Contestualizzare la “prima colonizzazione”:
Archeologia, fonti, cronologia e modelli interpretativi fra l'Italia e il Mediterraneo

Contextualising “early Colonisation”:
Archaeology, Sources, Chronology and interpretative models between Italy and the Mediterranean

Local response to the early Phoenician presence in western Andalusia: the case of imported items in Setefilla

Michał Krueger - Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań)

The Phoenician influence on Tartessian culture is commonly perceived as crucial for the development of indigenous structures of power. This paper will analyze the local reaction to the Phoenician presence in western Andalusia, with a discussion of the Setefilla case.

Setefilla is one of the best known Tartessian sites and is located on the periphery of Tartessos in actual western Andalusia, Spain. Placed on the right bank of the Guadalquivir River, it defended, during the Bronze and Iron Age, the entrance to the Sierra Morena mountains. The archaeological site consists of an extensive necropolis and a village. The necropolis is positioned on a topographically prominent location, inbetween the Guadalquivir River and the settlement of Setefilla. By now 14 burial mounds are identified in the necropolis, some of them were discovered and partly excavated by George Bonsor in the 1920s. Fifty years later, in the decade of 1970s, Maria Eugenia Aubet excavated the tumulus A and the tumulus B. The excavations, continued in the 80s, revealed the uninterrupted inhabitancy from at least the Middle Bronze Age. Setefilla became a reference for archaeologists and key site for understanding a wide range of issues related to the Tartessian culture, thanks to publications of the archaeological materials\(^1\) and further studies\(^2\).

The tumulus A is 29 meters long and is the biggest in the whole necropolis. 65 cremation graves and also the central burial chamber were discovered in this structure. Four constructive phases can be distinguished. Big slabs limited the oval territory of the tumulus A. Tumulus B is smaller; it is 16.70 meters long, it has neither limiting slabs nor a central chamber. The earth barrow covered 33 graves. There are several arguments which suggest that the necropolis was established as early as in the 9\(^{th}\) century.

Setefilla’s material culture presents a diversity and complexity unparalleled in the Tartessian area. Local hand-made biconic stands coexisted in the same tumulus with wheel-made \(\text{à chardón}\) vessels and bowls used as funerary urns. The repertoire of indigenous hand-made pottery includes decorated vessels, basically bowls. The technique of decoration was stroke burnished pattern with geometrical motives, mostly in form of a net. Moreover, some of the graves contained Phoenician imports like cups, bowls, plates, cinerary urns and one bottle made of alabaster. Even a richly decorated wheel-made Phoenician cup with bones of a dolphin inside was discovered in the tumulus A. Nevertheless, the status of those extraordinary, imported finds is not equal and depends on context in which the items were found.

---

Having in mind the context, it is essential to pay attention to the indigenous bowls, as they served not only to contain offerings, but they were used as funerary urns or as possible lids for *à chardón* vessels and, as a consequence, they were directly related to human bones. In the Tartessian culture there was a clear connection between the human dead body and geometrical ornament. A small detail visible in the Ategua stele, constitutes the unique representation of a funeral in the Late Bronze Age Tartessian artifact, and which can strengthen this interpretation: it shows a parallelogram in which lies the deceased. The same motif appears in many bowls used as urns or containers for funerary offerings in Setefilla and some belt buckles.

It was initially hypothesised that hand-made decorated bowls and wheel-made pottery are mutually exclusive. Comparisons made between these items confirmed this supposition and show their clear incompatibility. The starting point for the analysis is the statistical relationship between local hand-made bowls with geometrical decoration and foreign wheel-made pottery.

In tumulus A seven bowls with geometrical decoration, used as funerary urns, were found\(^3\). Equally, ten decorated bowls, used as lids for *à chardón* vessels\(^4\) were discovered. In tumulus B there were few testimonies of artifacts with geometrical decoration used as funerary urns\(^5\). In nearly all graves where geometrical decoration was documented, imported items of Phoenician origin were not present. However, there were three exceptions of this rule in tumulus A\(^6\) and one in tumulus B\(^7\).

In this context, it is highly probable that at the beginning of colonial stage, imports in Setefilla were not mere objects of prestige, but became objects of ritual significance that clearly competed with biconic vessels, typically Tartessian, documented in the Late Bronze, and with bowls decorated with geometrical ornamentation.

Probably, the ritual rule consisted of the exclusion of certain categories of objects in graves that already contained other kinds of material items. Out of 10 bowls used as funeral urns in the tumulus A, seven posses geometrical decoration, which clearly confirms their ritual meaning. In total, in tumulus A there are 17 tombs in which the geometrical decoration was observed. Its extremely low presence in graves with Phoenician imports suggests the redefinition of objects with ritual value by members of the community of Setefilla. It is possible that Phoenician imports, mainly plates, i.e. the same type of container (in terms of function and morphology) as Tartessian bowls, at the beginning of the process of cultural contact with the Phoenicians, acquired primarily a ritual value and not an economic. Afterwards, Phoenician pottery started to coexist with geometrically decorated bowls. Moreover, in phase III and IV (tumulus A), the proportion of bowls with geometrical decoration is minimal, documented only in tombs: A9 and A24. The same phenomenon of mutual exclusiveness of decorated bowls and Phoenician imports can be seen in the tumulus B. Furthermore, taking into account the relative “richness” of three tombs with combined grave goods (tumulus A), it could be claimed that items of local and foreign origin are a visible sign of broken funeral rule and, at the same time, a symbol of emergence of a new aristocracy which possessed objects which were mutually exclusive.

Imports *per se* are neither an indicator of the Phoenicians, nor do they represent prestige or power. The eschatological status of these items can differ widely. An amorphous fragment of Phoenician pottery had not the same meaning as a decorated cup or a big painted urn. Normally, in statisticl research this difference disappears under the same criteria: import. These products obtained different meanings in the indigenous context. It appears that at the beginning of the colonial stage imports were distributed in Setefilla according to a certain funerary rule. The

\(^3\) A15, A16, A18, A27, A57, A61, A64.


\(^5\) B1, B8, B20, B21.

\(^6\) In tumulus A the only cases of the coexistence of imported pottery with ornamented bowls are: A41, A45 and A62. Tomb A64 had no red slip pottery, but it contained a wheel-made alabastron and a knife that never appeared in bowls used as urns with geometrical decoration. It should be highlight that bowls which coexisted with Phoenician imports were used as possible lids, not urns.

\(^7\) Tomb B28 – grave goods consist of a wheel-made urn and a geometrically decorated belt buckle.
incompatibility of Phoenician pottery with decorated bowls of local origin is confirmed by statistical analysis. There is no doubt that later its meaning changed radically: economic and power competition led to stratification of the local community. In this context, imported items served as objects of prestige and power. The emulation of supremacy is especially evident in case of tumulus H, where prestige goods were numerous. Tumulus H is not an only the proof of the profound changes which occurred in Setefilla. The process of consolidation of structures based on economic values more than on blood relationships can be seen in other Tartessian sites, such as La Joya (Huelva) or Acebuchal, one of the most significant sites of Los Alcores, which shows ostentatious signs of social differentiation.

Therefore I argue that the attitude of the community of Setefilla at the beginning of colonial adventure was highly selective while using foreign material culture. The first stage could be characterized by the presence of non-local items used as ritual objects. Especially wheel-made pottery received special treatment in funeral context. Later, the significance of imported items changed in order to highlight the status of a deceased. From then on, Phoenician pottery and other objects of oriental origin were used as highly exclusive prestige goods.

Bibliography


