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The Phoenician Practice of Adapting Greek Drinking Vessels (Skyphoi and Kotylai)

Phoenician skyphoi are a phenomenon of the 7th and the first half of the 6th century BC, a few forerunners dating to the second half of the 8th century¹. In contexts dating to the years after the middle of the 6th century BC the skyphos appears to be residual. Ten years ago, M. Vegas argued that the production of this shape in Carthage ceased no later than 600 BC², which seems unlikely if we consider the material from Carthage which will be discussed in this paper, and has been published elsewhere. As to terminology, it is preferable to speak of >adaptations
rather than >copies
, as it seems quite evident that Phoenician potters/painters, rather than making more or less exact copies of known Greek types, took over general shapes and decoration schemes (Fig. 1)³.

In the Festschrift for B. Shefton, J. Boardman re-discusses the subject of these Phoenician and Punic adaptations of two typically Greek drinking vessels, skyphoi and kotylai⁴. Most of his conclusions are perplexing, especially his suggestion that these adaptations were primarily produced for Greeks living in Phoenician towns such as Toscanos or Carthage⁵. The very quantity of such cups among the ceramic drinking repertoire of Phoenician settlements would suggest otherwise. They appear in quite considerable numbers in almost every central and western Phoenician settlement excavation.

However, the proportion of these vessels amongst the total pottery finds of the period in question has never been examined in detail⁶. We will thus take a closer look at three case studies from Carthage that have been published or become available during the past ten years.

First new statistical evidence can be gained from the forthcoming publication of the results of excavations conducted by the University of Amsterdam in the settlement of Carthage. Fieldwork on

³ On the distinction, see Briese – Docter 1992, 25 f.; Briese – Docter 2002, 174.

¹ Phoenician and Punic skyphoi have been discussed on various occasions: Bernardini 1988; Rouillard 1990; Briese – Docter 1992; Briese – Docter 1995, 41–44 tab. 1 fig. 2 pl. 2; Ciasca 1999, 76. 86 fig. 7; Vegas 1999, 147–150 fig. 42 (F.11); Núñez 1999; Briese – Docter 2002; Peserico 2002, 49–51. 82 f. fig. 10 pl. 10; Boardman 2004; Vegas 2005; Rouillard 2007, 187. 241. 458 figs. 182, 1–4; 316, 6 a–b; Peserico 2007, 294–296. 304 f. The dates of the Phoenician skyphoi have been confirmed by all of these studies. In La Fonteta they first occur in phase II, covering the first half of the 7th century BC (Rouillard 2007, 187); in Cerro del Villar, a date in the last quarter of the 7th century BC is proposed (Aubet 1999, 91; Núñez 1999). It should be noted in this context that recent radiocarbon dates of animal bones from the earliest levels of the Carthaginian settlement, conventionally dated to the 8th century BC, have yielded much earlier dates, Docter et al. 2005; Docter et al. forthcoming. This might have repercussions for the earliest items.

² Vegas 1999, 148.

⁴ Boardman 2004, especially 156–160. He uses the word »copy«.

⁵ Boardman 2004, 157 f. (Toscanos: »The obvious answer should be that the cups were made locally for Greek use«), 159 f. (Carthage).

⁶ Boardman rightly stresses this point for Toscanos, concluding, without any further evidence at hand, however, that »they must be a minority, yet substantial enough, it seems, for production to be maintained, perhaps for a century« (Boardman 2004, 156). One could point out that at least some statistical data had already been available, see below, note 9.

the Bir Messaouda site was conducted in 2000 and 2001⁷. The peculiar archaeological formation processes which this site was found to have been subject to since Antiquity present quite a few archaeological contexts containing almost exclusively Archaic (or Early Punic) material. The majority of these contexts, however, must have been deposited in the Middle Punic period, so that we are dealing with re-deposited Archaic levels. Only six contexts proved to be composed exclusively of Archaic finds and, moreover, to have been deposited during this overall period. But even these pured Archaic contexts contained residual material dating to still earlier decades within the Archaic period. The finds of 33 archaeological contexts were used for the present analysis. The contexts contained a total of 3,011 pottery fragments, 546 of which being diagnostic fragments (c. 18%), stemming from 471 vessels.

The sample of 471 vessels contained 91 items used for drinking purposes (19.3%): 1 Corinthian skyphos, 6 Corinthian kotylai, 2 Phoenician kotylai, 21 Phoenician skyphoi, as well as 61 Phoenician bowls, carinated bowls and related shapes⁸, which means that the Carthaginian population accumulating the settlement refuse in these contexts used no less than 33% Greek shapes for their drinking habits, 25% being versions executed by Phoenician potters (skyphoi and kotylai). Are we to follow Boardman's line of argument and conclude that a third of Carthage's population was of Greek origin? This would seem rather unlikely, although theoretically one could suggest that this particular area of the city represented some sort of Greek quarter. Let us therefore consider the statistics of two other well-published contexts elsewhere in Carthage.

The second case study regards the fill in room T1 of an Archaic house in the settlement of Carthage (Rue Ibn Chabâat site) excavated in 1994 by F. Rakob of the German Archaeological Institute of Rome⁹. This large fill dates to the first half of the 7th century BC and contains some residuals. It probably comprised several thousands of pottery fragments. In 1999 and 2000, M. Vegas and K. Mansel published no less than 1,316 diagnostic fragments, 246 of which illustrated¹⁰. Of this sample of 1,316 fragments, 240 can be attributed to drinking vessels (18.2%). It should be noted that this percentage matches the 19.3% drinking vessels in the Bir Messaouda sample discussed above. The Greek drinking repertoire is represented by two fragments of Euboean skyphoi; Phoenician versions of skyphoi and kotylai account for 28 and 4 items respectively. This means that 14.2% of all drinking vessels are Greek or of Greek inspiration, skyphoi and kotylai produced by Phoenician potters constituting 13.3% of the sample.

The third case study is based on recently published results from excavations conducted by the University of Hamburg under the direction of Hans Georg Niemeyer below the crossroads of

⁷ On these excavations see Docter 2004a; Docter 2004b.

⁸ 68 Punic plates (or dishes) have not been considered to be drinking vessels in view of their extreme flatness and wide rims. The deeper, carinated plates, on the contrary, are more suited for drinking purposes and have therefore been included in the sample.

⁹ See Vegas 1999b, especially 395–397 figs. 1–4 and note 1, with further references.

¹⁰ See Vegas 1999b; Vegas 2000; Docter 2007b, 49, context no. 82, with full references.

site is hard to reconstruct. The database lists 10,193 items, both diagnostic and undiagnostic, but I have the impression that this number is too small¹². The definite 2007 publication lists no less than 910 drinking vessels from the Archaic period, 20% of which belonging to Greek drinking vessels and Phoenician skyphoi (182 items). The latter category alone constitutes 9.6% (87 skyphoi)¹³. The numbers from the three samples, 25%, 13.3% and 9.6% Phoenician drinking vessels of Greek inspiration, and 33%, 14.2% and 20% if we include original Greek drinking vessels, are considerable and unparalleled in the contemporary Greek world. >Unparalleled in the sense that I know of no example for a Greek community admitting such high numbers of non-Greek shapes into its daily pottery repertoire. >Unparalleled< also in the sense that hardly any Greek adaptations of Phoenician or Levantine shapes are attested on sites such as Pithekoussai, where we do have concrete evidence for the presence of poriental foreigners¹⁴. Plates or flat dishes are the conspicuous exception of course, as Boardman properly remarks, but do not seem to occur that often 15. Thus the answer would seem to lie in the scale of the phenomenon, leading us back to the hypothesis of a Greek quarter in Carthage. Two of the Carthaginian settlement sites used for the statistical exercise above, Bir Messaouda and Rue Ibn Chabâat, do in fact belong to a peripheral area with houses and metallurgical workshops bordering a city wall to either side¹⁶. Theoretically this would constitute an ideal location for a concentrated presence of foreigners, Greek and other. It could have hosted a large Greek clientele for these Greek drinking vessels produced in Phoenician workshops, as Boardman suggested. But how realistic is such a >Greek emporion in the periphery of the city of Carthage? I would say, as realistic or rather unrealistic as the heavily debated Greek emporion of Al Mina¹⁷.

Decumanus Maximus and Cardo X¹¹. Unfortunately, the total number of diagnostic sherds from the

¹¹ Niemeyer et al. 2007. The chapters used for this analyses are: Peserico 2007, Bechtold 2007 and Docter 2007a.

¹² See Docter 2007a, 453 with note 1. The amphorae from the 1986–1993 campaigns already account for 23,112 fragments.

¹³ The approach is slightly different from the other two case studies, since the material of the Hamburg excavations is published in a typological, rather than a contextual manner. This means that residual Archaic items from (much) later strata have been included as well. Apart from the 95 Greek imports and the 799 Phoenician drinking vessels, 16 Bucchero, Impasto and Etrusco-Corinthian drinking vessels had been imported in Carthage.

¹⁴ See especially Docter 2000. The article demonstrates that tracing foreign funerary rituals among the typical Pithekoussan burial practises shared by Pithekoussans of any background is much more rewarding than just looking for foreign objects in the tombs.

¹⁵ Boardman 2004, 155 f. Pithekoussan transport amphorae may perhaps also form an exception to the rule, but see now Docter et al. forthcoming, comments to cat. 36. 37 fig. 4 m. n, where the cautious suggestion is put forward that the shape of early Carthaginian amphorae may have been inspired by Nuraghic (and by extension Central-Italian and Pithekoussan) amphorae, rather than vice versa.

¹⁶ See Docter – Chelbi – Maraoui Telmini 2003, 44–48 figs. 1–5; Docter 2004b; Docter et al. 2006, 38–48 figs. 1–15. In both articles fig. 1 shows the position of the Bir Messaouda site in relation to the Rue Ibn Chabâat site and the Hamburg Decumanus Maximus site.

¹⁷ See the convincing dissection of the different arguments and evidence on the issue whether or not Greeks resided in Al Mina in the 8th century BC in Descoeudres 2002. Especially his treatment of the questions concerning the proportion of Greek to non-Greek pottery (53–55) and concerning the functions of the Greek pottery in the settlement (55–58) is conclusive.

Fortunately, the Carthaginian situation can now be compared with a well-published example of a more convincing emporion, the Levantine enclave in >Tartessian< Huelva¹⁸. Here, no less than 88,178 fragments were counted, comprising 8,009 diagnostic fragments of 7,936 vessels: 4,703 local handmade fragments (58.7%), 3,233 fragments of Phoenician or Levantine tradition (40.4%), 33 Greek fragments (0.4%), 30 Sardo-Nuraghic (0.4%), 8 Cypriot (0.1%) and 2 Villanova ones. The finds include 33 fragments belonging to 30 Greek vessels: 9 Attic Middle Geometric II kantharoi, skyphoi and closed vessels, 21 Euboean pendent semicircle skyphoi and plates as well as closed vessels. It is quite evident that the amount of Phoenician or Levantine pottery and the diversity of shapes and functions are such that the presence of a group of Levantines seems beyond doubt. In Carthage, on the contrary, the Greek material and that of Greek inspiration are not sufficient to allow for a comparable emporion-like situation: 6.4% (30 out of 471) in the Bir Messaouda sample and 2.8% (37 out of 1,316) in the sample from the Rue Ibn Chabâat¹⁹. It is therefore unlikely that we are dealing with a concentration of Greeks in this part of the settlement. By extension, it is also unlikely that a large Greek clientele for the >Greek< skyphoi and kotylai existed in Carthage at all.

One wonders, then, for whom these Phoenician skyphoi and kotylai were made. It seems clear to me that the primary consumers of such vessels were the Phoenicians themselves, or in this case, the Carthaginians. The popularity of these Greek shapes in Phoenician settlements is remarkable and might suggest that Greek drinking habits were widely accepted. The lack of further evidence, however, should suggest caution before we equate Greek drinking vessels with Greek drinking habits. Let us now turn our attention to the production aspect of the question. Boardman's remark that wwe need comprehensive clay analyses to determine whether we are dealing with local production, or import from other Phoenician centres; to be sure, for instance, that the Toscanos material did not come from elsewhere, because there was a perceived specialist, that is Greek, local market for it«²⁰ is even more puzzling than his suggestion that the adaptations were primarily produced for Greeks living in Phoenician towns. For although he produces copies of the illustrations from the 1992 Madrider Mitteilungen article, co-authored with Ch. Briese, Boardman does not seem to have read the contents very thoroughly²¹. Otherwise he would have certainly noted that the production region of Phoenician pottery can generally be distinguished quite easily due to the fact that Phoenician potters employed >impure< clays that were not levigated very well, and leave typical mineral inclusions visible to the modern eye²². In this respect, Phoenician skyphoi differ completely from Greek and Italo-Geometric

¹⁸ González – Serrano – Llompart 2004; González – Serrano – Llompart 2006.

¹⁹ To the two fragments of Attic amphorae 34 Greek fragments and fragments of Greek inspiration have been added, as well as a closed vessel with decoration of clearly Greek inspiration. The same figures cannot be reconstructed for the Hamburg excavation, see above, note 11.

²⁰ Boardman 2004, 159. This remark is decidedly tendentious given the available published evidence.

²¹ Seeing his figs. 4–6 to be copies of our figs. 1a; 3 a–d; 12 c–f (Briese – Docter 1992), we were flattered reading: »copying, like parody, is a form of compliment « (Boardman 2004, 161).

²² Pottery studies in the central and western Phoenician world have long been backed by scientific analyses of the different fabrics, see e.g. Docter et al. 1997; the individual contributions in Acquaro – Fabbri 1998, especially Peserico 1998; Cardell 1999; Aznar 2005; Montenat – Lerouge – Barrier 2007, with 498–502 pls. 4–8;

ones, debates on the provenance of the latter demanding sophisticated archaeometric analyses²³. Had Boardman read the 1992 article in more detail, it would hardly have escaped his attention that e.g. skyphos 59 of Toscanos can be considered a possible import from another Phoenician centre²⁴. Moreover, especially Carthage seems to have imported Phoenician versions of the skyphoi from other centres, particularly from the Circuito del Estrecho, that is to say chiefly from the South of Spain²⁵. Of the 36 Phoenician-Punic skyphoi from the excavations of the University of Hamburg in Carthage known in 1995, no less than seven (19%) came from elsewhere. The fact that five out of these seven imports were found in the earliest layers of phases IIa–III (c. 740–675 BC) together with the few local pieces in these layers suggests that local production of these Carthaginian skyphoi was initially rather low. One wonders why? Was it because Carthage had access to sufficient quantities of imported original Greek skyphoi during the 8th century? This is not improbable, especially given the numbers of Euboean, but also Italo-Geometric and Pithekoussan skyphoi in the earliest layers of the settlement²⁶. Perhaps one may even conclude that the idea of making these Phoenician versions of Greek skyphoi came from the Phoenician West, where Greek (Euboean, Pithekoussan and Italian Geometric) skyphoi are conspicuously absent²⁷. A local demand may have been felt here – and met by local production – earlier than in Carthage.

Extending this argument to Carthage, it can be argued that the popularity of the skyphos shape in the local pottery repertoire of the 7th and first half of the 6th century BC must have been triggered by the dwindling import of the Greek originals (viz. Euboean, Pithekoussan and Italian Late Geometric skyphoi)²⁸. On the other hand, the continued import of mainly Corinthian kotylai may explain why this particular shape was not adapted by the Carthaginian potters on the same scale as the skyphos²⁹. The sample of the Bir Messaouda site contains 6 original Corinthian kotylai and only 2 Phoenician adaptations. The ratio between Phoenician skyphoi and Phoenician kotylai in the sample is 21:2. In the Rue Ibn Chabâat sample the ratio is similar, 28:4.

Bechtold 2008. See also the detailed clay descriptions in the pottery chapters of the final publication of the Hamburg University excavations in Carthage (Niemeyer et al. 2007, especially 268–271).

²³ E.g. Jones – Buxeda i Garrigós 2004. And see the ongoing debate on the Thapsos class, being Corinthian or not; now Docter - Chelbi - Maraoui Telmini 2003, 48. 50 f. cat. 3 fig. 6 c; Docter 2007a, 460 fig. 244 cat. 4124 and Docter 2007a 475 f. fig. 243 cat. 4213 (Italian version), both with full references.

²⁴ Briese – Docter 1992, 55 fig. 11 a; Briese – Docter 2002, 183. 187. 206 cat. 61 fig. 11 a.

²⁵ Briese – Docter 1995, 42 f. tab. 1; Briese – Docter 2002, 197–199 tab. 6.

²⁶ Docter 2007a, 454–460. 470 f. 475 f. figs. 242. 250. 253 with full references for Carthage.

²⁷ The exception is Tartessian Huelva, but one has to admit that the recently published 9th and early 8th century BC finds (among which Greek Geometric skyphoi) from Huelva belong to an earlier phase than the one discussed here, see González - Serrano - Llompart 2004; González - Serrano - Llompart 2006. In combination with the fact that Huelva has long been known as the location of the only Attic Late Geometric II fragment of the Iberian Peninsula (760–730 BC), this also suggests continuing special relations with the eastern Mediterranean; see Rouillard 1991, 24 fig. 40, 6 pl. 12, 8.

²⁸ Docter 2007a, 454 f.

²⁹ On the import of Corinthian kotylai in Carthage, see Docter 2007a, 460–467, with full references. Apparently, Corinthian skyphoi were far less popular in Carthage, see Docter 2007a, 461 f. fig. 246. The sample of the Hamburg excavations has only 6 skyphoi, against 47 kotylai. This ratio is confirmed by all other Carthaginian excavations.

A last point in question is constituted by the models for the Phoenician-Punic skyphoi and kotylai, which Boardman seeks in the Corinthian (?) Thapsos repertoire: »There are especially among the early pieces copies of the Thapsos cup shape³⁰. It should be stressed that this comparison is incorrect. There is a marked chronological discrepancy between the Thapsos material of the 8th century BC and the adaptations of the 7th and 6th centuries BC. The few early Carthaginian skyphoi (both locally made and imported from other Phoenician centres) which would have been contemporaries of the Thapsos cups are not very helpful in this respect. Their shapes can either not be established with precision or do not seem Thapsos at all³¹. The chronological discrepancy is also evident in the decoration and cannot be argued away by the observation that the Phoenician version »retains the earlier style of decoration which had become a workshop habit, not seriously updated with reference to Corinthian production«³². Of course, the overall decoration scheme takes over general Greek schemes of the second half of the 8th century BC, but not necessarily of the Thapsos class alone. Similarly, the argument put forward by P. Rouillard on several occasions, according to which these Phoenican skyphoi »de tradition grécogéométrique« are derived from Euboean rather than Corinthian Late Geometric prototypes, is overestimating the evidence³³. In any case, the decoration technique is typically Phoenician and confined to Bichrome and Red Slip Wares, and in lesser degree Plain Ware.

The only models that seem to have been followed more or less accurately by the Carthaginian potters are the Corinthian Aetos 666 kotylai, or more likely Pithekoussan versions of the latter, which had been imported to Carthage in some numbers³⁴. Yet, in this case we cannot speak of true copies either³⁵, although the contexts or associations of these local versions of the Aetos 666 kotylai seem to be more or less contemporary with the Greek originals.

The relations between Greek and Phoenician-Punic skyphoi (and kotylai) should thus be defined in the same way as Ch. Briese and the author of this paper did in 1992: »If the Greek skyphos has been subject to a certain development in shape and decoration, it should not follow that this development was taken over at the same time in the Phoenician pottery. Significant elements of the Greek skyphos shape – lip, bowl, and base – and the pertinent decoration schemes, which are decisive in the Greek world for the attribution to a particular class, region and period, were only taken over much later by the Phoenician potter from a skyphos form that he considered to be >typical<. In the Phoenician world this general skyphos shape and decoration scheme underwent an independent development« ³⁶.

³⁰ Boardman 2004, 159, speaking of the Carthaginian skyphoi.

³¹ Briese – Docter 2002, 209–212: bases, handles and wall fragments cat. 115. 124 f. 128 f. fig. 15 f (= Briese – Docter 1992, 60 f. cat. 93 fig. 15 f); small rims cat. 103 and 130; complete imported skyphos, Briese – Docter 2002, 191 f. 211. 219 cat. 118 fig. 18 pl. II a–b (= Niemeyer – Docter 1993, 220 f. cat. 7 pl. 57, 5. 6; Niemeyer – Rindelaub – Schmidt 1996, 54 cat./pl. 34; Peserico 2007, 304 fig. 131 cat. 1693 pl. 35).

³² Boardman 2004, 156.

³³ Rouillard 1990; Rouillard 2007, 187.

³⁴ Docter – Chelbi – Maraoui Telmini 2003, 48. 50 cat. 2 fig. 6 b; Docter 2007a, 470 f. fig. 250, both with full references for Carthage.

³⁵ Briese 1998, 437–439. 448 fig. 5 pl. 37, 1. 2; Briese – Docter 2002, 201. 220 fig. 20 pls. IV. V.

³⁶ Paraphrase of Briese – Docter 1992, 41.

Finally, I would now add the conclusion that these Phoenician skyphoi and kotylai were made for a Phoenician, rather than for a Greek clientele.

Resumen

Over the past 25 years a lively debate has been going on as to the correct interpretation of the Phoenician / Punic adaptations (also termed >copies<) of Greek drinking vessels, in particular the skyphoi and the kotylai. This contribution to the debate brings in new statistical evidence, mainly from excavations in Carthage, leading to five conclusions: 1) these adaptations are mainly a phenomenon of the 7th and first half of the 6th century BCE, 2) they were made for a primarily non-Greek, Phoenician / Punic clientele, 3) they were made by Phoenician / Punic potters and painters, 4) they do not copy Thapsos class or Euboean Late Geometric drinking cups, neither formally nor stylistically, and definitely not contemporarily, and 5) the paces of introduction and varying levels of popularity of skyphos and kotyle adaptations in different Phoenician settlements may be explained by varying levels of access to Greek originals.

Zusammenfassung

Seit 25 Jahren findet eine lebendige Debatte über die korrekte Interpretation von phönizisch/punischen Adaptionen (auch ›Kopien‹ genannt) von griechischen Trinkgefäßen – insbesondere von skyphoi und kotylai – statt. Dieser Beitrag steuert neue statistische Beweise, hauptsächlich von Ausgrabungen in Karthago, zu dem Diskurs bei, die zu fünf Feststellungen führen 1.) die Adaptionen sind vor allem ein Phänomen des 7. und der ersten Hälfte des 6. Jhs. v. Chr., 2.) sie wurden in erster Linie für nichtgriechisches, phönizisches/punisches Klientel produziert, 3.) sie wurden von phönizischen/punischen Töpfern und Malern hergestellt, 4.) sie kopieren weder formal noch stilistisch und definitiv nicht gleichzeitig die Thapsos Klasse oder euböische Spät-geometrische Trinkbecher und 5.) die Geschwindigkeit der Einführung und die unterschiedliche Beliebtheit der Adaptionen von skyphos und kotyle kann durch den unterschiedlichen Zugriff auf die griechischen Originale in den unterschiedlichen phönizischen Siedlungen erklärt werden.

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Source of the illustration

Fig. 1: drawing courtesy B. Maraoui Telmini, inked by J. Angenon (Ghent).

Illustration

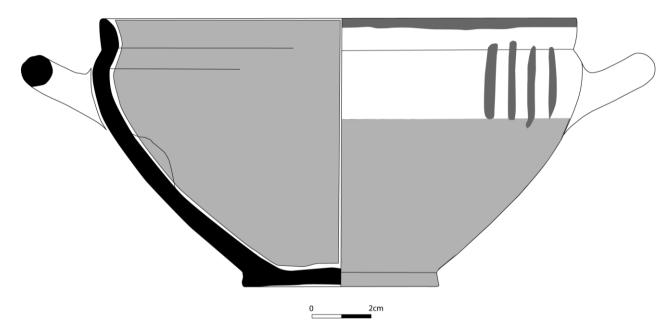


Fig. 1: Carthaginian Bichrome Ware skyphos, from Carthage, Tuniso-Belgian excavations on the Bir Massouda terrain (BM37910, context BM02/7222).