The *Tophet* and Child Sacrifice in the Ancient Mediterranean

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Maria Aubet begins her discussion regarding child sacrifice by noting, “The *tophet* undoubtedly constitutes the most characteristic cultural manifestation in the Phoenician settlements of the central Mediterranean and the one that has furnished the most archaeological information for a study of the ceramic and epigraphic material relating to the Phoenicio-Punic world” (245). Given the amount of material and the subject matter, it is not surprising that much has been written with regard to the literary, archaeological and epigraphic evidence for the existence of the *tophet* and to discuss and debate the purpose and meaning of these sacred precincts, which were in use from the eighth century BCE through the second century CE (reference). We have more than 20,000 urns containing the cremated remains of newly born children (sometimes combined with the remains of young goats or lambs), as well as more than 6,000 stelae from the *tophet* in ancient Carthage alone. The debate rages, among scholars, as to whether these findings, and those from other *tophets*, signify the practice of child sacrifice or represent the burial of stillborn infants and those who died shortly after birth.

The purpose of this paper is to review the literary sources, biblical and classical, and to consider the epigraphic and archaeological evidence in order to draw conclusions regarding the origin, transmission and purpose of these sacred precincts and the rituals associated with them. Given the fact that the *tophet* was a consistent feature of Phoenician cities throughout the central Mediterranean, this paper will conclude with a discussion of its social, religious and/or political significance to the residents of those cities.

The noun *tophet* (Hebrew: תֹּפֶת) is found in the Hebrew Bible eight times (2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 7:31, 32; 19:6, 11, 12, 13, 14). A related word, *taphéteh* (תָּפְתֶּה), occurs once (Isa 30:33). Relating the biblical references of the *tophet* to the material evidence of the sacred precincts of

the cities in the central Mediterranean which are of Phoenician origin has directly impacted how scholars interpret what happened there. It is therefore essential, in my opinion, that all scholars, regardless of their discipline, study the biblical references in their contexts.[1]

The etymology of this word is confusing at best and is in dispute among scholars (UBS Handbook, Jer 7:31). Its meaning must be determined from its context. In each context where *tophet* occurs there is a reference to "the valley of Ben-Hinnom" (or, "the valley of the son of Hinnom"), which is where the Jerusalem *tophet* was located. These texts refer to the *tophet* as a place of child sacrifice as these phrases clearly demonstrate: "to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire," "to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal," or "to make a son or a daughter pass through fire as an offering to Molech". Additionally and understandably, the tophet was also a place of burial (Jer 19:4-6, 10-15).

These passages that refer to *tophet* (or Topheth) are obviously linked to passages that do not use the word but include the same or similar phrases referring to burning children and/or passing sons or daughters through the fire. All told, there are no less than twenty-five references in the Hebrew Bible that clearly state that both Israelites and Canaanites sacrificed children, though not always in Jerusalem and not only to Baal or Molech, but also, at times, to Yahweh. However, nowhere do the authors/redactors of the Hebrew Bible state or even indicate that child sacrifice was commanded by Yahweh, nor that Yahweh condoned the practice. However, there are scholars who make reference to "binding of Isaac" (Gen 22), and the sacrifice by Jephthah of his daughter after Yahweh grants him victory over the Ammonites (Jdg 11:29-40), as proof that at some point the Israelites believed that Yahweh commanded such sacrifices and thus saw the

[1] I have included, in Appendix A, numerous but not all, biblical passages that are directly referred to in this paper and have, in my opinion, acted as a lens through which scholars have interpreted the material evidence found in the central Mediterranean *tophets*. All quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

practice as acceptable. It must be noted, however, that Yahweh stopped Abraham before he actually sacrificed Isaac and there is no comment either condoning or condemning Jephthah's vow or the sacrifice of his daughter. The most difficult passage to understand in this regard is found in 2 Kgs 3:26-27.

> When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

It would seem from a cursory reading that Yahweh responded to the sacrifice of Moab's son, as an obvious last resort, and "brought a great wrath" on Israel so that they withdrew and returned to their own land.

While there are a few confusing passages, but there are far more clear passages which demonstrate biblical authors'/redactors' abhorrence of such sacrifices. The prophets, in no uncertain terms, condemn and attributed this practice, whether by the Israelites, Judahites or Jerusalemites, to their imitation of the idolatrous practices of the nations around them, to those they failed to dispossess when they conquered the land (I.e., to the Canaanites, who would later be known by the Greeks as the Phoenicians). The prophets stated clearly that the practice of child sacrifice was one of the main reasons Yahweh sent destruction on the northern tribes of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BCE and on the people of Judah and Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BCE. The authors/redactors of the book of Jeremiah made it very clear that child sacrifice was never commanded by, nor acceptable to, Yahweh. In both Jeremiah 7:31 and 19:5 Jeremiah reports that Yahweh stated that burning their sons and daughters in the fire is something which, "I did not command, nor did it come into my mind."

Passages such as Exodus 13:1-2[2] do command that first born males, animal and human, were to be "set apart" to the Yahweh and thus he says, "it/he is mine." However, these cannot be taken as a command to offer human males as burnt offerings without clear corroborating literary or archeological evidence. The verb "to set apart" means "to sanctify, make distinct, be holy" but does not, in and of itself, imply making a physical offering (BDB reference). The purposes for which material things, animals or human beings were commanded to be set apart to Yahweh must be determined by careful study of discourses or commands in their biblical contexts.

The Hebrew Bible states numerous times that when Israelites, Judahites and/or Jerusalemites burned their sons and daughters in the fire at *tophet* in the Valley of Hinnom (or elsewhere), they were doing so because they were imitating "the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel" (see Appendix A).

Passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy clearly command the Israelites that they are not to burn their children in the fire or to give their offspring to Molech by putting them to death (See Appendix A3). Yet in spite of these commands as well as the condemnation of the biblical writers and prophets, there were times when children were sacrificed, perhaps to Yahweh, but certainly to Baal and/or Molech[3] (Xella _______).

Because of these biblical passages, scholars are convinced that the ritual of child sacrifice originated with the Canaanites which, at times, the Israelites appropriated and practiced in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom. Even though there has, as of yet, been no archaeological evidence of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, and no use of the term tophet for any place of child

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[2] The Lord said to Moses: "Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine."

[3] There is an ongoing debate among scholars regarding 'mlk'. Some think it refers to the sacrifice itself, while others contend that there was a Canaanite god known as Molech to whom children were offered as sacrifices.

sacrifice, this term has been applied consistently to the sacred precincts discovered in various ancient cities of the central Mediterranean region.

Outside of the biblical texts, there is very little literary evidence for the practice of child sacrifice among the Phoenicians living in the Levant. According to Aubet, Philo of Byblos, who wrote in the third century CE, is the most important source of information about Phoenicia, as he is credited with translating the Phoenician history of Sanchuniathon (ca. 1000 BCE) into Greek (246). Philo indicates that only monarchical and aristocratic Phoenicians practiced child sacrifice in times of extreme distress (war, plague, famine, etc.) in honor of either El or Baal and that this practice ended in the seventh or sixth century BCE but not before being passed on to Syria and Israel (Aubet 246-7). However, once again, to date there is no certain archaeological evidence of this practice in the Levant or of the existence of any sacred precinct similar to those found in numerous Phoenician colonies throughout the central Mediterranean (Xella, Tophet, 260, Quinn, Punic World, 33). Hess notes that existence of such a sacred precinct is one of the seven common characteristics of Phoenician colonies found in North Africa, Sicily and Sardinia (293). As previously noted, Aubet states that the existence of the *tophet* is "the most characteristic cultural manifestation in the Phoenician settlements of the central Mediterranean…" (245). Several scholars also note that these sacred precincts consistently appeared very early in the establishment of each of Phoenician settlements indicating they may have been part of their cultural identity (Cambridge Ancient History 489).

The literary evidence from Clitarch, Porphyrion, Tertullian, Diodorus and Plutarch indicate that human sacrifice was a regular practice in Carthage, and that such a practice was tied to the religious culture the colonists brought with them from Phoenicia. Clitarch stated that, "The Phoenicians, and more especially the Carthaginians, when they want some important project to

succeed, promise to sacrifice a child to Cronos if their wish is fulfilled."[4] (reference?). Plutarch understood that the Carthaginian's sacrifice of children was tied into their belief in gods and spirits. In part he wrote, "But they knowingly and wittingly themselves devoted their own children; and they that had none of their own bought of some poor people, and then sacrificed them like lambs or pigeons…" (reference?) Diodorus of Sicily, who wrote the Library of World History in the mid-first century BCE, demonstrates the connection between the practice of child sacrifice in Carthage and the honoring of their ancestral gods.

> Therefore the Carthaginians, believing that the misfortune had come to them from the gods, betook themselves to every manner of supplication of the divine powers; and, because they believed that Heracles, who was worshipped in their mother city,[29] was exceedingly angry with them, they sent a large sum of money and many of the most expensive offerings to Tyre. Since they had come as colonists from that city, it had been their custom in the earlier period to send to the god a tenth of all that was paid into the public revenue; but later, when they had acquired great wealth and were receiving more considerable revenues, they sent very little indeed, holding the divinity of little account. But turning to repentance because of this misfortune, they thought of all the gods of Tyre. They even sent from their temples in supplication the golden shrines with their images, believing that they would better appease the wrath of the god if the offerings were sent for the sake of winning forgiveness. They also alleged that Cronus had turned against them inasmuch as in former times they had been accustomed to sacrifice to this god the noblest of their sons, but more recently, secretly buying and nurturing children, they had sent these to the sacrifice; and when an investigation was made, some of those who had been sacrificed were discovered to have been supposititious. When they had given thought to these things and saw their enemy encamped before their walls, they were filled with superstitious dread, for they believed that they had neglected the honours of the gods that had been established by their fathers. In their zeal to make amends for their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly; and others who were under suspicion sacrificed themselves voluntarily, in number not less than three hundred. There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus, 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 sort of gaping pit filled with fire (20.14.1-5).

[4] I have included, in Appendix B, extended quotes from several classical authors referenced in this paper in order to allow those less familiar with these citations to be able to reflect on my short quotations in context.

The fact that “Thucydides, Polybius, Herodotus and Livy make no mention of it [I.e., child sacrifice] in their writings” (249-50) does not mean that the other authors fabricated the practice but may, as Aubet notes, indicate that there probably was no “***systemic*** practice of human sacrifice” (249-50). The dramatic descriptions of consistent and massive child sacrifices are thought by most modern scholars to be intentionally prejudicial (Aubet 250, Miles 70). However, in light of the significant amount and variety, as well as consistency, of literary evidence, both biblical and classical, it seems very unlikely that the reports of child sacrifice are complete fabrications.

With the discovery of a sacred precinct in Carthage, and in at least nine other cities of Phoenician origin, there is a great wealth of physical evidence that requires explanation (Miles 70, Guzzo & Lopez 161). There are scholars who hold that these the burial places of the stillborn and victims of high infant mortality. They take both biblical and classical references as fabrications of extreme prejudice and propaganda. However, there are also a significant number of scholars who see these sacred precincts as places of child sacrifice. They acknowledge that there is some obvious exaggeration in the literary sources, but that these references are essentially consistent with epigraphic and archaeological evidence and must be taken as essentially factual.

Archaeology has revealed consistent characteristics in these sacred precincts. Aubet describes, “…the *tophet* [as] an open-air enclosure clearly marked out and surrounded by walls which define a space reserved for sacrifice, on the periphery and generally to the north of the inhabited centre. Inside it were deposited cinerary urns, sealed at the top with a stone baetyl or plaster; they were replaced by stelae with an inscription to Baal or Tanit from the sixth to fifth centuries BC onward” (250). As Xella notes, the “characteristic findings of *tophets* are, first of

all, urns and stelae…The urns contain the cremated bones of (chiefly very young) human beings, [and] of animals (mostly, lambs and kids, also very young), or both mixed together…" (Interpretation 262). Even though there is much ongoing debate about the meaning of these remains, it is the epigraphic evidence on the stelae that for many scholars clearly defines the purpose of these sacred precincts.

To date, *tophets* have been discovered in many, but not all, Phoenician cities in the central Mediterranean: Carthage, Utica and Hadrumetum (Africa), Mozia/Motya (Sicily), Sulcis, Tharros, Bithia, Monte Sirai and Nora (Sardinia), and Rabat (Malta) (Aubet 212-256, Quinn 389, Xella Interpretation 261). The one located in Carthage, at Salammbô, is the largest; yielding more than 20,000 cremations urns and 6,000 stelae, and the oldest, having been in existence and use from the eighth century until after Carthage's destruction in 146 BCE, and perhaps even into the 2nd century CE (reference?).

The epigraphic evidence, according to numerous scholars, clearly points to "the *tophet* [as] a sacred place where one goes to fulfill a vow, either to ask the god(s) for a favour or because it has been granted" (Xella, Interpretation, 267). The inscriptions on all the stelae are clearly and entirely votive in nature (not at all funerary), where a child is promised as a sacrifice in fulfillment of a request answered by the god(s) or in anticipation of a request to be answered (Guzzo & Lopez 160). The inscriptions "have a remarkably stereotyped formulae." They are addressed to the god Baal Hammon and to the goddess Tannit (Tanit). A vow was made because the god answered a prayer or in anticipation of him/her doing so and that vow included the sacrifice, termed a '*mlk*'. Scholars have concluded that this term is "almost certainly a noun with the prefix *m*-, from the root *ylk*, with the meaning 'sacrificial offering'" (Guzzo & Lopez 162-9). These inscriptions are plainly different from Phoenician funerary inscriptions, which "indicate

the name of the deceased to whom the tomb belongs and to whom the inscription relates" (Guzzo & Lopez 167). Bonnet writes,

> "It is worth noting the fact that, in this religious "business," the dead children were never mentioned by name. The inscriptions bear only the devotee's name(s), title(s), and genealogy, but very rarely is their relationship to the urns' contents expressed. The burned babies were treated as objects devoted to the gods and no longer as individuals or human beings…Whereas in the funerary inscriptions from Carthaginian necropolis, the dead person was named…In the tophet, the baby had neither heirs nor a personal name." (383-84).

Guzzo and Lopez conclude that understanding these inscriptions as "clearly and exclusively votive" identifies "the *tophet* as a sanctuary" and that this conclusion fits with the information provided by the literary and the archeological evidence (177).

These requests, and thus the child sacrifices, were made in extreme situations such as war, famine, drought, plague, etc. Based on the numbers of urns discovered and considering the length of time the Carthaginian *tophet* was in use, scholars conclude that these sacrifices were relatively rare and were for the purpose of saving life (G & L 179, Miles 72). It also should be noted that child sacrifice was made mostly by those of the ruling class for the benefit of the community and would have been regarded as a privilege (Miles 73, Aubet 249).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the remains. As a result of the extensive studies conducted by Schwartz *et al*. on the bones and teeth of 540 individuals whose remains were found in 340 urns, they have concluded "that *Tophets* were burial grounds for the very young, regardless of cause of death" (2012, 739), who were cremated upon death (2010, 10). They acknowledge, however, "the Carthaginians may occasionally have practiced human sacrifice, as did other circum-Mediterranean societies". In the 2010 article, they leave room that at least some of those interned in *tophets* may have been sacrificed (2010, 10). After receiving and reviewing articles by other scholars who refuted their conclusions, their 2012 article seems

to leave very little room for human sacrifice in Carthage. They claim that those who conclude that *tophets* were burial grounds for sacrificed human infants regard the biblical and classical texts too literally and misunderstand the meaning of *mlk* on the inscriptions – instead of interpreting it as 'sacrifice' it should be understood as 'Molech' or 'god' (739, 744).

Articles by Smith *et al.* (2011 & 2013) and by Smith alone (2014) all attempt to refute the research done, and conclusions reached, by Schwartz *et al.* stating repeatedly that they "failed to account for the shrinkage of incinerated teeth and therefore concluded that the infants were younger than they in fact were" (reference?). Smith *et al.* conclude that since "the average age at death [is] between one and two months, rather than newborn, [that] makes it highly unlikely that the *tophet* infants died from natural causes" (2014,?). Schwartz *et al.* state that at least 20% were of prenatal age (2010: 9) while Smith *et al.* state that less than 2% were (reference?).

However, Xella points out that the sacrifice of infants who died prenatally could still be explained as the fulfillment of the promise of this child (while in utero) to the god(s) and that in this case the offering of an already dead child as a sacrifice would make sense. Also, if the *tophet* was a necropolis for infants, he queries, why were there only 20,000 over a period of four to five hundred years, or more of use. From the *tophet* in Mozia, the number of cremations excavated over the whole site for a period of four centuries yields only "one or two depositions a year" (Xella Bones 1202).

In his 2012-13 article, Xella states that "the *tophet* cannot simply be an infant necropolis, reserved for prematurely and naturally dead children" for the reasons which follow (267-68).

First, *tophets* are not found in all Phoenician towns. If they were burial grounds for children who died of natural causes, wouldn't they be found everywhere? In towns without a *tophet* would not one expect to find infant burials in the necropolis? But could not a case also be

made that these sacred precincts were the burial grounds of the children of elites only and that, in some towns, there may not been enough infants and very young children of elite families die to justify the construction of such a burial ground?

Second, with regard to animal sacrifices, Xella argues that "*tophets* are not consistent with the function of a necropolis (and examples of such installations for animals…are unknown)." He further notes that the animal remains in *tophets* are "nearly always newborn lambs and kids, which happens only once or twice a year a fixed periods." He reasons that since child death is not limited to once or twice a year, the animal burials are indeed votive and not funerary and that the children buried with them must be votive and not funerary and this defines the function of the *tophets*. That the cremated remains of animals signify sacrifice seems obvious but doesn't necessary prove that the cremated remains of children were the result of the sacrifice of a live child rather than the burial of a dead child.

The third avenue of proof Xella argues relates to the nature of the burial remains of the children themselves. He notes that "the rites of the *tophet* were very expensive," which while true could again point to these sacred precincts as the burial grounds of stillborn and newly born children of elites. He then sates, "the votive character of the *tophet* rites is incontestable." The content of the inscriptions found on the stelae are the key to interpreting the *tophet's* function as a burial ground for children who were offered in sacrifice to the gods Baal Hammon and Tanit. According to Guzzo and Lopez, these inscriptions include "a dedication to Ba'l (or to Tinnit and Ba'l) by the offerer…in a place called a 'temple' or 'sanctuary', of a specific type of offering called a *mlk*…[consisting] of living beings, human or animals" (177). This interpretation is consistent with a reasonably critical reading of the biblical and classical texts.

Numerous scholars agree with this interpretation of the literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence. Miles concludes, "Contemporary Greek writers thought that the Carthaginians were performing child sacrifice, and the archaeological evidence means that their claims cannot merely be brushed aside as anti-Punic slander" (72). Hess concludes, "However, the osteological evidence as well as the implications of the type of burials suggests infant sacrifice. Human sacrifice seems to have existed in Phoenicia and Israel at least until the middle of the first millennium BC" (258). Guzzo and Lopez sum up their article by stating that though relatively rare and utilized only in exceptional situations, "the Phoenicians/Carthaginians offered to Ba'l Hamon (and eventually also to Tinnit) a tiny member of their family in a sanctuary located on the margins of the town centre" (179). Culican acknowledges that "new evidence from the Tanit Precinct at Carthage shows that child sacrifice did in fact predominate down to the time of the Punic Wars" (489). Dolansky notes in her chapter, "Phoenician, Punic, and Israelite texts suggest that child sacrifice, known as a *mlk*-sacrifice was practiced in various Syro-Canaanite polities…Sacred precincts for child sacrifices are known from excavations of Punic colonies at Carthage, as well as in Sicily, Sardinia, Spain and possible in the Phoenician city of Tyre" (63-64).

On the other hand, Aubet, while acknowledging that human sacrifice took place in Carthage and other Phoenician cities, maintains that the majority of cremated remains were fetuses or newborn babies, probably stillborn, and thus not acceptable as sacrifices. She thinks that the cremation of human bodies "shocked the classical writers, who interpreted the rites as human sacrifice" (252-54). While, in her 2012-13 article Quinn states that *tophets* were "sites of infant sacrifice" (28-29). In her chapter in the book, *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, she writes, "the question of their function cannot be reduced to a stark choice

between infant cemeteries, as is now often suggested, and regular, large-scaled child sacrifice" (389). In the same book, Bonnet suggests that the choice between these two alternatives is "somehow a trap, because they are based on modern categories which do not exactly fit the fluid religious practices of ancient polytheism" (373).

I do find the case for child sacrifice more compelling and more consistent with all the evidence we have at present. I concur completely with Quinn's reasons for rejecting the revisionist position.

> This position is in my view hard to sustain, for reasons including the burial of children and animals in the same cemetery, often together and treated in the same way; the stark contrast between the votive inscriptions from the tophet and the funerary inscriptions found elsewhere; and the fact that the inscriptions often make it clear with formulae such as "because he heard his voice and blessed him" that the offering was made in return for a specific favor granted by the god, which is difficult to reconcile with the burial of children who happened to die young. More generally, it seems to me a useful methodological principle that when all the available literary sources agree on a phenomenon, and there is neither positive evidence against its existence nor any prima facie reason to doubt it (infanticide being unremarkable in the ancient Mediterranean, and human sacrifice by no means unknown), it is perverse to dismiss them; this is without considering the strong circumstantial evidence offered by the tophets themselves. (405, n. 16)

However, it is also obvious to me that, as Bonnet, Quinn and Aubet argue, there was more to the *tophet* than either just a necropolis or a place of human sacrifice. Whatever took place in these sacred precincts, it seems that the debate will continue to rage in the absence of literary evidence of Punic origin. However, the significance and meaning of the *tophets* to the people of these cities can, and needs to be explored and discussed.

Bonnet argues against any kind of "monolithic" interpretation of the function and/or meaning of the tophet in the Punic world. She states that "emphasizing the tophet's function as a singular place devoted to children's sacrifice…is due to a unilateral use and abuse of external evidence from the Old Testament and the Greek or Latin corpus" (378). In fact, the word

"tophet," which I would argue is a lens that has impacted how the epigraphic and archaeological evidence has been viewed, "never appears in the Phoenician and Punic documentation, but that the word *bt* (temple/sanctuary) is found on numerous stelae inscriptions. The use of *bt* indicates to her "that, for the Punic population, the tophet was not a radically different place but a sanctuary like others…a 'divine home' where people could have transactions with the gods" (374).

While no one denies its Phoenician origins, Carthage (as well as each one of the other Punic colonies in the central Mediterranean) was a "mixed city…a heterogeneous community…that shared holy places, festivals, religious symbols and ritual codification…" (Bonnet 276). For the *tophet*, which appeared very early in the founding of the Phoenician colonies, it is "extremely astonishing" that apart from the literary sources, there is a total lack of material evidence for its existence in the Phoenician cities in the Levant (Bonnet, 379). This raises the question as to whether this was indeed of Phoenician origin or an invention of the colonies, when Phoenician religious beliefs and practices intersected with those of the indigenous North African people.

Quinn, in her 2012-13 article, states that the ritual conducted in these sanctuaries probably originated in the Levant, but she makes the interesting suggestion "that the settlers who practiced this particular and unusual form of cult came from a different or indeed dissident religious tradition and left at least in part for that reason." She infers that since the practice of child sacrifice in the Levant (among the Canaanites, Israelites and others), is so well attested in biblical and classical sources, and yet there is no archaeological evidence of any sacred precinct equivalent to the tophets found in the central Mediterranean, that, "it seems likely that the practice only became fully institutionalized and retualised with special sanctuaries in the colonial

world" (33). Aubet seems to be in agreement with Quinn as she states, "Although the antecedents of the *molk* sacrifice are encountered in the east [i.e., the Levant], its definitive form and consolidation as a collective practice are of Carthaginian invention" (255). This is, to me, an intriguing theory which makes sense of the evidence we have and do not have at this time.

As tophets were established in other central Mediterranean locations, the iconography and epigraphy demonstrate both a dependence on Carthage, indicating that migrants from Carthage were settling these new colonies. But there is also an independence demonstrated by the make up and appearance of the stelae indicating the influence of local cultural and inclusion of indigenous peoples (Quinn, 33-38). Quinn concludes her article stating,

> If there was a corporate Western Phoenician or 'Punic' diaspora culture, the tophet sanctuaries weren't part of it. Instead, ritualized child sacrifice was a cultural practice that was shared among a small group of Phoenician-speaking migrant communities in the central Mediterranean, and one that shows us those communities choosing to identify with each other in such a way as publicly to constitute a distinct set of privileged relationships…At the same time the distinctive material cultures of these sanctuaries allowed the different settlements to undermine this mutual identification and underline their difference and distance from each other, distances which increased over time (40).

Several scholars, who argue strongly for the t*ophet* as a place of child sacrifice, present the epigraphic and archaeological evidence as homogenous in nature and thus undeniably proving their premise. Bonnet, and other scholars, however, point out that this evidence is not entirely homogenous. While there is a "standard practice" as indicated by an "overwhelming number of inscriptions," Bonnet argues that an "accurate reassessment of the *tophet* evidence" reveals "a large diversity of situations" (378-79). She does not deny that some form of child sacrifice occurred in these sanctuaries and that the inscriptions were votive in nature rather than funerary. However, she does argue, quite effectively, that a "monolithic" understanding of both the function and meaning of the *tophet* misrepresents the evidence. She suggests that we must reject "the scenario of cruel and primitive rites where children were thrown in the fire, and

parents laughed at this terrible practice," in favour of understanding the *tophet* as "a central place for religious, cultural, and social strategies, which transformed the small children's ashes into a contractual matter between men and gods." And "the *tophet's* gods were not bloodthirsty monsters but…the Carthaginians' benevolent, merciful, and diligent protectors" (383).

Quinn, in an chapter following Bonnet's, notes that whether the children buried in these sanctuaries had been sacrificed or not, these were important centres for the communities in which they were located (389). She describes how the layout of the sanctuary, with maintained service roads, along with obvious signs of redevelopment, reorganization and renovation, all indicate that these sites were not only for the benefit of the individual but were "public works" administered by "religious or civil authorities." Indeed, some of the stelae inscriptions contain the phrase "by decree of the people of Carthage" (390; Aubet, 254). In the remainder of her chapter, Quinn considers the changes in the visual appearance and iconography of the stelae through four separate chronological phases. She states that these changes indicate a cultural identity "under constant construction" that cannot be understood as Phoenician (or Punic) but rather imply "an increasingly strong cultural identity as a community" (399). Greek and Roman sources that labeled the Carthaginians and their practice of child sacrifice in an extremely negative light is a difference that "in the period of the Punic wars it seems that the Carthaginians embraced" (401).

In her discussion of the social and political significance of the tophet, Aubet offers an explanation as to why not every Phoenician-speaking settlement had a tophet. She notes that such a sanctuary appeared in colonies "at the same time as other structures and institutions: temples, fortifications and extensive necropolises. In other words, it only appears when a population increase and those other features peculiar to an urban colony are recorded." She

theorizes, based on this evidence (citing the example of Monte Sirai developing as an urban centre and becoming independent of Sulcis), that the tophet "seems to be identified with the concept of citizenship and bestows a kind of title legitimizing citizens' and community rights. She cites the example of Monte Sirai where the establishment of a tophet occurred no earlier than the fourth century BCE after it had grown into an established and independent urban centre (254). She would agree with Quinn that the tophet's "definitive form and consolidation as a collective practice are of Carthaginian invention" and spread from there to the other Phoencian-speaking centres when they grew sufficiently in size and independence (255).

While there is literary evidence of child sacrifice in the Levant there is no material evidence uncovered, to date, of the existence of anything like the tophets that have been discovered in these central Mediterranean. It does seem that the institutionalized and ritualized practice of child sacrifice was developed in the colony in Carthage and then carried on to other Phoenician-speaking centres once they were sufficiently established. At the very least the abundant evidence in the colonies versus the lack of evidence in the Levant for the existence of a sacred precinct we call a tophet, demonstrates that the practice of child sacrifice in the central Mediterranean was on a whole other scale than that of the Phoenician cities of the Levant. Without material evidence of its existence in the Levant, it seems reasonable to say that the tophet owes its existence more, if not exclusively, to the cultures of these central Mediterranean, Phoencian-speaking colonies rather than to the Phoencian cities of the Levant. The fact that child sacrifice was practiced just outside Jerusalem at a place called תפט according to biblical sources does not mean a sacred precinct like those found in the central Mediterranean existed there, nor in the Phoencia proper. It is unfortunate, because it is, at best confusing, and, at worst,

misleading that the name of this place identified by the author of the book of Jeremiah as *Tophet*, is also used of the sacred precincts found in the Phoenician colonies to the west.

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