THE PHOENICIAN-PUNIC HOUSE

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Abstract: The current rediscovery of the Phoenician-Punic identity revealed important aspects about this culture’s spatial organization. Many excavations are in progress in the south of the Iberian Peninsula. They share a connection with other Phoenician-Punic settlements in the Mediterranean. In this text, we intend to investigate four Mediterranean areas in which the Phoenician-Punic presence is found: the Levant, the Iberian Peninsula, Sicily and North Africa.

Rezumat: Actuala redescoperire a identității feniciano-punică a dezvăluit aspecte importante legate de organizarea spațială construită proprie acestei culturi. Numeroase cercetări arheologice efectuate recent în siturile din sudul Peninsulei Iberice au permis dialogul cu rezultatele cercetărilor din alte areale feniciano-punică din zonele limite Mării Mediteraneene. Obiectivul acestui text este de a oferi o imagine a stadiului cercetărilor privind structurile din zonele limitrofe Mării Mediteraneene. Obiectivul acestui text este de a oferi o imagine a stadiului cercetărilor privind structurile construite în acele zone unde prezența feniciano-punică este la ora actuală bine documentată: Levant (Orientul Apropiat), Peninsula Iberică, Sicilia și Africa de Nord.

From founding the settlements to building the dwellings

Our current knowledge of the Phoenician-Punic settlements has expanded due to discoveries located mainly in the Iberian Peninsula, where a myriad of Oriental building foundations1 were found. The Phoenician-Punic studies in Spain were one of the main contributing factors for the archaeological investigations in the Gadir underground.2

For a long time, space was considered only as a theater of human actions3 and Archeology shared the same idea as Geography, that we should value the form of things more than their development.4

According to Milton Santos,5 Strabo considered that a place’s attributes should be acknowledged for their permanence, while the superimposed attributes are regarded as mutable. However, Santos analyzes that changes actually occur in both categories.

One of the elements that differentiate the Phoenician foundations from other Mediterranean settlements is their topography.6 “The Phoenician urban landscape” can be described as foundations usually located on promontories, or islands not very far from the coast, preferably near shallow waters or straights7 (Fig. 1).

According to Markoe8 the typical Phoenician settlement consisted of two districts: the “Lower town” that housed manufacturing and residential buildings, and the “Upper town” that was home to the temples, administrative buildings and the residences of the wealthiest. The “Upper town” was also used as a citadel and was generally separated by walls.

The urbanism of the archaic Phoenician-Punic cities didn’t follow the Hippodamian grid. In the beginning, the foundations inherited Oriental elements without any Hellenistic influence.9 The Hellenistic influence appears more recently, in cities such as Carthage (Fig. 2), where the German archeological team considered the markedly white revetment of the blocks that formed the wall as a Hellenistic pattern.10

It is necessary to draw a parallel with the Hellenic culture, since once the Mediterranean, truly liquid cement,11 was the setting for exchanges, both material and cultural, among the civilizations that were developing along its borders.

One of the pieces of evidence of the extent of Hellenization12 extrapolates the cultural sphere and expresses itself through space. Such an example is that of a mint in 4th century BC Carthage, when the economy switches to the monetary.13

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1 To mention some examples, there is the Yacimiento Arqueológico de la Teatro de Títeres “La Tía Norica” in Cádiz, discovered in 2002 (Zamora López 2010, 203). In Huelva, there is the site Tierra Llana de Huelva, which is investigated systematically since 1990 (López Castro 2008, 82) and the settlement Dona Blanca, that connects ancient Gadir (modern day Cádiz) with the rural hinterland, providing access to the agricultural resources of the city (López Castro 2008 83). These are some of the best known examples from the south of the Iberian Peninsula. They illustrate the extension of the Phoenician-Punic presence in the West.

2 Sáez Romero 2011, p.18.

3 Febvre 1923, p. 37.

4 Santos 2005, p. 21.


6 Bondi 1999, p.311; Mezzolani 2000, p.1223.

7 Bondi 1999, p.311.

8 Markoe 2007, p.68.

9 Wagner 2003, p.53.


12 Tsirkin 2000, p. 1233) states that the problematic of Carthage’s Hellenization is divided in two different approaches of investigation. The first considers Carthage from the 4th to the 2nd century BC as Hellenistic. On the other hand, the second states that its Hellenization was superficial and it didn’t touch the essence of Ancient Carthage. Tsirkin mentions a ruling aristocracy that was familiar with the Hellenic culture, while the popular mass and at least a part of the priestly aristocracy still followed the Eastern traditions.