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The Gods of the Others: Images of Foreign Deities in the Hellenistic Cult Place of Kharayeb

The study of the terracotta figurines discovered by Maurice Chéhab and Ibrahim Kaoukabani in the cult place of Kharayeb, located in the hinterland of Tyre, and now stored in the Beirut National Museum, is part of the wider *Kharayeb Archaeological Project*, headed by Ida Oggiano of the Istituto di Scienze del Patrimonio Culturale (CNR-Rome).¹ The assemblage includes figurines of some Hellenistic gods, whose iconographies can shed light on the ways of divine re-presentation in this geographical area during the so-called *koine*, and may suggest cults and rituals in the sanctuary, as well as cultural and religious habits. From a technical and artisanal point of view, these objects allow a deeper understanding of the widespread circulation of moulds and artistic patterns along the Mediterranean, which determined the deliberate adoption or the ‘unconscious’ choice of foreign iconographies, also generally well-known thanks to various media, such as statues or seals, for example. The history of exchanges between Greece and the Levant – it is well known – is lengthy and stretches for centuries: consequently, high points of art and culture were directly related to their familiarity, that did not ensure a clear and easy transfer of symbols. Therefore, all the data from Kharayeb, here examined in this broader perspective, offer a more fine-grained analysis of those cultural dynamics, resulting from the longstanding contact between the Phoenician people and the Greeks,² and which peaked with the conquests of Alexander the Great.

1 I am very grateful to Ida Oggiano for the opportunity to study the Hellenistic terracotta figurines as a member of the *Kharayeb Archaeological Project*, and for the fruitful exchange of ideas on the archaeology of the ancient Levant. I am also thankful to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable remarks and comments.

2 On this topic, cfr. Castiglione 2021.

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1 The Cult Place of Kharayeb and the Terracotta Figurines

The sanctuary of Kharayeb, despite its location in the Tyrian rural hinterland, was remarkably well connected and had regular access to the coast, as suggested by the features of the great building and its architectonic elements, the inscriptions, and some technical similarities in the production of figurines, comparable with the nearby coastal centre.

In the earlier excavations, structures and many archaeological finds were discovered in the paved courtyard and in the *favissa*, and then they were published.³ The recent works at the site, headed by Ida Oggiano and Wissam Khalil from the Université Libanaise, provided a visual reconstruction of the archaeological context (Fig. 1) and a chronology for the complex from the 7th to the 1st century BCE, supported by the analysis of the figurines.

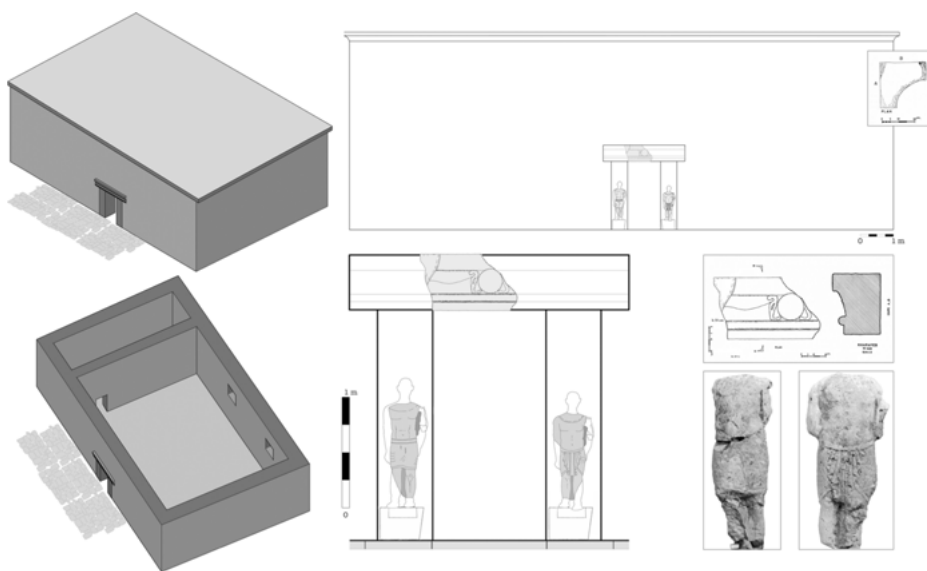


Fig. 1: Reconstruction of the cult place of Kharayeb. Composition by the author after Oggiano 2018, 20–21, figs. 4–6.

The first occupation connected to cult practices can be dated back to the Iron Age II/ Persian Period (with pottery dating back to the 9th–8th century BCE),⁴ while at the beginning of the Hellenistic period (c. late 4th century BCE) a larger and squared

³ Chéhab 1951–1952; Chéhab 1953–1954; Kaoukabani 1973.

⁴ Cfr. Oggiano *et al.* 2016, 198–203 (F. Nuñez Calvo), 206–210 (I. Oggiano); Oggiano 2018, 18; Oggiano 2020, 268.

edifice was built, with a paved courtyard and a *favissa*. The walls, made of blocks extracted from the quarries located upstream of the sanctuary, were probably covered with plaster and a stucco decoration.⁵

The renewed study of the whole coroplastic assemblage considers in detail the manufacture, iconography, and stylistic aspects, useful to determine a likely chronology.⁶ While in the Iron Age II and Persian period (c. 9th-late 4th century BCE), figurines were hand-made or single moulds produced and inspired by both the regional repertoire and an Eastern-Greek style,⁷ in the Hellenistic period (late 4th-1st century BCE) they were realised using double moulds and showed a broader variety of iconographies, inspired by Egyptian, Greek and local patterns. Most of them depict the worshippers involved in different religious and daily activities, and present typologies very popular in Greece, Asia Minor and Alexandria: pairs of lovers, mothers and children, draped men and women, infants and youngsters, musicians, and dancers. On the contrary, figurines of Egyptianizing and Greek gods account for approximately 5 percent of the total fragments. The Hellenistic terracottas were discovered in a secondary position (the *favissa*), as well as in two different layers – the “première” and “deuxième couche” –, in which the exact indication of their original context is not always specified further. Therefore, the precision of the dating provided here, mostly based on technology, iconography, and style, depends on the possibility of comparing the divine figurines found in Kharayeb with similar terracottas from other geographical contexts, having a defined chronology deriving from stratigraphic data, or with some Greek statues offering a *terminus post quem*. Thus, the following analysis not only allows us to better refine the chronological and cultural framework of the coroplastic assemblage, as well as to understand the cults and religious practices in the sanctuary, but it may also suggest, more extensively, economy, social aspects, cultural and artistic trends of Hellenistic Phoenicia.

2 The Hellenistic Gods: Some Methodological Remarks

Mythological dictionaries – fruit of centuries of antiquarianism – have recomposed artificially the biography of each divinity and have reduced their personalities to static labels. But a god is not a person in the narrow sense, even less a personality; rather, a god is a “divine power,” which is a part of a system of multiple deities, and continually reconfigures itself within both cultic contexts and narrative traditions. [. . .] The Greek gods are indeed plural and polyvalent, but they are not interchangeable. [. . .] *Furthermore, it is necessary to consider that the Greeks*

⁵ Cfr. Oggiano *et al.* 2016; Oggiano 2018.

⁶ Cfr. Oggiano 2012; Oggiano 2015a; Oggiano 2015b; Oggiano *et al.* 2016; Castiglione 2019; Roumié *et al.* 2019; Castiglione 2020a; Castiglione 2020b; Oggiano 2020; Castiglione in press; Oggiano/Castiglione in press; Oggiano *et al.* in press.

⁷ Cfr. Oggiano *et al.* 2016, 206–209.

produced various representations of their gods, which have their specific place within a precise context of elaboration and communication.⁸

Considering the quotation from Gabriella Pironti, it is possible to state that Hellenic deities were generally recognisable in a particular context also thanks to their features and attributes, important agents of communication. These peculiarities canalized the viewer's visual perception of the divine in a particular direction, without entirely confining it, explaining the essence, and alluding to the properties of the figure, making it distinguishable. But in the articulated and ductile language of polytheism, often not accessible to us and in which new sentences were always possible, the meaning of some attributes was often polyvalent and not always as precise as an epiclesis.⁹ These issues let us infer that, on the one hand, the images of Hellenistic gods and heroes were easily identified by the contemporary observers, thanks to their contexts and attributes, or because they were fixed figures canonized during previous periods. But, on the other hand, this one-to-one semantic system did not work everywhere and, above all, in every time, also in the original context. For example, in the Archaic period (7th–early 5th century BCE), the Greek divine or heroic figures, which were not clearly understandable in ancient narrative scenes, were usually identified by accompanying inscriptions, as extensively shown, for example, by the richly painted François Vase (570 BCE), or by an almost contemporary Attic black figure *dinos* signed by the painter *Sophilos* (580 BCE) or, previously, by an earlier Naxian amphora (mid-7th century BCE).¹⁰

Other debating points are related to the meaning and understanding of those foreign iconographies in different cult places. While it is obvious that, in the original context, divine or heroic images alluded to specific religious activities, there is, however, no guarantee that they had the same meaning if used in other spaces or times. In fact, the appropriation of imported iconographies and artistic styles in order to represent local deities does not necessarily reflect the adoption of foreign religious ideas and cult practices, also because the sphere of influence of divinities could vary considerably from place to place.¹¹ Therefore, it is questionable how images were understood away from the Egyptian or Greek world, for example, whether they were connected to practices and rituals also in Kharayeb, or if they had an economic and aesthetic value only, derived from the use of moulds and typologies widespread along the Hellenistic Mediterranean.

So, we will discuss our data in a broader and more comprehensive perspective, keeping in mind all the mentioned issues, the role of the intercultural exchanges

⁸ Cfr. Pironti 2010, 113–114, 119 (in the quotation, I added the words in *italics*). On the complexity of the Greek polytheism and on the multiplicity and plurality of gods, which were a source of anxiety to ancient Hellenic worshippers or maybe a concern about their efficiency, as well as a new, cognitive linguistic approach to the topic, see Peels-Matthey 2021.

⁹ Cfr. Mylonopoulos 2010; Pironti 2010.

¹⁰ Carpenter 1991, 35.

¹¹ Cfr. Nitschke 2013, 254–255; Martin 2014a; Martin 2017.

and interactions in acquiring foreign images and artistic styles to represent and visualise divinities and hero-gods and to perceive and worship them,¹² as well as the words of Jessica Nitschke concerning the new or restyled meaning of imported motifs in Phoenicia: “determining cultural provenance of a motif does not in itself explain what meaning it has in the new context, or why certain motifs were chosen while others were rejected. Clearly the Phoenicians were selective, and had good reasons for picking certain motifs while rejecting others”.¹³

3 Images like Statues

Considering the previous remarks about the reinterpretation of iconographies in a cultural setting (Phoenicia) different from that in which they originated (Greece or other Mediterranean areas), it is clear that the meaning of images related to daily life was surely well understandable and easily shareable, because of their common sense. Sometimes, they also had parallels with Greek sculpture, like a figurine found in Myrina echoing the Lysippian *Apoxyomenos*, or some terracottas of a boy playing with a goose found in Kharayeb and Tarsus, inspired by the much-copied group of a naked, chubby baby boy grappling playfully with a goose almost his own size, recalling the famous statue by Boethos.¹⁴ Although we cannot confirm whether those statues were really known along the Mediterranean, their echo in coroplastic production means that they may have shared some Hellenic cultural habits and a significant degree of feelings for the childhood condition.¹⁵

The figurines of deities and hero-gods from Asia Minor (e.g., Smyrna), the Levant and Mesopotamia also referred to famous statues by Lysippos such as the Weary Herakles or the *Epitrapezios*, by Kallimachos like the Aphrodite *Genetrix* (du Fréjus), and by Praxiteles such as the Aphrodite of Arles and the *Knidia*.¹⁶ To explain the acquisition of these foreign images, that were obviously less linked to daily life, it is necessary to consider the spread of technical and artistic issues in the whole Mediterranean, the movement of peoples, patterns and ideas, and also the influence of socio-demographic and religious aspects.

¹² Cfr. Nitschke 2013.

¹³ Nitschke 2015.

¹⁴ For the statue and its sculptor cfr. Plin. *HN* 34.84.

¹⁵ Cfr. Castiglione 2020b.

¹⁶ Cfr. Hasselin Rous 2016.

4 The Hellenistic Gods: Egyptianizing and Greek Iconographies

Many Egyptianizing divinities are documented in Kharayeb: Harpocrates alone or with Isis (at least 173 examples, among which at least 5 Isis *lactans*), Bes (at least 7 examples), “Baubò” (at least 2 examples), *Ptah-Pataikos* (at least 2 examples) and Apis (at least 1 example) (Fig. 2).

These typologies were strictly connected to the Alexandrian productions, as testified by some iconographies and technical aspects, although moulds have not been discovered at the site and the petrographic and PIXE analysis of the fabrics suggests that those objects were locally made or created in Tyre.¹⁷ Although it is reasonable to hypothesise a probable production of the Hellenistic figurines in some great workshops located in that coastal centre,¹⁸ whose scope probably reached Tel Kedesh too,¹⁹ it is however difficult to know if the connection concerning the Egyptian and Alexandrian terracottas or craftspeople with the Levant was direct, or mediated by Delos, where Phoenician and Egyptian communities were settled, and/or by centres of Asia Minor. Furthermore, it is also necessary to consider that the group of Isis *lactans* documented in Kharayeb was different from the original Egyptianizing archetypes, because it was probably inspired by Syrian manufacturing and produced in



Fig. 2: Figurines of Egyptianizing gods from Kharayeb. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. X 4, XXXII 3, XXX 2, and colour photographs by Ida Oggiano.

¹⁷ Roumié *et al.* 2019; Oggiano/Castiglione in press; Oggiano *et al.* in press.

¹⁸ On the topic related to the connection between the sanctuaries and the coroplastic production centres in the Levant, I delivered a paper in the International Scientific Seminar “*Trabajo Sagrado II*”, held in Rome in December 2021, and I am going to publish it.

¹⁹ For the petrographic analysis of a terracotta figurine from Tel Kedesh, indicating a possible origin near Tyre and testifying to the spread of the Tyrian production, see Erlich 2017, 43 and note 13.

local workshops by moving artisans or using imported moulds or the *surmoulage* technique.²⁰

Among the Greek-type gods, generally connected to emotions and elements of daily life, we can mention various deities: Dionysus with or without satyrs, or represented like a child with Silenus (at least 52 examples); Hermes (at least 39 examples); Eros alone (at least 34 examples) and with Psyche (at least 8 examples); Herakles (at least 28 examples); Aphrodite (at least 19 examples); Apollo *kitharodos* (at least 13 examples); a probable Demeter (at least 9 examples); Artemis *Kynegetis* (at least 5 examples) and a single terracotta of Zeus²¹ (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Figurines representing some Greek gods from Kharayeb. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXII, and colour photographs by Ida Oggiano.

The figurines associated with Dionysus, with or without satyrs, his regular companions, sometimes have drinking vessels, or, less often, present the child god with Silenus (Fig. 4).

They account for the most significant proportion of the corpus,²² different from the case of nearby Palestine, for example. To explain his substantial presence, it is necessary to consider that the Dionysiac religion had a special home in Macedonia long before Alexander's eastern campaigns, and that the oriental heritage of the god made him more significant for the Macedonians in the face of their eastern quest. Moreover, representations of *Papposilanoi*, actors and theatrical masks referring to the New Comedy of Menander, also testified in Kharayeb,²³ were frequently found within the context of Dionysiac devotion, probably due to being linked to the festive celebrations of the god of wine. Thus, these figurines could reflect both the

²⁰ For the Egyptianizing figurines from Kharayeb, see Castiglione 2019.

²¹ Cfr. Lancellotti 2003, 356.

²² Chéhab 1951–1952, 29–31; Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XX–XXIV, XXV.1–2.

²³ Cfr. Castiglione 2020a.



Fig. 4: Figurines of Dionysus, with satyrs and Silenus. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XX, XXI 2, XXII, XXIII 2–3, and colour photographs by Ida Oggiano.

impact of the cult of Dionysus and the influence of theatre in the daily lives of people and soldiers posted in the eastern lands.²⁴

Several terracottas represent a standing Hermes wearing the *clamis*, with the *kerykeion*-caduceus and a wide-brimmed hat, known as *petasos*.²⁵ He is also depicted as Hermes *Kriophoros*,²⁶ even if the youngsters carrying a ram cannot be unequivocally and directly identified with the god (Fig. 5).

The popularity of Hermes in the sanctuary and in the *hinterland* of Tyre is certainly due to his particular role as protector and god of thieves, merchants, passengers and shepherds,²⁷ among which we must probably include some of the worshippers in Kharayeb.

In the cult place, the god Eros is also documented, recognisable thanks to the wings, the supernatural features distinguishing him from the mortal children.²⁸ He is generally standing, in a front-facing position or leaning on a probable support, with an almost naked body and a short mantle or a short tunic,²⁹ and at least in one case holding a duck.³⁰ The young god occasionally has a cylindrical wreath on his head and he is sometimes represented frontally, seated on the back of a robust bird, turned to the right.³¹ Eros playing with or riding swans, ducks, or, more rarely,

²⁴ Cfr. Connelly 1990, 212–214.

²⁵ Chéhab 1951–1952, 26; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXV.3–4.

²⁶ Chéhab 1951–1952, 26–27; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXVI; Kaoukabani 1973, 45, pl. V.2–3.

²⁷ Cfr. Başaran/Ergürer 2018, 249–252.

²⁸ Cfr. Langin-Hooper 2020, 189–190.

²⁹ Chéhab 1951–1952, 27–28; Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XV–XVII.

³⁰ Kaoukabani 1973, 45, pl. IV.2.

³¹ Chéhab 1951–1952, 28; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. V.5.



Fig. 5: Figurines of Hermes. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XXV 3–4, XXVI 1–2, and a colour photograph by Ida Oggiano.

peacocks, is an iconography popular in the workshops of Greece, Asia Minor and Southern Italy, from the late Hellenistic period onwards³² (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Figurines of Eros. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. V 5, XV 1–3, and a colour photograph by Ida Oggiano.

In few cases, he is represented with Psyche: the couple is often depicted in a frontal pose and Psyche stands on the right, in a relaxed attitude, hugging Eros with her right arm. He occasionally has a *periskelis* in the shape of a coiled serpent

³² Cfr. Tsimpidou-Avloniti 2017a.

around his left thigh,³³ visible on similar items from Myrina and on some figurines of Aphrodite.³⁴ Another group, similar to terracottas from Maresha and probably dated to the 3rd century BCE,³⁵ represents the god holding a comic mask with his left hand. Sometimes, the upper part of Eros slightly turns towards Psyche and his right hand supports her head as she turns to accept his kiss.³⁶ From the iconographic point of view, the specific type of the two figures hugging each other is very popular and known from a series of copies from a possible late-Hellenistic original sculpture³⁷ (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Figurines of Eros with Psyche. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XIV 1 and 3, XVI 3–4, and a colour photograph by Ida Oggiano.

The hero-god Herakles is represented as a standing nude young male, with the weight resting on the right leg, the right hip raised slightly with the right arm bent on it. The left arm bends slightly at the elbow and leans on the voluminous folds of the heavy *leontè*, one of his distinctive attributes.³⁸ He has already accomplished the first

³³ Chéhab 1951–1952, 28; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XVI.

³⁴ For a figurine of Aphrodite from Mt. Carmel, see Klinger 2017. For a similar coiled snake garter around the left thigh of a figurine of Aphrodite with a *strophion* from Nea Paphos, see Michaelides 2015, 330–331.

³⁵ Erlich/Kloner 2008, 40–41, 161 pl. 21.108–109; in Maresha, the group is interpreted as a couple of lovers.

³⁶ Chéhab 1951–1952, 28–29; Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XIV, XVI.1,3–4, XXXI.

³⁷ For some parallels, see Kasapoğlu 2015, 178–186; Tsimpidou-Avloniti 2017b; Zografou 2017; Langin-Hooper 2020, 204.

³⁸ Chéhab 1951–1952, 25; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXVIII.2.

labour, the bout with the Nemean lion: the animal's large head is marked with deep-set, sagging eyes and a broad snout (Fig. 8a). Some figurines have a baldric slung diagonally from the right shoulder to left hip and crossing the pectorals, that makes the hero look well-armed and more menacing³⁹ (Fig. 8b). This type was found, for example, throughout Mesopotamia, Susiana and on the island of Failaka, in the Kuwait gulf, and it was considered an appropriate patron for the troops maintaining the frontier.⁴⁰ A mature and musclebound Herakles, with a lined forehead, a thick and luxuriant beard and the lion-paws of the lionskin knotted on his chest, is also documented,⁴¹ and it recalls a statue type probably originated in the 4th century BCE⁴² (Fig. 8c). Another figurine seems to represent the third labour of the hero-god, implying his incredible stamina and patience, and consisting in the capture of the Erymanthian boar (Fig. 8d). An adventure also testified in the sanctuary, at least by one figurine, is the wrestling with the giant Antaeus:⁴³ in Libya, before getting to the garden of the Hesperides to steal the golden apples, Herakles used his wits to complete this labour, because his strength did not suffice (Fig. 8e). Then, the hero-god undertook his last labour, obtaining the golden apples, as revealed by the figurines showing a pome in the left hand, that refer to a statue type, probably dated to the middle/third quarter of the 4th century BCE⁴⁴ (Fig. 8f). Finally, after all these feats, Herakles could rest. He is represented as a mature, fully nude man, with wide sagging shoulders, heavily muscled arms, a powerful body and well-defined abdominal musculature. These terracottas have the head inclining downward, the body dynamically positioned in a contrapposto pose, the right arm held behind the back and the club resting in the left armpit to support the weight of the upper body.⁴⁵ All these characters echo the Lysippian Weary Herakles sculpture: in particular, the body of an athletic figure and the unexaggerated muscles naturally rendered, let us infer that these figurines could relate to statues which were closer and more faithful late-Hellenistic, 2nd-1st century BCE copies of the original Lysippian or his Sikyon School Herakles, probably elaborated in Pergamon and the most popular in number and diversity of copies.⁴⁶ Such figurines, widespread in the Near East, testify, on the one hand, how the ancients grasped and exploited a sculpture or a sculptural motif and, on the other hand, the direct influence of the visual traditions of the Hellenistic *koine* in this part of the Mediterranean world⁴⁷ (Fig. 8g).

39 Chéhab 1951–1952, 25; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXVIII.1.

40 Connelly 1990, 210–211.

41 Chéhab 1951–1952, 25; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXVII.3.

42 Cfr. Richter 1954, 73–74 no. 121, pl. 93; Zanker *et al.* 2020, 23, 80–81, no. 24, fig. 50.

43 Chéhab 1951–1952, 33; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XCVIII.1.

44 Cfr. Richter 1954, 74 no. 122, pl. 94; Zanker *et al.* 2020, 23, 82–83, no. 25, fig. 51.

45 Chéhab 1951–1952, 25; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXVII.2.

46 These statues, on which the figurines are based, belong to Vermeule's second group of the Weary Herakles classification (Vermeule 1975, 325–326, 328. Cfr. Mazor/Atrash 2021 for a marble statue of the Weary Herakles recently discovered in Palestine).

47 Cfr. Hasselin Rous/Yalçın 2018; Langin-Hooper 2020, 153–154, 212–213.



Fig. 8: Figurines of Herakles. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XXVII 1–3, XXVIII 1–2, XCVIII 1, and colour photographs by Ida Oggiano.

The high percentage of Herakles' terracottas in Kharayeb, which is on a parallel with Sidon and Maresha, allows us to better define the broader spread of these typologies, especially the Lysippian one, found in Asia Minor (e.g., Pergamon, Tarsus), the Levant and Mesopotamia (e.g., Susa, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Nippur, Uruk), and it also suggests that the moulds widely travelled throughout the Near East.⁴⁸ Together with these technical issues, it is important to consider that the worship of Herakles in the Greek East and Alexander's special devotion along the campaign routes are well attested in the literary sources, which report Alexander's frequent stops to offer sacrifice to his famous 'ancestor'.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the role played by the cult of Herakles in the siege of Tyre must have forged a special relationship between the Macedonian troops and the hero-god.⁵⁰ As Stephanie Langin-Hooper pointed out for the Hellenistic Babylonian figurines, it is probable to argue that the users of figurines in Kharayeb were also interested in experimenting with the bodily forms, the athletic poses, and the styles of the dynamic lion hunters.⁵¹

A single terracotta, interpreted by Maurice Chéhab as a probable Zeus⁵² (Fig. 8h), could also possibly be included in the group of figurines depicting the Lysippian

⁴⁸ Cfr. Connelly 1990, 217.

⁴⁹ Alexander the Great, between 332 and 331 BCE, performed some rites in the precinct of the temple of Herakles/Melqart (Arr., *An.*, 2.24, 3.6.1; D.S., 17.46; Plu., *Alex.*, 29. Cfr. Le Guen 2014).

⁵⁰ Cfr. Connelly 1990, 211–212.

⁵¹ Langin-Hooper 2020, 153–154. Cfr. Le Guen 2014, 350–351.

⁵² Chéhab 1951–1952, 26; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXVII.1.

Herakles *Epitrapezios*, a type widespread in Athens, Delos, Tarentum, on the north of the Black Sea – on the west side of the Kerch-Kimmer Strait (e.g., Tyritake, Myrmekion) –, in Asia Minor (e.g., Priene, Smyrna, western Anatolia, Tarsus, Parion)⁵³ and Egypt. His physical features – a strong face structure, prominent cheekbones, a big nose, thick moustache and a bushy and voluminous beard, partially deformed in two large masses on the chin – are certainly reminiscent of Zeus, Asclepius, Hephaistos and Serapis as well, but the hero-god cannot be excluded. In addition, the laurel wreath crowning the head could also lead to the identification of Herakles *Epitrapezios*, which is also known in Kharayeb through other figurines (Fig. 8i).

Aphrodite is another popular divine iconography in Kharayeb. The goddess is usually represented alone, standing in contrapposto, naked or often half-nude, echoing the pose of the *Knidia*, the famous marble statue by Praxiteles, and sometimes adorned with a round armlet, emphasising her allure and seduction⁵⁴ (Fig. 9a). Some figurines depict the famous *Anadyomene*, based on a painting by Apelles (late 4th century BCE), emerging from the waves and raising her hands to wring two locks of wet hair (Fig. 9b). Similar terracottas, widespread in the Levant and Egypt,⁵⁵ have been found in Tyre, Beirut and Sidon, while a small later bronze statuette (c. 1st-2nd century CE), now displayed in the Beirut National Museum, has been discovered in Baalbek. Other terracottas could be identified as the half-draped *Anadyomene*,⁵⁶ a variant of the naked version dated to the 3rd century BCE and often associated with the representation of mortal women in the guise of the goddess.⁵⁷ The left hand holds the garment at the waist and the right arm is raised to the level of the head, probably to arrange or wring seawater from the hair (Fig. 9c). This hypothetical reconstruction is based on coroplastic parallels with opposite sides, found in Corinth, Ephesus, Tarsus, and Palestine (e.g., Hippios-Sussita), or on identical figurines from Gerasa (early 2nd century CE);⁵⁸ in addition to those examples, there is also a comparable marble statuette from Sidon.⁵⁹ Many other terracottas of Aphrodite have a naked upper torso and covered legs, with the drapery knotted immediately below the pudenda, and with thick folds falling to the feet⁶⁰ (Fig. 9d). Similar forms of drapery with the central knot are widely known, notably in statues of the goddess from Egypt and surrounding

53 Başaran/Ergürer 2018, 252–253; Hasselin Rous/Yalçın 2018.

54 For a figurine of Aphrodite from Mt. Carmel wearing many jewels, see Klinger 2017. For two figurines of Aphrodite from Nea Paphos, completely naked and wearing similar bracelets on both wrists (Armed Aphrodite) or with a pair of large, rounded earrings and a *periskelis* in the shape of a coiled serpent around her left thigh (Aphrodite with a *strophion*), see Michaelides 2015, 330–333.

55 Erlich/Kloner 2008, 11–12.

56 Chéhab 1951–1952, 25; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXVIII.1.

57 Cfr. Walker 2009.

58 Merker 2000, MF 1981–1; Erlich 2009a, 55, 58–59; Krinzingler/Ruggendorfer 2017, 316, TK 18, pl. 362.

59 Walker 2009.

60 Chéhab 1951–1952, 24–25; Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XXVIII.2, XIX.2.

regions under the Ptolemaic control, like Phoenicia, where some examples have been discovered in Sidon, Homs and Salamiyah, now in the Damascus Museum. The arrangement of the knot and the cascading folds, as well as the presence of the left hand holding the knot in place, recall a version of the *Pudica* Aphrodite, called the semi-draped *Pudica*, based on the semi-draped *Anadyomene*.⁶¹ Finally, a figurine of a seated woman, identified by Maurice Chéhab as Aphrodite,⁶² and which is on a parallel with another terracotta published by Ibrahim Kaoukabani as a crouching female washing herself,⁶³ seems not to have fitting comparisons, and it may perhaps be interpreted as a figure connected with the goddess, like the hetaera (or *hierodule*) visible on one side of the Ludovisi Throne, or as a simplification and significant variation of the Crouching Aphrodite, a well-known Hellenistic statue by Doidalsas (c. mid-3rd century BCE)⁶⁴ (Fig. 9e).

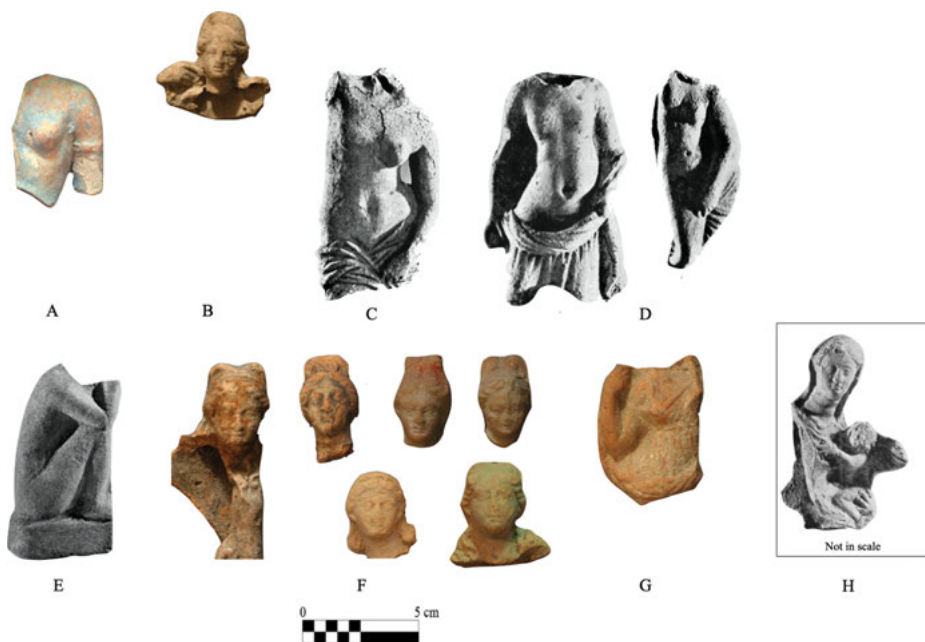


Fig. 9: Figurines of Aphrodite. Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XVIII 1–2, XIX 1–2, XXXIII 2, and colour photographs by Ida Oggiano.

⁶¹ Cfr. Denti 1985, 139–145.

⁶² Chéhab 1951–1952, 25; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XIX.1.

⁶³ Kaoukabani 1973, 45, pl. V.4.

⁶⁴ Cfr. Christofi 2019, 142.

Some fragments of figurines have heads with an elaborate double-bun hairstyle originally derived from the topknot or bow of hair seen on several famous statues of the goddess (Fig. 9f). These features and the attitude probably belong to terracottas imitating the first statue of the naked Aphrodite, sculpted by Praxiteles, and purchased by the city of Knidos, that was a popular creation much copied in various sizes and different media found all over the Mediterranean.⁶⁵ But the nudity of the goddess, expressing her erotic power and influence over sexuality, did not transfer from the divine realm to the world of mortal women: as Aphrodite was shedding her clothes, her mortal worshippers were putting on more layers.⁶⁶ Some hairdos, as well as the gesture of unveiling, known as *anakalypsis*, are referable both to Aphrodite and mortal women, with a significant crossover of iconography between figurines intended to unambiguously depict the goddess, and those with less specified identities (Fig. 9g). This flexibility was common throughout the Hellenistic world,⁶⁷ when the contemporary kings and queens styled themselves as *neos* Dionysus and *nea* Aphrodite, for example, like Arsinoe II of Egypt, who was associated and worshipped as Aphrodite long after her death. Moreover, the connection between the goddess and Arsinoe offers a likely explanation for the popularity of the figure in Egypt and in its Ptolemaic dependencies.⁶⁸ Direct evidence for this interplay between goddess and mortals, shown by hairstyles and gestures, also comes from a figurine of Aphrodite standing and fully clothed, carrying on her left shoulder the son Eros⁶⁹ (Fig. 9h). The presence of the wings certainly suggests this identification, but if they had not been depicted, the female figure could easily have been seen as a mortal *kourotrophos* woman.⁷⁰ If the goddess could dress and pose this way in Hellenistic Asia Minor (e.g., Myrina, Tarsus), Cyprus (e.g., Amathous), Cyrenaica, Egypt,⁷¹ Phoenicia and Mesopotamia (e.g., Uruk),⁷² then virtually any female figurine could be Aphrodite, if the occasion called for it and the users wanted to see it in that way. Therefore, the woman can be identified as Aphrodite, but also as a young bride, since Eros symbolises marriage and future childbearing. To explain the popularity (or not) of Aphrodite along the Mediterranean,⁷³ it is important to remember that the goddess was associated with physical beauty, love, overt sexuality, fertility, marriage, entertainment, and luxury, but also with water, navigation, trade, travel and naval battles, as well as with perpet-

⁶⁵ Cfr. Cyrino 2010, 73–77.

⁶⁶ Cfr. Llewellyn-Jones 2003, 200.

⁶⁷ Cfr. Langin-Hooper 2020, 205–209.

⁶⁸ Walker 2009.

⁶⁹ Chéhab 1951–1952, 32; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXXIII.2.

⁷⁰ Cfr. Tassignon 2019, 102–103.

⁷¹ Tassignon 2019, 102–103.

⁷² Langin-Hooper 2020, 205–209.

⁷³ Cfr. Sharpe 2014, 151; Çakmak 2017, 177–178. At Maresha, for example, Aphrodite is represented by only one figurine (Erlich/Kloner 2008, 11–12, 145 pl. 5.19).

ual rebirth, wealth and health.⁷⁴ Moreover, the Greek goddess was also worshipped with other gods, as a guardian of magistrates, both civic and military, and even as a guide of a whole city, in 3rd-century Athens for example, or on Thasos and Delos during the 3rd-1st century BCE.⁷⁵

Looking at the figurines of Apollo, they show the god in the contrapposto position, with the weight on the left leg, his relaxed right leg slightly forward, standing barefoot on a base, half-naked with a short cloak over the shoulder or wrapped around the right arm. He probably holds a plectrum (*plektron*) in his right hand, while the left supports the *kithara* next to the chest⁷⁶ (Fig. 10a). The terracottas draw their inspiration from the statuary type of Apollo *Kitharodos*, known from Attic vase-painting of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE.⁷⁷ Similar figurines, depicting the god and common boys in the same attitude, have been found in Greece (e.g., Athens, Olynthus, Thessalonica), Asia Minor, Mesopotamia (e.g., Babylon), Alexandria and rarely in Cyprus (e.g., Arsinoe).⁷⁸ Furthermore, the many terracottas from Kharayeb representing children, youngsters and women playing an instrument and dancing could be rightly connected to Apollo and his semantic system, alluding to the musical compositions offered to the god.

The iconography of Demeter was rare in the Levant, where the main topics were passion, fertility, love, and hunting. In our cult place, it is possible to count at least nine examples of a probable Demeter with the torch face downwards (Fig. 10b) and a group of two embracing females interpreted as the goddess with the daughter Kore.⁷⁹ Finally, two other figurines representing a young female holding an unsure piglet⁸⁰ could also relate to Demeter and her rituals (Fig. 10c).

Artemis, represented as *Kynegetis*, is another divine type rarely documented in Kharayeb.⁸¹ Like a huntress, she wears a sleeved, undergirded, knee-length chiton with a deep *kolpos* and possible shoulder straps, not clearly visible, and high leather boots (*ἐνδρπομίδες*). The goddess extends her right hand to the head of an animal, most probably a deer looking up at her (Fig. 10d). Although sanctuaries of Artemis are numerous in Greece and Cyprus, this iconography is uncommon. Terracottas of the goddess comparable to those from the Phoenician cult place have been discovered in Corinth and Cyprus (e.g., Arsinoe, Amathous, Salamis), where this peculiar representation may derive from creations in stone: a limestone statuette of

⁷⁴ Cfr. Klinger 2017, 94–96.

⁷⁵ Cfr. Ustinova 1999, 139–140.

⁷⁶ Chéhab 1951–1952, 37; Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XL.2, XLI.2.

⁷⁷ Cfr. Tzanavari 2017.

⁷⁸ Raptou 2019, 74, 81; Langin-Hooper 2020, 217–219.

⁷⁹ Chéhab 1951–1952, 31–32; Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XII–XIII.1,3.

⁸⁰ Chéhab 1951–1952, 51–52; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. LX.3.

⁸¹ Chéhab 1951–1952, 24; Chéhab 1953–1954, pl. XXIX.



Fig. 10: Figurines of Apollo (a), Demeter ? (b-c) and Artemis (d). Composition by the author, after Chéhab 1953–1954, pls. XIII 1, XXIX, XL 2, XLI 2, LX 3, and colour photographs by Ida Oggiano.

Artemis, depicted in a similar stance, was found in the sanctuary of Apollo at Pyla, dated to the late 4th century BCE.⁸²

5 Concluding Remarks

The Hellenistic figurines from Kharayeb confirm the strong influence of Greek images and culture in the cult place,⁸³ as also suggested by the probable Greek-style masonry plaster and stucco walls of the great building and by some imported pottery (Attic bowls) found at the site.⁸⁴ However, the local Phoenician presence was significant, still alive and kicking. Terracottas of gods and goddesses are among the most *koine*-specific motifs in the assemblage. The more frequent are the Ptolemaic figures as well as Dionysus, Hermes, Eros, Herakles, and then Aphrodite, with a percentage smaller than 10%. In other Phoenician centres, such as Tyre, Sidon, Beirut and Baalbek, similar preferences are confirmed: the most popular iconographies include Alexandrian typologies, especially Harpocrates, and Greek-types like Herakles, Eros and Aphrodite, together with a few examples of Hermes. Aphrodite and Eros were the most documented divine images in Cyprus, whereas in Palestine the Ptolemaic gods were abundant, as well as Eros and Herakles, while Aphrodite was not particularly widespread. This trend was common in the whole Levant, maybe because the goddess was considered too linked to sexuality, as Adi Erlich has stated for the figurines

⁸² Cfr. Sørensen 2009; Raptou 2019, 79. For Corinth, see Merker 2000, MF 1156.

⁸³ Cfr. Castiglione 2020a; Castiglione 2020b.

⁸⁴ For the building, see Oggiano *et al.* 2016; Oggiano 2018. For the imported pottery, see Oggiano *et al.* 2016, 204–205 (C. Nervi).

from Maresha.⁸⁵ An opposite datum comes from the archive of Tell Kadesh, in the Tyrian hinterland, where Aphrodite was one of the most frequent Greek deities to occur, accounting for approximately 4 percent of the total bullae and 9.5 percent of those bearing Hellenic mythological subjects. Lisa Ayla Çakmak, in explaining this percentage, in contrast with the lower ones from the contemporary archives at Seleucia on the Tigris, Uruk, Carthage and Cyrene, and with the total absence at Selinus,⁸⁶ has suggested that at Tell Kadesh some cosmopolitan individuals would have reasonably recognised Aphrodite, but others may have thought of Astarte, while “there were likely others who did not see a ‘who’ but a ‘what’ – a naked or half-naked woman, which, in that time and place, could be considered to be a relatively ‘new’ symbol”, certainly ignoring that the naked imagery of a goddess had been prevalent in the region several centuries earlier.⁸⁷ So, she argued that the rings with Aphrodite could have been selected not for their religious connotations, but just because this iconography was a new symbol from abroad and, as such, reflected an individual’s access to foreign merchandise.⁸⁸ Thus, a similar conclusion could be hypothesised for the figurines from Kharayeb and other Phoenician centres too, where the goddess was very popular.

The hero-god Herakles was widespread in the Levant, because, like Hermes, he was the patron of many activities, including athletic training and trade. His popularity was also linked to the associations with Alexander⁸⁹ and the use of his figurines as votives by members of the Seleucid army. Other divine iconographies could also be related to the rulers of the region: the few terracottas of Apollo can be connected to his role as patron deity of the Seleucid Empire, as well as Aphrodite who was the guardian of civic and military magistrates, and the presence of Dionysus, accompanied by his *thiasos*, was certainly influenced by the Hellenistic rulers, often assimilated to the god, and by the festivals they held. However, images of Dionysus are uncommon in the areas near Kharayeb, and its assemblage finds fitting comparisons, in terms of percentages, with the ancient site of Tarsus. In this Cilician centre, located at the crossroads of routes linking the Aegean coast to the nearby cities of the East and the Levant, Herakles, Dionysus, Aphrodite, and Eros were particularly favoured, while Zeus, Hera, Artemis, and Demeter were rarer.⁹⁰

Furthermore, the coroplastic patterns documented in Kharayeb were inspired by statues by Lysippos, Praxiteles and Boethos, even if the craftspeople who created those figurines deviated somewhat from the sculptures. Such differences show how

⁸⁵ Erlich 2019, 226–228. For an overview of the paucity of the iconographic evidence of Aphrodite in the Hellenistic Levant cfr. Çakmak 2017, 177–178.

⁸⁶ Çakmak 2017, 167–168.

⁸⁷ On the naked goddesses in the Levant see, more recently, Oggiano 2020.

⁸⁸ Çakmak 2017, 182–183.

⁸⁹ Cfr. Nitschke 2013, 265.

⁹⁰ Cfr. Hasselin Rous/Yalçın 2018.

the global influence of the Hellenistic *koine* was not received via passive absorption, but rather selectively engaged with, adapted, and deployed to meet particularly local needs.⁹¹

Another point is about the cult and rituals in Kharayeb as suggested by terracottas, always bearing in mind that, in the nonrigid and static system of polytheism, one of the most significant traits of deities was polyvalence.⁹² So, the different divine figures probably shared spheres of competence, being connected in a complex network linked to human fertility, healing, motherhood, childhood, and puberty. The many female figurines, the *hydrophoroi* and *kourotrophoi*, the youngsters, children and birds seem to confirm this hypothesis, as well as the presence of monkeys, referring to children's life protection,⁹³ and/or baboons, alluding to the liminal condition attributed to the dead foetus.⁹⁴ Images of Egyptianizing and Greek gods contribute to the same semantic system and also infer the existence of rites of passage, marking the transition from childhood to puberty and the consequent incorporation into the ranks of adults, differentiated according to gender. Isis, Demeter and Aphrodite had a *kourotrophos* aspect; Bes was a guardian against bad souls, the patron of births and children;⁹⁵ Ptah-Pataikos was connected to the foetus;⁹⁶ Harpocrates was a symbol of childhood; "Baubô" was a mythical example of a wet nurse and she was important for female sexuality and fertility, as well as Aphrodite and Eros;⁹⁷ Herakles had a prophylaxis value and was connected to the troubles of the newborn children;⁹⁸ Dionysus was linked to the transition from childhood to puberty;⁹⁹ Apollo, the *kouros* god *par excellence*, was the guide for youth during passages of age and was often named with the attribute of *kourotrophos*;¹⁰⁰ Artemis was worshipped as *kourotrophos* and was the protector of the family and children, regardless of gender: she often coincided with *Eilithyia*, patron of pregnancy and childbirth, and was also associated with girls' transitions and to critical phases in the lives of women, such as the passage from childhood to puberty and the preparation for marriage and motherhood;¹⁰¹ Hermes, the patron of children, had an important role in their education;¹⁰² finally, Dionysus with Silenus recalled the education with the pedagogue.¹⁰³ Although the

91 Cfr. Langin-Hooper 2020, 204–205.

92 Cfr. Pironti 2010, 113–114.

93 Cfr. Bellia 2014, 60.

94 Cfr. Dasen 2015, 211.

95 Cfr. Lancellotti 2003, 350, 356.

96 Cfr. Dasen 2015, 147–148.

97 Cfr. Bellia 2014, 58–59; Dasen 2015, 102–103.

98 Cfr. Bonnet 2015, 249.

99 Cfr. Bonnet 2015, 249.

100 Cfr. Nobili 2013, 157.

101 Cfr. Benissi 2019, 211.

102 Cfr. Nobili 2013, 157.

103 Cfr. Dasen 2015, 302; Benissi 2019, 210.

study of the figurines dated to the Iron Age II and the Persian period is in progress, and, at the moment, it is not possible to make a precise comparison between numeric proportions and percentages in the different periods, it is still interesting to note that the semantic horizon and the spheres of competence of the Hellenistic divine iconographies consisting in Egyptian and Greek-types, sometimes merged and adapted to local patterns, are linked to fertility, motherhood and childhood probably in continuity with the previous traditions, testified by some figurines discovered in the cult place and representing Bes, monkeys, pregnant women and women holding their breasts. Furthermore, it seems that the significant presence of infants, children, and youngsters' imagery in the Hellenistic assemblage did not occur in the same proportions among the terracottas of the previous periods in Kharayeb. This specificity could be derived from the particular interest in the many aspects of childhood and adolescence, including the passages of age, which was already known from the Persian period (see the case of Bostan esh-Sheikh for example) but widely increased during the Hellenistic period, in terms of various artisanal representations and works of art that reached much more places and social contexts, being appreciated by many and different kinds of people.

A last issue is whether the emergence of images of foreign gods affected the practice of cult in Kharayeb, and, if so, to what degree.

One possibility is certainly that some of this Egyptian and Greek-type divine imagery was simply selected and used because it portrayed, included or immediately referred to infants, children or youngsters without involving a direct role of the foreign deities in the local religious practices, and without more important religious implications, following the suggestions of some artefacts discovered on Cyprus and in Palestine and surely related to Alexandrian art, for example.¹⁰⁴ In this perspective, the worshippers of Kharayeb adopted those 'international' images for their polysemic values, expressing a syncretism of patterns and forms adapted to local religious needs (e.g., fertility, protection, healing). They become part of their own mentality without changing their behaviours and remaining deeply involved in local traditions and rituality.¹⁰⁵

But it is also necessary to consider that the interchange between Greek and non-Greek religious traditions was the most significant feature of Hellenism. It consisted of points of continuity and areas where new forms of conduct evolved, or in 'active' and 'passive' aspects of religion that resulted from the transformation of the power structure of the vastly expanded Greek world. There were two basic models of interaction: one resulted in the alteration of a local god into a shape of a Greek divinity, usually retaining the original identity in the form of a specific cult title;

104 Cfr. Jacobson 2007; Erlich 2009b; Papantoniou 2009; Papantoniou 2012; Papantoniou 2013; Castiglione 2019.

105 Cfr. Castiglione 2019.

the other consisted in the adaptation of the divinity under its own name into a Hellenic context or form, and in this case the use of Greek as a vehicle for expression did not necessarily mean that the cult was ‘Hellenized’ in the sense that it was transformed by Greek ideas.¹⁰⁶ The iconographic repertoire of the Hellenistic Levant, like images in transition, was indeed characterised by the adoption and adaptation of some Greek traits, with processes of influence and interference. Hellenic features were widespread and appreciated for their connection with dynamic social systems, sharing many aspects of local habits, culture, and emotions, also considering that terracotta figurines were usually made in the Phoenician heartland.¹⁰⁷ As seen in Bostan esh-Sheikh, where the Tribune of Eshmun, commonly identified with Asclepius, presents a relief depicting his father Apollo, in the sanctuary of Kharayeb it is also possible to suppose a fluid reality, a ‘middle ground option’ encouraging the process of glocalization, consisting in the inclusion of local culture and behaviours in a broader Mediterranean framework.¹⁰⁸ In this perspective, images and visualizations of gods inform us of the complex processes of religious syncretism, interaction/intersection and intercultural exchanges, characterising the open and voluntarily cumulative polytheistic system of Hellenistic Phoenicia.¹⁰⁹ But to better understand the full context behind the creation and adoption of foreign iconographies, and to see more clearly the different levels of meaning and translatability that such images had, it is crucial to abandon restrictive dichotomies and opposed categories. Cultures cannot be approached as fixed entities: they have porous boundaries, and they are part of dynamic social systems with changing structures in response to internal and external factors. Therefore, it is important to consider the flexibility of intercultural encounters between the Greek and Near Eastern worlds, retaining that “the Phoenicians could embrace Greek views (both intellectual and artistic) of their god(s) while still maintaining their own traditions”.¹¹⁰ Thus, on the one hand, these foreign images were easily recognisable by a small segment of Greek administrators, immigrants and/or Hellenophiles who would have been familiar with the Hellenic pantheon and its complex and overlapping network of Olympians, demigods, heroes and daemons. On the other hand, it is

106 Cfr. Potter 2005, 408, 424–426.

107 Cfr. Martin 2014b, 289–299; Roumié *et al.* 2019; Oggiano/Castiglione in press; Oggiano *et al.* in press.

108 Cfr. Bonnet 2013; Bonnet 2019: “Middle ground focuses on the spaces and actors of mediation and the creative in-betweens where cultures meet, learn to understand each other, and intertwine their destiny, without ignoring the harshness of power relations that conditioned the processes of cultural adaptation on both sides”.

109 For syncretism as an essence of polytheistic religious systems and as a process of syncretization, i.e. the evolvement of religion in a syncretistic process of inter- or intracultural encounters, see Pakkanen 2011. On the cultic practices as elements of mediation and multicultural arrangements, see Bonnet 2019.

110 Nitschke 2013, 279 (in the quotation, I changed the word “god” in the plural form).

also plausible that these gods were worshipped using a name in the local dialect,¹¹¹ and that their iconographies became part of the indigenous ‘social imaginary’, as testified by the many Orientalizing figurines and statuettes found in Greek contexts, where they were rarely identified by the title from their originating culture but, rather, called by Hellenic divine names.

Following the theoretical concept of materiality, in order to understand and explain foreign images as a particular cultural symbol, it is necessary to detail religious and cultural infrastructures, like the situated knowledge always embedded in a particular time and space. Just like the knowledge, objects were also invested with meanings through the social interaction they were caught up in, and these interpretive senses changed and were renegotiated through their life.¹¹² So, in the cult place of Kharayeb, figurines of foreign gods might have led to the introduction of new practices and/or to the reinterpretation of established ones, which, in turn, generated new ideas¹¹³ and surely gave voice to the many multicultural worshippers, mostly children and youngsters, who were seeking divine help on their path towards maturity.

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¹¹¹ For a comparison with Bactria, see Potter 2005, esp. 419–420.

¹¹² Cfr. Gosden/Marshall 1999; Çakmak 2017, 165–166, 182–183.

¹¹³ Cfr. Stavrianopoulou 2013, 179–180.

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