

EGYPTIAN FERTILITY MAGIC WITHIN PHOENICIAN AND PUNIC CULTURE

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A striking cultural element within the Greek and Phoenician world of the earlier first millennium B.C. are the Egyptian and Egyptianizing objects. They spread along with the Greek and Phoenician expansion, and can be found — generally speaking — wherever these seafaring peoples established themselves and wherever they had closer relations. Thus the Aegyptiaca arrived as far as the Northern coast of the Black Sea; they were distributed all over Italy (Hölbl 1979) as well as over the whole Phoenician and Punic West. The first important phase of diffusion of Egyptian cultural values, however, took place already in the second mill. B.C. and resulted from the Egyptian imperialism in Asia as well as from the close connections with the Minoan and Mycenaean world. The Sea People's invasion stopped all at once this expansion of Egyptian culture. Whereas we are confronted in the Greek area according to the actual state of our knowledge, with an absolute hiatus in the 11th and in the 1st half of the 10th cent.¹, the Egyptian Bronze Age cultural substratum in the Middle East survived in certain regions in spite of the general cultural regression. Here we think first of the Philistines with their anthropoid clay coffins and the Egyptianizing pottery (Dothan 1982). But I would like to point towards another aspect of the Egyptian element, that is the popular Egyptian magic, which is recognizable from innumerable small Aegyptiaca, scarabs and amulets of many different shapes, which penetrated into Syria and Palestine during the Late Bronze Age (Hölbl 1986, I: 11-53). This part of Egyptian popular religion can be traced in some places, especially at Megiddo (Hölbl 1986, I: 30-31) or at Tell Abu Hawam (*ibid.*: 33), also during Iron Age I. This old Egyptian substratum in Syria and Palestine receives a considerable impetus from renewed influences and imports from the 10th cent. onwards. The essential factor is now the activity of the Phoenicians. We can follow the formation of the Egyptian component in Phoenician art in several waves, above all in two periods: during the 8th and 7th centuries in the ivories and metal work, and thereafter, during the Persian period, in the Phoenician and Punic glyptics of hard stone. The unification of Egypt and Phoenicia in the Achaemenid empire obviously caused a cultural wave from Egypt to Phoenicia, at least in the sense of intensification of influence (Hölbl 1986, I: 16, 41, 43, 53).

Which areas of the complex Phoenician and Punic culture were affected by the Egyptian element? If one looks at the Egyptian component as a whole (at the noble arts — e.g. the jewellery of Carthage and Tharros — as well as at the mass-production of simple scarabs and amulets etc.), one will probably arrive at the conclusion that nearly all artistic manifestations of the Phoenico-Punic culture in the broadest sense (perhaps with the only exception of pottery) were more or less influenced by Egypt. In my opinion Garbini (1983: 32) rightly stressed the Egyptian component as the most important and unifying criterion of the Phoenician culture. But if one tries to look upon the Egyptian element in a more differentiated way, one will recognize that in Sidon, for instance, anthropoid sarcophagi (Kukahn 1955; Buhl 1983) and embalment (Torrey 1919-20: 21) are characteristic of the upper classes. And when we look for the scarabs and other little amulets (figurines of divinities, udjat-eyes etc.), we find them, admittedly, also with the rich people of Sidon (Torrey 1919-20: 27); but we arrive in this case at more specific results. At first we meet them in temple deposits, e.g. in a Libyan Period deposit of the temple of Baalat Gebal at Byblos (Dunand 1937: pl. LXXIII; 1939: 174-180), as votive offerings of rather poor women in the shrine of Tanit-Ashtart (or Tanit *and* Ashtart) at Sarepta (Pritchard 1975: 13-40, fig. 43, 44, 58; 1978: 140-148), or in the *bothroi* of the temple of Ashtart at Kition (Clerc *et al.* 1976). Regarding Cyprus it has been shown that scarab decoration, which is carried round the neck by female statuettes, became a sacred emblem of the local fertility goddess as well as of her priestesses (Clerc *et al.* 1976: 171); these scarabs had, therefore, a significance of cult and their magic value must have referred to fertility. Even the so-called Cypriot Temple Boys can carry scarab necklaces (De Salvia 1983a: 93-94, pl. X, 1). From these facts we conclude that the Egyptian popular beliefs concerning the protective power of the scarab for fertility and for the health of the little child was adopted unadulterated within the Phoenician and Cypriot area. (De Salvia 1978; 1983b: 210, n. 29).

Of great interest is a group of amulets in the shape of rectangular plaquettes which carry on one side the picture of a cow and which are distributed in Egypt, East-Phoenicia, Cyprus, Carthage, Mozia, Sardinia and Spain (Hölbl 1986, I: 103-105, 147-153). (Pl. 26). On the other side of the plaquette we find mostly the apotropaeic udjat-eye or the head of Bes (Hölbl 1986, II: pl. III, 6) who, like the cow, belongs in particular to the sphere of fertility; furthermore on such plaquettes there is often a scenic representation with the divine child protected by winged goddesses (Pl. 27). This infant god, with his implications of

birth and resurrection, is known to the Egyptians for the most part as Horus-Harpocrates, being likewise a personification of the sun child, and in the Middle East as Mot, Tammuz, Adonis, etc. He embodies and secures the regeneration of nature, fertility in every sense, and rebirth in the other world. On the cow plaquettes the boy can be represented also above the lotus flower (Pl. 28). It is the motif of the god upon the lotus that the Phoenicians elaborated creatively and in various ways beyond the Egyptian iconography and in accordance with their own religious ideas². But who is the cow? From the iconography and the Egyptian point of view it is the Hathor cow. That holds good for the finds from outside Egypt too. Thus, for example, a plaquette from Carthage shows the Egyptian gold hieroglyph, the designation of Hathor, above the cow (Pl. 29). At Kition a cow plaquette has been found among the votive offerings of Ashtart (Clerc *et al.* 1976: 144, Kit. 554, pl. XVIII). Like many other examples these plaquettes demonstrate, therefore, that Egyptian iconographic models were adopted and applied to Phoenician concepts, but still in accordance with their Egyptian significance. I do not know any examples of usage of an Egyptian motif contrary to its original sense. That means that together with the iconography the Egyptian content, too, was accepted³. The Hathor cow, for example, did not lose anything of her cultic quality⁴, in the sense that the Egyptian picture as well as the substantial Egyptian content, which referred to fertility, survived in the Phoenician and Punic culture.

Very important is the fact that the Egyptian amulets of Sarepta originate from the social background of poor women, a circumstance which underlines the significance within the **popular** religion. And from that point of view, I would like to claim that even the Aegyptiaca from the rich tombs of Sidon or from the anthropoid sarcophagus of a woman found in 1980 at Cádiz in Spain (Freijeiro, Sánchez 1981: 242, pl. 21e) should be considered in relation to their efficacy for female fertility.

We can perceive the importance of the magical Aegyptiaca within the Phoenician and Punic world not only from votive deposits but perhaps even more from grave finds. Aegyptiaca are met nearly exclusively in graves of women and children, so far as it is evident from the excavation reports. In the east the cemeteries of 'Atlit (Johns 1933) and Kamid el-Loz (Poppa 1978) are especially significant; they belong to the Persian period. Most expressive, regarding amuletic forces in the sphere of fertility, is the position of the amulets in grave L 23 at 'Atlit, in which 31 Egyptian type amulets were found between the legs of a

woman (skeleton c-VI) in a chain stretching from the waist to the ankles (Johns 1933: 48, 86, fig. 61; 87-88). That Aegyptiaca belong to the world of woman and child is confirmed in the west by numerous tombs in Sardinia, or by the Egyptian type amulets in the *Tophets* of Sulcis, Tharros (Hölbl 1986, I: 54, 61, 63, 70-71), and Carthage (Stager 1982: pl. 18d). Of course, the amulets in tombs do provide protection for the dead woman and the dead child. But the comparatively small number of certain specific Aegyptiaca for use in the other world⁵ shows that the Egyptian-type amulets, which we discuss in this paper, had their place first in daily life and became effective only secondarily after death. Their function in this world is evident from their presence in votive deposits.⁶

In the study of the Aegyptiaca from Sardinia one could distinguish 65 different kinds of amulets, divinities and powerful symbols (Hölbl 1986, I: 79-107). Checking through these amulets type by type we see that in Egypt they either possess general and comprehensive protective forces (against dangerous beasts etc.) or else they promote, among other things, especially fertility and the upbringing of the little child (Hölbl 1986, I: esp. 114, 116, 119, 128, 135). It is not only female fertility that the amulets proclaim, but even special virile forces connected with the ram and bull figurines have their place within the female world (Hölbl 1986, I: 140) (Pl. 30). What the amulets express from the Egyptian point of view on one side and the archaeological circumstances in the Phoenico-Punic area on the other side fit together perfectly, while special Egyptian beliefs connected with particular divinities like Sekhmet and Nefertem, which we find everywhere, were mostly not known in all probability outside Egypt. But we see from the contexts outside the Nile valley that the general protective forces of the most powerful amulets against dangers of every kind (e.g. the udjat-eye) are also beneficial to women and children; that means within the sphere of health and fertility in a broader sense.

Of course, we are not allowed to refer all Egyptian scarabs and figurines of steatite and faience, without exception, to fertility. In Cyprus, for example, it may be that the Egyptian significance of the Ptah-Pataikoi for minerals and the exploitation of metals was present too (Clerc *et al.* 1976: 117-118, 125). Moreover the Phoenician Pataikoi, with whom the Egyptian Pataikoi were identified, or could be identified, were navigation gods (Hölbl 1979, I: 121-125). Thus, in a certain framework, we have to concede that the Egyptian-type amulets had their protective powers for the sailor. In the Greek area, perhaps, the scarabs in the Poseidon temple of Sounion may give an example of

this case, unless they refer to Poseidon as impregnator of earth.⁷ However, far more dominant is the importance of the amuletic Aegyptiaca as evidence for fertility magic in the Mediterranean world. Although this paper concerns the Phoenician and Punic culture, we have to include also the Greek area. The Greeks got in touch with Aegyptiaca from the 10th and 9th centuries onwards via the Middle East⁸ and took over the significance for woman and child as well (De Salvia 1978; 1983b: 209-211). This is proved especially by the tombs at Lefkandi (on the island of Euboea) of the early 9th cent. B.C.⁹ From the 8th to 6th centuries certain places of the Greek world, favoured by overseas relations, were flooded with amuletic Aegyptiaca — and here too, the temples of female deities as well as the graves of women and children provide us with most material (De Salvia 1983b). In this respect, in the west, one must mention above all Pithekoussai (on Ischia), where in the 2nd half of the 8th cent. nearly all graves of children, even the poorest, contain one or more scarabs (De Salvia 1978; Hölbl 1979, I: 153-154, II: 177-196). In this connection the Egyptian significance of the scarab within fertility magic among the Greeks of the East and the transfer of these beliefs to Western Greece have been pointed out (De Salvia 1978). The transmission of Egyptian cultural values to the Greeks cannot be understood without the Phoenicians as mediators, at least at the beginning.

The Sardinian scarabs of jasper and cornelian represent a fascinating group of documents, especially because they carry also scenes from the high Egyptian religion (Hölbl 1986, I: 268-271, 277-278, 283). As for the theme of fertility, we may draw our attention to some of them which show the divine child of Egyptian iconography within a shrine (Fig. 14), or to scenes, in which the divine child is characterised as king who, as in Egyptian representations, can even receive infinite years of reign by means of palm-branches (Fig. 15). Here we are confronted with ideas expressed in Egyptian or Egyptianizing manner, which correspond to the Egyptian birthhouse theology (Daumas 1958); “correspondence”, it should be emphasised, and not necessarily “acceptance” of a theology. But the child god within a temple, characterized as king, complements on a more spiritual level the sphere of Egyptian fertility magic on the popular level. It is particularly the Punic scarab glyptic that shows us how closely the two aspects of Egyptian influence are interconnected: I mean, the usage of Egyptian-type amulets in accordance with the Egyptian model and the representation of Phoenician divinities by means of Egyptian iconographies. Isis with Harpocrates (Pl. 31), a very popular type among the amulets, is often represented on the jasper

scarabs (Fig. 16) — that is, from the iconographic point of view; but sometimes the engraver marks his Egyptianizing mother goddess with an unmistakable attribute of Ashtart (Fig. 17) (Gubel 1980).

The study of the Egyptian and Egyptianizing objects from Phoenician and Punic Malta and Gozo, now in the the museum of Valletta, has been undertaken quite recently by myself. Unfortunately the archaeological background does not offer anything with respect to our question concerning the significance of the Aegyptiaca within fertility magic. The available amulets give us a small but very representative selection from the spectrum known otherwise in the Phoenico-Punic world (Pls. 32-33). Moreover the scanty material at our disposal seems to come — perhaps without exception — from the east and for the most part from Egypt itself. This is remarkable, because in Sardinia or Ibiza the Egyptian-type faience amulets of Punic manufacture are very numerous (Hölbl 1986, I: 163). As a preliminary result we can perhaps say that the Egyptian cultural values from Malta and Gozo fit in best with the Egyptian element in the remaining Phoenician world, but seems to be connected more with the east than with the west and demonstrates, therefore, in its own way the connexion of Malta with the east. However, there is no reason to doubt that the amuletic Aegyptiaca, i.e. the scarabs and faience figurines, of these islands belong also to the evidence of Egyptian fertility magic within Phoenician and Punic culture.

Notes

- ¹ The latest datable Mycenaean contexts, which yielded Aegyptiaca, are represented by some LH IIIC tombs of the local phase II (1165/60-1100 B.C.) at Perati (Attica): S. E. Iakovides, *Perati*, A, Athens 1969, pp. 93, 141, 294, 304; B, Athens 1970, pp. 314-315, 456. At that time only very few people were in possession of these Aegyptiaca, which testify still Late Bronze Age connections between Egypt and the Aegean. The most ancient Aegyptiacum found in a datable context of the 1st Mill. B.C., which is known within the Greek Area, comes from a rich Early Protogeometric tomb at Fortetsa (c. 970-920 B.C.) — a tomb, in which one woman at least was also buried: J. K. Brock, *Fortetsa*, Cambridge 1957, p. 15, no. 106, pl. 173. It is a finger ring of faience, which in my view carries a much deformed *Mn-hpr-R'* pseudo-cartouche and which is obviously of Near Eastern manufacture. The closest parallel to the piece is a similar finger ring found at Hama (Syria) in a context (c. 1075-925 B.C.), which chronologically fits in best with the Cretan: P. J. Riis, *Hama*, II, 3, Copenhagen 1948, p. 159, fig. 202. The next Aegyptiaca of the Greek area belong to the early 9th cent. B.C.: a Sekhmet figurine from a Protogeometric tomb at Fortetsa (Brock, *Fortetsa*, pp. 29-30, pl. 21, 264; J.N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece*, London 1977, p. 49) and the Aegyptiaca of Lefkandi mentioned below, n. 9.
- ² A synopsis of the motif "god upon the lotus" on scarabs of hard stone known from Sardinia shows the following divine figures or symbols represented on or above the lotus: sun, moon, scarab, divine child, "Isis", siren, head of Bes, anthropomorphic divinity with head of horse(?), divinity with ram's head carrying a double crown, falcon, lying and sitting sphinx, couchant lion with double crown: Hölbl 1986, I: 271-277; see *ibid.*, II, n. 200 to chapter VII.

- 3 This, in my opinion, is also valid for the Canaanite and Phoenician ivories. Cfr. W. Helck, *Betrachtungen zur Grossen Göttin und den ihr verbundenen Gottheiten*, München 1971, pp. 154, 226; Helck 1979: 171. See Hölbl 1986, I: 14.
- 4 For another opinion see E. Acquaro, *Amuleti egiziani ed egittizzanti del Museo Nazionale di Cagliari*, Roma 1977, p. 34.
- 5 We think in this connexion of the few *shabti*s, which may have come to the west in Pre-Roman times; the circumstances of discovery do not satisfy almost anywhere; see Hölbl 1986, I: 404; II: n. 145 to chapter VI; Gamer-Wallert 1978: 64-65, 73, 186-187, 195, 231-232. Vercoutter 1945, does not mention a single *shabti*; cf. J. Vercoutter, Une statuette funéraire de Nechao II trouvée à Carthage, *Cahiers de Byrsa*, V (1955) pp. 23-28. Heart scarabs are nearly totally absent: cf. Hölbl 1986, I: 62, II, n. 70 to chapter II. With this the rarity of Osiris figurines fits in.
- 6 But the reader should be reminded that there are other Aegyptiaca, which are intended for the after-life, above all the amuletic capsules of metal (mostly of gold or silver), which are distributed all over the Phoenician and Punic world (Hölbl 1986, I: 345-353). In a Punic inscription incised on a silver leaf of such an amuletic capsule found in Sardinia we read explicitly of "the Lords of the balance" with reference to the Egyptian Judgement of the Dead: G. Garbini, Iscrizioni funerarie puniche di Sardegna, *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* XLII, (1982) pp. 462-463.
- 7 Cf. W. Pötscher, *Der Kleine Pauly* IV (1975) col. 1076 (s.v. Poseidon). — The Aegyptiaca of Sounion: Pendelbury 1930: 83-84.
- 8 Apart from the items indicated in n. 1 and 9 cf. the two steatite scarabs of the Tekke Tholos near Knossos, which during the late 9th cent. were in possession of a goldsmith's family of Near Eastern provenance living there, and which were deposited in the tomb together with the very precious stock-in-trade: R.W. Hutchinson, J. Boardman, The Khaniale Tekke-Tombs, *BSA* IL (1954) pp. 218, 227, n° 22-23; *id.* The Khaniale Tekke Tombs, II, *BSA* LXII (1967) pp. 64, 69, pl. 8.
- 9 For Lefkandi: M.R. Popham *et al.*, *Lefkandi*, I, text: London 1980, plates: London 1979; M.R. Popham *et al.*, Further excavations of the Toumba cemetery at Lefkandi, 1981, *BSA* LXXVII (1982) pp. 213-248, pl. 15-34. The tombs containing Aegyptiaca (including faience beads) are the following in chronological order from Early Protogeometric to Sub-Protogeometric: S 16, P 25B, T 12A, T 14, T 39, PP 42, T 1, T 15, T 22, T 42, PP 21, T 5, T 13, T 32, T 36, S 59, T 27, T 33. Whenever an anthropological examination was made, these tombs turned out to belong mostly to children, some to women.

Summary.

Egyptian type objects of magical nature (scarabs and amulets in form of Egyptian divinities and powerful symbols, commonly made of steatite and faience) are found all over the Mediterranean during the earlier 1st mill. B.C.: as votive offerings in temples of fertility deities — in the Phoenician sphere, e.g. at Byblos, Sarepta, Kition etc.; in graves, but almost exclusively in those of women and children (e.g. in a grave at 'Atlit, a Phoenician cemetery in northern Palestine, between the legs of a woman); as well as in Punic *Tophets* (Carthage, Sulcis, Tharros). These archaeological circumstances show that the genuine Egyptian amuletic force of the small objects concerning the protection of women and children as well as female fertility was taken over by the Phoenicians more or less unaltered. The known Aegyptiaca from Malta and Gozo fit in best with the picture of the remaining Phoenician world by their typology.

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