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MEDINA

MEDITERRANEAN NETWORK FOR THE VALORIZATION AND FRUITION OF INSCRIPTIONS PRESERVED IN MUSEUMS



Photo: Inscription in King Ahiiram Sarcophagus, Biblos.

ONE YEAR HAS PASSED; IT IS NOW TIME TO INTERACT !



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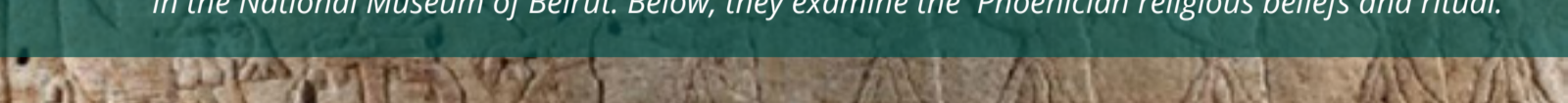
Phoenician and Nabataean inscriptions are following the trend...
DO NOT FORGET TO SPREAD THE WORD!

PHOENICIAN BURIAL PRACTICES

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Dr. Helen Sader is Chair of the History and Archaeology Department at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. As part of the MEDINA team in Lebanon, Dr. Sader and her research team are working to create a comprehensive catalogue of Phoenician objects and inscriptions housed in the National Museum of Beirut. Below, they examine the Phoenician religious beliefs and ritual.



Little information is available from the written sources on the beliefs Phoenicians had of life after death. The scattered information that can be gleaned from the available written sources from Phoenicia proper and its colonies, as well as from neighboring Ugarit, Egypt, and Greece, infer that the Iron Age inhabitants of Lebanon-like all other ancient Near Eastern people- believed in life after death. They also believed in the existence and immortality of the soul that survives the disintegration of the body. Some of the archaeological finds, such as the *ankh* sign, the lotus flower, and the scarabs, symbols of regeneration in Egypt, attest to these beliefs.

In the Iron Age two burial customs are attested: inhumation and cremation. Inhumation was the predominant form of burial in the Phoenician mainland until the Late Bronze Age (2nd half of the 2nd millennium B.C.). Cremation consists in incinerating the dead body on a pyre and in placing the cremated remains inside the grave, either directly on the floor in a pit (Tell Arqa) or in an urn (Tyre, Rashidiyye, etc.). This tradition was introduced in the Levant in the Iron Age and was not attested before. Its origin is unknown: some suggested that it was introduced by the Sea-People and others ascribe it to local (social or religious) conditions. In Phoenicia, this tradition is asserted between the 10th and the end of the 6th c. BC.

Two types of stone coffins are attested: the rectangular stone sarcophagus, like the Ahiiram coffin, and the anthropoid sarcophagus, which is of Egyptian origin. The royal necropolis of Sidon yielded the largest collection of anthropoid marble sarcophagi ever found (Figure 1). Beginning in the late 5th century B.C. the sarcophagi were influenced by Cypriot and Attic designs making them more Hellenized, as is reflected by the Greek hairstyle represented on most of them. Anthropoid sarcophagi are a typical Phoenician production found only in Phoenician cities and settlements. This type of coffin was of course restricted to the royal and aristocratic families, while the common people were buried in wooden coffins or directly in an earth pit.



Figure 1: marble anthropoid sarcophagus from Ain Hilweh, Sidon.

Concerning the funerary ritual, there is also hardly any indications about cultic performances in the texts. There is some information regarding the treatment of the dead body before interment: one Phoenician text from Byblos refers specifically to the embalment of the dead and mentions two products, myrrha and bdellium, which were used in this process. The inscription of the Phoenician queen Batnoam mentions a mouthpiece of gold that was placed on the face of the deceased. The scene depicted on the sarcophagus of Ahiiram king of Byblos (Figure 2) attest the existence of mourning rituals, of funerary offerings and of a funerary meal or banquet. The fact that pottery vessels, sometimes imported from Greece and Cyprus and containing food remains, accompany the dead, attest to this tradition. In Phoenician tombs of the 8th and 7th c. BC, the pottery assemblage includes always a cinerary urn, a bowl, a trefoil mouth jug (Figure 3), a ridged-neck jar (Figure 4) and a plate (Figure 5).

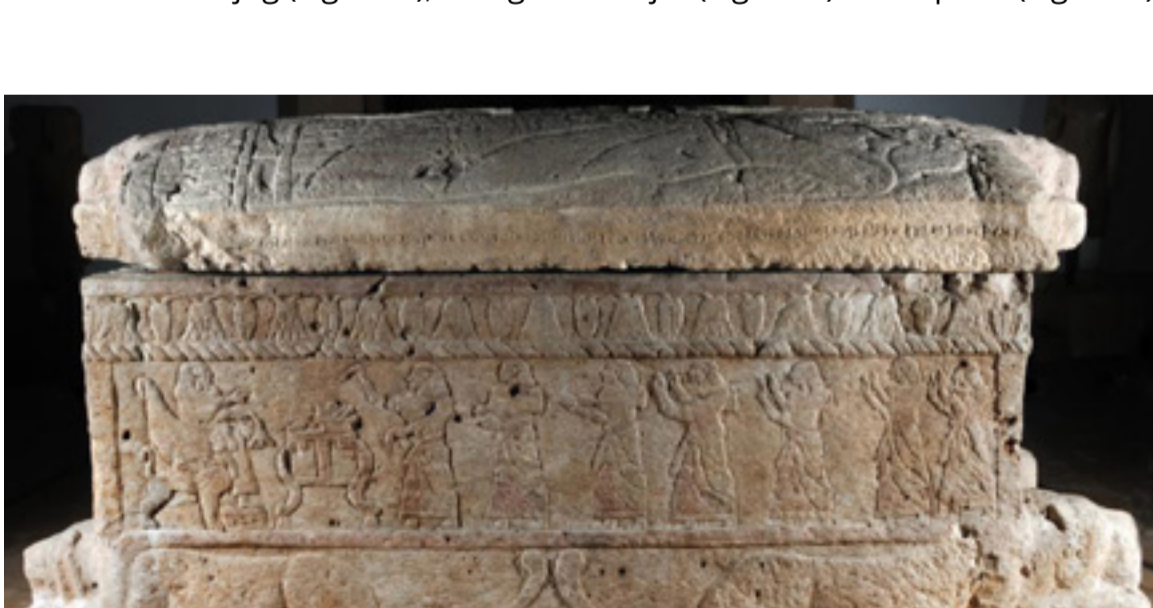


Figure 2: Ahiiram Sarcophagus, Biblos.

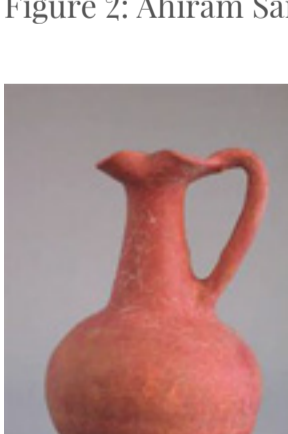


Figure 3: trefoil-mouth juglet from the necropolis in Khalde.

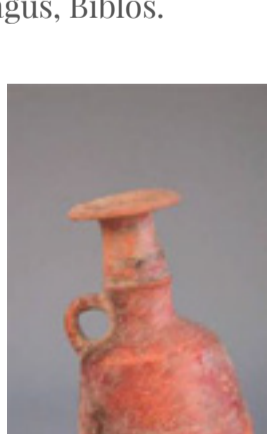


Figure 4: ridged-neck juglet from the necropolis of Tyre El-Bass.



Figure 5: plate excavated from the necropolis in Khalde.

The rich were accompanied by different types of jewelry, such as rings, bracelets, earrings, and bead necklaces as well as other luxury items such as ivory combs. In the tombs one finds also shrine models (Figure 6), masks (Figure 7) and terracotta figures representing divine beings.

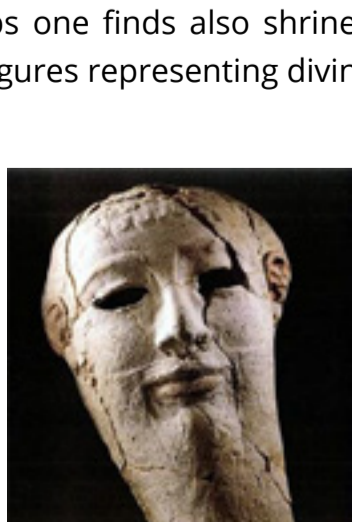


Figure 6: polychrome terracotta mask from Tyre el-Bass.



Figure 7: shrine model from Tyre.