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JOURNAL OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS 22 (2022) 224–257

Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions
brill.com/jane

A Perilous Sailing and a Lion: Comparative Evidence for a Phoenician Afterlife Motif

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Abstract

This essay introduces new evidence for an eschatological Phoenician motif that alludes to a final sailing and its perils, represented by a monstrous lion attacking or sinking a boat. The lion-and-boat motif was, so far, only documented in a Phoenician funerary stela from late classical Athens, the Antipatros/Shem stela. Excavations at the fifth-century BCE Tartessic site of Casas del Turuñuelo in southwestern Spain has revealed a set of ivory and bone panels that decorated a wooden box, bearing relevant iconography in the so-called orientalizing style. Additional comparanda from the Levant, Iberia, and Tunisia in various media (coins, ivories, amulets), add weight to this interpretation. Our analysis highlights how the artists behind the Athenian and Tartessic artifacts were innovative in their way of representing a theme that was not codified iconographically. Most remarkable is the use of an ivory-carving convention (the Phoenician palmette motif) to portray the stylized boat, a choice corroborated by a painted pottery sherd from Olympia. This "palmette-boat" depiction, in our view, is coherent with Egyptian Nilotic boats, but also with the use of flat or shallow river-boats in the Tagus and Guadiana region, illustrating mechanisms of local adaptation of Phoenician sailing and life-death "passing" symbolism. If, as we suggest, this representation can be added to that in the Athenian document, we now have testimonies of two different local adaptations of a Phoenician theme at the two ends of the Mediterranean *oikoumene* between the archaic and late classical periods.

Published with license by Koninklijke Brill NV | DOI:10.1163/15692124-12341332
 | ISSN: 1569-2116 (print) 1569-2124 (online)

Keywords

Phoenician religion – afterlife – Ashtart/Astarte – ships – lion in iconography – Tartessos – ancient Iberia – Tunisia – amulets

1 Introduction

This essay introduces new evidence for the eschatological Phoenician motif alluding to a final sailing and its perils, represented by a monstrous lion attacking or sinking a boat. The lion-and-boat motif was, so far, only documented in a Phoenician funerary stela from late classical-Hellenistic Athens, the Antipatros/Shem stela (probably to be dated between the mid fourth-and the third cent. BCE)[1]. But excavations at the fifth-century BCE Tartessic site of Casas del Turuñuelo in southwestern Spain has revealed a set of ivory and bone panels, originally decorating the sides of a wooden box and bearing relevant iconography in the so-called orientalizing style. Additional comparanda from the Levant, Iberia, and Tunisia in various media (coins, ivories, amulets), add weight to this interpretation. Our analysis highlights how the artists behind the Athenian and Tartessic artifacts innovated while representing a theme that was not codified iconographically. The use the Phoenician palmette motif to portray the stylized boat seems an idiosyncratic choice, here perhaps inspired by the frequent use of the palmette in ivory-carving, but a parallel instance coappears in a painted pottery sherd from Olympia. This "palmette-boat" depiction, in our view, is coherent with Egyptian Nilotic boats, but also with the use of shallow river-boats in the Tagus and Guadiana region, illustrating mechanisms of local adaptation of Phoenician sailing and life-death "passing" symbolism. If, as we suggest, this representation can be added to that in the Athenian document, we now have testimonies of two different local adaptations of a Phoenician theme at the two ends of the Mediterranean *oikoumene* in the archaic-late-classical periods.

2 The Boat and the Lion Motif in Phoenician Contexts

Phoenician artistic repertoires travelled and grew roots among communities across the ancient Mediterranean in areas where Phoenicians traded and settled. Motifs connected to deities and practices that were believed to protect

1 Tribulato 2013: 459–60 for the various date proposals.

life and foster regeneration appear prominently, whether in Phoenician productions of in the versions they inspired among local groups (what we generally call "orientalizing"). This explains the frequent deposit of artifacts with such iconography in funerary and cultic contexts. In some cases, we encounter rare combinations of known elements reworked in unique ways. Through a comparative exercise we can obtain further clues as to the scenes' interpretation. This is the case of the ivories from Iberia we treat below, and of a Phoenician funerary stela from Athens, which has puzzled scholars for some time. These items provide unexpected parallels that can illuminate each other as the product of communities at the fringes of the Phoenician world in the eastern and western Mediterranean, at different moments in time between the archaic and late classical or early Hellenistic periods.

Starting in Athens, an intriguing scene is presented on a bilingual Greek-Phoenician stele found in the Athenian cemetery of Kerameikos, dated sometime between the mid-fourth and the early third century BCE. Following the usual conventions of these funerary monuments from classical Greece, the center of the stela is decorated with a recessed square space with a relief representation (the German term *Bildfeld* is used for this space, and the stelae bearing it *Bilfeldstele*). The combination of relief representation and inscription, both tied to the deceased, is fairly common.[2] This monument departs from the funerary scenes we see in Classical-Hellenistic Greece, which usually show the deceased as he/she was when living, often seated and with his/her family or friends standing to say farewell. The representation of the deceased departs from Greek conventions in funerary monuments, unless we look back at Late Geometric and in some later vase representation, never on stelae.[3] This piece, instead, shows the unusual sight of a lion and, behind it, in a different plane (now blurred because of erosion of the relief), the tilted prow of a ship [FIGURE 1]. Both lion and human recline over the prostrate body of the deceased, who presumably is the man named in the accompanying epigraphs (we discuss the iconography again below).

A bilingual funerary dedication in Phoenician and Greek leaves no doubt of the Phoenician identity of the deceased[4]: The Phoenician reads "I (am) Shem[.], son of Abdashtart, the Ashkelonite; (the stela) which I, Domseleh, son of Domhano, the Sidonian, dedicated."[5] The Greek version offers a literal translation, only adapting the name of the deceased to "Antipatros, son of

2 For this stela as a *Bildfeldstele*, Osborne 2012: 319–22.

3 Osborne 2012: 323.

4 Stager 2005; Tribulato 2013.

5 Our translation.

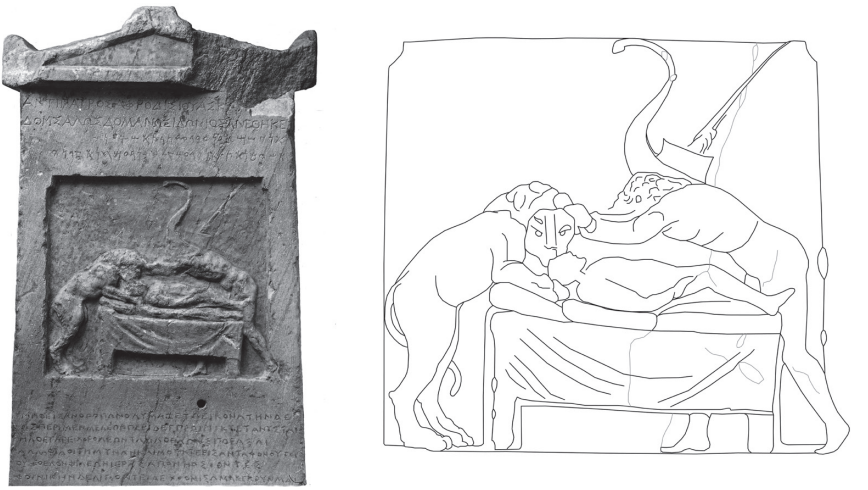


FIGURE 1 Funerary stele with Phoenician and Greek epigraphs and central relief showing a boat's prow and a lion besides two anthropomorphic figures. Detail of the scene depicted in relief. Drawing by E. Rodríguez González
NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, ATHENS (NAM 1488).

Aphrodisios." A longer epigraph was added in Greek hexameters, by a different hand, probably later on, as an explanation to the puzzling image. The text speaks in the voice of the deceased Shem/Antipatros, who offers an explanation to those passing by, which still remains rather cryptic for those without the cultural codes to decipher it[6]:

1 "Let no man be amazed at this image,
2 because on one side of me a lion lies stretched out and on the other side of me a prow.
3 For the hostile lion (ε{ἰ}χθρολέων) came, wishing to scatter my things (τἀμὰ θέλων σποράσαι),
4 but friends/dear ones (φίλοι) protected me and gave me funerary honors in this tomb,
5 (the friends) whom I wished for, that I longed for as they moved away from the sacred ship.
6 I left Phoenicia and it is in this land that I, a body, lie covered."

As commentators on this inscription point out, the entire monument is double coded. The artistic style deployed as well as the bilingualism of the epitaph and the Greek explanatory text show that the makers of this dedication were

6 Our translation, based on the Greek text in Stager 2005.

integrated into the Greek culture that surrounded them. But this and other bilingual inscriptions from Phoenicians thriving in community in Athens, Piraeus, and other Greek cosmopolitan centers also showcase the resilience of Phoenician identity among these communities. This is especially manifest in the recurrent use of theophoric names (sometimes "translated" into Greek, as in this stela), as well as patronymics, set formulae, and references to the mother city of the deceased's family or their functions within the community.[7]

This stela presents a fascinating case of cross-cultural iconography, language, and text. As Stager established, the lion must be interpreted symbolically, discarding previous interpretations that supposed Shem/Antipatros had died by lion-attack. The lion's head is damaged, and it is unclear whether he is biting, trying to bite, or simply hovering over the deceased's face (the beast's specific physical action is not mentioned in the inscription). At the same time, the naked figure opposite him is clearly pushing the lion away with both arms.[8] Taken all together, and thanks to the inscription, we can be sure that the scene is meant as symbolic. What the image tries to represent is the struggle over the dead man's remains and soul, not the cause of his death. In Stager's view, a number of symbolic references would have directed the passerby's thoughts to the goddess Ashtart, who is not only the main Phoenician goddess and connected to sailing, lion imagery, and the afterlife, but whose name is in the deceased's patronym (Abdashtart, "servant/devotee of Ashtart"). Ashtart and her local/regional iterations (especially Tanit) are ubiquitously present in Phoenician funerary culture, including the tophet dedications in Carthage and other sites in the central Mediterranean. Just as Aphrodite and Venus, with whom she shares an astral association and other qualities, Ashtart was a guide and protector for Phoenicians in their journeys and enterprises, as a protector of sailors and life more generally, a function extended to the afterlife journey. In the Northwest-Semitic world she underlies references to the "Queen of Heaven" and she was identified in Greece with Aphrodite Ourania, as shown in other dedications.[9] Last but not least, just as her Mesopotamian and Egyptian counterparts Ishtar, Isis, and Bastet, she was associated with the image of the lion or lioness. In the Syro-Phoenician world beast and goddess can appear together in a relationship of domination, with Ashtart shown as a Mistress of

7 Demetriou 2023; Osborne 2012.

8 Tribulato 2013: 474; Stager 2005: 434, who notes the stela would have been painted, helping to further distinguish the different items represented.

9 Examples in Stager 2005: 434–45.

Beasts, holding or standing on them.[10] We can also note a (male)lion-taming theme in Persian-period coins, where a king tames a lion as a "Master of animals," and on the reverse we see a trireme.[11]

While ships are not part of the standard Levantine ivory decoration, boats and artifacts related to maritime culture were embedded in Phoenician ritual life. This is not surprising, as the Phoenicians were the quintessential ancient maritime culture (and recognized by others as such), and much of their ritual life was connected to the sea, even taking place at sea.[12] For instance, ships are also part of the Phoenician-Punic amulet repertoire, are painted on the walls of Punic chamber tombs in North Africa, and in southern Iberia they appear in various media in open air sites and as votive offerings (see below). The maritime aspect of Phoenician religion is also manifest in the ritual use of caves accessible to sailors, usually connected to the worship of Baal/Melqart and Ashtart, whose protection at sea was sought. This type of non-formal cult in the open is difficult to trace archaeologically, but it is reconstructed thanks to votive deposits at coastal caves on Sicily, Ibiza, Malta, and Gibraltar.[13] Moreover, anchors and ship models were dedicated in sanctuaries in southern Spain, and the pavement of floors with seashells are understood also as a reference to grounds sacred to Ashtart, as we see also at the other end of the Phoenician world, on Cyprus.[14] On that island, representations of boats were engraved on the base of the Ashtart Temple 1 at Kition-Bamboula (ninth century BCE), and anchor stones were used in the foundations of the later Temple 4.[15] Finally, the same universe is illustrated by artifacts recovered from shipwrecks, such as the portable stone altar from the Phoenician wreck of the Bajo de la Campana, dated to late seventh–early sixth century BCE, or the portable incense burners or candelabra (*thymiateria*) found usually in burial contexts but also represented in depictions of Phoenician boats.[16]

The association of lion and ship, in turn, also makes sense within the Phoenician symbolic world-view. Lions were connected to ships and sailing

10 Examples on glyptic and other media from Syria-Palestine in Keel and Uehlinger 1998: esp. 22–4, 66–7, 103. See also Cornelius 2014 for Astarte and her iconography, including the lion pedestal or her identification as a lion. For leonine imagery in the Hebrew Bible, linked to power and the divine, Strawn 2005.

11 Stager 2005: 439–41; Betlyon, 2019: 394–5.

12 E.g., Brody 2008; Fumadó Ortega 2012; Christian 2013; Edrey 2019: 161–6 (maritime culture: 211–2).

13 Gómez Bellard and Vidal 2000; Marín Ceballos 2010; Vella and Anastasi 2019: 561–4. On the Gorham cave findings (Gibraltar), Gutiérrez et al. 2012; Finlayson et al. 2021.

14 Celestino and López-Ruiz 2016: 217, 243, 250.

15 Knapp 2008: 368; Reyes 1994: 18–9.

16 Brodi 2008; Fumadó Ortega 2012; Polzer 2014; Morstadt 2015.

in Phoenician iconography, as is shown primarily in Phoenician coins, which represent a lion head as the prow of Phoenician ships [cf. FIGURE 5 below], a motif with Egyptian precedents.[17] These representations are somewhat ambivalent, with the lion representing both protective or threatening forces, depending on the stance of the one protected or attacked. For instance, the lion is associated with Ashtart and often thought to represent this protective divinity in coins. As stated above, maritime protection was part of Ashtart's purview. We can see these associations at work on a passage situated from the same Tartessic-Phoenician milieu of southern Iberia, specifically the reported miraculous event during a naval battle involving lion-headed boats. The notice is collected by the late-Roman historian Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 1.20.12) and situates the battle in the area of Gadir at an uncertain date, probably sometime during the fourth century BCE.[18] Allegedly, the Phoenicians from Gadir averted an attack on their temple of Herakles (Melqart) thanks to divine intervention. The enemy's ships of the local (Tartessic?) leader Theron turned around and suddenly burst into flames, as if scorched by the sun's rays, in what seems an allusion to Herakles-Melqart's association with the Sun. The survivors claimed they saw lions standing on the prows of the Phoenician ships, which signals the perceived transformation of the boats' prows into supernatural sea-born lions.[19]

Dangerous beasts and monsters are often ambivalent themselves. They can be both protective and destructive, that is, they can avert your enemy or attack you, as you may be someone else's enemy. It all depends on the position or relationship of the onlooker vis-à-vis the amulet, coin, stela, or whatever object the iconography is on. This ambivalence accompanies Near Eastern and Greek monsters like the Gorgon, the Sphinx, or Mesopotamian Humbaba.[20] Scholarly interpretations of the lion in the Phoenician stela from Athens, thus, vary along these lines. In her study of the Athenian funerary stela of Shem/Antipatros, Stager identifies the malevolent lion, depicted and mentioned in the stela, with Ashtart. The goddess would have acted aggressively against the Phoenician sea-traveler, who perhaps had drawn.[21] Building on Stager's symbolic reading of the iconography, Tribulato offers a foil to this view. The lion does not refer

17 Stager 2005: 439–41; Betlyon 1982, 2019: 394–5; cf. Egyptian ships represented in the Ramesses III and the "Sea Peoples" battle scene, in the Medinet Habu reliefs (twelfth century BCE), while the Philistines' ships appear with bird-head protomes: Dothan and Dothan 1992: 17, 20.

18 Álvarez Martí-Aguilar 2014: 31.

19 Rodríguez González and García Cardiel 2020: 8–9.

20 Graff 2014: 265–6; López-Ruiz 2021b.

21 Stager 2005: 442 ff.

to Ashtart, but to a malignant demon who threatened the soul of the deceased in his journey to the afterlife. The lion-demon jeopardized Shem/Antipatros' rightful burial and the "good journey" that was guaranteed by the benevolent allies (*phíloi*) mentioned in the inscription (represented as a collective entity by the nude figure, following the "heroic nudity" convention), and generally overseen by Ashtart. Besides the oddity and uniqueness of the image, the idiosyncrasies of the vocabulary choices in the epigram suggest that the makers of this monument were struggling to reflect Phoenician concepts in conventional Greek visual and discursive language, for instance the cryptic allusion to the lion's threat ("to disperse my things," *ta emá*) and the hapax of the label for the monster ("hateful lion," *echthroléon*).[22] It is tempting to see this as a creative attempt to translate a so-far unattested Phoenician term for "lion," perhaps *lb'*, from a root attested in related languages Ugaritic and Aramaic.[23] The new bone-plaque motif we present here adds weight to that interpretation, as we will see below.

Lions, especially lionesses, are strongly associated with Ashtart as a powerful protector of life and the afterlife, and guidance at sea and in the afterlife journey. The male lions of the Shem/Antipatros stela and the Iberian ivory plaques (discussed below), however, are best interpreted as threatening enemies, specifically Underworld enemies, whom only Ashtart (a lioness herself) can avert, aided perhaps by other benevolent gods/daemons. Further clues from Phoenician afterlife iconography shed light on this symbolic thread. In one of the graves with wall-paintings preserved at Kef el-Blida in Tunisia we see a representation of a hairy monster that threatens the souls in their afterlife journey. Unfortunately, the graves are poorly documented and their date is highly uncertain, but their iconography contributes to the Phoenician-Punic funerary imaginary.[24] In the painting, a boat (in this context understood as the funerary boat) carries seated, armed men, while one of them on the prow brandishes what looks like a double-axe towards the fleeing demonic hairy figure, only faintly visible outside the boat. The prow figure has been interpreted as a *psychopompos* or souls' guide in the afterlife journey [FIGURE 2]. Our drawing follows Mhamed Hassine Fantar's reproduction of the very faded image, which makes into a generally anthropomorphic figure what is otherwise the vague

22 Tribulato 2013: 470–3.

23 Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 1996–2000, s.v. *lbu*. For a compound, cf. the name '*Abdlabi*' inscribed on one of the Syro-Palestinian eleventh century BCE arrowheads and for an archer at Ugarit, understood as a theophoric name alluding to Anat by Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 126.

24 Hassine Fantar 1998: 98–100; 1970: 26–32, pl. XXII; Ferron 1968; Lipinski 1992, s.v. "Kef el-Blida."

FIGURE 2 Wall painting from Kef el-Blida (Tunisia), showing a boat whose crew chase away a supernatural enemy
DRAWING BY E. RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ (AFTER HASSINE FANTAR 1970: PL. XXII)

profile of a large head perhaps marked by a mane. The fleeing figure has what some see as a cock crest (the cock appears in some of these Tunisian frescoes as an Underworld symbol), and two ladders can be seen in an inferior register. In our view, the "hairy head" may be a schematized representation of a wild, dangerous, or monstrous demon.

Similar clues emerge from the small body of Phoenician inscribed amulets found among the thousands of non-inscribed ones, generally found in funerary

contexts. Most of them include formulae requesting protection from the gods, with the typical formula "protect and guard PN, son of PN," but some contain iconography.[25] A silver band from Tharros (Sardinia), depicts a boat with two sitting figures (perhaps divinities) and seven standing figures holding a scepter and a sort of cross-shaped staff.[26] The accompanying inscription may mention "the possessors of the scale," which hints at an afterlife judgment akin to the one well attested in Egyptian eschatology.[27] A gold band from Granada (Spain) with Egyptianizing iconography mentions a demon called "the devourer," in one possible reading.[28] Finally, in the limestone amulets from Arslan Tash (Northern Syria), dated to the seventh century BCE, an inscribed incantation guarded the house against human-eating monsters that took the form of a sphinx (a winged, human-headed lion) and a big round-eyed hybrid creature, while apotropaic divine figures (a smiting god) are also depicted and called on for protection.[29] The Phoenician Arslan Tash amulets are particularly relevant, since they provide a unique parallel for the representation of monsters (the sphinx and the round-eyed monster) gulping down their victims in their entirety, with only the legs coming out of their mouth. We may find a distant parallel from the south-east Iberian realm in the tower-like funerary monument of Pozo Moro (Albacete), dated to around 500 BCE, which depicts what most agree are Underworld scenes, including human- (or soul)-devouring demons.[30]

The voracity of the lion was already deployed as an image for death in the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*, where the god of Death, Mot, is represented as an insatiable enemy of the Storm God Baal. Besides comparison to other wild animals (dolphin, buffalo, hind, ass) Mot's appetite is described like "the appetite of the lion in the wild,"[31] and he devours his rival Baal "like a lamb in my mouth, like a kid crushed in the chasm of my throat."[32] Mot (Death) swallows Baal and tries to annihilate him completely, thus preventing him to revive and become king of the gods, but Baal's sister Anat finds his corpse, and he comes back to life as she crushes Mot himself. The destruction of Mot is conveyed also in terms of dispersion and ingestion: "She seizes Divine Mot, with a sword she splits him, with a sieve she winnows him. With a fire she burns him, with millstones

25 López-Ruiz 2015: 63–70.
26 Amadasi Guzzo 1967: 108, n. 31, Plate XXXIX; Garbini 1994: 83–118.
27 Ribichini 2004: 60. Schmitz 2002: 821.
28 Amadasi Guzzo 2007; for another reading, Ruiz Cabrero 2003; cf. López-Ruiz 2015.
29 Pardee 1998. Cf. also Zamora 2003.
30 Almagro 1983; López Pardo 2006. I thank Madadh Richey for the Arslan Tash parallel.
31 *CAT* 1.4 col. VIII, repeated *KTU* 1.5 col. I, lines 14–16. Translations of the *Baal Cycle* are from Smith 1997.
32 *KTU* 1.6, col. II, lines 22–23.

she grinds him, in the field she sows him. The birds eat his flesh, fowl devour his parts, flesh to flesh cries out."[33] In short, we can assume the Phoenicians also associated the image of a voracious lion with the fear of dismemberment and dispersion at death, in the physical world and the hereafter, and a more direct allusion to Mot/Death cannot be discarded for the "hateful lion" in the Antipatros/Shem scene and inscription.[34]

In Phoenician funerary culture we also find expressions of fear that some enemy, human or divine, will physically damage the burial place and hence hamper the peaceful afterlife of the deceased. This is a recurrent theme in Phoenician royal tombs. We can cite the inscription set up by Tabnit I, king of Sidon and priest of Ashtart, ca. 500 BCE. Like other royal funerary inscriptions (e.g., Ahiram, Eshmunazar) this one ends with a threat to the physical and afterlife integrity of the transgressor, and invokes Ashtart as a protector of the dead:

> You must not open up (what is) over me nor disturb me; for such an act is an abomination to Ashtart. But if you in fact open up (what is) over me and in fact disturb me, may you have no seed among the living under the sun nor a resting place with the shades![35]

This body of amulets and textual evidence, in short, reinforces the idea that particular gods or demons (usually Ashtart but also the "friends" mentioned in the Athenian epigram) were tasked with accompanying and guarding the soul, and warding off any entities that might threaten the physical and spiritual integrity of the deceased in his/her journey. In turn, the "sacred boat," alluded to in the Shem/Antipatros stela both visually and textually, would symbolize that same crossing into the afterlife, a passing also implied in grave wall paintings from Punic Tunisia and in the boat engraved on one of the inscribed amulets.

33 *KTU* 1.6, col. II, lines 30–37.

34 For Mot and the idea of dispersion, Tribulato 2013: 480, after Ribichini 1987: 149–52. Mot (Mouth) is attested in Phoenician mythology as Mouth/Mot: López-Ruiz and Xella 2021. See Miller (forthcoming dissertation) for the more detailed reading of the lion in the Antipatros/Shem monument as an allusion to Mot.

35 *KAI* 13, lines 5–8. Transl. Gibson 1982: 103 (modifying "Astarte" for "Ashtart").

3 The Lion-Boat Motif in Tartessic Ivory-Bone Plaques

With this backdrop in mind, we turn to the carved bone-ivory panels from Iberia, which we think offers the only parallel to the motif also rehearsed in the funerary Phoenician stela from Athens. But first, some background is necessary. In recent decades, archaeological remains in southwestern Spain and coastal Portugal have greatly added to our knowledge of the Phoenicians in the west and their entanglements with local cultures. Phoenician activity and impact in the indigenous economy and culture is most visible and best documented in the area of Tartessos. This is how the Greeks and Romans designated a river and the region around it,[36] which forms a triangular valley roughly between Huelva and Cádiz on the coast to Seville and Cordoba inland, mapping onto areas the Romans labeled Baetica and Turdetania. Here, a Levantine-inflected local culture saw its peak of prosperity in the eighth-to-sixth centuries BCE, when they developed a rich proto-urban society and even their own script, ancestor of that of the Iberians. This self-transformation was stimulated by the interaction with Phoenician settlers in the region since the ninth century BCE, which had focused on metallurgical and agricultural exploitation, as well as the establishment of harbors to secure their long and short distance trade.[37] The Phoenician and Tartessic legacy left a long-lasting imprint in the hybrid practices and regional identities of the Tartessic area until Roman times, as evident in resilient traits among the Roman-period Turdetanians.[38]

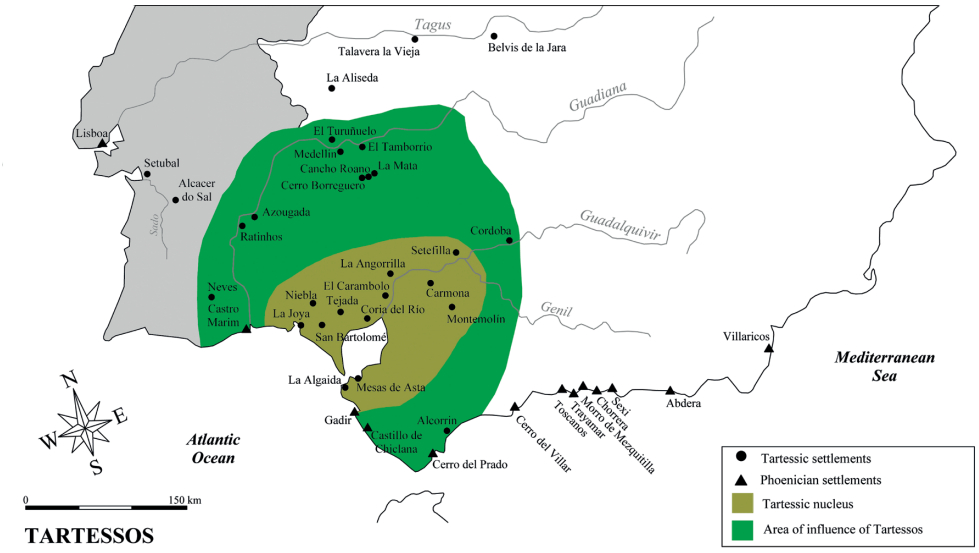
Beyond chronology, in terms of territory too, the Phoenician influence spills out of the core of Tartessos in the Guadalquivir valley. A secondary wave of adaptation of Levantine culture, possibly accompanied by a movement of population, produced remarkable developments in the interior around the Guadiana valley (Extremadura) in the sixth-to-fourth centuries BCE [FIGURE 3]. This wave followed the seeming decline of the Tartessic communities in the south.[39] Indeed, it is here where Tartessic buildings of a magnitude and state of preservation not found in the more populated south have been excavated in recent decades. The sanctuary of Cancho Roano (sixth-to-fifth centuries BCE), extensively documented and published in the twentieth century, is the best-known example of this interior Tartessic culture so far, but the entire

36 The river was called Tartessos in Greek texts (probably adapting local toponymy), but the Romans called it Baetis and the Arabs al-Wadi 'l-Kabir (Great River), today the Guadalquivir. Tartessos is first mentioned in fragments of Stesichoros' *Geryoneis* (seventh century BCE): *PMGF* 154 (Strabo 3.2.11).

37 Celestino and López-Ruiz 2016; López-Ruiz 2021a: 93–120.

38 Machuca Prieto 2019.

39 Celestino 2005.



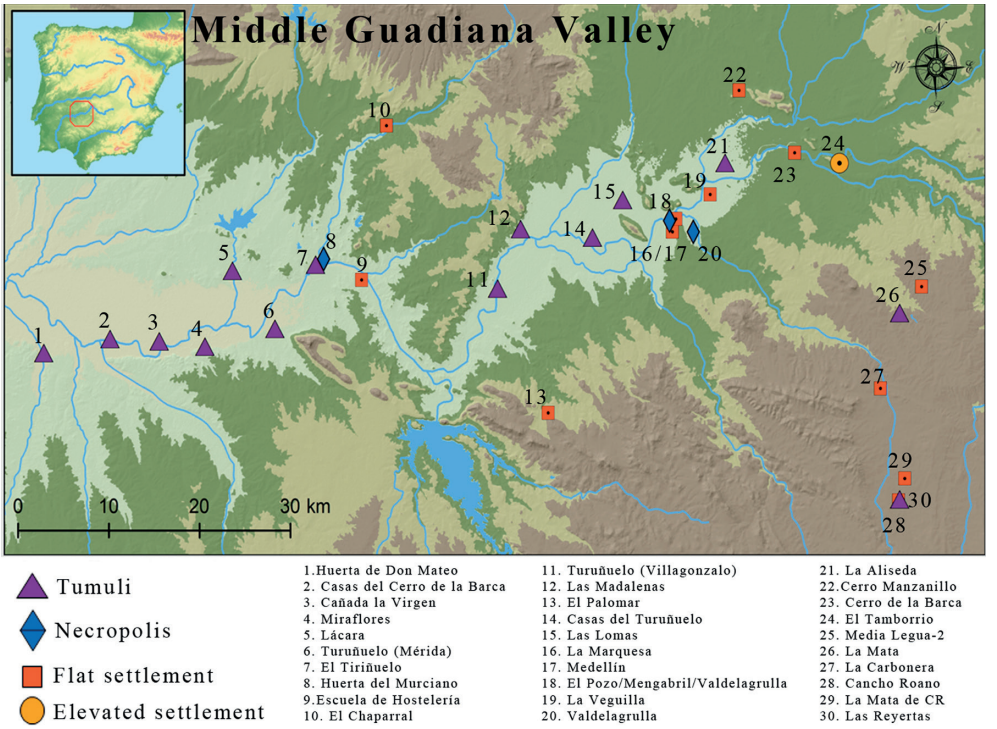


FIGURE 3 (Top) Map of Tartessos, with principal Tartessic and phoenician settlements. The map marks a territory ascribed to the nucleus of Tartessic culture and its area of influence. (Bottom) Map of the middle Guadiana valley with main Iron Age I sites, where Casas del Turuñuelo is situated (n.14)

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territory is in this period articulated through large and smaller buildings buried under tumuli, as recent surveys have demonstrated.[40] The ivory-bone plaques that we discuss here appeared in this very same area, at the nearby site of Casas del Turuñuelo (Badajoz). A multi-leveled structure was partially excavated there in 2015, bearing a monumental patio, a monumental staircase, and two rooms accessed from it, so far. The Turuñuelo building was also ritually closed down (like Cancho Roano), after being burned and methodically sealed with a layer of clay and dirt. The building later remained undisturbed and its closure is dated to the fifth century BCE by the Attic pottery found in the clay sealing layer.[41] Ritual activity in the building is manifest by the type of materials concentrated in the central space of room H-100, where the ivory-covered box that we are presenting here was found. This room contained an ox-hide shaped altar, a bathtub-shaped receptacle (made with mortar), a large bronze cauldron and grill spits, fishing hooks, and other banqueting implements such as jugs, cups, and plates. The religious importance of this complex, moreover, was corroborated by the remains of a horse hecatomb that lay at the bottom of the monumental staircase that led to the central room.[42] While the objects are published in the corresponding archaeological report, this is the first interpretive discussion of the plaques, their iconography, and broader implications for the reception of Phoenician culture in southern Tartessic Iberia.[43] In our view, this unusual iconography provides precious additional evidence for an important eschatological motif in Phoenician culture so far only tentatively documented.

Four ivory and bone plaques were found in their original position, forming a perfect rectangle, as they had decorated a wooden box, now charred by the final fire. The box's contents included small glass beads that must have been part of a necklace [FIGURE 4]. The four plaques bear carved decoration in the regional style that developed in Tartessos in the archaic period, often referred to as "orientalizing" or simply Tartessic. The category "orientalizing" is fuzzily applied to all sorts of art forms that appear outside the Near East, which selectively adapted themes and techniques stemming from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Levant.[44] In a western Mediterranean context especially, these "orientalizing" adaptations were mainly mediated by the Canaanite traditions brought on by Phoenicians as they settled and traded in the various areas where this type of art took hold (the Aegean, Etruria, Sardinia, southern

40 Rodríguez González 2015; Celestino and Rodríguez González 2017.
41 Celestino, Gracia, and Rodríguez González 2017; Celestino and Rodríguez González, 2020.
42 Rodríguez González and Celestino 2017, 2019; Celestino and Rodríguez González 2019.
43 See report on room H-100 and its materials, Rodríguez González et al. 2020.
44 E.g., Gunter 2009, Feldman 2014; Martin 2017.

FIGURE 4 Photo and drawing of the four bone-ivory plaques from room 100 from the site of casas del Turuñuelo (Guareña, Badajoz, Spain). The center photo shows the plaques in situ, framing a charcoaled wooden box; to the right a photo of the necklace beads contained in the box
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Iberia).[45] Their themes, however, present extraordinary and unique innovations on traditional themes. The short sides depict lions in attacking position, the leg of a devoured stag coming out of their mouth, while the long sides present friezes with aquatic motifs of boats and fish. The representation of boats or fish is in itself rare in the spectrum of Phoenician and orientalizing ivory repertoire (see below). Moreover, we will zoom in on one of the short plaques, which represents what we interpret as a lion devouring not only a stag but also a boat.[46] The group forms a highly original but coherent program, and the plaques are visually connected by the depiction of boats "moving" across two adjacent plaques and lotus flowers split in halves in the corners of the opposite plaques showing the lion scenes, the latter being a convention attested in other objects in the region.[47] The continuous reading of the box' decoration, therefore, informs the interpretation of the key scene of the lion and the boat. Moreover, the choice of materials deployed for the plaques is relevant too: only one plaque, the one depicting the procession or frieze of boats, is made of ivory (specifically from hippopotamus), while the other three were made of bone. This is a poorer, locally-accessible raw material, which suggests the three bone panels may have been replacements of older, damaged ivory ones. Presumably, the bone plaques were copies of the older plaques, since

45 López-Ruiz 2021a.
46 Rodríguez González et al. 2020: 52.
47 E.g., box from Cancho Roano. See Maluquer de Motes 1983: 90, fig. 34.

the iconography is consistent with the remaining ivory plaque, which (if the hypothesis is correct) underscores the symbolic importance of the object and its decoration and its status as an older relic worthy of reparation. Although it is not impossible that the box decoration would have been designed with uneven materials from its inception (choosing ivory for one side only), the decoration matches ivory work from previous centuries (see below), suggesting indeed that the box had been in circulation for quite a while and lending weight to the repair/copy hypothesis.

The iconography of the plaques has an undisputable Near Eastern pedigree. The motif of a lion or lioness attacking a cow, bull, stag or another victim is frequent across the Near East and the archaic Mediterranean. The lion attack motif usually represents the lion and its prey in the midst of the struggle, with the feline biting the weaker animal's neck or back, thus showing its dominant position. The motif is often interpreted as a representation of imperial or royal power, and it was thus also transferred to royal iconography, such as on the coins from Byblos in the classical period contemporary with our ivories [FIGURE 5].[48] More rarely, the lion bites a human, as in the "lion devouring a boy" Phoenician ivory from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II in Nimrud (ninth–eighth century BCE) [FIGURE 6]. To provide some examples from the Greek world, we can think of the mythical battle scenes represented on the frieze of the of the Siphnian treasury at Delphi (*c.*525 BCE), where a huge lion bites one of the Giant warriors who looks outward, and the lion biting a stag or bull was readily adopted in archaic-period friezes too, as attested in the remains of archaic pedimental sculpture from the Acropolis in Athens. On the other hand, stags, and more rarely fish and boats appear in Tartessic and Phoenician artwork. Boats and fish also appear in Punic funerary contexts (*hypogea*) of North Africa on a variety of media and in the Balearic Island of Menorca.[49]

The particular combination of elements here, however, is unique. The marine or fluvial theme on the long-sides of the box works as an overarching thread. One plaque shows a row of fish, while a row of boats occupies the parallel plaque, each ship hiding the prow of the one following and showing the sterns. Those familiar with Phoenician artwork will immediately notice the palmette-looking design of the boats. Here we argue that the palmette shape was a viable model for boat representation, and in fact adds symbolic significance to it (we return to this issue below), as supported by the programmatic context of the panels (especially the fish panel) and the comparative evidence

48 E.g., Betlyon 2019: 396.

49 Hassine Fantar 1970: 25–6 (North Africa); Carbonell Pastor et al. 2020 (Balearic Islands).

FIGURE 5 Phoenician coin of ʿUzzibaʿal, "king of Byblos." Byblos, fifth–fourth centuries BCE (public domain)

FIGURE 6 Ivory panel found at the North West palace in Nimrud (Iraq) of a lioness devouring an African youth, 900–700 BCE. The panel is inlaid with gold and precious stones, and was probably used for wooden furniture decoration (museum n. 127412)
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provided by a previous thorough study of boat representations in southern Iberia.[50] The two shorter plaques, in turn, have scenes involving lions carved on them: a lion devours a deer or a bovid on one; in our reading, the parallel short plaque shows a lion devouring or sinking the prow of the first boat of the incoming row of boats represented in the adjacent long panel, leaving only the lifted stern visible. On both parallel lion-attack scenes, only a leg of the animal comes out of the beast's mouth. The lion, in other words, does not simply inflict a lethal bite, for instance on the neck or back of the victim, but takes on fantastic, monstrous dimensions, as it can gulp down its entire opponent, or engulf a boat. This is an important aspect of the iconography and its parallels, as we discuss below [FIGURE 7].

The closest parallels for this ivory-bone group come the Guadalquivir Valley and the Huelva area, traditionally considered the core of archaic Tartessic culture. The dates of these Tartessic ivories, mostly from funerary contexts, range from the eighth to the sixth century BCE. The Turuñuelo plaques, however, have appeared in the hinterland, on the periphery of those Tartessic nuclei. But this is in not a surprising context altogether. The Phoenician-inflected, orientalizing traits of southern Tartessic culture went on to strongly influence cultural developments among the groups of the interior, especially in the Guadiana Valley, where the continuation of ivory trade and production is attested in neighboring sites, such as Cancho Roano. The technical and stylistic aspects of these plaques corroborate the general trajectory of this type of artwork. As mentioned above, thanks to the archaeometric study of the plaques, we know that only one plaque was made of ivory. Whether this reveals the substitution of bone for the other plaques, as copies of the original motifs of older plaques, the iconography, style, and incision technique used for the engraving differs from the Levantine style in relief and conform with the regional Tartessic tradition of Phoenician-style ivories documented in southwest Iberia.[51] Stylistically speaking, the most likely date-range for these plaques (or their originals) is the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, when the Tartessic artisan production was at its height. It is very possible that the decorated box (whether already "fixed" or not) arrived in this peripheral area as a relic stemming from the main workshops in the south.[52] This representation of the lion-and-boat motif would predate the one found in Athens by a few centuries, telling us that the motif

50 Rodríguez González and García Cardiel 2020.

51 Le Meaux 2010; Martín Ruiz 2011.

52 Rodríguez González et al. 2020: 67.

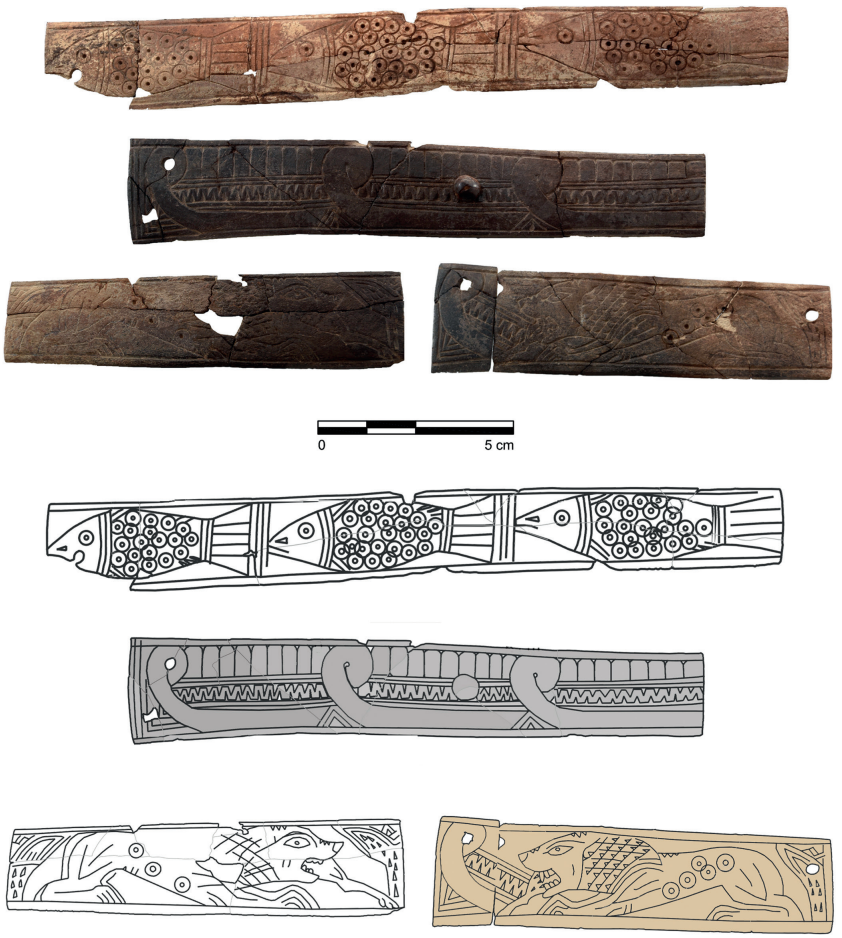

FIGURE 7 Photograph and drawings of the four bone-ivory plaques found in room 100 of Casas del Turuñuelo (Guareña, Badajoz, Spain)
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circulated in Phoenician-local networks since at least the archaic period. As a curated artifact, however, the wooden box with its ivory-bone decoration was in use in a later, fifth-century BCE religious context, when the Turuñuelo building was closed, which brings this expression of the motif closer in time to the Athens version, especially if we accept the earlier date for the inscription (mid fourth century BCE).

The Tartessic row of ships and the one destroyed by the monster-lion, then, add to the evidence of a poorly attested but important aspect of Phoenician eschatology, which is becoming better documented and systematically

studied.[53] The specific motif alluded to here is the confrontation of demonic entities and the crossing of a body of water.[54] In this, as in other aspects of their religion, the Phoenicians draw heavily from Egyptian culture, which is evident also in their assimilation of Ashtart and her symbols as a fertility and afterlife deity to those of Isis, many of which populate Phoenician and orientalizing ivories and other art forms (e.g., lion iconography, lotus flowers, ankh symbols, baby Horus, sphinxes, suckling calf and cow motif, etc.). The widespread use of amulets in Phoenician-Punic graves, and the shape of many of them, such as scarabs, ankh symbols, and zoomorphic amulet cases, are of direct Egyptian inspiration too, as long noted.[55] It has even been recently argued that there is material evidence of implements possibly used by Phoenicians to perform the funerary Egyptian rite of the "opening of the mouth," such as ivory spoons found in the Tartessos area.[56] The Phoenicians even reflected this "sailing eschatology" in their funerary landscapes, as they often placed their necropoleis on the west side of a river.[57] In this they follow Egyptian custom, whereby the Nile marks the division between the world of the living and that of the dead, which lay on its west bank, as the "west" represented the sunset, darkness, and the Underworld.[58] This pattern is well documented in southern Iberian Phoenician coastal sites, and is now documented also by a recent study of the Tartessic area around the Guadiana valley, precisely the area where Casas del Turuñuelo and these Phoenician-style ivory-bone plaques were buried.[59]

The images of the ivories from the Turuñuelo building, in our view, fit within this still-scarcely-documented symbolic universe. As pointed out above, the ivory-covered box was deposited in a ritualized space. Beads of a necklace were found where the charred box lay, and it is possible that other organic materials would have been kept in it, such as incense, grain, hair, and papyrus, to be used in rituals that perhaps involved a cult statue (perhaps the one whose feet have been found).[60] Although we cannot be sure which deity or deities were the focus of rituals performed in this space, it is very likely that we are dealing with the main Phoenician fertility gods Baal and Ashtart or a deity or deities

53 Ribichini 2004; López-Bertran 2019.
54 Bonnet and Xella 1995: 330–1; Frendo et al., 2005; Ruiz Cabrero 2007; Pappa 2015.
55 E.g., Vercoutter, 1945; Padró 1986; Marín Ceballos 1998; Hölb 2000; Lemaire 2008; López-Ruiz 2015.
56 Gómez Peña and Carranza 2020.
57 Frendo et al., 2005; Pappa 2015; De Jonghe 2017.
58 Asmmann 2005; Scalf 2017.
59 Pappa 2015 (coastal sites); Rodríguez González y Paniego 2021 (Tartessic área).
60 Celestino and Rodríguez González 2019: 357, fig. 10-b.

identified with them within Tartessic religion. Especially significant is the fact that the space of this room is centered around an ox-hide shaped altar, of the type found in other Tartessic sites, such as El Carambolo, Cancho Roano, Coria del Río, and Carmona. This local feature is interpreted through the bull and the fertility symbolism associated with Baal and his usual female companion Ashtart.[61] In some instances, the presence of Ashtart is made explicit by preserved bronze statuettes at these sites (such as at El Carambolo), but otherwise we can find an array of artifacts bearing symbols associated with this deity, such as sea-shell-decorated floors and lotus flowers, alongside the already mentioned boat models and anchors, evoking the protection or gratitude to maritime-protective gods such as Baal/Melqart and Ashtart. A working assumption, therefore, is that materials from the building of the Turuñuelo can be interpreted through the lenses of the same hybrid Phoenician-Tartessic cultural context.

4 The Palmette-Boat Motif: Parallels from Iberia and a Potsherd from Olympia

The idiosyncratic depiction of the ships in the Tartessic plaques deserves further comment. In our reading, the design here uses the standardized shape of the Phoenician and Levantine palmette to represent the procession of boats. This might seem a rare choice, but it is not at all random. The palmette is associated with the lotus flower and it is a symbol of vegetal regeneration, sometimes with palmettes stacked forming a tree of life motif. The choice is, moreover, in harmony with regional adaptations of Levantine art [see comparison in FIGURE 8]. A recent study by Esther Rodríguez and Jorge García shows that boat representations in the Tartessic realm developed a tradition of representing schematized boats inspired on Egyptian types, more specifically the solar boat type that had been integrated in the Phoenician symbolic repertoire.[62] In these regional examples, the authors propose the representation denoted fluvial boats, whose symmetrical ends are often shaped as lotus-flowers. The open shape of the palmette-looking boats in the Turuñuelo ivories would be a stylized version of this mode of representation. (We return to the details of the iconography below.)

61 Marín Ceballos 2006; Gómez Peña 2017.

62 Rodríguez González and García Cardiel 2020.

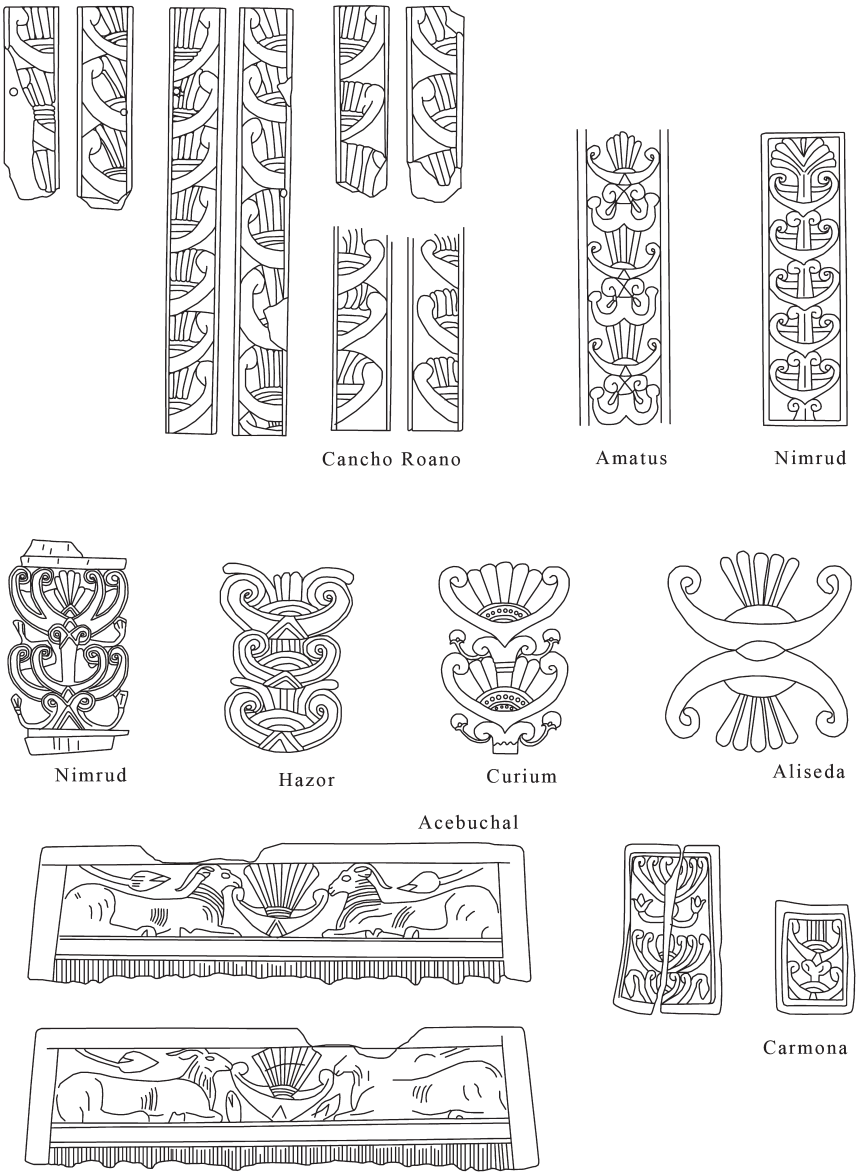

FIGURE 8 Drawing of representations of the palmette motif in ivories from various Phoenician and Iberian sites
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From the Tartessic world hail a handful of other art-pieces that belong in the same symbolic and representational universe: a bronze horse bit from Seville known as the "Bronce Carriazo" ("Carriazo bronze"), which represents a "mistress of beasts" figure holding ducks that form a boat-like shape, is interpreted as the solar boat with symmetrical bird protomes; and a similar piece from the sanctuary of Cancho Roano represents a "master of horses" along the same scheme.[63] More explicit even is a seal from the Aliseda site that represents a boat with two figures and a lotus flower, a representation tied it to the afterlife journey, and several graffiti on pottery from sites along the Tagus (including Lisbon) and Guadiana rivers, both navigable arteries into these hinterlands[64] [FIGURE 9]. The depiction of palmette-shaped ships, in fact, bounds together several levels of real and symbolic reference: The use of shallow boats for fluvial navigation is pertinent to the regional geography and networks of communication, along which buildings such as the one from Casas del Turuñuelo flourished. At the same time, the palmette-shaped river boat evoked Nilotic imagery charged with symbolic meaning in Phoenician religion and its local adaptations. Finally, the river vessel more generally encapsulated the eschatological theme of the afterlife crossing, which in turn was mirrored in the physical location of Phoenician and (at least some) Tartessic necropoleis, as mentioned already.

Returning to the details of the scene, in this case the artist represented the palmette shape with a flatter form than expected, compared to other representations of palmettes in general (see above FIGURE 8) or even river boats (FIGURE 9 below), all usually more curved on the bottom. This seems another idiosyncrasy of this artist, whether for other reasons of composition or style or perhaps intentionally seeking the effect of showing the hull of the palmette-boats as partly sunk under the flat water. The river or ocean context is more clearly expressed by other details, such as the row of partly-overlapping boats (as if sailing in parallel formation), and the triangular waves between the boats, that punctuate the scene to indicate movement, following a geometric

63 Escacena 2017; Celestino and López-Ruiz 2016: 277–279, Figs. 8.6 and 8.7. Bird and horse animal heads or protomes appear in the representations of Phoenician ships, for instance in Assyrian reliefs or in Egyptian ships (Sauvage 2007; cf. also note 17 above), though with the heads looking outward. Some instances of inward-looking animal heads at the prows are attested in the Levant (Phoenician-style Dor scapula but probably Cypriot; Cilician relief), Egypt (Nechao pendant), Persepolis (seals), and Cyprus (vase painting): see Sauvage 2015.

64 Rodríguez González and García Cardiel 2020; cf. López-Bertrán et al. 2008. See also Mora Serrano (forthcoming) for the perdurance of Ocean and ship images in Iberia well into Roman times, including ships with zoomorphic prows.

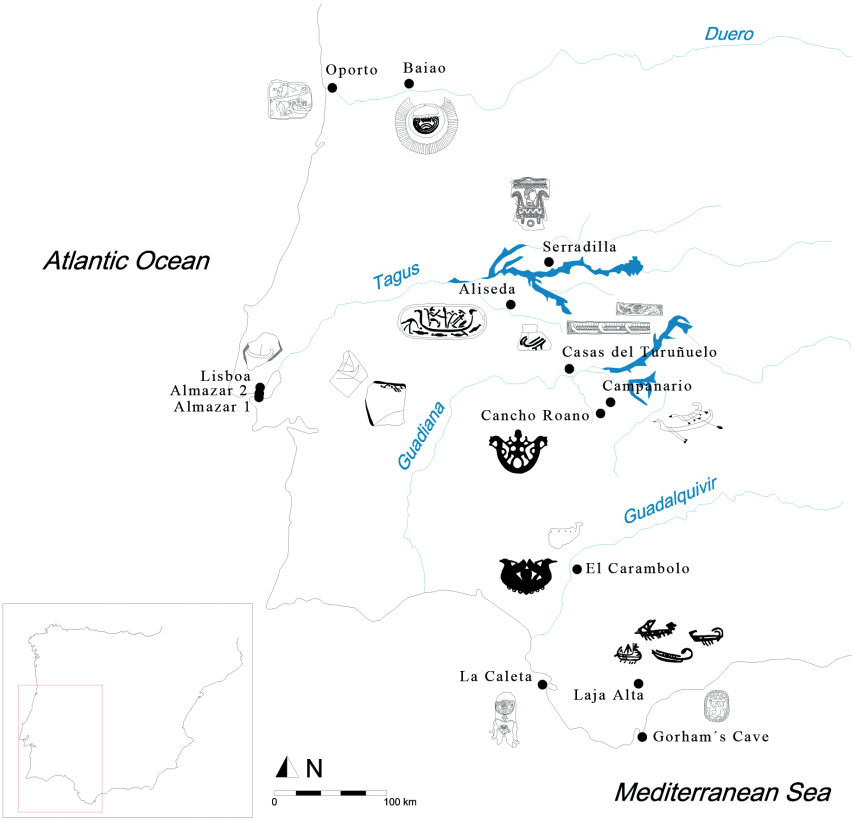

FIGURE 9 Distribution of representations of ships from Iron Age sites from south-west Iberia
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pattern used for waves also in Phoenician coins (cf. FIGURE 5). The water theme is also reinforced (perhaps for intentional clarification) by the row of fish in the parallel panel.

In one last holistic look at the ivory-bone panels we present here, we can appreciate the compositional coherence of the iconographic and symbolic program. The two short "lion panels" are set in parallel, as are the long ones with the friezes of boats and fish, forming a careful thematic structure. In our reading, the relationship between the lion and the boat is clear, in that this boat is the only one with a tilted stern in the group, and moreover lies at the head of the row of boats. The lion, thus, is not independent of the boats, and cannot be interpreted separately. Rather, it must be understood as a supernatural, colossal monster. Another important detail in favor of the purposeful utilization of the palmette as a boat (not as the usual vegetation motif) is that

the ivory plaques already deploy the lotus flower motif. While palmette and lotus can be sometimes connected and complementary in Phoenician-style ivories, in this case the half-lotuses mark the corners of the lion scenes but appear totally disconnected from the boats and designed in a different style. The artist is working with a limited set of Phoenician-style motifs used for ivory work, incorporated into the "orientalizing" repertoire of Tartessic ivories. This repertoire did include vegetal motifs representing regeneration, as well as animals or hybrids associated with power or with life and regeneration (lions, stags, sphinxes/griffins, etc.)[65] [cf. FIGURE 8 above]. The key is that this ivory-carving "toolkit" did not include boats. Some artisan, likely from southern Iberia, experimented with available motifs and regional modes of fluvial boat depiction as outlined above, and resourcefully resorted to the palmette motif, not unaware, we must think, of the added religious symbolism of the motif.

We have found an extraordinarily clear parallel to this otherwise rare innovation in the archaic-period depiction of a boat painted on a pottery sherd found in the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia [FIGURE 10]. The piece is tentatively dated to the late-seventh or sixth century BCE and not individually published or interpreted. The sherd belongs to a banqueting vase (possibly a crater) and

FIGURE 10 Photo and drawing of ceramic fragment from the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia, showing a palmette-shaped ship (ca. 7th–6th centuries BCE). Archaeological Museum of Olympia (n. Π 1665β)
COURTESY OF THE EPHORATE OF ANTIQUITIES OF ILIA @ HELLENIC MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS | HELLENIC ORGANIZATION OF CULTURAL RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT. DRAWING © ESTHER RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ

65 Celestino and López-Ruiz 2016: 214–66.

portrays a ship, as the Museum display notes. Although further research on this ceramic fragment would be needed to say more about it (e.g., in regard to its possible origins or more precise date), this representation leaves no doubt that the palmette motif could be deployed to represent a boat (sail and oars added here), possibly also codifying a mythological motif. What looks like the head of a griffin under the boat suggests as much, besides the tendency in archaic figurative vase painting towards mythological creatures and religiously-charged symbols.

If the Phoenician palmette could be used for boat imagery, perhaps the reverse cross-symbolism is also possible, that Nilotic or maritime connotations infused the vegetal palmette also in "mainstream" Phoenician representations? If this is the case, the palmette motif, one of the most lasting in all sorts of Phoenician media, merged Nilotic vegetal and fluvial motifs, all connected, at a more abstract level, with regeneration and the afterlife. Without going that far, we have argued that a palmette-boat tradition lies behind this and other artifacts of the Tartessic realm. The artisans who laid out this iconographic program were using available models (the palmette, lions, lotuses) to depict something that was not codified in ivory carving (i.e., boats, also rarely fish). Just as in the Athenian relief of Shem/Antipatros, artistic innovation was called for in order to represent or evoke an eschatological motif for which also there seemed to be no set models. Similar experiments can be found in the archaic Greek world, for instance in the Eleusis "Odysseus" vase, where the painter harnessed the image of a cauldron to depict the Gorgons' heads, with protruding protomes representing their snaky hair. In that case, artistic models from bronze sculpture were borrowed into vase painting, even if the experiment did not succeed as a Gorgon representation beyond this instance. The theme we have explored in this essay surfaces in exceptional artifacts from two ends of the Mediterranean, in both cases out of a local-Phoenician context. In both the Turuñuelo box and the Athenian relief we can appreciate the artistic effort and idiosyncratic solutions deployed in order to represent highly esoteric themes that did not lean on available iconographic models.

5 Conclusions

In our reading, the recently discovered plaques from southwest Iberia provide a rare instance of the afterlife motif of the final sailing of the deceased and its threats, as represented by a monstrous lion. While we cannot disentangle all the layers of meaning concentrated in their iconography, this new image provides a striking parallel to the enigmatic scene on a much-commented

relief from a Phoenician stela from Athens, while adding valuable evidence for our limited knowledge of Phoenician afterlife beliefs. The new evidence from Tartessic Iberia can be understood against the backdrop of an eschatological landscape that included the souls' journey, the threat by an afterlife demon portrayed and/or described as a lion, the crossing of water on a sacred boat, and the expectation of divine protection by life-regeneration divinities, especially Ashtart (herself associated with lions). In the Athenian and Tartessic exemplars of this theme, the artists sought original solutions for representing a concept without a set iconography. As we have shown, the theme still fits well within known ideas of the afterlife related to Ashtart as overseer of sailors in life and in the afterlife journey, a role to which she arrived as an astral goddess and a goddess of life and regeneration, as reflected in multiple media in Phoenician art and its local adaptations.

The parallels for boat representations produced here are generally preserved in ritually-charged contexts (funerary stelae, chamber tombs and cave painting, amulets, sanctuary votive deposits). In the case of our ivory-bone panels from Casas del Turuñuelo, the religious context is also clear, as the wooden box they decorated was placed at the center of a ritually-charged room of the Turuñuelo building. Most likely the box held relics associated with Ashtart or a local deity that assimilated her attributes, and the box itself was possibly a meaningful relic. In general terms, the decorative program of the lion and the boat must have functioned at a dual symbolic level: Ashtart was called on for divine protection of sailors and prosperity of their trade in life, and protection of their souls in their final sail into the afterlife. The images on the box represent a dreaded scenario in which supernatural enemies posed a risk that the goddess could ward off and protect against. In the context of its finding, we can speculate that the goddess' protection also functioned at multiple levels: she would have fostered and protected the sailing and trading activity along these fluvial arteries, just as she would also have guarded the relics within the box, and by extension the building itself, perhaps even in its "afterlife." As noted at the beginning of this essay, the building of Casas del Turuñuelo was ritually burned and buried towards the end of the fifth century BCE. The hecatomb-like animal sacrifice and ritual banqueting that preceded the building's closure enacted a large-scale symbolic burial.

As a last reflection, it is impossible to know to what degree the iconography in this object spoke at all these levels (or at all) to local users of the ivory box found in the Turuñuelo building; to what degree the Phoenician afterlife universe was also a point of reference for the "readers" of this iconography. For some, the artifact's value might have resided in its material quality and fine ornamentation (an inseparable aspect of much of orientalizing and Levantine

portable arts); others might have cherished it because of its ritually significant contents and its status as a relic. At least for some of its handlers or observers, the box decoration would have been fitting for its religious context: the lotuses, maritime or fluvial motifs, and the lion scenes thus added to their experience in this remarkable building. Whatever the case, the inhabitants of these Tartessic lands had lived alongside and in close contact with Phoenician and Punic groups for almost half a millennium by the time this box panels came to the Turuñuelo building. And indeed, from this prolonged contact emerged not only the adaptation of Phoenician technologies and artistic motifs, but creative appropriations of religious ideas and symbolic motifs, and cultural traits that persisted even through the dramatic changes brought on by the Roman expansion starting in the late third century BCE. The upcoming excavations of the building that surrounded these ivory-bone plaques promise to yield still many important clues for our reconstruction of this complex cultural milieu and, through it, aid in our understanding of Phoenician religion and its reception further afield.

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