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Phoenician Settlement, Production, and Trade in Southern Andalucía

## **Introduction and Background**

During the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Iberian coast experienced its first wave of Phoenician settlement and economic engagement. Most broad summaries of Phoenician colonization and interaction in Iron Age Iberia have focused on either the Atlantic coast, where a metal-driven trade developed in the Guadalquivir Delta around the famous Phoenician colony of Gadir (Neville, 2007), or on the eastern Mediterranean coast where colonial settlements on Ibiza and the coast engaged in intensive trade with indigenous groups (Belarte, 2009). However, archaeological work since the 1960's has revealed an equally significant area of Phoenician settlement and activity along the southern Mediterranean coast of Andalucía (see fig. 1). While this region has been studied extensively, it lacks the same degree of comprehensive analysis.

This is probably due, at least in part, to the uncertainty surrounding the motivation(s) of this colonial enterprise. Unlike the Guadalquivir Delta and the region of Murcia, this region lacks significant metal deposits, yet it still saw extensive settlement and economic engagement. Trade, both with the interior and as a waypoint between Gadir and the Mediterranean, the agricultural potential of the area (Aubet, 2001), the availability of timber (Treumann, 2009), and even social opportunity (Lopez Castro, 2006) have been set forth as possible motivators; and in all likelihood it was a combination of factors. Regardless of the exact stimulus, it is clear from the archaeology of the area that this colonial activity was not a mere offshoot of Gadir, but rather a significant colonization characterized by planned, hierarchical settlements and specialized production. A significant Phoenician elite presence is well attested in both the architecture of settlements and particularly the rich funerary culture around sites like Morro de Mezquitilla and Almuñécar.

During the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and increasingly so during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the southern Andalusian coast was thriving economically as trade with indigenous communities in the interior spurred intense production and exchange in sites like Cerro del Villar and Toscanos. Metallurgy seems to have been limited across the coast, but

large-scale pottery production and agriculture is attested at Cerro del Villar. By using the three sites of Cerro del Villar, Morro de Mezquitilla, and Toscanos as examples, this paper seeks to provide a brief synthetic analysis of this region focusing on production at these Phoenician sites and the importance of indigenous elites in the trade relations that influenced the economic development of these sites.

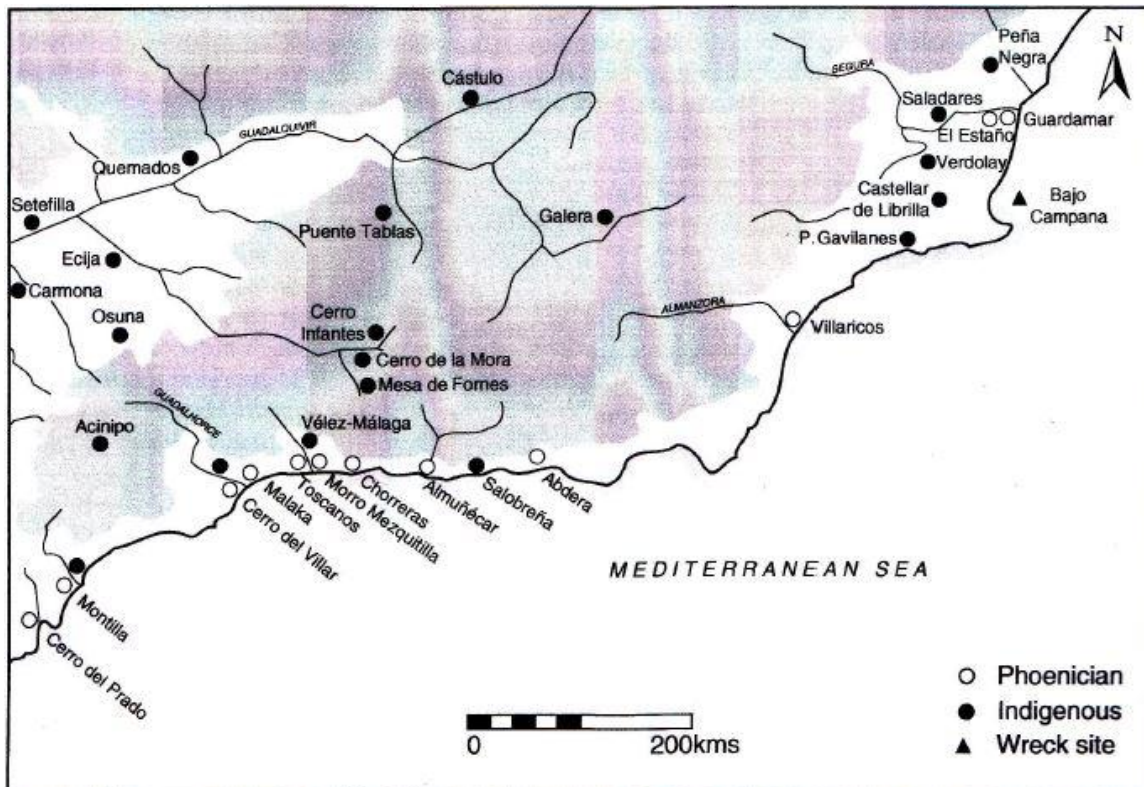


Fig. 1: The Phoenician colonies (○) and indigenous settlements (●) of eastern Andalucía (Neville, 2007: 13).

Before examining these three sites in detail, some general characteristics of this Phoenician colonization should be noted. The settlement pattern in this area was extremely regular, with every site sharing five important characteristics: (1) sites were founded on the coast in river mouths, on either islets or small promontories; (2) settlement areas are fairly small, around 5 ha; (3) sites were founded in close proximity to one another, for example, Toscanos and Morro de Mezquitilla are only around 5 km from each other; (4) all settlements have excellent natural anchorages; (5) the necropoleis of these settlements are located on the opposite side of their respective rivers (Aubet, 2002a:

80-84). The locations of these settlements favor both maritime and fluvial movement, allowing for trade with both the Andalucían interior and the wider Mediterranean, and their proximity suggests that these coastal sites enjoyed, and probably relied on, close relationships. Other shared elements among these sites include a lack of evidence for territorial control of their hinterlands, the presence of specialized production (especially at Cerro del Villar) a level of self-sufficiency, a strong elite presence, settlement planning, and trade with indigenous groups. A shared chronology can also be seen in this region, with most sites being founded in the middle to late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, experience their greatest economic activity in the 7<sup>th</sup>, and falling into decline and abandonment in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Neville, 2007).

### **Cerro Del Villar**

Cerro del Villar (see fig. 2) is perhaps the most important site in terms of Phoenician production along this coastal stretch—providing some of the most exciting economic evidence. It was first discovered in the 1960's, and since 1987 has been the subject of an extensive interdisciplinary investigation. While not much of the site itself has been uncovered, its importance as a center for agriculture and commercial pottery production has been revealed (Aubet et al., 1999). Cerro del Villar was founded in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE on an islet in the Guadalhorce River Delta, and was the principal Phoenician settlement in the Bay of Malaga until the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Today, the site is slightly over 1 km from the Mediterranean, but originally it had direct access to an excellent natural harbor. Meanwhile, the Guadalhorce, which formed the principal route of communication between the interior and coast (see fig. 3), enabled the site's intensive engagement with inland communities (Aubet, 2002a: 86). Like other Phoenician coastal sites in the area, Cerro del Villar was small, only 5 ha, and seems to have experienced its highest levels of activity in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Aubet, 1995: 51-56).



Fig. 2: Google Earth™ image showing the location of the ancient islet.

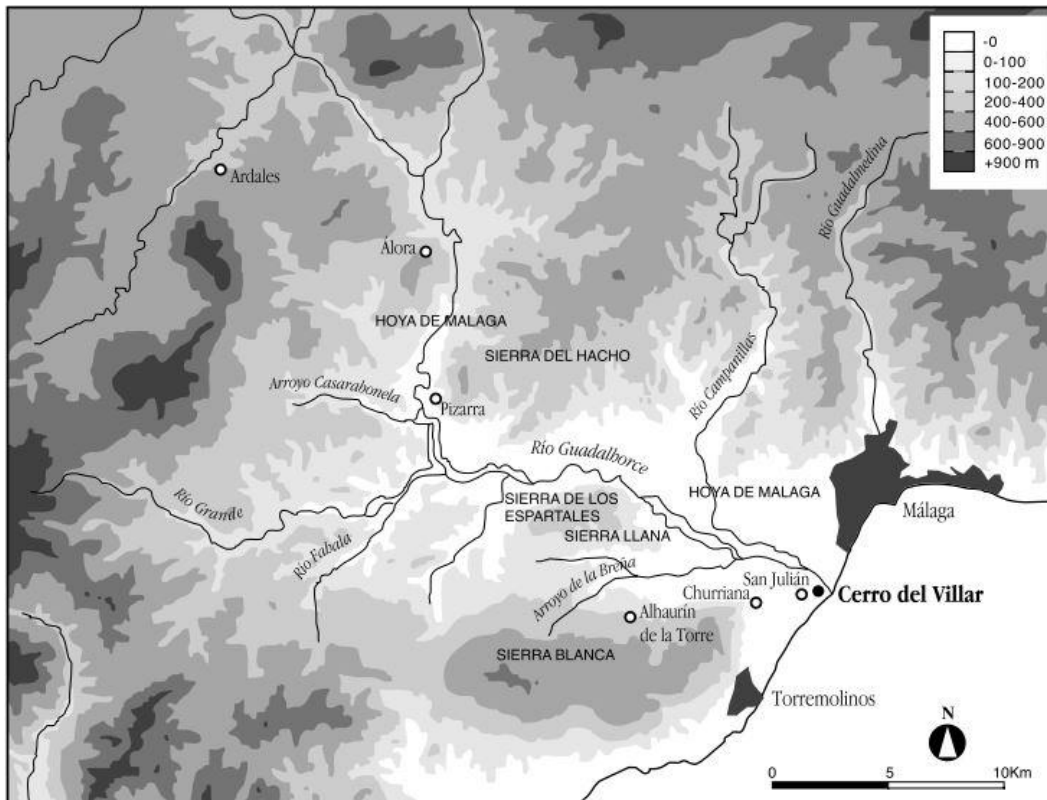


Fig. 3: Location of Cerro del Villar along the Guadalborce River (Aubet et al., 1999: 7).

Excavations at the site from 1987-1995 focused mostly on the center of the ancient islet (see fig. 4), and while limited in scope, these investigations have uncovered ten occupation levels ranging from the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE as well as some of the main domestic and industrial elements of the site (Aubet et al., 1999). The site displays a regular plan all the way down to its earliest levels, with large residential areas separated by streets (Aubet, 1995: 56). This degree of planning hints at some centralized control and suggests that the settlement of this site was never the work of a few adventurous groups, but from the beginning was an elite-directed and relatively large-scale venture. The domestic buildings (see fig. 5) that made up these areas were often equipped with small domestic ovens (see fig. 6) and wells. These large rectilinear buildings share a north-south orientation and are divided into separate rooms. Some have more than six rooms arranged around a courtyard. Others, identified as luxury dwellings, had direct access to the sea—with stone staircases providing access to private jetties (Neville, 2007: 23). These fairly large and varied rectilinear structures speak to a certain degree of social hierarchy, while the attached ovens and wells suggest that small-scale domestic production was occurring alongside intensive industrial

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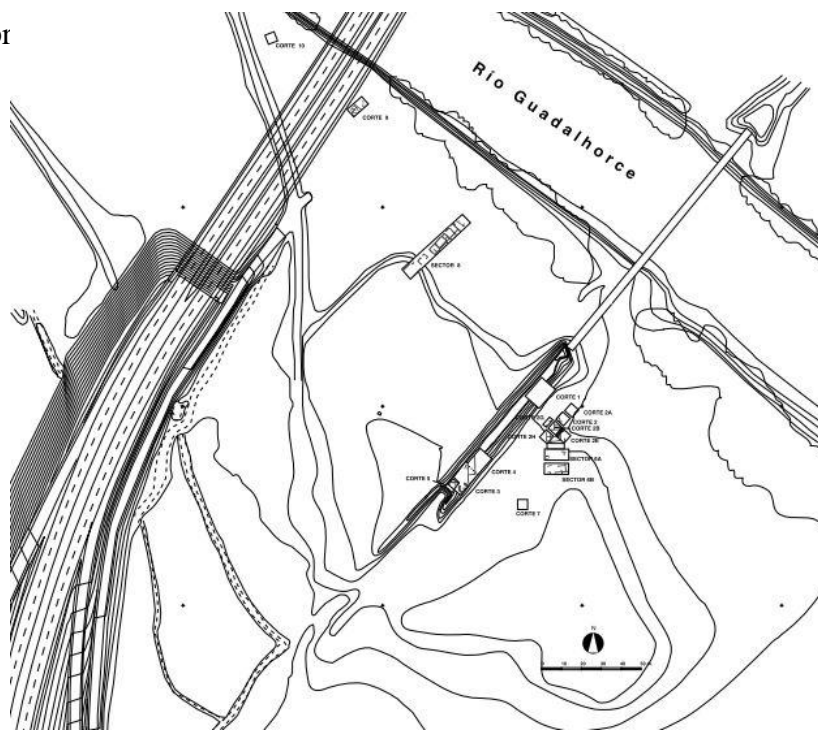


Fig. 4: Schematic plan of the 1987-1995 excavations at Cerro del Villar (Aubet et al., 1999: 9).

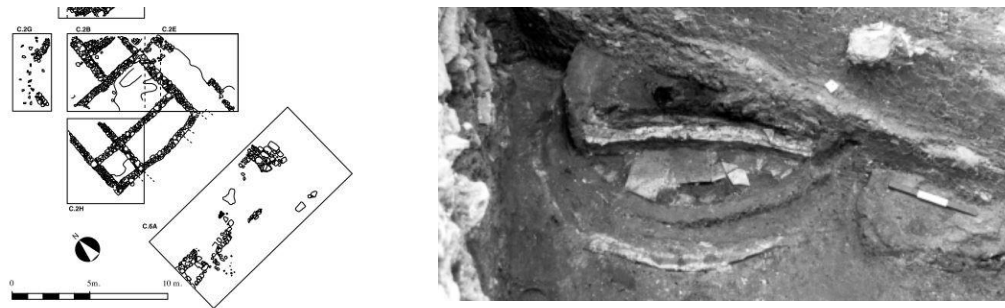


Fig. 5 (left above): Example of domestic architecture from sector 2 (Aubet et al., 1999: 16).

Fig. 6 (right above): Example of a domestic oven (Aubet et al., 1999: 84).

Perhaps the most interesting development in Cerro del Villar occurred in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when a large industrial zone devoted to the commercial production of pithoi, amphorae, and other large ceramic containers was established on the highest part of the site. This area consisted of large kilns situated beside two large rectangular buildings (see fig. 7), and the finds uncovered support the interpretation of this central edifice as an industrial sector with differentiated areas for clay preparation, working, and firing (Aubet, 1995: 56). This area no doubt produced pottery (see fig. 8) on a large scale to supply Cerro del Villar's extensive exchange with indigenous communities. It is in this central area that we see the clearest and most extensive evidence for large-scale, industrial production in southern Andalucía. During the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, a time of increased economic activity in the region, Cerro del Villar became a specialized site for the production of pottery that was destined for export to indigenous communities at sites such as Cerro de la Mora, Alhama, and Cerro de los Infantes among others (Niemeyer, 2002: 42).



Fig. 7: Reconstruction of the central pottery workshop (Aubet et al., 1999: 290).

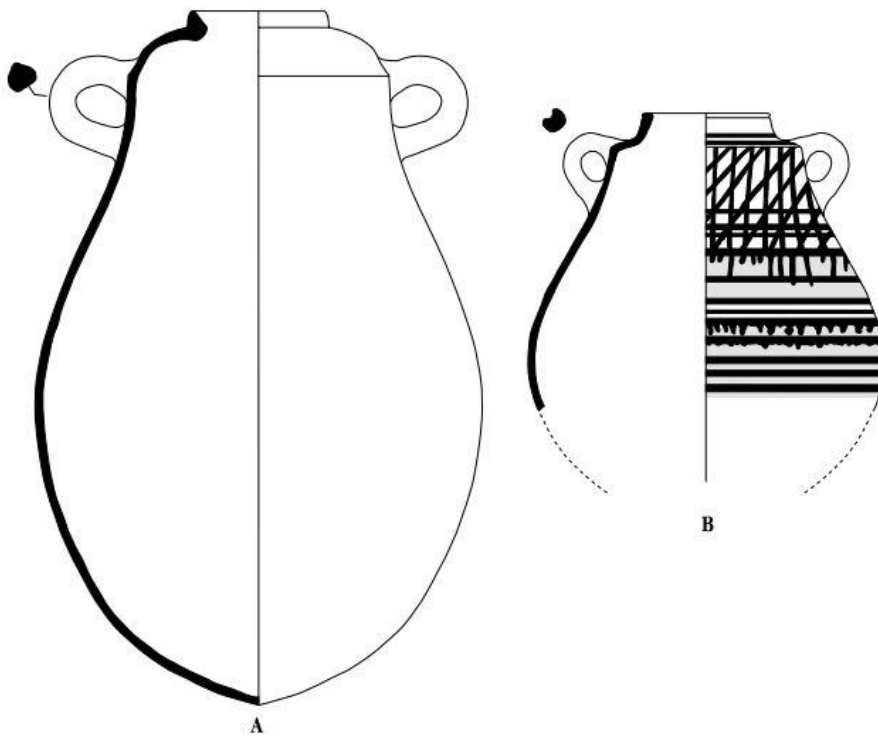


Fig. 8: Example of Amphorae produced (Aubet et al., 1999: 178)

While this industrial sector speaks to Cerro del Villar's significant economic engagement with its hinterland, imported pottery found at the site provides evidence of its wide-ranging Mediterranean contacts as part of the larger Phoenician trading network. Examples including Ionian cups, ceramic from Samos, Etruscan amphorae and bucchero not only help date the site, but also reveal its broader connections (Aubet, 1995: 56-57).

Pottery production clearly became one of the central activities at Cerro del Villar, but the settlement was also engaged in intensive and diversified agriculture. Geomorphologic and paleogeographic studies have shown that the area around the site provided excellent conditions for intensive agriculture, and indeed Cerro del Villar is the only settlement in the surrounding area that has produced numerous stone grinders (see fig. 9), revealing the grinding of wheat on both a domestic and large scale (Aubet, 2002a: 91-92). Palynological samples from the site provide evidence for wheat, barley, legumes, lentils, and peaches. While the analysis of phytoliths and container residues suggest that while wine was initially imported from the east, vineyards were eventually planted around Cerro del Villar, and the discovery of grapes within amphorae is highly suggestive of wine-making (Buxo, 2009: 157-158; Neville, 2007: 114). According to Aubet, the area's high agricultural potential combined with the site's limited population means that a surplus was produced for export (2002a: 94). It seems certain that many of the amphorae produced in the central industrial area were used to export wine.

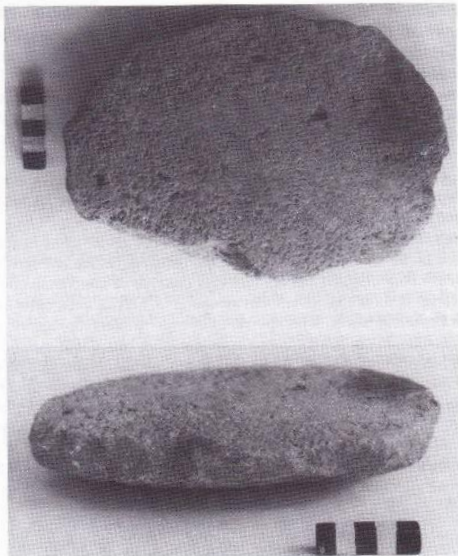


Fig. 9: Stone grinder example (Aubet, 2002a: 92).



Agriculture and ceramic production were probably the most important elements of Cerro del Villar's economy, but there is evidence of further diversification. Although better metallurgical evidence exists at Toscanos and Morro de Mezquitilla, there are signs of limited metal production on a local level, (Neville, 2007: 115). More significantly, there is evidence of both fishing and dyeing activity. Numerous fish, both littoral and pelagic, have been found, and in one structure, fishing equipment such as hooks, lead weights, and harpoons has been found. While in another, many murex shells were discovered (Neville, 2007: 111-112). *Garum*, the fermented fish sauce that would become a major Andalusian export in the Roman period, seems to have been produced at the site as well (Aubert, 2001: 328). This evidence for intensive fishing, as well as the concentration of fishing equipment in one building suggests that perhaps there was a specialized group of fisherman alongside potters, iron workers, and farmers.

While not the largest or most elaborate Phoenician settlement (see Toscanos below), Cerro del Villar was clearly a thriving colonial center in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The interdisciplinary investigation of the site has granted us a remarkably full view of a site that leveraged its strategic position on the Guadalhorce to trade with indigenous communities in the interior—exporting locally produced goods (wine and *garum*) in locally produced containers. Small yet hierarchical, the settlement maintained maritime links with the wider Mediterranean, but it was economically oriented towards interaction with the interior.

### **Morro de Mezquitilla**

Lying about 80 km to the east of Cerro del Villar, Morro de Mezquitilla, while perhaps not as economically diverse or vibrant, provides the best metallurgical evidence of any site along the coast. Founded on the Algarrabo River in the mid. 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the site is well known for the rich chamber tombs at its necropolis (Trayamar), but evidence for iron working exists down to the earliest levels of the site, and the activity seems to have played a key role in its development (Schubart, 1998: 556). The site exhibits all the shared characteristics of Phoenician settlement described above, and its development reflects the general trends seen at other sites. Occupation seems to have consisted of two main phases. The first, already planned, was characterized by large

mudbrick dwellings divided into separate rooms, some with hearths, which were connected by high thresholds (Schubart, 2002: 10). These buildings were organized along regular streets which were terraced to follow the hill's slope (Neville, 2007: 19). Building K, the largest structure at the site, belongs to this first phase, and consists of 16 rooms covering 190 m<sup>2</sup> (see fig. 10). This structure has been identified as an elite residence, and an iron workshop was even incorporated into its western part (Lopez Castro, 2006: 82). The site was certainly well established by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but in the 7<sup>th</sup> century the settlement experienced a reorganization that can be seen at other sites as well, particularly Toscanos. The second phase also consisted of rectilinear structures, but with stone foundations and a new orientation (Schubart, 2002: 11). Across the southern Andalusian coast, the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE represents a period of maximum economic growth and it is against this backdrop that this transition was initiated. Additionally, the site of Chorreras only 1 km away was abandoned at this time, and its population may have transferred to Morro de Mezquitilla, whose position on a high promontory was superior (Neville, 2007: 23).

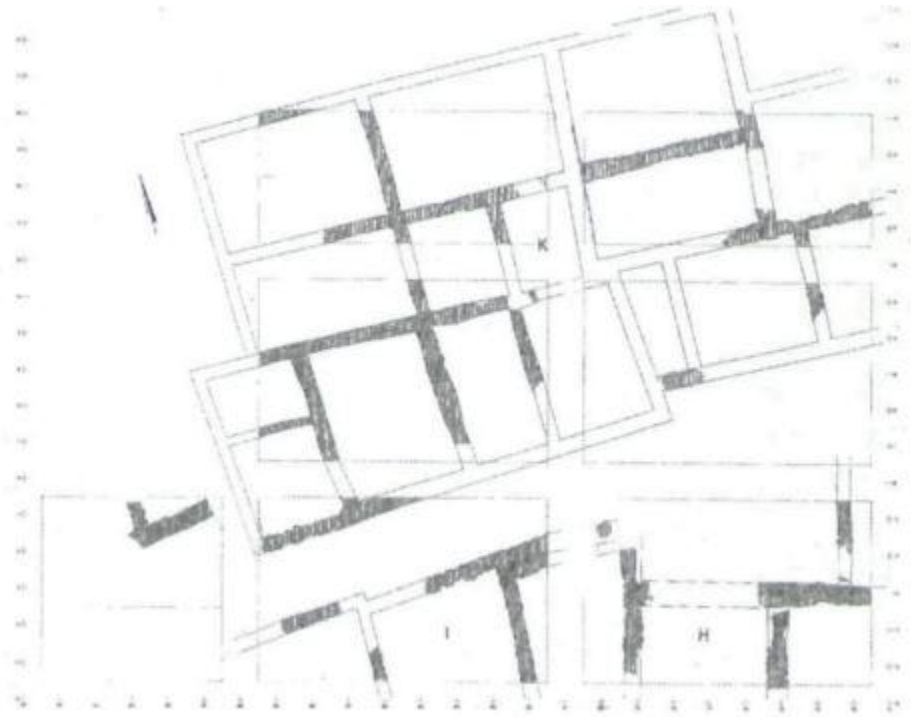


Fig. 10: Building K of Morro de Mezquitilla (Lopez Castro, 2006: 83).

The most significant aspect of the site is the metallurgical evidence it has provided (the most of any site in the region). The remains of multiple metal workshops have been discovered at the site, and within these, the site's German excavators have found ovens, iron slag, bellows nozzles, and ceramic vessels with adhered iron slag (see fig. 11) (Schubart, 2002: 7). While the metallurgical evidence is extensive, there seems to have been no primary smelting from iron ores, which is logical given the lack of metal deposits in the region. Instead, iron working seems to have been limited to secondary production and the recasting and working of metal (Schubart, 2002: 8-9). The site appears to have been producing iron objects on a local level. Indeed, all evidence for metallurgy in this region is limited, unlike the large-scale commercial ceramic production of Cerro del Villar.



Fig. 11: Bellows nozzles from Morro de Mezquitilla (Schubart, 2002: 29).

### **Toscanos**

Toscanos, the largest and most extensively excavated settlement along the southern Mediterranean coast also provides evidence of iron working. Founded c. 740/730 beside the Velez River (see fig. 12), Toscanos is perhaps the most 'urban' site on the southern Andalucían coast, although it has many characteristics in common with other settlements. As with Cerro del Villar and Morro de Mezquitilla, Toscanos had large rectilinear structures from an early date and was also protected on its western side by a defensive ditch (Neville, 2007: 20). Building H, which has been classified as an

elite dwelling, stands out in terms of its size and layout—seven rooms arranged around a central courtyard and encompassing 110 m<sup>2</sup> (Lopez Castro, 2006: 82).

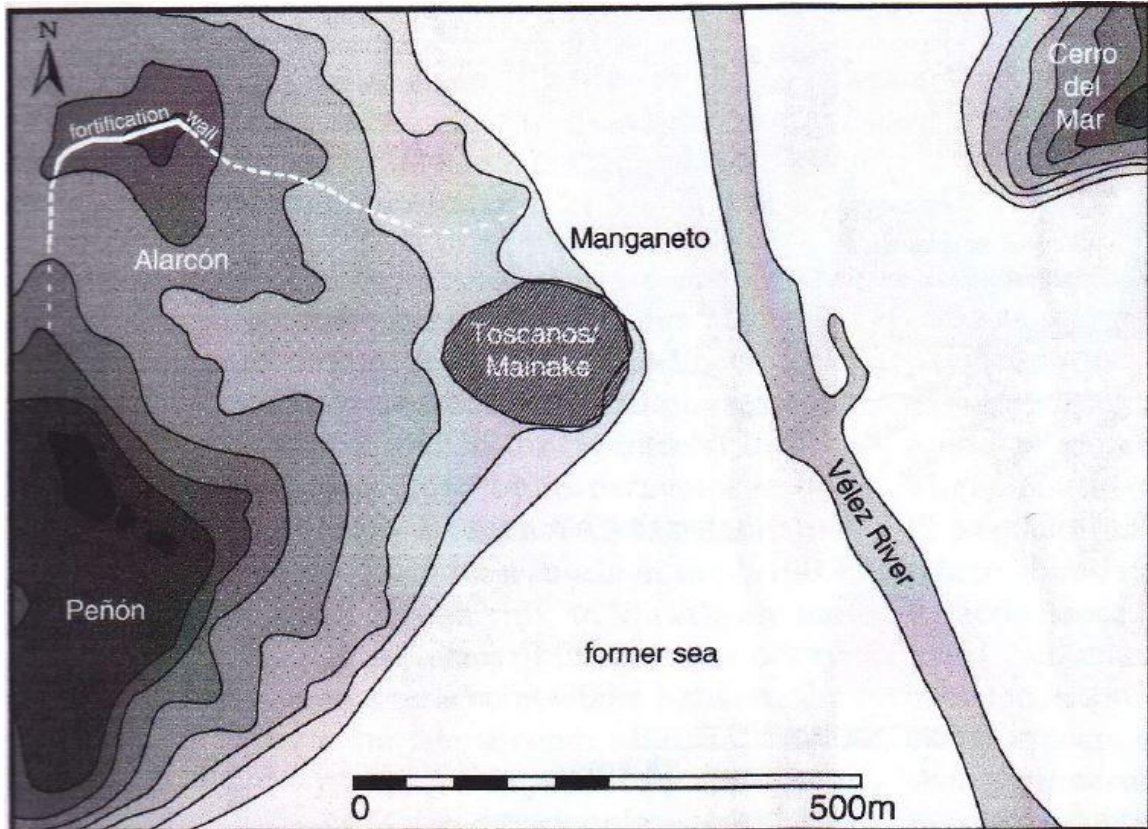


Fig. 12: Toscanos and the surrounding area (Neville, 2007: 14).

During the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Toscanos underwent a major expansion and reconstruction (see fig. 13). New clusters of structures cropped up, including building C, a large three-aisled building that has been identified as a warehouse (see fig. 14). Located in the center of the settlement and attached to building H by a flight of stone stairs, building C was relatively large (165 m<sup>2</sup>) and featured superior construction, with an ashlar and rubble foundation beneath a mudbrick superstructure (Neville, 2007: 22). This structure contained the remains of transport and storage containers and is comparable to a warehouse in Motya and others in the Levant, and seems to have been the economic center of the site (Aubet, 2001: 317-321). Certainly the storage capacity of the structure would have exceeded the needs of Toscanos itself, and it must have played an important role in trade. Structures E, F, G (dwellings of lesser quality) are located just

west of the warehouse and were constructed at the same time, making it likely that they housed people whose labor revolved around the monumental warehouse (Niemeyer, 2002: 37). At the approximately the same time, a group of ashlar structures were erected farther to the west (see fig. 15). The size and workmanship of these structures differentiated them from the rest of the settlement, and their construction points to both the presence of an elite faction and the prosperity of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Niemeyer, 2002: 38).

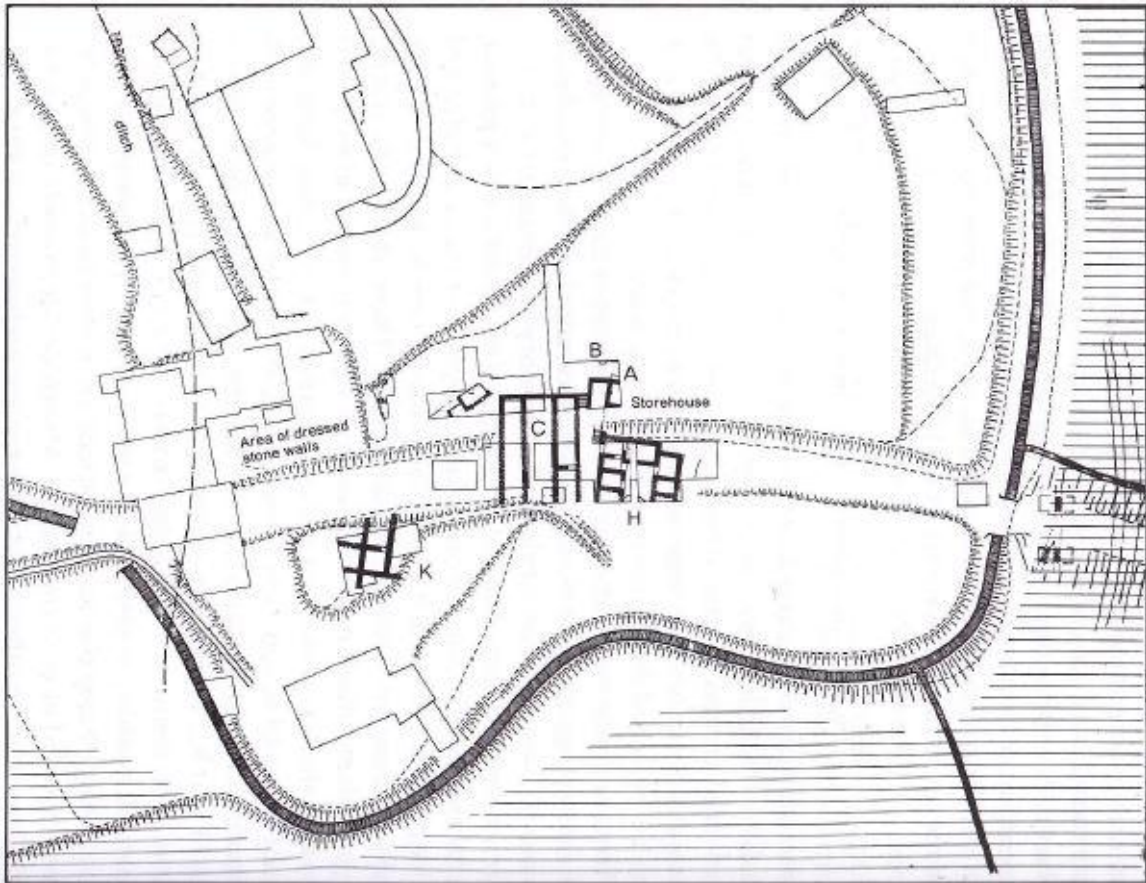


Fig. 13: The layout of 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE Toscanos (Niemeyer, 2002: 39).

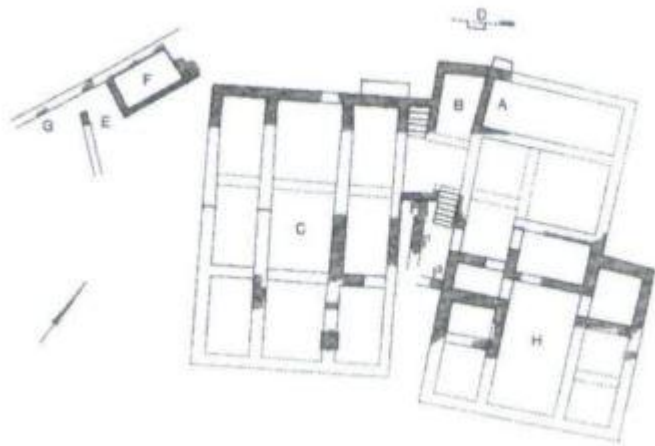


Fig. 14: Buildings C, H, E, F, and G (Lopez Castro, 2006: 83).



Fig. 15: Example of ashlar masonry (Aubert, 2001: 319).

Toscanos' metallurgical evidence also comes from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. As the settlement expanded, it incorporated Cerro del Penon to its west, and an iron working district was established on this hill (Niemeyer, 2002: 34). As with Morro de Mezquitilla and Cerro del Villar, metal working at the site seems to have been limited to local production.

As at Cerro del Villar, large numbers of fish remains have been found at the site—suggesting that intensive fishing was occurring from an early date (Neville, 2007: 111). However, it seems certain that the major economic activity of Toscanos centered on the central warehouse which must have played a key role in trade with the surrounding region, storing goods (perhaps even amphorae from Cerro del Villar) before they could be exchanged elsewhere.

### **Trade and the Role of Indigenous Elites**

This brings us back to what seems to have been the major preoccupation of these Phoenician enclaves, especially during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE: trade with indigenous communities in the Andalucían interior. This is seen most clearly at Cerro del Villar, where industrial pottery production was providing containers for the export of local commodities. Toscanos as well seems to have been oriented towards trade, as the central warehouse zone became the dominant focus of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE phase of the site.

Production at Cerro del Villar and other sites gives us one half of the trade equation. For the consumption of these goods, we must look towards native settlements. Evidence of this consumption comes in the form of Phoenician objects, mainly ceramic containers, that have been found in indigenous sites such as Cerro de la Mora, Alhama, and Cerro de los Infantes among others (Niemeyer, 2002: 42). Mirroring the development of Phoenician settlement, trade seems to have begun in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, before greatly increasing in intensity during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Aubert, 2001: 327; Sanmarti, 2009). Substantial trade and interaction was occurring between these Phoenician sites and local groups, and it is worth taking a closer look at these interactions.

It was initially thought that 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE Phoenician settlers colonized a southern Andalucían coast that was sparsely populated, almost empty. Now, however, it is clear that all of southern Andalucía was populated by indigenous settlements. As is often the case, the lack of indigenous settlements near the coast seems to have merely reflected a lack of modern archaeological interest, as sites unlooked for went unfound. The Phoenician sites of Almuñécar, Salobrena, and Montilla even seem to have been established near Final Bronze Age settlements and indigenous pottery was found in the

lowest levels of Almuñécar, Toscanos, and Morro de Mezquitilla (Aubet, 2002b: 103; Neville, 2007: 120). Furthermore, it was indigenous sites that controlled all the routes into the interior, dominating an interregional trade network that the Phoenicians tapped into (Aubet, 2001: 327). The robust, trade-based economy of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE Phoenician coast was not possible without pacts with local communities, and their elites.

While many considerations of colonial interaction have seen local elites as passive recipients of foreign goods and culture, it is clear that these elites were key actors in trade with the Phoenician coast. This colonial interaction can be best understood from a perspective of indigenous elite pragmatism; an endogenous viewpoint that still takes into account the importance of foreign contacts. These individuals were the only people capable of accessing regional networks and providing a market for Phoenician goods (Aubet, 2001: 102). For native elites, the foreign items offered by Phoenicians provided new social and economic opportunities. As Riva outlines, elites could draw on imports to create a new local self-definition that enhanced or maintained their prestige (2005). Phoenician culture was therefore not a straightforward imposition on local culture, but a potential source of cultural capital for elites that had the means to trade for it. Wine and *garum* contained in amphorae seem to have been among the major Phoenician imports, and as luxury food items they could have been of particular use to local leaders. In a seminal paper, Dietler describes the important social roles that drinking usually holds in society. He also outlines how drinking and feasting can be leveraged by elites for political, social, and economic gain as exotic food and drink can be used by elites to further differentiate themselves from society and even organize labor (1990). Wine, which was newly introduced by the Phoenicians, provided an important opportunity to Iberian elites, and the later production of wine in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE at indigenous sites points to the prominent position that wine acquired in Iberian society (Sanmarti, 2009: 57).

As pragmatic elites began to tap into the potential of Phoenician imports and these items became important for social dynamics, agriculture and production at indigenous settlements were intensified as elites adopted new economic strategies to take advantage of new foreign contacts (Aubet, 2001: 328). This is analogous to the restructuring and intensification (discussed above) that is attested at Phoenician sites during the



increasingly prosperous 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Both local and Phoenician elites would have benefitted from this economic system, and as a result of this intensifying interchange, a deep economic interdependency arose between these two differently structured societies. It is not surprising that the fates of both these societies were linked, and they experienced both shared prosperity in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and a shared decline and settlement nucleation during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Neville, 2007).

The important indigenous site of Acinipo, located in the Ronda depression west of Cerro del Villar (see fig. 1) serves as a good example for the local side of this economic system. As Aubet outlines, the settlement dates from the Final Bronze Age and occupied a strategic position across different lines of communication. The site saw its first imports, amphorae containing *garum*, during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE followed by increased trade with Cerro del Villar and Montilla among other Phoenician sites. This outside contact led to a restructuring of the surrounding hinterland and a creation of dependent economies from the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, as areas were deforested and agricultural villages cropped up. By the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Acinipo was 10 ha and had abandoned its earlier circular architecture for a hierarchical arrangement of rectilinear structures (Aubet, 2001: 328). In this case, we can clearly see an indigenous settlement changing in response to the economic opportunities presented by the Phoenician colonization of southern Andalucía. This is a pattern that seems to have repeated itself across the region.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, we have in 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BCE southern Andalucía a system of colonial interaction that was driven by local elites as much as by Phoenician colonizers. This simple statement seems only logical, but it has taken a while for Mediterranean scholarship to get beyond basic models of acculturation to post-colonial viewpoints that take local agency into consideration. Phoenician coastal settlement in the region—exemplified by Cerro del Villar, Morro de Mezquitilla, and Toscanos—presents us with a series of small, self-sufficient settlements in close proximity to one another whose locations favored both maritime and river-borne transport. While limited in size and population, these settlements had hierarchical settlement patterns, and a rich funerary

culture that reveals the presence of important elite factions at the earliest stages of settlement. The economies of these settlements grew through the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, with intensive production, agriculture, and fishing occurring simultaneously. Iron working, while attested at all three of the sites described above, was always limited; fulfilling local demands. Pottery production at Cerro del Villar, however, reached an industrial scale in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE; providing the containers needed to export locally produced goods such as wine and *garum* to indigenous communities such as Acinipo. Toscanos, the largest and most architecturally elaborate Phoenician foundation, became an important commercial enclave in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE when the settlement was reorganized around the imposing warehouse complex; a testament to the scale and prosperity of regional trade. Phoenician settlement on the southern Iberian coast was no secondary enterprise supporting activity in the Guadalquivir Delta, it was a complex and thriving zone in its own right.

Faced with such an impressive foreign colonization, it is perhaps easy to favor it over indigenous evidence and to view changes in native culture as a process of passive acculturation. However, dealings with indigenous elites, from their dominant position atop communities that control access to the Andalusian interior and regional trade networks, were crucial to Phoenician trade, and their agency must be taken into account. Viewed as elite pragmatism, the uptake of certain foreign goods is easily explained as an opportunity for social, political, and economic advancement. Dietler, in his discussion of colonialism, defines it as “the projects and practices of control marshaled in interactions between societies linked in asymmetrical relations of power and processes of social and cultural transformation resulting from those practices” and colonization as “the act of imposing political domination over foreign territory and people” (Dietler, 2009: 21-22). Based on these definitions, the character of Phoenician activity along the southern Mediterranean coast calls into question the use of terms “colonization” and “colonialism” to describe it. While Phoenician settlers may have brought new technologies and cultural forms, any territorial or martial asymmetry clearly favored the indigenous groups who dominated the landscape. As mentioned above, all Phoenician settlements were small and many were undefended, with no extension of control over their hinterland. Unlike later Punic and Roman colonization of the same area, territorial dominance does not seem

to have been a motivation or even an option. Yet these sites were not mere trading posts—they were permanent foundations that sheltered a wealthy elite class and significant industry. This seems to be an almost special case, where extensive foreign settlement and activity was geared only towards peaceful trade relations with indigenous powers. It speaks to the variability of colonial experience, and the need to examine local agency in colonial situations.

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