uncovered at Ugarit as Mount Zaphon, the deified mountain of Baʿal Zaphon, and was the mythic location of the storm god's palace. This prominent natural feature likely also served as a landmark and directional aid for seafarers sailing the waters off of the coast near Ugarit. Zeus Kasios, the Hellenized equivalent of Baʿal Zaphon, was honored with the offerings of model ships and his name was inscribed on anchors to ensure the god's aid when they were dropped during storms (Tito 2012; Collar 2017).

Phoenician marine deities also had special links to seafarers. The Greek myth of Cadmus relates how the legendary Phoenician prince prayed to Poseidon for protection during several storms. After his safe arrival in port on the island of Rhodes, Cadmus founded a temple dedicated to Poseidon in accordance with his vows to the god, made in distress at sea (Diodorus 5.58.2). Hanno, the leader of a Phoenician colonizing sea voyage in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, established a temple to Poseidon on a seaside promontory. This dedicatory act was undertaken to thank the god and likely to further ensure the safety of Hanno's fleet. We are not sure of the Phoenician name of the

deity that was translated by ancient Greek authors as Poseidon (Brody 1998: 23–26). It is possible that an unnamed maritime god, portrayed on fifth- and fourth-century BCE Phoenician coins as an archer riding over the seas on the back of a mythic, composite sea creature, the hippocamp, is the equivalent of Greek Poseidon (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Warship with horse headed prow, riding on hippocamp, coin, Byblos; and "Marine God" on his hippocamp, coin, Tyre. Source: Brody 1998, Fig. 22 and 23.

Goddesses played a vital role in the protection of sailors, as well. An Egyptian Middle Kingdom, or Middle Bronze Age, coffin text says that Hathor, who is equated in the text with the Lady of Byblos, which is an epithet of the Canaanite mother deity Asherah, holds the rudders that guide the voyage of funerary boats (Brody 1998: 28–29). The Canaanites are the Bronze-Age ancestors of the Phoenicians, or conversely the term Phoenician is the Greek name of the Levantine culture group that may have called itself Canaanite.[3] A port on the Red Sea was called Elath, indicating that the settlement was dedicated to the goddess Asherah under her original name, Elath, meaning "Goddess" (Deut 2:8; 2 Kgs 14:22; 16:6). The inscription "Elath of Tyre" is found minted on a coin that depicts the goddess standing in a galley as its protector deity (Brody 1998: 29). The goddess Tinnit, a Phoenician deity who is likely

[3] See Edrey 2019, Elayi 2018, various studies in López-Ruiz and Doak 2019, and Sader 2019. I would like to thank Helen Dixon for help accessing recent Phoenician publications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

a later form of the great goddess Asherah, is commonly associated with the emblem of the crescent moon or crescent-and-disk (Lipiński 1995; Brody 1998: 30–33; Martin 2018: 84, 90). This lunar symbol is found on standards depicted at the stern of Phoenician ships carved on votive stelae and represented on coins. These symbols of the moon represent the guardianship of the goddess Tinnit over these vessels, and suggest her protection over proper navigation, since pilots maneuvered steering oars located at the stern of ships. The "sign" of Tinnit, which may represent the goddess Tinnit or an aspect of this divinity,[4] is also depicted on standards at the prow and stern of a ship carved on a memorial stele from Carthage suggesting her divine safeguarding of the vessel (Fig. 2). Recently a bronze pendant of the sign of Tinnit was found near several ship graffiti carved on the walls of a Phoenician tomb at Maresha in the rolling hills, or Shephelah, of modern southern Israel, tentatively suggesting another link between the divine symbol and seafarers (Haddad, Stern, and Artzy 2018: 125; Wolff, Stern, and Erlich 2019: 34).

[4] Whether or not the so-called sign of Tinnit actually represent the goddess Tinnit is, like many aspects of Phoenician religion, ambiguous. Some scholars caution against the direct link between Tinnit and the symbol that has been given her name, which resembles a triangle with a cross piece at its apex and a circle on top (see Brown 1991: 123–31; Mendleson 2003: 7; D'Andrea 2014: 57; Martin 2018). Martin complicates the simple correspondence of the symbol with the goddess, interpreting it instead as representing aspects of the relationship between Tinnit and Baʿal Hamon. I do not accept portions of her interpretation as, to my knowledge, the symbol is never directly associated with a male representation, whereas on Carthaginian coins from the third century BCE the sign of Tinnit is linked specifically to a female image in profile, presumably of the goddess herself, as well as other symbols of the goddess such as the dolphin (Brody 1998: 32 Fig. 11). This suggests that the sign of Tinnit is linked with the goddess Tinnit, and not a male deity, even if it is not a representation specifically of a kind of shorthand of an anthropomorphic figure; despite the fact that very late, second-century BCE to second-century CE representations of the sign of Tinnit have changed to include very human aspects in the symbol. I would like to thank Becky Martin for sharing her work and ideas with me, and appreciate her critical scholarship.

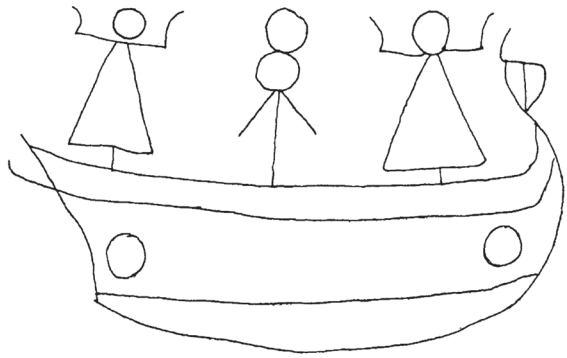

Fig. 2: Signs of Tinnit and caduceus on ship's standards, sacrificial stele, Carthage. Source: Brody 1998, Fig. 16.

The god Melqart's importance to Phoenician seafarers is verified by numerous data (Lipiński 1995; Brody 1998: 33–37). The reasons why Melqart was a patron god of sailors, however, are not well understood, despite the spread of the worship of this deity so important to the mother city of Tyre to its settlements throughout the Mediterranean basin and Atlantic (Martí-Aguilar 2017; Quinn 2018: 113–34). Melqart, a god of pestilence and possibly an underworld god, may have had sacred powers over granting success, a trait vital for the protection of travelers and merchants and for guarding sea voyages and mariners.[5]

[5] Scholars have often mistakenly attributed the qualities of a storm god to Melqart, based on the fact that he is called Baʿal Tsur, and on his misidentification with the "marine" god riding the winged seahorse on fifth- to fourth-century BCE Tyrian coins. The appellation Baʿal Tsur is more accurately translated as "the lord of Tyre" rather than "Baʿal (the storm god) of Tyre". This is proven in the Esarhaddon/Baʿal of Tyre treaty which lists three aspects of the Tyrian storm god separately from Melqart (Akkadian ^{d}mi-il-qar-tu). While Baʿal Shamêm, Baʿal Malagê, and Baʿal Zaphon control the marine storm, Melqart and Eshmun are described as having effects on the land and its fecundity (for the Assyrian text see Parpola and Watanabe 1988: 24–27). It should also be stressed that ancient Greek speakers, and several bilingual inscriptions in both Phoenician and Greek, translated Melqart as Herakles, or Tyrian Herakles, and not as Zeus, which suggests these ancients viewed Melqart as a divine hero and not a storm god. I have already discussed the problems of the identification of the Phoenician god

Melqart may also have been a tutelary deity of commerce, an aspect that was of extreme importance to the Phoenician economy and expansion throughout the Mediterranean. Classical sources demonstrate that numerous promontories, islands, and harbors were dedicated to Melqart, typically recorded under his equivalent name in Greek, Herakles (Semple 1927: 366; for the links between Herakles and Melqart see Malkin 2011: 128–29). The Phoenician god is also divinely linked to ship building, seafaring, exploratory voyages, and maritime adventure in classical textual traditions (Williams-Reed 2018: 143–49); and to tuna and the tuna run in the western Mediterranean (Bartoloni and Guirguis 2017; Fernández Camacho 2017).[6] Inscriptions in Phoenician note a "Rosh Melqart," a headland or promontory dedicated to the god (Bonnet 1988: 267–69). One Phoenician ship was also named Melqart, a form of devotion to the deity or indication that the vessel was imbued with the god's spirit (Herakles in the Greek; Arian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 2.24.6), and sacrifices were made to ask for the god's protection before setting sail and in thanksgiving after safe arrival (Heliodoros of Emesa, *Aethiopica* 4.16.8; Strabo, *Geography* 3.5.5).

Seaside temples and shrines

Phoenician seafarers worshipped these gods and goddesses among their diverse pantheon of deities while on land in order to ask for protection before setting sail on a voyage, or to give thanks to a divine patron after a safe arrival on shore. Temples dedicated to guardian deities provided sacred space in harbors for mariners to give propitiations to their divine protectors (Brody 1998: 39–54). Some of these offerings were unique to sailors and their maritime world. These included model ships, votive anchors, and anchor parts.

on the seahorse/hippocamp, above, and his misidentification as the Phoenician Poseidon. It should be stressed, though, that there is also no primary evidence that equates this god on the hippocamp with Melqart either.

[6] I would like to thank Pamina Fernández Camacho for sharing her fascinating article with me.

Evidence of Canaanite maritime votives is found in the dedicatory stone anchors and bronze model ships from the Temple of Obelisks and other sacred areas at Byblos. These offerings date to the beginning phase of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1950–1750 BCE), a period when Byblos was one of the most important harbor sites in the central Levant and sea trade was opening up with Cyprus, Egypt, and Crete. During the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1175 BCE), eastern Mediterranean maritime exchange expanded even further and increased in the quantities of goods exchanged. From this international period, ritual offerings of stone anchors are found in the Temple of Baʿal in Ugarit, a powerful Late Bronze commercial center located near the coast of north Syria as detailed above. This acropolis temple had two types of anchor offerings; ones built into the foundation of the structure itself, and others placed near the building's entrance or in its courtyard. These may represent the fulfillment of different types of vows made to Baʿal Zaphon, the patron god of the city to whom this particular temple was dedicated. Three contemporary temples and shrines have been excavated at Ugarit, as discussed above, none of which contained any type of maritime votive offerings. This suggests that sailors focused their divine thanks in the structure devoted to the storm god.

The tradition of offering anchors and model ships as dedications related to human–divine vows continued in later periods. Votive anchors and anchor parts are found in Phoenician temples at Tell Sukas on the Syrian coast, in its Period G[2] tripartite sanctuary dating to the early sixth century BCE; Kition-Bamboula on Cyprus,[7] in two phases of its sanctuaries dating to the mid-seventh to sixth century BCE; and at Coria del Río, near Seville in Spain, the westernmost point of the Phoenician colonial expansion (Riis 1970: 64; Caubet

[7] Ethnicity on Cyprus in the Iron Age is a notoriously tricky set of issues. The Cypro-Archaic period at Kition was likely populated by autocthonous peoples and Phoenicians. Phoenician evidence from the Bamboula sanctuaries, and elsewhere at the site, include ostraca and monumental stone inscriptions in the Phoenician language and Phoenician style ceramics made locally, Caubet, Fourrier, and Yon 2015. For the Phoenician or Cypro-Phoenician identification of the Bamboula sanctuaries see Calvet 2002; Caubet 1984: 112, 118; and Caubet, Fourrier, and Yon 2015.

1984: 107–18; Neville 2007: 127–28; Romero Recio 2008: 79; Caubet, Fourrier, and Yon 2015). A clay model ship was among the offerings uncovered in an eighth- to sixth-century BCE Phoenician temple dedicated to Baʿal and Astarte, overlooking the Guadalquivir river in Seville, which in antiquity was on the coast of the Atlantic (Celestino and López-Ruiz 2016: 239–43). The sanctuary at Kition-Bamboula, an important Phoenician, or Tyrian, colonial site on Cyprus, gives us the most detailed information. The temple contained stone anchors left as ritual offerings in two of its phases dating to ca. 650–500 BCE. This sacred structure was located in an area of the city overlooking the harbor, adjacent to ship sheds that were used for dry-docking warships (Yon 2001; Caubet, Fourrier, and Yon 2015). The temple appears to have been dedicated to several Phoenician deities, including Melqart, Baʿal, and Astarte (Bloch-Smith 2014: 173–76). Thus, it is difficult to attribute the votive anchors as offerings to a specific Phoenician god or goddess.

Both Melqart and Baʿal have been identified as divine patrons of mariners above. There have been several recent attempts to link Astarte, goddess of the hunt, war, kingship, and apotropaic magic, to the protection of Phoenician seafarers (Acquaro, Filippi, and Medas 2010; Ruiz Cabrero 2010; Christian 2013). This claim is rooted in misconceptions of Astarte's attributes imbedded in the secondary literature. I still cannot find any direct, indisputable primary data that demonstrate that Astarte was a patron goddess of Phoenician mariners, although it may be hinted at given the orientation of Phoenician temples dedicated to Astarte towards the planet Venus, a probable astronomical navigational aid for seafarers (see Esteban and Escacena Carrasco 2013: 140–41; Bloch-Smith 2014; Esteban and Pellín 2016: 165). Yet Astarte's irrefutable links to the maritime patron goddesses Aphrodite and Isis suggest that we may be missing the Phoenician data (Brown and Smith 2019; Bricault 2020),[8] not a surprise given the paucity of indigenous evidence for Astarte's powers, and interactions

[8] I would like to thank Laurent Bricault for sharing his important 2020 book on Isis Pelagia and the goddess's importance to mariners with me during the recent pandemic, which resulted in me not having access to a research library.

with the divine or human realms. The convergence of evidence from Kition-Bamboula of a temple dedicated to the goddess and other gods, votive anchors, neighboring military ship sheds, which overlooks the city's harbor may tentatively link Astarte in her warrior aspect as a protector of Phoenician warships and their crews. It should be noted, however, that both Melqart and Ba'al, who were worshipped at Kition-Bamboula, were also depicted as warrior gods, and were divine patrons of Phoenician warships (Brody 1998: 20, 33–34, Woolmer 2012) (Fig. 3). Thus, the offerings of anchors may have been related to any, or all, of the three deities worshipped in the temple at Kition-Bamboula.

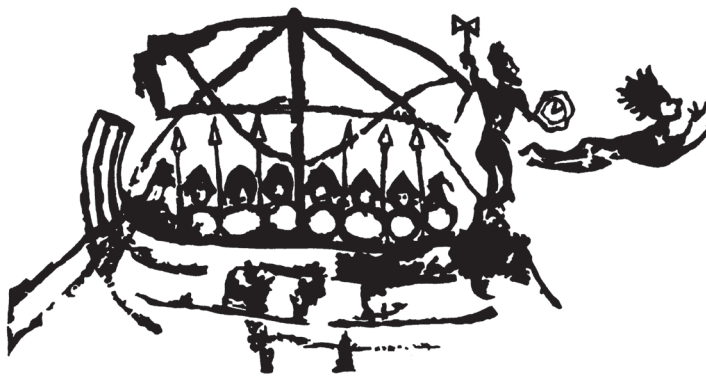

Fig. 3: Smiting god on prow of Phoenician warship, seventh- to sixth-century BCE(?) tomb painting (for confusion of dating see Camps and Longerstay 2000; López-Bertran, Garcia-Ventura, and Krueger 2008), Kef el Blida. Source: Brody 1998, Fig. 24.

Morphological changes in anchors themselves may explain the subsequent disappearance of votive anchors or anchor parts from the inventory of offerings found in the excavation of sanctuaries dedicated to the patron deities of seafarers (Brody 1998: 52). The later of the two maritime offerings at Kition-Bamboula was a large piece of a stone anchor stock, the weighted cross-piece of anchors that resemble ones we still use today. It is possible that anchors, or parts of anchors, like the stock, were offered in Phoenician temples dating later than the evidence from Sukas, Kition-Bamboula, and Coria del Río; however, developments in anchor technology meant that elements, like stocks,

were made from lead, a metal that is easily recycled, or from wood, which biodegrades. Thus, probable maritime votive offerings of lead or wooden anchor parts would no longer remain in the archaeological record.

Temples in harbor cities may have also served as navigational aids and landmarks for sailors, thus providing a very pragmatic and yet spiritual link for mariners seeking to dock their vessel safely on arrival. The Bronze Age Temple of Baʿal at Ugarit has already been detailed above as a likely navigational aid for ships docking at its port; and an earlier, Early Bronze–Middle Bronze temple from Byblos, the Tower Temple, was visible from sea and may have served as a kind of proto-lighthouse for nearby ships (Frost 2002: 62–64). Five stone anchors form the first step of the stairway leading up to this Byblian Tower Temple, demonstrating the structure's importance to seafarers. A recent GIS study reconstructs the critical role that all three major temples at the Phoenician settlement of Gadir (Cadiz) in Spain, the southern sanctuary dedicated to Melqart and two northern temples consecrated to Astarte and Baʿal Hammon, likely played in guiding ships to safe anchorage at the site (López-Sánchez, Niveau-de-Villedary y Mariñas, Gómez-González 2019: 286–305).

While voyaging away from port, shrines built on isolated promontories of land were visible to sailors in their travel between harbors. These shrines served sacral and functional purposes: they continued the link between seafarers and their holy patrons while distant from port, served as landmarks for safe navigation, and typically marked the location of freshwater sources (Semple 1927; Morton 2001; Vella 1998: 374–90). Classical authors provide us with the details of numerous Phoenician promontory shrines, found in locations from the eastern Mediterranean littoral to the Atlantic shores of Spain and Morocco. Excavated examples are more rare, likely because of their isolated locations. Discoveries spanning the second–first millennia at Nahariyah, Ashkelon, Mevorakh, Makmish, Tell Sukas, Kommos, Capo San Marco at Tharros, Kition, and Ras ed-Drek show material remains of these shrines that marked Canaanite and Phoenician routes throughout the Mediterranean (Brody 1998: 55–60; Vella 1998; Bartoloni 2018). Malta was home to at least four Phoenician promontory temples or shrines,

protecting seafarers during their approach to the island regardless of their direction of travel (Gambin 2002–2003).

Similarly, natural features that provided important landmarks from the sea could take on sacral qualities. Headlands or mountain peaks served as navigational aids from onboard ship and were often dedicated to patron deities. It is clear that several sacred caves were important features for Phoenician mariners, who drew dedicatory images of their ships, warships, or parts of their vessels on the walls of the cave sanctuaries at the Grotta Regina in Sicily and Laja Alta in Spain (Vella 1998: 164–66; Brody 2005: 179–81; López-Bertran, Garcia-Ventura, and Krueger 2008: 347–48; Christian 2013, 2014). The Grotta Regina also contained depictions of the sign of Tinnit, a divine symbol portrayed on a Carthaginian ship likely representing the goddess Tinnit, as detailed above. Further Phoenician cave sanctuaries are located near the sea, such as Es Culleram on Ibiza and Gorham's Cave on Gibraltar, and may have served as important landmarks that were visible from the water and thus were vital for Phoenician navigation over the sea lanes of the Mediterranean (Vella 1998: 254–63; Brody 2005: 179–81).

Sacred space aboard ship

In both ancient and modern traditional seafaring cultures, ships are considered to contain divine spirits that protect mariners from the dangers of the deep. This belief is manifested in several forms: by the representation of a deity or protective totem at the prow or stern of a vessel; by the addition of oculi, or eyes, at the ship's prow to guide the vessel and ward off harm; the attachment of ornamental horns on the prows of warships; and the naming of ships after a deity known for traits beneficial to sailors (Brody 1998: 62–73; Woolmer 2012). These vessels' divine spirits and other divinities were worshipped at sacred spaces onboard ship, typically found at the prow or stern of a vessel.

Evidence for the concept that ships were imbued with divine spirits is found in diverse sources. There are very few extant Levantine or Phoenician maritime texts, yet we know from the Late Bronze Age Ugaritic Kirta epic that the sacred mountain, Mount Zaphon, was

represented as a ship; and a parallel reference from a New Kingdom Egyptian papyrus details that Baʿal Zaphon was worshipped in the form of a ship (Brody 1998: 15–18). In later periods, seafarers dedicated ships, or model ships, to Zeus Kasios, Baʿal Zaphon's direct Hellenic counterpart, or more generally to Zeus the Savior, Zeus Soter. A letter from the king of Tyre to the king of Ugarit details the sinking of a ship in a storm (Bordreuil and Pardee 2009: 238–29). This ship is said to have literally died in the tempest (Ugaritic *mtt by gšm ʿadr*; Bordreuil and Pardee 2009: 238, Text 26 lines 13–14), suggesting an animate spirit that perished with the loss of the vessel. Classical authors supply occasional details about Phoenician ships: such as, merchant vessels and warships that are named after protective deities; figureheads representing gods, goddesses, or divine creatures at the prow of vessels; and the worship of images of deities at the stern portion of war galleys (Brody 1998: 65–67).

The excavation of shipwrecks has provided a source of material cultural remains related to the sacred and rituals aboard ship (Abdelhamid 2015). A figurine of a Levantine goddess was found in the excavations of a Late Bronze Age ship at Uluburun, Turkey, providing direct evidence of a deity onboard the vessel. The location of the female figurine among the scatter of artifacts indicates that it was housed at the prow of the doomed ship (Wachsmann 1998: 206–208), and likely represents the goddess to whom the vessel was dedicated. A Phoenician ship sank of the southeastern coast of Spain, floundering on a submerged rock outcrop called the Bajo de la Campana. Among a wealth of recently excavated cargo, a single stone altar was discovered, marking sacred space aboard this fated ship (Polzer 2014: 238–39). A recent find of a bronze ram from a Carthaginian warship in the waters off the west coast of Sicily has an inscription in Phoenician (Tusa and Royal 2012: 43; Biggs 2017: 355; Schmitz forthcoming). Preliminary readings of this direct evidence, from the rare find of material remains of a Phoenician war galley, suggest that the warship was dedicated to either Baʿal, or Tinnit and Reshep.

Reshep, a Phoenician deity not discussed thus far, was the god of pestilence. The other two deities possibly named in the inscription on the ram have been shown above to be divine patrons of Phoenician

seafarers. We look forward to further research on this important find, so we can better determine which god, goddess, or gods were worshipped aboard this third-century BCE Punic military vessel.[9]

Maritime iconography provides the richest source of evidence we have for ritual space aboard ships (Brody 1998: 68–72). These depictions show anthropomorphic prow ornaments that typically represent a guardian deity and animal totems that were companions to the gods or messengers between the earthly and heavenly realms. The Phoenicians were known for their horse-headed ships, which are mentioned by several classical authors and are depicted in Assyrian representations of Phoenician ships (Friedman 2015). It is possible that the horse-headed prow figure depicts an abbreviated form of the winged seahorse, or hippocamp, a composite creature with the head of a horse, wings of bird, and a sea-serpent's body and tail. This winged seahorse is shown directly below ships on coins from Byblos and Aradus, representing the protection of the hippocamp's companion god over these vessels (Fig. 1). A smiting god is depicted on the prow of a ship from a Phoenician tomb at Kef el-Blida, likely portraying Melqart (Fig. 3),[10] while another smiting god is found on the prows of ships depicted on coins, representing the storm god, Baʿal. Prow figures of goddesses are also found on ships depicted on coins. However, the representations lack enough details to be able to identify any individual goddesses from the Phoenician pantheon (Fig. 4). A war galley with a lion-headed prow is shown on coin from Byblos. The lion is a companion to both Asherah and Melqart, so it is difficult to interpret which of these deities was protecting the Byblian warship.

[9] I would like to thank Philip Schmitz for sharing his unpublished research on this inscription on the Phoenician ship's ram discovered in deep waters off of the Egadi Islands with me (Schmitz forthcoming).

[10] The cultural identity of this painting of a warship is interpreted variously as Libyan or Phoenician; see Camps and Longerstay 2000 and López-Bertran, Garcia-Ventura, and Krueger 2008. I view this war galley as Phoenician or Punic because the iconography of its prow figure, the bearded smiting god with an axe, conical cap, and shield, is par excellence that of the Phoenician god Melqart; see Bonnet 2007.

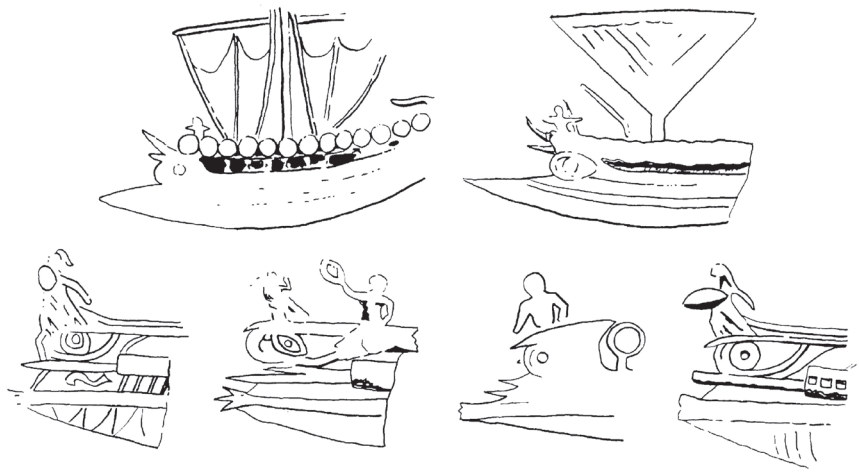

Fig. 4: Phoenician ships with anthropomorphic figures and apotropaic eyes at their prows, coins. Source: Brody 1998, Fig. 65.

Various divine symbols adorned the prows of Phoenician warships (Woolmer 2012: 238–52), and decorated the tops of poles placed both at the prow and stern of fishing vessels, merchant ships, and war galleys (Fig. 4). These decorations included the caduceus, crescent, crescent-and-disk, and the sign of Tinnit (Brody 1998) (Fig. 2). These emblems represent the protection over ships of all types offered by the major goddess of Carthage, Tinnit. Oculi, or ships' eyes, are very common in representations of ships and are depicted on several different kinds of Phoenician vessels; they are also occasionally uncovered in the excavation of shipwrecks or ship sheds (Figs. 2 and 4; Galili and Rosen 2015: 51–53, 91). Representations of parts of ships, such as prows or sterns, or ships' equipment, such as rudders and anchors suggest that specific areas of vessels or objects on board had sacral significance (Fig. 4). This interpretation of the Phoenician data is supported by classical texts that detail the concepts of the sacred anchor and holy steering rudder, as well as maritime votive offerings, such as stone anchors, anchor stocks, miniature anchors, rudders, steering oars, miniature steering oars, model boats, and even the prows or rams from captured enemy warships (Brody 1998: 76; Galili and Rosen 2015; Tito 2018).

Religious ceremonies performed by seafarers

Special religious ceremonies were performed by Phoenician sailors, in order to please divine patrons, ensure safety during a voyage, and aid in proper navigation. These rites typically involved some type of sacrifice, prayer, offering, libation, or vow at stages in a journey that required sacred protection. The sea itself was a liminal zone, and travel over the water was a particular rite of passage. Rituals were often conducted during transitional stages in a voyage: in port, propitiations took place before the journey or upon safe arrival; and onboard ship, rituals were conducted while leaving or entering harbor, while passing a landmark or headland, or in times of danger or need.

According to classical authors, Phoenician seafarers made sacrifices to Melqart before setting sail and after landing in harbor (Brody 1998: 75). Archaeological remains of anchors, anchor stocks, and model ships placed as offerings in temples in Canaanite and Phoenician coastal sites suggest that celebrations were performed or sacred vows fulfilled in these sanctuaries, perhaps as dedications after sailors survived numerous dangers faced at sea.

While away from the relative safety of harbor, Phoenician seafarers continued contact with their protective deities through the dedication of promontories and landmarks to their sacred patrons, and by building shrines on headlands. These sanctified natural features and sacred structures were a focus in mariners' rituals conducted while out on the water. They may also have indicated places to moor where ceremonies could be conducted, as well as marking the location of vital natural resources, such as fresh water.

Evidence for prayers taking place on board vessels as they arrived safely in port is found in several different Egyptian representations (Brody 1998: 78–79; Fabre 2004–2005). Wall reliefs dating from the Old Kingdom depict Levantine and Egyptian passengers on Egyptian ships with their hands raised up in a typical gesture of prayer as the vessels dock safely in Memphis. A painting from the New Kingdom tomb of Kenamun shows a convoy of Levantine ships mooring after arriving at the end of their voyage in Egypt. Some members of the crew hold

their hands up in prayer, while high-ranking crew members and captains burn incense and offer libations to celebrate the success of their journey. Incense burners have been discovered on several Phoenician shipwrecks, from the eastern to the western Mediterranean, dating from the eighth century BCE down through the Hellenistic period (Brody 2005: 178–79; Polzer 2014: 238). Musical instruments discovered on the much earlier, Late Bronze Age Uluburun shipwreck may have been used in shipboard ceremonies. Religious pendants from the Uluburun wreck, which would have been worn around the necks of sailors, are evidence of the personal piety of individuals on the ill-fated expedition. Several of the crew members on the ships depicted in Kenamun's tomb wear similar protective medallions (Brody 1998: 79–80).

While facing perils at sea, whether from tempests or battles, mariners made vows to their divine guardians in order to solicit their sacred protection. The fabled Phoenician prince, Cadmus, is portrayed praying for help from Poseidon while his craft was tossed by storms (Diodorus 5.58.2). After making landfall safely, Cadmus built a temple for Poseidon in fulfillment of his storm-driven vows. During a violent storm, the crew of the ship carrying the Israelite prophet Jonah pray to their storm gods, desperate to calm the winds (Jonah 1). After the sea is calmed, the mariners, some of whom were likely Phoenician, make sacrifices and offer vows to Yahweh, thanking Jonah's god for quieting the storm. In the heat of a naval battle, a Carthaginian marine is portrayed praying to his warship's deity for divine aid (Silius Italicus, *Punica* 14.436–41). When this galley is sinking, its pilot sacrifices himself to the ship's patron god by literally spilling his own blood on the statuette of the deity on board the warship.

Because of the hazards faced at sea, forecasts were essential for the safety of a voyage. A bad omen, read from a sacrifice to Melqart, was enough to turn around an expedition from Carthage to Gadir in western Spain (Strabo, *Geography* 3.5.5). A Phoenician navigator is commended for his capacity to predict what future winds will be like, and soothsayers were brought on a voyage from Carthage along the Atlantic coast of Africa (Silius Italicus, *Punica* 14.455–56; Periplus of Hanno). On board the ship carrying Jonah to Tarshish,

a western Phoenician location, the crew cast lots to reveal who was causing the storm threatening their craft (Jonah 1:7). An animal knucklebone, or astragalus, was found on the Late Bronze Age Cape Gelidonya shipwreck, which may have been rolled to read omens. This artifact hints at one of many possible methods that pilots or soothsayers may have used to predict future sailing conditions or divine the will of the gods.

Maritime mortuary ritual and burial practices

During a lifetime at sea, particular religious beliefs and practices protected the lives of seafarers; mortuary rites for their dead also show specialized traits (see Stewart 2007 for historic archaeological analogies). The only text that details the mourning rites of Phoenician mariners is found in the book of Ezekiel (27:27–31) in the Hebrew Bible. The passage indicates that the sailors did not perform mortuary rituals while onboard their ships; instead, they postponed their grieving until after they had arrived on dry land. Given ancient and modern traditional parallels, it is probable that mourning the dead while at sea was taboo because death rites would pollute a vessel, or bring it bad luck, and so was prohibited.

Mortuary rituals and sacred beliefs may also be interpreted from burials. A small number of tombs from the Middle and Late Bronze Age harbor sites of Byblos, Ugarit, Ashkelon, and Tel Akko have stone anchors seemingly built into their structures or have stone anchors left as burial offerings inside of the burial chamber (Brody 1998: 89–92). Later Phoenician burials sometimes include model ships among their grave goods, and several Phoenician tombs in north Africa and Maresha in the Shephelah of modern Israel include the depiction or graffiti of ships (Basch 1987: 303–307; Camps and Longerstay 2000; Hadad, Stern, and Artzy 2018: 121–24). These familiar maritime votives symbolized the profession of the interred, but were also charged with sacred significance in seafarers' rituals, and thus may have been a final tribute to a mariner's divine patron.

Conclusions

The evidence presented relate the specific nature of the religious beliefs and ritual practices of Phoenician seafarers, which was a subset of more generalized Phoenician religion generated by the unique concerns, fears, hazards, and spiritual needs faced at sea. Specialized religion is comprised of the unique sacral beliefs and rites of groups within a society, generated by their profession and/or their rank, role, or how they are viewed within their culture or kinship structure. While aspects of religion are found throughout a society, other characteristics may vary based on a group's or individual's position within a culture, or through constructed perceptions of gender and sexuality. This concept has generally been overlooked in the study of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean religions, which are typically reconstructed in a monolithic form, based primarily on textual data that derive from elite strata of ancient societies.

I have presented archaeological, textual, and iconographic evidence that reveal aspects of the religion of Phoenician seafarers, traditionally a non-elite group within its parent society. Comparative evidence from classical and modern traditional seagoing societies was used to construct a framework to better organize and interpret the scattered evidence, and allow me to demonstrate that Phoenician mariners had specialized religious beliefs and practices. These Levantine sailors focused on sacred relationships with divine patrons that controlled winds, storms, and aspects of wayfinding that aided ships through safe and successful voyages. The deities include Baʿal, Asherah, Tinnit, and Phoenician Poseidon. Melqart also had a special relationship with seafarers, perhaps as a tutelary deity of voyaging or maritime commerce. These patron deities were worshipped in harbor temples before setting sail, and upon safe arrival in port, sometimes with maritime offerings such as stone anchors, anchor stocks, or model ships. While at sea, the vessels themselves protected sailors from the deep while the spirits of deities imbued within the vessels provided divine guardianship, symbolized by various prow figures of gods, goddess, their companions, and other divine symbols. There were sacred spaces aboard vessels, and sacred mountains, divine headlands, and promontory

shrines allowed for continued communication with the gods as well as aiding in successful navigation. Ceremonies were performed at various liminal stages within a voyage in order to continue divine connection and protection, and when disasters were averted sacred vows were fulfilled in harbor temples and promontory shrines. When ships sank or death happened at sea, special mortuary rituals took place, and maritime symbols accompanied some sailors with them to their graves. This focused subset of Phoenician religion allows us to connect vital aspects of seafarers' spiritual life with what we have long known about the crucial importance of nautical technology and maritime trade to the early Levantine culture that pioneered exploration, commerce, and sailing. Related themes and artifacts are attested throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond the Pillars of Herakles to the Iberian and African shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

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