

Carthage

Practices

Carthage was founded by Canaanite-speaking Phoenician colonists from Tyre in North Africa and became a stable and important republic. As the Carthaginians expanded their influence they broadened their civilization with influences from neighboring North African peoples, Egypt, and the Greek world.

The Carthaginians worshiped a wide range of deities while keeping the gods of their Phoenician heritage.

Belief in a mortal person's life after death is suggested by the food and drink utensils often placed in tombs to accompany the dead, and again, though not very specifically, by the tomb-paintings at Kerkouane's Jebel Mlezza. One depicts a bird like a rooster – perhaps the deceased person's soul.¹

One of the unique features of Carthaginian worship was the 'tophet' (urn burials), the cremation-cemetery for infants. Scientific studies have revealed the ashes and bones of very young children: chiefly infants, stillbirths and some fetuses, in some cases accompanied by bones of animals (mostly young sheep and goats). These urns were dedicated to Tanit and Baal and accompanied by dedicatory stele. While some of the remains might have been from child sacrifices, the current belief is that most of them were buried to honor their young dead.

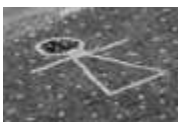
Deities and Important Concepts

- Baal Hammon ("Ruler of a Crowd or Multitude")
Chief god of Carthage. He was a deity of sky and vegetation, depicted as a bearded older man with curling ram's horns.

Baal Iddir, Baal Marqod, Baal Oz, Baal Qarnem, Baal Sapon and Baal Shamim were sometimes seen as aspects of Baal Hammon and sometimes viewed as distinct deities.

- Tanit
Consort of Baal Hammon, a heavenly goddess of war, a virginal (not married) mother goddess and nurse, and, less specifically, a symbol of fertility. She was worshiped alongside Baal Hammon and was given the epithet pene baal ("face of Baal") and the title rabat, the female form of rab (chief).

In later times she was most likely the cities paramount deity. Her symbols include doves, a palm tree, grapes, and a crescent moon.



Tanit's Symbol

- Astarte
Queen of heaven. Chief goddess. She is said to have helped in the resurrection of Melqart. She also had an aggressive warrior aspect.
- Melqart
Chief male deity at Tyre, associated with death and rebirth he was also worshiped at Carthage. Melqart, was said to have been resurrected after his cremation. Dynastic deity of Tyre. His divine characteristics also encompassed agriculture, maritime, civic and the underworld.

¹ Hoyos, Dexter. "The Carthaginians." *The Carthaginians*. p. 100, n.d. Web. 6 Nov. 2013. <http://historiantigua.cl/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The-Carthaginians-Peoples-of-the-Ancient-World.pdf>

- Eshmun
Healing god and protector of Sidon. His ancient temple was an important place of pilgrimage.

Eshmun started as a young man from Beirut that was hunting in the woods when Astarte saw him and was stricken by his beauty. She harassed him with her amorous pursuit until he emasculated himself with an axe and died. The grieving goddess revived Eshmun and transported him to the heavens where she made him into a celestial god.
- Hawot
Goddess of the dead.
- Demeter and her daughter Kore
Demeter was the goddess of the earth who's grief causes winter when Kore must spend her time in the underworld.

Modern Adaptations

- The use of the Carthage pantheon seems especially appropriate when a young child dies, is still born or is aborted.

Have the remains of the child cremate and placed in an urn. Say something like the following.

"To you strong Hammon Baal and lovely Tanit I give this child whose potential must remained un-actualized.
May their spirit fly to you to and be given sanctuary.
May their soul's journey be guided by you
as a benevolent ruler guides their people,
towards happiness."

- Mark the grave of the deceased with the symbol of Tanit and other markings found on the stele that commonly accompanied Carthaginian tombs. You can temporarily mark the resting place using a stone with the symbol painted on it.
- Bury eating utensils and cups with the idea that the soul will be nourished in afterlife by the memories of those left behind.

Sample Readings

While many steles have been found with pictures on them, I was unable to find any funerary text. The most common symbols represented Baal and Tanit.

Resources

- The Carthaginians by Dexter Hoyos
<http://historiantigua.cl/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The-Carthaginians-Peoples-of-the-Ancient-World.pdf>
- Carthage DID NOT sacrifice infants – a Pittsburgh study reveals
<http://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?333600-Carthage-DID-NOT-sacrifice-infants-a-Pittsburgh-study-reveals>