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# The Port of Astronoe in Tyre

JULIEN ALIQUOT

*The present study focuses on the port of Astronoe in Tyre. This harbour is mentioned in a series of Greek inscriptions from the Byzantine necropolis of the ancient Phoenician city. The review of all available sources leads to the conclusion that it was one of the two main ports of Tyre and that it corresponded to the harbour that Strabo called the ‘closed port’ and to the northern port of the island, the present-day Old Port. In Roman times Astronoe’s harbour was under the protection of a local goddess, whose myth was common to several Phoenician cities, including Berytus, the great rival of Tyre, and whose cult was celebrated in Tyre either in the sanctuary of Heracles, or in a specific sanctuary located inside the city. Mother of the gods and lover of one of the Dioscuri, protectors of sailors, Astronoe was the object of special attention from civic authorities and from Tyrian dignitaries, which explains why her name remained associated with one of the two main ports of Tyre in the early Byzantine period, in the formal toponymy as in the popular language of murex fishermen.*

**Keywords:** Phoenicia, Tyre, Astronoe’s harbour, Egyptian port, Greek epigraphy, Damascius.

## Astronoe’s Harbour and Other Tyrian Port Facilities

In his *Geography*, completed during the reign of Tiberius (14–37 AD), Strabo briefly described the island of Tyre and its harbours (XVI, 2, 23):

Tyre is a whole island, almost organised in the same way as Aradus, and it is connected to the mainland by a jetty that Alexander built during the siege. It has two ports, one closed, the other open, called the ‘Egyptian’.

There is little more to say about the Egyptian port, except that it was open towards Egypt, south of the city, and therefore that it was exposed to the swell and strong winds from the south-west. Between 1934 and 1936, by combining aerial and underwater research, Father Antoine Poidebard thought he recognised two breakwaters south of the peninsula

(Poidebard 1939). Surveys by Honor Frost, in the 1960s, and more recently by a Lebanese team, made it possible to identify these remains with the ruins of a submerged quarter of the ancient town (Frost 1971; 2005; Marriner 2009: 98–113; Nordiguian and Antaki-Masson 2017: 177, 178). The Egyptian port thus remains to be discovered.

The other port of Tyre, which Strabo distinguished from the Egyptian port, is better known. It was the northern port of the city, which is today reduced to the modest Old Port of the peninsula (**fig. 1**), but whose basin was much more extensive in antiquity (Marriner 2009: 79–98; Nordiguian and Antaki-Masson 2017: 176, 177). Its closed and protected aspect matches the situation of the intramural port that the *Periplus* of Pseudo-Skylax (104) mentioned in the Persian period (‘another city, Tyre, having a port within its walls’), without this identification being certain.



Fig. 1- The Old Port of modern Tyre (photo Julien Aliquot 2016).

The pair that the northern and the Egyptian harbours already formed under the reign of Alexander the Great shows up again in the Greek and Latin accounts of the siege of the city by the Macedonian conqueror (332 BC). Whereas the Latin historian Quintus Curtius only vaguely referred to the *portus* of Tyre (IV, 4, 9 and 12), Diodorus of Sicily sometimes mentioned one port (XVII, 42, 2; 43, 3), sometimes an indeterminate number of ports in Tyre (XVII, 42, 4). Arrian of Nicomedia (second century AD), depending on another tradition, was much more specific in his *Anabasis*. He made a clear distinction between a first port open to Egypt (II, 24, 1) and a second harbour turned towards Sidon (II, 20, 9; 20, 10; 21, 8; 24, 1). However, at no time did he suggest that the phrase he used to describe the port turned towards Sidon corresponded to an official name. Similarly, when Arrian dealt with the rampart located 'on the side of the city which looks at Sidon' (II, 22, 6), and again in the passage where Alexander was transported 'on the side of the rampart exposed to the south wind and facing Egypt' (II, 22, 7), no one has ever thought (and rightly so) that it would be relevant to speak of a 'Sidonian' or an 'Egyptian rampart'. This point must be strongly stressed, because all the archaeological literature refers to the northern port of Tyre as the 'Sidonian port', quite abusively in my view.

The issue of the northern harbour identification deserves to be asked again in the light of the epigraphic data from the Byzantine necropolis

of Tyre. This set of Greek inscriptions was to a large extent published by Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais in 1977. It includes two series of epitaphs which complement the literary sources referring to the two main ports of the city. Some of them relate to fishermen from the 'port of the Egyptians', λιμὴν Ἐγυπτίων (nos 77, 103), others to fishermen from the 'port of Astronoe', λιμὴν Ἀστρονόης (nos 8, 8bis, 24, 25, 68, 182, 182bis).

Henri Seyrig was the first scholar to reveal the existence of Astronoe's harbour, by translating the epitaph of Kalokairos, grandson of Monimos and 'murex fisherman of the port of Astronoe' (Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 8), in his study of the Tyrian pantheon published in 1963. The inscriptions dealing with the Egyptian port were still unknown at the time. It is for that reason that the location of the port of Astronoe could appear as a problem. On the one hand, Seyrig wrote (1963: 21):

Au v<sup>e</sup> ou au vi<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère, quand ce petit texte fut gravé, le culte de la déesse [Astronoe] était sans doute bien éteint. Mais on apprend maintenant que dans la bouche du peuple un des deux ports de Tyr gardait ce nom païen. Une aussi forte tradition locale décèle un culte local très bien établi.

On the other hand, he remained undecided (1963: 22 n. 21):

À première vue, le port 'd'Astronoë' paraît devoir être distinct du 'port égyptien', mais en dépit des études citées plus haut, ces questions gardent plusieurs obscurités, et l'on hésite à proposer une identification précise.

In his *Inscriptions de la nécropole*, Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (1977: 133, 134; cf. 1994: 1340, 1341, 1348) has taken the same position, while alleging that Strabo's closed port was called the 'Sidonian port':

Le port d'Astronoé était-il l'autre mentionné par Strabon, le port Sidonien, qui était un port fermé, à l'intérieur des remparts? Le port des pêcheurs de murex, des κογκυλεῖς, pouvait aussi bien être une petite crique distincte des deux grands ports. [...] Tyr pouvait avoir, en plus de ses deux ports internationaux, dont parlent les textes littéraires et dont subsistent sous la mer les vestiges archéologiques, un port suffisant pour abriter quelques barques, une simple plage où elles pouvaient être tirées au sec.

The fact is that such outer anchorages have been used in Tyre at all times. In the second century AD, the Greek writer Achilles Tatius alluded to one of them in his novel, *Leucippe and Clitophon* (II, 17, 3): ‘There is a small anchorage belonging to the Tyrians on an islet near Tyre (the Tyrians call it the Tomb of Rhodope).’ Geo-archaeological research indeed reported anchorages of this type in the formerly emerged parts of the sandstone ridge stretching north and south of the city, while also suspecting the presence of natural havens on the mainland shore, in front of the island (Marriner 2009: 113–118). However, none of these anchorages would deserve the name λιμήν. This Greek term refers both to an element of the landscape and to a functional facility, consisting of a more or less open harbour, protected from the sea swell and prevailing winds, and equipped with places allowing ship moorage (on harbour terminology: Rougé 1966: 107–119; Baladié 1980: 235–242; Arnaud 2016: 140, 141). It also has an economic and political connotation, since a site referred to as a λιμήν could be under the authority of civic magistrates called limenarchs, such as those who supervised the activities of the port of purple entrepreneurs in the city of Aradus under the Severi (Rey-Coquais 1970, no. 4016bis). It is therefore very likely that the port of Astronoe was one of the two main ports of Tyre, and not one of the small satellite anchorages dependent on the city. It should be added that Seyrig’s quite understandable caution is no longer appropriate since the two series of epitaphs relating to the fishermen from the port of the Egyptians and from the port of Astronoe have been published. The epigraphic evidence, by showing the persistent use of two specific names in the early Byzantine period, allows us to state that the port of Astronoe, the closed harbour mentioned by Strabo and the northern port of Tyre are none but the same.

### Economic Life in the Port of Astronoe

The Greek epitaphs from the Tyrian necropolis indirectly provide an overview of economic life in the two ports of the city in Late Antiquity, including activities

related to murex fishing and the purple industry, the great speciality in Phoenicia and particularly in Tyre. Here is a list of the relevant inscriptions:

- Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 8, without picture = Chéhab 1985: 733: Τόπος Καλοκαίρου, | ἔγγονος Μονίμου(υ), κογκυλέως λιμέ|νοϋς Ἀστρονόης. Translation: ‘Burial place of Kalokairos, grandson of Monimos, murex fisherman of the port of Astronoe.’
- Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 8bis, photo, pl. 23.4 = Chéhab 1985, photo, pl. 150b: Τόπος Καλοκαίρου, | ἔγγονος Μονίμου, κογκυλέως λιμέ|νος Ἀστρονόης. Translation: ‘Burial place of Kalokairos, grandson of Monimos, murex fisherman of the port of Astronoe.’
- Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 24b, photo, pl. 37.1: Μαρέας, ἀδελφός, καὶ Φωτίνη, ἀδελφ[ή], | κογκυλέων λιμέ(νοϋς) Ἀστρονόης. Translation: ‘Mareas, brother, and Photine, sister, murex fishermen of the port of Astronoe.’
- Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 25, without picture: [κον]-χ[υ]λέ[ων λιμ]ένος(?) | [Ἀστρο]νό[ης]. Translation: ‘... murex fishermen(?) of the port of Astronoe.’
- Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 68, without picture = Chéhab 1984: 139 (**fig. 2**): † Τόπος Πιστῶν Μαρκέλλου καὶ Κωπαδίνης, κογκυλέων λιμέ(νοϋς) Ἀστρονόης. † Translation: ‘Burial place of the worshippers Markellos and Kopadine, murex fishermen of the port of Astronoe.’
- Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 77a, photo, pl. 24.1 = Chéhab 1984: 227, photo, pl. 43b: † Κυριλλᾶ, ἀλιώης † | λιμήνος Ἐγυπτίων. Translation: ‘(Tomb) of Kyrillas, fisherman of the Egyptians’ port.’



Fig. 2- The Byzantine necropolis in Tyre: sarcophagus lid of Markellos and Kopadine, murex fishermen of the port of Astronoe (photo Julien Aliquot 2012).



• Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 77b, without picture = Chéhab 1984: 227, 228: Κύριλε, κονχυλ|λευτοῦ λυμήνος | Ἐγυπτίο|ν. Translation: ‘Kyrrillos, murex fisherman of the Egyptians’ port.’

• Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 103, photos, pl. 30.1 and 50.7 = Chéhab 1984: 403, photo, pl. 56a (**fig. 3**): † Σόρια γ΄ Φωτίου Κούφου, οἶνοπράτου, κοχχυλευτοῦ | λιμένος Ἐγυπτίων. † Line 1: κοχχυλευτοῦ (ed. pr., Chéhab).

Translation: ‘Three sarcophagi belonging to Photios son of Kouphos (or: Photios Kouphos), bar owner, murex fisherman of the Egyptians’ port.’ As Jeanne and Louis Robert (1978: 497, no. 522) have pointed out, the owner of the three sarcophagi did not combine the activity of murex fisherman with that of a wine merchant, but with that of a bar owner.

• Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 182, photo, pl. 31.2 = Chéhab 1985: 666, photo, pl. 135c: Ἡρακλίτου, κον(χυλέωζ?) | λυμένος Ἀστρονόης. Translation: ‘(Tomb) of Herakleitos, murex fisherman of the port of Astronoe.’ According to the first editor (101): ‘Pour compléter le mot abrégé à la ligne 1, il n’y a pas d’hésitation possible.’ In fact, κον(χυλευτοῦ) cannot be excluded (see below).

• Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 182bis, photo, pl. 53.2 = Chéhab 1985: 676: Ἡρακλίτου, | κον(χυλέωζ?) | λυμένος Ἀστρονόης. Translation: ‘(Tomb) of Herakleitos, murex fisherman of the port of Astronoe.’ Line 2: once again, κον(χυλευτοῦ) cannot be discarded (see below).

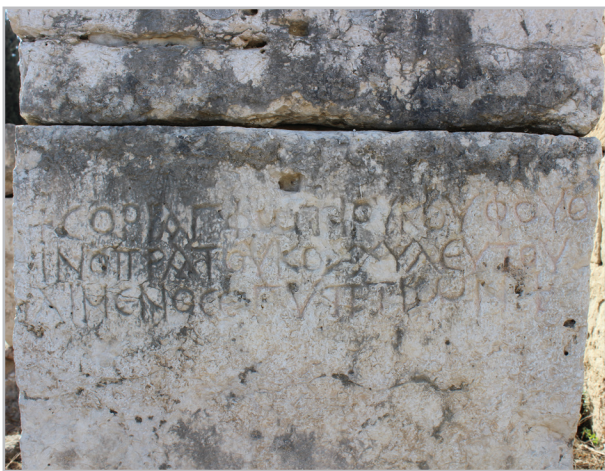


Fig. 3- The Byzantine necropolis in Tyre: sarcophagus box of a bar owner and murex fisherman of the Egyptians’ port (photo Julien Aliquot 2016).

In 1977, Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais put forward the hypothesis of an organisation of the murex fishermen in two corporations, each of which supposedly linked to a single port. According to him, the Greek term κοχχυλεύς would be specific to the murex fishermen from the port of Astronoe, while the synonym κοχχυλευτής would refer to the murex fishermen from the Egyptian port. However, the available sample (three certain examples in the first case, only two in the second) seems too small to provide definite evidence. When the name of the occupation is abbreviated (Rey-Coquais 1977, nos 182, 182bis), doubt remains between one term or the other.

Moreover, it is unlikely (here again despite Rey-Coquais 1977: 160; cf. 2002: 253), that the two terms designating the Tyrian murex fishermen referred to different statutes. It is true that only κοχχυλευτής was used as an equivalent of the Latin *murilegulus* or *conchyliolegulus* in legal literature (as illustrated by many examples from the *Theodosian Code* and the *Justinian Code*) to designate shell fishermen attached to imperial weaving and dyeing workshops. It is also true that the presence of these workshops in Tyre is proved by literary and epigraphic evidence. As regards the first type of sources, Eusebius of Caesarea (*Ecclesiastical History* VII, 32, 3) wrote about the eunuch Dorotheos, priest at Antioch under the episcopate of Cyril, between AD 272 and 303, after being appointed by the emperor to the position of a procurator of the purple workshop in Tyre, while the anonymous Pilgrim of Placentia (2) mentioned Tyrian public workshops where silk and other textiles were produced. On the other hand, the sarcophagus of Theoktistos, purple washer of the imperial dyeing house, has been found in the Byzantine necropolis of the city (Rey-Coquais 1977, no. 28). It may also be relevant to take into account a seal found in Tyre and bearing a mark that Jean-Claude Cheynet (2017: 108, no. 9) hypothetically interpreted as β(ασιλική) φ(αβρίξ), ‘imperial workshop’, where others had suggested reading β(αφεῖον) φ(οινίκης) (Delmaire 1989: 463 n. 41 = SEG 39.1595; cf. *Theodosian Code* X, 20, 18, for *bafia Foenices* in AD 436).

Whatever the value of this evidence, it should also be remembered that, by the end of the fourth century AD and onwards, the establishment of imperial monopoly

on purple made the murex fishing industry an official service in the empire and that all murex fishermen, who were now integrated among the workers attached to the *fiscus*, formed a group that was hereditarily linked to the administration of the imperial treasury (Delmaire 1989: 455–464). Therefore, there is no reason to assume that the difference between *κογχυλεύς* and *κογχυλευτής* implies any statutory distinction. It seems more relevant to see the competing use of both words as a social and linguistic phenomenon. The term *κογχυλεύς* is absent from the literary and legal tradition. It appears only in the Greek inscriptions from the Byzantine East, at Tyre in Phoenicia and at Corycus in Cilicia (Keil and Wilhelm 1931, nos 309, 601bis, 655, beside the compound *ἀσπαραγυλιοκογχυλεύς* under no. 681; cf. Drexhage 1998: 98). We can probably consider it as a popular synonym of *κογχυλευτής*.

## A Goddess for a Port

Although the sources which mention Astronoe's harbour are late, the very name of the port is much older. It refers to a Phoenician myth that was reported by Damascius, the famous Neoplatonic philosopher originating from Damascus, in his *Life of Isidoros* (or *Philosophical History*). This valuable account is based on stories collected in Syria and Phoenicia by the end of the fifth century AD (see Tardieu 1990; Aliquot 2010a; 2010b; 2013). It is known to us through the work of the ninth century AD Byzantine Patriarch of Constantinople Photius (*Library*, codex 242, 302, edited by Henry 1971: 55 = Zintzen 1967: 283, lines 1–13, fragment 348; cf. Athanassiadi 1999: 314, 315, fragment 142b, who incorporates in the same passage an extract from Photius' paragraph 212, here in square brackets):

In Berytus, he (Damascius) says, Asclepius is neither a Greek nor an Egyptian, but a Phoenician from the country. To Sadykos, in fact, were born sons whom they (the Phoenicians) interpret as the Dioscuri and Cabiri. The eighth after them was Esmounos, whom they identify with Asclepius. Since he was the most beautiful and admirable young man to be seen, he was loved, as the myth says, by the Phoenician goddess Astronoe, mother of the gods. While he was hunting in these valleys

as usual, when he saw that the goddess was tracking him and that she was going to hunt him in his flight and to seize him, [getting mad] he cut off his genitals with an axe. As for her, afflicted by this drama, after summoning Paean and reviving the young man by her generating heat, she made him a god whom the Phoenicians call Esmounos because of his vital heat. Others say it is better to interpret 'Esmounos' as 'eighth' because he was the eighth son of Sadykos.

Some clues (e.g. the demonstrative in the phrase 'in these valleys') show that Damascius reproduced a Greek tale he was told in Berytus. However, the story goes beyond the local legends of this city. Asclepius, alias Esmounos, is introduced as an authentic Phoenician, brother of the Dioscuri or Cabiri, the sons of Sadykos, and her lover Astronoe is a Phoenician goddess. Moreover, similarities have long been noticed between Damascius' *Life of Isidoros*, the Greek myth of Cybele and Attis and the *Phoenician History* by Philo of Byblus, according to which Sydyk the Just (also known as Sydek and Sydykos) and an anonymous Titanid gave birth to Asclepius and his seven brothers, the Dioscuri, Cabiri, Corybantes or Samothracians, who were identified with the inventors of navigation, the first transcribers of Phoenician myths and fathers of the first authors of remedies against animal bites and incantations (Philo of Byblus, *Phoenician History*, fragment 2 = Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio evangelica* I, 10, 13, 14 and 38). All this has already given rise to numerous comments. Without going into the details of discussions where mythological scaffolds sometimes reach heights of sophistication, we will try to evaluate the success that the various characters of the story have met among the Tyrians, to better understand the role assigned to the guardian goddess of the port of Astronoe within the pantheon of the city.

At the outset, it is worth saying that none of the male protagonists of the myth can be counted among the great gods of Tyre in Roman times. Sadykos left no trace at all, neither in Tyre, nor anywhere else. The Phoenician god Eshmun, under the name of Esmounos or Asclepius, is equally absent in the city, even though the Tyrians could not ignore his cult, which was especially thriving in Sidon, and even though one of them offered him a dedication

in the Asclepieion of Delos in the second century BC (Yon 2011: 50, no. 69; see also 38 n. 20; 44, no. 36, and 57, nos 90, 91, for Tyrians with Phoenician and Greek theophoric names alluding to Eshmun and Asclepius, in the Hellenistic period). A little less evanescent, the Dioscuri were honoured in Tyre as saviour gods in the Hellenistic period, according to a Greek dedication made by a benefactor called Demetrios (Rey-Coquais 2006: 18, 19, no. 3). This inscription corroborates Philo of Byblus' account by showing that the Phoenicians from Tyre, just like the Greeks, considered them as protectors of sailors and navigation.

Alongside these minor characters of the Tyrian pantheon, Astronoe stands out as a more remarkable goddess. Her name has been (rightly or wrongly) linked to that of Astarte and to a Phoenician-Punic theonym recorded in Rhodes and Carthage, *'štrny* (so Février 1968; Lipiński 1995: 137; *contra*, Seyrig 1963: 22, 23; Teixidor 1969: 321; Xella 2001: 69). Henri Seyrig (1963) also regarded it as a late variant of the name of Asteria, consort of Zeus and mother of Heracles, which appears in a Phoenician myth that was already known to Eudoxus of Cnidus in the first half of the fourth century BC (Athenaeus, IX, 47; cf. Zenobius, V, 56, who emphasises the Tyrian origin of Heracles in this case). Whether it is true or not, Astronoe's name is definitely Greek. We can analyse it as a compound of ἀστρο-, 'star', and νόος, 'intelligence', 'spirit'. The combination of these two terms opens a window on a world of astrological doctrines that was most likely to awaken curiosity for a philosopher such as Damascius.

## The Cult of Astronoe in Tyre

A Greek inscription preserved in the Louvre Museum (Ma 5437 = AO 4631) shows that it was under this suggestive name that Astronoe was locally worshipped in Roman times. Although incomplete, the text is highly informative on a theme which is little represented in the epigraphy of Tyre, that of civic life and institutions under the early Empire (on this topic, see Aliquot 2011: 80, 81, 88–91, no. 6, for the Puteoli file; Rey-Coquais 2009). It was published only very roughly by René Dussaud in 1911, without any picture (Dussaud 1911, with some suggestions

by André De Ridder; see also the short comments by Roussel 1913: 485; Dussaud 1946–1948: 225, 226; Dain 1933: 123, 172). The work currently carried out by the team of the *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie (IGLS)* to collect the Greek and Latin inscriptions from the Near East in the Louvre opens up new prospects. Here we will merely summarise the most reliable results of an ongoing research.

The block which bears the text was purchased for the Louvre in November 1908 by Father Sébastien Ronzevalle, from the Faculté Orientale in Beirut, with funds from the French Ministry of Education. It is a white marble slab, broken at the top and left, with a flat band at the bottom and a pilaster on the right. The inscription is complete only in the lower right corner. A squeeze, probably made by Ronzevalle himself, is now at the Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée (Lyon) in the archives of the IGLS programme. An autopsy of the inscribed stone was also performed by our team in the storerooms of the Louvre in 2018.

The difficulties in reading the text are great, due to the size of the gap on the left, at least one third of the inscription. Syntax is also not clear everywhere, but the inscription obviously summarises an honorary decree of Tyre for a citizen, Cassius Kersillechos, whose full name had not been restored so far. This man was mentioned twice here as well as in another fragment, which is also stored in the Louvre (Ma 4157) and which is linked to the same dossier, if not to the same inscription, a fact hitherto unrecognised (Dain 1933: 171, 172, no. 198; cf. Robert 1933: 145, photo, fig. 1.3).

As far as we can tell, the beginning of the text traces back Cassius Kersillechos' benefactions and municipal career. The honorand was a Roman citizen who had an extremely rare Phoenician *cognomen* (Benz 1972: 416, 417, for other Phoenician names with the element *šlk*; for a parallel in Gerasa, Welles 1938, nos 43 and 182). His *gentilicium* is remarkable too. Apart from him, only one other Cassius is known in Tyre, Cassius Maximus, i.e. Maximus of Tyre, a famous Platonic philosopher as well as a talented orator under Commodus (Aliquot 2011: 79). Cassius Kersillechos was no doubt praised for having adorned his homeland. As a proedros (i.e. 'chairman') of the council and the people, he had been the main magistrate of the city.



He was also a priest of various civic divinities and *stephanephoros* (i.e. ‘crown-wearer’ official) for life of a god who could be Heracles, alias Milqart, the holy patron of Tyre. The following part of the inscription revolves around the issue of erecting statues in his effigy in one or several sanctuaries dedicated to Heracles, Astronoe and perhaps other deities. The last lines of the text emphasise that such decisions were not only intended to pay Kersillechos a tribute that was proportionate to his benefactions, but also to honour the gods of Tyre through their servant. The city was represented by its eponymous magistrates, the *proedros* of the council and the secretary of the people, who had to supervise the procedure, associating a decree of the council with the vote by a show of hands of the citizens. According to the shape of the letters and to the presence of adscribed iotas, the decree dates from the first or second century AD.

René Dussaud was rather imprecise about the find spot of the inscribed slab: Tyre. Today it is possible to be a little bit more specific according to the letter that Nicolas Karam, priest in Yarun and true discoverer of the text, addressed to Father Sébastien Ronzevalle on the fifth of March 1908. The provenance of the inscription was identical to that of a Latin dedication preserved in the National Museum in Beirut (Yon and Aliquot 2016: 152, no. 307): ‘provient de l’ancien Sérail, ouest de l’ancienne basilique.’ Although both inscribed stones were eventually reused in the buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries formerly known as the *Sérail*, to the west of the Frankish cathedral, it is unlikely that they came from very far. It can thus be assumed that they were initially displayed on the Tyrian Peninsula, in the heart of the ancient city and close to its port facilities.

## Conclusion

If we take up all the data collected so far, it appears that the port of Astronoe, which is known from the inscriptions of the necropolis of Tyre, corresponded to the harbour that Strabo called the ‘closed port’ and to the northern port of the island, the present-day Old Port. In Roman times this harbour was under the protection of a local goddess, whose myth was common to several Phoenician cities, including

Berytus, the great rival of Tyre, and whose cult was celebrated publicly in Tyre, either in the sanctuary of Heracles, or in a specific sanctuary located inside the city.

Mother of the gods and lover of one of the Dioscuri, protectors of sailors, Astronoe was the object of special attention from civic authorities and from Tyrian dignitaries, which explains why her name remained associated with one of the two main ports of Tyre in the early Byzantine period, in the formal toponymy as in the popular language of murex fishermen. The persistence of this appellation in no way implies that her cult continued to be celebrated in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. On the other hand, it raises the question of the evolution of religious traditions linked to the northern port, where a small Christian oratory (**fig. 4**) was replaced in 2016 by a huge statue of the Virgin (**fig. 5**), dedicated on the eve of the Assumption during a ceremony organized by the fishermen’s union (on the cult of the Virgin Mary in Tyre in modern times, and particularly among fishermen, see Goudard and Jalabert 1955: 23, 24).



Fig. 4- Christian oratory in the Old Port of modern Tyre, 2015 (source: <http://voyageaulevant.tumblr.com>).





Fig. 5- The Blessed Virgin Mary, patron saint of the Old Port of modern Tyre (photo Julien Aliquot 2016).

We will not hide the provisional nature of the proposals made in this study. New discoveries will perhaps clarify, complete or even contradict these suggestions in the future. The investigation outlined here was intended above all as a contribution to the work in progress on the ports of Tyre. Far from closing the case, it should be continued by taking into account both written and archaeological sources.

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