

# HERAKLES/MELQART: THE GREEK FAÇADE OF A PHOENICIAN DEITY<sup>1</sup>



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**Abstract:** Whilst one of the most prestigious cults in Antiquity, the Greek and Roman worship to the god Herakles settle down on an ancient Phoenician liturgy dedicated to the god Melqart. With the support of epigraphy, textual documentation and archaeological material culture, it is possible to establish the differences and the proximities of these two deities. In this article, I will present some of the main theories on the origin of the divinized ancestral until its recognition as the Greek hero via *interpretatio graeca*, which culminated in the identification of the Far West of the Mediterranean as the famous *Herakles/Melqart Pillars*.

**Keywords:** Melqart, Herakles, origin, liturgy, cult, Archaeology, Epigraphy, Primary Sources.

**Resumo:** Enquanto um dos cultos mais prestigiados na Antiguidade, a veneração grega e romana ao deus Héracles e Hércule se estabeleceu sobre uma antiga liturgia fenícia dedicada ao deus Melqart. Com o suporte da epigrafia, da documentação textual e da cultura material arqueológica é possível estabelecer as diferenças e as proximidades dessas duas divindades. Nesse artigo apresentaremos algumas das principais teorias sobre a origem do culto desse ancestral divinizado até a sua identificação com o herói grego via *interpretatio graeca*, essa que culminou no reconhecimento do Extremo Ocidente do Mediterrâneo enquanto as *Colunas de Héracles/Melqart*.

**Palavras-chave:** Melqart, Héracles, origem, liturgia, culto, Arqueologia, Epigrafia, Fontes Primárias.

**Resumen:** Como uno de los cultos más prestigiosos de la Antigüedad, la veneración griega y romana del dios Heracles se estableció sobre una antigua liturgia fenicia dedicada al dios Melqart. Con el apoyo de la epigrafía, la documentación textual y del material arqueológico, es posible establecer las diferencias y la proximidad de estas dos deidades. En este artículo presentaremos algunas de las principales teorías sobre el origen de la adoración de este ancestro deificado hasta su identificación con el héroe griego a través de *interpretatio graeca*, que culminó en la identificación del Extremo Occidente del Mediterráneo Oriental como las columnas de *Heracles/Melqart*.

**Palabras clave:** Melqart, Heracles, origen, liturgia, adoración, Arqueología, Epigrafía, Fuentes Primarias.

Dossiê

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Solar God, farmer, navigator and colonizer. The god of dying and being reborn *par excellence*. Being one of the faces of Baal, he reigns in both celestial and terrestrial space. In his egergis (Greek: ἔγερσις) - the resurrection – this divinity sets and reborn by the grace of Astarte in the endless cycle of the stars. His deity radiates into the orbit of the firmament, making Melqart the true king of the city.

Melqart is a reasonably new deity in the Tyrian pantheon, not appearing in Ras Shamra's texts and being first commented in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE in Aramaic written on a stele found in the Northern of nowadays the city of Aleppo (KAI 201 *apud* RIBICHINI, 1999, p. 563; NEVILLE, 2007, p. 86). Sergio Ribichini (1999) states that in the inscription dedicated to Bir Hadad, king of Aram, present Syria, the deity initially receives the epithet of a warrior god.

On the other hand, it is known much more of this Tyrian god as pointed out by Elena Moreno Pulido (2009, p. 1) as a deity essentially connected to the vegetation and fertility. This author ponders that Melqart could be an assimilation of ancestral gods like Yam or Baal. According to his fruitful and passionate attributes, common in the eastern deities, the god would rise each spring and die each winter. To Moreno Pulido, in Syrian-Palestine, Melqart accumulated along with the agrarian attributes, also marine, colonizer and civilizer characteristics, which converged in its title as the god of commerce and overseas navigation (MORENO PULIDO, 2009, p. 1).

## MELQART, THE TYRIAN BAAL (MLQRT B'L SR)

Melqart (MLQRT) could be translated as the *king of the city* with the prefix (MLK) being the title of king and the suffix (QRT) being the city. It may possibly have been vocalized as / *mīqi* / or / *melq* / (King) and / *qart* / (City). For Ann Neville (2007) his name refers directly to the city of Tyre (Šūr), in close relation with the ruling dynasty, being represented as the archetype of the king of Tyre, responsible for the welfare and protection of his subjects (NEVILLE, 2007, p. 86) However, in view of his chthonic characteristics, the term *city* can also be interpreted as the *world of the dead*, according to Mesopotamian traditions (RIBICHINI, 1999b, p. 563).

Although one of the youngest deities of the Phoenician pantheon, Melqart origins are ancient, dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia BCE. The MLQ (or could have been more than just one) who ruled Syro-Palestine



would have been deified after his death and placed as an ancestor of the reigning monarchs. The Ugarit archives refer to this late king as a / *rephaim* /, maybe a substantial number of ancestors who had the privileged status among the dead, being invoked by the ruling kings to return to their hometown to provide the fertility of the earth and healing of the sick (NEVILLE, 2007, p. 86).

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, King Hiram I of Tyre establishes the great festival of *egersis* in honour of Melqart to commemorate the death, resurrection and awakening of his deity, from human origins, deified by the Tyrians, becoming a complete god, (NEVILLE, 2007, p. 86).

According to Kormikiari, (2017, p.115) Herodotus (II, 44) is an important source concerning the cult of Melqart. According to his account, the Tyrians paid tribute to the deity as if he were a hero who would have been a mortal. The author goes on to recall that Menander of Ephesus, which in turn is cited by Flavius Josephus (*Jewish Antiquity*, VIII, 146), narrated the destruction of several temples in Tyre by King Hiram, contemporary to Solomon. The new places of worship were dedicated to the honour of Herakles (i.e. Melqart?) and Astarte. King Hiram would have been the first to celebrate the *egersis* of Herakles in the month of *peryton* (i.e. February-March).

According to Corinne Bonnet (1988, p. 37) the feast took place between February 16 and March 17 and would not be the only one that took place in honour of the god. Ribichini (1999, p. 565) states that there would be gymnastic games celebrated in Tyre every five years in honour of Melqart.

In the Far West, an environment also reached by the Phoenician navigators, it is likely that the Tyrians, together with the founding act of Gadir, nowadays Cadiz - archaeologically attested as, until now, a 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE foundation - also delimited an area for building a temple dedicated to the god. Possibly located on the islet of present-day Sancti Petri, to the South of the ancient archipelago of the *Gadeira's Islands*, this temple would be associated with the other two places of worship that existed in Gadir, such as Baal, supposedly located on Kotinussa, and Astarte, also allegedly located on the island of Erytheia. It is possible to reflect on the possibility that the temple was strictly related to a ritual known as *egersis* that would happen twice a year (LIMA, 2018).

The temple probably had a view of the navigators coming to Cádiz Bay, but nevertheless, it would have little vision of the lands of the interior of the Iberian Peninsula, making it a landmark for those approaching Gádir (LIMA, 2018).



In opposition to Bonnet (1988, p. 37) María Eugenia Aubet (2001, p. 154) states that the cult would take place in the spring, shortly after the end of the rainy season, so it is possible to consider the divinity as having both solar and agriculture attributes. José Luis Escacena Carrasco (2009, p. 112) points out that the egerisis was a festival celebrated sometime between February and March. However, the author himself acknowledges that there are disagreements regarding how many times it was performed and what were its dates, which could vary throughout the year, transferring the service to June or December (ESCACENA CARRASCO, 2009, p. 112).

According to Alfredo Mederos Martín (2015, p. 194) the cult would last for three days and the entry of foreigners into the city would be prohibited as reported by geographer Pausanias in his work *Description of Greece*, written in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> CE, (10, 4.6):

Κλέων δὲ ἀνὴρ Μάγνης, οἱ τῷ Ἑρμοῦ προσοικοῦσιν, ἔφασκεν ἐς τὰ παράδοξα ἀπίστους εἶναι τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἷς ἂν μὴ παρὰ τὸν αὐτῶν γένηται βίον θεάμασιν ἐπιτυχεῖν λόγου μείζουσιν: αὐτὸς δὲ καὶ Τιτυὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἔφη πείθεσθαι γεγονέναι κατὰ τὴν φήμην: τυχεῖν γὰρ δὴ ὦν ἐν Γαδεΐροις, καὶ ἐκπλεῦσαι μὲν αὐτὸς τε καὶ τὸν ἄλλον πάντα ὄχλον ἐκ τῆς νήσου κατὰ τὸ Ἡρακλέους πρόσταγμα, ὡς δὲ αὐθις ἐπανήκειν ἐς τὰ Γάδειρα, ἄνδρα εὐρεῖν θαλάσσιον ἐκπεπτωκότα ἐς τὴν γῆν: τοῦτον πλέθρα μὲν πέντε μάλιστα ἐπέχειν, κεραυνωθέντα δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ καίεσθαι. (SPIRO's version, 1903)

Cleon of Magnesia on the Hermus used to say that those men were incredulous of wonders who in the course of their own lives had not met yet greater marvels. He declared that Tityos and other monsters had been as tradition says they were. He happened, he said, to be at Cadiz, and he, with the rest of the crowd, sailed forth from the island in accordance with the command of Heracles;<sup>1</sup> on their return to Cadiz they found cast ashore a man of the sea, who was about five roods in size, and burning away, because heaven had blasted him with a thunderbolt (Translation of JONES, LITT and ORMEROD, 1918).

As in the account, the liturgy would consist in the immolation of the god in the midst of a final ritual of his cremation, with the intention of his rebirth and immortalization by the virtue of fire (AUBET, 2001, p. 153-154). For Bonnet (1988, p. 79) there would be, on the first day, a succession of ritual events where the god was burned on a pyre. Besides this, would be an altar where animal and vegetable offerings were made. On the second day, the god



was buried in the presence of his priests, the king, and a female character, possibly a priestess, who would wear horns and a sceptre representing Astarte, Melqart's goddess. At dawn on the third day, the god would rise with two birds in his hands.

However, for Mederos Martín (2015, p. 194) on the first night of the liturgy, women held celebrations, holding vigils, lamentations and funeral banquets. On the second day, the Phoenicians were in procession toward the sea, carrying the wooden representation of the god to the coast and setting it ablaze. On the third day, the resurrection of the god occurred.

From the divergences between the modern authors as to how the celebrations were held, it seems that different liturgies could exist between Tyre, Gadir and possibly the other Phoenician foundations. However, the existence of a liturgical archetype of the celebration, such as the constitution of three days of events in one or two periods of the year, is noticeable. The change of season also seems to be one of the canons of this ceremony, with spring being the most recurrent. Possessing also chthonic aspects, the act of public immolation of the god's image to the faithful would represent the beginning of a fertile period, where the earth would be at the peak of its fertility.

In Tyre, within the celebration would happen the *hieros gamos* (Greek: *ἱερός γάμος*) time which the monarch attended the feasts and joined with a priestess of Astarte or the queen herself, interpreting (or doing it) the sexual intercourse union between Melqart and Astarte (AUBET, 2001, p. 154). Mederos Martín states that the union happened during the god's death (2015, p. 194). There would also be in this celebration an individual charged with carrying out the resurrection of divinity.

Known as MQM'LM, this priest was primarily responsible for the liturgy of Melqart's egeresis. He would be, according to Escacena Carrasco (2009, p. 111), the most knowledgeable of the Sun cycle. It would probably be an astronomer in charge of announcing to the priests the death of the god, based on the counting of the days and the reading of the stars. From the egeresis, there is/was only a marble vase from Sidon (fig. 1), dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE which narrates the practices of the celebration, woefully lost during World War II.

Escacena Carrasco points to the main character of this vase as Baal, however, this deity could designate Melqart since both possess solar qualities and are often confused by the epithet B'L (2009, p. 110). The inscriptions of the Sidon Vase, contain Melqart's binding with the fire by the epithet B'L KR. According to Elena Moreno Pulido (2011), as an ambivalent element, fire

favours both life and death. Melqart's decaying body would then be immolated by the flames for the renewal of his creative energies as the fields are burned (fire-fallow cultivation) for his most fertile return (MORENO PULIDO, 2011, p. 106).

The Sidon Vase disappeared from the Berlin Museum during World War II, making it impossible to search for a better understanding of the liturgical practices of egeris from this artefact. Fortunately, photographs were taken of the faces of the vase representing different moments of the celebration.



Fig. 1 - Sidon vase. Inverted colours for easier visualization of the decoration (ESCACENA CARRASCO, 2009, p. 108). Edited by Rodrigo de Lima, 2019.

From the previous notes (pages 3-4), I consider the temple of Melqart, closely linked with the shrine of Astarte. Thus, it's plausible to think on the coexistence of both from the beginning of the foundation of Phoenician cities as in the case of Gadir (MEDEROS MARTÍN, 2015, p. 194). Maybe in the form of natural landmarks, inasmuch as the archaeological register lacks the religious structures of these places.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the god appears as Milqartu, being as Eshmun, the mediator of an agreement between the king of Tyre, Ba'alu, and the king of



Assyria, Assar-adan. If the treaty were breached, the two deities would punish the transgressor by destroying their lands and enslaving their people. The disobedient would still be deprived of food, clothing and olive oil (SAA 2, 5 IV: 14; ANET, 534 apud RIBICHINI, 1999, p. 563). In another 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE testimony, the god is attested as Melqart Lord of Sūr (MLKRT BSR) (BORDREUIL 1990, p. 19 apud RIBICHINI, 1999, p. 563).

## HERAKLES ARCHEGETES (Ηρακλής αρχηγέτης)

According to the interpretation of Manuel Álvarez Martí-Aguilar (2014), based on Pompeu Trogo's account (44.5) the spread of the Melqart cult in Iberia would have occurred prior to the founding of Gadir. The same author states that the city of Carteia, in present-day San Roque, would be a possible candidate for the establishment of a foundation dedicated to Melqart. According to this interpretation, Carteia would have been founded by the Gadirites (i.e. the citizens of Gadir) who began their expansion along the Atlantic and Mediterranean shores and was referred by the ancient authors as Heraclea since it was believed to have been founded by Herakles (2014, p. 26).

ἐνταῦθα δὴ ὄρος ἐστὶ τῶν Ἰβήρων τῶν καλουμένων Βαστητανῶν, οὗς καὶ Βαστούλους καλοῦσιν, ἢ Κάλπη, τῇ περιοχῇ μὲν οὐ μέγα τῷ δ' ὕψει μέγα καὶ ὄρθιον ὥστε πόρρωθεν νησοειδὲς φαίνεσθαι. ἐκπλέουσιν οὖν ἐκ τῆς ἡμετέρας θαλάττης εἰς τὴν ἕξω δεξιὸν ἐστὶ τοῦτο, καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ Καρτηία πόλις ἐν τετταράκοντα σταδίοις ἀξιόλογος καὶ παλαιά, ναύσταθμὸν ποτε γενομένη τῶν Ἰβήρων. ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ Ἡρακλέους κτίσμα λέγουσιν αὐτήν, ὧν ἐστὶ καὶ Τιμοσθένης, ὃς φησι καὶ Ἡράκλειαν ὀνομάζεσθαι τὸ παλαιόν, δείκνυσθαι τε μέγαν περίβολον καὶ νεωσοίκους. (STRABO, Geography. 3.1.7, versão de MEINEKE, 1877).

Here is situated Calpe, the mountain of the Iberians who are denominated Bastetani, by others Bastuli. Its circumference is not large, but it is so high and steep as to resemble an island in the distance. Sailing from the Mediterranean into the Atlantic, it is left on the right hand. At a distance of 40 stadia from this [mountain] is the considerable and ancient city of Carteia, formerly a marine arsenal of the Iberians. Some assert that it was founded by Hercules; of this number is Timosthenes, who tells us it was anciently called Heraclæa, and that vast walls and ship-sheds are still shown. (STRABO, Geography. 3.1.7, translation by HAMILTON and FALCONER, 1903).



There is no new speculation about the name Carteia, Drietch (1936) and Millás (1941) according to Martí-Aguilar (2014, p. 27) already considered Carteia as a theophoric nomination, which may be the abbreviation of MLQRTYH (i.e. Island of Melqart?).

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, in Malta, a bilingual inscription (KAI 47) (fig. 2) reveals Melqart as being equivalent to Herakles ἀρχηγέτης. This same epigraph considers the god to be Šūr's Baal (B>L SR). Here I recall that Baal, besides being the supreme god of the Phoenician pantheon, also is translated as a honorific title of *Lord / Chief*, making Melqart the Lord of Tyre.



Fig. 2 – One of the two Malta's *cippi* at the Louvre Museum. The bilingual inscriptions initially at the top in Phoenician and the base in Greek. The image has been modified for better identification of the writing on the base. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y248otgz>, accessed 9/4/2019. Edited by Rodrigo de Lima, 2019.





1. L`DNN LMLQRT B`L SR `S NDR
2. `BDK `BD`SR WH`Y`SRSMR
3. SN BN SRSMR BN B`D`SR KSM`
4. QLM YBRKM

Version: “(1) To our lord, to Melqart, lord of Tyre: (that is) what he did (2) his servant Abdosiri and his brothers Osirisama, (3) the two sons of Osirisamar, sons of Abdosiri; because he heard (4) your voice. May he bless you!” According to Sznycer (1975, p. 195).

1. ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΣΚΑΙΣΑΡΑΠΙΩΝΟΙ
2. ΣΑΡΑΠΙΩΝΟΣΤΥΡΙΟΙ
3. ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΑΡΧΗΓΕΤΕΙ

Version: “(1) Dionysus and Serapion, the (sons) (2) of Serapion, Tyrians; (3) to the Heracles founder”. According to Sznycer (1975, p.195).

This religious syncretism and the concept that this god was once a man may be the key to understanding how Melqart will be interpreted by the Hellenics and the Latins (NEVILLE, 2007, p. 86). The Greek Heracles and Roman Hercules are divinized heroes, whose, as Melqart were both mortal and immortal.

In addressing the patterns of economic activity in ancient societies, Eleftheria Pappa (2010) comments that temples would play a central role in securing trade treaties, while this would also be strengthened by family ties that would ensure trade security, especially those dedicated to Melqart. The author points out that supernatural sanctions such as swearing to the gods were endogenous features of ancient societies. To this end, Pappa presents the example of the treaty regulated by divine forces that sealed the vassalage agreement between Assyrian King Assar-adan and the Tyrian prince Ba’alu in the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This agreement warned that, if broken, it would incur the wrath of the gods, causing shipwrecks in a windstorm.

Apart from the issue of contracts, Pappa argues that religious syncretism could also regulate economic mechanisms, in what she defines as an *investment in trust* since it merged patron cults and deities to protect negotiations as well as they would also reduce costs and facilitate technological exchanges (2010, p. 284-285).



Melqart's temples are closely linked with the expansionist enterprise. According to Diodorus Siculus (20: 14.1), Melqart, referred in one passage as Heracles, accompanied the founding of the new cities. Given their function, their sanctuaries are always in relation to the sea, in environments that could be frequented by sailors and merchants. The foundation of settlements is usually accompanied by the establishment of this sacred place. Unlike Astarte, Melqart was not part of the indigenous cults (NEVILLE, 2007, p. 87).

Pappa comments that the monuments dedicated to Melqart, where Phoenician trading posts are known as MQM, possibly vocalized as / *maqom* /, would probably have been installed to extend worship to non-Phoenician communities in order to foster trade (2010, p. 285). According to Cristina Kormikiari, / *maqom* / would be an emporium-sanctuary, that is, it could be part of a religious centre as well managing business practices and agreements (KORMIKIARI, 2015, p. 88).

On this religious syncretism, there is an example of another locality that was supposedly frequented by the Phoenician communities such as the island of Thasos where a large Herakleion was located southwest of the city agora, at the main entrance of the *asty* (Greek: ἄστυ) of Limenas. Juliana Hora (2018) reminds us that according to Herodotus (*Histories*, II, 44) Herakles was perhaps one of the most important patrons of Thasos. This male deity was often represented in the coins and his worship would have been, according to the tradition, implanted by the Phoenicians (cf. Hora, 2018).

### GADITANIAN HERAKLES (HERCULES-GADITANUS)



Fig. 3 - One of the five *ex-votos* found near the islet of Sancti Petri. One can notice the Egyptian characteristics. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y5hlkxpd>, accessed 9/15/2019. Edited by Rodrigo de Lima, 2019.



The sacred environment of the Herakles / Melqart temples would be part of a strategy for treaty-signing with other peoples, as is believed to have occurred in the Iberian Peninsula. Under the aegis of divinity, commerce was carried out by establishing relations between allochthonous and autochthonous. According to Neville (2007, p. 87) Herodotus (II.115) suggests that the Phoenician temples were places of asylum for sinking travellers, as well as offering the practice of sacred prostitution of both sexes, a hospitality practice that may have corroborated for the attendance of these sacred environments.

Concerning liturgical practices and their participants, Zamora López (2017) identifies the MQM'LM, probably vocalized as / *mīqim 'ēlim* / official directly linked to the egeresis during the Melqart cult. Through epigraphic evidence in Greek there is indication that in the resurrection ritual of the Tyrian Herakles, there would be one responsible for the cult. This officer would be the *egerseites toū Hērakléous* equivalent to / *mīqim 'ēlim* /. The author notes that often to this occurrence there is a second expression, MTRḤ ŠTRNY, which helps to detail the role of the officer. Interpreted as a possible reference to Astarte. Thus, Zamora López (2017, p. 66) proposes that during these rituals, the / *mīqim 'ēlim* / would consummate the marriage of the two deities, who also represented the monarchy and the priesthood. To suppress the lack of a Phoenician word for the name of this holiday, Kormikiari introduces the term / *marzeah* / or / *marzeh* /, using both Hebrew, Ugaritic, Phoenician, Punic and Aramaic to, according to the author “designate the liturgical celebration of a banquet that also included a sacrifice in honour of a deity” (KORMIKIARI, 2004, p.139).

In fact, Cadiz archaeological remains found on the city's beaches show an innumerable accumulation of inhumations and cremations associated with ressignified dry wells as sacred deposits and faunal remains that would have been consumed, such as wine, incense, olive oil and aromatic oils (cf. LIMA, 2018, pp 256-402). Also found are animal sacrifices that corroborate the liturgical practice that the Gadirites would celebrate for their dead a banquet in honour of the dead or dedicated to a deity. The term / *marzeah* or *marzeh* / denotes both the festival and the religious body. It is supposed to consist only of a small group of the great Phoenician citizen families (MARKOE, 2000, p.120; KORMIKIARI, 2004, p.139; NEVILLE, 2007, p. 73-74).

From the temple of *Melqart gadirite*, later known as *Hercules Gaditanus*, there was nothing left architecturally, only five ex-votos representing the image of the deity (fig. 3) were recovered, as well as a few later bronze statues, since this great temple, was intensely visited by important characters, from Hannibal to Julius Caesar. The temple was allegedly destroyed by Alí ben `Isá ben



(...) hay un negro que está de pie en la cima de un pináculo, / como si sobre él estuviera crucificado el viento. / Adelanta la pierna derecha y casi la alza, / como quejándose de un esfuerzo descomunal. / En la diestra presenta una llave que tú tomarías por ofrenda, / si no fuera porque él está compungido. / Y un pergamino en la izquierda, mano que lleva cerrada como si nos quisiera ocultar su contenido. De la mar señala el poniente y su región / mirando erguido hacia el ocaso del sol [...] / Os digo que en sus noticias hay un portento, / así que no preguntéis / si es de oro o de latón (...).

(...) There is a black figure standing on a pinnacle as if the wind crucified him. Advance with the right leg almost upwards. Like he was making a huge effort. In his right hand, he holds a key that you would take as an offering, if not because he is sorry. And a scroll on the left, a hand that is clenched as if to hide its contents. From the sea it points to the west and its region, aiming high at the sunset (...). I tell you that in your news there is something spectacular, so don't ask me if it was gold or brass (...). (My version).

According to Moreno Pulido, Melqart / Herakles is the true titular god of the Extreme Western region of the Mediterranean Basin. The author states that the myth of the oracle of Tyre, the hometown of this divinity, would have been one of the reasons why the Strait of Gibraltar became known as the *Pillars of Hercules* (2009, p. 1).

However, for Pappa, as far as the western Mediterranean Basin is concerned, the term *Pillars of Heracles / Hercules* does not allude to the rocky group bordering the Mediterranean Sea (in this case, the Rock of Gibraltar and the hill of Ceuta). For the author, this term would only be a poetic play of words about the temples erected by the Phoenicians in Gadir (Spain) and Lixus (Morocco). It would, therefore, have been the *interpretatio graeca* of the Phoenician entrepreneurs since the Herakles expeditions would have taken place in the same region (2010, p. 285).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

In this article, I intended to introduce Melqart / Herakles as a deity that was part of the Mediterranean Basin serving as an important agent in the enterprise of maritime expansion, as well as in the mediation between allochthonous and autochthonous communities. Whereas religiosity is established



as a point of contact between the different, the rites would also function as a mechanism of differentiation. As is evident from Kleon of Magnesia's account that he is obliged, along with his crew, to depart from Gadir, probably ordered by the inhabitants and the priesthood of the city. This account demonstrates how the civic body would behave at the time of religious festivities. This deity that dies and is resurrected by virtue of fire also presents itself as an essential element in the establishment of festivities that marked the beginning of a new season, guiding the calendar by way of the stars. Thus, the joy was reserved for the Phoenician community as the mourning of the liturgy of Melqart's death and rebirth. This would have helped in strengthening the local identity before foreigners. Through its cycle of living, dying and being reborn, Melqart / Herakles has become a symbol of power, expansion and fundamentally connection by blending into the different worldviews of the most varied Mediterranean communities.

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Dossiê

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