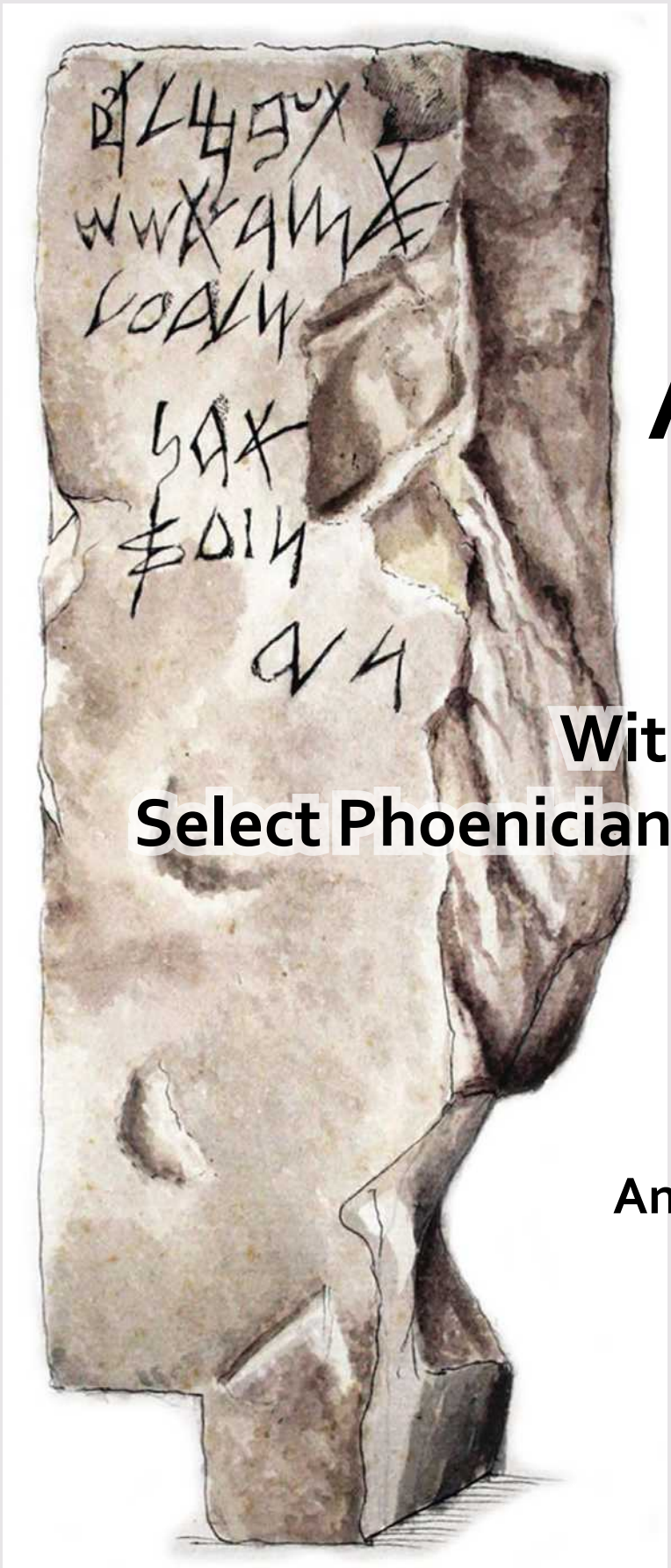

How to Read Ancient Texts

With a Focus on Select Phoenician Inscriptions from Malta

Anthony J. Frendo

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Cover Image (photo by Nicholas C. Vella): Count Saverio Marchese's copy of CIS I, 123 *bis*, courtesy Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta

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To my beloved wife Lillian, ever so loving, self-effacing, and unassuming

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Acknowledgements

To say that I owe so much to so many is – in the context of this monograph – definitely not a worn-out phrase. The topics I deal with in this book are partly those from many years gone by and partly from very recent times. For over thirty years, I taught a good deal of the issues discussed in this book, however, the topic I finally investigated demanded that I also had to dig into fresh soil.

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As can be seen in the captions of the Figures of this book, I also owe a great deal to various people who were very generous in providing me with photographs of various objects, or granting me permission to reproduce their own illustrations. I would thus like to thank heartily the following: Dr Maxine Anastasi, Senior Lecturer in Roman Archaeology at the University of Malta, who very kindly set out the photographs, formatted them, and made the drawings; Ms Sharon Sultana, Senior Manager, Archaeology and Natural History, Heritage Malta, for the different photographs of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus Inscription that she kindly sent, allowing me to publish them here, and for allowing me to see this inscription, as well as CIS I, 123, which are held in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta; and Professor Nicholas C. Vella FSA, Professor of Mediterranean Archaeology and Director, Doctoral School at the

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Last but not least, from the bottom of my heart I thank my dearest wife, Lillian, who was always there to listen to what I had to say and who always encouraged me. It is to her that I dedicate this work.

University of Malta, Tal-Qroqq, Msida, Malta
March 2024

Note to the Reader

When I cite an inscription as, e.g., CIS I, 123 this means the reader is being referred to inscription number 123 in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, Part I. If I cite the inscription as, e.g., KAI 61 this means the reader is being referred to Inscription number 61 in *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*. For specific details on *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, Part I see CIS I 1883- in the Bibliography, whereas for details on *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* see KAI: 1966-1969 in the Bibliography. Note, however, that when reference is made to a commentary on the text in, e.g., KAI, then the reference follows the general style of citing author/s and date followed by page number. Note also that there could also be a reference to the updated volume 1 of KAI, namely KAI 2002, for which see KAI: 2002 in the Bibliography.

When I cite texts in French, German, Italian, and Latin, I then provide the reader with my own translation (unless otherwise stated), normally in the footnotes.

Preface

For about three decades or so, one of the courses I taught at the University of Malta was on Phoenician inscriptions from the Levant and from Malta. Over the years I had in mind to go back and study in more depth a select number of these inscriptions with a view to publishing an updated interpretation of them in the light of the advances being made in Northwest Semitic epigraphy and philology. Owing to various teaching and administrative duties at the University, as well as because I had other publications to attend to, this project on the Phoenician inscriptions never got off the ground. However, over the years I accumulated many insights from my research, as well as from the intelligent questions my students put to me in class, with the result that I deem this moment to be the best for me to undertake the task I had originally had in mind.

The original plan was to do the usual thing undertaken in such types of research, i.e. to study (in this case) a number of select inscriptions from the Maltese archipelago, concentrating on the script, the philology, and the cultural information that could be gleaned from the texts examined. I had intended to concentrate on a selection of Phoenician inscriptions that had actually been found in the Maltese archipelago, at the same time including any pertinent information gleaned from other parts of the Mediterranean. I had planned to entitle this projected work: *Faint Voices from Canaanite Malta during the first Millennium BCE: a Study of select Phoenician-Punic Inscriptions*.

But it so happened that the more I delved into the subject the more it became apparent that there were a number of crucial preliminary issues to be dealt with at a deeper level. Not to examine these properly would have meant sweeping them under the carpet, with the result that the study of ancient inscriptions, especially in the field of Phoenician, would be left with a host of unexamined assumptions. In such a scenario, we would be missing out on significant information about one very important group of our Mediterranean ancestors, i.e. the Phoenicians. Thus, for example, it became clear to me that there were many things which we generally assume to be true but which definitely need much more careful analysis. Such matters included the principles of interpretation, and these same principles applied to the reading of ancient texts, the notion of verse and poetry, the role of orality in antiquity, the problem of word division (or the lack thereof), and not least the issue of how to read verse in an inscription written in *scriptio continua*.[1] Permeating these problems was the question of the relationship between the 'knower' and the 'known', and hence the problem of what is meant by objectivity. More attention also needs to be paid to pinning down the literary genre and the life setting of the texts the archaeologists retrieve in their excavations.

[1] For the meaning of *scriptio continua*, see n. 5 in Chapter 3.

Issues such as the foregoing eventually led me to change the title of this book from the one mentioned above to the current one, i.e. *How to Read Ancient Texts: With a Focus on Select Phoenician Inscriptions from Malta*, with the aim of examining three Phoenician inscriptions retrieved in Malta, while at the same time dealing in depth with the aforementioned issues (and related ones) that are often either neglected or given insufficient attention. The result, hopefully, is an enhanced understanding of the inscriptions chosen and the coalescence of an approach that can be used on other inscriptions from antiquity. The target audience in mind here includes colleagues and scholars working in the field of Northwest Semitic inscriptions (especially Phoenician) and the Hebrew Bible, as wells as classical scholars and archaeologists of the Mediterranean (especially of the Levant).

It is clear that by undertaking the aforementioned tasks, and in aiming to reach the projected objectives, I had to delve into interdisciplinary research, at times studying certain issues for the first time. This should not be a problem, assuming most of us accept the fact that *dies diem docet*,[2] and that even the study of the Humanities often demands research of this nature. Indeed, there are fields of study – archaeology, the Bible, and the topics discussed in this book – that, by their very nature, have to draw on various disciplines. Thus, for example, 'the study of the Bible in the humanities is not a discipline as is often thought, but a field of study that draws on various disciplines and other fields for its conceptual frameworks and methodologies.'[3] The same holds good for this study.

In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that 'to be interdisciplinary, scholarship must embrace approaches that are not traditionally in conversation with the datasets or methodologies already present within a given field. Such work is informed by areas of study beyond our shared chronological and geographical scopes that can illuminate our evidence in fresh ways'.[4] The ideal is for there to be a two-way flow of traffic, in the sense that interdisciplinary research also aims at permitting 'findings in our present scholarly domains to enrich those fields from which we draw new methods and ways of seeing'.[5] It is clear that in research of this type (as in any area of research after all) we should be wary of employing concepts that, although very familiar to us, were not used in the languages and cultures of the ancient Near East, i.e. terms such as 'culture', 'migration', 'imperialism', etc.[6] Notwithstanding such an important point, we have also to keep in mind, however, that the way to understand ancient societies is, on one hand, by using the analogy of human experience, while on the other keeping in mind all the time the aforementioned fact that certain concepts

[2] A Latin proverb literally meaning 'day teaches day', i.e. that we learn as we go along, and thus by experience. The point being that there is always something new to learn.

[3] Zevit 2001: 9.

[4] Alderman *et al.* 2022: 2.

[5] Alderman *et al.* 2022: 4.

[6] Alderman *et al.* 2022: 5.

normal for us were foreign to past societies. The way forward is to study carefully all the available evidence whilst correcting and/or refining our own understanding as we proceed in our research. In this book, such an approach is especially helpful when the notions of ethnicity, verse, poetry, and prose are brought into the argument. The theoretical discussion of such concepts is very important. However, it is crucial in the first place to describe accurately the data being examined, since it is precisely these data which we have to understand, and it is by going back to them that we can verify whether our understanding is correct or otherwise. In this process we accept or revise our own insights.[7]

Although the target readership for this book, as mentioned above, is likely to consist of scholars studying various societies of the ancient Mediterranean, this should not be taken to mean that anyone with an interest in the subject under examination is excluded. For this reason I list the full details of all the bibliographical works consulted at the end of the book, providing in the footnotes only the basic information that directs readers to the respective works listed in the Bibliography. This 'author–date' system,[8] inter alia, also allows those who so prefer to ignore the aforementioned basic bibliographic information and any other notes.

I very much hope this monograph, which took so long to research and write, will be of help to many – primarily those involved in the arduous task of epigraphy and philology of the ancient Mediterranean, especially of Phoenician inscriptions, an area of study where great attention to detail is of paramount importance.

[7] On my take on how we can know the past, see Frendo 2003.

[8] Ritter 2002: 18.

Chapter 1

Introduction

As already mentioned in the Preface, this monograph is an interdisciplinary work which draws upon areas that go beyond that of Phoenician epigraphy as such. By now readers know that I shall be concentrating my attention on two main areas: first, that of the principles of interpretation involved in reading and understanding texts from the ancient Mediterranean world, and secondly that of applying the results gained in discussing such principles to three Phoenician inscriptions retrieved from the Maltese archipelago. However, the title of this monograph – *How to Read Ancient Texts: With a Focus on Select Phoenician Inscriptions from Malta* – is not self-explanatory.

This last point, together with the interdisciplinary nature of this study already discussed in the Preface, make it clear why I shall be dealing with questions such as the following: What is meant by an objective reading of an ancient text? What is the relationship between the knower and the known? What is exactly meant by Phoenician? Why not speak of Canaanite rather than of Phoenician? What is the main difference between verse and poetry, and between these latter two on the one hand and prose on the other? It will be shown that, even if not relaying a poem in the strict sense, a text can still have a poetic form and therefore fall within the category of verse and not that of prose. Why did the ancients make use of *scriptio continua*?[1] How did they read and understand texts written in this type of script? What was the role of orality and aurality in the ancient world? Do the select inscriptions studied in this monograph allow us to conclude that we have evidence of poetry in Malta in the first millennium BCE, or at least of utterances relayed in poetic form? Does a study of two inscriptions in particular allow us to conclude with a higher degree of probability that there was the practice of child sacrifice in Malta during the first millennium BCE?

I deal with the aforementioned questions either directly, such as when I discuss the problem of the identity of the Phoenicians in Chapter 2, or by tackling some issues (for example that of the principles of interpretation and objectivity) also in different chapters of the monograph, where and when the topic at hand demands that I do so, besides discussing such points explicitly in Chapter 5. As just stated, in Chapter 2 I discuss the thorny issue of the identity of those people whom the Greeks had labelled Phoenicians, just like many modern scholars do under their influence. It will be shown that every Phoenician is a Canaanite but that not every Canaanite is a Phoenician. In this regard the important point is to keep in mind that the Phoenicians can be

[1] For the meaning of *scriptio continua*, see n. 5 in Chapter 3.

tagged as 'maritime Canaanites'[2] and that many scholars use the terms 'Phoenician' and 'Canaanite' interchangeably. Since the Phoenicians are generally credited with having 'invented' and passed on the alphabet to the Greeks, in Chapter 3 I consider the general Mediterranean background and context of the reading of Phoenician texts by concentrating on the main hallmarks of communication in antiquity. The prime and crucial role of the lectors who read texts aloud in the ancient Mediterranean world helps us to understand better how Phoenician texts written in *scriptio continua* could be read and interpreted. The challenges that this type of writing posed applied both to prose and verse. Indeed, there is evidence that poems could even be written without any structured layout. Once again, the essential role of orality, and thus also of aurality, comes to the fore. In Chapter 4 I proceed to consider the main hallmarks of verse in the Levant, with a focus on Classical Hebrew verse, seeing that this provides the best analogue to Phoenician verse. However, before going any further, as already pointed out above, I stop to consider in Chapter 5 the basics of hermeneutics, namely of the general principles of interpretation that we employ when understanding any area of research, clearly also when coming to grips with ancient texts. It will be shown that we do not invent truth, but that we fashion it on the basis of the available data; it is clear that in doing this a bit of ourselves is involved, but this is not tantamount to a failure of objectivity. This chapter includes a consideration of the basic specific points to keep in mind when interpreting Phoenician inscriptions. Amongst other things, here I highlight the difficulties that we encounter when reading texts that are purely consonantal, written in continual script (though not always so, since we do have a number of Semitic inscriptions with interpuncts and spaces between words), without vowels, and lacking punctuation. In this regard, I underscore the role of loud reading, the importance of keeping the context of a text always in mind, as well as that of examining via an analysis of the literary genre of a text whether we are dealing with prose or with verse/poetry. In Chapter 6 I offer a close reading of two 'twin inscriptions' – CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*. I present various philological solutions, finally reducing them to only one that is highly probable; I do this by looking into the context of these inscriptions – both the textual and the archaeological. In the following Chapter (7), I attempt a reading and interpretation of a Phoenician text, which, even if not a poem in the strict sense of the word, is drafted in poetic form and which therefore classifies as verse. I am referring to the Phoenician remnant generally known as the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription. Once again, it turns out that philology and serious consideration of the context have to work hand in hand; indeed, this time round the context includes that of ancient Egyptian texts and belief. Finally, in Chapter 8 I present the main conclusions reached in this study, highlighting the role of orality and aurality in the reading of texts in antiquity, the importance of strict philological study, and the crucial role that context plays when reading ancient texts. The context I have in mind is threefold: 1) the textual context of an inscription itself; 2) its archaeological context; and 3) the cultural context of

[2] Smith 1995: 88.

the ancient Mediterranean, including that of how the Greeks, Romans, and Christians read texts, and how ancient Egypt influenced certain beliefs of the Phoenicians.

My main aim in this monograph is to discuss a number of thorny issues that we encounter when attempting to read and understand ancient inscriptions revealed to us from archaeological research. Thus, I purport to highlight the unexamined assumptions we often unconsciously make when studying these inscriptions, with the result that we either do not fully appreciate them or that we simply misunderstand them. I do this in the hope we gain a better understanding of these inscriptions while having a more solid theoretical and methodological foothold when examining them.

The scope of this monograph is to examine very closely three Phoenician inscriptions (CIS I, 123; CIS I, 123 *bis*; and the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription) from the Maltese archipelago in light of what we also learn from how people in the Greek, Roman, and Christian world read texts. This means that, although the strict chronological scope is that of *c.* 700 BCE to 218 BCE, both the geographical and the chronological scope will at times necessarily include inscriptions from elsewhere in the Mediterranean, from other times, and also from people other than those hailing from the Eastern Mediterranean seaboard.

This latter point indicates that I shall also include examples from the classical world as well as from Medieval Europe, since this will help throw light on matters such as that of *scriptio continua*, orality and aurality, and the ambiguity of texts before the introduction of punctuation. The method I use, therefore, is that of an empirical examination of the select inscriptions by reading them also according to the rules of Semitic philology, whilst keeping in mind their immediate context (both archaeological and textual), as well as the broad context that inscriptions of the ancient Mediterranean world other than the Semitic ones provide.

Before dealing systematically with the tasks outlined above, I shall here give some concrete examples in a rather summary and random fashion of what this study entails, thereby throwing some initial light on the questions that I raised at the beginning of this chapter. The first point I would like to highlight is that of the role played by readers in antiquity, and thus of the great importance of orality. The Hebrew Bible, for example, shows us clearly that the readers of a text knew the text before reading it out aloud to their audiences, and that the consonantal text acted simply as an aide-mémoire. There is a highly interesting idiom in this regard, since in biblical Hebrew 'the ability to read is literally "to know the document"'.[3] Hence not being able to read means not to know a document, which clearly implies that the person concerned had not been trained to read an unseen and unvocalised text (Isaiah 29: 11-12).[4]

[3] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 321.

[4] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 321, 502 n.435.

It is clear that a situation such as the one just mentioned could lead to a certain amount of ambiguity. However, in this regard it is important to also keep in mind the fact that in antiquity authors very often purposely wanted to write ambiguous texts. Indeed, ambiguity can be viewed 'as being more expressive of the complexity of the human dilemma'.[5] This clearly allows for there to be various possible interpretations of ancient texts, and this comes to the fore when we read these texts in the language in which they were originally drafted. Such is the case, for example, with the alphabetic poems of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, 'any translation of the Bible is no substitute for commentaries. By reading the text in its original language, however, we become aware of alternative interpretations.'[6] Thus when we read ancient texts their meaning is not so much a question of either/or, but of both/and.

This latter point makes it even more important to examine carefully the context of ancient texts, both the immediate textual as well as the archaeological one, where applicable. Knowledge of the context helps us to understand a text more fully; archaeology provides us with multiple concrete tangible examples of how context throws light on artefacts in general. Thus, it is context, for example, which shows us that amphorae, that are per se storage jars, in fact had multiple uses, e.g. acting as transport containers. Indeed, 'they were also used as toilets, for burial urns, and even as weapons in naval warfare.'[7] It is context that helps us to minimise the constraints texts make on their interpreters, since it leads the latter to realise that, while texts can have multiple meanings, their meaning is not indeterminate. As in the case of Phoenician inscriptions, it is the archaeological and linguistic contexts which allow us to choose the most likely meaning of multivalent words.

As already pointed out above, the context I have in mind is the one the text itself provides, i.e. what the words of a given inscription mean in their immediate verbal context; the archaeological context, by which I mean the findspot of a given inscription within a controlled excavation; and, finally, the general cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean and Levantine worlds. One of the reasons why I chose to focus on CIS I, 123; CIS I, 123 *bis*, and the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription, is that (with the exception of the generally very brief inscriptions, or often better still graffiti, retrieved from Tas-Silġ[8]) they are the only ones coming close to having a 'findspot' of sorts, at least in the sense of their having been definitely retrieved in a certain area in Malta as will be shown in Chapters 6 and 7. The majority of the major Phoenicia-Punic inscriptions that allegedly stem from the Maltese islands might not even have been originally found there.[9] It is a commonplace that the literary genre of the majority

[5] Armstrong 2019: 387 and reference there.

[6] Muraoka 2020: 20.

[7] Woolmer 2019: 162.

[8] Frendo and Mizzi 2015: 516-517.

[9] For the analysis of the extremely brief (tantamount to being graffiti), but numerous Punic inscriptions retrieved in the controlled excavations at the site of Tas-Silġ carried out by the University of Malta, see

of the Phoenician-Punic inscriptions from the Maltese islands is that of dedicatory, votive, or funerary inscriptions.

Another point to consider is that of the differences obtaining between poetry and prose. It will be shown that the distinction is not so easy to establish, especially when we consider that in some languages there is 'no single word that exactly covers our "poetry"'.[10] Moreover, we also have to keep in mind the role of orality; oral poetry really exists when it is performed, since 'an oral poem is an essentially ephemeral work of art, and has no existence or continuity apart from its performance. The skill and personality of the performer, the nature and reaction of the audience, the context, the purpose – these are essential aspects of the artistry and meaning of an oral poem'.[11] We can understand this better if we remember that although our Christmas carols are written, 'they surely achieve their main impact and active circulation through ever-renewed oral means'.[12]

The interpretation of ancient texts is beset with multiple problems and this is certainly the case with Phoenician inscriptions. The fact that the latter inscriptions are written without vowels, and that at times even certain consonants are omitted, certainly adds fuel to the flames. Thus, for example, the divine name *bʿl* lacks the ʿ in the personal name *ʿzrbʿl* which can actually be found as *ʿzrbl*.[13] The same phenomenon is already found in the Ugaritic texts, where we find *bnbl* instead of *bnbʿl*.[14]

The study of Phoenician inscriptions is generally focused on philological issues. In this regard, various possible solutions are offered in conjunction with different possible vocalisations of the unvocalised texts. This approach is useful and important; however, it is not sufficient. Other aspects need to be kept in mind. There is, for example, the question of context that was discussed above. Not least, we also need to consider and understand better the literary structure of these inscriptions. Wolfgang Röllig had highlighted the importance of the latter approach very aptly when he wrote: 'I am convinced that the way to improved grammatical and substantival understanding of the content of the sometimes very condensed texts (which can only be understood with difficulty) is through paying attention to the literary structure of the inscriptions'.[15] This means that the study of the literary structure of Phoenician inscriptions will enhance our grammatical understanding itself of these inscriptions

Frendo and Mizzi 2015, where reference is also made to the excavations at the same site that the Italian archaeological mission carried out four decades earlier, and to their epigraphic finds. For examples of Phoenician-Punic inscriptions allegedly found on the Maltese islands, but actually most probably originating elsewhere, see Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 15, 43.

[10] Finnegan 1977: 26.

[11] Finnegan 1977: 28.

[12] Finnegan 1977: 5.

[13] Benz 1972: 89, 203.

[14] Greenstein 1976: 55.

[15] Röllig 1995: 211.

and ultimately of their content, and hence of their most probable meaning. In this context it is clear that we also need to consider the literary genres and the life setting from which the literary genres of the inscriptions grew.

The foregoing examples are meant as samples (discussed in a summary and rather random fashion) of the issues that I shall be examining in detail in this monograph. By now readers will have realised that the general principles of interpretation as applied to the three Phoenician inscriptions I examine occupy roles that permeate different chapters of this study. Another important issue is that of the identity of the Phoenicians – a topic virtually flogged to death, but one which still demands further elucidation. Finally, last but certainly not least, is the discussion of reading and writing in antiquity, with a view to providing solid comparisons to what we find in Phoenician inscriptions. However, before proceeding any further we first need to understand what we mean by 'Phoenician'.

Chapter 2

The Phoenicians: Who are They?

Herodotus tells us that the Phoenicians had originally migrated from the Red Sea to the Syrian coast about 2,300 years before his time, namely since the time of the foundation of Tyre.[1] This chronological datum means those people whom Herodotus called 'Phoenicians' in his day were in fact the descendants of the Canaanites, i.e. the inhabitants of the Levant, at least from the early 2nd millennium BCE onwards. Indeed, 'whatever the basis of this tradition [as mentioned by Herodotus], it takes the existence of the Phoenicians back to the 3rd millennium, when their presence in Lebanon is well-attested [*sic*] archaeologically. The port of Byblos was known in Early Dynastic Egypt.'[2]

The foregoing oblige us once again to consider the problem of the identity of the Phoenicians. It has become clear to contemporary scholars that identity is not simply a matter of belonging to 'a particular racial or ethnic group, and that it must be consciously constructed by people who wish to be part of a group', and this leads us to 'face daunting problems in retrojecting it into the past'.[3] Clearly ethnicity is ascription, but one which demands that we distinguish between 'ascription' and 'self-ascription', and that we should realise that such a distinction is of paramount importance.[4] The difficulty lies in detecting the evidence that allows us to see what type of self-ascription we are dealing with, something which is very difficult when it comes to examining the identity of the Phoenicians.

This problem is compounded when we keep in mind that identity is neither static nor monolithic; it evolves in different places and at different times and it includes both continuity and discontinuity as well as the merging of different groups and cultures. At any given time, we have to pin down the predominant traits of a given population. A concrete example of these phenomena is given by the Canaanites in the central Levant who assimilated the Sea Peoples, with the culture remaining predominantly Canaanite. This contrasts with the south-western Levant where the Sea Peoples (in this case the Philistines) were *at first* predominant but who also *eventually* were assimilated into the Canaanite culture. Two aspects are thus crucial: firstly, the origin of a group of people is important for pinning down their identity, and, secondly, the

[1] Herodotus, 1. 1, 2. 44, and 7. 89. Note that the Greeks used the term 'Red Sea' to refer to 'all parts of the southern (our Indian) Ocean. Here [Herodotus 1.1] the Persian Gulf is meant, and the reference is to (real) ancient influences from Mesopotamia' (Burn 1972: 41).

[2] Salles 1996: 1174.

[3] Wallace-Hadrill 2014: 302.

[4] Prag 2006: 12 and references there.

predominant traits of the group in question are also important for determining who they are. Thus, we have to consider the *predominant traits* when it comes, for example, to the language, religion, and pottery of a given group of people. The upshot of all this is that '"pure" identities (such as "Greek" or "Phoenician") do not really exist. Cultural interactions occur to varying degrees in every geographical and historical context.'[5] This is exemplified by the case just mentioned of the Canaanites in the central and southern Levant: the Canaanites are linked to their land, but in fact we have variations owing to different types of interactions. In the Lebanon we have a strong Canaanite culture that (under Greek influence) we label 'Phoenician', whereas in the south-western Levant we find the Philistines interacting with the local Canaanites, eventually the former too being assimilated into the latter.

But although the foregoing points are important, they still beg the question of who the Phoenicians really are. Homer uses the word 'Phoenician' not as an ethnonym but 'to denote people from one of the coastal cities of the Levant who were on or over the sea.'[6] Thus toponyms are used to indicate the specific city-state from where a Phoenician would have originated and that is why, for example, the citizens of Sidon preferred '(... to record that they are "from the city of Sidon" in preference to calling themselves "Sidonian")'.[7] Homer brings out all this very clearly when he speaks of *Sidonian craftsmen* who had made the silver bowl given to the victor at the funeral games of Patroclus, while pointing out that it was *Phoenician traders* who took it to Greece.[8] In the *Odyssey* Homer tells us that Odysseus took a Phoenician ship to Pylos, but that the sailors returned to 'their own fine city of Sidon'.[9] In view of all this, Woolmer aptly points out that 'the implication from these two passages is that individuals from Sidon could be referred to as either "Phoenician" or "Sidonian" depending on the context in which they are found (the former being employed when they are on or over the sea, the latter when they are at home'.[10]

Notwithstanding the distinctions just mentioned, it is important above all else to remember that the identities of people are linked to places. As Peter van Dommelen states: '... identities, whether ethnic or otherwise, are socially constructed, while they are at the same time intimately connected to particular areas and places and/or objects and practices – a deeply felt "sense of place" is an important feature of most identities.'[11] This applies equally well to the Phoenicians; this latter term, of course, derives from the Greek *phoínikes* which 'is itself a somewhat all-embracing one, enveloping the whole range of Semitic peoples from the Levantine region,

[5] Bonnet 2014: 284.
[6] Woolmer 2019: 1.
[7] Woolmer 2019: 3-4.
[8] *Iliad* 23. 74-75; see also Woolmer 2019: 1.
[9] *Odyssey* 13. 271-286.
[10] Woolmer 2019: 2.
[11] Dommelen 2014: 44 and references there.

without distinction'.[12] It is well known that the people whom we call Phoenicians were thus labelled by the Greeks and that they did not use this term for themselves; the equivalent Semitic original term for Phoenicians seems to be Canaanite.[13] Indeed, the point just mentioned with respect to the term *phoínikes* applies equally to the term 'Canaanite'. Biblical scholars, for example, know very well that the term 'Canaanite' included different groups of people who inhabited the land of Canaan.[14] It is this sense of belonging to a place that is important when discussing the identity of the Phoenicians/Canaanites.[15] The Phoenicians were not a nation in the contemporary sense of the term – as noted above, it is each particular city-state that was crucial for their identity. And yet the Phoenicians had an homogenous culture spanning 'material culture, language, and religion – the three pillars that archaeologists and historians traditionally use to identify a culture even when internal narratives are absent'.[16] In view of this, we had best understand the Phoenicians as 'a confederation of merchant communities of predominantly indigenous populations residing along the central and northern Levantine littoral'.[17]

Besides the prime importance of keeping in mind the aforementioned 'sense of place' when discussing the identity of the Phoenicians, it is equally useful to note certain aspects indicating that the Phoenicians did have a sense of belonging that went beyond the particular city-states of which they were citizens. The evidence shows they also had a sense of belonging to a population not simply restricted to the specific city from which they hailed. Thus, for example, coins from Tyre dating to the last three decades of the 5th century BCE depict on their obverse 'a dolphin riding the waves and below them a murex, the symbol of Phoenician ethnicity'.[18] The Phoenician language too points in the same direction, since it exhibits links with the Amarna glosses, thereby showing that 'the Iron Age population was in its majority a direct descendant of the Late Bronze Age inhabitants of the Levantine coast'.[19] Sarepta has yielded an inscribed handle of an amphora where the inscription is written in the Phoenician language while employing the alphabetic cuneiform script used at Ugarit.[20] This shows that Phoenician was already in use in the 13th century BCE, and it was – as is well known – 'the language used in all four Phoenician kingdoms [Arwad, Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre]' during the Iron Age.[21] Moreover, during the 1st millennium BCE the onomastics in southern Phoenicia resembled those of northern Phoenicia,

[12] Prag 2006: 4 and references there.
[13] See my observations in Frendo 1993.
[14] See, e.g., Deuteronomy 7: 1 and Joshua 9: 1.
[15] Note that the 'Early Phoenicians' could have 'referred to themselves as Canaanites' (Killebrew 2019: 42).
[16] Doak and López-Ruiz 2019: 6. See also Sader 2019: 316.
[17] Killebrew 2019: 42 and references there.
[18] Peckham 2014: 464.
[19] Sader 2019: 151.
[20] Pritchard 1988: 15-16.
[21] Sader 2019: 151.

thereby allowing us to include northern Palestine within 'the Phoenician cultural sphere'.[22]

All this highlights the complexity of the issues involved in pinning down the identity of the Phoenicians. This is also borne out by the fact that in the Levant the overall continuity of the Iron Age Phoenician culture with that of the preceding Late Bronze Age does not account for all the evidence. There is, in a sense, some discontinuity too, or, better still, we are faced with an Iron Age that adapts the Late Bronze Age culture but is not identical to it. And yet we are not dealing with a simple adaptation of culture since it appears that 'the introduction of new deities and the modification of the spheres of action of already existent numina cannot simply be explained as the effects of evolution through time, but rather are based on changes in the ethnic sphere resulting from political events'.[23] This means that the presence of new groups of people (such as the Sea Peoples) in the Levant towards the end of the Late Bronze Age/beginning of the Iron Age has to factor in this complex issue of identifying who the Phoenicians really are.

The corollary of the foregoing point is that it does not suffice to simply bring into the equation the continuity of language or other cultural elements common to the Levantine Late Bronze and Iron Ages. Neither will linking certain cultural items with the Phoenicians help to clarify the issue of their identity. Such cultural elements could very well be linked with the Phoenicians but not with them exclusively. It is a commonplace, for example, that many identify the iconography of the palm tree with the presence of Phoenician culture, however, it turns out that such is not the case. In fact, the palm tree can be linked with the Phoenicians, but not only with them, since it is known that it was also linked with Apollo and Delos as well as with the Etruscans, for example at Caere. Indeed, 'there is no shortage of evidence for the palm as a polyvalent iconographic element across the Mediterranean.'[24] This is supported by the fact that on the reverse of the *Judaea Capta* coins the Flavian emperors minted to underscore their quelling of the first Jewish revolt in 70 CE, we find a mourning woman (a symbol for the Jewish people) who grieves under a palm tree, the latter signifying the province of Judah.[25]

The above-mentioned element of ethnic changes in the Levant linked to political factors[26] is important, but it should be viewed with great attention to detail whilst avoiding any type of generalisation. Hence, it is important to note that the 12th century BCE is more a time of 'great turmoil' rather than one of 'deep change'.[27]

[22] Sader 2019: 151.
[23] Röllig 1983: 90 and n. 75 there.
[24] Prag 2006: 28 and references there.
[25] Magness 2012: 167.
[26] Röllig 1983: 90 and n. 75 there.
[27] Peckham 2014: 47.

During this period in the Levant there was a sharp decline in urbanism, with the result that people regrouped along family and tribal lines. But there was one exception: the cities of Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, and perhaps Jerusalem. With the exception of the latter city, the former three are among the principal Phoenician cities, being the only ones that kept 'their urban status, their monarchies, their territorial integrity, and their social and economic stability'.[28] The common factor between these three centres is that they were Canaanite cities that kept their cultural and territorial integrity when they passed from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age. This means that when addressing the problem of the identity of the Phoenicians we must also consider seriously the Canaanite element that singles out who they are.

The evidence from Egypt and the ancient Near East indicates that the Phoenicians were viewed as a Semitic people. This is borne out by the epigraphic evidence from these regions. The Egyptians labelled the people of Western Asia as 'Asiatics', whom they viewed as 'miserable' and who 'comprised not merely the nomadic BEDOUIN (Shasu) but also the more settled peoples of Syria-Palestine...'.[29] In this regard, it is important to note a Theban papyrus (P. Brooklyn 35.1446) that had insertions added to it during the reign of Sobekhotep III *c.* 1740 BCE. The document establishes that a woman called Senebtisy held the right to 'ninety-five household workers'.[30] Out of 72 workers whose names are preserved, 45 are labelled 'Asiatic' and they each bear both a Semitic and an Egyptian slave name.[31] Thus, for example, in l. 10 we find 'The female Asiatic Hay immi', which is a West Semitic name meaning 'Where is (my) Mother?', whereas in l. 18 there is the name of a male Asiatic, namely Dôdi-hu atu, which is West Semitic meaning 'My beloved is He'.[32]

The Egyptians were also aware that the land of the Levantine coast where dwelled the Asiatics whose language was West Semitic was called Canaan. This is clear in the Amarna archive (14th century BCE), which consists of the correspondence between the local Canaanite rulers and the Pharaoh, who was their overlord.[33] The Amarna letters were mainly written by the local Canaanite rulers to the Pharaoh, but some were drawn up by the Egyptian side.[34] Be that as it may, the important point is that the Egyptians referred to this area as Canaan. Thus, for example, in one of the letters (EA 367) from the Pharaoh to the ruler of Akšapa we read: 'The king herewith sends to you

[28] Peckham 2014: 49, where he also states that Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos became 'demographically isolated'.

[29] Shaw and Nicholson 1995: 41.

[30] Ritner 2002: 35.

[31] Ritner 2002: 35.

[32] Ritner 2002: 35.

[33] In the Amarna letters, Canaan (*Kinaḫḫi* and *Kinaḫni/a*), though 'a territory of uncertain boundaries', certainly includes the littoral areas of the Levant, since from north to south it lies 'between Amurru and Egypt, and from east to west, ill-defined borders and Mediterranean' [*sic*] (Moran 1992: 389).

[34] Moran 1992: xvii.

Ḫanni, the son of Maireya, the stable overseer of the king [the Pharaoh] in Canaan'.[35] Akšapa is generally identified with biblical ʾakzīḇ – 'an important Canaanite city' that scholars locate either to the south of Acco or to its north-east, or in northern Galilee.[36] One of the letters that Abi-Milku, the local ruler of Tyre, sent to the Pharaoh shows beyond any reasonable doubt that the Egyptians view this city as being Canaanite; in EA 151 l. 50, Abi-Milku tells the Pharaoh that the latter had written to him saying 'Write to me what you have heard in Canaan'.[37]

Canaanite Tyre was to become Phoenician Tyre. The treaty (probably drawn up *c.* 677 BCE) between King Esarhaddon of Assyria and Baal, king of Tyre,[38] also shows that the Phoenicians were a Semitic people. The curses appearing towards the end of this treaty, 'known from a single four-column tablet found in Nineveh',[39] mention a number of west Semitic deities that formed part of the Canaanite and/or Phoenician pantheon; thus, we find mention of Astarte, Bethel and Anath-Bethel, Baal Shamem, Baal Malage, Baal Saphon, Melqart and Eshmun.[40] Indeed, 'true' Phoenicians make themselves known *after* the invasion of the Sea Peoples '... dans des inscriptions alphabétique et s'inscrivent dans une tradition Cananéene qui, linguistiquement aussi, en fait de proches parents des Hébreux de l'epoque biblique.'[41] This means the emergence of the people whom we label (after Greek usage) 'Phoenician' is linked to political events which took place in the Levant towards the end of the Late Bronze Age/beginning of the Iron Age, while maintaining many of their strong and age-old Canaanite elements.

It is not only the extra-biblical Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern texts that view the Phoenicians as Canaanites. Genesis 10: 18 informs us that the Arwadites, i.e. the inhabitants of Arwad (which lies in the north of the Levant and is considered by scholars one of the Phoenician city-states) are one group of the Canaanites in the Levant.[42] However, having a Canaanite identity did not mean belonging to the same 'ethnic' group; the population of Canaan towards the end of the Late Bronze Age was rather more than half Semitic, nearly one third Indo-Aryan, and *c.* 10% Hurrian.[43] Nor did a Canaanite identity mean having one political identity; the Phoenician city-states were politically independent of each other. And yet, the Canaanites of the Levant, and therefore also the Phoenicians and their city-states, had a strong sense of common identity; truly, 'through all their competition, and despite all their squabbles and

[35] Moran 1992: 365.
[36] Bimson 1995: 18.
[37] Moran 1992: 238.
[38] Lauinger 2017: 153.
[39] Lauinger 2017: 153.
[40] Lauinger 2017: 155.
[41] Lipiński and Röllig 1992: 351. English Translation: '... in the alphabetic inscriptions in a Canaanite tradition, who [are] linguistically also in fact close relatives of the Hebrews of the biblical period.'
[42] Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1906: 71.
[43] Peckham 2014: 12.

contretemps, these people had an underlying consciousness, evident in their religion and in their language, of their Canaanite identity'.[44]

However, the term 'Canaanite' did not indicate a cohesive ethnic group, since in fact it denoted 'a variety of cultures and peoples'.[45] In the Bible, this term 'was used in a non-specific manner and could refer to an individual (or group)' from different tribes, such as 'Amorites, Hivites, Girgashites, Jebusites, and Perizzites'.[46] All these groups inhabited the land of Canaan and the common factor is precisely the link to this land, namely the 'sense of place' I referred to above. Thus the term 'Canaanite' essentially means 'an inhabitant of the land of Canaan', whatever ethnic or social group that inhabitant belonged to. Brian Doak, for example, states that 'on biblical terms, "Canaan" designates a region or the people who live in that region before Israel arrives on the scene'.[47] Michael David Coogan is essentially of the same opinion, but he specifies matters further when he writes that 'in the Bible the term Canaanite is variously used to identify all the inhabitants of the land W of the Jordan or as one group within that region'.[48]

But a close reading of the relevant biblical texts indicates that it is highly probable that the term 'Canaanite' stands simply for the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. It is a commonplace that Deuteronomy 7: 1 mentions seven 'nations' of Canaan, namely the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites – where the Canaanites *seem* to be one group amongst others who inhabit Canaan. But in this regard we should keep in mind the results of contemporary biblical scholarship. Bernard M. Levinson, for example, points out that the list of 'nations' inhabiting Canaan is 'an after-the-fact literary compilation rather than a historical portrayal'.[49] Indeed, he adds that 'the ideal number *seven*, which signifies completion or totality... suggests that the enumeration may be artificial. The number of peoples included in the "table" elsewhere in the Bible varies considerably: twelve, seven, six, or fewer.'[50] These observations are crucial in order to make sense

[44] Peckham 2014: 14, who also notes that Canaanite society was 'an ethnic group of different social origins, sharing a country, a culture, and a common cause. Canaan remained a land of immigrants, and it was new arrivals with their brand new [*sic]* horizons that ultimately distinguished Iron Age Canaan from its Late Bronze Age heritage' (Peckham 2014: 12-13). I would reformulate this by saying that Canaanite society was a group of people of not only 'different social origins', but also of different ethnic origins. Given what Peckham said above, he probably did not mean to exclude this factor. See my discussion further on in this chapter.

[45] Woolmer 2011: 11.

[46] Woolmer 2011: 11.

[47] Doak 2020: 23.

[48] Coogan 1990: 114.

[49] Levinson 2004: 382.

[50] Levinson 2004: 382, where he also cites the other biblical passages that show how the 'identity, sequence, and number of the peoples included in the "table of nations" vary considerably', i.e. Genesis 15: 19-21; Exodus 3:8, 17; 13: 5; 23: 23; 33:2; 34: 11; Deuteronomy 20:17; Joshua 3:10; 9: 1; 11: 3; 12: 8; 24: 11; Judges 3: 5; 1 Kings 9: 20; Ezra 9: 1; Nehemiah 9 :8; and 2 Chronicles 8: 7.

of Deuteronomy 7: 1, when this latter text is read alongside some of the other texts in the Hebrew Bible that refer to the settling down of the Israelites in the land of Canaan. Joshua 24: 15 refers to 'the Amorites in whose land you are living'; the overall context of this text is the renewal of the covenant by all the tribes of Israel that Joshua had gathered at Shechem. The land that the tribes of Israel were going to settle in is also labelled as 'the land of the Amorites' in Joshua 7: 7. In these two texts the word 'Amorites' functions as an umbrella term standing for all the various 'nations' inhabiting the land of Canaan. So, what about the Canaanites? As already pointed out above, the term 'Canaanite' can also refer to 'all the inhabitants of the land W of the Jordan'.[51] And yet both the terms 'Amorite', as well as 'Canaanite', seem, at times, to refer to one group of people that inhabited Canaan, such as in Deuteronomy 7:1. This is a conundrum which needs to be clarified.

A close reading of Deuteronomy 1: 7 can help us to resolve a number of the aforementioned issues. One way of rendering the original Hebrew text of this verse is to read it as follows: 'Move on from here, continue your journey, go to the highlands of the Amorites, to those who make their home in the Arabah, in the highlands, in the lowlands, in the Negeb and in the coastland; go into the land of Canaan and to Lebanon as far as the great river Euphrates'.[52] This translation renders the main idea of the Hebrew text, but there are a few points we need to look at more closely. After the word 'coastland', the Hebrew text simply has 'the land of the Canaanites and the Lebanon as far as the great river Euphrates'; it is important to note that there is no coordinating particle *wāw* in front of the phrase 'the land of the Canaanites', a fact that in English would be better highlighted if we place this phrase in brackets thereby showing clearly that it is functioning as a gloss practically equating 'the hill country of the Amorites' with the 'land of the Canaanites'. Moreover, it is equally important to note that the Hebrew text has the coordinating particle *wāw* in front of the phrase *wᵉ'el-kol-šᵉkēnāyw*, which had better be read as 'and to all their [literally his] residents'. In view of this, I propose to read Deuteronomy 1: 7 as follows:

> Move on from here, continue your journey, go to the highlands of the Amorites, and to all their residents in the Arabah, in the highlands, in the lowlands, in the Negeb and in the coastland (the land of Canaan) and to Lebanon as far as the great river Euphrates.

This means that Deuteronomy 1: 7 is saying that the Israelites are being told to go into all the regions of the land of the Amorites, which the author equates with the land of Canaan. This is buttressed by the fact that in this text '*Amorites*, as in Gen. 15.16, seems to be used generically for the family of nations who are the original

[51] Coogan 1990: 114.

[52] Wansbrough 2007: 252.

inhabitants of Canaan, rather than technically to designate one of those nations (contrast Gen. 15.19-21; Exod. 3.8, 17)'.[53]

The foregoing points indicate two things: 1) that the Hebrew Bible refers to all the various groups of people who inhabited the land the Israelites were to inherit by using either of two umbrella terms, i.e. 'Amorites' or 'Canaanites'; but 2) that either of these terms could also indicate one of the 'nations' inhabiting the land before the entry of the Israelites. The idea that 'Amorites' and 'Canaanites' are interchangeable terms is further supported by the fact that 'the land which Israel is to conquer is called [in Deuteronomy 1: 7] "the hill country of the Amorites (*har hā'ĕmōrî*)" by a designation based on the name for the area in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions. An alternative general designation is "the land of the Canaanites" (*'ereṣ hakkĕna'ănî*), and elsewhere in Deuteronomy a list of peoples is used for describing the population of the land (cf. 7: 1; 20: 17)'.[54] Joshua 7: 7 and 24: 15 support the idea that the people who in many texts of the Hebrew Bible are called Canaanites are termed Amorites (under Neo-Assyrian influence) in these texts.

It was already pointed out above that identity is linked to ascription – either the ascription that someone else gives to a group of people, or self-ascription, where the group in question ascribes an identity to itself. In the present case, it is clear the term 'Amorites' is an ascription given by someone else, i.e. by the Neo-Assyrians, whereas it seems 'Canaanites' is a term the people of the land that Israel was to inherit had ascribed to themselves. With respect to the problem that the interchangeable terms just mentioned, i.e. 'Amorites' and 'Canaanites', seem at times to indicate only one of the groups who inhabited the land prior to the arrival of the Israelites (e.g. in Deuteronomy 7: 1 and Joshua 9: 1), modern customs can help us clarify matters. I once asked an Italian waitress working in Malta what her place of origin was, and she replied 'Umbria'. Obviously, the girl was Italian but she preferred to refer to her place of origin in a more specific manner and that is why her reply was 'Umbria' rather than 'Italy'. Clearly she was at one and the same time both an Umbrian and an Italian.[55] This is the 'sense of place' linked to identity which I discussed earlier on in this chapter. The waitress could have chosen to reply either 'Italy' or 'Umbria' – she chose the latter. However, her answer did not mean that she denied being Italian, namely that her place of origin was Italy; there is not the least sense of contradiction in saying that in this example we are dealing with someone who is simultaneously an Italian *and* an Umbrian, where the latter term specifies which particular type of Italian we are dealing with. In the same manner, when 'Amorites' and 'Canaanites' are

[53] Levinson 2004: 364.

[54] Bultmann 2001: 138.

[55] The anonymous reviewer suggested to me better examples to illustrate my own point, such as that of a person who is British but who specifies that he hails from Wales. We have here a clear analogy to the fact that all Phoenicians are Canaanites but not all Canaanites are Phoenician; similarly, all Welsh are British but not all British persons are Welsh. I thank the reviewer for pointing this out.

listed among the 'nations' inhabiting the land that Israel was to acquire they are in fact still being used as general umbrella terms, with Perizzites, Hivites, and the rest of the groups mentioned being specific instances of what particular type of 'Canaanites' (or 'Amorites', the equivalent term) we are dealing with. The aforementioned waitress was both an Umbrian and an Italian, just as the Girgashites and the Jebusites in Deuteronomy 7: 1, for example, were a specific type of Canaanite or Amorite. The supra-local terms ('Canaanite' and its equivalent 'Amorite') are found alongside those terms that refer to specific local groups, such as the ones just mentioned.

The evidence adduced thus far shows that the people whom we (under Greek influence) call Phoenicians were in fact Canaanites, namely various groups who had inhabited the land called Canaan. But it is important to also underscore, as already discussed above, that this does not mean we are dealing with a cohesive ethnic group. The problem becomes rather complex if we consider that a good many scholars are accustomed to describing the culture of the Phoenicians in the western Mediterranean as 'Punic'. It is important to note immediately that 'no-one in the surviving evidence describe themselves as "Punic", and in the later Latin tradition the aspirated form *phoenix* is directly associated, after the fashion of normal, topographical, regional ethnics in the Greek tradition and indeed as per epigraphic usage in the Greek east, with the region of the Levantine coast known as Phoenicia.'[56] Now the area that the Greeks called Phoenicia includes a large part of the eastern Mediterranean coast that ran from the south of Ugarit in Syria to the south of Mount Carmel in Israel.[57] It was highly improbable for the Greeks to distinguish between the inhabitants of the different Phoenician polities, i.e. those of Tyre and Sidon. The common cultural features of the Phoenicians were their language, their religion, and the monarchic institution for each of their city-states.[58] When discussing the identity of the Phoenicians, it is better to remove the term 'Punic' from the equation. In origin there was only one term both in Greek and Latin to refer to the Phoenicians, namely *phoenix*, which was at first identical to the term *poenus*.[59] Thus, in origin, these two terms referred both to the Levantine and western Phoenicians, and it was only in later times that *phoenix* stood for the Levantine Phoenicians, while *poenus* was used with reference to the western Phoenicians.[60] The rare cases in Greek epigraphy where *phoenix* is used as an ethnic label do this in connection with the *region* of the Levant, and this is neither surprising nor uncommon when we remember that this is 'an example of a regional *or supra-polis ethnic, typically based upon a toponym* [my emphasis]'.[61] So the

[56] Prag 2014: 21.
[57] Sader 2019: 147.
[58] Elayi 2018: 6-7.
[59] *Poenus* in Latin was at first used as an adjective referring to a Phoenician; as an adjective, it could also mean Carthaginian, i.e. 'of Carthage' (as a Phoenician colony). Eventually in Latin the word *poenus* was used as a noun meaning 'a Carthaginian' (Glare 2012: 1536).
[60] Prag 2014: 13.
[61] Prag 2014: 17.

term Phoenicians refers to the inhabitants of Phoenicia, just as its Semitic equivalent, Canaanites, signifies the residents of Canaan irrespective of their specific ethnic group. It is also interesting to note that as far back as 1891 William Robertson Smith was very much aware that those people whom the Greeks called Phoenician were essentially Canaanites; certainly 'the name of Astarte (pl. Ashtaroth) is derived from the Babylonian Ishtar, but it was through the *Phoenicians or maritime Canaanites* [my emphasis] that she reached Greece'.[62]

Thus, the Phoenicians are Canaanites, but this does not mean all Canaanites are Phoenician. It is a commonplace that *c.* 1200 BCE the Levant underwent major cultural and political upheavals and changes. It is important in this regard to distinguish between the southern Levant, where around this time we find both Philistines and Israelites, and the central and northern Levant, where, in contrast, the city-states are here 'defined by their resilience, cultural continuity, and continual seafaring and commercial activities, resulting in a shared material culture that has been termed "Phoenician"'.[63] As shown in the introduction of this chapter, Herodotus (1,1 and 7.89) tells us that the Phoenicians had originally come from the Red Sea area (meaning the Persian Gulf); by the early 2nd millennium BCE at the latest they had migrated to the Levant. If based on a historical tradition, this information could strengthen the distinction we have just made, i.e. that all Phoenicians are Canaanites (in the sense that they are linked to the areas in Canaan, as just referred to above) but that not all Canaanites are Phoenicians. Perhaps this explains why the Phoenician city-states could at times side with other Phoenician city-states, or against them, in different wars, i.e. because they belonged to various groups originally. Thus, for example, the fleets of Arwad, Byblos, Sidon, and Cyprus were on the side of Alexander the Great when he besieged Tyre, but Sidon aided Tyre. Curtius Rufus recounts[64] that during Alexander's siege of Tyre 6,000 Tyrians fell on the defensive walls of the city, 2,000 were crucified, whereas 15,000 were secretly saved by the Sidonians.[65]

From the foregoing observations, we could say the Phoenicians are direct descendants of the Late Bronze Age inhabitants of Canaan in the central and northern Levant, who include some foreign arrivals, i.e. the 'Sea People' and other migrants, who, Herodotus claims (as just pointed out) had come to this land from the area of the Indian Ocean. In turn, the Punic people[66] are the direct descendants of Phoenicians who had mixed with local populations in central and western Mediterranean regions and developed specific cultural traits from the 6th century BCE onwards. Scholars often use the term Carthaginian instead of Punic, however, even in this case we encounter a problem of terminology, since 'if "Punic" replaces "Phoenician" as the general term for the

[62] Smith 1995: 88.
[63] Killebrew 2019: 39.
[64] Curtius Rufus 4. 12-18
[65] Morstadt 2015: 91 and references there.
[66] The term 'Punic' is self-ascribed in antiquity only once before the time of Augustine (Prag 2006: 29).

western Mediterranean subsequent to the mid-sixth century, then that which is "Carthaginian" is "Punic" but that which is "Punic" is not necessarily "Carthaginian" (and ultimately all is still "Phoenician")'.[67]

The 'sense of place' discussed above remained important for the identity of the Phoenicians throughout their history, and therefore it is important to note the change in geographical names when Rome conquered Phoenicia in 64 BCE. The Romans called Phoenicia Syro-Phoenicia (hence the Syro-Phoenician woman of Mark 7: 26 whom Matthew calls Canaanite) to distinguish it from the area around Carthage, which they called Libo-Phoenicia.[68] It is a commonplace for New Testament scholars that Matthew wrote his gospel for a Jewish community in Syria who had converted to Christianity, and his use of the term 'Canaanite' betrays the Semitic way of referring to someone who hailed from what those such as Mark, who wrote his gospel for non-Jewish Christians, called 'Phoenician' (in Mark's case Syro-Phoenician). Indeed, the 'original self-ascribed name of the eastern Phoenicians was Canaanites'.[69] This is evidenced not only by Augustine's *Epistulae ad Romanos* (13) but also by a late Punic inscription (KAI 116,3) where a Carthaginian or a Phoenician from Phoenicia in Carthage labelled himself as 'Canaanite' – literally 'the man of Canaan'.[70]

As shown above, the Phoenicians had no supra-polis political identity, but they did have a sense of belonging to something that went beyond their local city-state. Besides the instances already mentioned, it is highly interesting to note that the common factors the Phoenicians harked back to were linked to the land of Canaan, and it was not only the Phoenicians in their motherland who did this. Hence, in the 4th century BCE there was a revival of the cult of the god Ṣid 'among the Phoenicians of the western Mediterranean who began to redefine themselves as "Sidonians", descendants of this eastern Mediterranean ancestor, in order to counterbalance their accelerating absorption into a non-Phoenician (indigenous and Greek, or Roman), world'.[71]

The fact that the Phoenicians could also refer to themselves as Sidonians when they wanted to underscore their general common identity lies in the fact that in the Early Iron Age Sidon was the most powerful of all the Phoenician cities, thereby replacing the dominance that Byblos and Tyre had during the Late Bronze Age. During the

[67] Prag 2006: 6.

[68] Ernst 2008: 595.

[69] Prag 2006: 13.

[70] The terms 'Canaanite' and 'Phoenician' could be interchangeable; 'Die beiden Begriffe "Kanaanäer" und "Phönizier" dürften also die gleiche Region und ihre Bewohner in den unterschiedlichen Sprachen [Canaanite and Greek] gemeint haben' (Morstadt 2015: 40 and references there). English Translation: 'The two terms "Canaanites" and "Phoenicians" must have indicated the same region and its inhabitants in the respective different languages [Canaanite and Greek].' However, see further on in this chapter where I argue that every Phoenician was a Canaanite, but that not every Canaanite was a Phoenician.

[71] Peckham 2014: 533 and references there.

12th and 11th centuries BCE Sidon emerged as the leading and most powerful Phoenician city and the Sidonians ruled a large area in Phoenicia, having control over 'other Phoenician cities (most notably Tyre)'; 'in fact, due to the pre-eminence of Sidon at this time the term "Sidonian" was often used as a generic designation for Canaanites or Phoenicians'.[72] It thus comes as no surprise that, although the title of the Phoenician monarchs was always king, namely *mlk*, + the name of the city/kingdom in question (e.g. *mlk gbl* = King of Byblos, see KAI 10 and KAI 11), Sidon was an exception in that each king of this city-state called himself 'King of the Sidonians' (see KAI 13 and KAI 14) thus implying they were also ruling over Phoenicians from other city-states.[73] It is important to note that it was refugees from Sidon who had founded Tyre. In fact, Hiram II, king of Tyre, is referred to as 'king of the Sidonians' by the governor of Carthage in Cyprus (KAI 31), and it should be pointed out that very likely this is the same Hiram mentioned in an inscription of Tiglathpileser III, whom the latter calls 'Hiram of Tyre'.[74] In this inscription the title 'King of the Sidonians' 'does not specifically refer here to Tyrian overlordship of Sidon, but goes back to an earlier period when Sidon was the leading power and Sidonians became established as a name for Phoenicians in general'.[75] Moreover, a broken votive warship of marble with an incomplete inscription on it dating from the 6th century B|CE shows (also on the basis of a reconstruction of the missing section of the inscription) that 'the ship is the symbol of Tyre, that the king is its captain, and that the people of Tyre, ethnically Sidonians, are its crew'.[76]

In Sidon archaeologists have unearthed a temple on the 'so-called college site' that was in use from the 13th century BCE up to the 8th century BCE, revealing 'ten phases of occupation' and showing 'continuity in both plan and cult from the Late Bronze Age into the Iron Age period'.[77] Hence those we are inclined to label Canaanites (in the Late Bronze Age) and Phoenicians (in the Iron Age) are in fact essentially one and the same people, although (as shown above), in the Early Iron Age new foreign groups were incorporated into those inhabiting various areas of Canaan. Indeed, 'inclusiveness was the trademark of the Phoenician cities. Their ancient, erudite, Canaanite cultural consciousness and habits of mind were prepared for the original, or even unexpected; for the curious and the clever.'[78]

The evidence marshalled or referred to in this chapter time and time again showed that the majority of scholars either imply or explicitly state that, when discussing the Phoenicians, they in fact have in mind the Canaanites of central and northern Canaan

[72] Woolmer 2019: 34.
[73] Sader 2019: 104.
[74] Oppenheim 1969: 283.
[75] Gibson 1982: 68.
[76] Peckham 2014: 463 and references there.
[77] Sader 2019: 198.
[78] Peckham 2014: 1.

from *c.* 1200 BCE onwards, as well as their expansion into the central and western Mediterranean. In view of this, Brian R. Doak's view can be considered one of the best ways of dealing with the problem of the identity of the Phoenicians, writing that 'scholars increasingly question the ambiguity of the term "Phoenicians" and use it as a shorthand – a term more specific than calling them "Canaanites" but less annoying than having to call them "Canaanites living in a set of cities along the northern [and central] Levantine coast who shared a language and material culture in the Iron I-II period and who also developed an organized system of colonies in the western [and central] Mediterranean."'[79]

Doak's stance shows us that scholars employ the term 'Phoenicians' to refer to the 'Canaanites' so as to avoid having to specify which Canaanites they are referring to. As I already discussed above, the problem becomes even more acute if we mix in terms such as 'Punic'. Are we to use the term 'Phoenician' (and/or 'Punic') or 'Canaanites' in order to signify those Canaanites 'living in a set of cities along the northern [and central] Levantine coast who shared a language and material culture in the Iron I-II period and who also developed an organized system of colonies in the western [and central] Mediterranean'?[80] This whole problem can easily turn into a logical impasse, and it seems that (on the available evidence) the best way forward is to keep in mind that the Phoenicians are in fact 'maritime Canaanites' of the 1st millennium BCE.[81] As discussed in this chapter, all Phoenicians are Canaanites, but not all those who inhabited Canaan (= Canaanites) are Phoenician. The label 'maritime Canaanites' has the advantage of being able to signify the Phoenicians of the Iron Age in the Levant, as well as in the central and western Mediterranean, without excluding the relevant links to their Canaanite predecessors of the Bronze Age. The late Punic inscription (KAI 116, 3) mentioned above, where a Carthaginian or a Phoenician from Phoenicia in Carthage referred to himself as 'Canaanite', literally 'the man of Canaan', is highly interesting since it shows that the 'Phoenicians' viewed themselves as 'Canaanites'. As I have already pointed out elsewhere, 'it is clear that for the Phoenicians *geographical origins* were tantamount to *group identity*'.[82]

The foregoing self-ascription of a Phoenician or Carthaginian man as a 'Canaanite' is helpful also in view of the 'Phoenician' inscriptions we shall be examining in this book. It is a commonplace that in certain instances it can be difficult to distinguish between a 'Phoenician' text from the Levant and an early 'Punic' one from the central Mediterranean. In such cases the overall umbrella term 'Canaanite' can be useful. However, it is important to keep in mind that, as shown above, every 'Phoenician' is a 'Canaanite', although not every 'Canaanite' (which is basically a geographical and not an ethnic term, just as, after all, 'Phoenician' is) is a 'Phoenician', since different

[79] Doak 2020: 174.
[80] Doak 2020: 174.
[81] Smith 1995: 88.
[82] See Frendo 2018: 76 for the discussion surrounding this point and the use of the *nisbe* in Phoenician.

ethnic groups dwelt in the land of Canaan (or Phoenicia as the Greeks would have it with respect to the coastal areas of the Canaanites), and since not all Canaanites were 'maritime Canaanites'. However, the evidence adduced and discussed in this chapter allows us to employ either the term 'Canaanites' or 'Phoenicians', depending on whether we want to use a general term with reference to the inhabitants of Canaan, or to specify we are referring to the coastal Canaanites mostly present on the shores of Lebanon and who expanded to the central and western Mediterranean.

Recent research appears to confirm the foregoing conclusions. With reference to the Phoenician kingdoms in the Early Iron Age, Carolina López-Ruiz tells us that 'these *coastal Canaanites* [my emphasis] maintained the basic religious, political, and cultural institutions of their ancestors that were to be a pillar of Phoenician identity in the first millennium'.[83]

We know that the above-mentioned inscriptions were written in a consonantal alphabet, often without any word division, without any punctuation, and in general without any structural layout. It is also well understood that it was the 'maritime Canaanites' who passed on the alphabet to the Greeks, thus to enhance our understanding of the Phoenician inscriptions we will be examining it is helpful first to consider the hallmarks of communication in the ancient world, with a focus on writing and reading – both with respect to prose and verse.

[83] López-Ruiz 2021: 284, 349 n. 10. See also her other highly interesting comments, e.g. when she mentions the various testimonies 'of the use of Canaan/Canaanite for their [the Phoenicians'] collective or their language' (López-Ruiz 2021: 17, 320 n. 40).

Chapter 3

The Hallmarks of Writing and Reading in Antiquity: Prose and Verse

It is important to consider the general hallmarks of speaking, writing, and reading in the Greek and Roman world, as well as in antiquity in general, since this will throw light on the principles of interpretation we need to keep in mind and employ when examining the 1st-millennium BCE select Phoenician texts from the Maltese archipelago. The first thing to note is that when the 'maritime Canaanites' passed on the alphabet to the Greeks, the latter turned the Semitic alphabet into one of signs 'not only for consonants (*áphōna* "mute", like writing itself) but also for vowels (*phōnḗenta* "vocal", unlike writing)'.[1] This means that a person who knew the Greek *alphabet* could read a text in Greek even if they did not understand the *language*, whereas someone who knew the Phoenician alphabet could not read a text in Phoenician unless they also knew the language. Although reading aloud was the norm in the classical world and later, silent reading was also known. M.B. Parkes reminds us that Isidore of Seville (*c.* 560-636 CE) regarded the letters of the alphabet as 'signs *without* sound' and thus these letters were in fact 'signs of things'. For Isidore 'letters are regarded as having a special power to convey silently the sayings of persons not present',[2] and this indicates clearly that we are here dealing with silent reading.

Although silent reading was known in antiquity, the ideal remained that of reading aloud. Parks reminds us that 'the ideal was a kind of expressive declamation with well modulated [*sic*] pronunciation, in which the text was carefully phrased (*distincta*) by means of appropriate pauses.'[3] For the Greeks the spoken word was considered to be animate (*émpsukhos*) whereas the written word was deemed to be inanimate (*ápsukhon*). This is the likely explanation why Socrates had refused to write.[4] Like the Phoenicians, the Greeks too used *scriptio continua*[5] and it appears this is what

[1] Svenbro 1993: 141 n. 99.

[2] Parkes 2016: 21. Parkes also reminds us that for Augustine, who follows Aristotle, the letters of the alphabet are 'signs of sounds, and these sounds in our speech are themselves signs of things we think' (Parkes 2016: 21 and 122 n. 16).

[3] Parkes 2016: 9.

[4] Svenbro 1993: 145, who, in n. 2 on the same page, states that to 'fix speech in writing, consequently, would be to kill it; accordingly, the Master [Pythagoras] does not write'. Plato did write – however, for him 'writing has no status at all independent of oral speech; it is simply *logos* "committed to writing" (*gegramménos*)' (Svenbro 1993: 89).

[5] The Latin words *Scriptio continua* (literally meaning 'continual script') refer to those texts drawn up with no spaces between words and without punctuation. However, from the outset it should be pointed out that we do have Semitic inscriptions (including Phoenician ones, such as KAI 1, Tafel I and CIS I, 132) where we do find both interpuncts and spaces between words. Interpuncts consist of points or other

made 'reading aloud a virtual necessity'.[6] A text was thus incomplete without its having been read aloud; in fact, 'the text is thus more than the sum of the alphabetic signs of which it is composed. These signs will guide the voice that will permit the vocalization of the text, its sonorous realization'.[7] Aristotle distinguishes between the voice (*phōnḗ*), which only a creature with a soul has, and other sounds which inanimate creatures emit; thus, humans have a voice, whereas inanimate creatures have only sound, but no voice.[8] It is the latter that conveys meaning to a written text.

In view of the aforementioned points, it is important to underscore that those who listened to the reading of a text were the latter's listeners and not its readers. Jesper Svenbro notes that some dictionaries of classical Greek are wrong in saying that a text's listeners were its readers.[9] However, Franco Montanari correctly points out that, inter alia, the verb *ἀκούω* can also mean 'to hear it said', 'to hear it spoken'; 'to perceive or understand by listening to a reading'.[10] Svenbro tells us that the Greeks highly valued words spoken out loud, both when it came to reading in general and in legal matters – another clear indication that reading aloud was the norm in ancient Greece.[11] In this context, it is also important, however, to signal the fact that 'the listener' in many Greek texts does not always necessarily refer to someone who is listening to another person reading a text out loud; obviously, it is not always clear whether 'the listener' signifies a reader who is reading aloud to his or herself, or whether they are listening to the voice of someone else reading the text.[12] In any case, the important point is that the text was read out loud.

Notwithstanding the foregoing points, we should not forget that in antiquity silent reading was also practised, although this was not the norm. B.M.W. Knox reminds us that, in his *Tusculanae disptutationes* 5.116, Cicero remarks that 'much greater pleasure can be experienced in reading them [songs] than in hearing them', which clearly shows that silent reading was practised alongside the general norm of reading texts out loud.[13] Even inscriptions could be read silently,[14] and from Athens in the 4th century BCE there is evidence also of the silent reading of a letter in the presence of others.[15] The first piece of clear evidence for silent reading comes from Greece in the 5th century BCE. *Hippolytus*, the drama by Euripides dated to 428 BCE, depicts Theseus seeing a tablet hanging from the hand of Phaedra and he breaks it to see the writing.

signs (such as vertical strokes) to signal word division.

6 Svenbro 1993: 45.

7 Svenbro 1993: 45.

8 Svenbro 1993: 139 and references there.

9 Svenbro 1993: 46 and n. 8 there.

10 Montanari 2015: 73.

11 Svenbro 1993: 122.

12 Hendrickson 1929: 189-190.

13 Knox 1968: 427.

14 Knox 1968: 430.

15 Knox 1968: 432 and reference there.

The chorus then asks Theseus what the tablet says, and he reveals the contents 'not by reading it aloud, but by summing it up. He has clearly read it *silently* while the chorus was singing'.[16] However, it is important to note that *such silent reading was an exception in ancient Greece*; readers needed their voices to crack the texts in front of them, the hallmarks of which were *scriptio continua*, phonetic spelling, and colloquial syntax (this would be 'the case of any Greek sentence before the emergence of a written idiom perceptibly distinct from spoken language').[17] In essence, the Greeks remained 'poor in letters' and they thus had 'to decipher the texts that they read with the help of their voices, a complex and cumbrous way of reading made necessary by the *scriptio continua*'.[18] By the time of Augustine, it became clear that, although reading texts out loud was still the norm, silent reading was also practised. In fact, in his *Confessions* (8.12), Augustine tells us that he himself read Paul's letter to the Romans '*in silentio*'. In antiquity silent reading 'was only strange, not necessarily difficult or incredible'.[19] And yet, when silent reading is 'alluded to, a special motivation or comment seems to be present to explain it as something *anomalous* [my emphasis]'.[20] In fact 'texts were usually read aloud' up to the 6th century CE, but with the introduction of silent reading writing passed on information to the mind directly through the eyes.[21]

The evidence for reading texts aloud in ancient Greece is also borne out by the various words for 'to read' in classical Greek. Thus, for example, the word *némein*, which per se means 'to distribute', is also used to signify 'to distribute the words of a text orally', thus meaning 'to read'. Sophocles' fragment 144 shows that, before leaving for Troy, the Achaean chiefs give this order to those 'seated on the throne and who hold the tablets of writing' in their hand: 'read [*néme*] the list so that we can see if any of those who swore the oath are absent!'[22] In the context of oral transmission, *némein* thus means 'to read', namely to split the words of a text written in *scriptio continua* and distribute them according to the meaning that the distribution of letters reveals. When from the 6th century CE onwards silent reading eventually replaced reading aloud, it was necessary to introduce punctuation to 'distribute' the letters of a text correctly. Reading texts aloud had made it clear, for example, where one had to make a pause (whether long or short) in the text being read, with the consequent bearing that such a pause had on the meaning of the text itself. Many functions that reading aloud had performed now were in need of a substitute; one of the solutions was punctuation, which solved 'structural uncertainties in a text', and pointed out

[16] Svenbro 1993: 163 and references there.
[17] Svenbro 1993: 166.
[18] Svenbro 1993: 116.
[19] Hendrickson 1929: 186.
[20] Hendrickson 1929: 193.
[21] Parkes 2016: 1.
[22] Svenbro 1993: 110 n.3.

'nuances of semantic significance which might otherwise not be conveyed at all, or would at best be much more difficult for a reader to figure out'.[23]

The main issue with reading out aloud texts written in *scriptio continua* is to figure out how readers could deal with such texts. Reading a text in continual script did not pose an insurmountable problem when we remember research has shown that 'speech is not made of words separated by silence, but of sound streams separated by breathing pauses', and that 'it comes in spurts of sound, about two seconds long, called intonation units, which stress one key word and then end with a tiny pause before moving on to the next two-second spurt. Speech has to divide up into these bundles to be understood'.[24] In view of this, we have to account for *scriptio continua* in the light of orality and oral transmission. Indeed, 'it is writing that begins to resolve words into distinct entities',[25] and therefore inscriptions in continual script are *not* to be viewed as an advanced stage of writing but as an early phase of writing in societies that were much more characterised by orality rather than literacy. This means that a great responsibility lay with the reader and when reading a text in continual script, the lector had to pin down letters, syllables, words, and ultimately reach, 'through further stages to comprehension of the whole work'.[26] Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria* 1.1.34 tells us that readers had to divide their attention 'so that their eyes are occupied in one way and the voice another'.[27] This meant the voice of the lectors was occupied with the piece of text that preceded what their eyes were looking at – their eyes had to be one step ahead of their voice.[28]

The foregoing means that reading in antiquity was tantamount to interpretation. The pauses that lectors introduced in their reading are a proof of this. In ancient Rome readers of literary texts belonged to the 'social elite', while the scribes were 'freedman or slaves', and the lectors had to first understand a text before reading it, otherwise confusion and misunderstanding would ensue.[29] Thus *scriptio continua* also meant that it provided texts that were neutral and open to various interpretations, albeit not to an infinite number. One way of controlling the number of different interpretations of a text was via the introduction of punctuation, as mentioned above. It was the pauses in a text shown via punctuation, for example, that indicated the 'received interpretation' of a text; Augustine 'foresees a need for punctuation to direct the response of the reader'.[30] It is clear that texts written in *scriptio continua* could at times be misinterpreted. The 4th-century CE grammarian Servius criticised his colleague

[23] Parkes 2016: 1.
[24] Moran 2018: 96-97.
[25] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 447 n.294.
[26] Parkes 2016: 10.
[27] As cited in Parkes 2016: 9.
[28] Parkes 2016: 10.
[29] Parkes 2016: 11.
[30] Parkes 2016: 67.

Donatus for incorrectly reading Aeneid 2.798 thus: 'collectam ex Ilio pubem', i.e. 'a people gathered from Troy', whereas the correct reading (that makes sense in the light of the context) should be 'collectam exilio pubem' ('a people gathered for exile).'[31]

It is of interest to note that the Etruscans separated words by using interpuncts ('a point or symbol placed between words, especially in the earliest Latin manuscripts'[32]). The latter Roman practice (following Etruscan custom) died out by the end of the 1st century CE, and the Romans then imitated the Greek scribes and wrote in *scriptio continua*. As we shall see later, the Phoenicians have given us inscriptions in *scriptio continua*, but, as already pointed out above, we also have Phoenician inscriptions with spaces between words, as well as with word division via interpuncts. Before the 6th century CE, punctuation (and thus phrasing) was not supplied by the authors, nor by the scribes – that was the job of the lectors. The result was that 'ancient scribes presented the text on the page in a way which afforded the reader far less assistance than he would have needed to read it at first sight'.[33]

The evidence marshalled thus far in this chapter shows us that, right up to the 6th century CE, writing in ancient Greece and Rome, and in antiquity in general, had hallmarks (such as *scriptio continua*, lack of punctuation, and the highly important role readers played in the understanding of texts) which can be better understood in the light of the importance of orality that characterised the societies in question. In antiquity, as in our own contemporary world, texts were broadly divided into prose or verse, and it is mainly the latter category that needs further elucidation.The abovementioned difficulties linked to prose texts written in *scriptio continua* proved not to be insurmountable and we can see how well readers took in their stride texts written in continual script. One could ask, however, whether the same can be said when it comes to verse. The main issue here is to try unravelling how verse (which nowadays we associate with a specific format) could have been understood if written in *scriptio continua*. The same clearly applies to any verse written in *scriptio continua* which the Phoenicians might have bequeathed to us in the Maltese archipelago.

Before even attempting to tackle the problem just mentioned, it is important first to keep in mind that even in modern and contemporary societies things are by no means clear when it comes to distinguishing between verse and prose. Samuel Taylor Coleridge reminds us that 'the definition of good Prose is – proper words in their proper places; – of good Verse-the most proper words in their proper places. The propriety is in either case relative.'[34] Nowadays it is customary for some critics to maintain there is even a difference between poetry and verse, although not everybody

[31] Parkes 2016: 10, 117 n.26.
[32] Parkes 2016: 304.
[33] Parkes 2016: 10.
[34] Coleridge 1884: 220.

upholds this distinction. However, for those who prefer holding onto it, verse would be viewed as being 'merely clever or mechanical', whereas poetry would be 'elevated or inspired'.[35] This is precisely why certain dictionaries would claim that a poem is to be viewed not only as 'a composition in verse'[36] but also as 'a composition of high beauty of thought or language and artistic form, typically but not necessarily in verse',[37] the latter being 'a line of metre',[38] which is in turn said to be 'that regulated succession of certain groups of syllables (long and short, stressed and unstressed) in which poetry is usually written'.[39] It is clear not all verse is poetry, and thus beneficial to maintain a distinction between them.

We are confronted, therefore, with three important terms – prose, verse, and poetry. The latter two are both non-prose and thus are be distinguished from prose, while also keeping in mind (as just pointed out) that, although poetry is typically drawn up in verse, this is not always the case. The main point is to distinguish between prose on one hand, and poetry/verse on the other. As far as poetry/verse is concerned, it is interesting to note that A.E. Stallings prefers in general to use the term verse, 'which, if it rises to a certain level might also be Poetry'.[40] I opt to follow Stallings in such a way, that when dealing with non-prose I shall employ the term 'verse' unless there is clear evidence of a text that is 'elevated and inspired'. It is the latter that counts in poetry; in fact, Stallings refers to a conversation in *Middlemarch* between Fred Vincy and his sister Rosamond, who had objected to Fred's use of slang. Fred objects to his sister's remark, saying 'I beg your pardon: correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of poets'.[41] Stallings loves Fred's remark 'because the word "slang", etymologically murky, is itself disreputable, full of subversive power, the verve of the vernacular. Poetry is the strongest slang of all'.[42] What is important is that 'a poetic text is a complex of structures' which includes (in written poems) layout, rhyme, and punctuation.[43]

However, it is rhythm that is generally viewed as one of the main hallmarks of verse, and it is usually linked to metre. Yet, this aspect of measurement need not be the only criterion for determining the rhythm of verse. The online *Collins Dictionary* surely gives a very satisfactory definition of rhythm as being 'a regular series of sounds or movements',[44] without listing the above-mentioned regular pattern and thus the number of long and short, or stressed and unstressed syllables. The emphasis on

[35] Baldick 1990: 173.
[36] Kirkpatrick 1983: 990.
[37] Kirkpatrick 1983: 990.
[38] Kirkpatrick 1983: 1444.
[39] Kirkpatrick 1983: 792.
[40] Stallings 2016.
[41] As cited in Stallings 2016.
[42] Stallings 2016.
[43] Parkes 2016: 114.
[44] *Collins English Dictionary*, rhythm, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/rhythm.

'sounds or movements' allows us to envisage a situation where it becomes perfectly clear that 'all metre is rhythm, but not all rhythm is metre'.[45] This is so because (as already mentioned above) all human discourse (whether prose or verse) is rhythmic, even if not always metric. As Dobbs-Allsopp states with reference to the citation from Jousse's work just listed – 'the explosion of sound that constitutes human speech is inherently and necessarily rhythmic'.[46] The result is that a poem can be non-metric, while prose can be metric without being poetic; as Gerhard Fecht has pointed out, language in metre can be poetic, but this is not necessarily so.[47]

The foregoing points indicate why it is very difficult to define poetry and pin down its essential characteristic. Pinning down such a hallmark would help us understand the broad distinction between prose on one hand, and verse and poetry on the other. The very moot question of what constitutes poetry 'depends heavily on the particular theoretical disposition assumed', but it seems that (with the exception of some modern genres, i.e. the 'prose poem'), 'the line [verse] is the single differentia of poetry on which almost all critics and poets agree'.[48] But this is not a fully satisfactory solution in view of the fact that there are non-poetic texts (such as names and commodities), e.g. in Classical Hebrew, that were set down in lines, such as in Joshua 12: 9-24.[49] The situation is complex since the point just raised shows clearly that there must be something else besides the line that constitutes the identity of poetry. And yet, apart from the line, in Classical Hebrew, for example, 'there are no intrinsic markers or clear-cut boundaries between poems and nonpoems, but only a cluster of intersecting and always local variables that signal the presence of poetry'.[50] Indeed, 'the poetic is Protean; it assumes many shapes and guises',[51] while 'revelling in its ambiguity, [it] earns its power from its indefinability'.[52]

Thus, the line often held pride of place in helping readers 'detect' poetry. In fact, in antiquity scribes did present the rhythmic structure of poetry by laying out each verse on a separate line, and readers could *see* the 'patterns of stichic verse'.[53] However, things were not always so. In view of the practice of using *scriptio continua* in classical times, it should come as no surprise that we also have crystal-clear evidence of poetry, the format of which exhibits no lines at all. The 4th-century BCE manuscript of Timotheus demonstrates this, containing a poem not presented in visual lines. This does not make this piece of Greek writing 'any less poetic' since 'it is

[45] Jousse 1990: 240 as cited in Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 400 n. 58.
[46] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 401 n. 61.
[47] Fecht 1990: 40.
[48] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 551.
[49] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 551.
[50] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 551.
[51] Vassallo 2017: 207.
[52] Callaghan 2017: 210.
[53] Parkes 2016: 97.

just that the reading cues provided by lineation are absent and that any visual effects accompanying (graphic) lineation are necessarily left unrealized'.[54] So what clues are needed to detect poetry in antiquity when visual lineation is absent?

The first thing to note is that it could very well be the case that there were times when there was no need to write down poetry using visual lineation. In the Middle Ages, for example, although each verse of poetry was generally laid out on a separate line, this was not the case when the melody of a hymn was familiar. In such an instance, 'scribes could copy the verses of a hymn stanza across the page or column like a prose text'.[55] If we consider texts that are closer to Canaanite writings (both geographically and from the viewpoint of linguistic affinity), we see that even in this case there are cues other than the visual line to help readers realise they are dealing with verse or poetry. In Akkadian poetry, for example, cuneiform wedges were used 'to separate the two poetic lines on a columnar line', while sometimes we find that 'one line per column was used, with additional spacing between signs when the number of words was insufficient to fill up the line completely'.[56] Notwithstanding such cues, it is important to remember that a poem really occurs when it is read, and therefore sound, orality, and audition are very important.[57]

However, when a hymn or poem was not familiar and it was not laid out visually in lines, what cues did readers have to understand they were dealing with verse? Pattern and structure come into play. The line plays a crucial role even in what is known as 'free verse',[58] but the point is that 'a line may be determined in almost any way, and since lines may be grouped on the page in any fashion, it is the mode of variation itself which is significant'.[59] There are various types of 'free verse', but the crucial point is that each type has 'in common one principle', one example being that which 'makes each line a grammatical unit', such as a clause, or a phrase.[60] This means that visual lineation as we know it, gives way to pattern and structure. This situation could be linked to the fact that all poetry was oral in origin, being 'sung or chanted; poetic scheme and musical pattern coincided, or were sometimes identical'.[61] The verse of the Hebrew Bible can help us to appreciate better the structure of Northwest Semitic verse. John Hollander realised that parallelism plays an important role in identifying biblical poetic rhythm, with respect to which he writes – 'its song is a

[54] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 174 and fig. 8.
[55] Parkes 2016: 98.
[56] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 34.
[57] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 556 and reference there.
[58] Baldick (1990: 88) defines free verse as 'a kind of poetry that does not conform to any regular metre: the length of its lines is irregular, as is its use of rhyme – if any. Instead of a regular metrical pattern it uses more flexible cadences or rhythmic groupings, sometimes supported by anaphora and other devices of repetition.'
[59] Hollander 1989: 26.
[60] Hollander 1989: 26.
[61] Hollander 1989: 4.

music of matching, its rhythm a kind of paralleling'.[62] It is, in fact, parallelism that helps in fixing the end of a line of verse even when there is no visual lineation. This was 'a very common oral technique'.[63]

When it comes to prosody, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines parallelism as the 'correspondence, in sense or construction, of successive clauses or passages'.[64] Dobbs-Allsopp reminds us that Robert Lowth himself does not use one 'set of terms' to describe parallelism, 'but is rather gesturing to a range of observed correspondences'.[65] James Engell tells us that the verse of the Hebrew Bible has 'nothing to do with syllable, stress, or quantity in their usual senses, but rather with *recurring patterns* [my emphasis] of syntactic and grammatical units, with couplings of phrase that repeat, amplify, or specify meaning in strongly rhythmical patterns'.[66] This shows us clearly that recurring patterns (which could very well simply be syntactic patterns) can signal the presence of verse even when no visual lineation is present. As shown above, the parallelism between such patterns helps fix the end of a line of verse. Hence, the parallelism between sentences is not restricted to semantics; essentially, 'syntax and word order are critical to his [Lowth's] understanding of the structural core of "parallelism of sentences".'[67]

As already mentioned, in antiquity texts were generally read out loud, and research has shown that 'speech is not made of words separated by silence, but of sound streams separated by breathing pauses' and 'it comes in spurts of sound, about two seconds long, called intonation units, which stress one key word and then end with a tiny pause before moving on to the next two-second spurt. Speech has to divide up into these bundles to be understood'.[68] This helps us understand how the aforementioned recurring patterns that emerge from syntactic parallelism, for example, show readers when to detect the end of a line and make the necessary pauses. In this regard, we need to remember that it is not correct to split up cultures into oral and written, but rather into oral and oral plus written. Clearly, 'while writing may replace oral interaction in certain contexts, it does not diminish the basically oral-aural nature of linguistic acts.'[69]

Hence it is the 'sentence logic', the 'meaningful chunks' of speech flow that helped readers in antiquity read verse even when no graphic lineation was provided. When a poem was metrical then a pause and thus silence indicated the termination of a line

[62] Hollander 1989: 26.
[63] Dobbs-Allsopp 2021: 12 and references there.
[64] *Oxford English Dictionary*, parallelism, https://www-oed-com.ejournals.um.edu.mt/view/Entry/137469?redirectedFrom=parallelism#eid.
[65] Dobbs-Allsopp 2021: 14.
[66] Engell 1999: 131.
[67] Dobbs-Allsopp 2021: 17.
[68] Moran 2018: 96-97.
[69] Goody 1987: xii.

(in this case after the 'designated number' of either stresses or syllables had been reached.[70] However, when the above-mentioned free verse was in play, then the end of a line usually overlapped 'with the end of discrete syntactic units'.[71] So it is the period and the pause that coincide with the end of a line. Abnormal word order could also provide a cue that we are dealing with the end of a line of verse.[72]

The foregoing points help us appreciate how verse was read out loud properly, even when no visual lineation was at hand. It is important to keep in mind that even when written texts (including verse) were available, orality-aurality (as shown above) still played a very important role in society. In largely oral cultures, the notion of 'word' was different to ours. In fact, the unit of meaning was not necessarily 'word' as we understand it today in our cultures. Raymond F. Person has shown that the notion of 'word' in 'a primarily oral culture *may* [my emphasis] be equivalent to what we could call a line, a stanza, or even the entire epic'.[73] One clear example comes from ancient Israel, where the word *dāḇār* did not simply stand for one word, but it could also signify 'utterance', 'speech', or 'message'. Deuteronomy passages 4:13 and 10:4 instruct us that the 'ten words' refer to the ten commandments, which clearly contain much more than simply ten words.[74] In reality, we see that in the cultures of the ancient Near East, for example, 'the oral and the written exist in tandem, and that the writing culture is in various ways framed by assumptions typical of oral words'.[75]

The aforementioned link between oral and written literature is important and it shows us that 'they slide into each other both in the present and over many centuries of historical development, and there are innumerable cases of poetry that has both "oral" and "written" elements'.[76] Everywhere, prose 'emerges after verse' and this accounts for the fact that the phrases of oral poetry are reflected both in written verse and written prose. Notably, as the two latter categories 'emerge out of oral poetic traditions' we see that they have a tendency 'to continue using traditional oral style and idioms'.[77]

The fact that prose everywhere emerged after verse and that the style and idiom of oral poetry linger both in written poetry and in written prose poses a problem as to what really distinguishes verse from prose. biblical Hebrew provides a good example in answer to this question, since biblical narrative/biblical prose uses a limited amount of vocabulary, whereas we find 'that there are many terms that appear in

[70] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 44.
[71] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 45.
[72] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 48.
[73] Person 1998: 603.
[74] Person 1998: 604.
[75] Niditch 1997: 69.
[76] Finnegan 1977: 24.
[77] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 243.

poetry but never in prose'.[78] This is an illustration of Coleridge's definition of prose and verse we cited earlier, i.e. that 'the definition of good Prose is – proper words in their proper places; – of good Verse – the most proper words in their proper places. The propriety is in either case relative';[79] when it comes to verse, it is a question of employing 'the most proper words'. Biblical verse also has other hallmarks besides the use of extensive vocabulary just mentioned, i.e. it is compact, it uses flexible syntax and formal patterns, it employs repetition via parallelism, and it uses archaic language, while it also exploits sound play.[80]

The repetition just mentioned lies 'at the heart of pattern and of parallelism',[81] and (as shown above) it is parallelism that allows us to detect the line structure of verse even when the written verse in question exhibits no visual lineation. For what are poetic lines after all? As Dobbs-Allsopp says, they 'are nothing more than the consumable, bite-size chunks of language that the play of parallelism concomitantly creates and reveals, essentially a (common) kind of end-fixing, vocally punctuating the boundaries of those chunks of poetic thought'.[82]

Thus, orality plays a crucial role in helping us better appreciate texts stemming from ancient times. Once again, ancient Israel provides a good illustration regarding the role of orality; in the post-exilic period, the technology of writing was seen as worthy and valuable, but even when writing was becoming more common, orality was not put aside. Thus, we see that edicts were proclaimed by word of mouth, records were read out to the king, and 'quotation from a written source is not from one uniform tradition "a book", but from one of a number of variants all of which are the tradition'.[83]

The evidence discussed in this chapter shows that both in the case of prose, and even in that of verse, in antiquity *scriptio continua* did not pose insurmountable problems to the lectors who read out aloud the texts they had before them. One of the main clues for detecting the presence of verse in biblical Hebrew, for example, was parallelism, but mainly when the latter functioned as a tool for fixing the end of poetic lines. Another important criterion to detect verse was the presence of extensive vocabulary, much of which was not to be found in biblical narrative. It is now time to take a closer look at the major hallmarks of verse in the ancient Levant, with a focus on Classical Hebrew.

[78] Alter 2019: 5.
[79] Coleridge 1884: 220.
[80] Alter 2019: 34, 35, 54.
[81] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 270.
[82] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 270.
[83] Niditch 1997: 98.

Chapter 4

Verse in the Levant: Classical Hebrew

It is a commonplace amongst scholars of the ancient Near East that Classical Hebrew is the closest linguistic relative of Phoenician; this is valid both for prose as well as verse. Hence, in this chapter, we shall be taking a closer look at the main hallmarks of Classical Hebrew verse as this will be helpful in detecting any evidence we might have for verse in the Phoenician inscriptions from the Maltese archipelago to be examined further on.

The main hallmarks of biblical verse are the line, compactness via the use of short clauses, verbal inventiveness (such as allusions, ambiguity, and a good number of puns), and 'discernible poetic diction' i.e. a high number of words with rare meanings, rare words, 'bold ellipses', and 'sudden transitions in subject matter and grammar').[1] Most importantly, there is also the use of parallelism.

The important role of parallelism in Biblical verse was discussed in the previous chapter, but we need to underscore the fact that the primary force of parallelism is syntax and not lexicography. To draw lexical conclusions on the basis of parallelism (a common practice known as the 'Standard Description') could lead to incorrect lexical conclusions – something that occurs 'even in the best dictionaries'.[2] We need to remember that 'in this respect especially the Standard Description is a theory that examines poems as if they were made up of ideas; but poems are made up of words'.[3] It was shown that the close link between parallelism and syntax was employed in fact so that the former signal the end of a line of verse. In turn all this is best understood in the light of an essentially oral-aural society. This is borne out by the fact that the close link between the 'verbal art' of Ugarit and Iron Age Israel 'was certainly cultural, traditional, and oral', but this 'need not have been scribal; in fact, presently there is no empirical evidence that it was scribal'.[4]

As shown in the previous chapter, all poetry was originally oral. biblical Hebrew shows that the *nota accusativi*, the definite article, and the relative particle *ʾašer* are all characteristic of prose and that they did not feature in oral poetry. However, there is also evidence that, once oral poetry was transcribed, these particles were used even in verse, since once they 'enter the written language they become available for poets

[1] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 552; 551.
[2] O'Connor 1997: 641.
[3] O'Connor 1997: 641 and reference there.
[4] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 313.

to use, regardless of the mode of composition'.[5] However, in this case these particles were only sparsely used. An important distinction between biblical Hebrew poetry and biblical Hebrew prose is rhythm, which is linked to pauses. The main point here is that 'the syllables and stresses come periodically interrupted and not in an endless stream'. In fact, it has been shown that after every two, three, or at times four stressed syllables accompanied by intervening unstressed syllables we get a pause.[6] It is not only the pauses that contribute to the rhythm of biblical Hebrew verse, but also word repetition, which can occur via the use of the various forms of the same root.[7] The main point is that the distinction between prose and poetry does not lie in metrics. Gerhard Fecht has shown that in 2 Samuel 1 there are 27 Masoretic verses[8] that make up 90 metric verses, the first 60 of which comprise an historical text, while the last 30 verses constitute the poetic section of this chapter. The historical section is poor in stylistic and artistic means, and contains a narrative that moves towards an end in a linear fashion. On the other hand, the poetic section is rich in stylistic and artistic images; it does not employ a narrative with reports drawn up in a linear fashion, it makes use of repetition, and all in all yields a sharper text.[9]

The foregoing points show the main differences between prose and verse in biblical Hebrew; however, it is important to keep in mind that in the southern Levant graphic representation of verse did not play an essential role. Rather, 'verse as a matter of historical fact was not always written out in the southern Levant, and when it was written out it was not always distinguished graphically from written prose.'[10] The Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran, for example, provide a highly interesting example in that Psalm 108: 18-29 is presented in two different formats: the format of 4QPsb is given as 'one verse line per column line', whereas this same text is presented in 11QPsa as 'a running text'.[11] Orality is the crucial point when it comes to pinning down the structure of a poetic text in Classical Hebrew. The Gezer Calendar provides evidence that in origin this was a brief text to be transmitted orally. It exhibits a repetitive style, 'songlike in style of folk wisdom on the environment', and in the 'format, style, and theme' there is 'the stuff of an oral culture'.[12] This is one example of verse that had emerged orally and was later written down, leaving clues as to its oral origin. In the Hebrew Bible we find poems that were composed orally as well as

[5] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 304.

[6] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 124.

[7] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 155 and reference there.

[8] This refers to the Masoretic text (abbreviated MT), 'which is the text of the Hebrew Bible that Jewish scholars, called Masoretes, established, and which consists of consonants, vowel signs, accents (which could also function as punctuation marks and musical signs for chanting the biblical text), as well as notes. The oldest *complete* Masoretic manuscript of the Hebrew Bible is the Leningrad Codex (c. 1009 CE)' (Frendo 2021: 45 n. 40).

[9] Fecht 1990: 133-134.

[10] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 92.

[11] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 31 and figs 2, 15a, and 15b.

[12] Niditch 1997: 46.

others that were drawn up immediately as written texts. However, in the end this did not make much difference to the readers of biblical verse since, whatever their method of composition, biblical poems 'were written to be read aloud, vocalized, and thus heard'.[13] Those who read out loud a poetic text to their audience while vocalising it, needed 'to hear (...) the rhythm, syntax, and meaning of words in order to perceive the poetry's structure'.[14]

The aspects just mentioned were not the only ones that showed the type of rhythm involved in verse. In fact, the oral recitation of verse (whether composed in writing or originally drawn up orally) implies there must have been a number of other elements that signalled rhythm and which now escape us, e.g. element like 'musical instrumentation, melody, dance, foot-tapping, [and] head-bobbing'.[15] Classical Hebrew rhythm is free and it is not a rigid universal law – biblical Hebrew poetry is not metrical, it is free 'from metrical constraints'.[16] I would specify this by saying that metre is present in biblical poetry, but it is not ubiquitous and does not constitute its distinguishing hallmark. As Michael O'Connor claimed, there are systems of poetry shaped by 'metrical constraints', but so too there are others 'shaped in part by a series of syntactic requirements, i.e., by a system of syntactic constraints. Among them there is Canaanite verse'.[17] This is where Hebrew verse fits.

The points discussed thus far beg the question of how readers could recognise the structure of Hebrew verse which was drawn up in a consonantal script where *matres lectionis*[18] were very rarely used before the period of the Qumran scrolls and which turned out to be a *scriptio continua* without punctuation. It was quite difficult for readers to pin down sentences, verse lines, paragraphs and the 'stanza or poem boundaries'[19] unless they could hear the text vocalised and thus they needed to hear the vocalised text read out to them in order to unravel 'the rhythm, syntax, and meaning of words in order to perceive the poetry's structure'.[20] It is true that, as mentioned earlier, a number of Northwest Semitic inscriptions employ interpuncts and word spaces, but these are useful and helpful to readers of 'relatively short texts',[21] which means that 'for more extended and complex texts, whether poems or prose narratives, the "old"

[13] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 319.
[14] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015a: 113.
[15] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 401 n. 65.
[16] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 10, 285.
[17] O'Connor 1997: 65.
[18] Latin for (literally) 'mothers of reading'. This refers to the Hebrew consonants *he*, *yod*, and *wāw*, i.e. h, y, and w, which, before the introduction of the vowel signs by the Masoretes, were used to respectively indicate the long vowels h, i and e, and u and o. Since these three letters, namely consonants of the Hebrew alphabet also represent the aforementioned vowels, they are known as vowel-letters in Hebrew grammars.
[19] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 320.
[20] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 320.
[21] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 320.

Hebrew-script language is mostly useless absent a reader with prior extratextual knowledge of the text in question'.[22] This implies that the societies that practised such a method of reading were still basically employing an aural type of reading and that most probably written texts functioned as an aide-mémoire.

It is a commonplace that parallelism plays a very important role in Classical Hebrew verse. However, it is not constitutive of this type of verse where we can find instances of non-parallel 'enjambed lines'.[23] Moreover, parallelism is also present in Classical Hebrew prose. The only way in which parallelism can be viewed intrinsically important to Hebrew verse is in its role of fixing the end of lines. Indeed, 'what is distinctive about parallelism in Hebrew verse is its prominent role in line fixing and in joining adjacent lines and the peculiar rhythm of recursion that it creates, neither of which applies to the use of parallelism in the prose portions of the Bible.'[24] There are other devices in Hebrew verse that help us detect the end of a line, such as a pause and sentence logic, but as far as line fixing is concerned, the main feature is parallelism, where we can see that it is the line that is repeated. In fact 'the unit most often iterated is the line, its shape emerging to match the adjacent lines that are set in equivalence.'[25] Parallel lines also reveal syntactic frames that match perfectly. One such clear example can be found in Isaiah 11: 3, which is made up of two poetic lines each of which has an identical syntactic frame, i.e. Conjunction – Negative particle – Participle – Verb.[26] This phenomenon of parallel syntactic frames is known as the 'Syntactic Description', which 'accounts for parallelism as a grammatical and not an exclusively or focally lexical phenomenon'.[27] As already mentioned, parallelism can also act to join adjacent lines of poetry and this helps to effect 'the peculiar rhythm of recursion'.[28] Thus, the chief hallmarks of parallelism in biblical Hebrew poetry are that it helps fix the end of lines while joining adjacent lines. These two aspects do not factor in the parallelism that obtains in biblical Hebrew prose.[29]

These points show that the smallest unit of Hebrew verse is the line which some scholars call by variant names such as colon, half-line, or verset, while the combination of two smallest units (two lines) is a pair of lines often referred to by many scholars as a couplet, or a bicolon, or, moreover, a line by others![30] The important thing is to know what a line of biblical Hebrew poetry is. O'Connor tells us that it is 'generally a sentence with two or three grammatical elements (constituents) consisting of a total

[22] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 321.
[23] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 143.
[24] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 552.
[25] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 552.
[26] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 552.
[27] O'Connor 1997: 642.
[28] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 552.
[29] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 56.
[30] O'Connor 1997: 643.

of two or three words (units)'.[31] This is fine, but there remains the ultimate question of how the readers of biblical Hebrew could detect a poetic line, especially when normally the Masoretes used the same format, i.e. a running one, both for the prose and verse sections of the Hebrew Bible.[32]

The foregoing point means that special formatting in the manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible cannot be used as the only criterion to pin down verse; often there was verse present that exhibited no special format. So, how can we recognise a line of verse when it is laid out like prose? The answer is not simple, but the main thing to keep in mind is that verse has got structure, and that 'the poetic line has rhythmic, sonic, and even syntactic structure such that its shape is ultimately apprehensible no matter the manner of presentation'.[33] There are a number of helpful pointers, e.g. parallelism, concise language, a uniform and simple clause structure, and rhyme.[34] However, in the last analysis reader judgment and interpretation have a crucial role to play; as Dobbs-Allsopp points out, 'Lowth models the only way by which contemporary critics can ultimately get at biblical Hebrew line structure, namely: through interpretation, that is, by actively construing them ['those places where the Masoretes had failed to lineate'] as *lines*.'[35] Readers of the biblical Hebrew text establish lines of verse on the basis of various factors which then turn out themselves to be clear hallmarks of these same lines that reveal verse as having a structure. It is a matter (that will be examined in more depth in Chapter 5) of reading the texts in question on the basis of certain assumptions that are then themselves either fully endorsed or corrected after carefully re-examining them in the light of the evidence.

What follows, therefore, is that Hebrew verse does have a structure that sets it apart from Hebrew prose. To start with, a line of Hebrew verse is 'not too long. Not too short', and would normally have from five to twelve syllables, three to five words, and two to four stresses. Such a line 'can be sung or recited comfortably within the nominal two-second capacity of working memory.'[36] This fits squarely with the custom of oral reading in ancient times as discussed earlier; indeed, 'in biblical verse sound patterns and repetitions often seem orchestrated in ways that reveal the line itself as a structured entity',[37] with lines grouped in twos thus providing the 'rhythmic ground of every biblical poem'.[38] The line reveals the structure of biblical Hebrew

[31] O'Connor 1997: 643.
[32] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 30.
[33] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 36 and references there.
[34] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 37.
[35] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 41.
[36] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 49, 50.
[37] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 71.
[38] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 129.

verse even in the absence of parallelism; furthermore, even 'non-parallelistic lines' are grouped in twos (bi-cola) or threes (tri-cola).[39]

Although biblical Hebrew verse is structured, it reveals no patterned rhythm and the regularity of syllables is lacking. This shows that we are dealing with non-metrical verse, with free verse, but with a type of verse having an 'organic' structure when we consider that it reveals lineation, syntactic patterns, tone, and elements of meaning;[40] clearly, 'what is consistent in moving from line to line in biblical verse is precisely the variation in the number of accents. Biblical verse is not metrical.'[41] Scholars have failed to find 'a consistent quantification mechanism (meter) by which biblical Hebrew line structure is generated. In my opinion this is because none exists', writes Dobbs-Allsopp.[42] The oral aspect thus comes to the fore in view of the fact that rhythm is present in oral recitation. Rhythm is natural to speech, but metre comes at a second stage, seeing that 'rhythm is the unmarked category, which when regularized becomes marked and metrical'.[43] A line of biblical Hebrew verse contains the elements which make up the accent of a sentence that turns out to be the emphasis of a syllable in a word or of a word in a sentence.[44] As already mentioned, poetry was recited orally in ancient times and it is important to note that the line plays a very important role. In fact, in 'orally derived poetry' we find 'the punctuating function of poetic lines'.[45]

A short extra-biblical Hebrew inscription illustrates some of the points discussed thus far. I am referring to the Khirbet el-Qôm Tomb inscription 3. O'Connor studied this inscription on the basis of the re-reading that Ziony Zevit[46] had made of it, and the former concluded that the inscription includes one example of a brief poetic text. The inscription has six lines in all, the last three of which are incomplete. The first three lines are complete, with the first line functioning as a heading, while the second and third lines make up two lines of verse. On the basis of Zevit's study, O'Connor reads line 1 as *ryhw hʿšr ktbh*, which, as just mentioned, functions as a heading. Lines 2 and 3 consist of a string of letters, a number of which are repeated, probably since they function as 'apotropaic repetitions'.[47] Following Zevit,[48] after eliminating the

[39] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 76.

[40] Dobbs-Allsopp 2009: 553.

[41] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 410 nn. 190, 186,

[42] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 56. In metric verse regular patterns can be counted, but such patterns do not obtain in biblical Hebrew verse since 'no matter what phenomenon is isolated – individual words, syllables, stresses, syntactic frames – no "strictly-patterned [*sic*] regularity" that can be counted and thus scanned ever emerges to any sustained degree and certainly never over the course of an entire poem, no matter how short. biblical Hebrew poetry is not metrical' (Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 99-100).

[43] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 118.

[44] Fecht 1990: 19-20, 17 n. 28.

[45] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 134.

[46] Zevit 1984.

[47] O'Connor 1987: 225.

[48] Zevit 1984: 43, 44.

letters that are repeated, O'Connor relays these two lines as follows: *brkt ʾryhw lyhwh* (line 2) and *wmṣryh lʾšrth hwšʿ lh* (line 3). Visually the first three lines are laid out as follows:

1. *ʾryhw hʿšr ktbh*
2. *brkt ʾryhw lyhwh*
3. *wmṣryh lʾšrth*[49] *hwšʿ lh*

It was the syntactic structures of lines 2 and 3 that led O'Connor to conclude that these lines are in fact lines of verse. As he says: 'The lines [ll. 2 and 3] of the Khirbet el-Qôm text exhibit the kinds of syntactic structures with which we are familiar in Hebrew poetry, and the similarity is sufficient to make it reasonable, despite the brevity of the text, to call it poetic.'[50] O'Connor provides the following alternative translations for lines 2 and 3:

L. 2 'May you bless Uriah, O Yahweh', (or, 'You have blessed Uriah, O Yahweh')

L. 3 'And from his enemies, O Asherata, save him' (or, 'O Asherata, may you save him from his enemies')[51]

The first translation is preferable to the alternative one since it accounts for all the Hebrew words, including the conjunction at the beginning of line 2.

The points discussed in this chapter show that the smallest basic unit of biblical Hebrew verse is the line and that lines of verse were not always laid out graphically – their format was often that of a running text. This means that establishing that certain lines were lines of verse was not a straightforward matter. As explained above, it was the readers themselves (both ancient and modern) of texts who actively constructed (through their judgment and interpretation) the lines of a given text as lines of verse.[52] This is also the case with the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription to be discussed in Chapter 7. However, judgment and interpretation are not always error-proof, and so it is important to first take a close look at how we can reach correct conclusions and then deal with the main aspects of the principles of interpretation before examining in detail (in Chapters 6 and 7) the Phoenician inscriptions selected for this monograph.

[49] O'Connor (1987: 225 and references there) parses the letters *t* and *h* as a double feminine ending.
[50] O'Connor 1987: 228.
[51] O'Connor 1987: 228-229.
[52] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 41.

Chapter 5

Basic Principles of Interpretation: General and Phoenician-Specific

The topics that I have dealt with thus far, especially those discussed in the preceding chapter, demand that I also tackle the principles employed when it comes to understanding Phoenician inscriptions. However, prior to that it is important to first take a close look at the salient basic issues in hermeneutics, namely those concerning the general principles of interpretation. Thus, for example, the conclusion that it is the readers themselves of Classical Hebrew texts who pin down certain texts as made up of lines of verse begs the question of how the principles of judgment and interpretation involved in this process operate and whether they can lead to a correct reading of the texts in question. In other words, how can readers be objective when they read ancient texts that were generally drawn up in *scriptio continua*, without signs of punctuation, and often without any special format when verse was involved?

Good reading is not necessarily a question of logic since social normativity plays a crucial role when it comes to interpreting texts. As Simon Goldhill says, 'if there is a sign by a wintery lake which reads "do not walk on the ice", as a good philosopher you may know that such phrasing could logically allow you to jump or dance on the ice. But it would not be good reading to follow this logic.'[1] This means that context must always be taken into consideration when reading texts. Thus, for example, it is important to be aware that in ancient times writing often functioned simply as an aide-mémoire, just like 'a musical score for a performer who already knows the piece. It was taken for granted that a reader perusing the text of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or Homer's *Iliad* already knew it by heart.'[2] The context of texts (whether textual, archaeological, or cultural) helps the readers to determine their meaning more accurately. In fact, the meaning of words can be either referential or actual and it is the context that determines the latter. In Europe, during the 12th and 13th centuries of our era it was context that pinned down the meaning of texts. As Parkes puts it: '[In] terms of logic, the context (*propositio*) determined the "actual" meaning of a word (its *suppositio*) as opposed to its "referential" meaning (its *significatio*).'[3] A modern example helps clarify this point. The referential meaning of the word *Franc* was 'a unit of currency', but its actual meaning (before the introduction of the euro) depended on whether you were 'on the Swiss side of Lake Geneva' or on the French

[1] Goldhill 2021: 19-20.

[2] Armstrong 2019: 18.

[3] Parkes 2016: 44 and 133 nn. 22, 23.

side, since the value of this unit of currency was not the same in both places.[4] The importance of context is also borne out by archaeological objects which could be themselves texts, i.e. when archaeologists retrieve inscriptions. Clearly, in this regard one does well to note 'the mutable identities and the different contextual meanings that objects take on when they move from place to place and change owners'.[5]

The foregoing point throws light on how we can better comprehend ancient Semitic texts that were written without vowels. The case of Classical Arabic is interesting in that the vocalisation of the Quran admitted different solutions, all of which were accepted. The reciter of the Quran was the one who vocalised the consonantal text and Muslims accepted 'canonical' variants as valid and left them side by side. We know that none of the variants make 'a substantive difference to the meaning – it was even said that the prophet had recited the same passage differently on certain occasions'.[6] Moreover, the Quran was planned 'to be performed, and not to be read silently' or in sequence.[7] The reading aloud of texts is important since the meaning of the text is thereby enhanced; thus, for example, 'Muhammad's audience would have been able to pick up verbal signals that are lost in written codification (and in translation)'.[8] Reading in antiquity turns out to be an interpretation of the written text since 'people often regarded it as inert until it was ignited by a living voice, just as a musical score comes fully alive only when interpreted by an instrument'.[9]

Thus, it turns out that the reading of ancient texts is tantamount to interpreting them and this issue becomes more acute when we realise that the interpretation of texts must take into consideration the fact that they rarely yield only one meaning: more often than not these texts are of their very nature ambiguous. The Hebrew Bible provides ample examples of ambiguous texts. Not to cater for such ambiguity is to provide interpretations of texts that are 'reductive', such as when a number of scholars read Qoheleth 12: 1-7 simply 'as an allegory for old age'; this is so because this interpretation 'insists on a single key for the passage, and it cannot account for the strange hybrid images, the multiple ambiguities, through which it acquires supplementarity, an excess of an indeterminable meaning'.[10] However, although it is a fact that ancient texts are often ambiguous, it is important to note that ambiguity (which can even turn out to be a sophisticated literary device) is not identical to indeterminacy of meaning. We can return to a text and discover that it yields a new meaning (or indeed new meanings), but this process is not indefinite. We re-examine

[4] Parkes 2016: 44.
[5] Vella 2014: 36 and reference there.
[6] Armstrong 2019: 244.
[7] Armstrong 2019: 239.
[8] Armstrong 2019: 239.
[9] Armstrong 2019: 8.
[10] Landy 2004: 233 and references there.

a text 'with full acceptance of its ambiguities, open to new readings',[11] but this does not mean that the new readings are unlimited. The biblical Hebrew copula, the *wāw*, for example, is itself multivalent and in fact 'it compels us to *decide*' as to its specific meaning. The readers of ancient Hebrew texts are the ones who have to interpret the text while reading it. We should note that 'by consistently translating the "*wāw*" as "and", the *Authorised Version* replicates the problem and defers the decision to the English reader.'[12]

The foregoing example itself shows that a word can be ambiguous, or even multivalent, but as already pointed out this is not tantamount to indeterminacy of meaning. John Barton suspects that postmodernism is impertinent and frivolous when it purports to ascribe any meaning whatsoever to a given text without recognising that the latter does in fact put constraints on the reader. He urges scholars 'to look the text straight in the eye', adding that 'to us it seems that you can make all the right noises about the profundity of a text and yet be deeply frivolous so long as you think its meaning is, ultimately, *beliebig* [optional].'[13] Barton is not one-sided since, on one hand, he knows that there are biblical scholars who employ historical criticism and yet give '*beliebig* interpretations',[14] while on the other hand he does give Jacques Derrida his due when he writes that the latter 'and those who follow him alert us to aspects of the biblical text we would otherwise overlook'.[15] Other scholars too have argued that the fact a text can (and often is) ambiguous (or indeed multivalent) does not mean it can have an infinite amount of meanings. Thus, for example, Paul R. Noble distinguishes between indeterminacy, selectivity, and ambiguity. Selectivity means 'choosing which from among the range of questions that *the text itself* is willing to answer one will actually investigate',[16] whereas indeterminacy negates the possibility of reader-independent answers to questions put to a text. The reason for indeterminacy is that one thinks a given text can answer any question a reader puts to it.[17] Literary genre analysis itself shows us that texts are not on the side of indeterminacy; and if a text is ambiguous, this is not tantamount to indeterminacy, as already shown.[18]

The theme of selectivity just mentioned is important since it enhances our understanding of how we interpret texts. The metaphor of seeing something 'from a certain perspective'[19] does not militate against objectivity, provided we understand this metaphor correctly. The metaphor simply shows that there exists a certain form

[11] Britt 2004: 74.
[12] Sherwood 2004: 263.
[13] Barton 2004: 301.
[14] Barton 2004: 301.
[15] Barton 2004: 303.
[16] Noble 1995: 239.
[17] Noble 1995: 239.
[18] Noble 1995: 237.
[19] Noble 1995: 240.

of selectivity, such as when we see a table. It is the latter that 'sets the agenda' since 'the viewer's "perspectivity" is limited to choosing between the options that the object itself puts on offer.'[20] It is important to realise that the metaphor of seeing something 'from a certain perspective' does not confirm indeterminacy of meaning but a choice of which questions to deal with out of those which a text allows us to answer.

The points discussed thus far in this chapter can themselves function as principles of interpretation that help us to read ancient texts better. I am referring to the importance of context (both immediate and general), the fact that the reading of ancient Semitic texts generally meant giving an oral interpretation to a written consonantal text, and that texts are often ambiguous, or indeed multivalent, and that choosing which questions to answer out of those that the text itself allows us to tackle does not militate against objective interpretation. However, all these points still beg a number of general basic issues related to interpretation, such as the nature of objectivity and the relationship between the knower and the known.

Hermeneutics deals with the principles of interpretation, and as such it 'studies the varying relationships between meaning and meant'.[21] One of the main problems besetting the study of the principles of interpretation is that known as the hermeneutic circle, where the interpretation of each part depends on the interpretation of the whole and the latter interpretation on that of each part – which clearly runs the risk of having the interpreter go round in circles, i.e. of getting trapped in circular arguments. If each interpretation depends on an interpretation then the circular arguments seem to be unbreakable and the only way to get out of the impasse is to first realise there is a link between hermeneutics and cognitional theory. Obviously the problems involved in interpretation are highlighted – inter alia – by 'the confusion that reigns in cognitional theory and epistemology: interpretation is just a particular case of knowing, namely, knowing what is meant; it follows that confusion about knowing leads to confusion about interpreting.'[22]

The inevitable result of the above is that it is important to realise that the basic issue in interpretation, and therefore also in the interpretation of texts, is to be aware of how the dynamic structure of human understanding operates. As I wrote elsewhere, 'no matter what its field of research happens to be, the human mind starts out with some inevitable assumption or theory and studies the available data with a view to understanding them. However, this is not sufficient for it to reach the truth; in order to do this it must check whether its own insight is correct, and if it turns out to be so, then truth is reached. A judgment must be made as to whether there is sufficient

[20] Noble 1995: 241.
[21] Lonergan 1973: 28-29.
[22] Lonergan 1973: 154.

evidence for a statement to be maintained or not. Thus, the human mind turns out as having a dynamic cognitional structure which passes through three stages: data, insight, and judgment.'[23] The interpreter of any given field of investigation, including that of texts, never starts with an 'empty head'.[24] We approach the data with our own ideas, with a pre-understanding, or with a hypothesis in mind. Unfortunately, 'the principle of the empty head bids the interpreter forget his own views, look at what is out there, let the author interpret himself. In fact, what is out there? There is just a series of signs. Anything over and above a re-issue of the same signs in the same order will be mediated by the experience, intelligence, and judgment of the interpreter. The less that experience, the less cultivated that intelligence, the less formed that judgment, the greater the likelihood that the interpreter will impute to the author an opinion that the author never entertained.'[25] In such a process of understanding, it is clear that errors can and do occur, but it is precisely when we recognise that we have made a mistake that we are 'not making a further mistake'.[26] The human act of understanding can very much be viewed as a 'self-correcting process of learning',[27] and this is what can break the aforementioned hermeneutic circle. As Bernard J.F. Lonergan puts it, this process 'spirals into the meaning of the whole by using each new part to fill out and qualify and correct the understanding reached in reading the earlier parts'.[28] This is exactly how we also read ancient texts.

The dynamic cognitional structure of human understanding just described operates in any area of study and it helps us understand how we can make progress in research while also admitting that we can – and often do – make errors along the way. However, as already pointed out, recognising a mistake as being what it is helps us avoid making it again. Moreover, since interpreters approach the data with their own pre-understanding, hypotheses, questions, and, at times, even bias, it is inevitable that they leave an imprint of themselves (no matter how minute) on the end result. Joseph Ratzinger elaborates: '[We] know today that in a physical experiment the observer himself enters into the experiment and only by doing so can arrive at a physical experience. This means that there is no such thing as pure objectivity even in physics, that even here the result of the experiment, nature's answer, depends on the question put to it. In the answer there is always a bit of the question and a bit of the questioner himself; it reflects not only nature in itself, in its pure objectivity, but also gives back something of man, of what is characteristically ours, a bit of the human subject.'[29]

[23] Frendo 2011: 57 and reference there.
[24] Lonergan 1973: 157.
[25] Lonergan 1973: 157.
[26] Lonergan 1958: 347.
[27] Lonergan 1973: 209.
[28] Lonergan 1973: 159.
[29] Ratzinger 2004: 175.

This all begs the question of how we can understand the relationship between the knower and the known, between objectivity and subjectivity, and therefore also how we can be sure our interpretation of the data is correct. With respect to texts, including Northwest Semitic texts, it is important to remember that the above-mentioned hermeneutic circle is at work inasmuch as, for example, we remember that in fact we understand a sentence by first understanding the words it contains, but that we can then get at the exact meaning of the words themselves only in view of the whole sentence itself. This is obviously a concrete example of the hermeneutic circle, which, however, we can break via the above-mentioned 'self-correcting process of learning'. Indeed, 'now this cumulative network of reciprocal dependence is not to be mastered by any conceptual set of procedures. What is needed is the self-correcting process of learning in which preconceptual insights, accumulate to complement, qualify, correct one another.'[30] Our interpretations will be certain once we ascertain there are 'no further relevant questions'[31] to be made to the investigation at hand.

The role of the interpreters is crucial in that the more authentic they themselves are the more likely it is they can provide a correct interpretation of the data being investigated. As we know, many scholars attribute to Thomas Aquinas the following principle of interpretation, namely *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* ('what is received is received according to the manner of the recipient'). In reality, although Thomas Aquinas does employ this principle, he never formulated it exactly in the manner as that just cited. It was scholastic theology and philosophy that did so. It could also very well be the case that the aforementioned principle originated in Aristotle, or was simply a Latin proverb. Be that as it may, it is important to note what Aquinas himself actually wrote and what use he made of this principle when it came to his explaining how the human mind operates in its quest for truth. There are two things to note here: how Aquinas formulated the aforementioned principle, and then how he applied this principle when it came to explaining how we acquire knowledge. This is how he formulated the principle:

> 'Manifestum est enim quod omne quod recipitur in aliquo, recipitur in eo per modum recipientis' (*Summa Theologica* I q. 75 a. 5 ad quartum)

That is to say, 'For it is clear that all that which is received in something, is received in it according to the manner of the recipient.'

When discussing how this principle is applied to the human manner of acquiring knowledge, this is what Aquinas has to say:

[30] Lonergan 1973: 209.

[31] Lonergan1973: 163.

> 'Cognitio enim contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente. Cognitum autem est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis' (*Summa Theologica* I q. 12 a. 4 ad tertium)

That is to say, 'For knowledge occurs according as that which is known is in the knower. However, that which is known is in the knower according to the manner of the knower.'

The foregoing position that Aquinas holds with respect to human understanding is in line with the points discussed above, i.e. that the knower, including the interpreter of texts, is always involved when trying to understand the data, in the sense that there is no such thing as pure objectivity divorced from the knower. The dynamic cognitional structure discussed above shows that it is the 'self-correcting process of learning' that helps us to ensure our interpretations of the data are correct and upheld, verified, by these data themselves. The more one tries to understand the data properly the more likely it is that one's interpretation is objective. It could very well not be the only possible interpretation, but as long as it is verified by checking it against the data, then it is objective even if other interpretations are possible, thus enhancing our understanding. For, 'in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by value, objectivity is simply the consequence of authentic subjectivity, of genuine attention, genuine intelligence, genuine reasonableness, genuine responsibility. Mathematics, science, philosophy, ethics, theology differ in many manners; but they have the common feature that their objectivity is the fruit of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility.'[32]

The fact that ultimately 'genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity'[33] is shown very clearly in this description of what happens when someone is attentive to the data more than others had been before: 'people have passed that way myriads of times and seen nothing; and one day the man of genius notices the links between what we do not know and what is every minute before our eyes. What is knowledge, but the slow and gradual cure of our blindness?'[34] It is inevitable that in the process of gaining knowledge and reaching correct interpretations – even if not complete and exhaustive, as is generally the case – there will be a bit of ourselves. But this does not mean we are not being objective or that we go about inventing things. What it means is that we create, or better still, that we fashion truth not *ex nihilo* but on the basis of the data that offer the questions we are allowed to ask and that we strive to answer in a given case.

The general principles of interpretation discussed thus far operate in any area of research, and the reading of Phoenician inscriptions (including those from the

[32] Lonergan 1973: 265.
[33] Lonergan 1973: 292.
[34] Sertillanges 1987: 77.

Maltese archipelago) is no exception. However, there are also a number of criteria that are specific to the reading of these inscriptions that one should also keep in mind when interpreting them. In view of this, I shall now discuss the principles of interpretation specific to Phoenician inscriptions. Scholars have observed several hallmarks characterising the study of Phoenician inscriptions which can themselves, in turn, function as further basic principles of interpretation specific to these inscriptions.

The first thing to keep in mind is that of palaeography. It is a commonplace that many scholars date an inscription on the basis of the type of letters (shape and stance) employed. However, it is important to note that this typological approach is not watertight, as letter types in vogue in a certain region at a certain period of time could turn up in another region at a later period. Thus, for example, the Tel Zayit abecedary dating to c. 1000 BCE is 'conspicuous for its integration of earlier and later forms of the letters', since in it we find four letters that keep the 12th/11th-century BCE forms, whereas the letter *mem* anticipates its 9th-century BCE form, with the scribe adding two archaic forms of this letter at the end.[35] This shows we have to be extremely cautious when it comes to dating inscriptions on the basis of their letter forms.

This example of the Tel Zayit abecedary is not the only one showing us that when studying inscriptions it is unwise to rely only on palaeography. In this respect, both the general public and respected scholars alike agree. Similarly, in connection with the debate on the authenticity or otherwise of the Shapira scrolls[36] it is interesting to note what John Majka has to say, i.e. that he is unconvinced one can reach conclusions in this area basing oneself purely on palaeographic analysis. Further, he writes that those who follow this latter path 'think that ancient scribes created their texts with some sort of ancient typewriter, and that all the letters from the scrolls must conform *exactly* to standard forms. Graphologists will tell you that nobody writes even their signature the same way twice.'[37] Scholars have reached analogous conclusions when studying the palaeography of the Fakhariyeh inscription with a view to establishing its date. For example, Stephen A. Kaufman notes that the presence of an 11th-century BCE (or even earlier) form of the letter *lamed* in this inscription 'points not to the antiquity of its script – only to its peripheral position *vis-à-vis* Phoenicia'.[38] According to the typological method that scholars use in their palaeographic analyses, the Aramaic version of the Fakhariyeh inscription should date to the 11th century BCE, but this conclusion is wrong mainly for the historical evidence that the inscription itself yields when it mentions Šamaš-nūri, which goes to show that the inscription

[35] Peckham 2014: 22.

[36] For this debate see Hendel and Richelle 2021, and Dershowitz and Tabor 2021.

[37] Majka 2022: 7.

[38] Kaufman 1982: 143.

should be dated to the 9th century BCE.[39] The archaic script used in the Fakhariyeh inscription does not allow us to date it to the 11th century BCE; we are here dealing with a script that, according to the typological charts of the letter forms that scholars use, should date to the 11th century BCE but which in fact has to be dated to the 9th century BCE. This goes to show that the 'slavish adherence to typological dogma' should give way.[40] The evidence indicates that there is no such thing as the linear development of scripts and that 'typology, of course, does not prove chronology'.[41] In fact, the Aramaic inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh and other inscriptional finds 'demonstrate that we must no longer conceive of all of the Northwest Semitic alphabetic scripts as straight-line development from an early Phoenician ancestor'.[42]

If we apply the foregoing points relative to the Aramaic Fakhariyeh inscription to the Phoenician epigraphic repertoire, it would be inevitable to ask this basic question: 'how many of the Phoenician inscriptions are actually dated by reliable external criteria, rather than by where they fit into the matrix [typological] itself?'[43] This question is all the more pertinent when we remember that the typological method of Northwest Semitic epigraphy has not given us 'chronological certainty' – 'neither absolute nor relative'.[44] The typology of letter forms can only give us a rough estimate of dates. It is important to try and 'characterize a hand typologically. It is quite another thing to maintain that such a characterization has chronological significance in any but the broadest of terms.'[45]

The pitfalls of the typological method in palaeographic analyses are very similar to the problems that beset pottery typology when it comes to ceramic dating. It is common in archaeological studies to use pottery as a chronological tool. Scholars often 'date the pottery and the layers on various sites on the basis of similar pottery types that appear on comparable sites with layers whose dates are known. It is clear, however, that when ceramic dating is used in cross-dating (as is often the case in the archaeology of the southern Levant) things can get fuzzy, since pottery of a certain date on one site can continue to be used at a *later stage* on a different site.'[46] The only way out of this impasse is to ensure that the pottery to be dated was retrieved in a

[39] Kaufman 1982: 10 and references there.

[40] Kaufman 1982: 10.

[41] Kaufman 1982: 140; note also the highly interesting case of a Nabataean-Latin bilingual found at the Palatine in Rome which had been dated to the period of Malchus I (59-30 BCE) because of the 'final archaic *alef*' (Graf 2022: 66); however, usage of this type of *alef* is known to have extended into the 1st century CE (Graf 2022: 66), and in view of this, alongside the fact that the rest of the text is 'paleographically compatible with Nabataean Aramaic of the 1st century CE' (Graf 2022: 67), the inscription should be dated to the latter century.

[42] Kaufman 1982: 143.

[43] Kaufman 1982: 2.

[44] Kaufman 1982: 3.

[45] Kaufman 1982: 11 n. 26.

[46] Frendo 2021: 53.

layer from a site that was excavated according to the principles of archaeological stratigraphy. This will ensure that there is a solid relative chronology of the layers excavated and in which the pottery was retrieved. In turn, the relative dating can be translated in chronometric dating if the layers in question are independently dated, for example, either via radiocarbon dating if applicable, or via coins that carry evidence for a date. The analogy of pottery chronology to that of palaeographic analyses is clear, as just pointed out with the Aramaic Fakhariyeh inscription. This latter case, as shown above, included clear evidence that supported a 9th-century BCE date for the inscription and not an 11th century BCE one, as the letter types had led a number of scholars to believe.

The problems inherent in the sole use of letter types to date inscriptions can also be seen with respect to the analysis of the specific stance that the letters exhibit. There are certain inscriptions the layout of which is closely linked to the meaning of the text. In such instances, the layout was so important to the scribe that he was ready to change the stance of certain letters to maintain the layout he had in mind. Such is the case, for example, with the famous Gezer Calendar inscription, which has seven lines in all and where we find that each line from line three onwards starts with the word *yrḥ*.[47] In order to cater for this pattern, the scribe left an empty space where necessary, and, in two instances, where there was not enough space left to guarantee the pattern just mentioned, the scribe made a letter fit in by changing its stance. We have evidence of two such instances in the Gezer Calendar inscription, i.e. of the letter *mem* at the end of line 4 and of the letter *ḥeth*, which is the third letter of the final word in line 5.[48]

Another important factor to keep in mind when interpreting Northwest Semitic inscriptions is the material they were written on. Traditionally scholars concentrated on the text itself and on its letter types in order to understand a given inscription. However, the material on which the scribe wrote the letters is also important for us to know, as this can give us a better overall grasp of an inscription. Even in this respect, the Gezer Calendar inscription provides interesting evidence. For an inscription to be monumental it does not necessarily have to be large and highly visible, i.e. the Gezer Calendar itself is incised on a small piece of stone.[49] However despite its small size, this inscription is deemed to be monumental. By the very fact of their being inscribed in stone, such inscriptions are reckoned as being monumental.[50] Thus, whether or not an inscription is monumental does not depend on its size but on the material used. If the latter is stone, then the inscription is monumental, in the sense that this material ensures that the inscription (as its content should verify) can be

[47] Morenz 2012: 212.
[48] Morenz 2012: 213.
[49] Morenz 2012: 211-212.
[50] Morenz 2012: 210.

considered to function as an historic document or record. Such is the case with the Gezer Calendar.[51]

Scholars who study Phoenician inscriptions deal with a consonantal alphabet. We commonly speak of the 22-letter Phoenician consonantal alphabet, however, strictly speaking it is more appropriate to speak of *abjad* in this case – the reason being that 'the term *alphabet* for writing systems that exclusively or predominantly represent consonantal phonemes is conventional, but some scholars prefer to use it only for scripts that use individual graphemes for both consonants and vowels. The alternate term for a consonantal inventory of graphemes is *abjad*'.[52] It is important to keep this distinction in mind since the vowels play a crucial role when it comes to reading – suffice it to keep in mind that consonants cannot be pronounced unless we employ a vowel sound to utter them. Joe Moran reminds us that 'the vowel sound of a syllable is the basic unit of speech. A consonant cannot be fully voiced without it. Every voice is an exhaled breath; every unrestricted sound that the breath makes is a vowel sound. So vowels have more heft than consonants.'[53] Since the native speakers of Phoenician are extinct, it is clear that we have to be very cautious when it comes to vocalising the texts, seeing that often no clear context can lead to a serious misunderstanding of the texts in question.

The role of context is crucial not only for simply vocalising the consonantal texts in Phoenician but also for their correct grammatical parsing. Thus, by way of example, Paul G. Mosca parses the word *ʾyt* in lines 7A-8B in the Cebel Ires Dağı inscription as an independent object pronoun rather than as the widely held *nota accusativi*. He explicitly states regarding this point that 'it was my sense of context that forced me down this road, for it seemed to me that the coherence and continuity of the inscription demanded it. Indeed, I maintain that grammar and context are mutually enriching and that they make equally important contributions to the process of decipherment.'[54]

Another important hallmark of Phoenician texts to keep in mind when attempting to interpret them is the fact (already discussed earlier in Chapter 3) that in antiquity texts were normally read aloud and that silent reading was the exception and not the rule. It was Saint Ambrose in the 4th century CE who first practised silent reading, which means that with respect to Phoenician 'l'écriture devait donc en général

[51] A very important point in this regard is that of the type of 'writing' employed. A monumental style of writing, i.e. one that exhibits 'usually more angular letter shapes', is present on inscribed stone, whereas we encounter a cursive script that has 'rounded letter shapes' when we examine writing 'with ink on flexible but perishable materials like papyrus and leather'; in this latter case there are 'circular movements of the hand and connecting letters' that help the scribe save time (Gzella 2021: 159).

[52] Gzella 2013: 170 n. 1.

[53] Moran 2018: 92.

[54] Mosca 2013: 32.

tenir compte des sonorités de la langue pour en faciliter la mémorisation et la compréhension'.[55] This means that when reading Phoenician inscriptions we have to keep in mind factors such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, sound metaphors, rhythmic symbolism, and euphony.[56] Phoenician was in fact well suited for recitation; indeed, 'la phrase est, en général, simple et donne lieu au style dit 'coupé', bien adapté au *récit.*'[57] Reading out loud Phoenician texts helped accentuate their meaning. Such is the case with line 25 of the 10th-century BCE inscription of Yeḥimilk where we read: *hʾt ḥwy kl mplt hbtm l*, i.e. 'he restored all the ruins of these temples'. Here in line 25, *h t* functions like a fronted subject which 'presents the thematic Focus, highlighting with pronominal reference the rhematic information supplied in the previous clause. Here Yeḥimilk is focused as the one who restored the temples, the emphasis on the doer rather than the object.'[58] The emphasis that the fronted subject provides was very probably accentuated by the reader since 'the intonation of the reader/listener may have accentuated this [emphasis]'.[59]

Another hallmark of the Phoenician texts to keep in mind is the signalling of paragraphs/significant sections in a given inscription. Although *scriptio continua* was the rule, and despite the fact that the layout of an inscription was normally absent, there are cases where the scribe helped the reader focus on different significant sections of an inscription that functioned like our present-day paragraphs. One way of doing this was via the use of dots. For example, in an inscription from Kition (CIS I, 88), set up by the grandsons of its king, Milkyaton, we find that the scribe used dots to signal 'three significant sections or paragraphs'.[60] These dots help the reader of the inscription to identify three sections that follow the introduction, which focuses on the third year of Milkyaton's reign and which is followed by the first dot, signalling a parenthesis that tells us Reshephyaton 'had dedicated a statue to Melqart'.[61] A second dot separates the latter section from the following one, linking with the introduction and informing the reader that Milkyaton's son put the statue 'on a platform with steps and railings'.[62] The third and last dot heads the last section of the inscription, mentioning the embellishments that the grandsons of Milkyaton had accomplished in the sixth year of his reign. In addition to the three dots just mentioned, which help the reader of the inscription comprehend the three paragraphs/sections coming after the introduction, we find that in the last section dots separate the names of

[55] Stéphan 1985: 188 and reference there. English Translation: 'therefore writing in general had to cater for the sound of the language in order to facilitate its memorization and understanding.'
[56] Stéphan 1985: 188.
[57] Stéphan 1985: 268. English Translation: 'the phrase is generally simple and gives way to a style said to be "cut", well suited to the *story*.'
[58] Schade 2013: 129.
[59] Schade 2013: 129 n. 47.
[60] Peckham 2014: 509.
[61] Peckham 2014: 509.
[62] Peckham 2014: 509.

each of Milkyaton's grandsons, thus giving them 'prominence as the authors of the inscription'.[63] The inscription thus ends by providing the context for the renovations, and presenting a prayer for Milkyaton.[64]

This use of dots to signal the various sections/paragraphs of Phoenician inscriptions indicates the important role that the structure of the text plays in these inscriptions. More often than not, it is the readers of the inscriptions who have to detect their structure; however, at times the scribes lend a helping hand, even in this respect. For example, there are cases, i.e. in the Marseille Tariff (KAI 69), where the scribe sets the title of the inscription (lines 1 and 2) apart from the body of the text. This is evident since 'the title is in two lines set off from the rest of the document by leaving the end of the second line blank.'[65]

Finally, when interpreting Phoenician inscriptions, it is also very important to keep in mind the literary genre of the texts in question. Scholars are accustomed to employ general terms, such as whether an inscription is votive, funerary, dedicatory, or commemorative. Sometimes, it is important to go beyond such general terms and make some necessary distinctions. In fact, there are cases when the term 'votive', for example, does not simply denote the literary genre of an inscription but the category to which it belongs. The literary genre of a votive inscription can be either dedicatory or commemorative.[66] However, in commemorative inscriptions the votive elements are not mentioned. These inscriptions were meant to be seen by the public and thus they tell us about who erected them, what they commemorate, why they were erected, and when they were set up, although at times this element is missing.[67] It is important to also note that commemorative inscriptions do not tell us where they were erected as 'they are displayed at the entry to, or are placed on, the physical object'.[68] The important point is that the same category of inscriptions can appear in different specific literary genres, and thus there are times when it is important to distinguish between the category to which a Phoenician inscription belongs and its literary genre. Be that as it may, Phoenician scribes normally employed three general genres when drafting their inscriptions – votive-dedicatory, funerary, and commemorative. Clearly it is the actual inscriptions, on a case by case basis, that will allow us to conclude whether other genres were in vogue, such as incantations.[69]

The literary genre of Phoenician inscriptions can be linked to the syntactical pattern which scribes used. Thus, until the late 1st millennium BCE the scribes used the

[63] Peckham 2014: 509.
[64] Peckham 2014: 509.
[65] Peckham 2014: 552.
[66] Altman 2007: 75 and references there.
[67] Altman 2007: 71.
[68] Altman 2007: 71.
[69] Stéphan 1985: 102-105, 187.

following syntactical pattern when drawing up dedicatory inscriptions: Object-Relative Pronoun, Verb, Subject, Personal Name, Preposition, and lastly Personal Name or Divine Name. This pattern is present in the Ahirom inscription.[70] By the late 1st millennium BCE, the sequence just mentioned is inverted in some Phoenician inscriptions and in most of the Punic and Neo-Punic ones. In these latter cases the dedicatee is usually pre-posed, while 'in a few cases' in Punic 'the verb is pre-posed', and 'at least in one Neo-Punic text' we find that the 'subject is pre-posed', whereas the verb is never found in the final position.[71]

The foregoing remarks regarding the literary genres we find in Phoenician inscriptions refer to those written in prose. It is more difficult to pin down poetic texts in Phoenician because, as already discussed earlier, Phoenician inscriptions were usually drawn up in *scriptio continua* and without the use of punctuation, with the result that we generally find no layout of the text that can help us conclude that we are dealing with poetry. However, it is logical to hypothesise that the genre of poetry, as opposed to prose, must have obtained in Phoenician too, seeing we find it in the neighbouring Ugaritic and Hebrew literature.[72] The Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic literature are not the only examples where we can find parallels to Phoenician poetry. Thus, for example, the Tell Sirān inscription inscribed 'on a very small bronze bottle' is an example of Ammonite poetry that 'is written... in a balanced, cadenced, and rhythmic style'.[73]

Scholars have in fact detected poetic texts in Phoenician, as we shall mention here below. One such example is the inscription of Eshmunazar II, dating to *c.* 480-475 BCE. Eshmunazar II reigned from 489-475 BCE,[74] and lines 18-19 of his inscription refer to the gift of Dor and Joppa, which the Persian king made to the Sidonians after they had helped the Persians at the battle of Salamis (480 BCE).[75] This inscription 'offers an unusually high proportion of literary parallels with the Hebrew Bible, especially its poetic sections', and like the inscriptions of Karatepe, Ahirom, Yeḥimilk, and Tabnit, it 'witnesses, if indirectly, to a rich tradition of Phoen. rhetoric which prob. had its origins in courtly and epic poetry'.[76] If Phoenician poetry was metric, it is extremely difficult to ascertain any metre employed as the accents are not registered in Phoenician inscriptions and also because the precise inflection of the vowels is hypothetical.[77] However, in the inscription of Eshmunazar II certain alliterations signal rhythm at times, and it seems that this text had two refrains, with the repetition

[70] Greenstein 1976: 52-53 and references there.
[71] Greenstein 1976: 53 and references there.
[72] Stéphan 1985: 187.
[73] Peckham 2014: 400.
[74] Gibson 1982: 102.
[75] Gibson 1982: 108.
[76] Gibson 1982: 105.
[77] Stéphan 1985: 207-209.

of words or phrases in each, i.e. *mlk ṣdnm*, *bnmnm*, and *mškb* (this being repeated four times). All this led Fady Stéphan to conclude that 'il est possible que ces passages devaient être chantés dans les cérémonies funéraire. Il est encore d'usage en Orient, de nos jours, de graver sur la stèle un extrait du poème lu sur la tombe du défunt.'[78] Thus, given the nature of the evidence, we have no Phoenician poetry as extensive as that which we find in the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts. All we can hope for is to find phrases or fragments of poetry inserted in the inscriptions and which hint at the hallmarks of poetry.[79]

However, the Kilamuwa inscription (KAI 24) *c.* 825 BCE proves to be a rather extensive example of early Phoenician poetry. It consists of 16 epigraphic lines presented 'without indication of verse lines', but which can be viewed as constituting 22 such lines, with 11 verse lines to each of the two major sections.[80] Two horizontal lines just below line eight of the inscription splits the inscription into the two aforementioned sections. Note that there are two 'vertical dividers' at the end of line eight and at the very end of the inscription (at the end of line 16), with line one acting as a caption to the whole inscription.[81] The Kilamuwa inscription provides a good example of Phoenician 'verse structure'.[82] The first 11 verse lines (Section I) that follow the caption of the inscription can be grouped 'naturally according to sense into four couplets and an intervening tercet (2:2:2:3:2), and this structure is reinforced by a number of techniques'.[83] The poetic identity of this inscription lies in its 'verse structure', which shows that we are not dealing with narrative; furthermore, 'the most obvious is that we have here a perfect example of a twenty-two line verse structure.'[84] This observation is supported by the fact that in this inscription the length of the lines varies and it is not governed by syllable count nor by patterns of stress, and although parallelism is present it 'does not dominate'.[85] The Kilamuwa inscription is an official document, yet one which is poetic – its genre is that of 'official poetry', which itself 'implies an accepted poetic tradition with recognised canons and techniques to which the writer of this poem conformed and was no doubt chosen in view of the already proven skill in their practice'.[86]

Notwithstanding the robust analysis and conclusions of Terence Collins mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, Michael O'Connor does not agree that the Kilamuwa

[78] Stéphan 1985: 210. English Translation: 'it is possible that these passages ought to have been sung during the funerary ceremonies. It is still customary in the Orient, in our days, to inscribe on the stela the extract of a poem that was read over the tomb of the buried person.'
[79] Stéphan 1985: 259.
[80] Collins 1971: 183.
[81] Collins 1971: 183.
[82] Collins 1971: 183.
[83] Collins 1971: 185.
[84] Collins 1971: 188.
[85] Collins 1971: 188.
[86] Collins 1971: 188.

inscription is verse. He classifies this inscription as 'brilliant rhetorical prose'.[87] However, he also notes that the word *kn* in line three of the inscription can be viewed as 'a simple existential', or as 'an auxiliary', or as a 'marker of a Verb Phrase deletion transformation',[88] equating the latter with 'verb gapping'.[89] O'Connor chooses the third option, i.e. verb gapping, and he thus translates *kn bmh* as '*bmh also*'[90] rather than Collins' 'There was Bmh'.[91] However, O'Connor himself says with reference to 'verb gapping' in Hebrew poetry (which provides a good example of Northwest Semitic verse), that 'another feature of Hebrew poetry, which, though not a necessary condition for it, verges on being a sufficient one, is verb gapping'.[92] The upshot of all this is that O'Connor's choice of the presence of 'verb gapping' in the Kilamuwa inscription does not militate against viewing the latter as poetic verse; on the contrary it upholds it. Given this latter point, and Terence Collins' convincing analysis and arguments, we may well consider the Kilamuwa inscription as an example of Phoenician verse. We can also say with John C.L. Gibson that this inscription 'has an almost metrical structure, and much of it can easily be divided into short couplets or triplets showing a rough parallelism of lines, each with three or four main stresses. It is not regular poetry, but it has a distinct poetic flavour,' and, accordingly, 'it is perhaps the clearest instance in Phoen. of the influence of the Canaanite poetic tradition known from the epics of Ugarit and poetic parts of the Hebrew Bible.'[93] In the last analysis the main factor for viewing the Kilamuwa inscription as verse is precisely its 'verse structure'.[94]

An interesting example of Levantine poetry comes from Arslan Tash. I refer to the first incantation plaque (KAI 27) from this site, where we find a main inscription and three minor ones written in a mixed dialect (Phoenician-Aramaic), which is very probably 'a fringe dialect comparable with the dialects of Moab and Zenjirli, one that is not easily placed within the Canaanite or the Aramaic subdivisions of Syrian or Northwest Semitic'.[95] Both the main inscription, as well as the three minor ones from Arslan Tash, exhibit a poetic structure and the grammar used is that employed in poetry. Indeed, 'the Phoenician article is nowhere used in these poetic incantations, even where it might be expected in Phoenician prose of the period. This is as it should be. The Canaanite article developed only in the era after the loss of the case endings, i.e., between the thirteenth and tenth centuries B.C., after the classical period of Canaanite prosody. Its use in archaic and archaizing Hebrew poetry is also exceedingly

87 O'Connor 1977: 18.
88 O'Connor 1977: 20.
89 O'Connor 1977: 18.
90 O'Connor 1977: 19.
91 Collins 1971: 184.
92 O'Connor 1977: 18.
93 Gibson 1982: 33.
94 Collins 1971: 188.
95 Gibson 1982: 80.

rare.'[96] The main inscription has 18 lines (4 on the obverse of the first plaque and 14 on its reverse) and the poetic structure is clear when we realise that the structure of this incantation compares well with the incantations from Ugarit. As Frank Moore Cross and Richard J. Saley put it, 'it is extraordinary that prosody has not been used before to aid in the interpretation of the text.'"[97] In fact even the inscription on the second incantation plaque has a poetic structure; the texts on both plaques 'are capable of being arranged in a rough metrical order with three or four main stresses to a line of poetry, though there is no obvious concern with parallelism'. In view of this latter point, Gibson uses the term 'semi-poetic structure'.[98] However, I think that we can simply use the term 'poetic', since parallelism (as shown earlier in connection with Hebrew poetry) is not a *sine qua non* for poetry or poetic structure to be present – the line is the essential hallmark of Hebrew poetry, although parallelism does often play an important role. Be that as it may, it is highly interesting to note that the poetic elements present in the Arslan Tash incantations served 'to facilitate the chanting or murmuring of the spells by members of the families concerned as they passed the plaques on entering or leaving their houses'.[99]

The preceding two paragraphs on the presence of poetic structure in Phoenician inscriptions act as a reminder that when reading these texts we should be on the lookout for what scholars generally deem to be a signal for the possible presence of poetry, i.e. the line acting as a verse of poetry, the use of parallelism (primarily syntactic rather than semantic), and word pairs. With respect to Neo-Punic poetry, it is important to keep in mind that it is not an ideal representative of Phoenician-Punic poetry since by this late period of Neo-Punic times there were certain developments that were either absent or rarely present in earlier times. Thus, for example, although Phoenician-Punic inscriptions are generally drafted in *scriptio continua*, where even a word can start on one line of the inscription terminating in the next line (where the layout of the text is absent both in the prose and poetic texts), the Neo-Punic inscriptions *can at times* present a clear layout. The first (Text A) of two Neo-Punic inscriptions from Mactar is presented in 11 columns, the first four of which each have three lines, where 'each line [the epigraphic one] corresponds to a verse of poetry'.[100] This inscription also provides evidence for rhyme by having the final lexeme at the end of each line ending in the letter *t*, with the use of *scriptio plena* yielding the rhyme via the sound *-ot*.[101] As far as the second inscription (Text B) goes, we have an echo of the age-old Phoenician-Punic custom of not presenting a layout of the text. In this case the epigraphic lines do not correspond to the poetic lines, but the poetic text can still be detected by rearranging 'the lines into verses' on the basis of 'the recurrence

[96] Cross and Saley 1970: 48.
[97] Cross and Saley 1970: 45-46.
[98] Gibson 1982: 80-81.
[99] Gibson 1982: 81.
[100] Krahmalkov 1975: 171.
[101] Krahmalkov 1975: 171.

of the end rhyme *-o* in the strophe'.[102] In the case of these two Neo-Punic inscriptions it is the readers of these inscriptions who will solve the difficulties of translation if they keep in mind that 'the key to context is the determination of the peculiar end rhyme and structuring of the work into its original versification'.[103]

One final hallmark of Phoenician inscriptions that needs to be underscored and kept in mind as one of the principles of interpreting these inscriptions is that they have no punctuation. However, it is clear that the end of an inscription definitely marks the equivalent of a full stop, whether the inscription can be broken down into different sentences or whether it simply consists of one sentence. American poetry, for example, includes many poems that are written as 'one-sentence poems' and so they clearly have only one full stop at the end.[104] Be that as it may, the end of an inscription plays an important role in its interpretation since it signals the end of what a particular inscription would have aimed at conveying. Joe Moran is correct in extolling the importance of the full stop when he says: 'learn to love the full stop, and think of it as a goal towards which your words adamantly move – because a good sentence, like a good life, needs a good death'.[105] The scribes of Phoenicia were no exception.

It is now time to have a close look at a few Phoenician inscriptions from the Maltese archipelago and to highlight the principles employed in interpreting them. The principles of interpretation discussed in this chapter (both the general ones and those specific to Phoenician inscriptions) will be employed. Thus, for example, it will be shown how context (both the text of the inscription itself and the general archaeological one) plays a crucial role in helping us arrive at the most probable philological interpretation of CIS I, 123 and CIS 123 *bis* to be discussed in the next chapter.

[102] Krahmalkov 1975: 172. Note that in the case of Text B we have a 'varied end rhyme', in the sense that 'a monorhyme is used in the same strophe but the rhyme differs from strophe to strophe' (Krahmalkov 1975: 174).

[103] Krahmalkov 1975: 173.

[104] Moran 2018: 150.

[105] Moran 2018: 211.

Chapter 6

Context as the Indispensable Criterion of Interpretation: The Case of CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis*

Principles of whatever sort are best understood when illustrated by concrete examples. It is thus time to look closely at two Phoenician inscriptions from Malta – CIS 123 and 123 *bis* – by way of examples of how the various principles of interpretation discussed in the previous chapters can blend and mix with one another and how context turns out to be indispensable for determining the most probable meaning of an inscription when, per se, it is philologically multivalent.

In view of the various factors discussed up to now it is clear that the reader of CIS 123 and 123 *bis*, just as in the case of the vast majority of Northwest Semitic inscriptions, has to keep in mind factors such as letter forms, the material on which the inscriptions were inscribed, the absence of vowels, alliteration, the fronted subject that is tantamount to stressed intonation, the use of dots that signal paragraphs or sections of an inscription, the structure of an inscription, the latter's genre and its syntax, the absence of punctuation, and, perhaps most of all, the context of the inscription. It is the data themselves that show readers which of the factors just mentioned will actually have to be dealt with.

It is well understood that CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis* turn out to be parallel inscriptions, in that they are virtually identical: they can be considered fraternal twins. I do not need to rehearse all the general information about these votive inscriptions, which is available to scholars in the collections of Northwest Semitic inscriptions with which they are familiar. However, from the start I want to underscore that the essential difference between them is the name of the person making the sacrifice, and, depending on how we decide to decipher and translate the first three words of both inscriptions, there could also be other differences that we will discuss below.

Before describing the inscriptions, we have to note that CIS I, 123 is complete and is currently housed in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, Malta, whereas CIS I, 123 *bis* is lost.[1] Indeed, it was lost from the very beginning in the sense that the editors of CIS were unable to ascertain where it was housed in private hands in Mdina. We know that Judge Bonavita bought this inscription and that his inheritors, however, 'only had an apograph'[2] of it, i.e. a transcript of it. It is intriguing that 'a visit

[1] For a thorough explanation of the fate of CIS I, 123 *bis*, see Vella 2013: 592-593.

[2] Vella 2013: 592 and reference there.

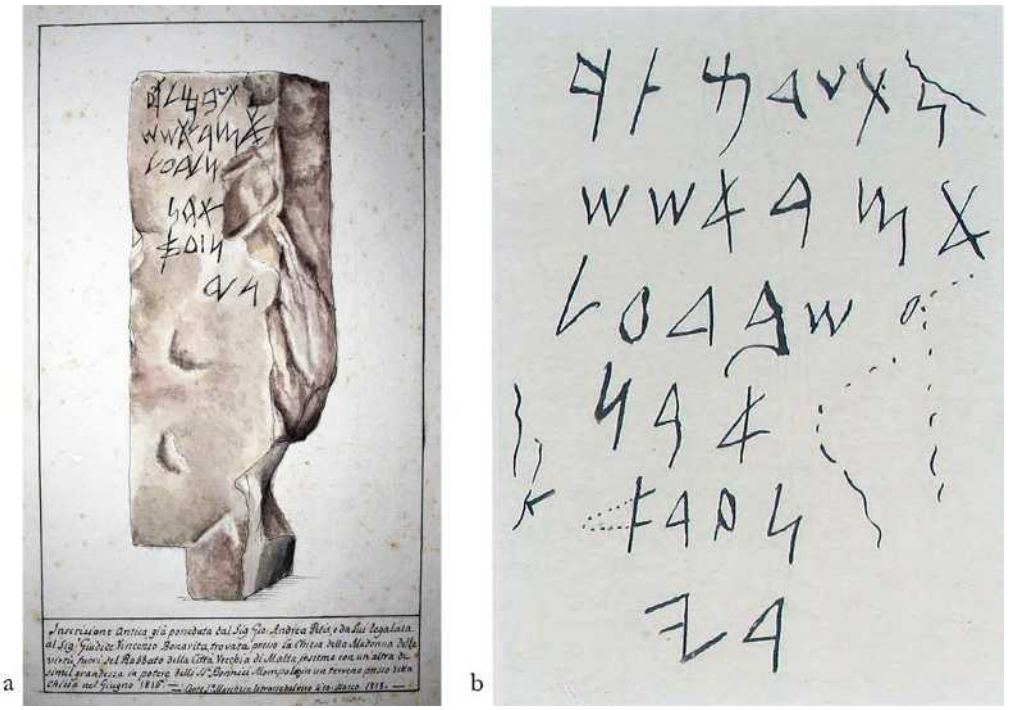

Figure 1. a) CIS I, 123 bis *Count Saverio Marchese's Copy 1818, photograph by Nicholas C. Vella, courtesy Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta; b) CIS I, 123* bis *(CIS I, Plate XXV).*

to the Bonavita collection by the *Corpus* compilers did not yield anything Phoenician.'[3] The editors of CIS never acquired a photograph of CIS 123 *bis* and they had to make do with a transcript (that the French consul sent to Quatrémère) which was published in two versions: one by H.A. Hamaker and the other by W. Gesenius. CIS published the former version (Fig. 1b) which is what we see in modern collections of Phoenician inscriptions.[4] However, as Nicholas C. Vella says: 'In reality... another representation of the inscription [CIS 123 *bis*, see Fig. 1a] does exist: it is a drawing executed in ink and watercolour by the erudite antiquarian Count Saverio Marchese, now held in the archives of the Mdina cathedral.'[5]

As already mentioned, CIS I, 123 is extant, and kept in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, Malta, with the museum identification number 937 (Fig. 2 left; Fig.3). Peckham comments on the script both of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, however, since, as already discussed above, the latter inscription exists only in drawn copies his comments must be taken very seriously, essentially with respect to the script of CIS I, 123. He tells us that 'the script is a mixture of cursive and formal forms,

[3] Vella 2013: 593.
[4] Vella 2013: 592 and references there.
[5] Vella 2013: 593 and references there.

Figure 2. Left, photograph of CIS I, 123 by Nicholas C. Vella, courtesy National Museum of Archaeology, Heritage Malta. Right, CIS I, 123 bis *Count Saverio Marchese's Copy 1818, photograph by Nicholas C. Vella, courtesy Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta.*

and the writing, like the writing on the tombstones from the graveyard at Tyre, is unprofessional (lines are crooked, letters are disproportional and sometimes poorly spaced or even unfinished) and probably not done by the scribe but by the mason who carved the stones.'[6]

As far as CIS 123 *bis* is concerned, we shall be considering the copy that Count Saverio Marchese left us in the aforementioned drawing now in the Cathedral Museum, Mdina (Fig. 1a). The drawing measures 290 x 185 mm, and has the catalogue number 1050.[7] The illustrations presented in Vella's study led me to write elsewhere that 'Marchese's copy seems to be of excellent quality, and it is one which, in my opinion,

[6] Peckham 2014: 245.

[7] For very useful information regarding this drawing, see Vella 2013: 593 n. 12.

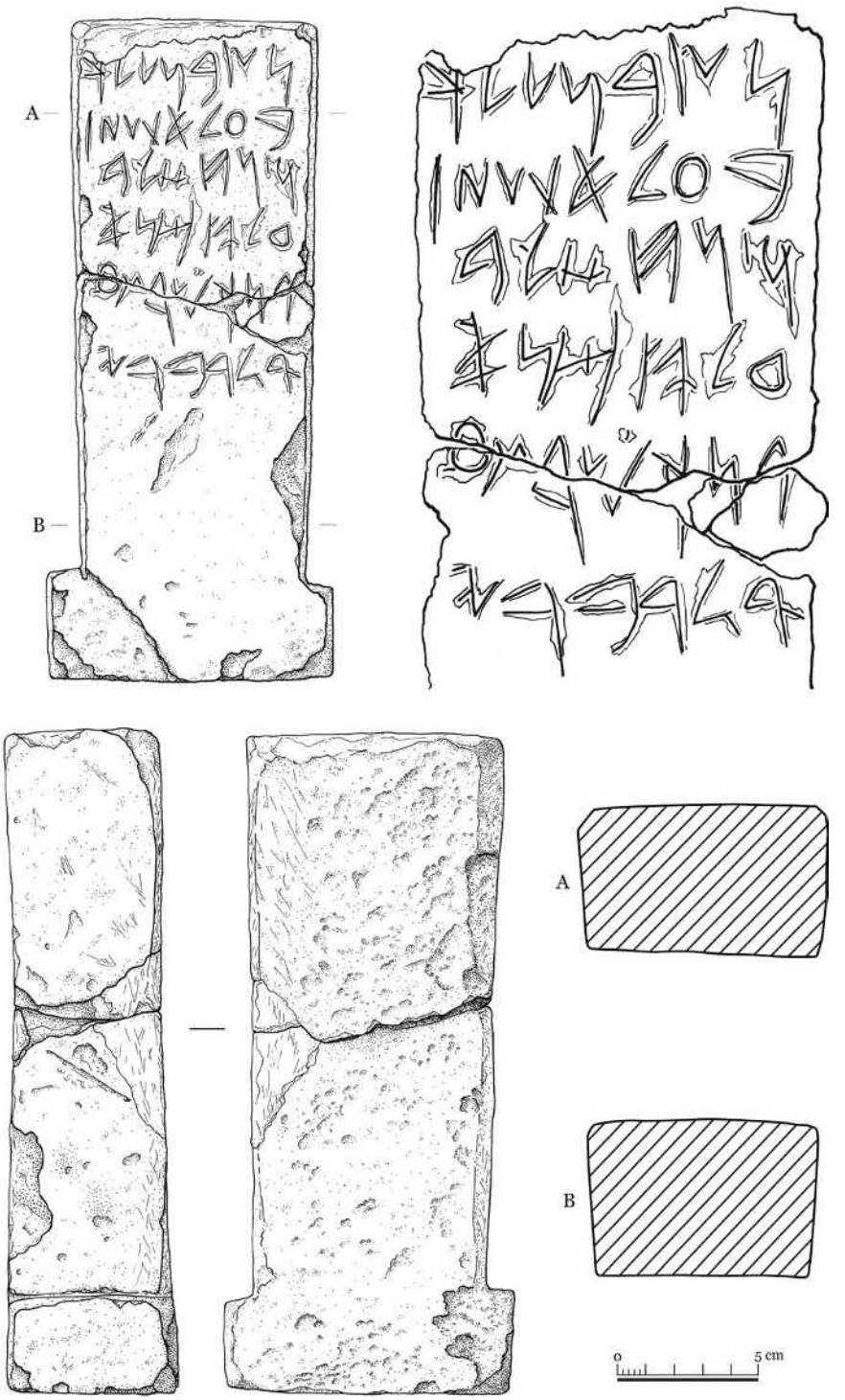

Figure 3. Drawing of CIS I, 123 by Maxine Anastasi

seems to be more trustworthy than the copy which is published in CIS and which also appears in other publications'.[8] (I can confirm this after having seen the drawing of Saverio Marchese personally.[9])

The examination of CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis* has to proceed in parallel (Fig. 2) owing to the fact that the wording of the two inscriptions is very similar indeed.[10] However, we must be careful to avoid circular arguments and 'therefore each inscription should ideally be first read and interpreted on its own merits'.[11] The only way out of this impasse is to read each inscription separately without overlooking the possibility that one inscription can well shed light on the other where pertinent. The 'self-correcting process of learning' discussed in Chapter 5 will aid readers of these parallel inscriptions to reach reasonable and reliable conclusions, reinforced by the data.

The following are the commonly accepted transliterations of CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis*.

CIS I, 123[12]

1. *nṣb mlk*
2. *bʿl ʾš š*
3. *m nḥm lb*
4. *ʿl ḥmn ʾ*
5. *dn k šmʿ*
6. *ql dbry*

According to the commonly accepted 'word division' the text reads thus:

nṣb mlk bʿl ʾš šm nḥm lbʿl ḥmn ʾdn k šm ql dbry

CIS I, 123 *bis*[13]

1. *nṣ(?)b mlk*
2. *ʾmr ʾš š*
3. *[m ʾr] š l(?)bʿl*
4. *[ḥmn] ʾdn*

[8] Frendo 2012: 528 and n. 15 there.

[9] I thank Mgr Dr Edgar Vella, Curator of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina for allowing me to inspect this drawing, and his curatorial assistant, Mr Raymond Saliba, who helped me during my visit at the museum. I also appreciate the help that Mr Mario Gauci, Archivist of the Metropolitan Chapter, Mdina, gave me by putting me in touch with Mgr Dr Vella and Mr Saliba. Mr Gauci kindly also gave me permission to publish a photograph by Nicholas C. Vella of Count Saverio Marchese's copy of CIS I, 123 *bis*.

[10] The discussion of CIS I 123 and 123 *bis* in this chapter is partly based on my earlier work (Frendo 2012: 528-534).

[11] Frendo 2012: 529.

[12] See, for example, Gibson 1982: 74.

[13] See, e.g., Gibson 1982: 76.

5. *[k š]m(?)ʿ ql(?)*
6. *[db]ry*

According to the commonly accepted reading and 'word division', the foregoing reconstructed text reads thus:

nṣ(?)b mlk ʾmr ʾš š[m ʾr] š l(?)bʿl [ḥmn] ʾdn [k š]m(?)ʿ ql(?) [db]ry[14]

However, it should be noted that for the reasons I adduce in the discussion further on, I read the third word as *ʾsr* and not *ʾmr*.

As is well known, the real problems with these two inscriptions lie with the interpretation of the two words in line one and the first word in line two, and the conundrum is how to translate the first three words of these inscriptions. Assuming for now that the commonly accepted reading of the letters of both inscriptions is correct, we are thus dealing with the following problematic phrases in CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis* respectively:

CIS I, 123: *nṣb mlk bʿl*

CIS I, 123 *bis*: *nṣb mlk ʾmr*

Since the remaining sections of these inscriptions pose no problems of translation, and assuming that the reconstruction of CIS I, 123 *bis* that is generally proposed by scholars is correct, there is no need to deal with these sections now. I thus start by presenting a selection of translations that various scholars offer for each of the first three words of both inscriptions. Most of these translations are philologically possible and therefore at the end a solution will have to be found, mainly in view of the broader context of the inscriptions including that of their findspot.

The following is a list of translations that various scholars propose for *nṣb mlk bʿl* in CIS I, 123; each of these translations will be discussed and referenced at the end of the following list:

1. Stela of Milk-Baʿal
2. Stela of an offering instead of an infant
3. Stela of a sacrifice consisting of an infant
4. Stela of a sacrifice of a lord
5. Stela of a (human) sacrifice of one making (it)
6. Stela of a sacrifice to Baʿal
7. Stela of one sacrificed to Baʿal

[14] Note that the letters followed by (?) are doubtful; for the uncertain letters, see, e.g., Gibson 1982: 76.

1. Stela of Milk-Baʿal

This translation is basically the one that G.A. Cooke opted for in 1903. He translates *nṣb mlk bʿl* as 'Pillar of Milk-Baʿal', where *mlk* is read as the common noun *milk* meaning 'king' and which is here applied to the West Semitic male storm and fertility god Baʿal. Cooke sees *nṣb* as the equivalent of the Arabic *nṣb*, with the meaning of 'an idol-stone to which worship was paid'.[15] He reminds us that in Phoenician it is the word *mṣbt* 'which as a rule is a funeral monument'.[16] Thus in this case, *nṣb mlk bʿl* is stating that the stela itself stands for Milk- Baʿal and that he was worshipped under the guise of this stone. From the philological point of view, Cooke's translation of *nṣb mlk bʿl* as 'Pillar of Milk-Baʿal' is possible, although, as will be shown below, it is not a highly probable one.

2. Stela of an offering instead of an infant

This is the translation that Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig choose for *nṣb mlk bʿl*, i.e. 'Stele der „*Darbringung an Stelle eines Säuglings*"'.[17] *Mlk* is here parsed as 'a verbal noun in the Yiphʿil form with a preformative mem from the verb *hlk/ylk* with the meaning of "sacrifice" (the noun from the verb to cause to go up, namely to offer in sacrifice).'[18] In this regard, it is important to note that some scholars take this meaning as automatically referring to a human sacrifice, indeed to child sacrifice.[19] This is incorrect , since '*mlk* of itself cannot mean "human sacrifice"; rather it is a general word used for "sacrifice", the nature of which is indicated by an accompanying word.'[20]

With respect to the word *bʿl*, Donner and Röllig parse it as the preposition *beth* attached to the word *ʿûl,* i.e. infant.[21] The preposition *beth* is here taken to mean 'instead of, as a substitute for'. However, a search in the major dictionaries and other reference works, such as grammars, of Northwest Semitic, Classical Hebrew, Phoenician-Punic, and Ugaritic has yielded no evidence that the preposition *beth* can mean 'instead of, as a substitute for'.[22] We should also note that, out of the 18 meanings that Charles R. Krahmalkov gives for the preposition *beth* in his dictionary of Phoenician-Punic,

[15] Cooke 1903: 103.

[16] Cooke 1903: 104.

[17] KAI 1966-1969, vol. 2: 76. English translation: 'Stela of the offering instead of an infant'.

[18] Frendo 2012: 529 and reference there.

[19] See, e.g., Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 20, where she sees the word *mlk* as being 'verosimilmente un termine tecnico designante il sacrificio di un bambino'. English translation: 'likely a technical term meaning the sacrifice of a child'.

[20] Day 1989: 9. See also Frendo 2012: 530.

[21] KAI 1966-1969, vol. 2: 76, 77 and references there.

[22] Brown *et al.* 1906; Friedrich and Röllig 1999; Kautzch and Cowley 1910; Koehler and Baumgartner 1994-2000; Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995; Jastrow 2004; Arnold and Choi 2018; Gibson 1994; Donner 2013; Joüon and Muraoka 2006; Merwe *et al.* 2017; Waltke and O'Connor 1990; Krahmalkov 2000; Clines 1995.

three are of particular interest, i.e. 'COSTING, WORTH, expressing the value of an object'; 'AT A COST OF, expressing amount of expenditure'; and 'IN PAYMENT OR EXCHANGE FOR'.[23] This last meaning is what could cause confusion. The evidence that Krahmalkov himself presents for it shows that it simply stands for the price that one pays for an object that one buys or acquires, and not for something that one substitutes for something or someone. The evidence that Krahmalkov himself presents for this last meaning shows that the latter per se simply means 'at the cost of' and not 'in exchange for',[24] since it is easy to misunderstand the latter phrase. And yet, the wording 'in exchange for' is legitimate so long as it is taken to signify the payment one makes to obtain something and not that it means 'to substitute something for someone or something else'. The meaning of *beth* as 'in exchange for' can be kept as long as it is understood to be in fact a *beth* of price. Gibson himself shows that in Hebrew the preposition *beth* can mean '*for* of exchange (*Beth pretii*)',[25] and Clines is of the same opinion.[26] All this justifies the remark that John Day had made to the effect that to differentiate between the meaning of *beth* as 'at the cost of' and 'in exchange for' is based 'on an artificial distinction (at least in origin)'.[27] The preposition *beth* also stands for 'the idea of equivalence (one thing *for* another) whence the ב *pretii* [= of price]'.[28] But the preposition *beth* does not mean 'instead of' in the sense of 'a substitute for'.

The result of the foregoing remarks is that the evidence does not justify that we analyse *bʿl* as *b* + *ʿûl*, understanding it as 'instead of an infant'.

3. Stela of a sacrifice consisting of an infant

In this translation, the word *bʿl* in the phrase *nṣb mlk bʿl* is once again parsed as the preposition *beth* + the common noun *ʿûl*, but this time the preposition functions as a *beth* of essence. This type of *beth* 'is used to indicate the predicate and especially the predicative'.[29] In practice it 'marks identity of a noun in the context, occasionally with a predicate, and connoting "(having the same nature) as" or "(consisting) of".'[30] Thus the *beth* of essence in fact helps to define the noun to which it is attached, and this is why Frank Moore Cross translates *bʿl* as 'consisting of an infant'.[31] This translation is philologically sound and thus possible, but whether it is highly probable is a different issue that will be discussed below.

[23] Krahmalkov 2000: 94.
[24] Gibson 1982: 75. See also Frendo 2012: 529-530 and references there.
[25] Gibson 1994: 150.
[26] Clines 2001: 187a.
[27] Day 1989: 7 n. 13.
[28] Joüon and Muraoka 2006: 457.
[29] Joüon and Muraoka 2006: 458.
[30] Arnold and Choi 2018: 119.
[31] Cross 1994: 100.

4. Stela of a sacrifice of a lord

This is another possible translation. In this case, the word *bʿl* in the phrase *nṣb mlk bʿl* is taken to mean 'lord', in the sense of a 'citizen'.[32] Therefore, the phrase simply states that the stela is commemorating the sacrifice that a citizen offered, without telling us what type of sacrifice was presented to the deity.

5. Stela of a (human) sacrifice of one making (it)

Gibson opts to translate *nṣb mlk bʿl* as 'Stele of a (human) sacrifice of one making (it)'.[33] Although he translates *mlk* as (human) sacrifice, he says that this word means 'a bringing, offering, sacrifice', and that is why he places the word 'human' in brackets.[34] As already discussed above, *mlk* cannot of itself mean 'human sacrifice'; it simply means 'sacrifice'. Only an accompanying word can specify what type of sacrifice is meant.

The problem really lies with translating *bʿl* as 'of one making it'. Gibson is correct when he says that the phrase *bʿl (h)zbḥ* means 'offerer, sacrificer', as in CIS I, 167, 2, 3.[35] Cooke reminds us that the phrase *bʿl hzbḥ* literally means 'owner of the sacrifice', which he translates as 'the person offering the sacrifice'.[36] In this case, the word *bʿl* functions as a 'noun of relation'[37] and is thus in the construct state and used as a 'status word' to refer to 'the owner of an object which embodies his manner, his character or his occupation'. Thus, e.g. *bʿl ḥ^{q}lōmōṯ* means 'dreamer (someone who possesses the gift of dreaming and the interpretation of dreams, ...)'.[38]

Although the translation of *bʿl (h)zbḥ* as 'offerer,sacrificer' is correct, it does not apply to *nṣb mlk bʿl* since in this case the word *bʿl* is not used as a 'status word' in CIS I, 123, 2. In fact, as just pointed out, Gibson does not translate *nṣb mlk bʿl* as 'Stele of a (human) sacrifice of the offerer/sacrificer' but as 'Stele of a (human) sacrifice of one making (it)'.[39] He offers no explanation for his translation of *bʿl* as 'of one making (it)'. A possible rationale Gibson might have had in mind for this translation is that he would have viewed the writing of /b/ instead of /p/, thus considering these two phonemes as free variants. However, it should be pointed out that in Phoenician /p/ and /b/ are not free variants but simply allophones, and therefore it was not possible to substitute one for the other in the case of a different word or root. Thus it is clearly not possible to write *bʿl* when *pʿl* is meant; these two words are different and

[32] Gibson 1982: 75.
[33] Gibson 1982: 74.
[34] Gibson 1982: 74.
[35] Gibson 1982: 75.
[36] Cooke 1903: 113.
[37] Cooke 1903: 119.
[38] Koehler and Baumgartner 1994-2000: 143. See also Gibson 1994: 33-34.
[39] Gibson 1982: 74.

have different roots – 'Baʿal/lord' is not the same word as 'to do, to make'. It is true that in Ugaritic the verb 'to do' is *bʿl*, however, this stems from 'a partial assimilation (voicing) of *p in the YQTL form of the verb to a following voiced (*Yipʿalu). This form then became generalized and spread to other forms of the verb, with the result that only *bʿl* is attested in Ugaritic.'[40] This observation buttresses the idea that /b/ and /p/ are not free variants – not even in Ugaritic.[41]

It is thus clear that in the phrase *nṣb mlk bʿl* the word *bʿl* cannot stand for *pʿl* since 'interchanges of b and p *in the same root* [my emphasis] do not represent free variants but positional variants that are conditioned by different phonological environments';[42] we are here dealing with an allophone and not with a free variant.

From the foregoing, the translation of *nṣb mlk bʿl* as 'Stele of a (human) sacrifice of one making (it)'[43] is not possible in view of the fact that the word *bʿl* is not functioning as a 'status word' and since /b/ and /p/ in Phoenician are not free variants but allophones and thus *pʿl* cannot be substituted with *bʿl*.

6. Stela of a sacrifice to Baʿal (literally 'of a sacrifice of Baʿal')

This translation partly resembles the one discussed in number 1 above, with the difference that instead of reading *mlk bʿl* as the name of the composite deity Milk-Baʿal, it renders it as 'of a sacrifice to Baʿal'. In this case, *bʿl* functions as an objective genitive and thus indicates that we are dealing with a sacrifice offered to the deity Baʿal.[44] In a sense, *mutatis mutandis*, this translation is analogous to that presented in number 1 above, where *nṣb mlk bʿl* was read as 'Stela of Milk-Baʿal', whereas here it is deciphered as 'Stele di *mlk* a Baʿal (?)'.[45] This latter translation makes good sense and to read *bʿl* as the name of the deity Baʿal could well be 'la siegazione più plausibile'.[46] As just pointed out, Maria Giulia Guzzo Amadasi leaves *mlk* untranslated, but she glosses this word as being 'verosimilmente un termine tecnico designante il sacrificio di un bambino'.[47] However, as shown above, *mlk* of itself cannot mean 'human sacrifice'. But the translation of *nṣb mlk bʿl* as 'Stela of a sacrifice to Baʿal' is possible.

[40] Greenstein 1976: 52.

[41] 'Moreover, were there free variation of b and p in Ugaritic, one would expect beside the numerous attestations of bʿl "Baal" also pʿl, and beside npš "lifebreath" also nbš, etc.' (Greenstein 1976: 52).

[42] Greenstein 1976: 51.

[43] Gibson 1982: 74.

[44] When there are two nouns, the first of which is in the construct state and the one following it is in the genitive, and 'the first noun indicates an action performed to, for, or against a person indicated by the second noun', we have an example of an objective genitive (Joüon and Muraoka 2006: 436). For examples of the various types of the objective genitive in Classical Hebrew, see, e.g., Kautzsch and Cowley 1910: 416; Gibson 1994: 31-32; Merwe *et al.* 2017: 227; and Arnold and Choi 2018: 14.

[45] Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 20. English translation: 'Stela of *mlk* to Ba al (?)'.

[46] Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 21. English translation: 'the most plausible explanation'.

[47] Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 20. English translation: 'likely a technical term meaning the sacrifice of a child'.

7. Stela of one sacrificed to Baʿal (literally 'of a sacrificed one of Baʿal')

I have already discussed this translation elsewhere.[48] The main difference between this translation and the preceding one is how we understand the word *mlk* in the phrase *mlk bʿl*. In the preceding translation *mlk* is taken to mean 'sacrifice' and is parsed as a verbal noun of the form *māqtil* in the Yiphʿil.[49] On the other hand, in this translation *mlk* is taken as a verbal noun of the form mūqtal in the Yuphʿal, meaning 'a sacrificed one' (in the masculine singular form). It is true that the Yuphʿal form is rare in Phoenician, and that it is claimed that 'einige eventuelle Passivformen (Jufal?) sind unsicher'.[50] However, in Old Phoenician (= KAI 24, 10, 13, 14, 15) we find the word *mškbm* parsed as a Participle in the Yuphʿal, literally meaning 'die Hingelegten', unless it is a Samalian word rather than Phoenician.[51] But there is also evidence for the Participle in the Yuphʿal form in late Punic, where doubts linger with respect to the orthography and not as to whether we are dealing with a participle of the Yuphʿal form.[52] In the instances just mentioned the context is what determined this analysis. Be that as it may, in the case of *mlk bʿl* it is important to note that in Phoenician-Punic we also find the phrase *mlkt bʿl*, where *mlkt* is the feminine form of *mlk* and that this feminine variant 'indica semplicimente il sesso femminile della vittima umana'.[53] In view of this, it is much more likely that *mlk* and *mlkt* are best translated as 'one sacrificed' (a male and female respectively). Thus, it makes more sense to translate *nṣb mlk bʿl* as 'Stela of one sacrificed to Baʿal' (literally 'Stela of a sacrificed one of Baʿal') than to take it to mean 'Stela of a sacrifice to Baʿal' (literally 'of a sacrifice of Baʿal') – since in the former proposal we thus have a specification of what type of sacrifice we are dealing with, i.e. the sacrifice of a male human being, rather than to mention the word 'sacrifice' without any specification whatsoever.

Nṣb mlk bʿl constitute the first three words of CIS I, 123, and scholars are bound to encounter in the literature *at least one* of the aforementioned seven translations of these three words. The foregoing analysis shows that five out of the seven translations discussed are all philologically possible, and therefore it is important to try and pin down the one translation that is the most probable in view of all the available evidence. The following are the five possible translations of *nṣb mlk bʿl*:

Stela of Milk-Baʿal (1)

Stela of a sacrifice consisting of an infant (3)

[48] Frendo 2012: 532-533 and references there.
[49] Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 21 and references there.
[50] Friedrich and Röllig 1999: 75. English Translaion: 'some possible passive forms (Jufal?) are uncertain'.
[51] Friedrich and Röllig 1999: 94. English translation: 'those laid down/put away'.
[52] Friedrich and Röllig 1999: 103.
[53] Garbini 1980: 197, 196. English translation: 'simply indicates the female sex of the human victim'.

Stela of a sacrifice of a lord (4)

Stela of a sacrifice to Ba'al (6)

Stela of one sacrificed to Ba'al (7)

In view of this it is clear that context is the factor that will have to determine which of these possible translations is the likeliest one.

Since CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis* are parallel inscriptions, and since the first three words on the extant inscription, i.e. CIS I, 123, pose no problem in deciphering the relevant letters, it is the first three words in the copy that Count Saverio Marchese made of CIS I, 123 *bis* (Fig. 1a) that constitute the context we should first deal with. As already mentioned above, the commonly accepted reading of the first three words of CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis* is as follows:

CIS I, 123: *nṣb mlk b'l*

CIS I, 123 *bis*: *nṣb*[54] *mlk ʾmr*

As we can see, the difference between both inscriptions with respect to the first three words lies in the third word: instead of the word *b'l* in CIS I, 123, there is the word *ʾmr* in CIS I, 123 *bis*, which the majority of scholars translate as 'lamb'. Since, as shown above, *mlk* can mean 'sacrifice', the phrase *mlk ʾmr* is then often taken to mean 'offering of a lamb'.[55] This is because the two words *mlk ʾmr* 'are transcribed *molchomor* and qualify the phrase "a great nocturnal sacrifice" in Latin inscrs. of offerings made to Saturn found at Ngaus (formerly Nicivibus) in Algeria.'[56] In these inscriptions there are also variants of *molchomor*, i.e. *morchomor*, and *mochomor*.[57] The *molchomor* sacrifice would thus be the sacrifice of a lamb instead of a human sacrifice,[58] since in three of the four Latin inscriptions (etched on stelae) where this sacrifice is mentioned we find the following formulae: *agnum pro* vikario, *anima pro anima*, *sanguine pro sanguine*, and *vita pro vita*.[59] Moreover, the stelae in question depict Saturn possibly holding a sacrificial knife, and a sheep.[60] Thus, the archaeological evidence, both textual and non-inscriptional, *seems to favour strongly* the interpretation that *mlk ʾmr* means

[54] Note that as far as CIS I, 123 *bis* is concerned, those who base their reading of this inscription on the copy found in CIS I, Pl. XXV (see Fig. 1b) have doubts regarding the letter *ṣ* in the word *nṣb* (Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 22, Gibson 1982: 76, and KAI 61 B, 1 in KAI 2002: 17). However, in the copy of Count Saverio Marchese this second letter in the word *nṣb* does indeed seem to be a *ṣ* (Fig. 1a).

[55] KAI 1966-1969, vol. 2: 76 and references there; Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 20.

[56] Gibson 1982: 76.

[57] Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 20.

[58] Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 20.

[59] KAI 1966-1969, vol. 2: 76 and references there.

[60] KAI 1966-1969, vol. 2: 76 and references there.

'sacrifice of a lamb' and allows us to understand this as being a sacrifice, whereby a lamb is offered instead of a human being, specifically a child. As far as *ʾmr* meaning 'lamb' goes, Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig refer to two cognate words – *ʾimr* in Ugaritic and *immeru* in Akkadian.[61]

This, however, begs the question as to whether we can really say that *ʾmr* means 'lamb' in CIS I, 123 *bis*, since 'even allowing for the vagaries of classical transcribers, it is very difficult to see how *-omor* could have arisen out of [*ʾimmar*], in which neither of the vowels is of the [o, u] class'.[62] Clearly, it seems more likely it reflects a participle either active (*ʾōmēr*) or passive (*ʾāmūr*) from the verb *ʾmr* meaning 'to say' or 'to promise'. It is on this ground that Gibson translates *nṣb mlk ʾmr* as 'Stele of a (human) sacrifice of one promising (it).[63] This is solid philological reasoning, but there is a problem in that it is highly likely that the third word in CIS I, 123 *bis* is in fact not to be read as *ʾmr* but as *sr*, i.e. Osiris.

It is important to keep in mind that up to 1945 scholars had read the third word in CIS I, 123 *bis* as *sr*; Giovanni Garbini had put forward strong arguments in favour of this reading (as I have already discussed elsewhere).[64] It was R. Dussaud who came up with the idea that we should read this word as *ʾmr*.[65] The whole issue revolves in fact around the second letter of this third word. Since CIS I, 123 *bis* is lost we have to depend on the copies that we have of it, with the result that we are on 'uncertain palaeographical ground'.[66] The *mem* in the word *mlk* 'is wholly different from the assumed *mem* in the alleged reading of the word *ʾmr*'[67] (Fig. 1b), and it is amongst the oldest attestations of this letter; eventually it would become typical of the later Punic script.[68] However, there is another type of *mem*, i.e. the oldest form that was no longer used after the 9th century BCE and which is absent in line 2 of CIS I, 123 *bis*. The logical conclusion to draw from all this is that 'the evidence suggests that the second letter of the first word in line 2 of this inscription [CIS I, 123 *bis*] is most probably a *samek* and not a *mem*',[69] and that therefore the likely reading of the third word in CIS I, 123 *bis* is *sr* and not *ʾmr* (Fig. 1a). The evidence also suggests that this *samek* is admittedly of a type that is 'leggermente diverso da quelli noti',[70] but this is not a problem when we remember that this letter 'happens to be the one least

[61] KAI 1966-1969, vol. 2: 76.
[62] Gibson 1982: 76.
[63] Gibson 1982: 76.
[64] Garbini 1980: 195 n. 22, 196; Frendo 2012: 531.
[65] Dussaud 1946: 376-377. See also Day 1989: 8 n. 22 and Frendo 2012: 530-531 and references there.
[66] Frendo 2012: 531; Garbini 1980: 195 n. 22.
[67] Frendo 2012: 531 and references there.
[68] Garbini 1980: 196.
[69] Frendo 2012: 531.
[70] Garbini 1980: 196. English translation: 'slightly different to those known'.

frequently attested in Phoenician-Punic epigraphy' and that therefore 'its evolution is not well known'.[71]

The foregoing conclusion is supported by a careful examination of the available extant copies that we have of CIS I, 123 *bis*. The copy published in CIS[72] (Fig. 1b), and which is also found in Guzzo Amadasi's publication of this inscription[73] itself, leads one 'to agree with Garbini's preference for a *samek* rather than a *mem*',[74] and if we compare it with the newly published copy of Count Saverio Marchese (Fig. 1a), which I discussed above, we seem to have a confirmation of 'this choice'.[75] The reading *ʾsr* instead of *ʾmr* means that the first three words of CIS I, 123 and 123 *bis* now respectively read as follows:

CIS I, 123: *nṣb mlk bʿl*

CIS I, 123 *bis*: *nṣb mlk ʾsr*

This is highly interesting in that we thus have a nice parallel between the third word of both inscriptions, namely Baʿal and Osiris. The reason for this clearly lies in the fact that the Egyptian god Osiris 'is the equivalent of the west Semitic god Baʿal'.[76] This commonly accepted equivalence is in its turn corroborated by an artistic representation of the 4th/3rd century BCE, i.e. that of Osiris, who is shown on a Carthaginian scarab 'in uno schema iconografico che è proprio di Baʿal Ḥammon'.[77]

This now leads us to see in what ways the parallel inscriptions, namely CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* can throw light on each other, without getting ourselves entangled in any circular arguments, and on condition that in the end we allow the 'self-correcting process of learning' discussed in Chapter 5 to lead us to sound conclusions based on a correct and verified understanding of the data. The first thing to note is that if we take *nṣb mlk bʿl* and the parallel *nṣb mlk ʾsr* to respectively mean '*Stela of Milk-Baʿal*' and '*Stela of Milk-Osir*', then this turns out to be a further corroboration of the fact that 'Osiris was so very much the equivalent of Baʿal in the minds of the Phoenicians in Malta'.[78] In this regard note that in CIS I, 122 we find the personal names *ʿbdʾsr* and *ʾsršmr*, where in both instances *ʾsr*, i.e. Osiris, is used as a theophoric element. So, both in CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* the outstanding problem is how to explain that these

[71] Frendo 2012: 531 and references there.
[72] CIS I, Pl. 25.
[73] Guzzo Amadasi 1967: fig. 2.
[74] Frendo 2012: 531 n. 33.
[75] Frendo 2012: 531 n. 33.
[76] Frendo 2012: 532.
[77] Garbini 1980: 198. English translation: 'in an iconographic pattern that is specifically Baʿal Ḥammon's'.
[78] See Frendo 2012: 533, and 533-534 n.42 for further evidence of how Egyptian culture imbued that of the Phoenicians in Malta, as testified by the archaeological evidence, both inscriptional and unwritten material remains.

two inscriptions first mention Baʿal and Osiris respectively and then go on to say that the offering in question was made to Baʿal Ḥammon. Cooke had already dealt with this issue and clarified it thus: '[It] is curious that the pillar of one deity [Milk- Baʿal] should be dedicated to another; but Milk-Baʿal and Baʿal-ḥammān were prob. only different aspects of the same god.'[79] This is so in view of the fact that 'Baʿal Ḥammon was a specification of which Baʿal was actually in question.'[80] In the Ugaritic texts the word *baʿal* (meaning 'owner', 'lord', 'master', or 'husband') was originally used as an epithet of the deity Haddu, then becoming a variant name for this god. Eventually, the god Baʿal was linked to different places, with Baʿal Ḥammon acting as the Baʿal of Ḥammon,[81] which is not that far from Tyre.[82] A contemporary phenomenon 'obtains in the Roman Catholic faith when it comes to the veneration of the Virgin Mary. There is one Our Lady, but then one speaks of Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Czestokowa, and so on and so forth.'[83]

Another common word shared by CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* is the first word in each of these inscriptions, *nṣb*, which, as already shown above, is the equivalent of the Arabic cognate *nṣb* and thus stands for 'an idol-stone to which worship was paid'.[84] Hence in Phoenician *nṣb* differs from *mṣbt*, 'which as a rule is a funeral monument'.[85] It is important to specify that we are dealing in fact with ancestor worship, as *nṣb* 'functions in reality as a baetyl which acts like the physical representation of the sacrificed victim's soul'.[86] In view of this, it is preferable to read *mlk* as either 'sacrifice' or 'one sacrificed', as already discussed above.

This means that in the end, out of the seven translations of the first three words of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, i.e. *nṣb mlk bʿl* and *nṣb mlk ʾsr* respectively, as discussed above, even options 1 and 3 should preferably be excluded. The result is that *we are left with the following two possible translations* of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*:

6. Stela of a sacrifice to Baʿal (to Osiris in CIS I, 123 *bis*)

7. Stela of one sacrificed to Baʿal (to Osiris in CIS I, 123 *bis*)

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[79] Cooke 1903: 104.

[80] Frendo 2012: 533.

[81] Ḥammon is commonly equated with ʾUmm el-ʿAmed, 19 km. south of Tyre (Jidejian and Lipiński 1992: 484).

[82] Frendo 2012: 533 n. 40 and references there.

[83] Frendo 2012: 533 n. 40.

[84] Cooke 1903: 103.

[85] Cooke 1903: 104.

[86] Frendo 2012: 533 and reference there (n. 41) to Garbini (1980: 197) who had written that 'il confronto con i monumenti figurati su cui sono incise le iscrizioni menzionanti il *mlk bʿl* suggerisce che *nṣb* indichi specificamente il betilo, espressione materiale dell'anima della vittima sacrificato in olocausto'. English translation: 'the comparison with the figurative monuments on which the inscriptions mentioning the *mlk bʿl* are inscribed suggests that *nṣb* indicates specifically the baetyl, [which is] the material expression of the soul of the victim sacrificed as a holocaust'.

From the philological point of view, each of these translations is possible, with the result that it is only the context that will allow us to choose the translation that is more probable. As already shown above, CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* act as a context for one another; they are both short inscriptions, and I have already shown how they throw light on each other with respect to the translation of *nṣb mlk b'l* (in CIS I, 123) and of the parallel *nṣb mlk 'sr* (in CIS I, 123 *bis*). Ultimately, the only remaining context that can throw light on which translation is to be preferred is the archaeological one.

We do not have a thoroughly clear-cut, direct archaeological context for the two inscriptions, however there is evidence which, although circumstantial, does throw a great deal of light on what the overall context of these inscriptions most probably was. The *Malta Government Gazette* of 1819[87] records that: 'In another excavation near the City Notabile [Mdina], there have been found sixty earthen vessels filled with bones of a very small size, therefore supposed to be those of children or small animals: they have two Phoenician inscriptions cut on two stones of the country, a palm[88] and a half high, but only a third of a palm broad, resting upon a foot of the same sort of stone, by which it appears to have been fixed in the rock. The rough shape of the vases seem [*sic*] to indicate an antiquity contemporary with the dominion [Phoenician] of that nation of whose letters and language the inscriptions are composed.'

Very similar information can be found in an article by Edward Charlton, who, when writing about the discovery of Phoenician pottery together with Phoenician inscriptions, explicitly says that Malta has 'a fine and quite perfect Phoenician inscription of six lines, which was found near the hospital at Rabbato, in an excavation like a tank, which contained also, a large number of vases filled with the bones of animals and birds'.[89] This information is very similar to the aforementioned one in the *Malta Government Gazette*, and the latter's mention of small bones 'supposed to be those of children or small animals' is echoed in Charlton's 'the bones of animals and birds'. This seems to suggest that we are dealing with 'one and the same discovery, and that the inscriptions referred to in both sources are the ones considered here (CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*)'.[90]

The foregoing leaves open the crucial question as to where CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* were actually found. Although up to now it is not possible 'to pin down the *exact* find-spot' of these two inscriptions, we can speak about the proposal of 'some possible locations'.[91] The latter consist of portions of land that were all either very near the Dominican convent in Rabat or somewhat further away, but not too far. The

[87] *Malta Government Gazette* 1819: 1986. It was Ann Shortland-Jones (1998: 92) who first pointed out this important notice.

[88] For the equivalent of the palm at the time of the discovery in question, see Vella 2013: 594 n. 14.

[89] Charlton 1861: 133.

[90] Vella 2013: 593-594.

[91] Vella 2013: 595.

inscriptions could well have been found in an area 'on the plateau across the road from the Dominican convent', or on 'land on the cultivated clay slopes right below the church of Tal-Virtù and behind the Dominican convent', or 'another area further away".[92]

The above-mentioned information in the *Malta Government Gazette*, and that reported by Charlton, suggest possibly a *tophet*. Before Ann Shortland-Jones had traced the information in the *Gazette*,[93] 'the assumption had already been made that they [CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*] belonged to the genre of *tophet* votive dedications'.[94] From the two possible translations, cited above, of the first three words of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, the second, i.e. 'Stela of the one sacrificed to Baʿal (to Osiris in CIS I, 123 *bis*)', corroborates in a clear manner the hypothesis that these two inscriptions do very likely stem from a *tophet*.

However, there are a few points that need further elucidation. The first thing to note is that it is important to remember that the attribution of the two inscriptions to the genre of a votive dedication made in a *tophet* should not be based on interpreting *mlk* per se as a human sacrifice; as already discussed above, *mlk* can clearly mean 'sacrifice', but of itself it does not mean 'human sacrifice'; for that to be the case, further specifications are required. The above information regarding the bones that are 'supposed to be those of children or small animals' and those of 'of animals and birds' indicates that we are most probably dealing with a *tophet*, where, as is commonly known, the burnt remains of children and animals were buried with votive inscriptions marking their place. This evidence provides a context on how best to analyse *mlk* in CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*. The context shows clearly that we are dealing with a human sacrifice, although, if *mlk* is parsed as a verbal noun in the Yiphʿil form it cannot support this conclusion. However, this word *mlk* does show that we are dealing with a human sacrifice (most probably of children) once we parse it not as a verbal noun of the Yiphʿil form, but as a verbal noun of the passive of this form, i.e. of the Yuphʿal.[95] Garbini had already noticed that in Punic inscriptions we also find the phrase *mlkt bʿl*, which is the feminine variant of *mlk*, and as such 'indica semplicemente il sesso femminile della vittima umana'.[96] However, we can only speak of a 'vittima umana' if *mlk*/*mlkt* are parsed as verbal nouns, masculine and feminine respectively, of the Yuphʿal form.[97]

[92] Vella 2013: 595, 604 fig. 5, 605 fig. 6.

[93] Shortland-Jones 1998: 92.

[94] Vella 2013: 593 and references there.

[95] Frendo 2012: 532.

[96] Garbini 1980: 197, 196. English translation: 'simply indicates the female sex of the human victim'.

[97] It is true that 'einige eventuelle Passivformen (Jufaʿl?) sind unsicher' (Friedrich-Röllig 1999: 75) [English translation: 'some possible passive forms (Yuphʿal?) are uncertain'], however, note what seem to be good examples of this form (Friedrich-Röllig 1999: 103) and the proposal being made here, where the archaeological context alongside philological considerations corroborates the reading of *mlk* as a verbal noun of the Yuphʿal form meaning 'the one sacrificed'.

The foregoing points regarding the likely overall archaeological context of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, i.e. the association with a *tophet*, help us decide which of the two proposed translations 'Stela of a sacrifice to Baʿal' ('to Osiris' in CIS I, 123 *bis*) and 'Stela of one sacrificed to Baʿal' ('to Osiris' in CIS I, 123 *bis*) to prefer. The former proposal does not specify which sacrifice is being referred to, whereas the second option, i.e. 'Stela of one sacrificed to Baʿal' ('to Osiris' in CIS I, 123 *bis*), clearly tells us that we have here is an act of human sacrifice (in view of the evidence adduced above, most likely that of a child). This proposal is backed by and tallies perfectly with the overall archaeological context discussed above and which is very probably that of a *tophet*.

The analyses and discussion thus far now allow us to propose the following readings and translations for CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, which include the above-mentioned commonly accepted reconstructions and translations where applicable:

CIS I, 123 reads as follows:

nṣb mlk bʿlʾš šm nḥm lbʿl ḥmnʾdn k šm ql dbry

'Stela of the one sacrificed to Baʿal which Nahum set up for Baʿal-Ḥammon, lord, because he heard the voice of his prayers [literally words].'[98]

CIS I, 123 *bis*. reads as follows:

nṣ(?)b mlkʾsrʾš šʾ[mʾr]š l(?)bʿl [ḥmn]ʾdn [k š]m(?)ʿ ql(?) [db]ry

'Stela of the one sacrificed to Osiris which [Arish] set up for Baʿal-[Ḥammon], lord, because he heard the voice of his [prayers].'[99]

CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* are two parallel inscriptions, both drawn up in *scriptio continua*. As explained earlier on in this study, the oral reading of texts in public plays a major role in helping us better appreciate the problems that *scription continua* poses and assist us to understand the texts drafted in this manner. However, the content of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* does not support the idea that we have here texts meant to be read by a lector to a public assembly, such as exemplified by the case of Ezra, who read publicly from the *Book of the Law* to the assembly of God's people (Nehemiah 8: 2-3). CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* per se are not public documents, and it may very well be the case that these two inscriptions were meant for the eyes of the person who commissioned them or, perhaps, only for the eyes of the deity to whom the sacrifice in question was offered – Baʿal-Ḥammon. Early alphabetic texts were either read aloud (if designed as public documents), or privately (if meant to be read only

[98] Cf. Gibson 1982: 74.
[99] Cf. Gibson 1982: 76.

by those who drafted them), or, perhaps, 'they were not meant to be read at all!'.[100] The small sphinx from Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai with an inscription on it was dedicated to the goddess Hathor and had been deposited in her temple. As Aaron J. Koller pointed out, '[the sphinx's] early alphabetic inscription, then, was supposed to be read only by a deity – and it is likely that goddesses can read even without spaces.'[101]

The foregoing points are grounded also on the fact that there are *no pauses between words when we speak* and therefore the same applied originally when writing was used in antiquity – as just illustrated. Spaces between words in alphabetic writing emerged *c.* 1200 BCE, many years after the alphabet was invented.[102] When documents were public there were only two options: either a lector read a text aloud in public, after having first read the text, which would have had no word division, or the text would have been placed in a public area for literate individuals to read. In this latter scenario, the text would be presented with word division, as is the case of CIS I, 132, which mentions public building works in Gozo completed under the leadership of a certain Arish.

We know that Phoenician inscriptions were drafted either in *scriptio continua*, without any aid at all (as in the case of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*), or else dots, vertical strokes, or empty spaces were employed to indicate (at least partially) what we call 'word division'. However, to account for all the available evidence one would have to bear in mind that, ultimately, the whole issue revolves around the fact that in Northwest Semitic writing systems, including Phoenician, word division 'marks out a prosodic unit'[103] rather than single words, and therefore it is intrinsically linked to how a written text was read orally. In Phoenician-Punic word division is linked 'explicitly to the question of accent, that is prosody'.[104]

What light do CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* throw on the presence of the Phoenicians in Malta? We have here two inscriptions very likely dating to the early 7th century BCE[105] that show us we are dealing with a very early phase of the Phoenician presence in Malta. This is borne out by the fact that only the votaries (Nahum and Arish (?) in CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*. respectively) are mentioned, with no reference to genealogy, and 'this may indicate that they were transients or recent arrivals, who had no family on the island by which they could identify themselves or acquaintances who would recognize them by their lineage'.[106] This contrasts with an inscribed stela from Sulcis,

[100] Koller 2022: 67.
[101] Koller 2022: 67.
[102] Koller 2022: 66-67.
[103] Crellin 2022: 51.
[104] Crellin 2022: 35, where he refers to Friedrich and Röllig 1999: 146, section 219.
[105] Gibson 1982: 73 and references there.
[106] Peckham 2014: 245.

which is later[107] than the parallel inscriptions from Malta, and where we have the name of a man, a patronymic, and a grandfather's name. The votary from Sulcis can then be placed 'in the third generation of one of the families who founded the colony in the latter part of the eighth century'.[108]

Thus, the founders of the Phoenician settlement in Malta were 'literate Phoenicians'[109] who introduced writing to the Maltese islands. Their earliest inscriptions, CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, could therefore have 'marked foundation sacrifices by two leaders of the expedition'.[110] This possibility is supported by the translations of these two inscriptions, as proposed above, the overall context of which is very likely that of a *tophet*, as discussed. Many scholars now consider *tophets* to be multi-purpose sacred areas where different rites were performed, and, in this regard, they reject the opposition or stark contrast between a necropolis and a sanctuary.[111] It is true there is evidence that the Greeks viewed the cremation of children with abhorrence and that they rejected this practice on the part of the Phoenicians in a polemic manner by declaring it to be the practice of 'child sacrifice'.[112] However, this should not blind us to the fact that there were clear instances when the Phoenicians deliberately offered their children in sacrifice to the gods. This is plainly evidenced in CIS I, 295, which Peckham reads thus: 'To the Lady, to Ṭanniṯ Face-of- Baʿal, and to the Lord, to Baʿal Ḥammon, what Bodmilqart, son of ʿAbdʾadom vowed – flesh of his flesh, deliberately'.[113] The deliberate sacrifice of children also obtains in CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, as shown above.

The evidence adduced and discussed in this chapter illustrates how the various principles of interpretation mentioned earlier in this study operate. The detailed examination of CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis* has shown how the various principles of interpretation blend and mix one with the other. The priority is to first examine the relevant texts separately and only later to read parts of the inscriptions in the light of the whole, and eventually one inscription in the light of its parallel inscription. This clearly risks leading to circular arguments which can only be broken and avoided if all along the 'self-correcting process of learning' discussed in Chapter 5 is adhered to by checking every move with the available data. The result of the analyses conducted in this chapter shows that out of seven translations of the crucial phrases *nṣb mlk bʿl* and the parallel *nṣb mlk ʾsr* (the former in CIS I, 123 and the latter in CIS I, 123 *bis*) only

[107] Guzzo Amadasi dates the inscription from Sulcis to the 6th century BCE (Guzzo Amadasi 1967: 98).

[108] Peckham 2014: 245 n. 317. The 8th century BCE is, in this case, clearly an approximate calculation. The important point is that the settling down of the Phoenicians in Sulcis occurred before that in Malta.

[109] Peckham 2014: 520.

[110] Peckham 2014: 520.

[111] Hieke 2019: 179 n. 22 and references there.

[112] Hieke 2019: 177 and references there.

[113] Peckham 2014: 545. It is important to highlight that deliberate child sacrifice was generally practised by men and only rarely by women. In such cases, women 'do not refer to their devotion as "deliberate"' (Peckham 2014: 546).

one turns out to be the most likely correct reading. This reading, i.e. 'Stela of the one sacrificed to Baʿal' and the parallel 'Stela of the one sacrificed to Osiris' (in CIS I, 123 and in CIS I, 123 *bis* respectively) is buttressed above all by the overall context, which, most likely, is that of a *tophet*.

The above-mentioned point that 'word division' in Phoenician turns out to be essentially a matter of prosody applies both to prose texts, such as CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, as well as to those texts drafted in poetic form, even when they are not poems per se. In the following chapter, the principles employed in interpreting CIS I, 123 and CIS I, 123 *bis*, alongside other principles of interpretation discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, but mainly in Chapter 5, will be applied to a text commonly known as the Tal-Virtù Papyrus in order to illustrate how to best navigate between diametrically opposed interpretations of a given inscription.

Chapter 7

Reading and Interpreting Phoenician Verse: The Tal-Virtù Papyrus

The papyrus commonly known as the Tal-Virtù Papyrus refers to fragments found in a bronze amulet holder, on which was depicted in ink the goddess Isis as well as an inscription in Phoenician. This amulet holder containing the papyrus was retrieved in 1968 in the area of Rabat known as Tal-Virtù, within the private garden of the late Hon. Dr Daniel Micallef, then minister of education, when workers accidentally hit on a Punic tomb while constructing a water cistern. Dr Micallef understood the importance of this find and handed the material (together with the fragments of a large storage jar and two pieces of a stone pillar found with the amulet holder) to the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, Malta. In view of this, the authors of the *editio princeps* of the bronze holder containing the papyrus labelled the find '*the Micallef amulet*'.[1] Although this term refers both to the bronze amulet holder *and* the papyrus found in it, the text itself is now simply referred to as the Tal-Virtù Papyrus. The bronze amulet holder and the papyrus are held in the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta: the amulet holder has the object I.D. 859 (and the old catalogue number VRT69/M/3), whereas the papyrus itself has the object I.D. 938 (and the old catalogue number VRT69/ORG2).[2]

In the *editio princeps* of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus we are given all the necessary information about the amulet bronze holder and the papyrus inscription in ink contained within it.[3] We shall be focussing our attention on the inscribed papyrus (Fig. 4), and readers should refer to this *editio princeps* for an understanding of the amulet bronze holder.[4] In this regard, suffice it to say that the lid of the amulet holder is in the shape of the Egyptian falcon god Horus,[5] and, as will be shown later, this link with Egyptian culture is paralleled by the contents of the Phoenician inscription and the drawing of the goddess Isis depicted on the papyrus.

The fragmentary papyrus found in the amulet holder consists of four pieces, with the largest fragment measuring 7 cm by 4.8 cm. The other three fragments are very small

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1 Gouder and Rocco 1975: 2 n. 2.

2 I owe this information to Ms Sharon Sultana (Senior Manager, Archaeology and Natural History, Heritage Malta), who was of great help to me when on 3rd May 2023 I once again saw first-hand the 'Tal-Virtù Papyrus' (this time at a closer range), and the relative photographs at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, Malta.

3 Gouder and Rocco 1975.

4 Gouder and Rocco 1975: 2-5.

5 Gouder and Rocco 1975: 3.

Figure 4. Photograph (2023) of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus Inscription, courtesy National Museum of Archaeology, Heritage Malta.

(2.7 cm by 1.3 cm; 1 cm by 0.4 cm; 1.8 cm by 0.2 cm). The second and fourth fragments show what seem to be definitive traces of ink, which, however, are 'assai mutile perché possano essere completate e utilizzate', and repeated attempts to place the minor fragments in place have failed, making it clear that the papyrus is incomplete.[6] The traces of ink just mentioned could thus be either parts of faint letters, or stains of ink, or the blackening of the papyrus due to various causes.[7] In view of the fact that (as will be shown), as it stands, the inscription written on the largest fragment makes sense, it is highly likely that the traces of ink on the second and fourth fragments are just stains of ink, or simply the effect of some other unknown factor on the papyrus. The inscription consists of five lines, the first two of which are complete. The other three lines preserved to the left of the image of Isis seem to warrant the conclusion that 'it is likely that their beginnings are complete because the text makes sense as it is preserved and because, if there were more text, it would have begun asymmetrically to the right of Isis and her staff'.[8] This means that there are no missing letters to the right of Isis's image, while there seem to be no missing letters to the left of the image either. The image of Isis shown on the papyrus has part of her left arm removed as well as all the upper part of the sceptre and the last section of the lower part. However, as just shown, this does not impact the completeness of the inscription in any way.[9]

We are told that it is difficult to date the inscription as we find letters in their 'stadio primitivo' alongside others that have already reached their final stage of evolution.[10] The *taw*, the *šin*, the *qoph* (and perhaps also the *tsade*) are in their early stages, whereas the *wāw*, the *lamedh*, and the *daleth* are fully developed (Fig. 7).[11] In view of this, we can cautiously conclude that the inscription dates to the 6th century BCE, especially when we remember that 'la scrittura corsiva si evolve più facilmente della scrittura lapidaria', and the letter forms in their early stages just mentioned, should thus prevent us from excessively lowering the dating of the inscription.[12] The Tal-Virtù Papyrus exhibits links with Egypt also in the letter forms employed (Fig. 7); indeed, 'sembra usata una scrittura corsiva che s'apparenta con la corsiva documentata ad Elefantina.'[13] Such a type of Phoenician cursive script constitutes the remote origins, already in the 6th/5th century BCE, of the Neo-Punic cursive script that was, in

[6] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 6. English translation: 'very mutilated to be sufficiently completed and used'.
[7] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 8.
[8] Peckham 2014: 440.
[9] However, in the *editio princeps* of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription, the authors show that they allow for the possibility that some letters are missing to the right of the image of Isis; this despite the fact that their analysis demonstrates that the inscription makes sense as it stands (Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12).
[10] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 15. English translation: 'early stage'.
[11] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 18.
[12] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 18. English translation: 'the cursive script evolves more easily than that on stone'.
[13] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 18. English translation: 'it seems that a cursive script is used that is related to the cursive one evidenced at Elephantine'.

fact, 'in use before 146 B.C.', and which shows clear links with Egypt (particularly Elephantine).[14]

This 6th/5th-century BCE papyrus inscription from Tal-Virtù was not received in scholarly circles in the same way that other inscriptions from ancient times are generally received, i.e. with various alternative readings and interpretations of the text to that presented in the *editio princeps*. The main difference lies in the fact that in one scenario (that proposed by Philip C. Schmitz and which is discussed below) we have a case where the reading of the original text is *practically wholly different* to that presented in the *editio princeps*, and demands a close reading of the evidence. The main authors (other than Tancredi C. Gouder and Benedetto Rocco, who were responsible for the *editio princeps*) who dealt with the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription are Günther Hölbl,[15] Hans Peter Müller,[16] J.A. Emerton,[17] R. Ben Guiza,[18] J. Brian Peckham,[19] and, as just mentioned, Philip C. Schmitz.[20] As I shall discuss later, Hölbl's study is highly interesting, even crucial, for our understanding of the papyrus inscription, despite the fact that his work wholly depends on the translation offered in the *editio princeps*.[21] Müller 'accepted Rocco's readings and transliterations of words, but offered several fresh philological interpretations of them', whereas 'Emerton cited the papyrus to illustrate Isa 5: 14'.[22] R. Ben Guiza[23] also essentially endorses the reading proposed by Gouder and Rocco; he tells us that the palaeographic analysis of the Tal-Virtù inscription leads him to accept that the inscription is complete except for a few letters,[24] and that 'le tout est majoritairement bien lisible malgré les quelques vides'.[25] Peckham follows the reading of Gouder and Rocco with only a few differences and with a highly interesting analysis.[26]

In view of the foregoing observations, it is clear we have to compare and contrast the reading of the papyrus inscription Gouder and Rocco presented with that which Peckham and Schmitz propose. This is the reading of Gouder and Rocco:[27]

[14] Kerr 2013: 11 especially nn. 9 and 10.
[15] Hölbl 1989.
[16] Müller 2001.
[17] Emerton 2015 [2003].
[18] Guiza 2005.
[19] Peckham 2014.
[20] Schmitz 2017.
[21] He tells us his observations depend on the translation found in Gouder and Rocco 1975, which he trusts as being basically correct (Hölbl 1989: 118).
[22] Schmitz 2017: 61.
[23] Guiza 2005: 64.
[24] Guiza 2005: 65.
[25] Guiza 2005: 64. English translation: 'the whole is mainly well readable despite some gaps'.
[26] Peckham 2014: 440-441.
[27] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12.

1. *šḥq ʿz lb ṣrkm*
2. *l(?)ʿ(?)g(?) dkk wḥ(?) ʾyb*
3. *..... sl bs ʿl ʿn*
4. *..... ʾp ṭ*
5. *..... lym sg tl*

The sign (?) indicates letters Gouder and Rocco are not certain of, but which they retain to be the likeliest reading. This is the translation they offer:

1. «Ridetevi, 0 forti d'animo, del vostro nemico,
2. fatevi beffe, fiaccate ed assalite l'avversario.
3. ..... disprezzate(lo), calpestate(lo) sulle acque;
4. ..... anzi distendete(lo)
5. ..... suI Mare, legate(lo), sospendete(lo)! ».[28]

Gouder provides an English translation:[29]

1. 'laugh at your enemy O valiant ones,
2. scorn, assail and crush your adversary,
3. .... disdain (him), trample (him) on the waters,
4. .... moreover, prostrate (him)
5. .... on the sea, bind (him) hang (him)'

Peckham resolves the five lines of the inscription 'into four lines of poetry', which he lays out as follows:[30]

1. *šḥq ʿz lb ṣrkm*
2. *lʿg dkk wḥ ʾyb*
3. *sl bs ʿl ʿn*
4. *ʾp ṭ (5) lym sg tl*

He translates the inscription as:[31]

1. 'Laugh, strong of heart, at your adversary!
2. Deride, distress, cast adrift the enemy!
3. Make light of him, shame him, on the sweet waters!
4. [Yea] Confuse him, on the sea enclose him, mock him!'

[28] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12.
[29] Gouder 1991: 14.
[30] Peckham 2014: 440.
[31] Peckham 2014: 440.

In 2017, Schmitz read the papyrus inscription as:[32]

1. *[... l] šmrk(?)m(?) w(?)lnṣrkm*
2. *[... yd y]mn w [figure] tkw(?) yt*
3. *[vacat] [figure] kp rglyk*
4. *[vacat] [figure] ḥšš*
5. *[vacat] [figure] w(?)y m(?)m(?) [w]ll*

And offers this translation:[33]

1. [... to] watch over you (plural) and to protect you (plural)
2. [... right ha] nd, lest [*figure*] be harmed/pressed (both)
3. [vacat] [*figure*] the soles of your (singular) two feet
4. [vacat] [*figure*] caring
5. [vacat] [*figure*] both day and night

Clearly, when we compare the readings (and consequently the translations) of Gouder and Rocco, Peckham, and Schmitz we see (as will be shown below) that Peckham accepts the reading of Gouder and Rocco, even to the extent of not considering as doubtful the four letters about which the former had some slight misgivings. In this sense we can say that Peckham read the papyrus inscription essentially as Gouder and Rocco had, while providing a translation that differed slightly from theirs and which, at times, implies a different philological analysis. But in essence we are dealing with the same content. On the other hand, Schmitz presents a reading that is virtually wholly new – his translation, therefore, being also practically a complete novelty.

In view of this, it is imperative we understand why Schmitz has come up with a thoroughly new reading. With a few strokes of the pen he opines that 'two-thirds of Rocco's readings are inaccurate; Gouder and Rocco's translation is therefore moot; Hoftijzer and Jongeling were justifiably dubious about the readings; and, consequently Müller's commentary was premature.'[34] However, it is important to note that Schmitz makes no reference to Hölbl's[35] or Peckham's[36] observations regarding the papyrus inscription – the two scholars whose comparisons of this inscription with Egyptian literature in the case of the former, and the reading and translation of the Phoenician text for the latter, turn out to be crucial (as will be shown further on) for our understanding of this text.[37] Schmitz tells us that 'after having studied a high-

[32] Schmitz 2017: 63.
[33] Schmitz 2017: 63.
[34] Schmitz 2017: 62 and references on p. 61.
[35] Hölbl 1989: 116-123.
[36] Peckham 2014: 440-441.
[37] Schmitz (2017) presented his study in a *Festschrift* published in my honour, and I am extremely grateful to him for that. The fact that I endorse the reading by Gouder and Rocco, which was essentially followed by Peckham, does not mean that I do not appreciate Schmitz's work. The common factor that he and I

resolution image of the papyrus, copied its letters, and searched for similar forms in the extant corpus of Phoenician-Punic, and in consultation with several experienced palaeographers, I have been convinced that a new treatment of the papyrus is necessary.'[38] The result is Schmitz's reading and translation cited above. We are also told that Robert Holmstedt drew the text from the image that Schmitz presented.[39] However, Holmstedt did not read all the text exactly in the same way Schmitz did; in fact, the latter writes 'I am encouraged to find his [Holmstedt's] readings *largely* [my emphasis] identical to mine'.[40] Since Holmstedt's drawing is not presented in Schmitz's study, we do not know which letters these two scholars read differently. It is a pity that Schmitz does not publish Holmstedt's drawing – nor any other drawing of the Papyrus inscription for that matter. Schmitz presents enlarged images of each line of the papyrus inscription,[41] however this is not the same as having a drawing. It is a given that the drawing of an inscription best allows us to trace exactly how a scholar reads the relevant letters.

Although, as shown above, Schmitz's reading of the inscription differs drastically from that of Gouder and Rocco, as well as Peckham's, still there is agreement as to its overall literary genre. Schmitz tells us that 'the text of this papyrus shows lexical features that indicate that it probably functioned as an amulet. The Egyptian or Egyptianizing deity image on the papyrus was undoubtedly intended to enhance this essentially magical quality.'[42] Notwithstanding this, the fact remains that Schmitz's interpretation is wholly novel, consequently so is his lexical analysis.

This confirms that we need to look at various readings and interpretations of the papyrus inscription when deciding which reading is the most likely, bearing in mind all the principles of interpretation at work. The first thing to note is the chronological sequence of the main studies referred to above. The timeline regarding the *main* publications to consider for the purpose of this study is crucial; these are the relevant dates: 1975 saw the publication of the *editio princeps* of the papyrus inscription by Gouder and Rocco;[43] in 1989 Hölbl published his highly interesting remarks;[44] in 2014

share is that we are both seeking to faithfully comprehend the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription – one main difference lies in the fact that apparently Hölbl's work was not available to Schmitz, and, as readers will see for themselves, this work plays a crucial role in my argument, especially when I was faced with a number of letters that could be read in different ways and where, therefore, context plays a vital role in helping me choose the reading that makes more sense. Context helps to show the way forward when letters are not wholly legible.

38 Schmitz 2017: 62.

39 Schmitz 2017: 61 n. 1.

40 Schmitz 2017: 61 n. 1.

41 Schmitz 2017: 62 n. 1 where he refers to Figs 3-7.

42 Schmitz 2017: 69.

43 Gouder and Rocco 1975.

44 Hölbl 1989: 116-123.

Peckham published his take on the reading of the inscription and its interpretation;[45] and finally in 2017 Schmitz published his novel reading and interpretation.[46] As already noted above, it is striking that Schmitz makes no reference whatsoever to the work of Hölbl and Peckham, since both play a pivotal role when it comes to deciding which reading is the most likely, especially when facing virtually wholly different proposals. It is these two scholars that we must first consider.

Hölbl's observations on the Tal-Virtù inscription are highly important, not only in their own right, but also because he made these observations on the basis of the study by Gouder and Rocco without having any knowledge of Phoenician-Punic, and also because Gouder and Rocco were unaware of the conclusions that an Egyptologist like Hölbl would reach on the basis of their reading. Hölbl is explicit in stating that he is in no position to make linguistic comments on the inscription, and that he trusts that Gouder and Rocco's translation is essentially correct, although supposedly in need of improvement.[47] After carefully studying the translation found in Gouder and Rocco, Hölbl concludes that the Tal-Virtù papyrus inscription is, in fact, dealing with a passage in which Isis (whose image is portrayed on the papyrus) is requesting certain powers to overcome an enemy from across the sea.[48] Hölbl considers that the words on the Tal-Virtù papyrus belong to the literary genre of the *Feindvernichtungsliteratur*,[49] with the closest parallel being that of the sayings of Apophis, which deal precisely with the victory of the enemy over the water. These sayings were collected in the New Kingdom.[50] The *Book of Apophis* provides a ritual regarding the victory of the Sun and *maat* over darkness and chaos. The aim of these texts was to protect the Sun god; such protection was later applied to the Pharaoh and eventually generalised; indeed, it was 'im Sinne eines Amulettes gegen die von Apophis ausgehenden Übel verallgemeinert'.[51] It is true that the falcon head of the Tal-Virtù amulet is linked to Isis and that it reminds us of the myth of Horus; hence, the enemy of the Sun god could also be Seth who features in this myth. The Tal-Virtù inscription 'is based on various sources of ancient Egyptian literature which stem from various periods, however it seems that the closest parallels are in fact found in the collection of magical spells dating from the New Kingdom period known as the Book of Apophis.'[52]

The foregoing parallel between the Tal-Virtù inscription and the *Book of Apophis* is very close indeed; the former is an exhortation to overcome an enemy from over

[45] Peckham 2014: 440-441.
[46] Schmitz 2017.
[47] Hölbl 1989: 116 n. 122, 118.
[48] Hölbl 1989: 118. English translation: 'Literature dealing with [literally 'of'] the destruction of the enemy'.
[49] Hölbl 1989: 119.
[50] Hölbl 1989: 121.
[51] Hölbl 1989: 121. English translation: '[Was] generalized in the sense of an amulet against the evil issuing from Apophis'.
[52] Frendo 2018a: 242.

the waters, whereas the latter deals with overcoming Apophis 'auf dem (Himmels-) Gewässer'.[53] The malign intention of Apophis was to impede people from ever reaching their eternal home.[54] It is important to note that Isis has the same role both in the Tal-Virtù inscription as well as in the *Book of Apophis*: she is the one who, by means of her magic, overcomes the enemy by uttering the relevant sayings.[55] However, Hölbl tells us that the *Book of Apophis* makes it clear that the 'strong of heart' mentioned in the Tal-Virtù inscription are Re or Re-Harachte, Horus, Ra's team, i.e. the Ennead of Heliopolis, Nephthys, and Isis herself.[56] In view of the fact that Isis herself is one of the 'strong of heart' it is preferable to construe the Tal-Virtù text as being uttered not *by* Isis, but as being addressed *to* Isis and the other 'strong of heart'. As I have already pointed out elsewhere, 'this means that it is highly probable that Isis is to be viewed not as the one who is encouraging the "courageous ones" but as forming part of this group. The exhortation found in the Tal-Virtù inscription was drawn up by someone who was praying that Isis and her divine associates annihilate the monster Apophis and thwart his attempts to bar the dead person from reaching his or her eternal destination. In this context, it is also interesting to note that in the Egyptian Book of the Dead it was the deceased person who actually played the role of the sun god who overcame Apophis.'[57] Moreover, we know that there is explicit evidence that it was the deceased who uttered the magic spells written on the amulet that was buried with him or her. Coffin Text 648, for example, is very explicit when it says 'My magic spells are on my mouth'[58] and it thus clearly attests to 'a notion that is especially pertinent when read in the context of the powerful words that the deceased claims for himself when he recognizes that he is "mighty by means of what is on him". This is a reference to the actual protective amulets the deceased is wearing on his body.'[59]

The aforementioned similarities between the Tal-Virtù inscription and the *Book of Apophis* are not limited to literary genre and overall themes. Hölbl has noted that even the verbs used in both sources are all identical with the exception of the last, namely the one that refers to hanging.[60] Thus, we can safely say that the Tal-Virtù inscription and the amulet holder in which it was found are greatly redolent of Egyptian culture. We do not know which myth and text this inscription is exactly referring to, but the foregoing points make it clear that it is highly likely we are dealing at least with a free (but very close) rendering of an original Egyptian text. It is doubtful whether we can ever find an Egyptian text that is verbatim identical to that on the Tal-Virtù papyrus, since it is probable that the text on this papyrus was formulated in a Phoenician

[53] Hölbl 1989: 121. English translation: 'over the heavenly waters'.
[54] Hölbl 1989: 116-121, 123. See also Frendo 2018a 242.
[55] Hölbl 1989: 121.
[56] Hölbl 1989: 121 n. 150.
[57] Frendo 2018a: 242 and references there.
[58] As cited in Katansky 2019: 525.
[59] Katansky 2019: 525.
[60] Hölbl 1989: 121-122.

manner – perhaps even to purposely underscore the role of the water and the sea in accordance with the Phoenician worldview.[61] It was Phoenicians who had been in Egypt who probably gave us the Tal-Virtù papyrus inscription; this is so especially when we keep in mind that the letter forms of this inscription resemble (Fig. 7) those of the Elephantine texts.[62]

As already mentioned above, Hölbl took the translation of Gouder and Rocco as the basis for his study, not being versed himself in Phoenician-Punic. The highly interesting conclusions that he reached, and the close parallels between Egyptian texts and the Tal-Virtù papyrus inscription that he points out, are amazing when we remember that Gouder and Rocco were unaware of Hölbl's study, which (as already pointed out) was published fourteen years after their publication. The only logical conclusion is for us to assume that the reading and translation that Gouder and Rocco proposed for the Tal-Virtù inscription are essentially correct; this assumption equally applies to the reading and translation offered by Peckham. As shown above, the doyen of the study of Phoenician-Punic letter forms wholly endorses the reading of this inscription proposed by Gouder and Rocco.

The foregoing reading of the inscription led Peckham to write that its five lines 'seem to resolve into four lines of poetry'.[63] For Peckham the inscription is complete, as the first two lines are definitely so, without any trace of doubt, while the other three lines can safely be assumed to have their beginnings complete 'because the text makes sense as it is preserved and because, if there were more text, it would have begun asymmetrically to the right of Isis and her staff'.[64] Peckham lays out the four lines of poetry thus:

1. *šḥq ʻz lb ṣrkm*
2. *lʻg dkk wḥ ʼyb*
3. *sl bs ʻl ʻn*
4. *p ṭ (5) lym sg tl*

There is a good deal of parallelism in these four lines of poetry that I shall discuss in detail later. Suffice it for now to say that these four lines provide 'a nice balance between the four words [excluding the conjunction *p* in l. 4] of each line'.[65] Peckham reads this inscription on two levels: on one level he believes we are dealing with a spell by a Phoenician trader against his business competitors 'when they are at sea and when they enter the estuaries to do business with the people of the interior'; and on the other he refers to the casting and the design of this magical spell as being Egyptian,

[61] Hölbl 1989: 123.
[62] Hölbl 1989: 123; Gouder and Rocco 1975: 18.
[63] Peckham 2014: 440.
[64] Peckham 2014: 440.
[65] Peckham 2014: 440.

evoking 'the more serious matter of life and death'.[66] This latter interpretation tallies with the above-mentioned interpretations of Gouder and Rocco, as well as Hölbl, and with which I also agree.

The foregoing conclusions lead me to a difficult situation. On one hand, Hölbl's study makes perfect sense, but only on the assumption that the reading of the Tal-Virtù papyrus inscription by Gouder and Rocco is essentially correct (the same holds for Peckham, who also endorses their reading, and, as already mentioned above, even goes so far as to dispel the doubts Gouder and Rocco had regarding some of the letters they themselves had proposed to read). On the other hand, Schmitz's virtually wholly new reading of the inscription cannot be dismissed without serious justification. In view of this, the only way I can think of to help me decide on the most likely interpretation of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus is to make use of various interpretative principles (most of which were discussed earlier in this study, especially in Chapter 5), at the same time presenting a new, high-resolution photograph, as well as a drawing of it (Figs 4, 6). These principles, along with the illustrations just mentioned, lead me to opt for the reading of Gouder and Rocco, and as accepted by Peckham.

However, before presenting the transliteration, analysis, and translation of the inscription that I endorse and/or propose, a few remarks regarding Schmitz's reading of this inscription are called for. First, it is important to remind ourselves that some Phoenician letters are ambiguous by their very nature and they could therefore easily be mistaken one for the other. It is not impossible that Schmitz could have read a number of letters differently from Gouder and Rocco.[67] In fact, he himself tells us that Robert Holmstedt too had not read all the letters in the image of the Tal-Virtù inscription Schmitz presented to him (as the latter had done).[68] It is a pity we do not have this drawing and that therefore we cannot know which letters these two scholars read differently. Secondly, it should be pointed out that whereas Gouder and Rocco have four letters (all in l. 2) of which they were not absolutely certain, Schmitz has seven he was uncertain about (three in l. 1, one in l. 2, and three in l. 5).[69]

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[66] Peckham 2014: 441.

[67] It is well known that different scholars at times read ancient inscriptions differently for different reasons. A classic example is the Moabite Stone Inscription. André Lemaire (1994) had argued that the words 'House of David' could be found at the end of this inscription. In 2022, Lemaire and Jean-Philippe Delorme (Lemaire and Delorme 2022) interpreted new imagery of this inscription as confirming Lemaire's original proposal. Recently, however, Matthieu Richelle and Andrew Burlingame read new images of the squeeze and the remnants of the Moabite Stone inscription as not confirming Lemaire's original proposal; they found no solid epigraphic evidence to support the reading 'House of David' (Richelle and Burlingame 2023). For them the epigraphic evidence is that of [*b??]wd*[...], which could 'conjecturally' be read as *b[td]wd*, but 'that would rest on contextual and historical grounds rather than epigraphical considerations' (Richelle and Burlingame 2023: 57). For them to read *btdwd* ('House of David') is possible, but this is only a hypothesis (Richelle and Burlingame 2023: 57).

[68] Schmitz 2017: 61 n. 1.

[69] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12; Schmitz 2017: 63.

This means there is a degree of uncertainty even in Schmitz's own position – this is normal, especially when we have a Phoenician text drawn in ink on a fragmented piece of papyrus.[70] The last letter of the second line provides a good example of how certain letters can resemble each other, leading scholars to decipher them differently. Schmitz reads the last letter in l. 2 as a *taw*,[71] while Gouder and Rocco decipher it as a *beth*.[72] Prima facie it seems that Schmitz is correct in reading this letter as a *taw*, however, a closer look at his own illustrations, and those of Gouder and Rocco, does not exclude that this letter could alternatively be read as a *beth*. It is important to note the detailed observations Gouder and Rocco make about the letter *beth* (Figs 4, 5, 6). We first find their remark in connection with the seventh letter in l. 1, which they read as a *beth*, remarking that its upper 'eye' is absent, being reduced to a horizontal segment which then turns downwards.[73] The final letter in l. 2, which Gouder and

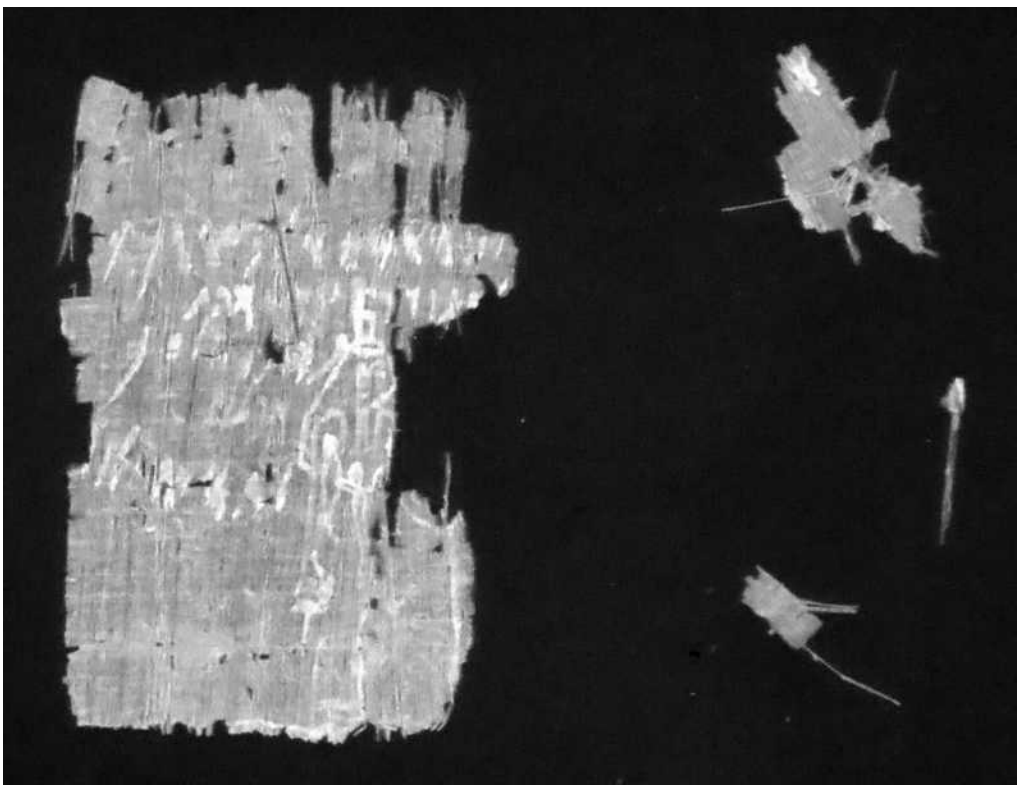

Figure 5. The glass negative (date uncertain, any time between 1968 and 1975) of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus Inscription, courtesy National Museum of Archaeology, Heritage Malta.

[70] The 5th century BCE Aramaic inscriptions in ink on papyrus from Elephantine provide a good analogy because they are 'difficult to decipher' owing to the presence of a 'sloppy cursive' script and 'often faded ink' (Gzella 2021: 98).

[71] Schmitz 2017: 63, 63 fig. 2, 65 fig. 4.

[72] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 11; fig. on p.9; pl. IV.

[73] 'Un *bet* mostra la scomparsa dell'occhiello superiore, ridotto ad un segmento orizzontale, che si

Figure 6. Drawing of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus Inscription by Maxine Anastasi.

prolunga verso la base a mezzo di altro segmento ondulato' (Gouder and Rocco 1975: 10). English translation: 'A *beth* shows the disappearance of the superior eyelet, reduced to a horizonal segment, which prolongs itself towards the base in the middle of another wavy segment'.

Figure 7. Chart of scripts by Maxine Anastasi, after Gouder and Rocco 1975: 17.

Rocco decipher also as a *beth*, appears in a more drastically reduced form,[74] while the third letter in l. 3, which they also read as a *beth*, shows its vertical element topped by the right part of the horizontal section.[75] In addition to these detailed epigraphic considerations, we should also note that Rocco and Gouder's reading means that the last word in l. 2 is *ʾyb* which provides an excellent parallel to *ṣr* in the last word *ṣrkm* in l. 1.

On the basis of the foregoing epigraphic observations, I choose to read the last letter of the second line of the Tal-Virtù papyrus inscription as a *beth* rather than a *yod*. However, given the possible ambiguity of the form of this letter in this inscription, there remain a few lingering doubts as to which reading is the 'correct' one. This is where context has to come in as one of the main principles of interpretation discussed in Chapter 5. If we read the letter in question as a *yod*, this means the last word of l. 2 would be the '*Nota accusativi*' *ʾyt*, which here helps to mark the subject, namely *rglyk* (in l. 3), of the passive verb (*tkw*); this usage is similar to what obtains in biblical Hebrew.[76] On the basis of this analysis, Schmitz translates ll. 2 and 3 thus: '[... right ha] nd, lest [figure] be harmed/pressed (both) [vacat] [figure] the soles of your (singular) two feet'.[77] Although Schmitz's analysis is grammatically sound in itself, the reading he offers of ll. 2 and 3 does not really throw sufficiently satisfactory light on the whole inscription. Moreover, even his reading *kp rglyk* in l. 3 is itself problematic

[74] '[Un] secondo *bet* ancora più sintetico del primo (riga precedente)' (Gouder and Rocco 1975: 11). English translation: '[A] second *beth* even more synthetic than the first one (in the previous line)'.

[75] '[Un] nuovo *bet*, di cui si vedono il tratto verticale e l'apicetto destro del tratto orizzontale' (Gouder and Rocco 1975: 11). English translation: '[A] new *beth*, of which the vertical stroke and the right apex of the horizontal stroke are visible'.

[76] Schmitz 2017: 65, 65 n.14.

[77] Schmitz 2017: 63.

in that while Schmitz parses *rglyk* as a noun, feminine dual construct: *raglāyik*, 'your [f ?] two feet',[78] with the second person (probably feminine) singular suffix *k*, we should not forget that in Phoenician-Punic a feminine noun in the dual is attested only once, i.e. in the Punic word *m ʾtm* ('two hundred').[79] The Hebrew equivalent of this word is *mᵉʾāṯáyim*,[80] which clearly shows that the *y* in the Punic version is not graphically represented. When a pronominal suffix is attached to a dual noun it would be attached to the construct state of the dual noun in question and therefore to an *ē* which originates from an *ay*.[81] However, as just pointed out the *yod* is graphically absent in Phoenician-Punic. This means that Schmitz's analysis does not take into account that the *áyik* in Hebrew, which contracts to *ēk*, also in Phoenician, is not graphically represented in the latter and that 'your (probably feminine singular) two feet' would have been written *rglk* and not *rglyk*. Schmitz reads seven letters in l. 3 of the Tal-Virtù inscription, whereas, as shown above, Gouder and Rocco, as well as Peckham, read eight letters. This latter reading is supported by the photographic evidence of the inscription (Figs 4, 5).

The foregoing points raise doubts regarding the version Schmitz proposes, both with his reading *rglyk* as the last word in l. 3 and *ʾyt* as the last word in l. 2. Regarding the latter, if we read the last letter of l. 2 as a *beth*, then the last word of this line would be *ʾyb*, meaning 'enemy'. This meaning fits perfectly with the overall translation of Gouder and Rocco, i.e. 'fatevi beffe, fiaccate ed assalite l'avversario',[82] and which Gouder renders in English as 'scorn, assail and crush your adversary'.[83] In turn, as already noted above, this translation also matches the very strong parallels in Egyptian mythology as well as the poetic structure of the inscription itself. Thus, the overall context supports the reading of the last letter of l. 2 as *ʾyb*, as well as the presence of eight letters and not seven in l. 3.

Our foregoing remarks regarding the reading of ll. 2 and 3 of the Tal-Virtù inscription, and the very close Egyptian parallels Hölbl had pointed out and which were discussed above, show how one basic hermeneutic principle is to take the context of inscriptions very seriously, not only with respect to the internal evidence that they yield but also archaeologically and inter-regionally.[84] Moreover, the palaeographic and philological observations presented above also show how reading the whole in the light of the parts, and the latter in the light of the whole, is a useful first step, since the resultant hermeneutic circle will be broken if we constantly go back to the data, all along exercising the 'self-correcting process of learning' we discussed in Chapter 5.

[78] Schmitz 2017: 66.
[79] Friedrich and Röllig 1999: 152.
[80] Friedrich and Röllig 1999: 174.
[81] Friedrich-Röllig 1999: 157.
[82] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12.
[83] Gouder 1991: 14.
[84] See the discussion in Chapter 5.

On the basis of all the points discussed thus far in this chapter, I choose to read the Tal-Virtù inscription the way Gouder and Rocco,[85] as well as Peckham, do. I also follow the latter's resolving of the five lines of the inscription into four lines of poetry.[86]

What follows is my own analysis, translation, and interpretation of this inscription, and the reading (Peckham's) I choose to adopt:

1. *šḥq ʿz lb ṣrkm*
2. *lʿg dkk wḥ ʾyb*
3. *sl bs ʿl ʿn*
4. *ʾp ṭ (5) lym sg tl*

And here is Peckham's translation,[87] with which I largely agree and for which I will present the necessary philological analysis:

1. Laugh, strong of heart, at your adversary!
2. Deride, distress, cast adrift the enemy!
3. Make light of him, shame him, on the sweet waters!
4. [Yea] Confuse him, on the sea enclose him, mock him!

It is important to present a thorough philological analysis of the Tal-Virtù inscription since it supports both the aforementioned very close parallels in Egyptian literature as well as the poetic structure of the inscription itself.

L. 1. *šḥq*: *Pace* the common opinion that the words of the Tal-Virtù inscription are uttered by the goddess Isis, for the reasons adduced above it appears more likely that the words of this inscription function like a prayer being addressed to Isis and her entourage. It is preferable to read the verbs in this inscription as the second person masculine imperative in the plural. So *šḥq* parses as the second person masculine imperative in the plural in the Qal of the verb *šḥq* 1 meaning 'to rub', as in Official Aramaic. Note that this verb, *šḥq* 2, can also mean 'to laugh' as in the Aramaic of Hatra.[88] The first meaning, 'to rub' is used figuratively of foes in the sense of pulverising, rubbing away, an enemy – as in Classical Hebrew (2 Samuel 22: 43 and Psalm 18: 43) and the last word of l. 1 in this inscription itself. However, it could also very well be the case that we have here a double meaning, i.e. of crushing an enemy, with *šḥq* paralleling *dkk* (to crush, to pulverise, to thresh, to fine) in l. 2, and that of laughing at, paralleling *lʿg* (to mock, to deride) also in l. 2.[89]

[85] As shown earlier in this chapter, Gouder and Rocco are not absolutely certain about the reading of four letters (all in l. 2); however, the context, as detailed in the discussion in this chapter, supports their reading – even of these four letters.

[86] Peckham 2014: 440.

[87] Peckham 2014: 440.

[88] Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 1121-1122.

[89] Emerton 2015 [2003]: 318.

ʿz: This is *ʿz* 2, i.e. the adjective meaning 'strong, powerful'.[90]

lb: This is the feminine noun meaning 'mind, intelligence, heart'.[91] In the context of this inscription the meaning 'heart' is preferable.

ṣrkm: This is the masculine noun *ṣr* in the singular, with the pronominal suffix second person plural masculine attached to it. The noun *ṣr* is also found in the inscription of Panammu I (KAI 214), and therefore in an inscription which turns out to be written in a dialect that is 'basically Aram. in character, as the majority of the isoglosses in both phonology and grammar and the bulk of the vocabulary show; but there is a substantial minority of features that link it more closely with the Canaanite dialects'.[92] This is borne out by the presence of the word *ṣry* in l. 30 of this inscription.[93] One would expect to find a *q* instead of *ṣ* in this Old Aramaic inscription,[94] however, given that the base of this word 'is very rare in Aram', it is highly likely that we are here dealing with 'a loan-word from Phoen.'.[95] This conclusion is supported by the use of the word *ṣr* in the Tal-Virtù inscription, meaning 'adversary, foe', as in Classical Hebrew.[96]

L. 2. *lʿg*: Second person masculine imperative in the plural in the Qal of the verb *lʿg* a cognate of the same Hebrew root meaning 'to mock, to deride'.[97] Some have serious doubts about both the reading of these first three letters of l. 2 as well as regards their meaning. Thus, Hoftijzer and Jongeling write with respect to *lʿg* 'highly uncert. reading and interpret'.[98] Schmitz tells us that 'Hoftijzer and Jongeling created entries for Rocco's readings and interpretations of individual words not attested elsewhere in the epigraphic corpus, but these are labelled "uncert." or "highly uncert"'.[99] As just pointed out, for Hoftijzer and Jongeling *lʿg* is one of the latter words. It is true that the reading of the first three letters of l. 2 is not easy. Gouder and Rocco tell us that the first three letters of l. 2 are incomplete, however, they provide a palaeographic analysis that seems to be reasonable and which (on the available evidence) supports their statement that 'le prime tre lettere sono monche: nel quadro della presente epigrafe l'identificazione come *lamed-ʿayn-gimel* sembra la sola possibile'.[100] It is also important

[90] Krahmalkov 2000: 362.
[91] Krahmalkov 2000: 252.
[92] Gibson 1975: 62.
[93] Gibson 1975: 68.
[94] Gibson 1975: ix.
[95] Gibson 1975: 76.
[96] Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1906: 865.
[97] Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1906: 541.
[98] Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 579.
[99] Schmitz 2017: 61.
[100] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 10. English translation: '[The] first three letters are damaged: in the context of the present inscription the identification as *lamed-ʿayn-gimel* seems to be the only possible one'.

to note that Peckham too endorses this reading.[101] The fact that some words appear only in this inscription and nowhere else in the corpus of Phoenician-Punic should not turn into a prejudice that there cannot be a text where certain words appear for the first time – this is what *hapax legomena* are and why in such cases we need to turn to cognate languages to come to grips with them.

dkk: Second person masculine imperative in the plural in the Qal. In Phoenician-Punic this is a *hapax legomenon*, similar to the Hebrew cognate *dkk*, which is the root of the adjective *dak* attested in Hebrew, meaning 'crushed, oppressed'.[102] Hence the verb *dkk* here very likely means 'to crush' in the sense of 'to overpower'. With respect to *dkk*, it is useful to note that, although it is generally claimed that in Phoenician geminate consonants are not indicated in the script,[103] still 'long consonants, in writing geminated, were still *preserved when final* [my emphasis] in Middle Phoenician'.[104]

wḥ: We have here the particle *wāw* followed by *ḥ*. Peckham does not account for this *wāw* – it does not even feature in his translation.[105] Gouder and Rocco make no comment on it, translating it as a simple coordinating particle, i.e. 'and'.[106] Given the context of the inscription, I propose to read this particle as an emphatic *wāw*, meaning 'yea', since in this manner it perfectly highlights the 'complementary or parallel'[107] statements of this inscription as will be shown below. As far as *ḥ* is concerned, Gouder and Rocco parse this as a second person masculine plural imperative of the root *nḥh*, thus linking it to its Hebrew cognate. But they also link it to the Arabic cognate *naḥā(w)* in its meaning of 'to shoot against someone', then translating it 'attack'.[108] Hans-Peter Müller, too, had linked this *ḥ* to the Hebrew cognate *nḥh* but taking the latter word not in its usual sense of 'to guide' or 'to lead' but in the sense of 'to expel' or 'to smite'.[109] The analysis and interpretation of *ḥ* that Gouder and Rocco, as well as Müller, made are possible, however they do seem somewhat stretched. I prefer to view *ḥ* as the second person masculine plural imperative in the Qal of the root *ḥwh* II, meaning 'to encircle'. Note the use of the word *ḥwt* in Phoenician, i.e. the feminine noun which means 'tent village', and for which the Hebrew cognate is *ḥawwā*,[110] the underlying root for which in turn would be precisely *ḥwh* II. The Arabic cognate *ḥiwa?un*, meaning 'a circle of tents', supports the idea that *ḥwh* II means 'to

[101] Peckham 2014: 440.
[102] Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1906: 194.
[103] Hackett 2004: 370.
[104] Harris 1936: 30.
[105] Peckham 2014: 440.
[106] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12.
[107] For this usage of *wāw*, see Krahmalkov 2000: 163.
[108] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 13, 12.
[109] Müller 2001: 259, and 259 n. 42, where he also explains *nḥh* in the sense of 'to push', said of the shepherd in Psalm 23: 3; Psalm 77: 21; and Psalm 78: 53, where *nḥh* is parallel to *nhg* (v. 52) that can mean 'to drive off', 'to drive away'.
[110] Krahmalkov 2000: 179-180.

encircle'.[111] This meaning also provides a neat parallel to the verb *sg* to be discussed further down.

ʾyb: This noun (most likely a participle used as a noun) is similar to the Hebrew cognate *ōyēb* meaning 'enemy'. It is parallel to *ṣrkm* in l. 1, but lacks the pronominal suffix which one would expect here. However, as G.R. Driver noted, in Hebrew poetry there are a number of cases similar to that which obtains in Ugaritic poetry, i.e. that 'when a pronominal suffix is attached to one noun, its force may be carried through to the parallel noun, which may then dispense with the corresponding suffix.'[112] As Emerton had already noticed,[113] the Tal-Virtù inscription provides us with another similar instance where the expected pronominal suffix is missing, since the force of the suffix *-km* in *ṣrkm* is carried to the parallel noun *ʾyb*, which graphically 'dispenses with the corresponding suffix'.[114]

L. 3. *sl*: Second person masculine imperative in the plural of the root *sly* in the Qal. This is another *hapax* in Phoenician-Punic, however, it has a neat cognate in Hebrew, i.e. sālā meaning, inter alia, 'to make light of',[115] which perfectly fits the context of the Tal-Virtù inscription. The word 'enemy' in the preceding line functions also as the object of all the remaining imperative verbs of the inscription. Hence it is also clearly implied here and we can translate *sl* either as 'of the (enemy) make light', or simply 'make light (of him)'.

bs: Second person masculine imperative in the plural of the root *būs* in the Qal. Once again, we have here a *hapax* in Phoenician-Punic, which, however, has a fitting cognate in the Hebrew verb *būs* meaning 'to tread down, to trample'.[116] It is important to note the reference that Gouder and Rocco make to the presence of the sequence of the verbs *bs* and *bz* (meaning 'to tread' and 'to despise' respectively) at Grotta Regina.[117] This parallels what we find here in the Tal-Virtù inscription; indeed, 'qui nel papiro abbiamo la stessa sequenza in un contesto simile: «disprezza »-« calpesta » (per «disprezza» è usato סל, sinonimo di בז)'.[118] Just as with the preceding verb *sl*, the word 'enemy' in l. 2 functions also as the object of *bs* and thus it is best to translate the latter as 'trample (him)'.

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[111] Brown *et al.* 1906: 295. Note also the Arabic verb *ḥaway* which, inter alia, means 'to gather, to collect something, to encompass, to embrace, to contain, to hold, to enclose, to comprise, to include (something)' (Wehr 1979: 255). In the context of the Tal-Virtù inscription, the meaning 'to enclose' is particularly significant.

[112] Driver 1948: 164.

[113] Emerton 2015 [2003]: 319.

[114] Driver 1948: 164.

[115] Brown *et al.* 1906: 699; see also Koehler and Baumgartner 1994-2000: 756.

[116] Brown *et al.* 1906: 100.

[117] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 14; 14 n. 26.

[118] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 14. English translation: '[Here] in the papyrus we have the same sequence in a similar context: "despise", "tread upon" (סל is used for 'despise', a synonym of בז)'.

ʿl: This is the preposition amply attested in Northwest Semitic meaning 'on'.[119]

ʿn: This is a feminine noun in the absolute state, the Hebrew cognate of which is spelled *ʿayin* and which means (as in Phoenician), inter alia, 'spring (of water)'.[120] It is parallel to *ym* (the sea) in l. 5, and therefore we have here a Syro-Palestinian mythical background. Alternatively, there could also be a reference to Egyptian *Nun* and *Naunet*, seeing that religion in the Phoenician motherland had been exposed to Egyptian influence already at an early stage.[121] Given the aforementioned parallelism of *n* and *ym*, as well as the basic meaning of 'spring (of water)' of the former, it is preferable to translate *ʿn* as 'sweet waters', following Peckham.[122]

L. 4. (l. 4 in the above-mentioned poetic structure which consists of ll. 4 and 5 as laid out in the papyrus). *ʾp*: This is a particle used adverbially in Phoenician with the meaning 'moreover, what is more', as well as in Punic meaning 'and, too, also'.[123] It is a cognate of the same Hebrew particle, *ʾap*, which is more precisely classified as a conjunction that denotes 'addition, esp. of something greater' and thus very appropriately meaning 'also, yea'.[124] 'Yea' fits the context of the Tal-Virtù papyrus perfectly and parallels the emphatic *wāw* in l. 2. It can thus be translated as 'yea' or 'indeed'. Peckham does not translate this word *ʾp*.[125]

ṭ: Gouder and Rocco view this as the second person plural imperative in the Qal of the verb *nṭw*, which they view as a *hapax* in Phoenician and as being the equivalent of the cognate Hebrew *nṭh*[126] meaning, inter alia, 'to stretch out, to extend',[127] and in the present context meaning 'to knock down'.[128] In the Tal-Virtù inscription this latter meaning makes sense, but given the aforementioned basic meaning of *nṭh* in Hebrew, it is preferable to seek a different cognate. Given that in Tigray/Tigrinya the root *ṭawaya* can also mean 'to bind' or 'to turn over',[129] it is best to view *ṭāwah* (which in Hebrew basically means 'to spin') as a preferable cognate. Either of the two Tigray/Tigrinya meanings fits the context of the Tal-Virtù inscription better, and so we can parse ṭ as the second person plural imperative in the Qal of the verb *ṭāwah* (literally

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[119] Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 844-845.

[120] Krahmalkov 2000: 381; Brown *et al.* 1906: 745; Koehler and Baumgartner 1994-2000: 817-819.

[121] Müller 2001: 262; 261.

[122] Peckham 2014: 440.

[123] Krahmalkov 2000: 68.

[124] Brown *et al.* 1906: 64-65. Hence *ʾap* in Hebrew can also be viewed as an emphasising or enhancing particle (Koehler and Baumgartner 1994-2000: 76).

[125] Peckham 2014: 440; in fact he uses the word "yea" in square brackets.

[126] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 14.

[127] Brown *et al.* 1906: 639.

[128] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12, where the authors translate *ṭ* as 'distendete(lo)', i.e. 'prostrate (him)' (Gouder 1991: 14).

[129] See the cognates listed in Donner 2013: 421 (and references there) and in Koehler and Baumgartner 1994-2000: 372 (and references there).

'to spin') but meaning, as in Ethiopic, 'to bind' or 'to turn over'; given the context, 'bind' is to be preferred. As pointed out above, the word 'enemy' in l. 2 functions also as the object of this verb *ṭ* and so we can translate the latter as 'bind (him)'.

lym: this consists of the multivalent preposition / prefixed to the noun *ym*. The latter is the common noun meaning 'sea' often found in Northwest Semitic, including Phoenician.[130] The multivalent preposition *l* here indicates 'the presence on a certain place' and is used in a locative sense meaning 'on'.[131]

sg: This best parses as the second person plural imperative in the Qal from the verb *sūg*, the best cognate for which is in fact Hebrew *sūg* II, for which all major dictionaries give the meaning of 'to fence in' or 'to fence around'.[132] This verb with this meaning is a *hapax* in Phoenician[133] and is rare in Hebrew itself. The dictionaries list various cognates for Hebrew *sūg* II, and though they vary slightly in their list of cognates, they all list Aramaic. In one instance Hebrew *sūg* II meaning 'to fence about' is even registered as an 'Aramaic word'.[134] In view of all this, we can translate *lym sg*, with Peckham, as 'on the sea enclose (him)',[135] with the word 'enemy' in l. 2 functioning as the object also of this verb.

tl: This verb (which in the present context best parses as an imperative second person plural in the Qal) is found in Neo-Punic under the root *tly* in the Piel meaning 'to hang'.[136] Gouder and Rocco parse it as a second person plural imperative in the Qal form from the same verb and view Hebrew *tālāh* with the same meaning, i.e. 'to hang' as a good cognate.[137] Hence, they translate *tl* as 'hang (him)'.[138] However, given the parallelism present in the Tal-Virtù inscription it is preferable to link *tl* with the Hebrew cognate *tll*, meaning, inter alia, 'to mock.[139] This provides a very neat parallel to one of the meanings of *šḥq* in l. 1, i.e. 'laugh at', as discussed above. So, we could translate *tl*, with Peckham, as 'mock (him)', with the word 'enemy'[140] in l. 2 providing the object also for this verb.

[130] Krahmalkov 2000: 209; Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 458-459.
[131] Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 551; Gouder and Rocco 1975: 14 and references there.
[132] Brown *et al.* 1906: 691; Koehler and Baumgartner 1994-2000: 745; Donner 2013: 875.
[133] Note, however, that in Phoenician *sg i*s attested In the *yiph il* with the meaning 'move, dislocate' (Krahmalkov 2000: 339).
[134] Brown *et al.* 1906: 691.
[135] Peckham 2014: 440.
[136] Krahmalkov 2000: 492.
[137] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 14.
[138] Gouder and Rocco 1975: 12, where they translate *tl* as 'sospendete(lo)', i.e. 'hang (him)' (Gouder 1991: 14).
[139] Brown *et al.* 1906: 1068.
[140] Peckham 2014: 440.

In view of the foregoing philological remarks, I propose the following translation for the Tal-Virtù five-line inscription, which can be resolved in four lines of poetry as mentioned above:

> Laugh at/crush, O strong of heart your adversary;
> Deride, overpower, yea, encircle the enemy;
> Make light (of him), trample (him) over the sweet waters;
> Yea, bind (him), on the sea enclose (him), mock (him).

The foregoing translation and four-line verse layout of the five-line Tal-Virtù papyrus inscription confirm we are dealing with an inscription that has a 'poetische Form',[141] which also corroborates Peckham's view that 'the five lines of script seem to resolve into four lines of poetry'.[142] These fours lines, which could be viewed as having a poetic form even if not a poem in the strict sense of the word, are in fact full of parallelisms; moreover, there is an overall structural symmetry.[143] Thus, *šḥq* in l. 1 parallels *tl* in l. 4 – a neat parallelism between 'to laugh at' and 'to mock'. There is also a neat parallelism between *ṣrkm* in l. 1 and *ʾyb* in l. 2 ('your adversary' // 'the enemy') as well as between *ʿn* in l. 3 and *ym* in ll. 4-5 of the poetic layout. The comparison between the enemy's plight on the 'sweet waters' (literally 'the spring') and 'on the high seas' (literally 'the sea') is striking.[144] We should also note the 'staccato imperatives' in ll. 3 and 4 of the poetic layout, as well as the fact that *sl* ('Make light of') and *tl* ('mock') in ll. 3 and 4 balance each other.[145] A good balance also obtains between the number of words in each of the 'poetic lines'; each of these lines (= ll. 1, 2, 3, 4-5 of the papyrus) has four words[146] except for the last, which has an additional word, i.e. the particle *ʾp*. The latter particle, here meaning 'yea', balances the emphatic particle *wāw* in l. 2.

The data presented and discussed in this chapter show that the Tal-Virtù inscription is replete with references to Egyptian mythology. However, we do not know which Egyptian text and myth are precisely being referred to. It is an open question whether we can even ever find an Egyptian text that literally has the same equivalent words as those on the Tal-Virtù papyrus inscription, although Hölbl had pointed out that, with the exception of the word 'hang' (according to Gouder and Rocco's translation), all other imperatives reflect the ideas found in the *Book of Apophis*.[147] On the other hand, the falcon head of the Tal-Virtù amulet and the picture of Isis remind us of

[141] Müller 2001: 263; 263-264. English translation: 'poetic form'.
[142] Peckham 2014: 440.
[143] Peckham 2014: 440.
[144] Peckham 2014: 440. However, the 'sea' could here refer to Egyptian *Nun* and *Naunet* and thus echo the primordial flood (Müller 2001: 261-262), or even reflect the deity *ym* who features quite prominently in Canaanite mythology, rather than referring to the 'high seas' of the ocean.
[145] Peckham 2014: 440.
[146] Peckham 2014L: 440.
[147] Hölbl 1989: 122.

the myth of Horus.[148] It is also likely that the Tal-Virtù inscription reflects Egyptian mythological themes which are formulated in a Phoenician manner – and this includes the importance of the water and the sea in accordance with the Phoenician world view.[149] In view of this, the enemy mentioned in the inscription could be either Apophis, or the monster Seth of the Horus myth.[150] Be that as it may, the Tal-Virtù inscription refers to the victory of the dead individual in the afterlife, in the sense that good forces protect her/him via the protective magic of Isis – all this is relayed via a mythological model heavily influenced by Egyptian belief.[151] It would even not be surprising at all if it turned out that the Phoenicians present in Egypt would have been responsible for spreading such beliefs, especially as the script of the Tal-Virtù papyrus is similar to that found in the texts from Elephantine.[152]

The foregoing conclusions hold (even if only hypothetically) if the reading of the inscription endorsed here is correct.[153] The snag is that the script of the inscription is not crystal clear. However, the observations made thus far have helped the present author in deciding whether to endorse the reading proposed by Schmitz, or the version offered by Gouder and Rocco (the latter in turn followed by other scholars, including Peckham as shown above). Reaching this decision turned out to be a *tour de force*, and I could only reach shore safely, so to speak, by employing basic principles of interpretation, i.e. that when the script of a text is not wholly clear, or ambiguous even, the reading which makes more sense is the one to be hypothetically endorsed. In this case, the conclusions presented in the foregoing paragraph in turn buttress this hypothetical reading, especially when we remember that Hölbl, who, as shown above, had made his pertinent observations in this regard *long after* Gouder and Rocco had published their study, essentially confirmed their results via his contribution from an independent source, i.e. Egyptology. From the linguistic point of view, I did not dismiss the multiple *hapax legomena* present in the Tal-Virtù inscription but clarified them via cognates in other Semitic languages. In both cases, it is clear that another hermeneutical principle at work is that of comparison. As A.H. Sayce had already

[148] Egyptian mythology knows of a link between Isis and her brother/husband Osiris, as well as between Isis and her son Horus; the bronze amulet holder and the papyrus inscription found in it reveal the link between Isis and Horus via the representation of Isis on the papyrus and Horus who is shown in relief on the bronze holder lid (Gouder and Rocco 1975: 7).

[149] Hölbl 1989: 123. The fight against 'the enemy' takes place on the sea and on the primordial sources of the great Abyss (Gouder and Rocco 1975:15).

[150] Hölbl 1989: 123.

[151] Hölbl 1989: 123.

[152] Hölbl 1989: 123; Gouder and Rocco 1975: 18.

[153] It is important to always remind ourselves that there are instances where scripts turn out to be illegible, or indeed where letters resemble each other. The difficulty in reading the letters of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus is not an isolated case. The Deir Alla Aramaic plaster text is also difficult to read, for example, and 'on account of the contested readings and interpretations, the usual translations of the text show major disagreements in some parts...' (Gzella 2021: 60 n. 25). In such instances we have to choose the reading and translation that make better sense in the given overall context.

noted 'We can know things scientifically only in so far as they can be compared and measured one with the other. Where there is no comparison there can be no scientific result. Even the logicians of the Middle Ages taught that no conclusion can be drawn from what they termed a single instance.'[154] The analysis of the Tal-Virtù inscription shows that single instances are no longer to be so considered if we take into account cognate languages, neighbouring cultures, and the archaeological as well as the general Mediterranean context. This analysis has also shown that, as discussed in Chapter 4, similar to what obtains in Hebrew verse, so even in Phoenician the basic unit of verse is the line. The lines do not necessarily have to be laid out graphically, and nowadays scholars can only pin them down via interpretation.[155] Moreover, as already shown, just as in Hebrew verse, so too in the Tal-Virtù inscription does parallelism play a crucial role in fixing the relevant lines of verse.

In conclusion, the evidence discussed in this chapter leaves no doubt that the Tal-Virtù inscription shares all the main hallmarks of Northwest Semitic verse, i.e. puns, parallelism, the use of rare words, and a carefully crafted syntax, where, in this case, the above-mentioned 'staccato imperatives' play a crucial role in helping the reader follow the prosody of the poetic form of this text. This is a clear and concrete example of the various principles discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, and one that can help us better appreciate Northwest Semitic verse.

[154] Sayce 1897: 107.

[155] Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 41.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

By now it will have become clear to the readers of this monograph that, although ancient texts were often drafted in ways that are wholly foreign to us (such as when they exhibit the use of continual script, with no special layout for verse, no punctuation, no apparent structure, and without vowels, for example, in Phoenician inscriptions), still ancient societies, including the Phoenicians, could deal with such peculiarities. They did this in various ways that I discussed in this book, with pride of place held by the reading of texts out loud and by the fact that what was important was not the division between words as such but that (as in the case of Phoenician) word division is linked 'explicitly to the question of accent, that is prosody'.[1] Hence the crucial role of orality and aurality often referred to in this book.

After introducing the topics planned for discussion (Chapter 1), I next examined in Chapter 2 the identity of the Phoenicians, concluding that in fact the Phoenicians are Canaanites, specifically 'maritime Canaanites'. It was shown that every Phoenician can be viewed as a Canaanite but that not every Canaanite would be a Phoenician.

We then proceeded to examine in Chapter 3 the nature of communication in the ancient world by looking at the hallmarks of writing and reading, both with respect to prose and verse. Thus the main hallmarks of speaking, writing, and reading in the Classical world and in antiquity in general were discussed. Our findings were that orality, and thus lectors, played a crucial role in the ancient world. This also accounted for the reasons why texts were generally drafted in continual script, and that even poetry is often relayed with no specific format: lectors turned out to be the first interpreters of a text. However, it was also pointed out that, although *scriptio continua* was the rule, we still have Semitic inscriptions that make use of interpuncts and spaces between words. This led me to discuss the problems that *scriptio continua* pose for modern readers and how the ancients worked around such difficulties. Once again, the main finding turned out to be the primary role played by the reading of texts out loud – even in Phoenician society. This conclusion is the same as that reached in the following chapter (4), where I look closely at the main hallmarks of verse in the Levant with a focus on Classical Hebrew verse. The analysis presented in this chapter also highlights that the basic unit of biblical Hebrew verse is the line, which readers themselves established, since they were generally confronted with running texts that lacked a structural layout. This led to another conclusion, i.e. that the judgment and interpretation of the lectors played a vital role when attempting

[1] Crellin 2022: 35, where he refers to Friedrich and Röllig 1999: 146, section 219.

to read Hebrew verse. These conclusions show that Hebrew verse is a good analogue to Phoenician verse.

The judgment and interpretation just mentioned are not error-proof and therefore the next step was to discuss in Chapter 5 the main basic principles of interpretation in general, as well as those which pertain specifically to Phoenician inscriptions. Here we looked more closely at *how* the principles of judgment and interpretation operate whilst discussing whether we can in fact reach a 'correct' reading of ancient texts – whether prose or verse. In this regard, it was shown that the 'self-correcting process of learning' plays a leading role. It is inevitable that in this whole process there will be a bit of ourselves, but this does not mean that we cannot be objective. I concluded that we do not invent truth but that we fashion it by a very close analysis of the available data. Indeed, 'genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity'.[2] The basic principles of interpretation function in any area of research, including Phoenician epigraphy. However, there are a number of principles of interpretation that concern specifically the reading of Canaanite inscriptions, including those that are Phoenician. Hence, I discuss the fact that the dating of inscriptions via the study of letter types can be fraught with difficulties. I also highlight the problems inherent in texts that are purely consonantal, without word division and usually lacking any type of punctuation. In view of all this, the upshot was the crucial role that context plays in such texts – context understood in its widest possible sense. It was also concluded that it is important to study the literary genre of these texts since this enhances our understanding them.

In Chapter 6 I attempt a close reading of two Phoenician texts – CIS I, 123 and CIS 123 *bis* – in the light of all the points discussed in the previous chapters, especially those of a methodological nature. I showed that these 'twin inscriptions' allow for multiple philological solutions that can be reduced to one (i.e. the one that supports the most likely interpretation) on condition that we take context very seriously into account – in this case the textual context as well as the archaeological one. The conclusion is that in Malta the earliest Phoenician settlers practised child sacrifice beyond any reasonable doubt. From the methodological point of view, the main conclusion is that context and philology have to work hand in hand.

The foregoing points led me next to examine very carefully (in Chapter 7) the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription, a text which, even if not poetry in the strict sense of the word, is drafted in poetic form and thus has a poetic structure. This is a concrete example, as discussed in Chapter 3, that it is important to distinguish not only between prose and poetry but also between poetry and verse; it was concluded that not all verse reaches the level of poetry. I follow the same methodology as that employed in Chapter 6. Hence, the minute philological analysis is carried out in the light of the context,

[2] Lonergan 1973: 292.

which this time round has a threefold aspect: the semantic context of the inscription itself; the archaeological context of the find; and last, but definitely not least, the Mediterranean cultural context, specifically that of ancient Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife. Moreover, just as in Classical Hebrew verse, so here too parallelism plays an important role. The reading and interpretation of the inscription I chose to adopt led to a very clear general conclusion, i.e. that in the 6th century BCE the Phoenicians in Malta had very close links with those in Egypt, and that both groups of Phoenicians shared the Egyptians' belief in the afterlife.

The above-mentioned specific conclusions reached in the various chapters of this book themselves lead to some conclusions of a more general nature. The first thing to note is the importance of interdisciplinary work. It was clearly shown that philology is essential when studying ancient texts, but at the same time it became clear in the course of this study that philology cannot function in isolation. Context turned out to be of the essence for a 'correct' reading of texts. And, as just pointed out in the preceding paragraph, context includes the archaeological as well as the overall cultural Mediterranean one when studying inscriptions from the Levant.

A second general conclusion is that – as shown in Chapter 7 – we should give great weight to *hapax legomena*, not simply by refusing to sweep them under the carpet, but also by recognising that, in a language (as is the case with Phoenician) that has a limited vocabulary, we must study such *hapax legomena* very seriously via comparative Semitic lexicography. What at first sight would seem to be wholly unclear and doubtful could turn out to be a contribution to a richer vocabulary.

Another general conclusion that stems for the various chapters of this study is the prime role of orality and thus of aurality. It was shown that there is no natural hiatus between words when spoken but a 'division' that stems from a group of words followed by a pause. In languages where there was no punctuation, as was the case with Phoenician, the main point regarding 'word division' was that of where an accent fell while speaking and/or reading a text, with the result that prosody and not empty spaces between words are the key to a proper reading of texts.

A fourth general conclusion is that when the letters of an inscription are not crystal clear, or actually even ambiguous, the reading that makes more sense in the textual as well as in the overall cultural context is to be preferred. I showed in Chapter 7 that such is the case via the analysis of the Tal-Virtù Papyrus inscription.[3]

[3] Shock-proof certainty is definitely not the order of the day in Northwest Semitic studies. Thus, for example, a tomb inscription in Aramaic from a cave near Sheikh Fadl in Egypt '*may* [my emphasis] contain remnants of a historical or fictitious story with an Egyptian or Assyrian background, but the reading of the very badly faded letters is extremely uncertain' (Gzella 2021: 102).

A final general conclusion stemming from this study is that we should be more aware that, before the introduction of punctuation as we know it, texts turned out to be often ambiguous even though the lector would have read them prior to reading them out loud. Indeed, there were also instances when ambiguity was employed purposely.[4] Once again it is the role of orality and aurality that comes to the fore. A well-known example is an oracle commonly attributed to the Sybil from Cumae. Without punctuation the oracle reads:

Ibis redibis non morieris in bello

This oracular reply given to a soldier going to war is intentionally ambiguous and it can be read in either of the following two ways – *depending on emphasis and, eventually, on punctuation*:

Ibis, redibis, non morieris in bello (You will go, you will return, you will not die in battle)

Or:

Ibis, redibis non, morieris in bello (You will go, you will not return, you will die in battle).

It is clear that, when a text lacked punctuation and when we do not know where the emphases and pauses of the reader lay, ambiguity is difficult to avoid. This state of affairs makes it all the more important for us to be ever more conscious of the various principles of interpretation that we can employ to get a better understanding of ancient texts. This study has also shown that ambiguity, or even possible multiple meanings of these texts, are not tantamount to the indeterminacy of their meaning and that we can understand them better if we also take social normativity into account (Chapter 5).

I hope this monograph turns out to be one step in the right direction for us to better understand texts from the ancient world, including that of the Phoenicians, namely the 'maritime Canaanites'.

[4] Thus, e.g., Sourvinou-Inwood (1996: 445) writes about 'the Greek perception that ambiguity is the idiom of prophecy, that there are limits to men's access to knowledge about the future: the god speaks ambiguously, and human fallibility intervenes and may misinterpret the messages.'

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