

Phoenician Epigraphic Miscellanea¹

M. Heltzer — University of Haifa

[Four objects inscribed with a Phoenician text are presented and published in this article. The objects belong to the collection of Mr. Shlomo Mousayeff, to whom we wish to express our most sincere thanks for the permission to study and publish them.]

I. An Alabaster Vessel Bearing a Phoenician Inscription

The first Phoenician inscription we are publishing here is written on the upper part of an alabaster vessel in the form of an alabastron (fig. 1). The piece is of unknown provenance, though the alabastrons proper seem to be of Egyptian origin. The height of the vessel is 24.5 cm. The text is inscribed in two lines. The shape of the incised signs seems to point to the Phoenician script of the Achaemenid period and suggests a date between the second half of the Vth cent. BCE to the beginning of the IVth cent. BCE. Therefore the vessel may come from the Phoenician coast or from Cyprus.

The inscription reads (figs. 2 and 3)²:

- (1) *mslt šyš z*
- (2) *mšql blbytm*

One can see that after the first word in both lines the letters have a more cursive shape. The translation and interpretation is not without problems:

— 1. 1: *mslt*: The reading of the word is absolutely clear. On the other hand, it proves the reading on three other vessels in which the same word appears normalised as *mslh*.³ These examples are:

1) A fragment of an alabaster vessel. The inscription had at least four lines, but only the first one can be read (*BIFAO* 58, p. 20, Pl. 1III).⁴ The inscription is painted and reads: *mslt* III III III) "*mslt* 130(?)" (Cf. also *RES* 1847).

1. Note the abbreviations used in this paper: *BAR* = *Biblical Archaeology Review*, *BIFAO* = *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, *BMB* = *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, *Benz* = F.L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions*, Rome 1972, *CIS* = *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum*, *DNWSI* = J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, Leiden 1995, *EI* = *Eretz-Israel*, *IEJ* = *Israel Exploration Journal*, *IMJ* = *Israel Museum Journal*, *Maraqten* = M. Maraqten, *Die semitischen Personennamen in den alt- und reichsaramäischen Inschriften aus Vorderasien*, *RES* = *Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique*.

2. The drawing and the photographs were made by Mr. Robert Deutsch.

3. *DNWSI*, p. 665

4. N. Aime-Giron, "Adversaria Semitica", *BIFAO* 38 (1939), pp. 1-63, esp. 20-27.

2) The second is an alabastron, now in Paris in the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque Nationale. It is 25 cm high and 23-26 cm broad (*BIFAO* 58, p. 21, Pl. IIa). The inscription, also painted, reads: *msltlp* III ... (further signs are not clear).

3) There exists also an alabastron on p. 22 (Te IIIb) but its inscription is dubious. It seems that the original inscription was later covered with Greek letters in Hellenistic times. The date of these inscriptions must be contemporary with our inscription, i.e. between the end of the Vth and beginning of the IVth cent. BCE.

Their exact provenance is unknown, but such alabastrons came generally from Egypt.

As for the meaning of the word, the fact that such inscription is found on alabaster vessels shows that *mslt* does not mean "alabaster". On the other hand, the numeral signs must stand for measures or weight units (as stated by Aimé-Giron). It seems that *mslt* is connected with the Hebrew word *sal* "basket" and it has the meaning of a container of a certain type.⁵

— *šyš*: This is the well known word designating alabaster and marble. Cf. Hebr. *šayiš* (I Chr., 29, 2).

— *z*: The demonstrative pronoun "this (is)".

— I. 2: *mšql*: "weight". No doubt, the meaning is here "its weight", probably referring to *mslt*. This word shows that the numerals in the other inscriptions were weights and not units of liquid measures. This gives us at least a first insight about the contents of the vessel. What we do not know, however, is the nature of the weight units.

— The last letters of the inscription are: *b l b y t m*. One can read:

- *b lb ytm* "by the heart of an orphan"; but such interpretation is absurd and makes no sense.

- *bl bytm* "without houses"; but this is also absurd and without sense.

- So it only remains *b lby tm* as a plausible reading: *b lby* "with (or in) my heart"; *tm* "perfect, honest"⁶; with the resulting translation "by my honest heart". This phrase could express the guarantee of the perfect condition of the contents of the vessel or/and the "honesty" of the weight (whose amount is not given).

The translation of the whole text would then be: "(1) container of alabaster (is) this. (2) (Its) weight (is) by my honest heart".

Perhaps the last expression is a kind of Phoenician business formula, guaranteeing the honesty of certain weights, measures or the like. However, this formula is only attested here. We hope that further epigraphic publications will clear up this question.

II. Two Inscribed Phoenician Terracotta Krateroi

The provenance of these two vessels is unknown. However, to judge from their typology they probably come from Phoenicia proper (Lebanon) or Cyprus. Both pieces are krater(oi) the handles of which reach the top of the rim. Such kraters are well known and were studied by P. Bikai;⁷ according to her chronological results we must date them by the VIIIth cent. BCE.⁸

5. This has nothing to do with the word *mslt* "an earthwork" in the Moabite inscription of Meša.

6. *DNWSI*, p. 1218-*tm*3-2.

7. P.M. Bikai, *The Phoenician Pottery of Cyprus*, Nicosia 1987; krater no. IV, 129-132; 430-433 and the photograph.

8. Bikai, pp. 69-70.

1. The first krater is 29.5 cm high. The inscription is written in black paint in cursive script on the upper part of the body (fig. 4). It consists of three letters: *šlm* (figs. 5 and 6).

This word is attested in Phoenician only in *CIS.I.34* in a fragmentary text (*DNWSI*, p. 968). In Aramean (from Old Aramean on), as well as in Hebrew it is always connected with a statue or image. Here, however, it is written on a vessel. Therefore we suggest to interpret it as a personal name in the hypocoristic form, despite of the fact that no root *šlm* is attested so far in the Phoenico-punic onomastic material.⁹ One may note that *šlm* is a well known (astral) deity during the VIth-Vth cent. in North Arabia (Maraqhep, p. 39) and appears as theophoric element in the Aramaic name *šlm šzb* “*šlm* saved” (Maraqten, pp. 205-206, cf. Akk. *šalm-ma-lik*) or also *šlmyhl*, *šlmyd*. If this interpretation is correct, the purpose of the krater could be that of keeping the bones and ashes after the incineration (i.e. as an ossuary-urn). Did then the krater contain the ashes and bones of someone native of the Aramean region or North Arabia who travelled and died in Cyprus?

2. The second krater has a height of 32.5 cm. (fig. 7). The Phoenician inscription is written just below the neck and it was incised after the firing of the vessel. All the signs are clearly visible (fig. 8). Paleographically it belongs to the VIIIth century BCE. The inscription reads as follows: *‘khr* (figs. 8 and 9).

As far as we know, such a word is not attested elsewhere and every interpretation must remain hypothetical. First of all, it is possible to take the suffix *-t* as the feminine ending (singular or plural) or also as the suffix to build abstracts. *‘khr* is unknown so far. In the entry *‘khr* the *DNWSI* (p. 842) refers to Punic *‘kr* with the meaning “to destroy”, and possibly also as the pass. part. of *‘kr* “(to trouble > to stir [flour with water])”. One should note that the *-h-* is sometimes infixed to form plurals; e.g. Hebr. *‘em- ‘immahōt* “mothers”, Ug. *bt - bhm* “houses”, Aram. *‘b‘abāhātān* “fathers” etc. Perhaps we have here the same phenomenon; and one could therefore interpret tentatively that the krater contained some kind of stirred or mixed substance.

III. A Cypriote Cylinder-Seal with an Archaic Canaanite-Phoenician Inscription

The last inscribed object is a cylinder-seal made of black hematite. Its height is 19 mm (fig. 10). In all likelihood the seal comes from Cyprus. The “Lord of the animals” is depicted in the middle of the scene holding in his right hand a certain beast and in his left the tail of a lion, which probably was a later addition.¹⁰ To the right of the “Lord of the Animals” we see a winged figure (sphinx) with the front paws with claws, the head of a bird and human legs and body. J. Smith has dealt with seals of this type and dates them to the XIVth and beginning of the XIIIth cent. BCE.¹¹ The possible addition of the lion, on the other hand, suggests a slightly later date. This motif indeed appears on several seals of the late-Cypriote period (XVth-XIIIth cent. BCE).¹² But of special interest to us is the small inscription placed between the beast in the hand of the “Lord of Animals” and the back of the body of the sphynx. We read here: *Fn(r’)*.

The signs are very archaic:

9. In fact Akkadian and Ugaritic do not help us in the interpretation of the word.

10. This is the opinion of Dr. Joanna Smith, a specialist in Cypriot glyptics. It is my pleasure to express here my thanks for her highly professional communication.

11. J. Smith, *Seals and Sealings in the Late Cypriot Period*, Ph.D. Diss., Bryn Mawr College 1994.

12. J.-C. Courtois-Webb, J.M., *Les cylindres sceaux d'Enkomi*, Nicosia 1987, Pl. 21; Pl. 36, Pl. 412; E. Porada, “Late Cypriote Cylinder Seals between East and West” in: *Acts of the Archaeological Symposium. Cyprus between the Orient and Occident*, Nicosia 1986, pp. 289-300, Pl. XX 5, where such sphynx appears.

— / (lamed): This sign with its turn to the left from the vertical stroke is similar to the lamed of the Canaanite arrowhead inscriptions of “Eliba^aal, man of Yada^ba^aal” (ʔlb^al / ʔš yd^ab^al) and of “Gerba^aal, the Sidonian” (grb^al / šdny). The first one must be dated to the XIth cent. BCE and the second belongs to the middle of the same century.¹³

— ° (ayyin): It has no counterpart among the arrowhead inscriptions of the late XIIth-XIth cent. BCE. We see only sometimes a spot in the round of the letter.¹⁴ Only on the Cretan Bowl inscription the °ayin has inside the circle a short vertical stroke.¹⁵ The impression is that we have to do here with a very early form of this letter.

— n (nun): It looks also very archaic. It seems as though the material of the cylinder-seal would not allow to use sharp angles like in the arrowhead inscriptions. Such a nun with sharper angles is found on the inscription of “Zema^a, son of ʔlš^al” (zm^a / bn ʔlš^al)¹⁶ from the middle of the XIth cent. BCE; on the arrowhead of “Abdelim, son of ʔAky” (bd^alm bn ʔky) from the same century and “Aḥa^a, son of °Aštart” (ʔḥ^a bn °štrt) also from the middle of the Xth cent. BCE.¹⁷ However, the most striking parallel can be seen in the proto-semitic n.¹⁸ This would support the archaic date of our seal inscription.

— Concerning the t (taw), it is difficult to say whether it is a true sign or the end of the leg of the beast in the hands of the “Lord of the animals”.

In any case what we have is l^an(t^a) “Belonging to °Anat” or “Devoted to °Anat”. °Anat or °Ana<D> can be the name of the deity or a hypocoristicon of a personal theophoric name containing the name of this goddess. At any rate, we have here a very archaic inscription —possibly one of the oldest, dating back to the XIIIth cent. BCE.

More recent inscriptions —dated to the IVth cent. BCE— mention also l^ant. One appears twice on a bronze helmet from the site of ancient Idalion on Cyprus (RES 1 209).¹⁹ Another l^ant is inscribed on the upper part of a spear (RES 1210) found near the sanctuary of Athena in Idalion. Of interest is the fact that these attestations come also from Cyprus.

And this brings us to the problem of early Canaanite-Cypriote relations. We have published the inscribed arrowhead of ḥš kty // mšq °bdy “Arrow of Kitionian, cupbearer of °Abday”.²⁰ It seems that in South Lebanon in the XIth cent. BCE there existed a certain chiefdom of °Abday, who is well attested in the arrowhead inscriptions of his dependents. He was a Kitionian, i.e. a man who came from Kition in Cyprus, living in Canaan. With this new inscription the converse relation may be attested.

13. The arrowhead of “Eliba^aal, man of Yada^ba^aal”: R. Deutsch-Heltzer, M., *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions*, Tel Aviv-Jaffa 1994, no. 2, pp. 13-14 and Pl. 7; the arrowhead of “Gerba^aal, the Sidonian”: J.T. Milik, “Flèches à inscriptions au Musée National Libanais”, *BMB* 16 (1961) pp. 103-108; cf. also F.M. Cross, “The Arrow of Survar, Retainer of °Abday”, *EI* 25 (1996) pp. *9-*17, esp. p. *14.

14. Cross, *EI* 25 (1996) p. *11, fig. 3, lines 1 and 3.

15. Cross, *EI* 25 (1996) fig. 3, line 4, and F.M. Cross, “Newly Discovered Inscribed Arrowheads of the Eleventh Century B.C.E.”, *IMJ* 10 (1992) fig. 1, p. 58, line 4.

16. R. Deutsch-Heltzer, M., *Forty New ...*, pp. 18-19, Pl. 1, line 14.

17. R. Deutsch-Heltzer, M., *New Epigraphic Evidence from the Biblical Period*, Tel Aviv-Jaffo 1995, nos. 43 and 48, pp. 16-17 and 22-23, p. 38, pl. 1.

18. Cf. B. Sass, *The Genesis of the Alphabet and its Development in the Second Millennium B.C.*, Wiesbaden 1988, Pl. 4. For the letters of the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, cf. Pl. 5; and for the Proto-Canaanite and Early Phoenician letters cf. after p. 182.

19. P. Magnanini, *Le iscrizioni fenice dell' Oriente, Testi, Traduzioni, Glossari*, Rome 1973, p. 116, nos. 1 and 2.

20. R. Deutsch-Heltzer, M., *Forty New Ancient ...*, pp. 16-18, Pl. 1. The previous reading was ḥšky // mšl °bdy, but the reading was corrected by P.K. McCarter from mšl “ruler” to mšq “cupbearer” (P.K. McCarter Jr., “Pieces of the Puzzle”, *BAR* 22/2 [1996] p. 40, and accepted by R. Deutsch and M. Heltzer, “Abday on Eleventh Century B.C.E. Arrowhead”, *IEJ* 47 [1997] pp. 111-112).

Fig. 1

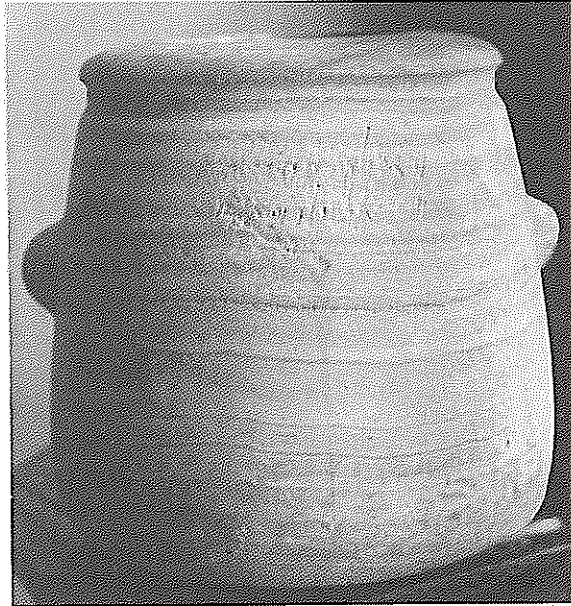


Fig. 2



Fig., 3

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ p l m r 4
4 1 m g 1 6 2 4 4

Fig. 4

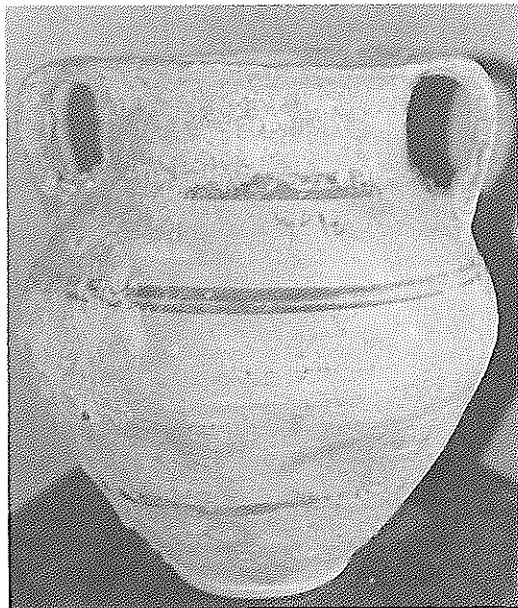


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

47 12

Fig. 7

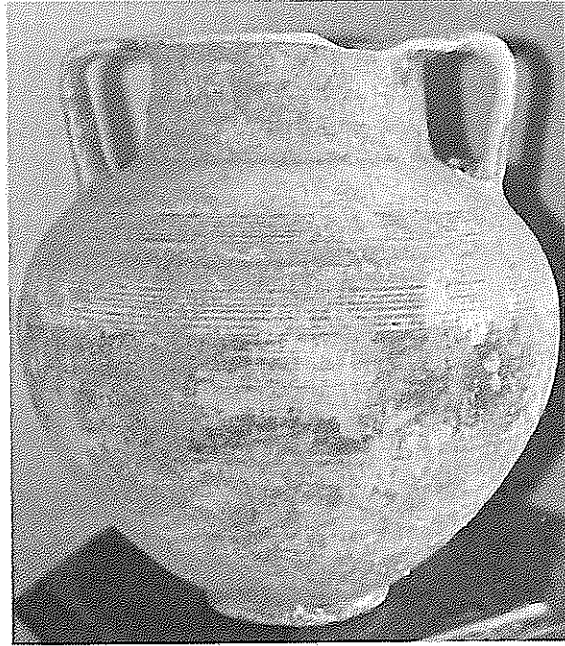


Fig. 8

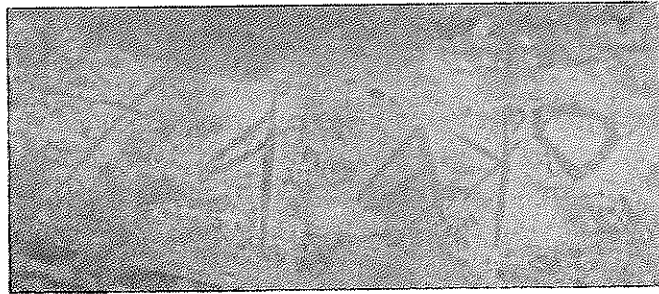


Fig. 9

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Fig. 10

