

City of Caelestis: Encountering the Punic Past at the Tophet of Roman Carthage

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Preface

This paper is intended as an article adaptation of the final chapter from my dissertation, titled *Resurrecting Carthage: Mapping Memory in the Roman Colony, c. 146 BCE – 200 CE*. My project examines the Roman colony at Carthage from its foundation (c. 28 BCE) by Augustus amidst the ruins of Rome's old rival city to its flourishing under the Severan emperors (c. 200 CE). As the leading metropolis of provincial Africa, Carthage was a meeting point of imperial colonists and local African populations. Leveraging limited textual references with digital maps, I reconstruct the city's urban environment to visualize how Roman Carthaginians preserved, erased, or reframed their pre-Roman heritage.

My dissertation project is divided into two parts. Part I traces the historical narrative of the colony's development from the Punic city's destruction in 146 BCE, to its Augustan refoundation (late 1st century BCE), and urban boom under the Antonine and Severan emperors (2nd – 3rd centuries CE). Part II, meanwhile, examines the restoration of three "sites of memory" closely linked to the Punic past. Chapter 3 examines the old Punic citadel of the Byrsa Hill, Chapter 4 the city's famed *Cothon* harbor complex, and Chapter 5 the tophet sanctuary. By reconstructing these sites of memory, I reveal how residents promoted Carthage as an imperial city, but one firmly rooted in its pre-Roman past.

Paper Abstract

The sanctuary of Tinnit at Carthage was one of several open-air temples, known as "tophets," established at communities of the Punic diaspora in the central Mediterranean. The sanctuary was a core institution of Punic Carthage's cultic and civic life but decried by Greco-Roman and modern audiences alike as a site of infant sacrifice. By focusing primarily on these sacrificial rites, scholars have demarcated tophets as distinctly non-Roman spaces, relegated to the Punic past and with no place under imperial rule. Rather than disappear, these sanctuaries proliferated across Roman North Africa, becoming key sites for maintaining and reinventing Punic traditions in the face of a changing province.

At the center of this phenomenon was the old tophet sanctuary at Carthage which, after 300 years of abandonment, was rebuilt as a monumental temple complex. The restored sanctuary at Carthage looked on the surface like other contemporary Roman temples, but was dedicated to the joint worship of Saturn, Venus, and most of all Caelestis. As a Romano-African adaptation of Punic Tinnit, Caelestis became the principal deity of Roman Carthage and standard bearer of the booming metropolis. This chapter reconstructs the tophet at Carthage as a site of memory which served to connect the city's residents to their perceived Punic antiquity. I argue that by reviving the cultic rites of Caelestis, Roman Carthaginians asserted a cultural identity situated between the reality of their Roman colonial present and Punic diasporic past.

Introduction

On Christmas Eve 1921, Francois Icard and Paul Gielly were hunting down a graverobber in the ruins of Carthage. Gielly, a minor French colonial official and an avid collector of antiquities, was accustomed to acquiring relics from a local Tunisian supplier. One day, this supplier brought him a large stone stele that contained the striking image of a robed man carrying an infant in one arm while raising his other in a vowing motion (Fig. 1a).¹ This image struck Gielly as all too familiar and led him to go to Icard, a police inspector in Tunis. Icard and Gielly hunted down the supplier and caught him extracting dozens of stelae from a property near the old harbors of Carthage. They promptly bought the property and began digging themselves, convinced that they had discovered the infamous tophet, home to storied rites of child sacrifice (Fig. 1b).²

The discovery of the tophet sent shockwaves through the world of classical scholarship and captivated the attention of a horrified public. The term “tophet” derived not from Graeco-Roman sources but from the biblical Hebrew name (תּוֹפֶת, *Tōpēt*) for a “high place” in the valley of Ben-Hinnom where children were made to “pass through fire” (Jeremiah 7:31-2; II Kings 23.10).³ Scholars had already drawn connections between this biblical tradition and Graeco-Roman legends of Carthaginian child sacrifice, leading archaeologists to identify their discovery with these ghastly stories.⁴ One such archaeologist was the eccentric Count Byron Khun de Prorok, who wrote of his excavations at the site, “it is a dreadful period of human degeneracy that we are now unearthing in the famous Temple of Tanit.”⁵ This condemning tone contributed

¹ This is the infamous “Stele of the Priest and Child,” discussed pg. 9; For the image of the stele, see Adriano Orsingher, “Understanding *Tophets*: A Short Introduction,” *The Ancient Near East Today* 6.2 (ASOR, 2018).

² This paper uses the conventional term “tophet” to refer to open-air sanctuaries of Tinnit and Ba’al Hammon. For Icard and Gielly’s excavations, see Serge Lancel, *Carthage: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 228-34; Lawrence Stager, *Rites of Spring in the Carthaginian Tophet* (Leiden: The BABESCH Foundation, 2014), 2-3.

³ There is no archaeological evidence from sites in the Levant linking the biblical tophet to the rites of the Carthaginian sanctuary. For a summary of scholarship on the term tophet, see Lancel 1995, 227.

⁴ See Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* XX.14.5-7 and Plutarch, *On Superstitions* 13.C-D.

⁵ F.B. Khun de Prorok, “The Excavations of the Sanctuary of Tanit at Carthage,” *Annual Report: Smithsonian Institution* (1925), 571. For more on Khun de Prorok’s involvement at Carthage, see Stager 2014, 2-3.

to existing orientalist assumptions about the tophet in popular culture. Legends of the Carthaginian tophet were first popularized by Gustave Flaubert's 1862 novel, *Salammbô*, which contains an infamous scene of children being sacrificed *en masse* into the mouth of a fire-breathing statue of Moloch.⁶ This horrifying image was reproduced throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most famously in several opera productions of *Salammbô*, the 1914 Italian silent film *Cabiria*, and the 1928 German sci-fi film *Metropolis* (fig. 2).⁷ The discovery of the tophet at Carthage seemed to confirm these popularized images of violent rites and fueled a modern aversion to the seemingly barbaric Carthaginians.

The frenzied colonial context of the site's discovery reinforced an orientalist view of Punic culture as incompatible with Greco-Roman civilization. When Augustus established a colony at Carthage around 28 BCE, scholars assumed that the Romans washed away the Punic tophet and any connection to its barbaric rites.⁸ Picard concluded that the former sanctuary was covered by little more than harborside warehouses, replacing the sacred with the utilitarian.⁹ Such assumptions drew strong pushback by revisionist scholars, who questioned the presence of child sacrifice at the tophet altogether. These scholars regard ancient accounts of the rites as nothing more than anti-Punic polemic and suggest the tophet was simply a necropolis for naturally deceased children, despite evidence to the contrary.¹⁰ By framing the tophet as either a

⁶ Gustave Flaubert, *Salammbô* (1862), Ch. 13; Moloch was long understood as a biblical god of death, though the origin of the term Moloch, and its connection to Punic tophets, is heavily debated. See note 32 below.

⁷ *Cabiria*, directed by Giovanni Pastrone (Itala Film, 1914); *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang (UFA 1927).

⁸ Before the discovery of the tophet, colonial archaeologists often ignored Punic ruins under the assumption that the Roman wiped the city clean. See Matthew McCarty, "French Archaeology and History in the Colonial Maghreb: Inheritance, Presence, and Absence," *Unmasking Ideology in Imperial and Colonial Archaeology*, ed. Bonnie Effros and Guolong Lai (UCLA: Institute of Archaeology Press, 2018), 367 – 75.

⁹ G. Charles Picard, *Les religions de l'Afrique antique* (Paris, 1954), 106-7; *Ibid.* "Heures et malheures d'un grand port," *La Carthage de Saint Augustin* (Paris: 1965). See also note 87 below.

¹⁰ The debate over child sacrifice is discussed in detail on pp. 8-11. For the origins of this counterargument, see S. Moscati, *Il sacrificio punico dei fanciulli: Realtà o invenzione?* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1987).

true marker of cultural difference or a xenophobic fabrication used to justify Roman conquest, both positions fail to reconcile the Punic site with its Roman re-use.

This limited focus on the site's sacrificial rites ignores the continuing place of tophet cults in the cultural identities of colonial Carthage and other North African communities under Roman rule. After the destruction of Punic Carthage, a second generation of tophet-like sanctuaries proliferated across provincial North African towns claiming a Punic heritage. During the 2nd century CE, many of these provincial tophet sanctuaries were rebuilt as Roman-style temples to Saturn, who was closely linked to Punic Ba'al Hammon. In this same transitional period, a massive sacred complex was built over the former tophet at the Roman colony of Carthage and dedicated to the worship of Venus, Saturn, and most of all Caelestis. Inextricably linked to the Punic goddess Tinnit, Caelestis became the most popular deity of Roman Carthage and, in many ways, *the* civic symbol of the African city. Rather than fading into obscurity after destruction, the site of the tophet retained its sacred function and transformed into a key feature in the religious landscape of the Roman metropolis.

This paper examines the tophet as a memorial touchstone between Carthage's cultic past and religious life in the Roman city. I argue that residents of Roman Carthage redeveloped the sanctuary site and elevated its chief deity to reclaim the cultural capital that the tophet once held for the Punic city. In other word, the Roman sanctuary and Caelestis became central parts of Roman Carthage *because of* the importance of tophet rites in the Punic past. Despite the polemics of Greco-Roman writers, the sacrificial rites performed in honor of Ba'al Hammon and Tinnit did not prevent their cults from flourishing in the Roman period. Carthaginians reclaimed the tophet as a bridge between their city's storied Punic past and prosperous Roman present.

The Punic Context of the Tophet

The tophet of Carthage belonged to a network of distinct open-air sanctuaries at Punic cities in the central Mediterranean and North Africa (fig. 3). These cities were founded in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE by diasporic Phoenician communities, who migrated from the coast of the Levant and formed their own western “Punic” cultural network.¹¹ Tophet sanctuaries accompanied the earliest colonies in the central Mediterranean, including Carthage in North Africa, Motya on Sicily, and Sulcis on Sardinia.¹² These sanctuaries were distinguished from other contemporary religious structures by their open-air layouts, location on the peripheries of urban settlements, and assemblage of altars, votive stelae, and cremation urns containing a mix of burnt animal and infant human bones.¹³ These sanctuaries also had a limited geographic range, with no analogous structures in the Phoenician cities of the Levant nor Punic colonies of Iberia.¹⁴ Quinn labels the central Mediterranean Punic colonies the “circle of the tophet” and suggests that their founding colonists may have been the practitioners of a socially liminal religious tradition, which they newly institutionalized in their colonial contexts. Rather than a shared tradition across the Phoenician diaspora writ large, tophets were a unique religious practice shared by a regionally specific network of peer-polity communities.¹⁵

The sanctuary at Carthage represents one of the longest lasting tophets, with continuous use throughout all six centuries of the Punic city. As at other colonies, the sanctuary lay on Carthage’s urban periphery, over 1 km from the original urban center. The tophet was

¹¹ The term “Phoenician” is the Greek name (Φοίνικες) for the inhabitants of the seafaring peoples from the Levantine cities of Tyre, Sidon, Arwad, Byblos, etc. The term “Punic,” meanwhile, derives from the Latin moniker (*Punices*) referring to the peoples of the Phoenician colonies founded in the western Mediterranean.

¹² Josephine Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 94-95.

¹³ Paolo Xella, “‘Tofet’: An Overall Interpretation,” *Studi epigrafici e linguistici* 29/30 (2013), 260-1.

¹⁴ Matthew McCarty, “The Tophet and Infant Sacrifice,” *Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*, ed. Brian R. Doak and Carolina López-Ruiz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 319-320.

¹⁵ Quinn 2018, 99-112; *Ibid.*, “The Cultures of the Tophet: Identification and Identity in the Phoenician Diaspora,” *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Erich Gruen (Malibu, CA: Getty Museum, 2011), 388-413.

increasingly incorporated into the growing city and, by the 3rd century BCE, lay within the city walls adjacent to the harbors (fig. 4).¹⁶ Though the layout of the sanctuary is poorly understood, a plethora of funerary evidence reveals over six centuries of continuous deposition.¹⁷ From the mid-8th to 5th centuries BCE, the sanctuary featured urns capped with stones or small L-shaped monuments, known as “throne-cippi.” From the 4th to 2nd centuries BCE, these cippi were replaced by limestone stele bearing inscriptions and a range of iconography.¹⁸ The increasing presence of these *stelae* reflected the growing scale of sacrifice at the site, as evidenced by an estimated 20,000 urns deposited between 400 – 200 BCE alone.¹⁹ By its later phases, the tophet at Carthage contained thousands of funerary monuments, amounting to a veritable forest of stelae that formed a unique religious space for neighboring Punic and Greco-Roman visitors alike.

The sanctuary’s sheer scale attests its sacred import for Carthaginians but makes its associated rites of infant sacrifice even more striking. Many scholars suggest that the tophet was nothing more than a child necropolis, a place to bury already deceased infants during a time when child mortality rates were high.²⁰ This necropolis hypothesis, however, is contradicted by overwhelming iconographic, osteological, and epigraphic evidence for infant sacrifice at tophet sites. First, there is the infamous “priest stele,” which depicts a priest carrying an infant in one hand while making a sign with the other, potentially showing the act of vowing the infant for sacrifice (Fig. 1b).²¹ Second, analysis of cremation urns revealed the presence of burnt animal

¹⁶ For the city’s urban development in relation to the tophet, see Ivan Fumado Ortega, *Cartago Fenicio-Púnica Arqueología de la forma* (Seville: University of Seville Press, 2013), 296-304, 360-64.

¹⁷ The site’s limited understanding stems from significant robbing, scattered excavations, unpublished findings, and modern development on the site. For a reconstruction of the evidence, see H el ene B enichou-Safar, *Le Tophet de Salammb o   Carthage: Essai de reconstitution*, Collection de l’ cole fran aise de Rome 342 (Roma, 2004).

¹⁸ Excavations at the tophet suggest four distinct phases of the site’s development. See Lancel 1995, 228 - 248.

¹⁹ Lawrence Stager, “The Punic Project,” *The Oriental Institute 1977-1978 Annual Report* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 34.

²⁰ For more on the necropolis hypothesis, see Moscati 1987; H el ene B enichou-Safar, “Sur l’incin ration des enfants aux tophets de Carthage et de Sousse,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 205 (1988), 57–68.

²¹ P. Xella et al. “Phoenician Bones of Contention,” *Antiquity* 87 (2013), 1204-5.

bones alongside those of infants.²² These cremated animals, usually lambs, are sometimes found in the same urns as infants and other times in their own urns, functioning both as supplemental and substitute offerings.²³ Third, the site's hundreds of funerary inscriptions follow a clear votive formula. Many early inscriptions dedicate the offering of a "*mlk* of a person," a noun denoting the object of a sacrifice and etymologically related to the term "Moloch."²⁴ The Punic term *mlk* is used interchangeably with animal sacrifice, as some inscriptions attest a "*mlk* of a person" and others a "*mlk* of a lamb."²⁵ This style of votive inscription is not found in any standard funerary context, where the dead are the recipient, not the subject, of divine offerings.²⁶ This material and epigraphic evidence suggests that infants, most of whom alive, were buried in the tophet as votive offerings. This does not make the tophet, as Xella reminds us, a "theatre of numberless massacres," but a space where parents offered their children as the highest level of individual sacrifice in times of crisis or great need.²⁷ Modern denial only clouds the reality that these rites were a normalized, and celebrated, component of Carthage's religious life.

For Carthaginians, the tophet maintained their city's relationship with two principal deities: Ba'al Hammon and his consort Tinnit. Understood as a lord of the universe, giver of life,

²² The osteological analysis of infant bones has produced conflicting interpretations based on different dating methods. Schwartz et al. propose many infants were stillborn and newborn, suggesting they died natural deaths. Smith et al., meanwhile, date the infants to a narrow cohort of 1-2 months, suggesting the children were chosen for sacrifice at a specific age. Both interpretations depend on methodological differences and neither prove that the children were alive at time of cremation, simply that they tended to die in a certain age range. See J. Schwartz et al., "Two Tales of One City: Data, Inference and Carthaginian Infant Sacrifice," *Antiquity* 91 (2017), 442–454; P. Smith et al. "Age estimations attest to infant sacrifice at the Carthage tophet," *Antiquity* 87 (2017), 1191–99.

²³ Xella, Quinn, Melchiorri, and van Dommelen 2013, 1200 - 203; McCarty 2019, 318.

²⁴ For an example of a 6th century *cippi* inscription, see *CIS* I.5684; Maria Guzzo and Jose Lopez, "The Epigraphy of the Tophet," *Studi epigrafici e linguistici* 29/30 (2013), fig. 5.a; In 1935, Eissfeldt proposed that the term *mlk* was etymologically connected to the biblical Hebrew "Molok," traditionally understood as the divine recipient of human sacrifice. He also suggested that *mlk* was a verb denoting the act of offering sacrifice, not a god. Guzzo and Lopez support Eissfeldt's underlying hypothesis but argue that *mlk* should be understood as a noun denoting the subject of a sacrificial offering. See Otto Eissfeldt, *Molk als Opferbegriff im Punischen und Hebräischen und das Ende des Gottes Moloch* (Halle, 1935).

²⁵ Guzzo and Lopez 2013, 169 – 171.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 178.

²⁷ Xella 2013, 271 – 273.

and protector of the community, Ba'al Hammon served as the divine recipient of sacrificial rites across all tophet sites and became widely popular across North Africa.²⁸ The goddess Tinnit, meanwhile, is paired on stelae with Ba'al Hammon starting in the 5th century.²⁹ Tinnit is often described as the "face of Ba'al," making her both Ba'al Hammon's consort and a divine mediator between the god and humankind.³⁰ While Ba'al Hammon was worshipped at all tophet sites, Tinnit's name is found almost exclusively at Carthage and her associated iconography appears within and outside the funerary context.³¹ The so-called "Sign of Tinnit," defined by a triangle topped with a circle and crossbar, is found on over 2/3 of the stelae at the Carthage tophet but also in such wide-ranging contexts as amulets, mosaic floors, and even graffiti on pottery (Fig. 5).³² The sign was matched by a series of Carthaginian coins featuring the head of a goddess, thought to be Tinnit.³³ These coins appear on gold and electrum from the 4th - 3rd centuries BCE and mirror similar types from Syracuse, placing the local cult of Tinnit within a wider Hellenistic iconographic discourse (Fig. 6).³⁴ The coins and sign associated with Tinnit elevated the goddess to a civic symbol of Carthage that communicated to both local and regional audiences.

From its founding, the fortunes of Carthage corresponded with the influence of its tophet.

As Carthage increased its imperial reach in the 3rd century BCE, the sanctuary's characteristic

²⁸ Lancel 1995, 194-99; Paolo Xella, "Religion," *Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*, ed. Brian R. Doak and Carolina López-Ruiz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 282-3; Matthew McCarty, "Gods, Masks, and *Monstra*: Situational Syncretism in North Africa," *Beyond Boundaries: Connecting Visual Cultures in the Provinces of Ancient Rome*, ed. M. Alcock and J.F.D. Frakes (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2016), 269-70.

²⁹ Older scholarship refers to the goddess as "Tanit," from the Phoenician *TNT*. See Lancel 1995, 199.

³⁰ Xella 2019, 282-3.

³¹ Guzzo and Lopez 2013, 170. Tinnit was once thought to be the western Phoenician variant of the goddess Astarte, as suggested by a stele found at Sarepta, near Sidon, which refers to "Tinnit of Astarte." However, Lancel suggests that Tinnit is listed as a consort of Astarte, much the same as her pairing with Ba'al Hammon, and forms a distinct deity who was transferred to and refashioned in Carthage. See Lancel 1995, 199-201.

³² McCarty 2017, 406-7; The sign of Tinnit may originate in the Levant, where variations of the sign are found, but it is unclear when the sign becomes associated with the goddess. See Lancel 1995, 201-4; Eran Arie, "The Earliest Known 'Sign of Tanit' Revealed in 11th Century BCE Building at Megiddo," *Tel Aviv* 44.1 (2017), 61-71.

³³ John Betlyon, "Coins," *Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*, ed. Brian R. Doak and Carolina López-Ruiz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 397.

³⁴ G.K. Jenkins and R.B. Lewis, *Carthaginian Gold and Electrum Coins* (London: 1963), 225.

stele types and iconography were imitated in African communities under the city's influence. At Hadrumetum's tophet, inscriptions to Tinnit are common from c. 250 – 150 and, at Cirta, Signs of Tinnit appear on over half of the stele from this period.³⁵ These communities did not show dedication to Tinnit out of “mindless imitation,” but as an active choice to indicate political and cultural allegiance with Carthage.³⁶ The Carthaginian tophet's associated rites, deities, and symbols formed a distinct cultic package that symbolized the city's Mediterranean power.

Tophet in Transition: Revival and Reinvention in Roman North Africa

Worship at Carthage's tophet came to a sudden halt in 146 BCE when the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus captured, destroyed, and abandoned the city. In the words of Shaw, this break in ritual was “by default,” caused by the removal of the population responsible for maintaining the space.³⁷ When the Roman colony at Carthage was founded in the late 1st century BCE, the site of the tophet was initially left undeveloped, relegated to the peripheral “urban backside.”³⁸ The sanctuary's abandonment contrasted with its growing infamy in imperial discourse. Greco-Roman audiences were already familiar with the practice of human sacrifice by Carthage and other Punic communities, with roughly 30 surviving accounts from the 5th century BCE on attesting these rites.³⁹ After the Roman conquest of North Africa, these tales became more elaborate and frightening. When describing Agathocles of Syracuse's 310 BCE siege of Carthage, Diodorus Siculus (1st century BCE) recounts the rituals that supposedly took place:

³⁵ Quinn 2018, 107-112.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Brent Shaw, "Lambs of God: An End of Human Sacrifice," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 29 (2016), 259-91.

³⁸ Henry Hurst, *Excavations at Carthage: The British Mission 2.1* (British Academy: University of Sheffield Department of Archaeology, 1994), 111.

³⁹ Quinn 2018, 92; Paolo Xella, “Sacrifici di bambini nel mondo fenicio e punico nelle testimonianze in lingua greca e latina – I,” *Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul vicino oriente antico* 26 (2009), 59-100.

διορθώσασθαι δὲ τὰς ἀγνοίας σπεύδοντες διακοσίους μὲν τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων παίδων προκρίναντες ἔθυσαν δημοσίᾳ ... ἦν δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀνδριάς Κρόνου χαλκοῦς, ἐκτετακῶς τὰς χεῖρας ὑπτία ἐγκεκλιμένας ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ὥστε τὸν ἐπιτεθέντα τῶν παίδων ἀποκυλίεσθαι καὶ πίπτειν εἰς τι χάσμα πλήρες πυρός...

In their zeal to make amends for their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly... There was in their city a bronze image of Kronos, extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a gaping pit filled with fire...⁴⁰

Diodorus describes Carthaginians sacrificing their children *en masse* to appease Kronos, understood as Ba'al Hammon. The exaggerations of this tale, including the statue feeding children into a pit of fire, paint a grim picture of Carthage that frighteningly highlights Punic difference.⁴¹ Later writers perpetuated such polemical accounts, with Plutarch describing Carthaginian mothers watching their children's throats be cut without crying.⁴² By the early Principate, child sacrifice at Carthage was remembered as an exotic foreign ritual divorced from the "civilized" sensibilities of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.

These accounts falsely imply that tophet sanctuaries, their rites, and associated deities had no place under Roman rule. In reality, a new wave of tophet-like sanctuaries proliferated across Roman North Africa during the 1st centuries BCE and CE. McCarty enumerates over 100 sites that date after the fall of Carthage and fit the tophet tradition, as evidenced by the presence of urn deposits and stelae dedicated to Ba'al Hammon or Saturn.⁴³ These new sanctuaries stretched from western Numidia to the Libyan coast, but many concentrated in the towns of Carthage's

⁴⁰Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* XX.14.5-7; Text and translation from Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Vol. X, Trans. Russel Geer, Loeb Classical Library 390 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954).

⁴¹ For further discussion of the Diodorus passage, see Xella 2009, 70-1.

⁴² Plutarch, *Moralia*, *On Superstitions* 13.C-D). Greek text: Παρεισθίκει δ' ἡ μήτηρ ἄτεγκτος καὶ ἀστένακτος. Translation: "meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan." Text and translation from Plutarch, *Moralia*, Vol. II, Trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library 222 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

⁴³ Matthew McCarty, "Africa Punica? Child Sacrifice and Other Invented Traditions in Early Roman Africa." *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3.3 (2017), 400. For a list of the sites, see Marcel Le Glay, *Saturne africain, monuments I* (Paris: De Boccard, 1962).

surrounding territory, including Thignica and Thugga (Fig. 7).⁴⁴ It is tempting to see these sanctuaries as survivals of pre-existing Punic cultural influence, but the evidence suggests a distinct revival of tophet practice. At the sanctuary of Henchir el-Hami, for example, the deposition of urns began in the late Punic period, but most *stelae* were erected from the late 1st century BCE to 2nd century CE.⁴⁵ While this sanctuary had pre-Roman roots, it experienced a higher volume of ritual activity after the conquest.

The vast majority of Roman-period tophets were built generations after the fall of Carthage and exhibit significant variations from Punic practice. First, most of their *stelae* inscriptions are written in Latin or Neo-Punic script, the linguistic successor to the language of Carthage and a common language across African communities from the late 1st century BCE on.⁴⁶ Second, these sanctuaries exhibit a wide range of urn deposits beyond infant and lamb bones, including offerings of deer, birds, and even vegetables.⁴⁷ Lastly, the iconography of tophet *stelae* underwent significant modifications. For example, Carthage's signature sign of Tinnit changed from an aniconic symbol to anthropomorphic figures, such as those at the sites of Tubernuc and Maghrawa (fig. 8).⁴⁸ These inscriptions, deposit types, and iconography suggest a distinct post-conquest phase of tophet tradition. This new wave of sanctuaries was created at the impetus of

⁴⁴ Shaw 2016, 275-77.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 275 - 6.

⁴⁶ McCarty 2017, 401-2; Out of 98 sites, 74 have inscribed dedications in Latin and 23 in Neo-Punic. Two sites, Cirta and Hadrumetum, have inscriptions in the old Punic script, but only 5 Latin inscriptions are dated before the Augustan period. For the Neo-Punic script evidence, see Maria Guzzo, "Les phases du phénicien: Phénicien et punique," *Proceedings of the 10th Meeting of Hamito-Semitic (Afroasiatic) Linguistics (Florence, 18-20 April 2001)*, ed. Pelio Fronzaroli and Paolo Marrassini (Florence: 2005), 95-103.

⁴⁷ According to McCarty, infants and ovicaprines (sheep or goats) continued as the primary offerings at the sites of Althiburos, Henchir el-Hami, and Lambafundi. Rsippisir and Sabratha exhibit only ovicaprines. The sites of Thugga, Thuburnica, Thinissut, Bou Kournein, Dj. Ressay, Zitha, and Volubilis all contain the remains of birds. The Portus Magnus tophet contained over 100 urns of only burnt vegetal offerings. See McCarty 2017, 404 - 407.

⁴⁸ McCarty enumerates 22 sites where the Sign of Tanit takes on anthropomorphic features. McCarty 2017, 407-9.

communities under Roman rule and had no direct connection to Carthage itself.⁴⁹ As such, McCarty argues that they represent not the survival of the same tophet cult, but the local Romano-African reinvention of a new set of rites that imitated past tradition.⁵⁰

For African communities living under Roman rule, the familiar Carthaginian practice of tophet rites served as an expression of localized identity rooted in the Pre-Roman past.⁵¹ Strikingly, many of the towns with new tophets lay within Carthage's *pertica*, the dependent territory in which the colony's citizens enjoyed privileged status over existing populations.⁵² Shaw argues that these town's subordinate status suppressed their integration into the Roman municipal system, encouraging them to maintain local religious and civic institutions.⁵³ Another tradition revitalized by these towns was the political title "*sufetes*," the name for Carthage's elected dual-magistrates. From the 1st century BCE to late 2nd century CE, the title of *sufete* is used in several Neo-Punic and Latin inscriptions from African towns to describe a wide range of both single and dual magistrates that resemble the Carthaginian office in name only.⁵⁴ McCarty argues that these new *sufetes* acted as mediators between local populations and Roman administrators, evoking the memory of a once powerful Carthaginian position to create a new

⁴⁹ Some scholars argue that Carthaginian refugees founded the sanctuaries, while others suggest they were created by Carthage's former Libyan subjects. See Bruno D'Andrea and Sara Giardino, "Il tofet dove e perche. L'identita fenicia, il Circolo di Cartagine e la fase Tardo Punica," *BdAO* 4 (2013): 1–29; Luis Ruiz Cabrero and Victoria Pena Romo, "La pervivencia de los tofet como elemento de cohesion territorial tras la caida de Cartago," *Carthage et les autochtones de son empire du temps de Zama*, ed. Ahmed Ferjaoui (Tunis: INP, 2010), 459–470.

⁵⁰ McCarty 2017, 395.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 411.

⁵² In the towns of the *pertica*, those Roman citizens enfranchised through Carthage, known as the *pagani*, enjoyed special tax exemptions and access to regional political, privileges from which the rest of the population, the *civitates*, were excluded. See S. Aounallah, "Le *pagus* en Afrique romaine," *l'Africa Romana* 18 (2010), 1615-1630.

⁵³ Shaw 2016, 275.

⁵⁴ McCarty 2017, 411 – 416.

“Punic-looking” institution of authority.⁵⁵ As such, African communities reinvented the institutions *sufetes* and *tophets* as markers of cultural distinction from their Roman rulers.

The rites of the *tophet* in Roman North Africa did come to an end in the late 2nd century CE, as attested in both the textual and material record. The Christian theologian Tertullian of Carthage (2nd – 3rd century CE) claims to remember the end of child sacrifice, recounting the following tale:⁵⁶

Infantes penes Africam Saturno immolabantur palam usque ad proconsulatum Tiberii, qui ipsos sacerdotes in eiusdem arboribus templi sui abumbratricibus scelerum votivis crucibus vivos exposuit, teste militia patris nostri, quae id ipsum munus illi proconsuli functa est. Sed et nunc in occulto perseveratur hoc sacrum facinus... Cum propriis filiis Saturnus non pepercit, extraneis utique non parcendo perseveratur, quos quidem ipsi parentes sui offerebant, et libentes respondebant et infantibus blandiebantur, ne lacrimantes immolerentur.

Throughout Africa, infants used to be openly sacrificed to the god Saturn up to the proconsulship of *Tiberius*, who had these priests crucified alive on sacred crosses: the trees of their sanctuary that had shadowed their crimes. The military service of my father, who assisted the proconsular governor in this task, was witness to the fact. Even to the present day, however, this sacred crime is being committed, although now in secret... Since Saturn did not spare his own children, he persevered in not sparing those of others. Their own parents offered [their infant children] to him, freely making their offering, caressing their infants so that they would not seem to be sacrificing them tearfully.⁵⁷

Tertullian draws on the same polemical tropes found in earlier authors, referencing Saturn (Kronos) eating his sons and parents holding back their grief. The personal reference to his father, however, gives some legitimacy to the story and dates the Roman crackdown on child

⁵⁵Ibid., 417 - 18.

⁵⁶ Shaw 2016, 268; The veracity of Tertullian’s account is repeatedly called in to question. Rives summarizes the many problems with this passage and argues that its rhetorical context makes it suspicious, suggesting that Tertullian intentionally made the practice of sacrifice seem closer to his own time to contrast pagan practice with that of Christians. See J.B. Rives, "Tertullian on Child Sacrifice," *Museum Helveticum* 51, no. 1 (1994), 54-63.

⁵⁷ Tertullian, *Apologia* 9.2-4. Latin text and translation from Shaw 2016, 266.

sacrifice to sometime between the 160s - 170s.⁵⁸ Moreover, Tertullian implies that the practice went from one openly carried out by priests to a private practice, no longer tied to a public cult.⁵⁹

Tertullian's account aligns with the abandonment of tophet sanctuaries across North Africa, but only tells half the story. In late 2nd and early 3rd centuries CE, most tophets, and their associated rites, transitioned as temples of Saturn replaced open-air sanctuaries.⁶⁰ Under the reign of Septimius Severus, Thugga's extramural hilltop tophet was levelled and replaced with a monumental temple, under which hundreds of votive stelae were recovered.⁶¹ The temple featured an enclosed courtyard flanked by a portico and three *cellae* on one end, a layout characteristic of other African temples (fig. 9).⁶² The temples at Thugga and other African towns transformed former open-air sanctuaries into enclosed spaces that aligned with the sacred architecture typical of other cities across the empire. This architectural transformation was coupled by a shift in the mode of sacrifice, even where open-air shrines persisted longest. At the town of Nicivibus (N'gaous), near the provincial border of Africa Proconsularis and Numidia, a series of stelae dating to the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries CE specifically speak of substitutes for human sacrifice.⁶³ These stelae refer to the type of sacrifice as a "*molchomor*," "*morchomor*" or *mochomor*, the Latin equivalent of Punic *mlk*, but also refer to a "lamb serving as a substitute"

⁵⁸ There is no other record a proconsul named "Tiberius," making the passage difficult to date. Shaw contends this is a copyist's error, but does not negate the legitimacy of Tertullian's father's story. See Shaw 2016, 167 – 170; T.D. Barnes, "Tertullian's Father," *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: 1971), 13-21.

⁵⁹ The end of child sacrifice attested by Tertullian seems to be complete by the mid-3rd century, when the Christian apologist Minucius Felix refers only to the practice in the past tense. See Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 30.3.

⁶⁰ J.B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), 142-3. Sites that transitioned from open-air sanctuaries to temples of Saturn include Thubursicum Numidarum, Mactaris, and Henchir el-Hami. For a survey of such sites, see Marcel Le Glay, *Saturne africain, histoire* (Paris 1966), 265-66.

⁶¹ For the stelae recovered from the favissa at Thugga, see R. Lantier and L. Poinssot, "Les stèles découvertes dans une favissa du temple de Saturne à Dougga (Tunisie)," *BCTH* (1942), 224-4.

⁶² For excavations at the Thugga temple, see Samir Aounallah et al., "L'aire sacrée de Baal Hammon – Saturne à Dougga," *Antiquités africaines* 56 (2020), 245-273.

⁶³ Shaw 2016, 178.

(*agnum pro vikario*).⁶⁴ While lambs were long sacrificed at tophet sites, the stelae at Nicivibus expresses the substitution of an animal sacrifice in the place of a human offering.

The end of human sacrifice and open-air sanctuaries at tophet sites and change to more recognized Roman cultic forms may initially appear as a dramatic break. But to Romano-Africans, these spaces served as updated sanctuaries to worship the very same deity: Saturn, or Ba'al Hammon. In many African contexts, the Roman god Saturn is hard to distinguish from Punic Ba'al Hammon. Stelae at Roman period tophets are dedicated to both deities, with the deity invoked usually falling along linguistic lines between Neo-Punic and Latin.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Saturn's most common epithet, *dominus* ("lord"), can translate to the Punic title *Ba'al*.⁶⁶ As McCarty suggests, the precise identity of the god on inscriptions and iconography changes situationally between audiences. Saturn was never fully equivalent to, nor distinct from, Ba'al Hammon.⁶⁷ Yet, African Saturn does emerge as a local deity, more closely tied to his Punic predecessor than the Roman god whose Latin name he bears.⁶⁸ While the building of temples seemed to normalize African Saturn in the imperial cultic context, the memory of his former sanctuaries and their unique rites continued to imbue the god's worship with local meaning.

From the destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE to the end of tophet rites around 200 CE, tophet sites across Roman North Africa underwent a process of gradual abandonment, renewed expansion, and finally transformation. While Greco-Roman authors remembered Carthaginian child sacrifice as the extinct barbaric practice of its former enemy, this distinct set of rites proliferated far beyond their original range and flourished in provincial North Africa. More than

⁶⁴ For the Nicivibus stelae, see J.-P. Laporte, "N'gaous (Numidie): deux inscriptions nouvelles," *H.-G. Pflaum, historien du XXe siècle*, ed. S. Demougin (Paris 2006), 89-109.

⁶⁵ On a stela from Calama urns sacrificed infants were dedicated to Baal Hammon and Saturn. McCarty 2016, 270-2.

⁶⁶ Brent Shaw, "Cult and Belief in Punic and Roman Africa," *The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World II*, ed. Michele R. Salzman and William Adler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 248-9.

⁶⁷ McCarty 2016, 278-9.

⁶⁸ Shaw 2013, 249.

mere survival, the rebirth of tophet sites was an intentional move by African communities living under Roman rule to retool a Carthaginian religious rite into a localized cultural practice. While child sacrifice and tophet sanctuaries phased out in the later Principate, the cult of Saturn found new expression in the many temples that continued his worship across North Africa. The story of tophets in Roman North Africa is neither one of cultural survival nor imperial assimilation, but rather reinvention and adaptation.

The Restored Sanctuary at Roman Carthage

By the time tophet rites ended across North Africa, the sanctuary of Tinnit at Carthage had been in disuse for over three centuries. Archaeologists long assumed the site lost its sacred function and faded into obscurity. When Picard discovered Roman foundations in the upper strata of the tophet, he suggested they were nothing more than a series of storage warehouses serving the colony's nearby harbor facilities.⁶⁹ The former tophet was declared all but dead, forgotten in a Roman city where its horrific rites had no place.

This interpretation has since been challenged. Based on a new survey and reassessment of past excavations, Hurst argues that the site was in fact home to a monumental temple complex during the height of Roman Carthage.⁷⁰ This rebuilding of the sanctuary space took place by the late 2nd century CE, the same period that saw the building of monuments across the city and the conversion of other African tophets to temples of Saturn. The restored Roman sanctuary followed soon after the renovation of the adjacent harbor complex, making it part of a larger

⁶⁹ The harbor facility interpretation was proposed by Picard after his excavations in the 1940s and is presented in two of his books (1954, 1965). This interpretation is repeated by historians such as Le Glay (1961) and Rives (1995), along with archaeologists Stager (1978) and Ellis (1988). For a summary of the harbor interpretation, see Hurst 1999, 15. For Picard's original interpretation, see Picard 1954, 106-7; Idem. 1965.

⁷⁰ Hurst's reconstruction is based on his reassessment of past excavations and a survey of the Roman remains carried out by a Cambridge team from 1995-6. For a summary of past excavations and the results of the Cambridge survey, see Henry Hurst, *The Sanctuary of Tanit at Carthage in the Roman Period: A Re-Interpretation* (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 15 – 18 and 42-3.

redevelopment of the city's southeastern quarter (Fig. 10). Hurst identifies three linked structures built as a coordinated effort: a temple to Venus, a temple to Saturn, and a terraced staircase leading to a possible temple of Caelestis (Fig. 11).⁷¹

Moving from south to north, the first of these structures was the temple of Venus. This was a large courtyard structure, with evidence of a raised portico on the north side that gently curved around the open space.⁷² The western end shows remains of a large structure, with a corridor paralleling the courtyard, vaulted *cella*-like rooms supporting a second floor, and a thick enclosure wall on the edge of the space.⁷³ This formed a raised complex alongside an enclosed courtyard, resembling other African temples like that of Saturn at Thugga. Several material finds associate this temple with Venus. These include a fragmentary sculpture of Venus and Cupid, a small terracotta Venus figure, and several votive marble hands holding doves.⁷⁴ These items were all found below the floor of a late 4th century renovation on the western end of the temple, which saw the addition of an apsidal hall that contained the so-called "Seasons mosaic."⁷⁵ The Seasons mosaic depicts female personifications of the four seasons, a common mosaic motif seen

⁷¹ Hurst distinguishes three phases of development at the Roman sanctuary: early to mid-Roman (2nd - 3rd centuries CE), Late Roman (4th - 5th centuries CE), and Late Antique (6th century CE). This dating scheme is based on building materials and scattered contextual finds. The early/mid-Roman period is defined by the presence of yellow mortared *opus caementicium*, the same material found in other monumental buildings at Carthage dating to the Antonine and Severan periods. The Late Roman period is based on mosaics that match comparable mosaic art in the city with a *terminus post quem* of the late 4th century and the presence of the city wall foundations, constructed in 425 CE. The Late Antique phase is marked by the presence of grey charcoal-flecked *opus caementicium*. Hurst emphasizes that this neat chronology does not account for now lost Roman structures that may have preceded the monumental structures of the early/mid Roman period. See Hurst 1999, 18.

⁷² Ibid. 46.

⁷³ Ibid. 47 - 52.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 56. For the original report on these finds, see G. Charles Picard, "Séance de la Commission de l'Afrique du Nord, 18 mars 1946, 1, Fouilles de Salamambo ("sanctuaire de Tanit")," *BAC* (1946): 59-60.

⁷⁵ Hurst bases his discussion of the Seasons Room on Picard's description. However, they differ slightly on the dating of the structure, with Hurst seeing stylistic similarities to the late 4th - early 5th century and Picard preferring an early 4th century date. They also disagree on the purpose of the new construction. While Picard sees the Seasons Room as part of a secular structure that must predate the primacy of Christianity in Carthage by the late 4th century, Hurst interprets it as an addition to the existing temple of Venus and reconfirmation of her cult in the face of Christian pressures. For a full reassessment of the Seasons Room, see Hurst 1999: 61-70.

at other Roman sites. However, several items of its decorative iconography, namely doves, a lotus flower, and roses, imply a continued association with Venus (Fig. 12).⁷⁶ This collection of evidence strongly suggests that, from the 2nd – 4th centuries CE, a temple of Venus occupied the southern portion of the former sanctuary of Tinnit.

This temple was likely built with Venus' Punic equivalent, Astarte, in mind. Several sanctuaries dedicated to Astarte were associated with Venus in the Roman period. This included the African town of Sicca Veneria and the mountaintop sanctuary at Erx in Sicily, understood by Romans as the home of "Venus Ericina."⁷⁷ While Astarte was not a central deity to the Punic tophet, scattered inscriptions confirm she was worshiped in pre-Roman Carthage and one surviving stele even makes reference to "Astarte of Erx".⁷⁸ Moreover, a Roman period statue bust found in the city features an inscribed dedication to Venus Ericina, suggesting Venus was understood in Carthage as the same Astarte honored at Erx.⁷⁹ With this in mind, the temple of Venus at the former tophet emerges as a revitalization of the worship of Astarte at Carthage.

The temple of Venus was abutted to its north by a temple of Saturn. This structure is poorly attested, largely because the early excavations of Lapeyre and Picard largely ignored the Roman features in their search for Punic stelae, over 3500 of which were found in this zone. However, based on passing notes of vaulting on the western side and the packing of Punic materials into a paved surface, Hurst speculates that the temple contained a series of inner *cellae* shrines and a paved courtyard.⁸⁰ Firmer evidence for the temple of Saturn comes from a marble

⁷⁶ Hurst 1999, 66-70.

⁷⁷ For Sicca Veneria, see Rives 1995, 136-7. For Venus of Ericina, see Beatrice Lietz, *La dea di Erice e la sua diffusione nel Mediterraneo: un culto tra Fenici, Greci e Romani* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2012).

⁷⁸ Xella 2019, 283.

⁷⁹ The inscription is unprovenanced but displayed in the Bardo Museum. See Zeineb Ben Abdallah, "Catalogue des inscriptions latines paiennes du Musée du Bardo," (Tunis: Institut National d'Archéologie, 1986), 253, no. 5.

⁸⁰ Hurst 1999, 35 - 42.

bust fragment and five Roman era stelae recovered at the site.⁸¹ The bust depicts a bearded figure with curly, long hair and possibly draped with a cloak, which Leglay interprets as Saturn and dates to the 2nd century CE (Fig. 13a).⁸² Meanwhile, four of the stelae are dedicated to “*Saturno Augusto*,” one of which depicts a bull being led to sacrifice (Fig. 13b).⁸³ Taking these material finds along with the surviving structural features, Hurst argues the site was home to a courtyard style temple of Saturn, again similar to that at Thugga (fig. 9).⁸⁴

The location of this temple created a spatial link between the Roman cult of Saturn and his Punic predecessor, Ba'al Hammon. As such, this structure aligns with the contemporary practice of replacing tophet sanctuaries with temples of Saturn observed in many African towns. The difference at Carthage was that Saturn's temple emerged after a three-century gap in cultic activity at the site. Before the temple, Saturn was selectively worshipped elsewhere in the city, as evidenced by a mixed Latin and Neo-Punic stele dedicated to “Lord Ba'al” and a votive bull's head dedicated to Saturn.⁸⁵ Before Hurst's reassessment of the Roman tophet space, scholars like Rives took these scattered finds as evidence of individual worship of Saturn, but argued that Carthage contained no formal public cult to the god.⁸⁶ However, the construction of Saturn's temple in the late 2nd century reveals an intentional decision to reclaim the tophet space as a formal cultic center dedicated to the same deity worshiped there three centuries prior.

⁸¹ These finds are recorded by Le Glay, who notes they were recovered in the excavations of Lepeyre and Picard at this very site. See Le Glay 1961, 13-24.

⁸² Ibid. 13.

⁸³ Ibid. 20.

⁸⁴ For a full interpretation of the Temple of Saturn, see Hurst 1999, 42-3.

⁸⁵ Le Glay 1961, 14-15, no. 3 and 4; The votive bull's head was recovered near the Antonine Baths, but the provenance of the stele is unknown. However, like the other stelae found near the tophet, this stele bears the shape of a temple facade and depicts a sacrifice. Rives translates its inscription as, “To the Lord Ba'al, the vow which CREScens made; he heard his voice, he made prosperous,” with the with the capitalized letters (CRES) in Latin script and the rest Neo-Punic. For translation and discussion, see Rives 1995, 154.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 154.

The temples of Saturn and Venus were both overshadowed to their north by a monumental terrace complex, the largest structure of the Roman sanctuary. The terraces began at the edge of the rectangular harbor and formed a staircase, 120m in length, leading up to the top of the small 13m hill named Koudiat El Hosbia (fig. 11).⁸⁷ This created a continuous line of sight between the hilltop and Carthage's famed harbor complex, providing easy access to the sanctuary for incoming ships. Each artificial terrace was supported by a series of vaulted chambers, running from east to west and placed directly over a portion of the former tophet cemetery. The vaults were filled in with miscellaneous materials, including a plethora of Punic stelae, cippi and urns, buried and hidden from view under the Roman foundations.⁸⁸ The monumental terraces were superimposed over the former sanctuary to produce a new terraformed topography, spatially linked but visually distinct from the past Punic space.

While it is unclear what the terraced staircase led to, Hurst postulates that a temple sat atop the Koudiat el Hosbia hill. No excavation has been carried out on the hill and a large villa now occupies it, but Carton noted signs of a large structure in his 1912 survey.⁸⁹ Additionally, Carton recovered a statuette of the goddess Fortuna, who is identified by her characteristic steering oar in her right hand.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the excavation of a courtyard building at the western foot of the hill recovered several terracotta figures, including ones of nude pregnant

⁸⁷ The two lower terraces were confirmed by both published excavations and the Cambridge survey of the site. The upper terrace is inferred from structures shown on Bordy's 1897 map of Carthage ruins. See Hurst 1999, 20 – 33.

⁸⁸ Hurst notes that Kelsey's 1927 excavation cleared one of the vaults, leaving it as an open subterranean chamber filled with the Punic era remains. This vault remains a popular tourist attraction at the tophet today and is misleadingly displayed as a Punic era burial chamber. Hurst 1999, 27.

⁸⁹ Hurst 1999, 85-7. Carton identified the structure as a monastery described by Procopius (Proc. *BV* II.26). See L. Carton, "Note topographique sur l'emplacement probable du monastère de Solomon à Carthage," *BAC* (1916).

⁹⁰ Hurst 1999, 87. Fortuna is occasionally paired with the epithet *Caelestis*. For the cult of Fortuna *Caelestis* at Rome, see F. Coarelli, *Il foro boario* (Rome: 1988), 405.

females and animals such as lionesses and sphinxes.⁹¹ These figures are often symbols of goddesses like Punic Astarte or Tinnit and Roman Venus or Caelestis, suggesting cultic activity near and around the hill. Based on this material evidence and its alignment with the terraced complex, the Koudiat el Hosbia hill appears to have carried a sacred function, but its associated divinity cannot be ascertained.

There is, however, reason to suspect the hill was home to a temple of the goddess Juno Caelestis, better known simply by her epithet. The worship of Caelestis is widely attested in Carthage, including in the works of Ulpian and Augustine.⁹² The location of Caelestis' temple is unconfirmed, but the 5th century bishop of Carthage, Quodvultdeus, describes the structure:

Apud Africam Carthagini Caelestis, ut ferebant, templum nimis amplum omnium deorum suorum aedibus uallatum, cuius platae lithostroto pauimento ac pretiosis columnis et moenibus decorata prope in duobus fere milibus passuum pertendebat...

In Africa, at Carthage, there was a very big sanctuary of Caelestis, so they said, surrounded by temples of all her deities, and her *platae*, decorated with a mosaic pavement, precious columns, and buildings, extended for almost two miles...⁹³

While Quodvultdeus does not indicate in which part of Carthage the temple presided, he does give us two topographic clues. First, he tells us that the temple was “surrounded by temples of all her [Caelestis'] deities,” which may refer to the temples of Saturn and Venus that lay next to the terraced staircase. Second, he confusingly describes the two-mile long “*platae*” consisting of a mosaic floor, columns, and buildings. While this may be an exaggeration and the translation of *platae* is debated, Hurst interprets this as the road connecting the sanctuary to the sea, which ran

⁹¹ Hurst 1999, 87-90. This excavation was carried out at the Avenue Bourguiba site led by the ‘Save Carthage’ British Team. For the full report on this structure, see H.R. Hurst and S.P. Roskam, *Excavations at Carthage: The British Mission 1.1* (British Academy: University of Sheffield Department of Archaeology, 1984).

⁹² Ulpian, *Fr.* 22.6; Augustine of Hippo, *Civ. Dei* 2.4.

⁹³ Quodvultdeus, *Liber de promissionibus et praedictionibus Dei* 3.38.44. Translation from Hurst 1999. Text from R. Braun, *Quadvultdeus. Livres des promesses et de prédictions du Dieu II* (Sources Chrétiennes 102: 1964).

up the eastern waterfront of the city and featured a columned portico.⁹⁴ This would explain Augustine's reference to a mosaic in the *maritima platae Carthaginiis* ("Maritime *platae* of Carthage"), which must have served as a pathway linking the temple of Caelestis to the sea.⁹⁵ This description and the material evidence places Caelestis' temple at Carthage as the central feature among the assemblage of cultic structures occupying the former sanctuary of Tinnit.

Taking together the temples of Venus, Saturn, and Caelestis, the Roman period complex emerges as a key site of religious life in Roman Carthage. While the complex's imposition over the former tophet provided a sense of sacred continuity, the Roman site was a fundamentally different space. The once open-air funerary sanctuary was reshaped in terms of its sacred architecture, terraformed landscape, and especially religious rites. On the surface, the complex's temples and the animal sacrifices conducted there were typical of ritual architecture and practice elsewhere in the empire. However, the tophet's memory loomed heavy over the Roman complex, producing a site for local tradition to find new expression in the imperial center. African Saturn intermingled with his Italic counterpart beside the docks of Carthage, the gateway to *Africa Proconsularis*. Visitors on business from African towns offered sacrifice to the same deities whom their parents had given dedications in tophets just a generation before. The Roman sanctuary in many ways defied temporal and cultural boundaries, simultaneously participating in Roman ritual discourse while perpetuating the Punic past.

The Primacy of Caelestis in Carthage

The memorial power of the Punic tophet was not confined to the grounds of Carthage's sanctuary space. The sanctuary's primary deity, the goddess Caelestis, took on an oversized role

⁹⁴ Hurst 1999, 94-5.

⁹⁵ Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 16.8.

in and outside the city. Much like Ba'al Hammon and Saturn, Caelestis was inextricably linked to Tinnit. In the early Roman period, tophet sanctuaries in Carthage's hinterland exhibit the worship of both goddesses. At the sanctuary of Thinussit on Cape Bon, stela inscriptions written in Neo-Punic are dedicated to Ba'al Hammon and Tinnit, while later Latin inscriptions are dedicated to Saturn and Caelestis.⁹⁶ The title Caelestis, which translates generally to "heavenly," originally appeared across North Africa as a divine epithet, most commonly attached to Juno.⁹⁷ Dedications to Juno Caelestis are found in Latin inscriptions at the towns of Tubursico Bure, Thuburbo Maius, and even Carthage.⁹⁸ By the early Roman period, the epithet Caelestis marked an expression of Juno's cult in Africa tied to that of Punic Tinnit.

However, where Saturn was worshipped as a local deity across Roman Africa, Juno Caelestis remained a civic deity of Carthage. Tinnit and her iconography were symbols of Punic Carthage's cultural and imperial influence, an association which carried over into the Roman literary tradition. Even before 146 BCE, Romans thought of Juno as the goddess of Carthage. Plutarch attests that Gaius Gracchus named his attempted colony at Carthage *Junonia* and later authors, notably Servius and Macrobius, claim that Scipio Aemelianus appealed to Juno to move her cult from Carthage to Rome.⁹⁹ Juno's attachment to Carthage was solidified in the Roman tradition by Vergil's *Aeneid* (late 1st century BCE), where she is the principal deity worshiped by

⁹⁶ Rives 1995, 65; For the original excavation at Thinussit, see A. Merlin, *Le sanctuaire de Baal et de Tanit près de Siagu* (Tunis: 1910); For an example of these inscriptions, see Le Glay 1966, 215 f.

⁹⁷ The origins of the title *Caelestis* are a matter of debate, with arguments for both a tie to Tinnit and Astarte. By the Principate, however, Caelestis was clearly tied to Juno. For a *Caelestis*' changing use across of North Africa, see Alain Cadotte, "Tanit/Caelestis," *La romanisation des dieux: L'interpretatio Romana en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 158, (Boston: Brill, 2007), 65-111.

⁹⁸ Zeineb Ben Abdallah and Liliane Ennabli, "Caelestis et Carthage," *Antiquités africaines* 34 (1998): 179-80. For the inscriptions from Carthage, see René Cagnat, Louis Chatelain, and Alfred Merlin, *Inscriptions latines d'Afrique (tripolitaine, Tunisie, Maroc)* (Paris: Leroux, 1923), no. 1052 and 1053.

⁹⁹ Servius, *Aen.* 12.841; Macrobius, *Sat.* 3.9.7; Plutarch, *C. Gracch.* 11; The act of transferring a cult from one city to another is known as *evocatio*, a process by which Romans appealed to the gods of enemy cities to switch sides. The *evocatio* of Juno from Carthage to Rome is debated and relies on rather late evidence. See Rives 1995, 65-9.

Dido in Carthage and the divine antagonist of Aeneas. Vergil even provides a detailed description of the supposed temple to Juno in Dido's Carthage, which contained panels depicting events from the Trojan war.¹⁰⁰ Vergil confirmed Carthage as the city of Juno in the Roman imagination, making Augustus' contemporary colony at the site equally tied to the goddess. Much like the tophet space itself, Juno Caelestis was perceived differently depending on the audience. To Roman colonists and visitors, Juno of Carthage was firmly planted in the Roman mythic tradition. To those from African towns, Caelestis was a local deity who had flourished since pre-Roman times.

Caelestis' worship reached its height in popularity by the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries CE, around the same time her temple was constructed at the Roman sanctuary. On inscriptions, "Juno" began to be dropped from the goddess' title and Caelestis' title became increasingly fluid. Her name appears commonly as *Dea Caelestis*, sometimes as *Genius Civitatis* (i.e. "the genius of the city of Carthage"), and is often paired with Saturn or Aesculapius.¹⁰¹ While still tied to Roman Juno, Caelestis grew into a distinct goddess in her own right.

While her cult center was located over the former tophet, Caelestis was worshiped throughout the city. One ex-voto stele, found just east of the Byrsa hill and dating to the 210s, is dedicated to the "divine will of the unconquered goddess Caelestis" (*Invicto Numini deae Caelestis*) for the health of the Severan emperor Caracalla and his mother Julia Domna.¹⁰² Another stele, recovered on the outskirts west of the city and dating to the late 2nd century,

¹⁰⁰ Vergil *Aen.* 1.446-93; For the temple of Juno at Carthage as described by Vergil, see Clay Diskin, "The Archaeology of the Temple to Juno in Carthage (Aen. 1. 446-93)," *Classical Philology* 83.3 (1988): 195-205. For the ekphrastic imagery of the temple, see Steven Lowenstam, "The Pictures on Juno's Temple in the "Aeneid"." *The Classical World* 87.2 (1993): 37-49.

¹⁰¹ For discussion of the inscriptionary evidence for Caelestis' naming in the Principate, see Cadotte 2006, 91-105.

¹⁰² The stele's dating between 211-217 CE is based on the reference to Caracalla and Julia Doma. Full inscription: *Invicto numini deae Caelestis. / Pro salute et aeternitate imperi(i) / Domini nostri M(arci) Aureli(i) Severi / Antonini Pii, Felicis, Aug(usti) et Iuliae / [Aug(ustae), m]atri[s Aug(usti)] et castrorum / [et senatus et pat]riae totiusq(ue) / [domus divin]ae.* For the transliteration and dating, see Ben Abdallah and Ennabli 1998: 176-8.

references a sacrifice made to Caelestis by a certain “Decimus Valerius Phoenix.” The cognomen “Phoenix” is rather rare in Latin and may be a reference to the Greek or Latin ethnic term for Phoenicians (Greek φοινικικός, Latin *poenus*).¹⁰³ While the first stele evoked Caelestis in honoring the emperor, the second represents the goddess’ worship by a private individual with a local ethnic name on the outskirts of the city. By the late 2nd century, Caelestis’ influence stretched across all parts of Roman Carthage’s social and urban fabric.

More than a popular local deity, Caelestis became *the* patron deity of the city, so much so that the goddess’ name and Carthage were almost synonymous. The goddess features in the work of Carthage’s most famous resident, the poet Apuleius, who called the city home in the mid-2nd century CE.¹⁰⁴ In telling the story of Cupid and Psyche in his *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius describes Psyche praying for help from the “sister and consort of great Jupiter” (i.e. Juno), who “frequents the blessed site of lofty Carthage (*celsae Carthaginis*)” and “travels through the sky (*caelo*) on the back of a lion”.¹⁰⁵ This goddess is implicated as Roman Juno, but her tie to Carthage and the title Caelestis is hinted at by the related words *celsae* (“lofty”) and *caelo* (“sky”). Moreover, Apuleius alludes to Caelestis’ Punic origins by describing her riding on a lion, a symbol common in iconography of both Tinnit and Caelestis elsewhere in Africa.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ The inscription transliterates as: *Caeles[ti] / sacrum. / D(ecimus) Valerius Phoenix, / I(ibens) a(nimo) v(otum) s(olvit)*. For the transliteration, dating, and discussion of the cognomen Phoenix, see Zeineb Ben Abdallah, “Appendix 1: A propos d’un ex-voto à Caelestis découvert à Carthage: note préliminaire,” In Hurst 1999.

¹⁰⁴ For the impact of Apuleius’ African and Carthaginian context on his work, see Keith Bradley, “Apuleius and Carthage,” *Ancient Narrative* 4 (2005): 1-29; Ibid. “Ch. 7: Apuleius and Carthage,” *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 6.4; Latin text: “Magni Iovis germana et coniuga, sive tu Sami, quae sola partu vagituque et alimonia tua gloriatur, tenes vetusta delubra; sive celsae Carthaginis, quae te virginem vectura leonis caelo commeantem percolit, beatas sedes frequentas.” Translation: “O sister and consort of great Jupiter—whether you dwell in the ancient sanctuary of Samos, which alone glories in your birth and infant wails and nursing; or whether you frequent the blessed site of lofty Carthage, which worships you as a virgin who travels through the sky on the back of a lion.”

Text and translation from Apuleius, *Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass)*, Volume I: Books 1-6, trans. Arthur Hanson, Loeb Classical Library 44 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ The best example of lion imagery associated with the goddess comes from the earlier mentioned sanctuary at Thinnissit on Cape Bon, which interchangeably exhibits dedications to Tinnit and Caelestis. There, a statuette with

Caelestis' intimate tie to Carthage comes to the fore in the *Florida*, a collection of speeches that Apuleius delivered in the city. In praising the city, Apuleius declares:

Carthago provinciae nostrae magistra venerabilis, Carthago Africae musa **Caelestis**,
Carthago camena togatorum (*Florida* 20.10)

“Carthage is the revered teacher of our province, Carthage is the **heavenly** muse of Africa, Carthage is the muse of the toga wearers”¹⁰⁷

Two things stand out from this laudatory statement. First, Carthage is simultaneously described as the “muse” of Africa and people who wear the toga, the quintessential Roman dress, recognizing Carthage’s identity as both an African and thoroughly Roman city.¹⁰⁸ Second, Apuleius’ use of the adjective *Caelestis* is a clear reference to the city’s principal deity. The phrase could equally be translated as “Carthage is the muse of Caelestis in Africa.” Taken this way, Caelestis is not merely the patron deity of Carthage, but Carthage is the earthly muse of the great goddess who had ruled in the city for centuries.

Caelestis’ role as the civic symbol of Carthage was further sealed in the numismatic iconography of the Roman city. In the Punic period, Carthaginian coinage frequently featured a portrait head of Tinnit on its obverse, highlighting the primacy of her cult in the city (fig. 6). After the city’s destruction, the goddess appears on one of a series of coins issued in 46 BCE by Q. Caecilius Metellus Pius Scipio, a general commanding Pompeian forces in Africa.¹⁰⁹ The coin’s obverse depicts a standing female figure with a lionhead holding a triangle shaped symbol

an inscription to Caelestis on its base bears the head of a lion. For discussion of the lion statuette, see Raimondo Zucca, “Un artifex di Pheradi Maius? A proposito di una scultura fittile del santuario di Thinissut (Africa Proconsularis),” *Gerión Revista de Historia Antigua* 22.1 (2005): 355 - 66.

¹⁰⁷ Translation my own. Latin text from Apuleius, *Apologia, Florida, De Deo Socratis*, trans. Christopher Jones, Loeb Classical Library 534 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁸ The Latin term *Camena* refers to the water muses of the Roman tradition. In his translation of this text, Jones translates *Camena* as “Latin Muse” to distinguish this from the more general *Musa* preceding it.

¹⁰⁹ Metellus Scipio’s other coins also feature African imagery, including an elephant and a personified portrait of Africa wearing an elephant skin. Maritz argues that these coins reflect a distinctly Roman view of the Pompeian forces’ rule in Africa, not an appeal to the local population. See J.A. Maritz, “Dea Africa: Examining the Evidence,” *Scholia: Natal Studies in Classical Antiquity* 15.1 (2006): 104-8.

in her right hand, with the letters GTA inscribed at the top (fig. 14).¹¹⁰ The goddess is identified as Tinnit based on her lionhead, reminiscent of a roughly contemporary statuette from Thinissut, and the triangle, which resembles a Sign of Tinnit.¹¹¹ As a leader of opposition forces in Africa, Metellus Scipio appealed to the once great goddess of Carthage as a sign of authority, though a century after her patron city's destruction and a decade before its refounding.

The goddess is absent from the coinage of the early Roman colony but reemerges in the context of Caelestis' growing popularity under the Severan dynasty. Lancellotti argues that, in the early 3rd century CE, the Severan dynasty strategically showed deference to the great goddess when issuing coins aimed at Carthage.¹¹² This is seen most clearly in a series of coins minted between 201-10 CE by Septimius Severus and Caracalla that feature images of the goddess on their reverse.¹¹³ In each coin, the goddess is depicted riding on the back of a lion and leaping over a stream gushing from rocks, ringed by a legend that translates to "the indulgence of the emperor towards Carthage."¹¹⁴ In some cases she faces the viewer, wears a high headdress with long locks, and holds a drum in her right hand and a scepter against her left arm (fig. 15a).¹¹⁵ In other cases, the goddess turns her head and holds a thunderbolt and spear (fig. 15b).¹¹⁶ While the subtleties of these coins vary, each clearly identifies Caelestis by her pairing with a lion, as

¹¹⁰ M. H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage 1* (Cambridge 1974), 472, no. 460.4, 2 pl. 54; The abbreviation *GTA* is commonly assumed to stand for "*Genius Terrae Africae*" but Martiz points out that the phrase is not attested on any inscription and could just as well mean something like "*Genius Tanit Africae*." Martiz 2005, 105.

¹¹¹ For the statuette, see Zucca 2005, 355-66; While Crawford identifies the triangle as an Egyptian Ankh, Rives suggests it is probably a sign of Tanit given the African context. Crawford 1974: 472, no. 460.4; Rives 1995: 68-9.

¹¹² While Lancellotti identifies a firm tie between the Severans and Caelestis, Rives doubts they had any connection to Caelestis and instead suggests they simply acknowledged the local goddess of Carthage, as emperors tended to do for local cults. M.G. Lancellotti, *Dea Caelestis: studi e materiali per la storia di una divinità dell'Africa romana* (Pisa-Roma, 2010), 49; Rives 1995, 68-70.

¹¹³ Attilio Mastrocinque, "Juno Caelestis and Septimius Severus," *Acta Ant. Hung.* 57 (2017): 277.

¹¹⁴ The legend reads *INDULGENTIA AUGG IN CARTH* (*Indulgentia Augusti in Carthagine*).

¹¹⁵ Examples of this type include RIC IV Septimius Severus 267B; Also F. Gnechchi, *I medaglioni romani III* (Milano, 1910), 39, no. 7.

¹¹⁶ This variation is the more common type. Examples include RIC IV Septimius Severus nos. 266, 776; RIC IV Caracalla nos. 130a, 131b, 415.

Apuleius alludes to, and honors her in bestowing the emperor's "indulgence" towards Carthage. This coin represented the Severans' many signs of imperial favor towards the African metropolis, which included bestowing the Pythian games upon Carthage and building the city's massive Odeon theatre.¹¹⁷ The best symbol the emperor could draw on to represent the civic image of Carthage was that of the great goddess Caelestis. Just as Tinnit featured on the coinage of Punic Carthage over four centuries prior, her Roman successor was elevated back into the city's numismatic iconography as an appeal to the goddess' past sacred authority.

Where the emperor employed the image of Caelestis on imperial coinage, Roman Carthaginians encountered the goddess' iconography even in the mundane settings of daily life. A nearly identical image of Caelestis riding a lion is found on a series of ceramic oil lamps deposited at Carthage's Roman necropoli (fig. 16).¹¹⁸ Lamps of this style were produced locally in Africa at workshops operated by families like the Pullaeini, whose products' popularity is attested by the presence of their makers-mark on dozens of recovered lamps.¹¹⁹ The Pullaeini were originally from the town of Thugga, but achieved high office in Carthage by the reign of Hadrian, when one family member served in the city's highly exclusive priesthood of Ceres.¹²⁰ The Pullaeini were one of many families who immigrated from the towns of Carthage's hinterland to pursue careers in the regional capital, gradually permeating the Carthaginian elite.¹²¹ It is fitting that a family from Thugga, a town with a functioning tophet well into the 2nd century CE, featured Caelestis on their products. Moreover, as immigrants to Carthage, this

¹¹⁷ Discussed in Ch. 2, pp. ...; For evidence of the Pythian games at Carthage, see Louis Robert, "Une vision de Perpétue martyre à Carthage En 203," *Comptes rendus des Séances de l'année - Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 126. 2 (1982): 229-35.

¹¹⁸ Jean Deneauve, *Lampes de Carthage* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1969), nos.931 and 1042.

¹¹⁹ Deneauve 1969: 85-6, 342.

¹²⁰ Sex. Pullaienus Florus Caecilianus is attested as a patron at Uchi Maius (CIL VIII. 26267a) and Thugga (CIL VIII.26615). See Jacques Gascou, "Les Sacerdotes Cererum de Carthage," *Antiquités africaines* 23 (1987): 103-4.

¹²¹ For an epigraphic study of African families pursuing office in Carthage, see Monica Hellström, "Epigraphy and Ambition: Building Inscriptions in the Hinterland of Carthage." *Journal of Roman Studies* 110 (2020): 59-63.

African family helped replicate the image of the goddess in the Roman colony. As Rives argues, it was elite Romano-African families who simultaneously embraced Mediterranean-wide cultural traditions while expressing those traditions in a localized civic context.¹²² Thus, through both imperial coinage and everyday objects like lamps, Caelestis spread her influence in the iconography of Carthage once again.

To residents of Carthage in the early 3rd century, the thriving cult of Caelestis must have expressed an aura of great antiquity, as if goddess had ruled over the city since the days of Hannibal. But the reality of Carthage's abandonment and the relative silence of Caelestis' cult in the early colony marked a dramatic break in the goddess' worship. Elsewhere in Africa, Caelestis was honored alongside Saturn in tophet sanctuaries and their subsequent temples. During this period of regional transformation, the provincial capital of Carthage finally built its temples of Caelestis and Saturn. Here, the goddess eclipsed her male counterpart in popularity. Caelestis became *the* civic deity of Carthage because she simply carried more memorial capital to the city's Romano-African elite, who sought to express a uniquely *Carthaginian* identity.¹²³ The colony at Carthage went from the "city of Juno," whose antiquity was filtered through an imperial lens, to the "city of Caelestis," firmly rooted in its own prestigious past.

Conclusion

This picture of an elevated Roman tophet space stands in contrast with where we started. Most scholarship on the tophet gives the impression that the sanctuary's primary legacy was that of child sacrifice. Indeed, Greco-Roman authors writing in the early Principate did condemn these seemingly alien rites as a barbaric relic of the pre-Roman past. And Roman officials in

¹²² Rives 1995: 169-72.

¹²³ Ibid. 161- 69.

Africa did crack down on the practice in the late 2nd century, at the same time temples of Saturn were replacing tophet sanctuaries. However, the very need to confront the rites and the presence of these temples proves that the cults of Saturn and Caelestis remained crucial components of Romano-African religious life. The taboos, both ancient and modern, surrounding child sacrifice obscure the reality that Rome's African subjects valued the maintenance of worship in these sacred spaces. Tophet sanctuaries and their associated deities were a celebrated local tradition, a legacy to be promoted rather than scorned.

From the founding of central Mediterranean Phoenician settlements in the 8th century, tophet sanctuaries marked a distinct regional cultural network. By the Punic Wars, the largest tophet site was that of Carthage, where the sanctuary's associated rites, deities, and symbols formed a cultic package closely tied to the cultural influence of the city. Rather than declining after Carthage's fall, tophet sanctuaries proliferated across Roman North African, where provincial communities promoted the past Punic practice as a marker of local identity under imperial rule. The late 2nd century saw a transition from these open-air sanctuaries to enclosed temples, where the same deities were honored in a different ritual form. During this period of regional transformation, the provincial capital of Carthage built a monumental temple complex directly over the city's former tophet. Among the gods worshipped at the restored sanctuary, Caelestis rose to be the chief deity and civic symbol of Carthage. Through the restoration of the Roman sanctuary and ascendancy of Caelestis, Roman Carthaginians redeployed the memory of a past Punic tradition to promote a unique civic identity embedded in their city's antiquity.

The story of the tophet at Carthage is a testament to the power of cultic memory to transcend temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries. Despite an over three century abandonment, the total transformation of the space, and the imposition of new ritual traditions, the Carthage

tophet remained a powerful memorial touchstone to the city's religious past. The endurance of the sanctuary and its deities did not happen by default. The residents of Carthage actively chose to rebuild the sanctuary complex, make offerings in its temples, and celebrate Caelestis as their chief deity. They did so because they remembered the tophet as a uniquely *Carthaginian* tradition. Even with Roman-looking names, temples, and rituals, the worship of Caelestis at the former sanctuary perpetuated a Carthaginian identity among imperial subjects.

Figures and Maps

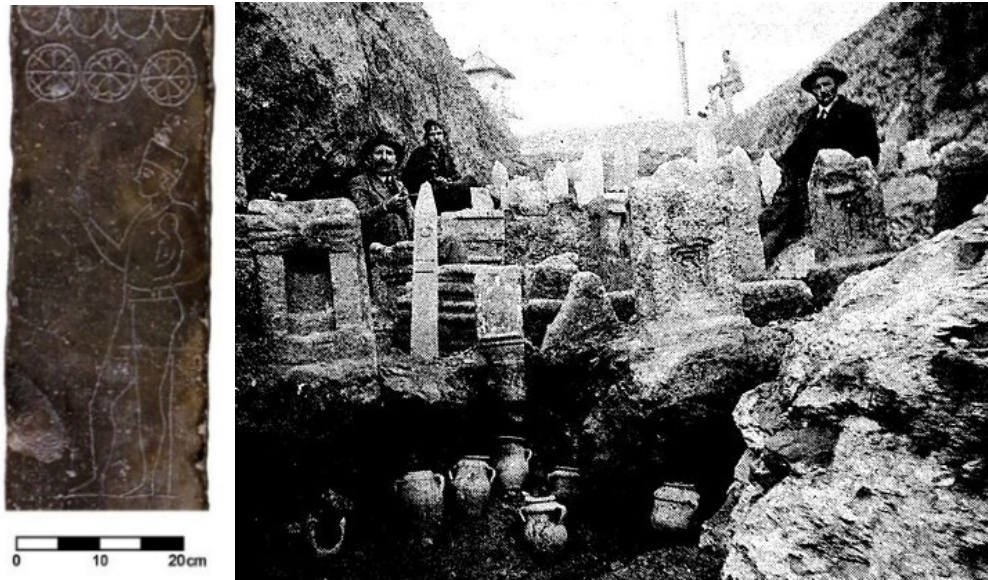


Figure 1: (a) The “Stele of the Priest and Child,” c. 4th – 3rd centuries BCE (Bardo Museum, Tunis); (b) Photograph of Icard and Gielly’s Tophet excavations in 1922 (photo from Lancel 1995: fig. 123)



Figure 2: (Left) Poster for 1914 film *Cabiria*, depicting the sacrifice of children to a statue of Moloch; (Right) Scene from the 1927 film *Metropolis*, depicting workers being consumed by the modern “Moloch” of industry

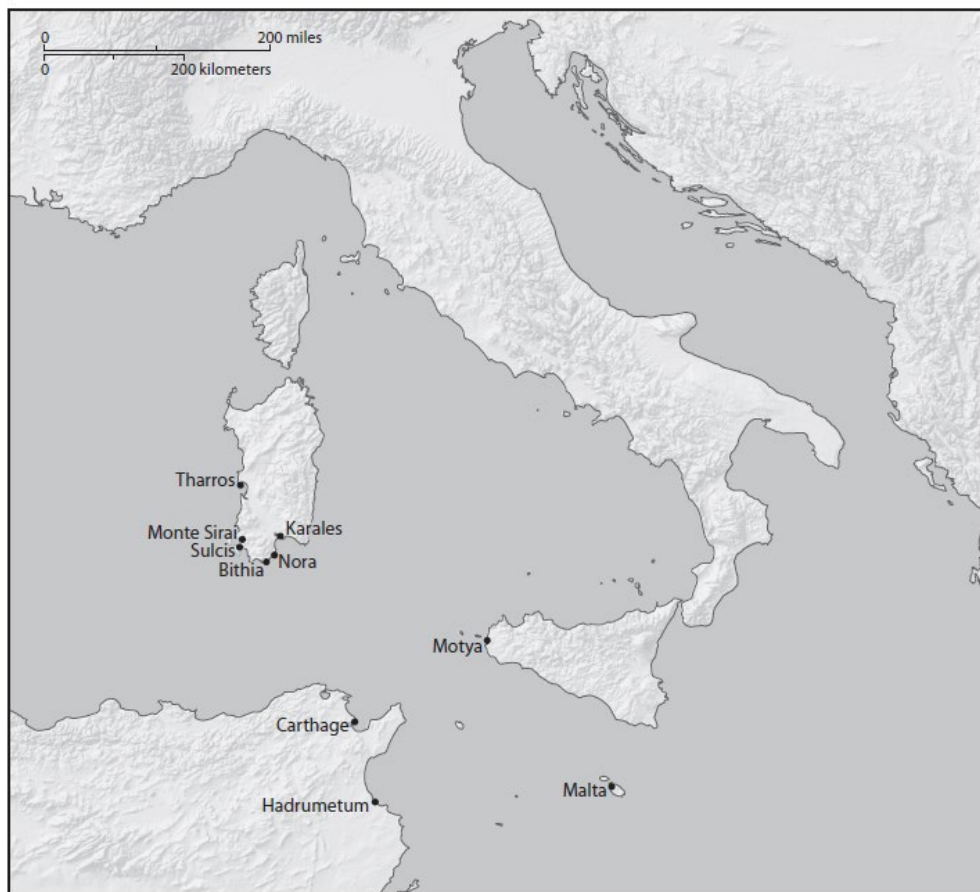


Figure 3: The “Circle of the Tophet,” sanctuaries established between 8th – 3rd centuries BCE (Quinn 2018: fig. 5.1)

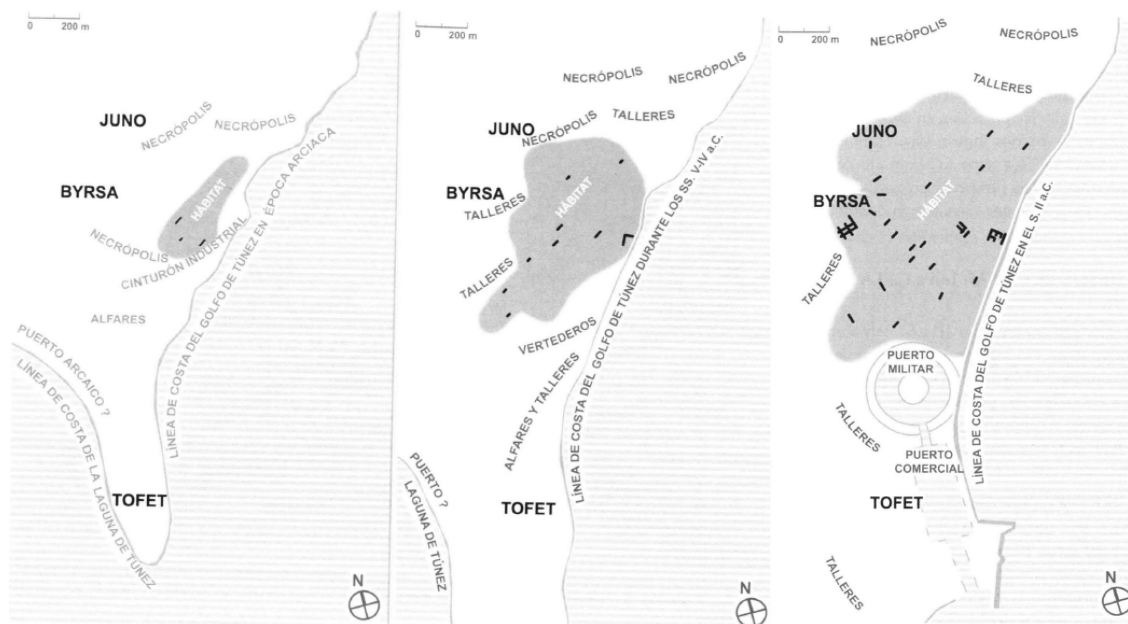


Figure 4: The development of Carthage during the 8th – 6th, 5th – 4th, and 3rd – 2nd centuries BCE (left to right). The inhabited city is indicated in grey and the tophet (“Tofet”) lay to the south, along the sea and far from the city center (Figures V.30 and 56 in Ortega 2013: 344)



Figure 5: Steles fragments from Carthage featuring signs of Tanit (Left: [British Museum](#), 125117) (Right: [Louvre Museum](#), AO 23225)



Figure 6: Electrum Stater minted at Carthage, c. 350 – 320 BCE (American Numismatic Society [1997.9.133](#))

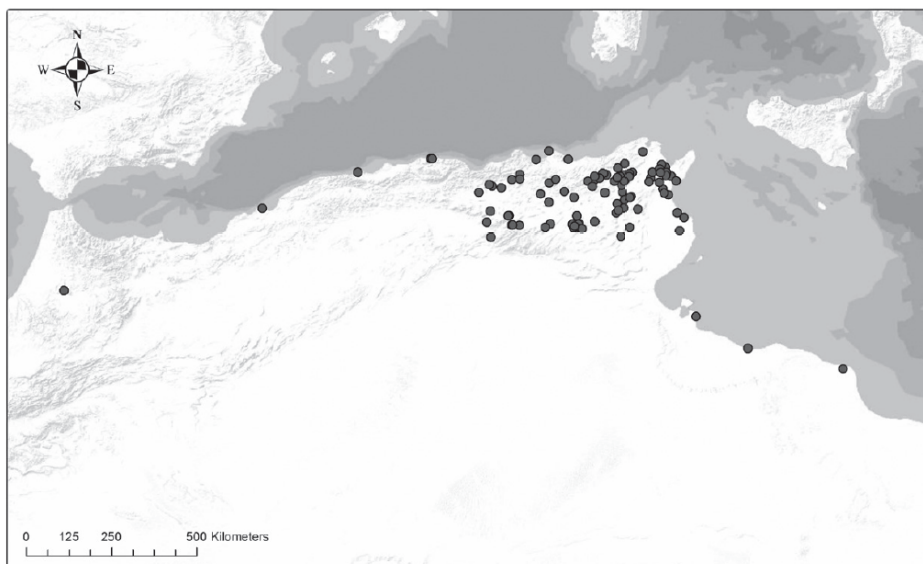


Figure 7: Tophet-like sanctuaries founded in North Africa after 146 BCE (Fig. 2 in McCarty 2017)

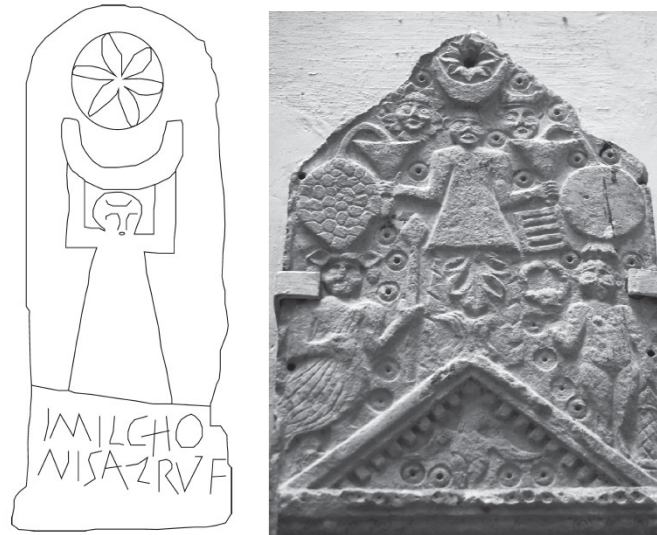


Figure 8: Stelae from Tubernuc (left) and Maghrawa (right), depicting anthropomorphized ‘Sign of Tinnit’ (Fig. 5 and 6 from McCarty 2017)



Figure 9: An aerial photograph view of Thugga's temple remains. The central courtyard is intersected by the *favissa* trench, from which hundreds of dedicatory stelae and urns were excavated (fig. 1 in Aounallah et al. 2020)

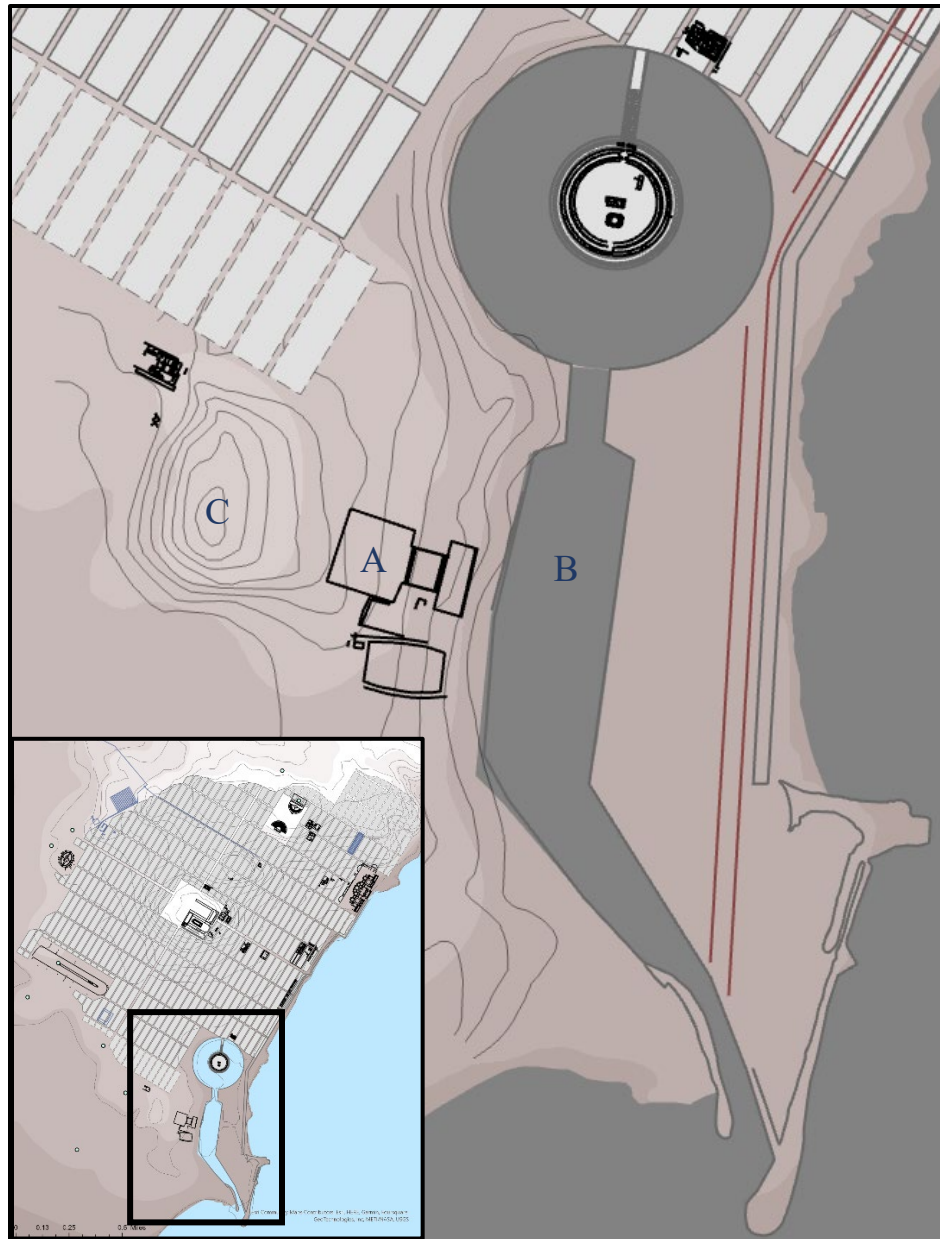


Figure 10: The harbor zone of Roman Carthage (c. 200 CE): The Tophet complex (A) is located between the rectangular harbor (B) and the Koudiat El Hosbia Hill (C) (map by author)

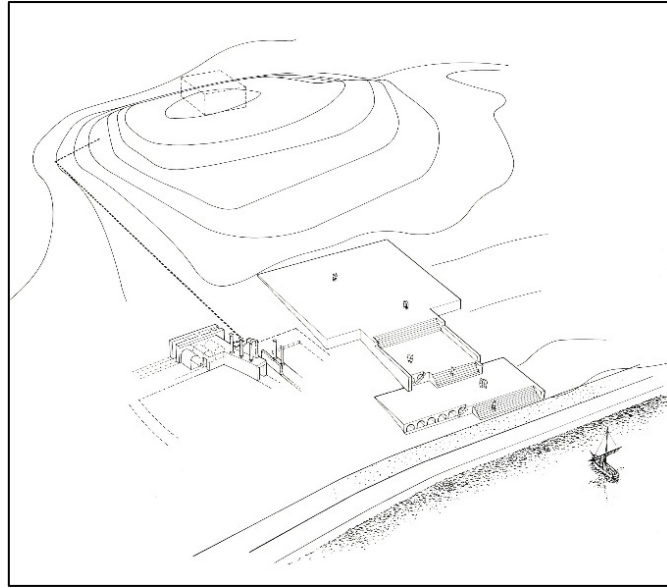


Figure 11: Reconstruction of the Roman era sanctuary showing terraced staircase complex (right), possible Temple of Saturn (center), possible Temple of Venus (left), and the theoretical location of Temple of Caelestis on top of the Koudiat El Hosbia Hill (Fig. 18 in Hurst 1999).

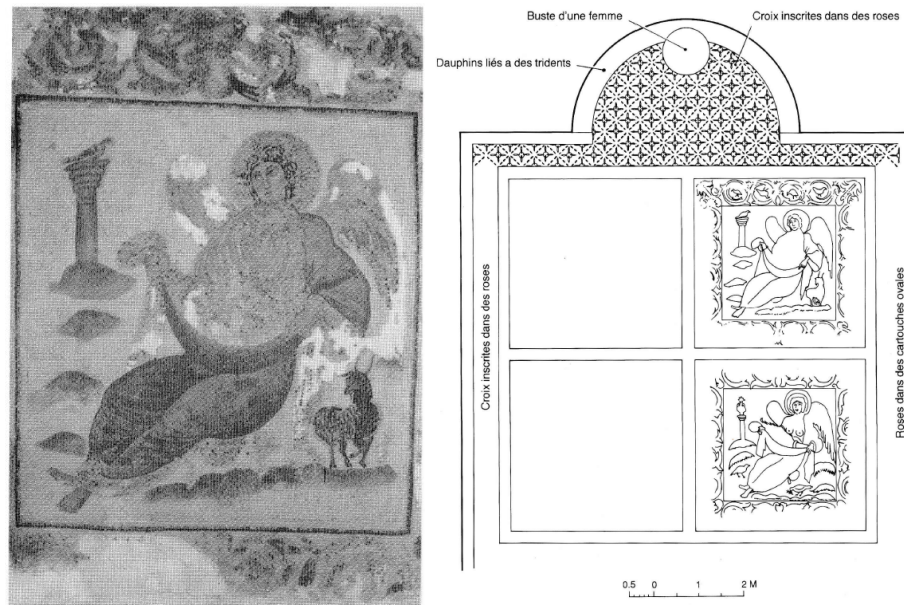


Figure 12: (left) “Autumn” panel from the Seasons Mosaic, with dove in upper left-hand corner; (right) Reconstruction of the Seasons Mosaic, following Picard (fig. 32 and 33 in Hurst 1999)



Figure 13: (A, *left*) Bust of Saturn; (B, *right*) Stele featuring sacrificial bull and a dedication to Saturn (fig. 19 and 20 in Hurst 1999)



Figure 14: Coin of Metellus Scipio depicting Tinnit ([ANS 1937.158.266](https://www.ansp.org/objects/1937.158.266))



Figure 15: (A., *left*) RIC IV Septimius Severus 267B; (B., *right*) RIC IV Septimius Severus no. 266



Figure 16: Ceramic lamps featuring image of Caelestis riding lion, both bearing makers-mark of Pullaeni family (Deneauve 1969: nos. 1042 and 1092)