

Article

The discovery of a Romano-Punic tomb in the region of Msallata

Abdulhafid Fadil Elmayer

Professor of Ancient History, College of Arts, University of Tripoli-Libya

Abstract

A mixed Romano-Punic tomb discovered on private property to the west of Msallata contains many small stone chests containing cremated human remains. Some of these chests carry the name of the deceased written in the Latin or neo-Punic alphabet. Besides the stone chests, there are pottery jars containing animal remains. Figurative relief and religious symbols suggest the practice of rituals associated with the Tophet (sanctuary-necropolis) of Carthage. In addition to the stone chests and pottery urns there are many other objects that are typical of the grave goods usually buried with the Phoenician dead: oil lamps, tableware, coins, medals.

ملخص

قبر روماني مختلط اكتشف في مزرعة خاصة ملك أحد المواطنين في موقع الشعافيين غرب مسلاتة يحتوي على العديد من الصناديق الحجرية التي تحتوي رفاة الموتى وبعض هذه التوابيت يحمل اسم الميت مكتوبا بالحرف اللاتيني أو البوني الجديد. إلى جانب هذه الصناديق توجد جرار فخارية تحتوي على بقايا حيوانات. تشير الرموز التصويرية والدينية إلى ممارسة الطقوس المرتبطة بمقبرة قرطاج. بالإضافة إلى الصناديق الحجرية والجرار الفخارية هناك العديد من الأشياء الأخرى التي تشبه المقتنيات الجنائزية التي يتم دفنها عادة مع الموتى الفينيقيين: مصابيح الزيت، أدوات المائدة، العملات المعدنية والمداليات.

Keywords: hypogaeum, Msallata, stone chests, amphorae, lamps, inscriptions

Discovery of the tomb

While a Libyan man, who prefers to remain anonymous, was digging in the garden beside his house located in Al Shafeen (Ash Shi'āfiyīn) in the western part of the territory of the town of Msallata (Al Qasabat), in the administrative district of Murqub, about 30 km west-southwest of its capital Khoms (near ancient Lepcis Magna), he discovered a subterranean (hypogeal) tomb chamber (2 m wide x 4 m long x 3 m deep). This locality, towards the seaward end of the Eastern Jebel (see Figure 1), would in antiquity have been in the territory of Lepcis Magna and this tomb is similar to some of those tombs that have already been discovered in the region of Lepcis (e.g., Di Vita-Évrard *et al.* 1995; Faraj *et al.* 1997).

The tomb chamber contains multiple stone chests with lids (Figure 2), as well as pottery jars, housing cremated human remains. Some of the receptacles contain ashes, while others contain both ashes and bones. There are also various other grave goods, including several big empty amphorae.

Since the discovery, the landowner has partially excavated the chamber and carefully stored the finds (Figure 3) and has kindly allowed them to be inspected.

The finds within the tomb

Multiple rectangular stone chests containing human remains apparently belonging to both children and adults were found arranged beside, and stacked on top of, each other in the large chamber (Figure 2). These stone chests are generally of high quality, equipped with lids with pitched (gabled) roofs (Figure 3), and come in two sizes: the smaller being generally approximately 10 × 20 cm (e.g. nos 5 and 7; Figures 7 and 9); the larger chests

approximately 20 × 50 cm (e.g. nos 1–3; Figures 4–6). In total, 20 of these stone chests were revealed in the initial discovery and there are still many others under the soil. The majority of these chests are anepigraphic and undecorated, but a small number do bear inscriptions in neo-Punic as well as Latin scripts (nos 1–6 below). A further small chest (no. 7), while uninscribed, carries a figurative scene sculpted in low relief depicting a man and a woman either side of a calf's head and other elements that may relate to religious ritual (Figure 11). There are two types of amphorae, small (Figure 12) and large (Figure 13), used as cinerary urns containing ashes and animal remains, and further large amphorae that are empty (Figure 28). Amongst the grave goods found, the metal objects include a Roman coin (Figure 14) and a bronze medallion or earring (Figure 15). The metal objects are outnumbered by the ceramics, which include oil lamps, of which one at least bears a manufacturer's stamp (Figure 18), and kitchenware and tableware, including a jug, pots, and dishes, again one of them with a manufacturer's stamp (Figures 18–26).

Burials

N^o 1. Cinerary chest with neo-Punic inscription (Figure 4)

A stone cinerary chest bearing a Phoenician (Punic) language inscription in a neo-Punic script of broadly carved letters.

Arabic transliteration
ل ب ع ن ب ع ل أ ش ت

Latin transliteration
L B ' N B ' L ' ŠT

Translation
'For son of Bal Ast'

Commentary

L: 'For'; cf. KAI 1, line 1; KAI 16, line 2; KAI 46, lines 5 and 8; and KAI 143.

Email: fe05632@gmail.com

Cite this article: Elmayer AF (2024). The discovery of a Romano-Punic tomb in the region of Msallata. *Libyan Studies* 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lis.2023.26>



Figure 1. Map showing the location of Al Shafeen (Ash Shi'āfiyīn) indicated by a red pin (adapted from Google maps by B. Salway).



Figure 2. Stone cinerary chests *in situ* during excavation (photo: Author).

B'N: 'son of'; cf. the neo-Punic inscription from El-Amruni, where it is found in the plural B'NM = 'their sons' (KAI 117 = HNPI El-Amruni N 1, line 5).

'ŠT: a Punic personal name that occurs in another inscription from Tunisia (HNPI Hr. Maktar N 54). So 'Balast' is a Punic name like b'l-sylk = b'lslk, which occurs in other inscriptions found in Africa Proconsularis (HNPI Sabratha N 2, Carthage N 13, Sousse N 9.)

N° 2. Cinerary chest with neo-Punic inscription (Figure 5)

A further stone cinerary chest with gabled lid, the surface of which has been finished with a chisel, before being inscribed with a Phoenician (Punic) language inscription in neo-Punic script of finely carved letters.

Arabic transliteration

ش ل ت ل ع ن ب ع ل ه ق ل و د ي

Latin alphabet transliteration

ŠL TL'N B'L HQLAUDI

Translation

'For Tlan head of the Claudii'

Commentary

ŠL = 'for'; as above in no. 1, line 1, preceded by the marker of relativity ('Š' = ش).

TL'N: a Punic personal name.

B'L: 'head' or 'citizen' (Jongeling 2008, 386).

HQLAUDI = 'H+Qlaudi': H = definite article; Qlaudi = the Latin *gentilicium* Claudius, which occurs similarly transliterated in another Punic inscription from Roman Tripolitania (IRT 318c = IPT 27 = TRE 32 = HNPI Labdah N 19, line 1). The combination 'Tlan head of the Qlaudi', strongly suggests that Tlan was a Roman citizen, whose citizenship derived in some way ultimately from a grant by the emperor Claudius (reigned AD 41–54), and who would be known in Latin more conventionally as 'Claudius Tlan'.

Or B'L H Qlaudi = could mean the citizen of Qlaudi:

As a personal name is not usually preceded by the definite article, probably Claudi is the name of a city if there is one by this name. B'L HQLAUDI = the citizen of QLAUDI, like:

B'L HMYddm = the citizens of Mididi (Jongeling 2008 p.154, Hr. Meded 26.3).

B'l hmk't r m = the citizen of Maktar (Jongeling, op. cit., p.104, Hr. Maktar N.33, 3).

N° 3. Cinerary chest with mixed Latin and Phoenician inscription (Figure 6)

This stone chest with inscribed lid was found thrown aside on the ground in the middle of the room between the other stone chests. It



Figure 3. Stone chests in storage after retrieval from the tomb chamber (photo: Author).



Figure 4. Stone cinerary chest with neo-Punic inscription (photo: Author).



Figure 5. Stone cinerary chest with lid bearing inscription in Phoenician letters (photo: Author).

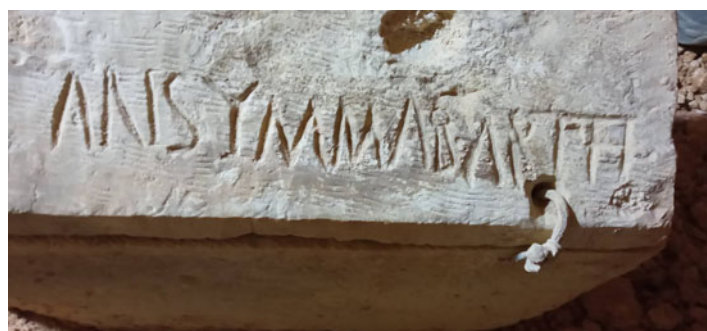


Figure 6. Detail of lid of stone cinerary chest with mixed language inscription (photo: Author).



Figure 7. Lid of stone cinerary chest with inscription in Latin letters (photo: Author).

seems that this chest had been dislodged earlier, possibly for re-use. The inscription on the lid seems to be composed of three graphical distinct units, comprising both Latin and Phoenician letters, as well as traditional Phoenician religious symbols. The Latin text is executed in an unadorned, but reasonably regular, capital script.

Latin/graphic/Arabic transcription

ANSYMMMA 𐤏𐤍𐤁𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏 𐤏𐤎𐤏𐤏𐤏

Commentary

ANSYMMMA: although the reading is clear, the meaning of this sequence of Latin letters is obscure. In the funerary context we might expect it to be a personal name, and consider it most likely to be Punic in light of the Phoenician religious signs. The sequence YMMA does indeed actually appear, in a Hadrianic-period, Latino-Punic brick stamp from Lepcis (KAI 178 = TRE 325–327 = LPE Lepcis Magna LP 1, line 2), as part of the word YMMANNAI, which is apparently equivalent to the Latin occupational title *offinator* ('artisan'). So, rather than a personal name element, YMMA here might refer to 'craft/manufacture'.

𐤏𐤎𐤏𐤏𐤏: the central one of the three graphic units of this inscription is a crude version of the sign of the Phoenician goddess Tanit, who is usually represented by a more elaborate anthropomorphic symbol with acroteria/raised arms: 𐤏𐤎𐤏𐤏, as seen in the 'Tophet of Salambô' sanctuary-necropolis in Carthage (Poinssot and Lantier 1923, 42–43, with Plate III.9, and 48–49, with Plate IV.8–22). The triangular sign of Tanit is here flanked by simplified representations of *caducei* (staves entwined by twin serpents). Above the sign of Tanit, but hardly visible because of damage, is a depiction of a winged solar disk, a further symbol of Tanit.¹

𐤏𐤎𐤏𐤏𐤏 = TNT: the last graphic unit of the inscription could be the three letters in ligature of the name of goddess Tanit (TNT or TINIT) written in the Phoenician alphabet.

Given the religious elements with which it is paired, the enigmatic Latino-Punic *ansymma* might be a dedicatory formula of some kind. The use of the sign of Tanit in this funerary context raises the question of the practice of the ritual sacrifice/dedication of infants to the goddess, associated with the Tophet of Salambô at Carthage.²

N° 4. Cinerary chest with inscription in Latin letters (Figure 7).

A further stone cinerary chest with gabled lid, the surface of which has been finished with a chisel, before being inscribed with an inscription in a Latin script of elegantly carved, if slightly irregular, serifed letters.

Transcription

IDIBAL NVNNI

Translation (if Latino-Punic)

'Nunnius Idibal'

Translation (if Latin)

'Idibal son of Nunnius'

Commentary

Idibal: Punic masculine personal name, a variant of 'dnb'1 (Idnbal), explicitly attested with the Latin parallels *Iddib[a]le*, in a bilingual inscription from Lepcis Magna (neo-Punic: KAI 120 = TRE 27 = HNPI Labdah N 13, line 2; Latin: IRT 319b, line 1), and *Idnibal*, in another bilingual from Sulci on Sardinia (neo-Punic: KAI 172 = HNPI Sant' Antioco N 3, line 1; Latin: CIL X 7513 = CIL I² 2225 = AE 1998, 663, line 1).³

Nunni: not attested otherwise in Latino-Punic epigraphy, but plausibly a personal name: either (a) a Punic rendering of the Roman (Latin) *gentilicium* 'Nunnius' (cf. CLAUDI in the neo-Punic text no. 2 above), which is attested a dozen or so times further west in Africa Proconsularis;⁴ or (b) a Latin rendering of a Libyan or Punic patronym, representing the genitive case of an unattested name whose nominative form would be 'Nunus' or 'Nunnius'. In Latin like: M. Nonius (PIR1 N102 year 25/25 or 25/24 BC); AE1947.53.

N° 5. Cinerary chest with inscription in Latin letters (Figure 8)

This stone cinerary chest with lid bears an inscription on one of the short faces of the body of the casket. The inscription is executed in rather irregular and haphazardly laid-out Latin letters. The G is markedly angular, while the L is curvilinear. The correct interpretation of the word division is uncertain.

Transcription

GALIC

VMABA

Edition (if Latino-Punic)

Gali C|umaba

Translation

'Galius Cumaba (?)'

Edition (if Latin)

Gali c|um Aba

Translation

'(Tomb) of Galius with Aba.'

Commentary

GALI: may derive from the Latin *gentilicium* Galius (attested in North Africa, e.g., at Thibilis, Numidia (ILAlg. II.2, 5253)),⁵ either (a) in the neo-Punic nominative,⁶ or (b) in the Latin genitive and most probably represents the name of the deceased. Alternatively, it may be a variant with simplification of the double LL of the relatively common Latin *cognomen* Gallus, which is attested at Lepcis Magna, notably as the *cognomen* of a Roman proconsul at the beginning of the first century AD, L. Caninius Gallus (PIR² C 390), who acted as *patronus* of the community and contributed to the building of its theatre (IRT 521), and also as borne by a member of the local élite of equestrian status, L. Volusius Gallus, who was permitted by the city council to erect a statue in honour of his wife in the third quarter of the third century AD (IRT 579).



Figure 8. Stone cinerary chest with inscription in Latin letters (photo: Author).



Figure 11. Figurative relief sculpture on small stone chest (detail) (photo: Author).

CVMABA: either (a) a secondary name element, qualifying Galius, if the language of the inscription is Punic, or (b) the name of a second individual, indicating that the chest houses the remains of a second person (wife?) alongside those of Galius.

N° 6. Large stone cinerary chest with inscribed lid (Figure 9)

This stone chest containing human ashes bears an inscription on its roughly finished gabled lid, possibly in Latin letters, but the text is not legible.

N° 7. Stone cinerary chest with figurative relief (Figures 10–11)

A further small stone cinerary chest, with a barrel-shaped lid reminiscent of the *cupula* tombs of Roman North Africa (Figure 10),⁷ is unusual in featuring an elaborate, if rather primitively carved, scene in bas-relief on one of its long sides (Figure 11).

The scene depicts a man to the left brandishing a sword in his right hand and a woman to the right, flanking a calf's head in between. There appears to be a table under their feet and also two faces of people (or masks), one upright above and to the left of the table, the other horizontal to the right beside the table underneath the female figure. The scene may depict a religious ritual at an offering table.

N° 8. Amphorae used as cinerary urns (Figures 12–13)

Amongst the ten or so amphorae used as containers for ashes are two large amphorae full of ashes and animal bones (Figure 12). These are of a type with a long neck topped by a rounded rim, long bifid handles, a sharply carinated shoulder, tapering ovoid



Figure 9. Large stone cinerary chest with lid carrying an inscription (photo: Author).



Figure 10. Small stone chest with figurative relief sculpture (photo: Author).



Figure 12. Two amphorae containing ashes and animal bones (photo: Author).



Figure 13. Flat-bottomed amphorae containing ashes (photo: Author).

body and conical base. In design they conform to Peacock and Williams's Class 10 (Dressel type 2–4) late-republican–early-imperial period wine amphorae, manufactured in Italy, Gaul and Spain (Peacock and Williams 1986, 105–106). The amphorae in Figure 29 (see below) are of the same type.

A further group of nine smaller, flat-bottomed amphorae containing ashes were retrieved from the tomb and collected together by the owner of the property (Figure 13). These amphorae have long necks topped by broader moulded rims, oval handles and tapering ovoid bodies. These amphorae are probably of local (Tripolitanian) manufacture, so far unclassified but belonging to a series frequently found in funerary context in the Lepcis Magna area (Cifani *et al.* 2008, 2304–2306, with n. 55).

Grave goods

Alongside the receptacles for containing human remains the tomb contained a range of grave goods (metal objects, lamps and other ceramics) consistent with what is traditionally typical of Phoenician burial practices and more specifically of other tombs of the Roman imperial period discovered in the region of Lepcis and the Eastern Jebel.⁸

Metallic objects (Figures 14–16)

A small number of metal objects has been retrieved in clearing the fill from the tomb chamber. These include: a Roman bronze coin, too corroded to identify, that was found beside one of the stone chests (Figure 14); the greater part of a fragmentary bronze disc, found loose on the floor of the tomb chamber, that is decorated with a series of small, round holes pierced at the outer edge,



Figure 14. Roman bronze coin (photo: Author).



Figure 15. Fragmentary decorated bronze disc (photo: Author).



Figure 16. Small bronze handle (photo: Author).

and which may be a Punic medallion or part of an earring (Figure 15); and a small bronze handle, which may have belonged to a mirror or bronze patera (Figure 16).

Pottery

Oil lamps (Figures 17–18)

At least three mould-made clay oil lamps of the Roman 'discus' type were discovered alongside the stone chests in the tomb. Two very similar lamps (A and B) are decorated with images of gladiators (Figure 17).

Both lamps are of very similar fabric and design. They appear to be made of brown clay with dark grey glaze and of a type without a rear handle but with a nozzle that is wide and angular with two decorative volutes.⁹ In both cases the shoulder of the lamp body is narrow and separated from the concave discus by an inward sloping rim featuring three concentric rills.¹⁰

Left-hand example (A): this has a small channel running between the discus and the mouth of the nozzle and a central fill hole in the discus.¹¹ The discus image shows a frontal view of a single gladiator in attacking position, head turned to the left; the figure wears a crested helmet, a loincloth (*subligaculum*)



Figure 17. Lamps A and B decorated with depictions of gladiators (photo: Author).



Figure 18. Oil lamp C with stamped base (photo: Author).

with belt and an armband (*manica*) on his right arm, in his left hand he holds a rectangular shield (*scutum*), while in his right hand, drawn across his body, he holds a short sword (*gladius*) up above his head, poised to deliver a back-handed slash. The figure can thus be identified as a *murmillo*. This seems to be a well-preserved example of the same decorative design (if not a product of the same mould) known from a fragmentary example excavated from Augustan-Claudian levels at Cosa in Etruria (Rickman Fitch and Wynick Goldman 1994, 120, cat. 562, with Plate V = Miączewska 2015, 108, cat. A.a.28, with Plate p. 208, dated between 25/20 BC and AD 40/45).¹²

Right-hand example (B): the nozzle lacks a channel and the fill hole in the discus is off-centre, to the left of the image.¹³ The discus image depicts the rear view of a single gladiator in an attacking stance, wearing a conical helmet with a central plume and decoration of feathers (*galea*), a loincloth and equipped with greaves (*ocreae*) on both legs. He holds a convex square shield (*parmula*) up in front of him with his left hand, but the weapon in his right hand is out of sight behind his body. The image can be

identified as a *Thrax*. Lamps with rear-view images of single gladiators are relatively unusual; indeed, the stance is rather misleadingly listed under ‘frontal view’ in a recent study specifically dedicated to Roman discus lamps with gladiatorial images (Miączewska 2015, 111–12, cat. A.a.34–A.a.35, with Plates p. 210). However, an almost identical image is found on one lamp from Gnathia in southern Italy (Fioriello 2003, 37, no. 1 = Miączewska 2015, 111–12, cat. A.a.34) and an unprovenanced lamp in the British Museum (Bailey 1980, 140, Q790 = Miączewska 2015, 112, cat. A.a.35). The British Museum lamp also shares the same nozzle and shoulder design with our lamp B, but is divergent in two technical aspects: (i) it has an additional air-hole pierced between the volutes where the nozzle joins the body; and (ii) its fill hole is placed centrally between the legs of the gladiator.¹⁴

A third mould-made clay oil lamp (C) was retrieved from the fill to the right of the stone cinerary chest no. 5 above (Figures 2 and 8). In contrast to the others, this lamp is finished in a red slip, has a simpler, rounded nozzle, a loop-shaped handle at the rear and is stamped with the impression of a maker’s name on the base in simple, rounded Latin capital letters, with interpuncts separating the name elements (Figure 18).

Transcription

C·OPPI·RES

Edition

G(ai) Oppi Res(tituti)

Translation

‘(Product of) Gaius Oppius Restitutus’

Commentary

This maker’s stamp is well known. The Oppii were Roman potters or owners of a pottery workshop, making lamps of many types, on the Janiculum in the Trastevere region of Rome, during the late Flavian to early Antonine period (Maestripietri and Ceci 1990, 119–20). To judge by the large number of surviving stamp marks, the Oppii were the most prolific, central-Italian lamp-makers of the period between ca. AD 70 to 140 (Bailey 1980, Q916–Q1317, fig. 108), with the Roman provinces of Latin North Africa accounting for the greatest overseas diffusion of their wares (Maestripietri and Ceci 1990, 125–27). The ‘C·OPPI·RES’ stamp specifically seems to have been in use from ca. AD 90 onwards. Of the numerous examples catalogued in the British Museum’s collection, to judge by the placement of the interpuncts and the evidence of wear on the upper part of the ‘S’, lamp Q986 would appear to bear an impression made by the very same stamp as that used on this newly discovered lamp (Bailey 1980, 195, Q986).

The Oppius Restitutus lamp (C) is certainly of Italian (indeed Roman) manufacture and both of the close parallels for the gladiator lamps A and B (Rickman Fitch and Wynick Goldman 1994, 120, cat. 562 = Miączewska 2015, 108, cat. A.a.28, from Cosa; Bailey 1980, 140, Q790 = Miączewska 2015, 112, cat. A.a.35, unprovenanced) are also considered to be of Italian manufacture, and dated between the Augustan and Claudian periods. However, the fabric and finish of the two gladiator lamps retrieved from this tomb are not inconsistent with a place of manufacture in North Africa and a dating to the Augustan/Tiberian period for the left-hand (*murmillo*) example (lamp A) and Claudian/Flavian for the right-hand (*Thrax*) example (lamp B) respectively.¹⁵

Kitchenware and tableware (Figures 19–27)

A jug and a selection of dishes and pots were also retrieved from the general fill of the tomb. The pots include a tall grey-brown clay pot with red slip interior, deep everted collar-type rim, ovoid body and pedestal base (Figure 19); a round-bodied, red clay pot (*olla*), with everted moulded rim and flat base (Figure 20); a grey-brown clay, curved-bodied bowl, with moulded



Figure 19. Grey-brown clay pot with pedestal base (photo: Author).



Figure 20. Round-bodied, red clay pot (photo: Author).



Figure 21. Grey-brown clay, curved-bodied bowl (photo: Author).

rim (Figure 21); and a red clay pot, with straight walls and flat bottom (Figure 22).

One of the smaller pots, found to the left of the inscribed stone cinerary chest no 5 (Figures 2 and 8 above), has on its base the impression of a stamp in Latin letters within a cartouche (Figure 23). The surface is worn, which makes the reading slightly uncertain.



Figure 22. Deep, red clay pot with straight walls (photo: Author).



Figure 23. Impression of *terra sigillata* maker's stamp (photo: Author).



Figure 24. Shallow grey-brown dish (photo: Author).



Figure 25. Red clay dish (photo: Author).

Transcription

IINNI S

Edition

Enni s(erui?).

Translation

'(Product of) the slave of Ennius.'

The reading is very uncertain and has not been confirmed by matching with any already-known manufacturer's stamp.

The dishes include a shallow circular grey-brown clay dish (*patera*), with a flat rim (Figure 24); a simple circular red clay dish (Figure 25); and another simple circular red clay dish with very worn red slip finish (Figure 26).

The most elegant piece of pottery is a flagon of red-yellow clay with a tall, slender neck, topped with a flat, circular moulded rim, a handle with 90° angle, on top of a wide body of elliptical profile and small, flat base (Figure 27).

Amphorae (Figure 28)

Figure 26. Red clay dish with red slip finish (photo: Author).

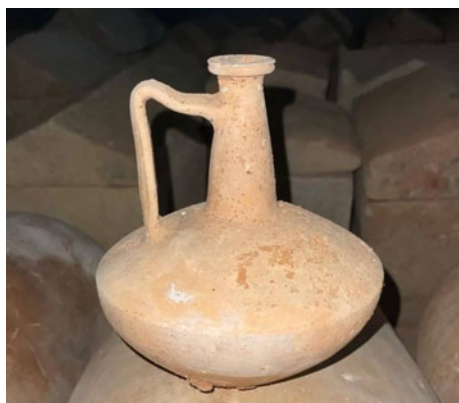


Figure 27. Flagon of red-yellow clay (photo: Author).



Figure 28. Three empty transport amphorae (photo: Author).

The final group of grave goods comprises a set of three amphorae that appear not to have been used for containing human remains. These are of the same type (with a long neck, a sharply carinated shoulder, tapering ovoid body and conical base) as those used as cinerary urns (above Figure 12), and so may also originally have been used to transport wine. This type was manufactured between the late first century BC and mid-second century AD (Peacock and Williams 1986, 106).

Conclusions

The implication of the fact that the inscribed cinerary chests carry Phoenician and Latin names is that the tomb was used by a family, or families, of mixed Punic and Roman culture. These inscribed chests provide further confirmation of the diffusion of the Punic language into the Libyan interior and the continued vitality of the neo-Punic epigraphic habit in the hinterland of Lepcis Magna. This vitality was already evidenced for the early Roman imperial period by the discovery of a neo-Punic ostracron concerning commercial dealings and a contract for selling a farm in a 'valley of the palm tree' at Al Qusabat in Msallata (*IP*T 86 = *TRE* 51 = *HNPI* Al-Qusbat N 1), in which one of the parties has the Latin name *Dn^ot^o* (i.e. Donatus). This confirmed the existence of a Phoenician-speaking community in this district and the use here of written Punic in their mutual commercial dealings. Furthermore, the influence of Roman civilisation here at Al Shafeen can be seen in the inscriptions of the stone chests, not only by the use of Latin names in the neo-Punic texts (e.g. no. 2), but also, conversely, by the use of the Latin alphabet for transcribing Phoenician names (e.g. no. 3). There is also plausibly at least one Roman citizen amongst the persons buried here: Tlan head of the Claudii (no. 2), whose *gentilicium* is not likely to pre-date the reign of the emperor Claudius (AD 41–54). The variety of scripts and (possibly) languages in use may reflect different phases in a shift of writing habits over time: from Phoenician written in neo-Punic script (nos 1–2), to Phoenician in Latin script (nos 3–4) and finally possibly Latin in Latin script (no. 5). In terms of the material culture, the grave goods overwhelmingly belong to the contemporary Roman mainstream, with wine amphorae of likely overseas origin, mass-produced pottery featuring a Latin maker's stamp and at least one oil lamp of Italian manufacture.

On the other hand, other aspects may reflect the persistence of traditional practice: the presence in this tomb of pottery jars containing animal remains (no. 8, Figures 12–13), buried beside the stone coffins for human remains, together with the use of the traditional symbols relating to Tanit, as known from the Tophet of Salambô sanctuary-necropolis at Carthage (no. 3, Figure 6), may suggest the performance of similar religious rituals here. Further corroboration may be found, if the sculpted bas-relief scene (no. 7, Figure 11) is correctly interpreted as depicting a religious offering, in understanding the scene as depicting an act of human sacrifice.

As for the chronology of the active use of the burial chamber, the date ranges ascribed to the most datable objects found – the oil lamps – suggest a period of active use stretching from the early first century to the mid-second century AD.

Acknowledgement. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Benet Salway (University College London) for reading my article and for his help. I also thank the Department of Antiquities and Dr Shakshuki for permission to publish the findings in this article. I remain responsible for any errors that remain.

* Professor of Ancient History, College of Arts, University of Tripoli-Libya

Abbreviations

AE = *L'Année épigraphique. Revue des publications épigraphiques relatives à l'antiquité romaine*. Paris 1889–.

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, consilio et auctoritate Academiae litterarum regiae Borussicae editum*. Berlin 1863–.

- HNPI = Jongeling 2008. Texts available online at www.punic.co.uk/phoenician/neopunic-inscr/puninscr.html (accessed on 8 February 2023).
- IPT = Levi Della Vida, G. and Amadasi Guzzo, M.G. (eds). *Iscrizioni Puniche della Tripolitania (1927–1967)* (Monografie di Archeologia Libica 22). L'Erma di Bretschneider, Rome. 1987.
- IRT = Reynolds, J.M. and Ward-Perkins, J.B. (eds). *Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*. British School at Rome, Rome/London. 1952 + IRT2021: *Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania (2021)* by J.M. Reynolds, C.M. Roueché, G. Bodard, C. Barron et al. Available at: <http://irt2021.inslib.kcl.ac.uk> (accessed on 8 February 2023).
- KAI = Donner, H. and Röllig W. *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften, mit einem Beitrag von O. Rossler, I–III²*. Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden. 1966–1969.
- LPE = Kerr 2010.
- PIR² = Groag, E., Stein, A., et al. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III, edita consilio et auctoritate Academiae litterarum Borussicae, editio altera*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig. 1932–2015.
- TRE = Elmayer, A.F. *Tripolitania under the Roman Empire (B.C. 47–A.D. 235)* (Markaz Jihad Al-Libyin 8). GSP/LAJ, Tripoli. 1997.

Notes

- 1 On the symbols of Tanit, see Yadin 1967, 53.
- 2 On the vexed question of the ritual, see, most recently, McCarty 2019.
- 3 See further Jongeling 2008, 313–14.
- 4 E.g. *CIL* VIII 294–96, 11490 (El Hamima); *AE* 1979, 655 (Bou Jelida); *CIL* VIII 23500–23501 (Mactar) and 470, 472 (Ammaedara); *AE* 2014, 1550 (Calama). We are grateful to an anonymous reader for this suggestion.
- 5 We are grateful to an anonymous reader for this suggestion.
- 6 On rendition of Latin names ending *-ius* in Latino-Punic texts, see Kerr 2010, 68–74.
- 7 On the *cupula* type tombs, widespread across Latin North Africa, including at Lepcis Magna, see Stirling 2007.
- 8 Di Vita-Évrard et al. 1995 (Lepcis); Faraj et al. 1997 (Eastern Jebel); López-Bertran 2019, 301.
- 9 The nozzle design conforms to Loeschcke 1919, 213, fig. 1, type I and Bailey 1980, type A.
- 10 The profile of the shoulders conforms to Loeschcke 1919, 213, fig. 2, shoulder form IIa.
- 11 Corresponding to Loeschcke 1919, type I A and Bailey 1980, type A, group i.
- 12 Cf. a similar volute-nozzled lamp (but Loeschcke 1919, type I B) featuring a *Thrax* in the same stance in the Cesnola collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Lightfoot 2021, 227, cat. 288).
- 13 Corresponding to Loeschcke 1919, type I B (more precisely type I B/C, according to the refined typology of Goethert-Polaschek 1985, 16, fig. 7) and Bailey 1980, type A, group iii.
- 14 Bailey 1980, 140, Q790, with Plate 4, dated to the first half of the first century AD. Cf. Lightfoot 2021, 224, cat. 283 and 233, cat. 294 for the similarly volute-nozzled lamps (but Loeschcke 1919, types I A and type IV respectively) with two different scenes depicting a *murmillio* from behind.
- 15 Cf. the similar volute-nozzled lamps in the J. Paul Getty collection: Bussière and Lindros Wohl 2017, 65–66, no. 77 (Loeschcke 1919, type I A = Bailey 1980, type A, group i) and 90, 92–95, nos 119, 123, 125, 127, 129 (Loeschcke 1919/Goethert-Polaschek 1985, type I B/C, = Bailey 1980, type A, group iii), all of which are considered to be of North-African manufacture.

References

- Bailey, D.M. 1980. *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum, 2. Roman Lamps Made in Italy*. British Museum Publications, London.
- Bussière, J. and Lindros Wohl, B. 2017. *Ancient Lamps in the J. Paul Getty Museum*. Getty Publications, Los Angeles.
- Cifani, G., Severini, F., Felici, F. and Munzi, M. 2008. Leptis Magna: una tomba a camera nel suburbio occidentale (uadi Rsaf). In: J. González, P. Ruggeri, C. Vismara and R. Zucca (eds), *L'Africa romana. Le ricchezze dell'Africa. Risorse, produzioni, scambi. Atti del XVII convegno di studio, Sevilla, 14–17 dicembre 2006*. Carocci editore, Rome: 2287–2315.
- Di Vita-Évrard, G., Fontana, S. and Musso, L. 1995. Leptis Magna: une tombe exemplaire du Haut-Empire. In: P. Troussset (ed.), *L'Afrique du Nord antique et médiévale: [2.] Monuments funéraires et institutions autochtones, VI^e colloque international sur l'histoire et l'archéologie de l'Afrique*. Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, Paris: 153–78.
- Doak, B.R. and López-Ruiz, C. (eds) 2019. *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Faraj, M., Asmia, M. and Al-Hadad, M. 1997. Tarhuna, Zwitina cave: hypogean tomb. *Libya Antiqua*, n. s. 3: 217–18.
- Fiorillo, C.S. 2003. *Le lucerne imperiali e tardoantiche di Egnazia* (Documenti e studi 35). Edipuglia, Bari.
- Goethert-Polaschek, K. 1985. *Katalog der Lampen des Rheinischen Landesmuseums Trier*. Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein.
- Jongeling, K. 2008. *Handbook of Neo-Punic Inscriptions*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Kerr, R.M. 2010. *Latino-Punic Epigraphy. A Descriptive Study of the Inscriptions* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe 42). Mohr, Siebeck, Tübingen 2010.
- Lightfoot, C.S. 2021. *The Cesnola Collection of Cypriot Art: Terracotta Oil Lamps*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- Loeschcke, S. 1919. *Lampen aus Vidonissa: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte von Vidonissa und des antiken Beleuchtungswesens*. In: Kommission bei Beer & Cie, Zürich.
- López-Bertran, M. 2019. Funerary ritual. In: Doak and López-Ruiz 2019: 293–309.
- Maestriperi, D. and Ceci, M. 1990. Gli Oppi: una famiglia di fabbricanti urbani di lucerne. *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3: 119–32.
- McCarty, M.M. 2019. The Tophet and infant sacrifice. In: Doak and López-Ruiz 2019: 310–25.
- Miączewska, A.B. 2015. *Roman Discus Lamps: Studies in the Significance and Meaning of Gladiatorial Images* (Acta Humanistica Gnesnensia 5). Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Instytut Kultury Europejskiej, Gniezno.
- Peacock, D.P.S. and Williams, D.F. 1986. *Amphorae and the Roman Economy: An Introductory Guide*. Longman, London.
- Poinssot, L. and Lantier, R. 1923. Un sanctuaire de Tanit à Carthage. *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 87: 32–68.
- Rickman Fitch, C. and Wynick Goldman, N. 1994. *Cosa: The Lamps* (Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 39). University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Stirling, L.M. 2007. The koine of the cupula in Roman North Africa and the transition from cremation to inhumation. In: D.M. Stone and L.M. Stirling (eds), *Mortuary Landscapes of North Africa*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto: 110–37.
- Yadin, Y. 1967. Symbols of deities at Zinjirli, Carthage and Hazor. *Yediot Bahaqirat Eretz-Israel Weatqoteha* 31.1: 29–63 (in Hebrew).