Individualisation as an historical trend in the religion of the Phoenician cities in the Hellenistic times?

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1. Introduction

For the first meeting of the research group on “Religious individualisation in historical perspective”, I have chosen to investigate the case study of Phoenician religion in the Hellenistic period because several elements make it interesting in the perspective of the issue we are tackling. It also an issue I am currently working on since I spent a sabbatical in Princeton, IAS, where I began my work in progress. Starting from some general observations¹, I would like to point out three elements.

1. Since 332 B.C., the Phoenician kingdoms (also called “city states” to underline their similarities with the Greek model of the polis) are part of the Graeco-Macedonian Empire. Important changes took place after the “conquest” on different levels:

- on the political level: with the end two or three generations later of the local dynasties and the integration of the Phoenician cities in the Ptolemaic or Seleucid empires²;
- on the linguistic and cultural level: the Greek koinè becomes more and more spread in the everyday life of the Phoenician people who often adopts Greek

names, even if we find Phoenician inscriptions and names until the 1st century B.C. at least;

- in the material culture: pottery, dresses, iconography, coinage, etc. are largely inspired by Greek models;
- and finally in the cultic life too Greek influences become more and more visible although the Phoenician traditions remain vivacious. We can assume that the religious practices fit particularly to the strategies of cross cultural negotiations.

2. The Greek civil religion is usually considered as modelled by the political and social structure of the *polis*, at least in the Classical times, and is therefore a religious system based on a collective dimension more than on an individual one. It is generally taken for granted that the rituals of the classical *polis* give birth to collective identities in which the role of the single persons is underestimated. In his Introduction, Jörg Rüpke has rightly and critically addressed the ambiguity of this historiographical construction based on a clash between two dimensions which should not be conflicting at all.

The religious life attested in the Phoenician cities illustrates a rather different political and social context. Even if somebody (like Jack Goody!) calls them “city states”, Tyre, Sidon or Byblos are kingdoms. The social structure is more pyramid-shaped, or vertical, and relies much on the single royal figure. In fact, the king is said, in the royal inscriptions, to be the gods’ representative, chosen by them for his personal qualities. He is the mediator between the divine society and the human one: “beloved by the gods”, he is also “the one who keeps the people alive”. He is presumably active in several public rituals and it is worth noticing that the king of Sidon, in his own inscriptions, first mentions the title of “Astarte’s priest” and then the title of “king of the Sidonians”. The articulation between the individual and the collective levels of religious practices is thus differently operated in the Greek and the Phoenician polytheisms. Our concern, regarding the Hellenistic times in Phoenicia, when the local monarchies disappear and the Greek models become more significant, could thus be expressed in that way: can we consequently and empirically observe new paradigms in the religious agency characterised by an increasing focus on the individual?

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3. Before trying to answer this question, I would like to spend some time on the complex phenomenon of “hellenisation” which is at the very core of my investigation. If anyone would agree on saying that the introduction of a set of Greek cultural features (personal names, toponyms, images, cults, social behaviours or attitudes, literature…) transforms the “indigenous” traditions, the problem is how to describe and explain this so called process of “hellenisation” without using the old models of a colonial “acculturation” or the confused notion of “syncretism? The first one implies that the Hellenistic culture carries a kind of “modernity” inoculated in the “primitive” Phoenician traditions and that part of this process deals with the promotion of a (more?) individual approach to the divine. Yet the persistence of native languages in ritual contexts (funerary or dedicatory inscriptions), for example, does not necessarily reveal a lack of “hellenisation” and a “primitive” or “conservative” behaviour. The second concept (syncretism) is not precise enough to grasp the reality of “gods in translation” and the complex process of translatability of religious names, practices, images and beliefs.

Such are, roughly considered, the elements that legitimate a Phoenician journey at the end of our first empirical exploration of the religious “individualisation”. However, I would like to correct immediately one or two points. First of all, it is important to keep in mind the fact that the Phoenicians did not wait for Alexander’s conquest to get used to Greek cultural standards. From the archaic times, at least (even since the Late Bronze Age, at least), Greek and Phoenician peoples were continuously connected in the Mediterranean networks. Everybody knows that the Greeks learned the alphabet from the Phoenicians at the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. – where and when exactly is a most debated issue - and had with them, in both directions, intense

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exchanges. The late Persian period (V\textsuperscript{th} and IV\textsuperscript{th} centuries B.C.) shows an unequivocal and large penetration of Greek cultural elements in the Phoenician cities, especially at Sidon, the major town at that time\textsuperscript{9}. So, when Alexander and his army arrived in Phoenicia, they discovered a world which was already deeply “hellenised”. The conquest only intensified and rooted the process. Hence, it would be wrong to define sharp cultural and chronological boundaries between two different moments and two different habitus. “Hellenisation” or “Hellenism”, far from any instance of clash or collapse, deals with strategy and negotiation, social fluidity and cultural creativity. Glen Bowersock suggests that Hellenism is “a language and culture in which peoples the most diverse kind could participate (…). It was a medium not necessarily antithetical to local or indigenous traditions. On the contrary, it provides a new and more eloquent way of giving voice to them”. Consequently, the range of effects, behaviours and images is extremely vast and goes far beyond the colonial model of an imposed acculturation or the ideal picture of a meeting between East and West (Droysen’s \textit{Verschmelzung}). Moreover, we probably have to refrain from using labels like “Phoenician” and “Greek” cultures, which rely on an idealist and essentialist mapping of the Mediterranean world, made of separated unities, whereas we prefer now to emphasize the connectivity and cross cultural processes\textsuperscript{10}.

Turning now to our main concern, we must be very cautious in establishing far-fetched or rough “markers” of Greek culture or identity, such as an increasing attention paid to the individual religious needs, a presumed “Hellenistic” typical trend, according to the common vision of post-classical religions in the Mediterranean, a vision which we presumably have to challenge. Besides, as pointed out by Jörg Rüpke in his introduction, the ratio between collective and individual actions, in religious contexts, in as much as it is actually possible to separate these two instances, should not be considered in an evolutionist perspective as a marker of “progress”.

Before analyzing some concrete example in the Sidonian cults, my second preliminary observation aims to remember that any investigation on Phoenician history is confronted with a notorious scarcity of evidence. From their literature, although the Phoenicians invented the alphabet, nothing has survived. Only the inscriptions and the iconographical material can inform us about the native point of view, but these documents are relatively few and often stereotyped.


Could anyone study the evolution of Greek religion without Homer, Hesiod or Pausanias, or the transformations of Roman religion without Livy or Cicero? Despite this objective difficulty, the situation is not that bad, and does not avoid us trying to ascertain diachronic changes in the Phoenician history. Some years ago, Fergus Millar affirmed that the history of Hellenistic Phoenicia and Syria, because of the evidence available (or not available), is a kind of “dead angle”\textsuperscript{11}. I am nonetheless convinced that we have enough evidence to investigate the religious landscape of Hellenistic Phoenicia in an historical perspective if we take into account both the classical and Phoenician sources, an endeavour which was never made before.

Let me begin with a brief sketch of the Phoenician religious system before the Hellenistic period, paying a special attention to the involvement of groups and/or individuals in the cult. Afterwards, I shall present two relevant examples illustrating the tension between tradition and creativity, individual and group, in the Sidonian context. We shall focus on the strategies displayed by the Sidonians to forge a new cultural and religious environment compatible with both their native traditions and the Greek inputs. At the end, I shall suggest some exploratory reflexions on the process of cultural creativity in mixed contexts using the concept of “Middle Ground” (due to Richard White’s study of the relationship between Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, from 1650 to 1815\textsuperscript{12}) and echoing Marshall Shalins and J.Z. Smith’s analysis on cultural evolutions and religious landscapes.

2. Phoenician religion before Alexander

First of all, I must confess that the label of “Phoenician religion” is highly questionable on different grounds:

- Phoenicia or Phoenicians as a whole never existed (just like the “Indians”): the reality presents a very fragmented space with several small kingdoms, which had their own identity and pantheon. The word “Phoenician” doesn’t even exist in Phoenician. Nonetheless we can observe some affinities between the Tyrian, Sidonian, Byblian and other local cults, which can justify to a certain extent a global approach;


- Furthermore, the Phoenician culture soon developed a diasporic dimension which involves the whole Mediterranean world. The Punic world has Phoenician roots and proclaims them proudly especially in the cultic field;
- We should also ask if it is legitimate to use more or less clear cut ethnic categories for cultural aspects of life? Is there a Phoenician way of thinking? A Phoenician religiosity? A Phoenician “mentality”? Having a look at the material culture of the Phoenician cities, it becomes immediately clear how hybrid it is, even long before the “hellenisation”. Greek, Persian, Mesopotamian and mostly Egyptian elements are constantly present in the “Phoenician” culture.

Keeping theses elements in mind, we can observe that the pantheons of the Phoenician cities are based on a similar structure. Every civic pantheon is ruled by a divine couple made of a local Baal (Baal of Tyre, of Sidon, of Byblos, etc.) associated to a goddess (generally called Astarte). Together they chiefly symbolize the single city or kingdom’s identity, although several other gods and goddesses are worshipped with specific competences (the sea, the war, the snake bites, the birth and childhood, the death…). The main goddess, the Baalat of every kingdom, is mentioned in the royal inscriptions as the divine queen who “makes” the king and gives him the necessary skills to be legitimate, powerful and right. She protects him and is responsible for a long and prosperous reign. The power, the charis and the sense of justice of every mortal king is inspired by a divine model. Consequently, in the religious public life, the king plays an important personal role as an intermediary between the gods and the people. The individual and exceptional relationship between the State gods and the king makes it possible for the whole community to live peacefully, to conquer new territories or to defeat an enemy, to have food and clothes, to be healthy and to have children… In such a context, characterized by a “contractual” religious exchange, according to which the gods receive offerings from the humans and give them what they are asking for, the collective destiny of the society is closely bound by the personal ability of the king to capture the gods’ benevolence. But the “religious contract” also binds directly any single citizen to the gods: the Phoenician inscriptions reveal that anybody could offer gifts to the

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gods, asking them to be heard and blessed. In such cases the concerns deal with single families: health, offspring, prosperity, longevity…

Hence, the Phoenician inscriptions dating from the Persian period, or even before, throw light both on the individual and collective dimension of the religious practices. These two levels are closely bound. For example, the worshippers always introduce themselves as part of a kinship or lineage: “son of X, grandson of Y…”. The longer is the genealogy the more prestigious appears the person. They also often mention their social status or rank, with titles like “judge, rab, governor, member of the Senate”, etc. In fact, the epigraphic medium, displayed in public spaces, like sanctuaries, offers the opportunity, for the local elites, to underline their high status in the society. We do not deal with absolute monarchies where the power is totally concentrated in the king’s hands. The economic background of the Phoenician kingdoms, involved in the Mediterranean networks, promoted the emergence of entrepreneurial elites. We can hardly doubt that for them the “hellenisation” process was basically a positive challenge.

Even if Alexander was welcomed by the Phoenician authorities and by the people almost everywhere, except in Tyre14, the Macedonian conquest partly broke up the existing political, social and cultural network. The indigenous kings, who embodied until that time some sort of divine power, became Alexander’s subjects. The new authorities theoretically respected the local aristocracy and the royal family, but they transformed them in political tools or puppets. The royal charisma was seriously questioned whereas, at the same time, Alexander presented himself as a divine “international” figure. Such an important change in the political and social order had important consequences on the religious level. The cultic mediation of the king lost part of his meaning and centrality. The local gods were officially maintained or adopted, and “only” translated in or identified with Greek gods, but as a matter of fact their religious authority was seriously at risk. When the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores joined in Mexico or in Peru, they declared that the local gods were dead. Such an assertion was not made in Phoenicia but the Phoenician gods were to a certain extent submitted to the Greek gods. The process of *interpretatio* – on which Cliff Ando and Mark Smith have recently thrown important light – is also a hierarchical approach to the divine world. The case of Melqart in Tyre is extremely

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meaningful: the local Baal, identified with Heracles centuries before\textsuperscript{15}, doesn’t disappear, but he is almost completely swallowed up by Heracles and put under Greek control. The Greek iconography and symbols (the bow, the lion skin) becomes his official image, even on the coinage or the weights. We can however confidently assume that it was not or not only a Greek decision, but also and maybe mainly a Tyrian strategy. In fact, on one hand, like the kings, the local Baals are “used” by the Greeks to mark their territory but, on the other hand, the Greeks are used by the Phoenician to give their own culture a new dimension and resonance. The result is that both parts work more or less consciously for a cultural compromise, a sort of “Middle Ground”.

In such an interactive context, new spaces and new figures of religious mediation had to emerge. The Hellenistic (more) hybrid society needs single persons able to elaborate a new balance between tradition and innovation, and to display original strategies “in between”. Looking at Hellenistic Sidon now, I shall focus on the invention of new forms of religious agency tied with social strategies of political and cultural mediation in which the individual operates at the same time for his own interest and for the group’s integrity and promotion.

3. Eshmun-Asclepios in Bostan esh-Sheikh (Sidon)

The city of Sidon, between Beirut and Tyre, on the Phoenician coast, was the capital of a rich kingdom since the beginning of the 1\textsuperscript{st} millennium B.C. at least. Homer calls all the Phoenicians Sidonians, using a \textit{pars pro toto} figure. During the Persian Empire, Sidon was the major Phoenician city, with a royal dwelling and a huge \textit{paradeisos}. Because of his Mediterranean networking, Sidon is a very cosmopolite city, open to many influences, especially the Greek ones.

The god Eshmun is already considered in the II\textsuperscript{nd} millennium as the Baal of Sidon\textsuperscript{16}. His name is connected with the oil, an important element in the everyday life, for the health and the medicine, but also for the royal investiture. Eshmun’s divine spouse is Astarte, called “Name of Baal” because she has such a close relationship to the god that she is the only one who knows his

\textsuperscript{15} C. Bonnet, \textit{Melqart. Cultes et mythes de l’Héraclès tyrien en Méditerranée}, Namur-Louvain 1988 ; see in particular Herodotus II, 44.
name\textsuperscript{17}, a crucial information for the cultic requests. Both gods are venerated in an important sanctuary built in the very city, “Sidon on the sea”, but they have another prestigious cult-place outside Sidon, on the first slopes of Mount Lebanon, at Bostan esh-Sheik\textsuperscript{18}. This extra-urban sanctuary, irrigated by the Ydal holy spring, was constructed by the local kings probably during the VII\textsuperscript{th} or VI\textsuperscript{th} century B.C., when the Phoenician kingdoms were under Babylonian dominion. Step by step, the sanctuary became a very famous cult place, where the royal family, the local elite and all the Sidonian citizens came to honour their civic Baal with different types of offerings. Among them, we must underline the presence of numerous statues of small children, the so called temple boys (and girls, but more rarely), included children of the royal family. This type of statue originates from Cyprus and probably refers to specific rituals concerning birth, childhood and the offspring, hence the central issue of the continuity of each family and the whole city. A set of Phoenician inscriptions reveal that Eshmun was invoked to protect the young population of Sidon who should provide a future to the society. More than 20 royal inscriptions give a further confirmation of the king’s central position in the religious life: as a single person, he works for the collective interest.

Because Eshmun was identified with Asclepios, probably since the IV\textsuperscript{th} century B.C., many scholars look at him as “healing god” and consider Bostan esh-Sheik as a healing sanctuary, similar to Epidaurus for example. Its increasing size and prosperity during the Hellenistic times is thus understood as a tangible sign of the major attention paid to individual needs: body, health, afterlife. A more personal and direct experience of the divine should also take place in this context. According to my opinion, such a view is superficial and simplistic. The translation of Eshmun into Asclepios must be investigated as a strategy aiming at a new cultural compromise of which each partner could take advantage. What about “individualisation” in this context? Are the Hellenistic religious behaviours attested in Bostan differently orientated as before? Is the Phoenician cult of Eshmun deeply transformed?

Several dedications to Asclepios, dating to the Hellenistic and Roman times, have been discovered in the Bostan sanctuary. Looking carefully at the evidence from the pre-Hellenistic

\textsuperscript{17} C. Bonnet, « Le visage et le nom. Réflexions sur les interfaces divines à la lumière de la documentation proche-orientale », in Mélanges Pierre Brulé, Rennes 2009, in the press.

time, we have observed above that Eshmun’s cult deals both with the child welfare and the society’s future. The single citizen, child or adult, is considered as a member of a community, in the context of a social kinship. The introduction of Asclepios in the sanctuary, from the IVth century B.C., does not fundamentally change the ritual shape: the god still receive images of temple boys, of small children playing or involved in their everyday life activities, offerings like games or glass beads… The Greek inscriptions which mention Asclepios still emphasizes the family dimension of the offerings; nothing expressly points to a more individual cult or to a major interest in the body, in “self-care” or individual destiny, nor is the relationship between the gods and the people more direct or personal as it was before the emergence of “hellenisation”. The personal factors are always encompassed in a collective frame.

The clue for a correct interpretation of the “translation” of Eshmun in Asclepios should be the fact that the Phoenician religious tradition, expressed through cults and myths, was not exactly replaced by Greek features, supposedly more individual and more “modern”. In fact, the worshippers of the Bostan sanctuary are still Sidonian citizens, frequently using their own language. We possess circa 20 Hellenistic inscriptions from Bostan in Greek and 20 in Phoenician. In the latest, made by Sidonian citizens, the some formulary dedications are used as during the Classical period and Eshmun is still mentioned as the beneficiary of the cult. At the same time, under the name Asclepios and in Greek, the Sidonians also worship their traditional god. Nothing betrays a change in beliefs or practices.

But, from a strategic point of view, using both divine names and showing an hellenised face, with Greek inscriptions, Greek iconography and Greek architecture, the Sidonians favored a cultural compromise which allowed the Greek or hellenised people to visit the sanctuary, to recognize their own god and to make offerings to an “international” shared god. The Sidonians longed for taking advantage from the new political and cultural environment. Consequently they endeavoured to be part of the prestigious and international religious network of the Asclepieia and of the big business of Mediterranean pilgrimage. The Sidonians quickly understood how important and economically fruitful it should be to be admitted as member of the trendy club of the Asclepios’ great sanctuaries.

19 For the inscriptions from Bostan, see R. Stucky, Das Eschmun-Heiligtum von Sidon. Architektur und Inschriften, Bâle 2005.
Several pieces of evidence show that the Sidonians intentionally emphasized the compatibility between Eshmun and Asclepios. A bilingual inscription from Cos, written in Greek and Phoenician, dating from the end of the IVth century B.C., deals with a maritime construction offered by the son of the Sidonian king to Astarte as goddess of the sea and seafarers and paid by Eshmun’s sacred funds. I wonder if the Sidonian authorities didn’t pay attention to the Coan harbour because it was a place visited by Sidonians pilgrims attracted by the famous international Asklepieion.

The Sidonian cult of Eshmun-Asclepios, far from revealing an individualisation process and an emerging concern for personal religious experiences or for individual needs, is rather a tangible hint of a new religious koinê, which includes the Phoenician “hellenised” kingdoms. Besides, the iconographical evidence from Bostan, mainly the famous “Tribune d’Eshmun” and the so called “Bâtiment aux frises d’enfants” (dating from the IVth-IIIrd century B.C.), expresses the Sidonian claim and desire to be integrated in a larger context, in which their own traditions do not disappear, but on the contrary are consolidated and widespread. Both monuments display images of groups dancing together, hand in hand, playing music, producing harmony or playing games in a circle. Barbara Kowalzig’s recent analysis, developed with other textual and iconographic documents, points to a persistent symbolic and iconographic frame which symbolizes the concept of integration in the Greek community through political and religious actions.

The concepts of “hellenisation”, “individualization”, “modernity” or “healing cults” do not do justice to the diversity and complexity of behaviours, beliefs and practices testified in the Sidonian sanctuaries. The Greek claim for cultural supremacy, even if sophisticated and based on translatability between the gods, is balanced by the Phoenician strategy which aims to preserve or even promote the traditional heritage taking advantage of the new international connectivity and using Greek tools to favour the integration process. Now, the search for a cultural compromise

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requires mediators able to work in the “middle ground”: lobbying, networking, spinning… These persons try to build bridges between two cultural shores, working at the same time for their own personal prestige and for the benefit of the whole society.

4. Diotimos’ inscription: a Sidonian cognate to the Greeks

Diotimos is known through a Greek inscription from Sidon, discovered in a garden by Ernest Renan in 1862 and studied in 1939 by Elias Bickerman

24. The inscription contains an honorific epigram for the Sidonian Diotimos, winner at the Nemean Games in Greece. The stone and the squeeze are now unfortunately lost. The mention of the Cretan sculptor Timocharis allows us to date the monument from 200 B.C. circa. The elegant and sophisticated epigram was probably composed by a local poet deeply hellenised. In fact, we are informed about Greek literary circles in some Phoenician cities. Meleager of Gadara, who spent many years in Tyre when he was a young poet, is the best example of this milieu

25. Here is a translation of Diotimos’ inscription:

The City of the Sidonians honor Diotimos, son of Dionysios, a judge (dikastès), who won the chariot race at the Nemean Games.
Timocharis from Eleutherna made the statue.
The day, on which, in the Argolic valley, from their starting posts, all the competitors launched their quick horses for the race, the people of Phoronis gave you a splendid honor and you received the ever memorable crown.
For the first among the citizens, you brought from Hellas in the noble house of the Agenorids the glory won in an equestrian victory. The holy city of Cadmos, Thebes, also exults, seeing its metropolis distinguished by victories.
The prayer of your father, Dionysios, made in occasion of the contest was fulfilled when Greece made this proclamation: “Oh proud Sidon, you excel not only with your ships but also with your yoked chariots which are victorious.”

The athletic *agones* are a typical feature of the Greek culture. They give the possibility to single citizen to be distinguished by the *kleos* within a civic context which constitutes anyway a strong social bound. The introduction of these *agones* in the Near East is a major aspect of “hellenisation”, together with the *gymnasion* or the theatre\(^\text{26}\). They promote the Greek models of sociability and identity. They offer spaces of cultural mediation under Greek control. In Tyre, for example, where the resistance to the Macedonian army was the strongest, Alexander imposed immediately after his victory the celebration of athletic games in honour of Heracles in order to appropriate Melqart’s cult (the Baal of Tyre)\(^\text{27}\). But these contests were skilfully used by the local elite as a new occasion to display their virtue and their integration into the Greek world.

The Phoenicians, used to work in a Mediterranean frame, quickly understood how prestigious, from a social and cultural point of view, a victory was in a Greek (especially panhellenic) festival. Hence they participated not only to the Greek *agones* celebrated in Phoenicia (mainly in Tyre and Sidon), but also in Greece itself. Phoenician competitors definitely considered as “Greek” won important games since the III\(^{\text{rd}}\) century B.C. in Delos, Athens, Cos and Corinth! The participation to such competitions is a relevant strategy of integration for the Phoenician elites, and through them for the Phoenician cities, but it doesn’t mean at all that they loose their own identity. Diotimos, for example, is most probably a descendant of the Sidonian royal family (I follow here Christian Habicht’s recent suggestion). He won the prestigious chariot race at the Nemean Games, celebrated in Zeus’ honour. He must be a very rich man, aware of the Greek culture and practices, but still deeply bound to Sidon. For sure, he and his father are mentioned in the honorific inscription with Greek names; they are celebrated according to the Greek traditions, by an elegant Greek epigram and Diotimos receives a statue made by a Cretan artist. All these elements could lead us to the conclusion that Diotimos is totally hellenised and that such a celebration of a single citizen is a feature of “individualisation” tied with the new cultural trend, typical of the Hellenistic *koinè*.

We must however refrain from such a simplistic analysis. In fact, the mythological elements contained in the text deserve more attention. Even if they are included in a Greek context, they


recall a more sophisticated strategy of communication and a complex cultural landscape. First of all, it is worth noticing that Diotimos is at the same time proud of his victory in a Greek competition, but also mentions his title and duty of “judge”, *dikastès*, in Greek, which clearly translates a Semitic word, *shufat*, meaning something like “governor” in that context. The cultural mixture is evident and not conflicting at all. At that time (200 B.C. circa), in Sidon, the kingship has been abolished and a new political and social deal was emerging. Diotimos presumably belongs to the (ex) royal family and he skilfully uses a typically Greek strategy to get prestige, glory and immortality, being also involved in the institutional Sidonian framework as a “governor”, a *shufat*. Thus he appears as a typical Phoenician mediator of the Hellenistic time. The mythological traditions, in these circumstances, provide a common language useful for the creation of a cultural compromise. In this perspective, the concept of mythological kinship helps to reveal very ancient bonds between the Greek and the non Greek people. The idea of a common family prevails on the model of a Greek supremacy on Barbarian enemies.

During the conquest of Phoenicia, Alexander himself uses the mythological appeal and displays his Heraclean genealogy, especially in Tyre, where Melqart was considered as a local Heracles. Nonetheless, Alexander’s request – he wanted to make an offering in Melqart’s insular and civic temple - was not considered as legitimate by the Tyrians. The central question is the Greek notion of *syngeneia*, the mythical kinship, which creates a cultural network including all the Greek or hellenised people, and excluding the “Barbarians” from the great, old and glamorous family of Hellenic people.

Similarly and skilfully, Diotimos alludes in his honorific inscription to the memory of Agenor, the first king of Sidon, and his glorious family. Now, Agenor is an extraordinary case of Greek-Phoenician interaction. In fact he is told, at least since the Vth century B.C., to be Phoronis’ son, the king of Argos, and to have given birth to Phoinix, the Phoenicians’ eponymous hero, to Europa and Cadmos. The last one is well known in Greece too as the mythical *oikistès* of the city of Thebes and the hero who introduced the Phoenician alphabet in Greece. Through this “comforting (mythological) fiction”, Diotimos finds a way to underline the crucial Phoenician contribution to the Greek culture and to advertise a hybrid sense of belonging without resisting Hellenism. As Agenor has a clear Greek origin, the Phoenicians are definitely Greek, but Agenor,

28 Arrianus, II, 15, 7 ; Curtius Rufus IV, 2, 2 ; Justinus XI, 10.
through his sons, fecundated Greece and “civilized” it\textsuperscript{31}! It is a tricky message in a context of “hellenisation”!

Turning to our main issue, Diotimos’ inscription shows how a single citizen can be honoured with an elegant inscription and a public monument, using his personal glory, his “selbst feiern” for the prestige of his family, the whole city and the “Phoenician culture” challenged by the Greek models. The Phoenician elite borrowed the Greek aristocratic and even tyrannical model of the \textit{kleos} won in the \textit{agones} to recover part of their political and social prestige lost after the Macedonian conquest\textsuperscript{32}. Through this strategy, they also inscribe the Phoenician identity in the symbolic and imaginary network of the Greek mythology, promoting their integration and the mutual comprehension.

5. Conclusion

Reflecting about the Hellenistic dynamics, John Ma recently proposed to renounce to the “paradigms” (for example the paradigm of fusion or separation) and to work with the “paradoxes”\textsuperscript{33}. According to him the admission of contradictory situations and parameters coexisting in historical contexts is a fascinating clue to these “times of troubles”. The category of “hellenisation” thus naturally includes a wide spectrum of responses and levels of interaction, a huge range of attitudes and behaviours: violent opposition and peaceful communication, ideological pressure or resistance and rebellion. Far from any “obviousness”, such an approach emphasizes the importance of creativity and opportunism in cultural interaction, according to space, time, purpose and social context. The documents which I have presented here illustrate the paradoxical aspects of the culture of Hellenistic Phoenicia with its tricky religious, political, social and cultural landscape.

I completely agree with J.Z. Smith who he pays a special attention to the “religious work” in his “Imagining Religion”\textsuperscript{34}. The \textit{homo religiosus} is more properly a \textit{homo faber}. “Hellenisation”, like “occidentalisation” in Canada or Mexico in Modern Times, stimulated an uninterrupted

\textsuperscript{31} Later on, Achilles Tatius, speaking of Sidon, calls it “mother of the Phoenicians, father of the Thebans”: \textit{Leucippe and Clitophon}, I, 1, 1.


creativity as an answer to a certain disruption of techniques, memories and native imaginary. A state of cultural instability and deep mutations, after Alexander’s conquest, turns out to promote the construction of new cultural layouts and forms in which some individuals found new spaces for their political, social or religious agency. The Phoenician case illustrates the fact, emphasized by J. Rüpke, that individualisation is not coextensive to “modernity”, neither to the concept of “progress”. It should not be regarded as opposed to society, but as an option in the numerous aspects of interaction inside the social network.

The process of “hellenisation” in Phoenicia created new actions and discourses able to promote the dialog and a cultural compromise involving the individual and the society. The new political and cultural context favoured the emergence of mediation figures who tried to maximize the benefits derived from an environment oriented towards the Greek world and a new conception of “otherness”. New identities lead to new agencies in a context where the old boundaries are replaced by transactions and networks of relations. Such an analysis is also developed by Richard White for the Indians’ experience with the French, English and American people between 1650 and 1815. It aims to break the deadlock of a binary alternative between conquest and resistance, and the traditional idea that the native populations only tried to protect their own traditions threatened by the new and modern cultures brought from outside. White’s book is a very stimulating approach of the acculturation process and it provides a more “ecological” view on new cultural landscapes. The concept of “Middle Ground” can be a useful tool to describe the creative process of cultural mediation going on in Phoenicia and the interaction between the Greeks and the local population. I can not develop it here, but the similarities are numerous and meaningful.

Marshall Sahlins’ works also provide an interesting conceptual framework for my analysis. He offers a “biological” conception of culture, which is basically the very core of human nature, and he pays a special attention to the evolution of native cultures in context of conquest. According to him, the native populations confronted with new layouts or new products, don’t try to become similar to their conquerors, but they endeavour to become more themselves, using the

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conquerors’ tools. The traditional social relationships are reinforced and not weakened. The cunning of culture, the invention or re-invention of traditions, all these sorts of strategies are promoted by the social elites, the *develop-chiefs*, who play a central role in the transformation of culture and in its perennial transmission. Because of that social ability to negotiate new cultural frameworks, the culture is the very human nature.