

Phoenician Settlements in Andalusia. A GIS-based Analysis.

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Introduction

The end of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean between 1200 and 1100 BC saw the collapse of several civilizations in its eastern part and, thus, the decline of a formally high degree of connectedness. However, by the turn of the millennium other actors appeared on the map and extended the far-reaching connections across the entire Mediterranean and beyond. The first to establish a network that was including the entire Mediterranean were the Phoenicians whose homeland was located along the east Mediterranean coast.

The Iberian Peninsula and particularly the region of Andalusia was a main destination of Phoenician expeditions and, subsequently, settlement foundations. The talk aims to analyze the reasons of the Phoenician exploration of the Mediterranean Sea and it tries to investigate the relationship between Phoenician settlers and the local people in Andalusia based on the location and distribution of their settlements.



Fig. 1: Phoenician network and settlement foundations in the Mediterranean.

The Phoenicians in the Levant

The Phoenician homeland was located in the Levant along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Phoenician people lived in cities that functioned as full-fledged states. It is important to highlight that despite a number of common features such as the language, religion, economy, organization of the society etc. *the* Phoenicians were not a group of people with a common identity. At times the city states stood in competition with each other and they emphasized their own sense of belonging through the worship of a city god, own rituals and many more.

The Phoenicians developed a unique expertise in constructing ships and in seafaring. At the beginning of the first millennium BC until c. 850 BC, when Greek people started their naval explorations, Phoenician ships were the only vessels that sailed and oared across the entire Mediterranean.

The reasons that might have triggered the interest of the Phoenicians to navigate beyond their coastal waters has been discussed for a long time. One is certainly the threat of the Assyrian Empire that took control of the Levant by the end of the 9th century BC and which was famous for extracting huge amounts of wealth from their subordinates in order to finance the lavish life-style of the elite in the Assyrian core area. The Phoenician cities were part of the empire but retained a particular degree of independence through the regular payment of high tributes. These tributes had to be earned through exchanges and trade with other people in the Mediterranean. This traditional interpretation of the Phoenician explorations is, however, contested through the results of natural scientific dating of the first Phoenician settlements which are all older than the Assyrian conquest. It is safe to say, that the obvious wealth of the Phoenician cities was based to a huge degree on trade, with a particular emphasis on metals. As traders the Phoenicians also had to offer something in return for the desired goods from foreign lands. It is being reported in ancient written sources that the Phoenicians gave rather less valuable items that were, however, due to their exoticism and rareness objects of great value in the western Mediterranean, in exchange for highly valued resources. Although this reports are quite plausible, the Phoenicians also had something that was of immense value within the entire Mediterranean, which only people with large resources on their hands were able to purchase: purple dye. The purple pigments are an element of the *Murex brandaris* and *Murex trunculus* snails, which have several habitats in the Mediterranean Sea, one at the Levantine coast. The production of larger quantities of purple requires a particular know-

how, the needed facilities and access to extreme huge amounts of the snail. The reason is that twelve-thousand snails do not yield more than 1.4 g purple which is just enough to color a small stripe of cloth.

The Phoenicians in Andalusia

As mentioned above, Andalusia was one of the main destinations of Phoenician people. Famous Phoenician city foundations are Gadir (Cádiz), Almuñécar, Huelva and Málaga. According to recent natural scientific datings the foundation of some of these places goes back until the turn of the millennium which means that the foundation of the cities took place at the same time as the Phoenicians started to explore the sea.

It is clear that the geographic location and other factors played a significant role for the selection of potential settlement locations. One pattern has been recognized for a while: it is the tendency to establish the settlements on islands next to the coast or on the tip of land tongues that restricted the access to the settlements and allowed for a better defense. This is however not a specific element of Phoenician settlements in Andalusia, it is a strategy known from the Phoenician homeland. The powerful and through historical sources well-known city of Tyre is a good example in this regard. There has been a long dispute about the nature of the Phoenician settlements outside their homeland and specifically in Andalusia. Although the intend for the settlement foundation is always seen in the access to and control of the resources in the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula, it has been assumed that particular cities developed from trade outposts to full-fledged cities. Recent archaeological finds seem to support this idea and they also show that in locations that were considered to belong to the local communities, strong Phoenician elements, such as cult places, were present.

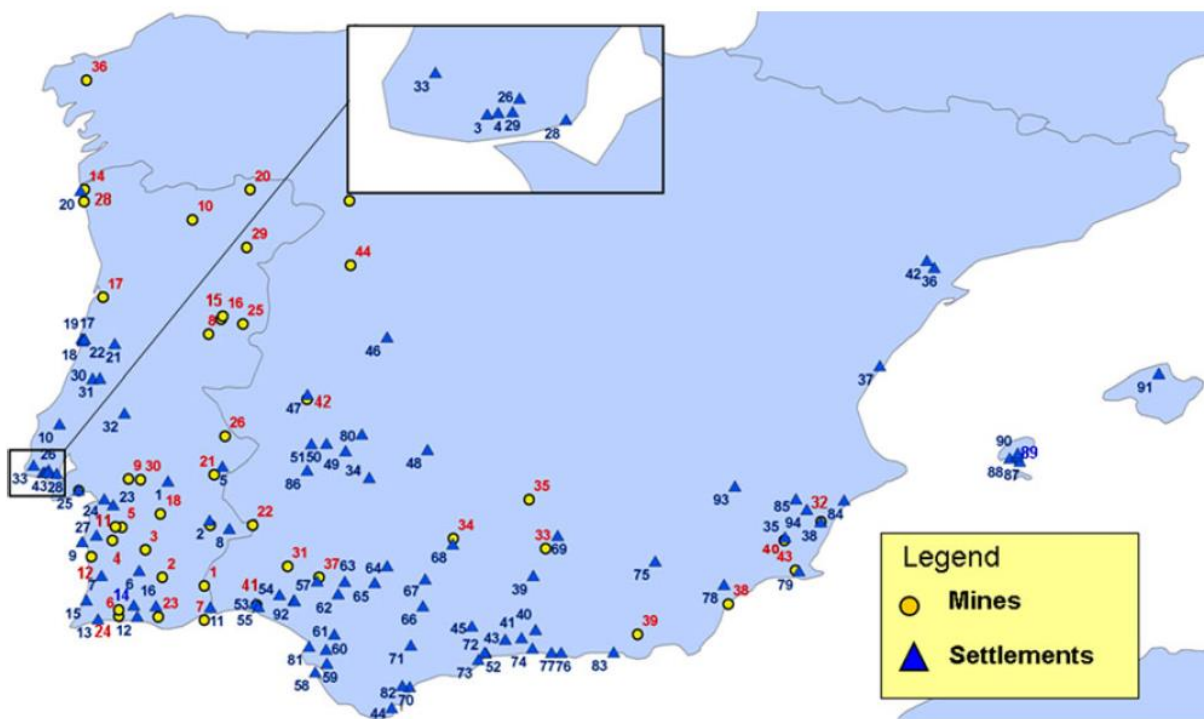


Fig. 2: Distribution map of mines of valued metals (Cu, Sn, Ag, Pb) and of Phoenician as well as local settlements.

GIS-based Studies

The application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has a long history in archaeological research and a number of methods have been developed to gain information beyond the mere distribution of sites. The analysis of larger datasets comes, however, with a cost which is a rather blurry picture of the past. This is because not each of the known sites has been researched in the same extent. Important evidence that affect the character of a location might be still unearthed. Additionally, the available distribution maps are only a snap-shot of the state of research. In some areas the actual picture might be quite complete, whilst in other regions a dramatic increase of sites could change the way the situation is being evaluated.

Another problem is even more difficult to solve. It is the question of the ethnic identity of the people in the settlements. In the best scenario, archaeology is able to recognize the origin of an artefact, for instance, if a vessel was produced by Phoenician or local standards. It is, however,

unequally difficult to figure out which people used a particular item and if these people identified themselves accordingly as local or as Phoenician. It is highly expectable that this was only the case in the initial phase of Phoenician settlement foundations. Depending on a number of factors it is quite likely that this distinction became increasingly blurry with the result that both locals and Phoenicians were living together in particular locations or at least were using items from both sides interchangeably.

Despite these restraints it is possible to recognize a few patterns that might be of help for understanding the role of the Phoenicians and their intentions a little bit better. The maps show clearly the existence of clusters of settlements which could be indeed interpreted as associated locations that may have shared a degree of belongingness in common. The distribution of settlements with Phoenician finds is aligned to the course of the rivers. This is because rivers functioned as main transport routes from the coast, where the main sites of the Phoenicians were located, and vice versa. The proximity to raw material deposits underlines the initial intent of the Phoenicians to secure the access and perhaps trading rights of these resources. Not directly observable from the maps, but very likely is that the formally foreign arrivals became in course of the several centuries spanning presence of Phoenician people in Andalusia locals. It is this overlay of different phases of the settlement activities that makes it from today's perspective difficult to make clear cut distinctions between locals and Phoenicians in later periods.

Conclusion

The GIS-based study of Phoenician and local settlements demonstrates as other similar examinations that there is a high demand for intensive research on that matter in the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula and in Phoenicia. It becomes clear that there was no standard procedure of how Phoenicians interacted with the local population. This is because the local people were not organized in large groups or state-like units but in smaller communities that all developed their own response to the presence of Phoenician people. The distribution of settlements emphasizes a strong relation to the river systems. A major problem is the identification of settlements that were exclusively or to the majority settled by Phoenicians and those sites that were mainly occupied by the local people. Over the course of the centuries a mutual adjustment is expectable and – judging by the known artefacts etc. – also recognizable.

In general, it can be argued that the relevance of Andalusia for the Phoenicians rested in the geographic location at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea, the access to valued resources and the cooperativeness of the local population to accept people of foreign lands in their home area.