

# *The Phoenicians and Tartessos*<sup>1</sup>

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One of the major factors determining the life and development of Spain prior to the Roman invasion was the Phoenician presence on the Iberian Peninsula. In the course of the eighth to sixth centuries B.C., that is, during the years when most of Phoenician settlements appeared in South Spain there was the Tartessian Power in this region. The Phoenicians maintained fairly close ties with the Tartessians, because both the parties concerned needed each other, were interested in each other: the former got from the Tartessians the necessary products which later they more often than not exported further to the East. With the aid of the Phoenicians the Tartessians obtained an access to the practically inexhaustible Oriental market that guaranteed the Tartessian aristocracy fabulous profits, to judge by the gorgeous treasure-troves from this region<sup>2</sup>. This interdependence and mutual attraction resulted in their mutually advantageous co-existence.

An example of the co-existence, in our opinion, is the settlement of Castillo de Doña Blanca situated on the other side of the Gaditanian cove opposite Gades. The settlement must have appeared in the ninth century B.C. and reached its hey-day in the next century<sup>3</sup>. Evidently it was the

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Russian by L. Chistonogova

<sup>2</sup> J.M. BLÁZQUEZ, *Tartessos*, Salamanca, 1975, p. 115-143, 272-283; R. MÉLIDA, «El tesoro de Aliseda», *Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Excursiones*, 28, 1921, p. 110-123; E. KUKAHN, A. BLANCO, «El tesoro de «El Carambolo»», *AEArq*, 32, 1959, p. 38-49; C. BLANCO DE TORRECILLAS, «El tesoro de cortijo de Evora», *AEArq*, 32, 1959, p. 50-57; M.E. AUBET, «Zur Problematik der orientalisierenden Horizontes auf der Iberischen Halbinsel», in *Phonisier in Westen*, Mainz, 1982, p. 321-324.

<sup>3</sup> D. RUIZ MATA y C.J. PÉREZ, *El poblado fenicio de Castillo de Doña Blanca*, Puerto de Santa María, 1985, pp. 51-2; S. MOSCATI, *Tra Tiro e Cadice*, Roma, 1989, pp. 13-15.

terminal stop of the trade route starting in the Upper Riotinto, going via San Bartolomé de Almonte and Tejada la Vieja to Gades<sup>4</sup>. D. Ruiz Mata, who excavated this settlement, has recently put forward an idea that it was actually a Phoenician colony<sup>5</sup>, but most likely it was only a Phoenician quarter within the native city<sup>6</sup>, very much like «the Tyrian camp» in Memphis (Her. II,112). The Phoenicians themselves were rather wary of foreigners. Arrianus (*Anab* II,16,7) and Curtius Rufus (IV,2,4) narrate that the Tyrians refused point blank to let Alexander in to the city, when he intended to make sacrifices in the temple of Herakles, that is, Melqart. Of course, the refusal was largely prompted by political reasons, but religious considerations should not be excluded either. Avienus (*Or. mar.* 356-369) quoting Euktemon, states that it was regarded as impiety for a foreigner to stay long in the sanctuary of Hercules, that is, of the selfsame Melqart. The principal temple of Melqart in Spain was that in Gades and it played a rather significant role in both religious and economic life of the Phoenicians<sup>7</sup>. Consequently it may be assumed that a foreign stay was limited not only in the temple, but also in the city itself. However, commerce demanded constant contacts. Hence, it seems, the importance of Castillo de Doña Blanca situated in close vicinity to Gades.

The Phoenicians' influence led to the emergence of the Tartessian Orientalizing civilisation. The profundity and variety of this influence cannot possibly be explained by exclusively their brisk trade. We deem it obvious that the Phoenicians cultivated far more close and intimate links with the Tartessians. It does not at all seem improbable that some part of the Oriental new-comers could have settled directly among the Tartessians in the native neighbourhood, particularly in the Baetis valley in the Cruz de Negro area<sup>8</sup>. Such Phoenician enclaves could have existed in other regions of Tartessus, too<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> On this route and the settlements along it see J.M. BLÁZQUEZ, «Panorama histórico de la cultura tartésica desde finales de la edad del bronce, s.VIII a.C., hasta los orígenes de la cultura tartésica», *RSF*, 19.1,1991, p. 4-48; C. GARCÍA SANZ, P. RUFETE TOMICO, *La ciudad de Tejada la Vieja*, Huelva, 1995; M.E AUBET, *Tiro y las colonias fenicias de Occidente*, Barcelona, 1994, p. 244; E.G. WAGNER, *Fenicios y cartagineses en la península Ibérica*, Madrid, 1983, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> D. RUIZ MATA, C.J. PÉREZ, *Op.cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> M.E. AUBET, «Cádiz y el comercio atlántico», Paper read during the IV International Congress of Phoenician and Punic Investigations, Cádiz, 1995, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Eadem, *Tiro...*, p. 239-241.

<sup>8</sup> E.G. WAGNER, *Op.cit.*, p.43-46; E.G. WAGNER, J. ALVAR, «Fenicios en Occidente: la colonización agraria», *RSF*, 17.1, 1989, p. 92-95.

<sup>9</sup> E.G. WAGNER, *Op.cit.*, p. 46-47.

And yet relations between the two forces were far from idyllic. Mutual benefit, interdependence and co-existence did not preclude confrontation. Opposition and counterstand accompanied the birth of Gades which was founded only at a third attempt. At first the colonists tried to settle down in the place where Sexi was later founded; then they were drawn to the area of the would-be Onoba (Strabo III,5,5), which means that the choice of a place to take roots into was by no means accidental. The first two failures may be reasonably accounted for by none other than the aborigines' counteraction<sup>10</sup>.

We believe that Gades was founded during the first stage of the Phoenician colonisation, before the Tartessian Power came into being<sup>11</sup>. The confrontation, though, did not disappear even during the second stage, as is plainly seen on the geographical map. No matter what kind of colonisation the Phoenician colonisation may be considered to be —commercial or agrarian— it is evident that the colonists were above all drawn by the advantageous conditions of the Baetis valley, the ocean coast of this region and the Riotinto estuary. In this region were concentrated the silver and copper ore mines so coveted by the Oriental strangers, and the approaches to them were fairly easy. Numerous firths made it easy for the boats to come up inland, the Baetis river was navigable as far as Corduba and even up beyond, so that the river was the main artery of communication with the inner areas of Tartessis (Strabo III,1,9-2,3). The Baetis valley was remarkably fertile, and later the Italian colonists made the most of it. For all that, there was only one Phoenician colony in the whole of this region - Gades, founded, as stated above, well before the formation of the Tartessian Power. The great bulk of the colonies, though, was situated to the east of the Pillars of Herakles. Some new archaeological finds in the future may bring to light certain traces of some other Phoenician settlements between the Pillars and Gades but they are hardly likely to radically alter the current general view<sup>12</sup>.

The area where most of the Phoenician colonies were founded, was less convenient and worse by far. Although the littoral valley was rather fertile, the mountains encoaching upon the sea coast reduced the opportunities of farming. The mountains are passable all right but the

<sup>10</sup> I.SCH. SCHIEFMANN, *The Origin of the Carthaginian Power*, Moscow-Leningrad, 193, p. 24-25 (in Russian).

<sup>11</sup> JU.B. TSIRKIN, «Primera etapa de la colonización fenicia» (in print).

<sup>12</sup> G. BUNNENS, «Le rôle de Gades dans l'implantation phénicienne en Espagne», in *Los fenicios en la Península Ibérica*, Barcelona, 1986, t. II, p. 190.

path along the Baetis valley and the plain is much easier and nicer. It looks as if the Tyrian colonists had been compelled to settle down in this area. On the western coast of the Iberian Peninsula there was also a Phoenician settlement -Abul<sup>13</sup>. The time of its foundation is not known, but more likely than not, it was not founded during the initial stage of the colonisation<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, the very location of the colonies founded in the eighth to seventh centuries (and, perhaps, in the ninth to seventh centuries) B.C. indicates that the Phoenicians strove, as it were, to encircle the bulk of the Tartessian territory in the south-east and the west. As we see it, the Tartessians would not allow their eastern partners to avail themselves of the access to the key sources of their wealth<sup>15</sup>. Hence the ensuing conflicts.

An oblique indication of such a confrontation may be found in the prophecy of Isaiah (23,10): «Overflow thy land, as the river, o daughter of Tarshish: there is no girdle any more». The girdle (mezah) stands for a girdle of the Tyrian colonies encircling the land of Tars-hish-Tartessos<sup>16</sup>. The liquidation of this girdle is ranked by the prophet with the Assyrian invasion which will destroy Tyre, too (23.13): «they razed her palaces, they made her a ruin». Chapter 23 of the prophecy belongs to Protoisaiiah and was written at the close of the eighth century B.C.<sup>17</sup>. This prophecy failed to come true either in the East or in the West: Tyre was not ruined and the Phoenician colonies in South Spain kept on existing and even grew in number. But it must be stressed that rumours —however exaggerated— about the conflicts in the West must have reached the East and Isaiah's prophecy recorded them<sup>18</sup>.

In this respect a new interpretation of the Nora stone inscription (CIS 144) is noteworthy. This most ancient of the Phoenician inscriptions in the West was discovered in 1773 and since then it has been the object of

<sup>13</sup> M.E. AUBET, *Tiro*.... p.254.

<sup>14</sup> According to M.E. AUBET, Abul was founded by the Gaditanians, and not by the Tyrians in the seventh century B.C., M.E. AUBET, *Cádiz*....p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> On the role of the indigenous factor and the geography of the Phoenician colonis (although at a different angle) see: J. GASUL, «Problemática en torno a la ubicación de los asentamientos fenicios en el sur de la Península» in *Los fenicios*...., t.II, p. 195.

<sup>16</sup> I.SCH. SCHIFFMANN, *Op.cit.*, p.50, 54.

<sup>17</sup> O. EISSFELDT, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, Tubingen, 1956, p. 375, 388-389.

<sup>18</sup> For details see: JU.B. TSIRKIN, «The Hebrew Bible and de Origin of Tartessian Power», in: *Los fenicios*...., t.II, p. 179-185.

innumerable studies and diverse interpretations<sup>19</sup>. Recently, upon his grammatical and structural analysis of the inscription, A.J. Frendo has offered its new translation, unambiguously connecting its contents with Tarshish: a) He was indeed expelled from Tarshish. b) in Sardinia he is (now) safe, safe is his army (too). c) Milkaton, son of Shabon, the previous commander<sup>20</sup>.

As early as the second millennium B.C. Sardinia had contacts with Spain and, most probably, it was the chief mediator between Spain and the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>21</sup>. The Hispano-Sardinian ties persisted well during the first millennium B.C., as well<sup>22</sup>. Pausanias (X,17,5) and Solinus (IV,1) describe the foundation of Nora by the Tartessian king Norax. According to Pausanias, he is the son of Erytheia, daughter of Geryon, by Hermes. Solinus, too, calls him the son of Mercury. The name of Norax, though, is not to be found elsewhere in Greek mythology<sup>32</sup>. On the other hand, in Spanish onomasticon there is the name Nori (Norissi) that is supposed to be derived from Norax<sup>24</sup>. Quite a plausible supposition suggests itself that Norax belongs to the mythological Tartessian kings and was later associated with the Hellenic mythological figures. In the myth of Norax, as it has come down to us, we must most probably see the reflection of Nora's role as the central link between Sardinia and Tartessos. In this case it is not at all surprising that after having suffered some failure in Tartessos-Tarshish, the Phoenician commander took his soldiers to Nora.

Judging from palaeographic data, the inscription must be dated in all probability from the ninth century B.C.<sup>25</sup>. That was the period immediately prior to the time when the great bulk of Phoenician colonies were founded in Spain. That seems to be the reason why Milkaton was obliged to leave for Sardinia. We cannot at present say what prevented him from

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<sup>19</sup> J.B. PEKHAM, «The Nora Inscription», in *Orientalia*, 41, 1972, p. 459; G. BUNNENS, *L'expansion phénicienne en Méditerranée*, Bruxelles-Rome, 1974, p. 30-41; J.C.L. GIBSON, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, t. III, Oxford, 1982, p. 25-27; O. NEGBI, «Early Phoenician presence in the Mediterranean Island», in *AJA*, 96, 1992, p. 609-610; A.J. FREND, «The Particles BETH and WAW and the Periodic Structure of the Nora Stone Inscription», in *Palestina Exploration Journal*, 1996, p. 8-11.

<sup>20</sup> A.J. FREND, *Op.cit.*, p. 9

<sup>21</sup> M.E. AUBET, *Cádiz...*, p. 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5; F. PRESEDO, «La realeza tartésica», in *Tartessos* (Revista de Arqueología, N. extra), p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> R. HANSLIK, «Norax», in *Kleine Pauly*, IV, 156.

<sup>24</sup> M. PÉREZ ROJAS, «Epigrafía tartésica», in *Tartessos...*, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> G. BUNNENS, *L'expansion...*, p. 40.

finding refuge at Gades, then already in existence. Anyway we think the Nora inscription reflects a complicated situation in South Spain on the eve of the massive Phoenician colonisation; it plainly hints at conflicts and strife between Phoenicians and Tartessians, so that the foundation of colonies was accompanied by military actions between the natives and new-comers. Both this inscription and the geography of the colonies rule out any chance for the Tyrians to strike roots into the territory of the Tartessians next to them.

Some military conflicts between the Tartessians and the Phoenicians must have taken place at later epochs too. According to Macrobius (*Saturn.* I,20,12), the king of Near Spain Thero attacked Gades, but his attack was miraculously repulsed by the Gaditanian fleet with the aid of god who burned the king's boats with sunlike beams and with the assistance of some lions that on a sudden appeared on the prows of the Gaditanian warships and scared away the attackers. A. Schulten once convincingly proved that the Near Spain of the legend under study is the Neighbouring Iberia of the Greeks whose name was misunderstood by Macrobius or his source<sup>26</sup>. The direct target of Thero's attack was the temple of Hercules: besides, Macrobius wove his account into the section devoted to Hercules. It follows that the god-saviour of Gades was doubtless Melqart. The country of Thero is viewed as if from inside Gades and the very narrative is highly favourable to the Gaditanians and inimical to Thero. All this plainly betrays the Phoenician origin of the legend<sup>27</sup>.

The «Iberia next to Gades» and its temple could be none other but Tartessus. Mythological details of the saga are but a slim ground for questioning the event itself. In antiquity frequent are accounts how god helped this or that party and their historicity is above suspicion. Even if the authenticity of Thero's attack is suspicious we must admit that such a story could have emerged only if similar attacks had indeed occurred in reality. Unfortunately it is not possible to date this event. We can only maintain that an armed conflict (or armed conflicts) between the Tartessians and Phoenician colonists did take place.

Interesting is the information of Justinus (XLIV,5,2-3) who writes that the peoples of Spain living near Gades (i.e., no doubt, the Tartessians) were very jealous of the rising new town (see above the passage about the foundation of Gades and the transference of Melqart's sacraments to the town), therefore they attacked the Gaditanians who

<sup>26</sup> A. SCHULTEN, *Tartessos*, Hamburg, 1950, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> I.SCH.SCHIFFMANN, *Op.cit.*, p. 50.

appealed to the Carthaginians for assistance, and the latter rescued the residents of Gades and, moreover, conquered the larger part of Spain. This short passage is inwardly discrepant. The Gaditanians could not possibly have asked the Carthaginians for help shortly after the town had been founded, because Gades was built almost three hundred years earlier than Carthage. And even if we admit (the way most of the archaeologists of today do) that Gades was not founded until the eighth century B.C., it looks highly improbable that the Carthaginians could have interfered in the affairs of the Iberian Peninsula, let alone captured most of its territory, because for many a long year after its foundation Carthage was not strong enough to venture on such an undertaking.

Therefore the following three possibilities may be deduced: 1) Justinus cutting down the text of Pompeius Trogus, squeezed into a phrase or two a relatively lengthy story of the Spanish events, the wars of the Tartessians with the Gaditanians among them, having combined the accounts of the wars shortly after Gades' birth with the description of the last war into which the Carthaginians actively interfered; 2) Trogus or his first-hand source misinterpreted some episodes of the armed conflicts in South Spain and conspicuously brought together in time the events that actually happened in considerably remote epochs; 3) the account of Trogus-Justinus can be traced back in the final analysis to the Carthaginian source who primarily dwelt at length on the two facts only—the foundation of Gades and of its celebrated temple, first, and the assistance rendered by Carthage to the Gaditanians and the conquest in later years of a large region of Spain, second.

The stories of Macrobius and Justinus describe some wars between Tartessos and the Phoenicians, especially the Gaditanians. Obviously the Tartessian kings were reluctant to abandon their hopes of expelling the Phoenicians from the indigenous Tartessian territory where they had got settled well before the rise of the Tartessian Power.

The causes of the confrontation are plain and understandable: the parties concerned were bitter rivals on the Atlantic trade routes. Still more important, it seems, was the determination of the Tartessian rulers to bar the Phoenicians away from the metal deposits that brought in very good returns: the rulers favoured their lucrative service as mediators. Hence their attempts either to oust—with luck—the new-comers away from the southwestern coast of the empire or at least to check the Phoenician expansion in the region. The situation on the Mediterranean coast was somewhat different. There on the territory of other tribes, the Tartessian kings' authority was perhaps weaker than it was in their native area. Besides the river

valleys, good for passing the mountains and reaching the fertile valley and mineral wealth of the Upper Baetis, were rather narrow and easy to control. All this does not mean that there were no Phoenicians outside their colonies. In Castillo de Doña Blanca they evidently occupied only a quarter of the town (like in MemPhis). Those Phoenicians who settled in the rural area, found themselves among the Tartessians, thus forming still other category of the Tartessian kings' subjects.

The confrontation, and even open wars at times, on no account ruled out cooperation and interdependence. The seventh century B.C. saw the zenith of the development of the Phoenician colonies and the peak of their influence upon Tartessians.

At the end of the seventh century B.C. to Tartessos came the Greeks from Phocaea whom king Arganthonios received in a friendly manner (Her. I,153). Some time later on the Tartessian territory there appeared Phocaeen colonies (or factories) —Mainaka and Port of Menestheus<sup>28</sup>. The emergence of the Greek colonies changed the correlation of forces at the extreme western point of the Mediterranean. We do not know what part —if at all— the Spanish Phoenicians and Tartessians took in the war between Massalia and Carthage that broke out during the construction of the Greek town (Thuc. I,13,6; Paus. X,8,6; Just. XLIII,5,2). At any rate, the Greek import in Tartessia, at Onoba too, grew sizably<sup>29</sup>, which bears witness to the Hellenes' success in their competition with Phoenicians for the Tartessian market. On the other hand, the Hispano-Phoenician settlements were experiencing at that time a severe crisis in consequence of the decline of the Tyrian Power whose integral part they were, the economic and political changes in Tartessia and last but not least of the rivalry with the Hellenes<sup>30</sup>.

The upshot of it all came about early in the fifth century B.C. Between Massalians and Spaniards an alliance was concluded (Just. XLIII,5,3). Although Justinus does not specify who those Spaniards were, we may presume them to be the Tartessians —suffice it to recall the Massalians' particular interests in the South of Spain. In all appearances the Tartessians whose power was then in a state of crisis, tried to overcome the crisis by means of pushing the Phoenicians from the Spanish littoral or at

<sup>28</sup> For details see JU.B.TSIRKIN, «The Greeks and Tartessos», *Oikumene*, 5,1986, p. 163-171.

<sup>29</sup> M. FERNÁNDEZ-MIRANDA, «Huelva, ciudad de los tartessios», in *Los fenicios...*, t.II, p. 256.

<sup>30</sup> We investigate this problem in another article still in print.



least from their own indigenous territory<sup>31</sup>. That is why they undertook to storm Gades and the storm was so powerful that the Gaditanians had to beg the Carthaginians to help (Just. XLIV,5,2-3). The latter, to quote Justinus, not only protected the townsfolk of Gades from wreck and ruin but also subjected a large part of Spain to their rule. True, the Gaditanians, on repulsing the Tartessian attack, closed the city gates before their «saviours'» faces, so that the latter captured Gades by storm (Vitr. X,13,1-2: *Ath.Pol.* 9). This fact is scarcely surprising: in Sardinia the Carthaginians did not stop at destroying or driving away their consanguineous brothers either<sup>32</sup>. Anyhow after all these events the Tartessian Power ceased to be (at least in its former proportions) and the Phoenician settlements passed into the Carthaginians' hands.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. J.L. LÓPEZ CASTRO, *Hispania Poena*, Barcelona, 1995, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> S. MOSCATI, *Op.cit.*, p. 32-37.

