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MALTA'S ROLE IN THE PHOENICIAN,
GREEK AND ETRUSCAN TRADE
IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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Malta must have played a significant role in the development of Phoenician commerce in the western Mediterranean, as well as in the impact of this trade on, and its rapport with, the Greek and Etruscan commercial activities in the same region. Although the role of the Maltese islands in the Phoenician and Punic world has been repeatedly illustrated in specific chapters on Malta and Gozo in monographs dealing with the Phoenicians in general,¹ and although various evidences of trading activity between Malta and other parts of the Mediterranean in antiquity have been discussed in a number of other scientific publications,² their role in the commercial interrelationship between these three powers still needs to be properly defined. The following is an attempt to make the first step towards achieving this task.

In this article I shall be using the adjectives 'Phoenician', 'Punic' and 'Carthaginian' without much distinction between the three, even though I am very much aware of the intrinsic differences between the three labels. As far as the present topic is concerned I would apply the generic term 'Phoenician' to all that is connected with this Semitic people both in their homeland and their movements in the eastern Mediterranean (an ethnic and political situation that survived, with varying degrees of political autonomy, practically down to Alexander's incorporation of the area in his empire),³ and in their commercial and colonial expansion in the western basin of the Mediterranean.⁴ It is in the latter area that the situation complicates itself,

¹ Such as in S. Moscati, *Il Mondo dei Fenici*, Milan 1966, 241-7; *id.*, *Tra Cartagine e Roma*, Milan 1971, 41-49; *id.*, *I Cartaginesi in Italia*, Milan 1977, 285-298; *id.*, *Italia Punica*, Milan 1986, 329-342; *id.* et al., *The Phoenicians*, Milan 1988, 206-9; A. Ciasca, "Malta", in F. Barreca et al., *L'Espansione Fenicia nel Mediterraneo* (Relazioni del Colloquio in Roma, 4-5 maggio 1970), Rome 1971, 63-75.

² A. Ciasca, "Ricerche puniche a Malta", in F. Barreca et al., *Ricerche Puniche nel Mediterraneo Centrale*, Rome 1970, 91-108; *ead.* "Nota sulla distribuzione di alcune ceramiche puniche maltesi", *Il Colloquio International sur l'Histoire et l'Archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord, Grenoble, 5-9 avril 1983*, *Bulletin Archéologique* 19 (1983) fasc. B, 17-24; A.J. Parker, "Sicilia e Malta nel commercio marittimo dell'antichità", *Kokalos* 22-23 (1976-77) 622-31. pls.CXXXIII-CXXXVIII; G. Hölbl, *Ägyptisches Kulturgut auf Malta und Gozo*, Vienna 1989.

³ See among many others, D. Baranki, *Phoenicia and the Phoenicians*, Beirut 1961; J. Fairman Brown, *The Lebanon and Phoenicia I*, Beirut 1969; D. Harden, *The Phoenicians*, Harmondsworth 1980; G. Garbini, *I Fenici. Storia e Religione*, Naples 1980.

⁴ G. Brunns, *L'Expansion Phénicienne en Méditerranée*, Bruxelles-Paris 1979; S. Moscati, *Cartaginesi*, Milan 1982; *id.*, *Il Mondo Punico*, Torino 1980; H.G. Niemeyer (ed.), *Phönizier im Westen. Die Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums über "Die phönizische Expansion im westlichen Mittelmeerraum" in Köln vom 24. bis 27. April 1979*, Mainz 1982, *passim*; E. Acquaro, *Cartagine: un Impero sul Mediterraneo*, Rome 1978.

mostly because the English language lacks the substantive, corresponding to the adjective 'Punic', to designate the western Phoenicians following their progressive detachment (culturally and politically) from the motherland from around the mid-sixth century B.C. when the ancient sources start referring to them as 'Carthaginians' (Greek *Karchedónioi*, Latin *Carthaginienses*)⁵ or 'Punics' (Latin *Poeni*).⁶ The modern historical perspective distinguishes, and very rightly so, between what was strictly Carthaginian - that is, referring to anything connected with or emanating from the city of Carthage - and the collective name of the Phoenician settlements in the west which, sometimes individually, at other times in concert, had dealings of various nature with the other political powers of the region, first the Greeks and later the Romans. Until this question of nomenclature is settled, the term 'Phoenician' is likely to remain the more generally applicable one.

It may sound commonplace and like stating the obvious, but it should, nevertheless, be emphasized that in ancient times all objects and artifacts of foreign origin found in a Maltese archaeological context must have reached Malta by sea since the latter is an island, or rather a group of islands. Therefore, although as yet no discovery of a pre-Roman shipwreck, in particular Greek or Phoenician, has ever been made in Maltese waters - at least not any that has been officially recorded, since the earliest material from the Xlendi wreck is second century B.C.⁷ - all Greek, Phoenician and Etruscan objects unearthed from the Maltese islands have all the qualities and attributes we normally associate with shipwrecks. All such objects are undeniable evidence of maritime trade, certainly in that direction (i.e., to Malta), and possibly in other directions (i.e., for re-export).

The same ease cannot be made for commerce between Phoenicians and Greeks on the island of Sicily.⁸ Since that island was divided between Phoenician colonies in the west and Greek colonies in the rest of it, certainly some of the commodities, even those of ultimate overseas origin, must have changed hands between Greek and Phoenician colonists by means of overland traffic, and were not necessarily imported directly from their centre of production. I mean to say that Greek archaic

⁵ From which is derived the Italian *Cartaginesi*.

⁶ From which is derived the Italian *Punici*.

⁷ Report on the Working of the Museum Department 1961, Malta 1962, 6-7, fig.5; Parker, *Sicilia e Malta* (n.2), 622-3.

⁸ See T.Tusa, "I Fenici e i Cartaginesi", *Sikanie*, Milan 1986, 577-631; *id.*, "La problematica archeologica relativa alla penetrazione fenicio-punica e alla storia della civiltà punica in Sicilia", in R. Romeo (ed.), *La Storia della Sicilia I*, Naples 1979, 145-61; S. Moscati, *L'Arte della Sicilia Punica*, Milan 1987; S.F. Bondi, "Penetrazione fenicio-punica e storia della civiltà punica in Sicilia", in R. Romeo, *La Storia della Sicilia, I*, Naples 1979, 163-218.

pottery found in the necropoleis of Mozia⁹ and Palermo,¹⁰ for example, could have got there through the intermediary of the Greek colonies of Sicily, and similarly the Phoenician faience and pottery discovered in the necropolis 'del Furco' at Syracuse¹¹ and the red-slip ware found in Zancle¹² could have reached these destinations through the intervention of Phoenician tradesmen from the western Sicilian colonies.¹³

A very different problem is, of course, posed by the Greek marble statue of a 'Charioteer' (datable to c.450 B.C.) discovered on Mozia some years ago.¹⁴ Phoenician commerce is normally concerned with small-scale, easily handled goods and the Mozia statue would be quite a rare exception. I would be more inclined to believe it was part of a booty plundered from a Sicilian Greek city in times of war.

There seems to be a traditional resistance to the view that by early Phoenician times open-sea navigation was regularly practiced. Some still believe that the Phoenician navigators, like their Greek counterparts, continued to hug the coast well into the first half of the first millennium B.C.¹⁵ The contents of three tombs discovered at Ghajn Qajjet,¹⁶ Mtarfa¹⁷ and Qallilija,¹⁸ all in the vicinity of Rabat, Malta, apart from establishing a *terminus a quo* for the Phoenician presence in Malta, go a long way to establish that open-sea faring was being practiced by the Phoenicians by the first half of the seventh century B.C., especially if one takes into consideration the diminutive size of the island and its pelagic position.

⁹ *Mozia VII-IX*, Rome 1972-78.

¹⁰ I. Tamburello, "Palermo punico-romana", *Kokalos* 17 (1971) 81-96; *ead.*, "Palermo antica (III)", *Sicilia Archeologica*, 38 (1978) 42-53; R. Camerata Scovazzo & G. Castellana, "Necropoli punica di Palermo", *Sicilia Archeologica* 45 (1980) 43-54.

¹¹ P. Pelagatti, "Siracusa. Elementi dell'abitato di Ortiigia nell'VIII e VII secolo a.C.", *Cronache di Archeologia e di Storia dell'Arte*, Catania, Università 17 (1978) 119-33.

¹² G. Bacci, "Ceramica dell'VIII e VII secolo a. C. a Messina", *Cronache di Archeologia e di Storia dell'Arte*, Catania, Università 17 (1978) 100-3.

¹³ This problem is treated extensively by Bondi, *Penetrazione fenicio-punica* (n. 8) 163-218; *id.*, "I Fenici in Occidente", *Modes de Contacts et Processus de Transformation dans les Sociétés Antiques* (Coll. École Française de Rome 67) Pisa-Rome, 379-400; and Tusa, *La problematica archeologica* (n. 8) 145-61.

¹⁴ S. Tusa, "La statua di Mozia", *La Parola del Passato*, 213 (1983) 445-56; Moscati, *Arte* (n. 8) 73-6.

¹⁵ For example, L. Breglia, *Le Antiche Rotte del Mediterraneo Documentate da Monete e Pesi*, Rome 1966, 122, pls. II-III.

¹⁶ J.G. Baldacchino & T.J. Dunbabin, "Rock tomb at Ghajn Qajjet, near Rabat, Malta", *Papers of the British School at Rome* 21 (1953) 32-41.

¹⁷ *Annual Report on the Working of the Museum Department 1926-27*, Malta 1927, 8; W. Culican, "The repertoire of Phoenician pottery", *Phönizier im Westen*, Mainz 1982, 45-82.

¹⁸ *Annual Report on the Working of the Museum Department 1916-7*, Malta 1917, 9-10.

In the first instance, the characteristic burnished red-slip ware which represented the bulk of the ceramic kit found in the Ghajn Qajjet tomb reveal a pedigree which can be derived from the Syro-Palestinian area, although they are related to contemporary pottery found in other early Phoenician settlements in the west.¹⁹ Secondly, the head of a bronze torch-holder from the same tomb is normally attributed a Cypro-Phoenician origin.²⁰ These items, together with the strongly Egyptianizing amulets and jewelry from other tombs²¹ as well as the archaic materials of oriental origin from Tas-Silġ, constitute strong evidence of a trading route from Phoenicia to the western Mediterranean (i.e., to Malta and, presumably, Carthage and western Sicily) via Cyprus and, very likely, Crete, or else from the eastern tip of the Syrtic gulf.

The two other significant items, a Proto-Corinthian *kotyle* and an eastern Greek 'bird-bowl' confirm the eastern origin of most of the furniture in the Ghajn Qajjet tomb,²² but they also open a new dimension to the question: the itinerary they followed to arrive in Malta.

1. Were they carried to Malta all the way from Phoenicia? - Proto-Corinthian and eastern Greek pottery are regularly found in Syro-Palestinian coastal cities.²³
2. Were they picked up from some *emporion* on the way, say from Cyprus, Rhodes, or even Crete?
3. Or did they reach Malta through a Sicilian or North African intermediary?

¹⁹ Ciasca, *Malta* (n.1) 67-8.

²⁰ Baldacchino-Dunbabin, *Ghajn Qajjet* (n.16) 37-8, fig. 6, pl.XIII; G. Tore, "Intorno ad un 'torchiere' bronzeo di tipo cipriota da San Vero Millis (S'Uraki)-Oristano", *Atti del I Convegno di Studi "Un Millennio di Relazioni fra la Sardegna e i Paesi del Mediterraneo"*, Selargius-Cagliari 1985, Cagliari 1986, 65-76.

²¹ G. Hölbl, "Egyptian fertility magic within Phoenician and Punic culture", in A. Bonanno (ed.), *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Amsterdam 1986, 202; *id.*, *Ägyptisches Kulturgut im Phönikischen und Punischen Sardinien*, Leiden 1986, 141, 268, 421; *id.*, *Malta und Gozo* (n.2).

²² As they provide the basis for the dating of the associated Phoenician material and of the end of Prehistory and the beginning of Ancient History for the Maltese islands, these archaic Greek pots deserve a special note. Previously they have been assigned to the second half of the eighth century (bibl. in A. Bonanno, "The tradition of an ancient Greek colony in Malta, *Hyphen* IV, 1 (1983) 15-6, nn. 84-8) mostly on datings suggested by Dunbabin (Baldacchino-Dunbabin, *Ghajn Qajjet* (n.16) 40) and accepted by W. Culican, ("Aspects of Phoenician settlement in the western Mediterranean", *Abr-Nahrain* 1 (1961) 48) and Ciasca (*Malta* (n.1), 64). In more recent years, however, both Culican and Ciasca have lowered their date to the second half of the seventh century: see Ciasca, "Insediamenti e cultura dei Fenici a Malta", in Niemeyer (ed.), *Phönizier im Westen* (n.4) 148. As to the Proto-Corinthian skyphos from the Mtarfa tomb, experts in this field concur on a date in the first half of the seventh century B.C.: see Culican, *Phoenician Pottery* (n.17), 76-8, fig.13-4.

²³ S. Moscati, *La Civiltà Mediterranea*, Milan 1980, 30-5.

Although possible, the last alternative seems to be the least likely, certainly at this period in time. The second calls in complications of Phoenician trading presence in the Aegean which lie outside the scope of this paper. In the absence of other evidence to the contrary the greater probability of 1. and 2. certainly points out to a direct commercial current from the eastern Mediterranean to, or via, the Maltese archipelago.²⁴

The picture presented by these archaic tombs is, indeed, further confirmed by the archaic repertoire retrieved from that remarkable ancient site explored by the Missione Archeologica Italiana of the University of Rome in the 1960s, the sanctuary of Tas-Silġ above the Marsaxlokk harbour,²⁵ especially the ivories,²⁶ some architectural features²⁷ and some statuettes.²⁸ In some of this material A. Ciasca sees tell-tale stylistic analogies with the Greek world of Ionia and the islands.²⁹

What is conspicuously absent in the material of both the Ghajn Qajjet and Mtarfa tombs, as well as all the other tombs datable from the early sixth century onwards, is the native element which down to the arrival of the Phoenicians, and possibly for a few centuries afterwards, constituted the prehistoric population of the *Borġ in-Nadur* and *Bahrija* cultures.³⁰ Is it because the tombs belonged exclusively to members of the newly established Phoenician community who found little or nothing indigenous worth including in their funerary furniture? Or was the native population so overwhelmed by the new culture as to abandon almost completely their own artisanal production? Antonia Ciasca has recently suggested that the early red-slip ware was locally produced and that it developed from an indigenous tradition.³¹ Evidence of a coexistence of some sort between the prehistoric native population and the literate newcomers was found, on the other hand, in a burial cairn in Rabat, Gozo³² and at Tas-Silġ where *Borġ in-Nadur* (and *Bahrija*) pottery was identified in association with the earliest layers of Phoenician occupation.³³

²⁴ Ciasca, *Malta* (n.1), 71; Moseati, *Civiltà Mediterranea* (n.23), 254.

²⁵ *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta, Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna 1963-70*, Rome 1964-71: sections on Tas-Silġ.

²⁶ S. Moscati, "Un avorio di Tas-Silġ", *Oriens Antiquus* 9 (1970) 61-4.

²⁷ *Id.*, "Un pilastrino da Tas-Silġ", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 39 (1964) 151-4; *id.*, "Alcune colonnette da Tas-Silġ", *Oriens Antiquus* 5 (1966) 15-8.

²⁸ Ciasca, *Malta* (n.1), 100: 'stile fenicio-cipriota'.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁰ J.D. Evans, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands: a Survey*, London 1971, 225-8; D.H. Trump, *Skorba*, London 1966, 44.

³¹ Ciasca, *Insedimenti e Cultura* (n.22) 142.

³² *Annual Report on the Working of the Museum Department 1923-24*, Malta 1924, 23.

³³ Ciasca, *Malta* (n.1), 65-6, 72.

Going back to the question of commercial sea routes from the east, it should be noted that the statuette of the so-called Melqart, or Reshef, fished out of the sea off Sciacca in 1955³⁴ not only pushes the plying of the western seas by Phoenicians even further back than is normally indicated by the archaeological documentation - it is dated to the ninth century at the latest - but, if the more widely accepted date of 14th-13th century is correct, it also opens the question of the earliest colonization in the west - those of Cadiz and Utica are fixed by the literary tradition around 1110 (Vell. Pat. i, 2, 3) and 1100 (Plin. xvi,216) respectively - as well as the question of the very entity of the sea-farers before the twelfth century. Should they be called Phoenicians, Canaanites or, more generically, Syro-Palestinians?

As yet, however, the archaeological record for Malta does not place the Phoenician presence there beyond the first half of the seventh century B.C., or thereabouts. The literary sources do neither contradict nor confirm this initial date of the settlement of this semitic people on Malta. Pseudo-Skylax,³⁵ writing in the mid-fourth century, described Malta as a Carthaginian colony, probably reflecting a contemporary reality, Malta having entered the Carthaginian political and military sphere with the decline of the political autonomy of the Phoenician motherland at the hands of the Assyrians first, and later, in a more definitive way, under the Persians. A later writer, Diodorus Siculus (v,12,1-4) writing in the first century B.C., somewhat anachronistically described Malta and Gozo as 'Phoenician colonies'. He was most probably referring to a much earlier reality; a reality, however, whose mark was somehow still felt or noticed in his own time, or in that of his source.

Diodorus makes two further comments of great significance. He emphasizes the two islands' pelagic nature ('Far off the south of Sicily three islands lie out in the sea') and the fact that they had 'harbours which can offer safety to ships in distress of weather'. The latter observation seems to imply only the occasional shelter, a point of reference to be used in difficult weather conditions, but it does not exclude *a priori* a regular port of call for ships navigating on a direct route that cut straight through what Cicero, a contemporary of Diodorus, labelled *mare periculosum*. In fact, Diodorus goes on to say that the Phoenicians selected Malta as a place to settle on precisely because 'as they extended their trade to the western ocean, (they) found in it a place of safe retreat, since it was well supplied with harbours and *lay out in the open sea*'. A port of call, therefore, but not a port of trade. Diodorus' last statement runs counter to what Thucydides (vi.2,6) tells us as to the preferences of the Phoenicians in their choice of sites for settlement in Sicily, i.e. 'promontories on the sea and small islands close to the coast' - for example, Motya.

³⁴ G. Purpura, "Sulle vicende ed il luogo di rinvenimento del cosiddetto Melqart di Selinunte", *Sicilia Archeologica* 46-7 (1981) 87-93.

³⁵ In K. Müller, *Geographi Graeci Minores I*, Paris 1885 (repr. Hildesheim 1965) 89.

Therefore, the choice of the Maltese islands must have been dictated not by the usual criteria but by their convenient position, right on the direct route from east to west,³⁶ without having to sail too close to the Greek-controlled southern coast of Sicily, or take the much longer route along the coast of North Africa. That this commercial traffic making use of Malta was a somewhat intensive one is borne out not only by the overwhelming Phoenician content of the archaeological material from the early seventh century onwards, but also by Diodorus' attribution of the great economic progress achieved by the Maltese inhabitants to the assistance received from the Phoenician merchants.

Presumably, then, the Phoenicians did not use Malta merely as a transshipment base in their trade system connecting the Tyrrhenian network with that converging on the Phoenician cities of the motherland; they also developed crafts and industries on the islands themselves. One of these crafts, referred to by the Sicilian historian as the most important one, was the weaving of linen, an industry the product of which is mentioned by several other ancient writers.³⁷ But this industry has not left any trace in the archaeological record. The other craft which was developed to such an extent as to produce exportable items was pottery-making to which I shall come back in a moment. It would seem likely that the colonizers helped the inhabitants to develop new lines of agriculture, in particular olive cultivation. The evidence for this is still rather flimsy and consists of pre-Roman (i.e. Punic) structures identified below several of the excavated Roman olive-pressing farms. However, from an examination of the documented Maltese ceramic exports Antonia Ciasca has come to the conclusion that Malta must have exported very little food merchandise, because large containers from Malta occur with far less frequency outside the islands than those of smaller dimensions.³⁸

To return to the role of Malta in the flow of trade between the eastern Mediterranean and the various centres on the Tyrrhenian sea in the archaic period, in two contributions published soon after the archaeological campaigns conducted on the site of the sanctuary of Tas-Silġ, and taking into consideration the results of those campaigns, Ciasca suggested that the island seemed to be detached, at least in the seventh and sixth centuries, from the great commercial routes directed to the Phoenician colonies of the west and that it appeared to fit more in the routes that from the eastern islands reached the areas of central and north Tyrrhenian through the straits of Messina.³⁹

³⁶ Ciasca, *Malta* (n.1), 72-3.

³⁷ A. Bonanno, "Distribution of villas and some aspects of the Maltese economy in the Roman period", *Journal of the Faculty of Arts* (University of Malta) IV, 4 (1977) 77, n.26.

³⁸ Ciasca, *Ceramiche Puniche Maltesi* (n.2), 22-3.

³⁹ Ciasca, *Ricerche Puniche*, (n.2), 101; *ead.*, *Malta* (n.1), 75.

The arguments brought forward in support of this view are the following: 1) the marked difference of the Phoenician pottery of Malta from that of the group Motya/Carthage; 2) the distribution pattern of the torch-holder represented, apart from Malta, in Sidon, Cyprus, Rhodes, Sardinia and Caere; 3) the distribution pattern of the 'bird-bowl' in Rhodes, Thera, Malta, Gela, Syracuse, Rhegion, Caere, Vulci, Vetulonia, Populonia.

To be frank, and with due respect to the authority of Ciasca, I find this conclusion somewhat hard to accept. In the first place it would seem more logical, all other things being equal, to suppose that Malta was on the straight route to Carthage and to the Tyrrhenian via the Sicilian canal⁴⁰ than on one that arriving in Malta from the east veered suddenly north to reach the Tyrrhenian via the straits of Messina. The latter route seems even less probable given that the straits must have been 'controlled' in some way by the Greek colonies of Rhegion and Zancle. Furthermore, it should be remembered that differences in the ceramic kit and in other cultural manifestations between one colony and another is not a new thing among the Phoenician colonies of the west. On the other hand, Michel Gras has identified several more points of contact between Malta and Motya/Carthage.⁴¹ Finally, the distribution patterns of the Cypro-Phoenician torch-holders⁴² and of the eastern Greek 'bird-bowl'⁴³ do not in fact exclude the possibility, I dare say the probability, of their reaching the Tyrrhenian centres via the Sicilian canal.

In this respect one must, I think, distinguish between the two possible commercial carriers. If the carriers were Greek, the natural route would be, via some intermediary centre in the east (say Cyprus or Rhodes), straight to Greek Sicily and the Messina straits without reference to Malta. If the carriers were Phoenicians, then the more logical route would be through Malta to Carthage or Motya and from there to the other centres of the Tyrrhenian; unless we want to put aside the notion of the great Mediterranean sea-routes⁴⁴ and think of Malta as a backwater depending for its imported needs on the closest *emporìa*, be they Greek or Phoenician, in neighbouring Sicily.

Although Ciasca's more recent study⁴⁵ on the distribution of some recognizable Maltese ceramic products of the Phoenicio-Punic period is based, as she admits, only on a bibliographical examination of the data, I feel that her conclusions

⁴⁰ Moscati, *Civiltà Mediterranea* (n.23) 254.

⁴¹ M. Gras, *Trafics Tyrrhéniens Archaiques*, Rome 1985, 299-300.

⁴² Tore, *'Torchiere' Bronzео* (n.20), 65-76.

⁴³ B.J. Shefton, "Greeks and Greek imports in the south of the Iberian Peninsula. The archaeological evidence", in Nicmeyer (ed.), *Phönizier im Westen* (n.4) 337-70, fig. 2, nn. 38-45.

⁴⁴ Moscati, *Il Mondo dei Fenici* (n.1), 241.

⁴⁵ Ciasca, *Ceramiche Puniche Maltesi* (n.2), 17-24.

constitute a good starting point for future studies and I would like to repropose the results of her investigations because they throw light on the trade patterns in the Tyrrhenian sea in the period under examination.

A Maltese ceramic export which, according to Ciasca, is easily recognizable and which has a fairly wide diffusion is the ovoid, neckless amphora which is documented from the seventh to the third/second centuries B.C. with very little development. This type of amphora, doubtlessly used for storage and transport of liquid or solid foods, has been identified in Camarina (sixth century), possibly in the shipwreck of Porticello (fifth century) and at Gela. Its distribution became much more diffused in the third and second centuries: e.g. Carthage, Lilybaeum, Motya, Ibiza. Therefore, although for the sixth and fifth centuries it is documented only in Sicily, by the end of our period it was widely distributed in the Tyrrhenian trade pattern reaching as far as the Balearics.

Smaller containers of liquids, such as small amphorae and various small jugs in a characteristic red/orange clay with cream/white or ivory/white slip and simple broad-band decoration in reddish-brown (sometimes branches of leaves and flowers, stylized waves or even geometric motifs) whose production can safely be placed in the fourth and third centuries B.C., have so far only appeared in Carthage.

Other Maltese products of the common Punic repertoire (such as bilychne lamps and umbilicated plates) have been traced again at Carthage, Cagliari, Ibiza, Lilybaeum. The same distribution pattern in the Tyrrhenian is confirmed by the occurrence outside Malta of a two-handled vase with a widely splayed conical body and short rounded shoulders which is commonly found used as cinerary urn in Maltese tombs. It occurs in Lilybaeum, Motya, and in a tomb context at Leptis Magna, while a single example was fished up from the sea off the south coast of Sardinia.⁴⁶

The above-mentioned Leptis connection turns out to be only one of the many commercial contacts that must have existed between the Maltese islands and this Tripolitanian city, especially from the end of the fourth to the third centuries B.C. The tomb furniture of the two centres for the fourth-third centuries is so closely related that Ciasca holds that between them Leptis and Malta formed part of a specific area of Punic culture, placed geographically at the easternmost boundaries of the Phoenician colonial world in the western Mediterranean, and having its own particular characteristics.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ P. Bartoloni, "Un'urna punico-maltese dal canale di Sardegna", *Rivista di Studi Fenici*, 9 (1981), supplemento, 1-5.

⁴⁷ Ciasca, *Ceramiche Puniche Maltesi* (n.2), 24, n.31.

In her concluding paragraphs Ciasca tentatively classifies the vases with ivory/cream slip as 'luxury items' for export in competition with various other productions of white-background pottery of the Hellenistic period. She would not exclude the possibility that the Greek centres of Sicily provided the market for these products. In this respect she makes a further very important and valid observation. The wide-ranging trade contacts with the Punic world bear very little reflection in the Maltese context. On the contrary, the Maltese documentation indicates strong links with the Greek colonies of Sicily and Magna Graecia rather than with the rest of the Punic world. As an example she cites the fact that the presence in Malta of foreign Punic commercial amphorae is minimal whereas Greek and Italic amphorae are quite common.⁴⁸ Besides, from the fourth century onwards Greek imports become increasingly South Italian and include fragments of various types of red-figured vases, Campanian ware and others belonging to the Lagynos group. Some jewelry seems to be attributable to Tarentine production. Fragments of sculpture in Greek marble, on the other hand, testify further contact with Greece, more probably with the islands and Ionia.⁴⁹

As for the third component of the theme of this paper, the Etruscan one, it is not certain how much weight we ought to give to the absence from Malta of its *bucchero* which is, however, found in Carthage and Mozia. The so-called 'Etruscan' or 'Tyrrhenian' pirates⁵⁰ remind us of the pirates that, according to Cicero (*Verr.* ii,4,103-4) and obviously before his time, made regular and frequent use of the sheltered harbours of Malta.⁵¹

The Etruscan identity of the ivory or bone plaques to which the specimen from Ras ir-Raheb (Malta) belongs has been securely determined by Pallottino.⁵² In her study of the various workshops producing these plaques and their diffusion Marina Martelli included the Maltese example in her second group together with others from Ruvo, Velia, Locri and Rhodes. She dates this group to the period 540/30-500 B.C.⁵³ Although it does not fit comfortably in the archaeological context in which it was found,⁵⁴ this bone plaque is a sure evidence of some sort of contact with the Etruscan world.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-4, n. 30.

⁴⁹ Ciasca, *Ricerche Puniche*, (n. 2), 102.

⁵⁰ M. Gras, "La piraterie tyrrhénienne en mer Égée, myth ou réalité?" in *L'Italie Préromaine et la Rome Républicaine*. (Mélanges offerts à Jacques Hurgon), Rome 1976, 341-69.

⁵¹ J. Busuttill, "Pirates in Malta", *Melita Historica* V, 4 (1971) 308-10

⁵² M. Pallottino, "Scigno tarquiniese con rilievi d'avorio arcaici", *Rivista dell'Istituto d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte* 5 (1935) 37ff.

⁵³ M. Martelli, "Gli avori tardo-araici; botteghe e aree di diffusione", in *Il Commercio Etrusco Arcaico* (Quaderni del Centro di Studio per l'Archeologia Etrusco-italica 9), Rome 1985, 216-23, fig. 36.

⁵⁴ *Report on the Working of the Museum Department 1962*, Malta 1963, 6, pl. 4.

There is, moreover, another object of Etruscan origin found in Malta, a plate belonging to the so-called 'Genucilia Group'. Now preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford⁵⁵ it constitutes another testimony of commercial contact between Etruria and Malta, this time during the first half of the fourth century B.C., even though it could have reached Malta indirectly via Carthage. Together with the Genucilia plate found in Cyrene⁵⁶ the Maltese plate extends the area of diffusion of this class of Etruscan (or Central Italian) pottery beyond the southeast limit previously set by three such plates discovered in Carthage.⁵⁷

The above observations remain, for the moment, working hypotheses which do, however, open new fields of investigation, in particular on the commercial and cultural interaction between Malta and Greek Sicily, on the one hand, and between Malta and the Punic world, on the other, before the Roman conquest. To make more headway and achieve more concrete results one has to establish firmly the places of origin, the production centres of the classes of pottery mentioned above. In the Maltese case it is imperative to establish whether the types of pottery that are reputed to be of Maltese production - starting from the *Borġin-Nadur* pottery found in Thapsos, Ognina and other sites, through the red-slip ware and down to the ovoid, neckless amphorae - are really so or not. The best way to do this is certainly by the application of scientific techniques, such as the analysis of the fabrics and their constituent elements compared to the geology of the Maltese islands.

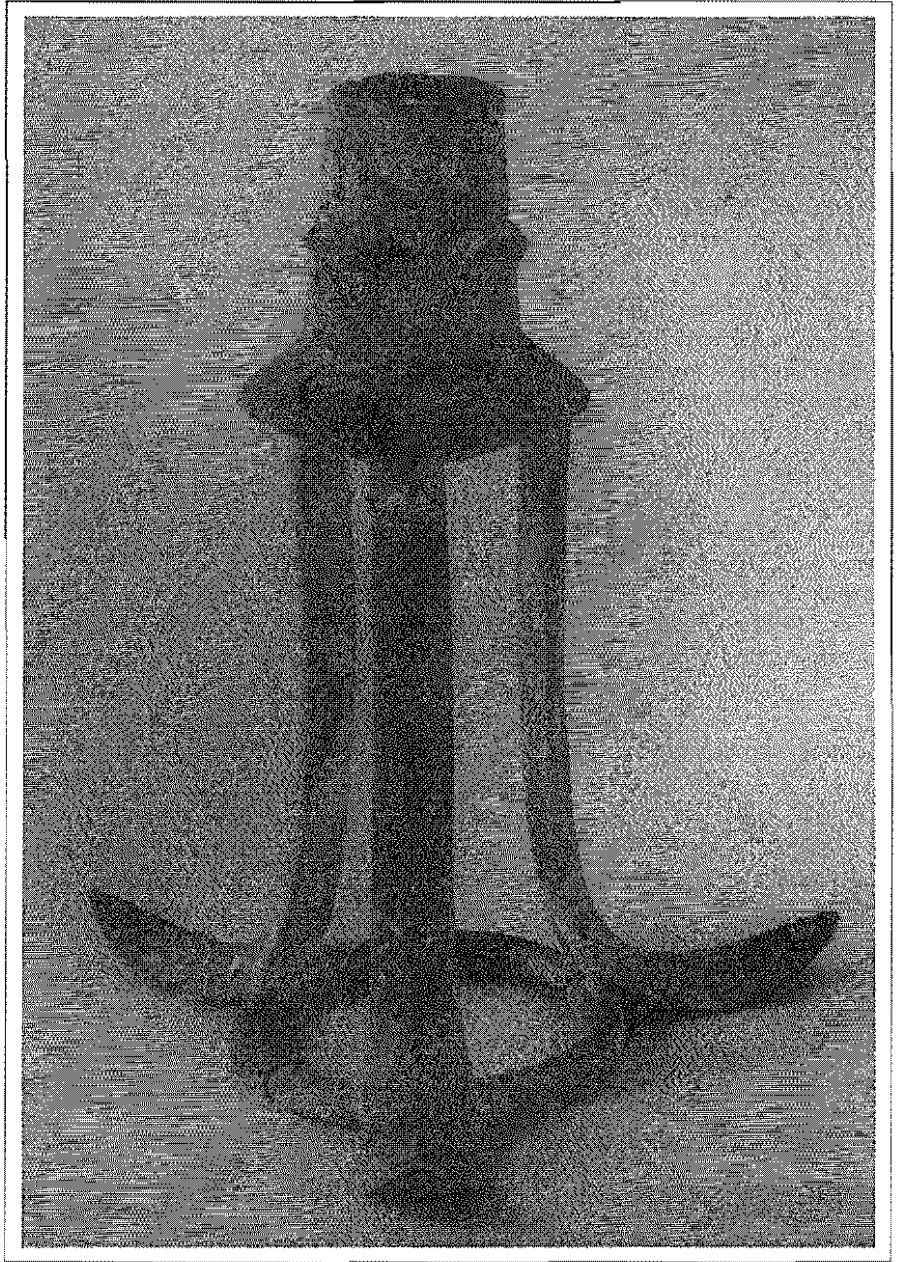
Acknowledgements

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⁵⁵ M.A. Del Chiaro, *The Genucilia group: a Class of Etruscan Red-figured plates* (University of California Publications in Classical Archaeology) III, 4 (1957) 284.

⁵⁶ L. Bacchielli, "Un 'Piattello di Genucilia'. I rapporti di Cirene con l'Italia nella seconda metà del IV sec. a.C.", *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia* 8, Rome 1976, 99-107.

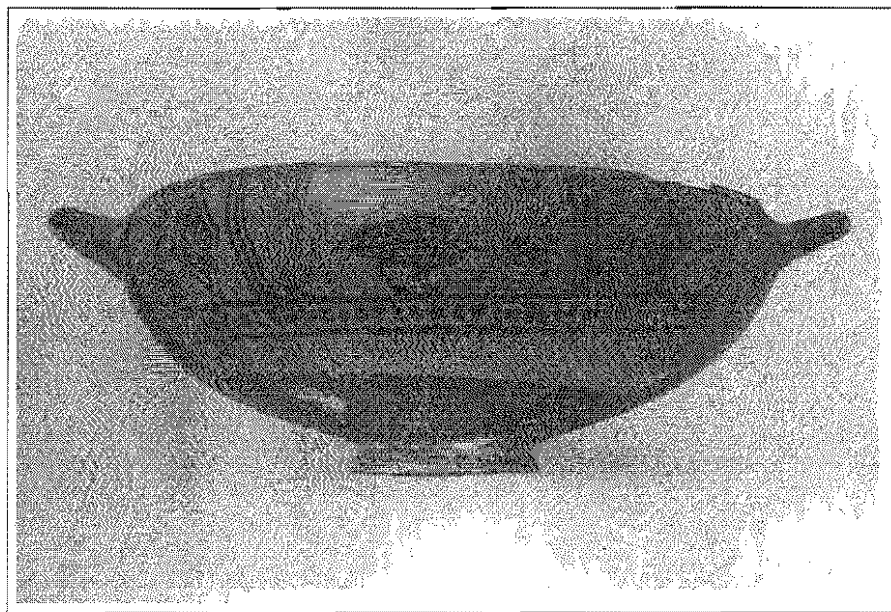
⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 100, n.13.



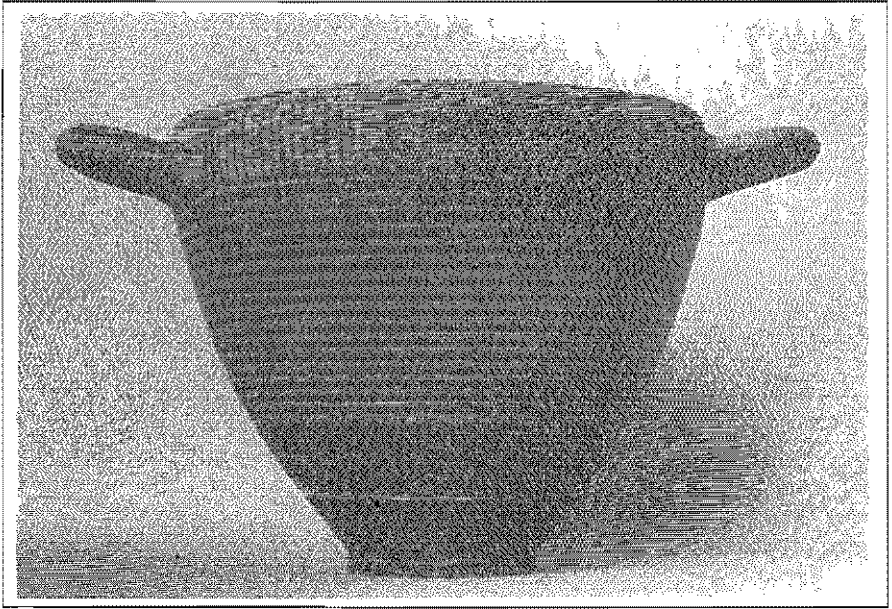
1. Head of bronze torch-holder found in a Phoenician rock-cut tomb at Ghajn Qajjet near Rabat in 1950.



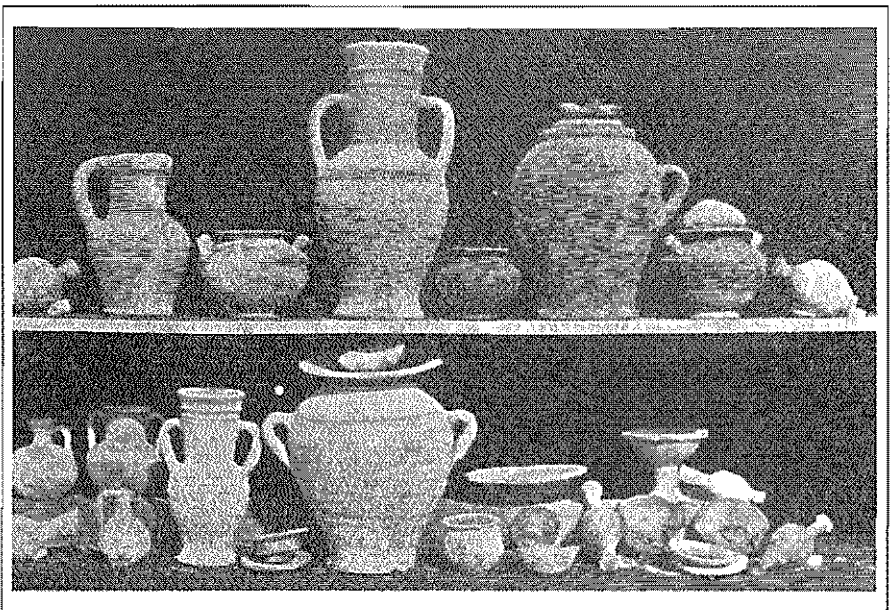
2. Proto-Corinthian *Kotyle* found in a Phoenician rock-cut tomb at Ghajn Qajjet near Rabat in 1950.



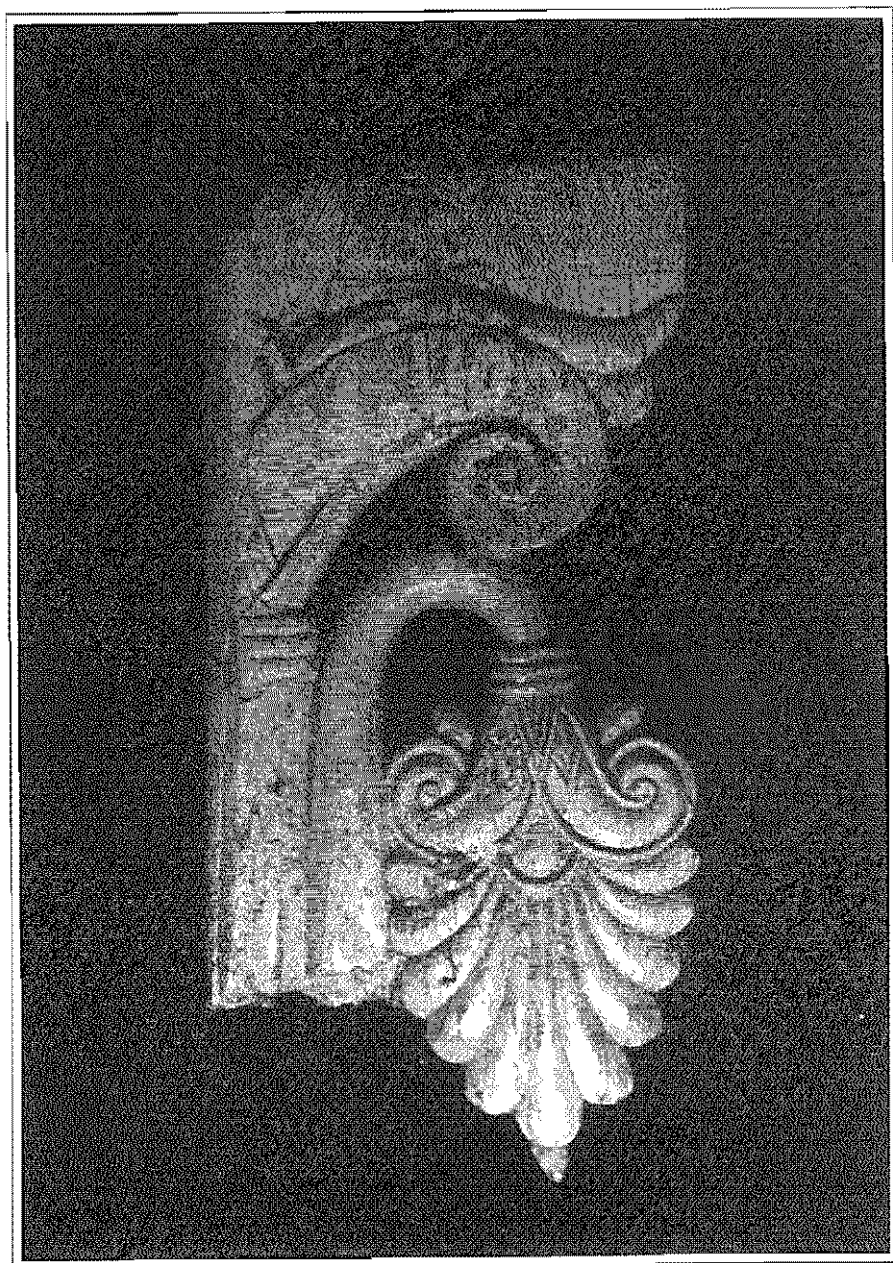
3. Eastern Greek 'bird-bowl' found in a Phoenician rock-cut tomb at Ghajn Qajjet near Rabat in 1950.



4. Proto-Corinthian *skyphos* found in a Phoenician rock-cut tomb at Mtarfa in 1926/27.



5. Typical pottery items from a late Punic rock-cut tomb. From Tomb no. 18 found at Tâc-Çaghqi, Rabat.



6. Gilt ornamental ivory fragment in open work. Half of an orientalizing voluted capital with hanging palmett. From Tas-Silg.



7. An Etruscan ivory plaque found in the remains of an ancient building at Ras ir-Raheb.