

A database for the *aegyptiaca* from the Iberian southwest: colonial encounters and the ‘Mediterranization’ of the Atlantic Iberian societies (8th to 5th centuries BC)

Um banco de dados digital para os *aegyptiaca* do sudoeste ibérico: encontros coloniais e “mediterraneização” das sociedades ibéricas da costa atlântica (sécs. VIII a V a.C.)

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PEREIRA, R. G. G. A database for the *aegyptiaca* from the Iberian SW: colonial encounters and the ‘Mediterranization’ of the Atlantic Iberian societies (8th to 5th centuries BC). *R. Museu Arq. Etn.*, 33: 28-35, 2019.

Abstract: This is a preliminary study on the presence of *aegyptiaca* on the Western coast of the Iberian Peninsula. This article deals with the Egyptian and Egyptianizing material brought to the Iberian territory by the Phoenician expansion between the 8th and 5th centuries BC. As this material is still little studied, proposing the construction of a corpus for the region of the Iberian southwest will be a valuable tool for understanding the phenomenon of relations between natives and foreigners. Thus, this material culture will be the basis for a study of the Phoenician presence in what was once a geopolitical unit: the Iberian southwest. Commercial relations, technology transfer and the subsequent transition from Late Bronze to Early Iron ages between native societies are topics of interest in this corpus development. The presence of luxury goods in native and mixed necropolises demonstrates the gradual process of adopting Mediterranean elements in the funerary rites and in the daily relationships of these native societies, illuminating an entire process of social reformulation and giving rise to more complex hierarchical structures.

Keywords: Egyptianizing art; Phoenician expansion; Early Iron Age; Iberian southwest; Reformulation of identities.

The Iberian *aegyptiaca*: the background

Aegyptiaca are Egyptian objects of religious nature found in the entire Mediterranean Basin as a result of Greek and Phoenician colonization. Predominant *aegyptiaca*

consist of faience objects bearing motifs of Egyptian divinities and demonic entities: hybrid animals and symbols. Besides their direct role through the reception and distribution of Egyptian original artifacts across the Mediterranean world, Greeks and Phoenicians also created local workshops on their own to produce ethnic Egyptianizing versions of *aegyptiaca*. Such locally manufactured objects clearly exemplify that Greeks and Phoenicians

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had gained some insight into Egyptian religious beliefs. Even if these objects were not used in the precise manner that they should have been back in Egypt, they were regarded as highly precious and venerated, having been assigned a completely new function and identity within a different cultural environment. Thus, they were probably familiar with the significance of at least some of these objects and the magical connotations they carried (Kousoulis 2011).

During the Orientalizing and Archaic Periods, Egyptian, Phoenician and Greek aegyptiaca also reached the remote Atlantic shores of the Iberian Peninsula. From the Late 9th century BC onwards, the establishment of Phoenician groups in colonies in the Iberian Peninsula transformed the surrounded areas into areas of colonial encounters (Catalán 2004). Those areas allowed the formation of continuous relations between these geographically and historically remote communities. As an example, the presence of aegyptiaca in Portugal confirms the existence of an interconnecting commercial network between Phoenicians and native Tartessian elites from peripheral zones (Arruda 2005; Catalán 2004).

The imports of Phoenician goods came along with patterns of transmission of technology and craftsmanship. Phoenician colonists encountered in the Iberian Peninsula several culturally diversified native communities. Such differences included technology, social-political structure, everyday praxis (Aubert 2001). Most important: Phoenician colonization sparked the transition from the Late Bronze to an Early Iron Age in the region. As a result, those native societies underwent a series of transformations, becoming more hierarchized and complex. The transition process was intensified at the beginning of the “second wave of colonization” (8th-7th centuries BC), when Phoenicians established new settlements in the Southwest, from the Malaga-Cadiz area to the Atlantic coast, including the coastal regions of Portugal from Algarve to the Tagus estuary. Next, there was a transition to an “integrating colonization” (Arruda 2015). That new wave of colonization was mostly a product of combined efforts by the so-called “Tartessians” (i.e. Orientalized

natives) and Phoenicians of second and third generations, mostly from Cadiz area. Nevertheless, Phoenician presence in Eastern Andalucía (Spain) assumed a distinguished form in relation to what happened in the Atlantic area (Portugal). Archaeology points out to some native communities assimilating different extents of Phoenician culture (Arruda 2015) as an indication of distinct and local strategies and demands.

Colonization vs. assimilation: the changing of cultures

The encounter between Phoenicians and native Iberians is here defined as “colonization”. Although colonial experience incorporated a set of complex mediatory experiences, including pragmatically guided alliances and connivance as well as inequality, episodes of conflict and tension led to symbolic resistance as well. Thus, Phoenician colonization in Southwest Iberia was not reduced to some binarism, by bringing Phoenicians and Natives into a game of polarizations between dominated versus dominant. It was not the result of direct military intervention, and yet, provoked the collapse of entire social systems, which were later replaced by new ones. That can be clearly attested in Além-Tejo (Portugal), with the systematic abandon of Late Bronze settlements (Arruda 2014). An identical collapse is also documented in the Spanish territories of Extremadura and Upper Andalusia (Torres Ortiz 2004).

Colonial dominance should be understood rather as economic coercion and technological dependence; that is, ideological control. The role of Phoenician colonizers was crucial for the construction of new social models, created by the dynamics of social interaction. The colonization promoted the disintegration of local current social systems, later replaced by more complex ones, well-adapted to their new reality. From the 6th century BC onwards, the entire south of Portugal was deeply Orientalized (Santos *et al.* 2010). But native communities were not passively colonized. Archaeological data reveals that the adoption of an “eastern package” by indigenous communities

took place in different ways, and it should be stressed that the arrival of new protagonists inevitably led to regional asymmetries (Sánchez 2005). Both colonists and indigenous groups contributed to the process of cultural change that took place during this period.

As traditional identities collapsed, new identities were formed by incorporating Phoenician cultural elements into native societies. Once the native populations remained attached to the same ancestral lands, the roots for the maintenance of their identities remained stable (Said 1990). The consequent cultural transformation is not necessary any product of "Phoenicization" policies, but rather something spontaneously produced by the unpredictable and dynamic social relations. Certain native groups assimilated new technologies and cultural elements from the foreign population; others kept themselves apart, while some Late Bronze sites also were abandoned. The disappearance of the pre-existing cultural models of Bronze Age communities within one and a half centuries illustrated how colonization created imbalances in terms of available resources and also in social inequalities.

Stable interethnic relations between Natives and Phoenicians presuppose the creation of a set of proscriptions governing situations of contact, allowing for articulation in some sectors of activity, and establishing conditions on social situations. On the other hand, when such interaction increases in intensity such as the creation of Phoenician quarters in native communities, reduction of differences is expected as this generates some similarity and community of culture. Ethnic boundaries canalized social life in the Iberian southwest. It entailed complex organization of behaviors and social relations. As such, the identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and relations. Native Iberian communities depicted themselves as the linear continuity of their forefathers, regardless of regional diversities. Native communities would surely pursue different patterns of life and institutionalize different forms of behaviors when facing different opportunities.

As identities are fluid and ever-shifting in relation to ancestry (time) or neighbors (space), new identities are always proposed in order to conciliate innovations and keeping the perception of otherness valid.

Portugal as the gateway to the Iberian Hinterland

In Portuguese territory, the Atlantic coast carries the best evidence of more archaic Mediterranean influences. The Sado estuary reveals a well-documented presence of Eastern maritime merchants. The settlements of Abul, Setubal and Alcácer do Sal are rich in Phoenician objects, especially *aegyptiaca*. In fact, the age and abundance of such evidence suggests that Alcácer do Sal could have been the "gateway" to the estuary and the Hinterland. Thus, such evidences contested a strong theory from the Madrid School (Almagro-Gorbea 2009; Torres Ortiz 2005) defending the Phoenician presence in Portuguese littoral as consequence of Phoenician-Tartessian incursions from the East. New archaeological data is now pointing the Tagus vale as the original corridor for Phoenician presence in Spanish Extremadura, suggesting a West-East route (Arruda 2011).

The topographical position of these sites in every case occupied costal positions on small islands or peninsulas near the mouth of navigable rivers, allowing for easy access to inland areas. Some colonies were founded "ex novo": such as Abul (Mayet, Silva & Makaroun 1994) and Santa Olaia (Pereira 1997; Rocha 1908). Other sites, of indigenous origin, may have had Phoenician "quarters": like Conímbriga (Alarcão 1976; Correia 1996); Alcácer do Sal (Silva et al. 1980-1981); Almaraz (Barros, Cardoso & Sabrosa 1993); Castro Marin (Arruda 2000); Lisbon (Arruda 2000, 2015); Santarém (Arruda 1993, 2000); and Tavira (Maia & Silva 2004). The Phoenician language was also spoken at all these sites, as is shown by inscriptions found in Lisbon (Arruda 2014), and Tavira (Zamora López & Amadasi Guzzo 2008). Phoenician alphabet was also used as basis for an unknown native writing system found in several stelae in

southern Portugal and Spain, usually identified as “Tartessian” – the so-called “Southwest Script” (Correa Rodríguez 1996; Correia 1996).

The role of Phoenician colonizers was crucial for the construction of new social models, created by the dynamics of social interaction. Consequently, both native and foreign symbolic systems had to be revised, forming new ones. As such, Phoenician presence triggered several actions and reactions of various intervening agents, leading to unpredictable results. In fact, archaeological data reveals that the adoption of an “eastern package” by indigenous communities took place in different ways, and it should be stressed that the arrival of new protagonists inevitably led to regional asymmetries (Arruda 2015). Both colonists and indigenous groups contributed to the process of cultural change that took place during this period.

Portugal also has several necropolises presenting strong parallels to Phoenician necropolises from Cadiz-Gibraltar-Malaga areas. Some C14 datings (Arruda 2005; Barros & Soares 2004) for material obtained in Portuguese territory parallels with those obtained in Phoenician necropolises the Mediterranean coast of Andalucía (Spain); specifically Level 1 at Toscanos (Almagro-Gorbea 1970), and phase 2 at Mezquitilla (Schubart 1982, 1983). There are also evidences for parallels with Acinipo (Aguayo et al. 1989) and Cerro de la Mora (Castro Martínéz, Lull & Micó 1996), corresponding to a second generation of contact between Phoenicians and natives from the Hinterland of Malaga. From the 6th century BC onwards, the entire south of Portugal was deeply orientalized (Arruda 2005).

In Iberian Southwest, native elites adopted Phoenician artifacts as elements of social distinction. New aegyptiaca became commissioned by local workshops, reproducing Egyptian and/or Phoenician egyptianizing religious objects. Most aegyptiaca in the Peninsula remain attached to the sacral-funerary field, but not exclusively restricted to it. Indeed, it is possible to notice an uniformity in funerary practices as a result of the transition towards the Iron Age, and as such these sites share the

same techniques, morphologies, and decorative styles. Throughout the entire Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of the Peninsula, the development of some standardization in the funerary world is visible. That indicates fairly uniform rituals and practices.

To achieve this goal, the project will address the Southwestern necropolises and attempt to understand the collapse of Late Bronze societies and their transitions towards more complex societies by assimilating Phoenician orientalizing elements.

The preliminary corpus

The proposed documental corpus so far includes 18 Egyptian scarab amulets found in Portuguese territory (Arruda 2000, 2005). They are all from the Atlantic archaeological environment, making then very special for raising the question of the identity of their owners: natives or Phoenicians (Torres Ortiz 2004). In Portugal, to the date, no site yet yielded the common mass-produced types from either Rhodian or the Naukratis factories; the Phoenician and Egyptian types are the rule. These Phoenician types came from small factories from Cyprus, Sardinia and even Carthage, with one possibly from a local workshop (Gorton 1996).

From Southern Spain, the corpus receives a group of 25 similar amulets from Extremadura (Almagro-Gorbea et al. 2008), another group of 15 Egyptian scarab amulets from the necropolises of Cadiz, plus 17 (including 2 local-made Bronze replica) from the Tartessian region (Huelva-Cadiz-Seville) as well as a group of 29 from Gibraltar (Almagro-Gorbea & Torres Ortiz 2009). The typology and iconography point to diverse origins: Saite Egypt (and local imitations), Earlier period Egypt (and Phoenicia replicas), Phoenician colonies (especially Sardinia), and native-made bronze objects. Gibraltar (Gorham’s cave) also has seven Greek-Naukratis objects (Gorton 1996).

Scarabs are funerary amulets, but also had a protective and magic valor. That means they could also have been used for social distinction

as seals or emblems by their owners (Berges 1998). Some Egyptian exemplars are older than their funerary context. This could imply re-utilization or posterior Phoenician replicas.

The second category of *aegyptiaca* is composed by Egyptian funerary alabaster jars. There are 21 objects from the necropolis of Almunecar, Granada. The group from Almunecar forms the most important set of jars of the type outside Egypt (Molina Fajardo & Bannour 2000). They were all used for keeping ashes of human remains. Some of them are marked with pharaoh names from the 22nd dynasty and other inscriptions (Padró 1986). It is possible to situate the production of such jars as 22nd dynasty, possibly from the oasis of Kharga or Baharya, in the Lybian desert, two zones of production of Egyptian wine. Their inscriptions include lists of titles and funerary formulae. It implies that they must have been taken from their original necropolises and then re-used (Leclant 1991).

However, some pieces of evidence question the theory of the Egyptian royal necropolis of Tanis as origin of such jars. Similar jars have been found at Assur in the Palace of Assurbanipal II. Inscriptions in Assyrian language identify those jars as the treasure taken from the palace of Prince Abdimilkurti, king of Sidon, by Sennacherib in 677 BC (Culican 1970). The fall of Sidon also pushed Phoenicians towards the West and could explain the presence of Egyptian "royal gifts" being used as funerary urns by the same refugees who saved them from Assyrians.

The third category of *aegyptiaca* is composed by rare necklaces of glass beads. There are two examples from the necropolis of Palhais (Baixo Além-Tejo, Portugal). They are composed by approximately 450 hundred beads each. Their composition is made of ring form and cylindrical typologies in blue, green and white. Similar objects have been found in the Necropolis of Puig des Molins (Ibiza, Spain). The second exemplar has

ocular beads, a silver acorn-like pendent and an Egyptian wadjet-eye amulet in faience.

The trade of ocular beads is connected to the Phoenician commerce. During the 6th and 5th centuries BC several production centers propagated across the Mediterranean. Factories in Greece, Asia Minor, North Africa and Sicilia also produced replicas. Glass beads are not only ornaments; normally, they are associated to other elements such as scarabs and amulets. The eye amulet is magic and prophylactic, and it was a protective talisman in Egypt. Acorn-like pendants are common decorative fashion in general orientalizing jewelry. There are several equivalent examples in Cartage and Sardinia (Santos et al. 2010).

The last group of artifacts is made of Tartessian and/or Phoenician Bronze artifacts. They include an egyptianizing wadjet-eye amulet from Alcácer do Sal, probably a Tartessian copy (Gomes 2008) and bronze piriform Phoenician jars - some with tripods (Arruda, Lourenço & Lima 2015). Those bronze jars are rarely confirmed its funerary context inside the Peninsula. There are 21 other similar jars in the Peninsula. However, only 11 presented specific archaeological context all funerary. From those jars, two are in Portugal, 19 are in Avila (central Spain), and another from Alcalá del Rio (Seville area). According to their typologies (Celestino Pérez 1991; Jiménez Ávila 2002) the Portuguese artifacts have parallels in Italy and Carthage (Brisa) (Botto 2014).

Those objects show how Alcácer do Sal already had an orientalizing culture by the 9th century BC. There are many parallels with the western Phoenician world and/or orientalizing Tartessian culture by the 8th century BC. In addition, it indicates that for natives, there was no distinction between usages of Phoenician or Egyptian funerary artifacts. It also casts the question: How "Egyptian" were the *aegyptiaca* in the Iberian Peninsula actually?

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Resumo: Trata-se de um estudo preliminar sobre a presença de aegyptiaca na costa ocidental da Península Ibérica. Este artigo aborda o material egípcio e egípcizante trazido para o território ibérico pela expansão fenícia entre os séculos VIII e V a.C. Uma vez que se trata de um material pouco estudado, propor a construção de um corpus para a região do sudoeste ibérico será uma mais-valia para a compreensão do fenómeno das relações entre nativos e estrangeiros. Assim, essa cultura material será a base para um estudo da presença fenícia no que outrora consistia uma unidade geopolítica: o sudoeste ibérico. As relações comerciais, a transferência de tecnologia e a subsequente transição do Bronze Final para o Ferro Inicial entre as sociedades nativas são temas de interesse desse levantamento de corpus. A presença de bens de luxo e status em necrópoles nativas e mistas demonstra o gradual processo de adoção de elementos mediterrâneos nos ritos funerários e nas relações cotidianas dessas sociedades nativas, iluminando todo um processo de reformulação social e dando origem a estruturas hierárquicas mais complexas.

Palavras-chave: Arte egípcizante; Expansão fenícia; Idade do Ferro; Sudoeste ibérico; reformulação de identidades.

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