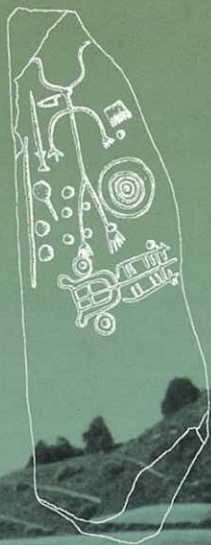


# *Colonial Encounters in Ancient Iberia*

PHOENICIAN, GREEK,  
AND INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

EDITED BY MICHAEL DIETLER  
& CAROLINA LÓPEZ-RUIZ



COLONIAL  
ENCOUNTERS IN  
ANCIENT IBERIA

*Phoenician, Greek, and  
Indigenous Relations*

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EDITED BY MICHAEL DIETLER  
& CAROLINA LÓPEZ-RUIZ

*Dea Mesquida Brund*

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# Phoenician Colonization on the Atlantic Coast of the Iberian Peninsula

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*Ana Margarida Arruda*

## *Introduction*

Although a Near Eastern presence had been documented for the “Far West”—namely Portuguese territory—since the nineteenth century, study of the arrival of Eastern Mediterranean populations on the European Atlantic coast expanded considerably in the last twenty years of the twentieth century. In effect, the discovery and excavation on archaeological sites of mostly Mediterranean material culture has almost tripled since the 1980s, and a return to archaeological materials that had long been sitting in museum storage facilities has also been possible.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the amount of archaeological data concerning the Phoenician presence in Portuguese territory is extensive and varying in nature, and we possess finds and architecture that can be analyzed in the context of an Orientalizing Iron Age (see maps in figs. 4.1 and 4.2).<sup>2</sup> Ceramics and their stratigraphic sequences, domestic and funerary architecture, radiocarbon dates, and even the geography of the sites are data that we can explore in order to understand the motives behind Phoenician voyages to Portugal, their chronology, and not only how settlement took place but how means of contact were established between the indigenous world and foreign groups of newcomers.

## *Sites, Materials, and Chronologies*

The geographical distribution of archaeological sites at which a Phoenician presence has been detected reveals, first of all, the littoral character of the overall colonization. Indeed, it becomes clear that at least until the sixth century BC such sites were confined to the coastal region. Looking further into the matter shows that even in this region settlement from the Mediterranean world is effectively confined to the three major rivers on the west coast (the Mondego, Tagus, and Sado) and leeward Algarve.

The majority of these sites have a predominantly indigenous character.

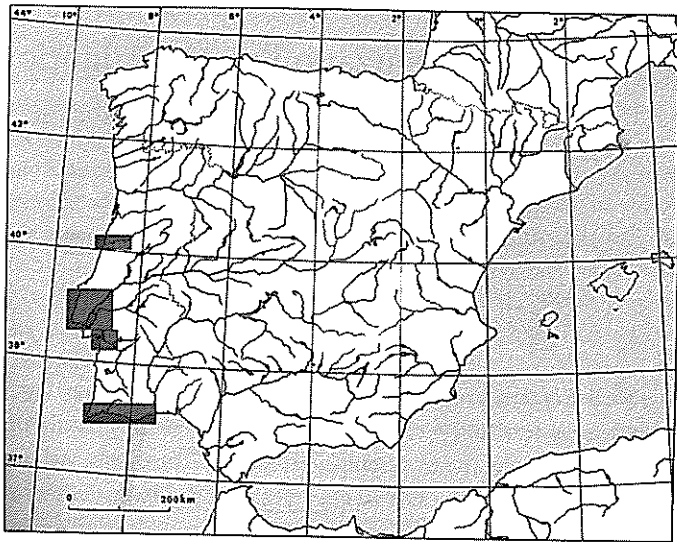


Figure 4.1 Portuguese orientaling areas in the context of the Iberian Peninsula.

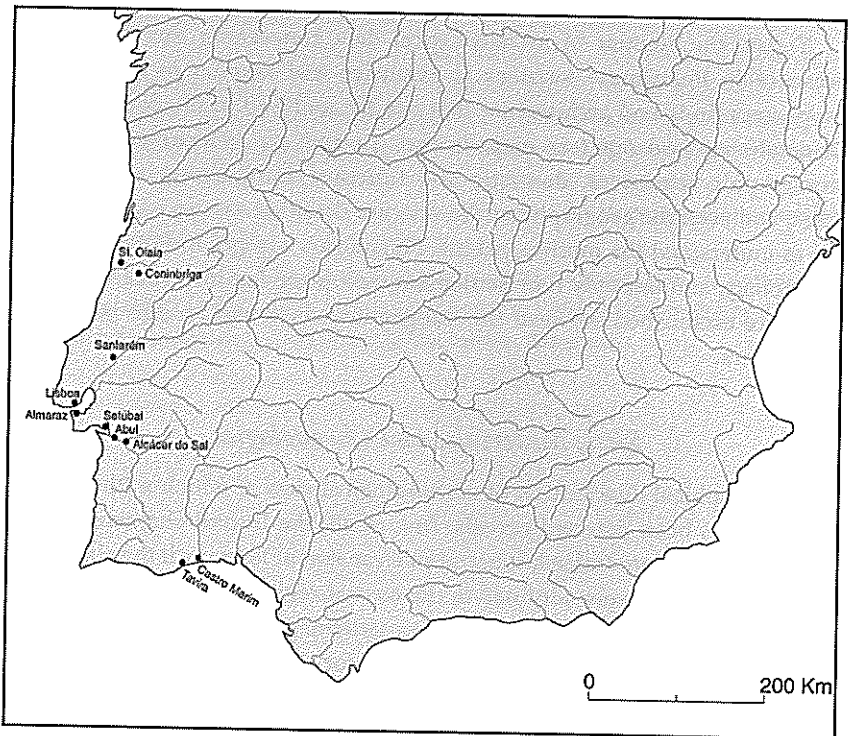


Figure 4.2 Portuguese sites with a Phoenician or orientaling culture.

The results we have from excavating in Conímbriga, at the Mondego, in Almaraz and Santarém, on the Tagus; in Alcácer do Sal and Setúbal, on the Sado River; and in Castro Marim and Tavira in eastern Algarve, have allowed us to conclude that, for all of them, human occupation began during the Late Bronze Age period and that during the beginning of the Iron Age, ceramics with oriental traits account for only a tiny percentage of the inventory. Only Abul (on the Sado estuary) and Santa Olaia (on the Mondego estuary) seem to correspond to Phoenician foundations. This judgment is due not only to the architectural characteristics and type of implantation the sites present but also to the fact that there is no evidence of an occupation prior to the Iron Age.

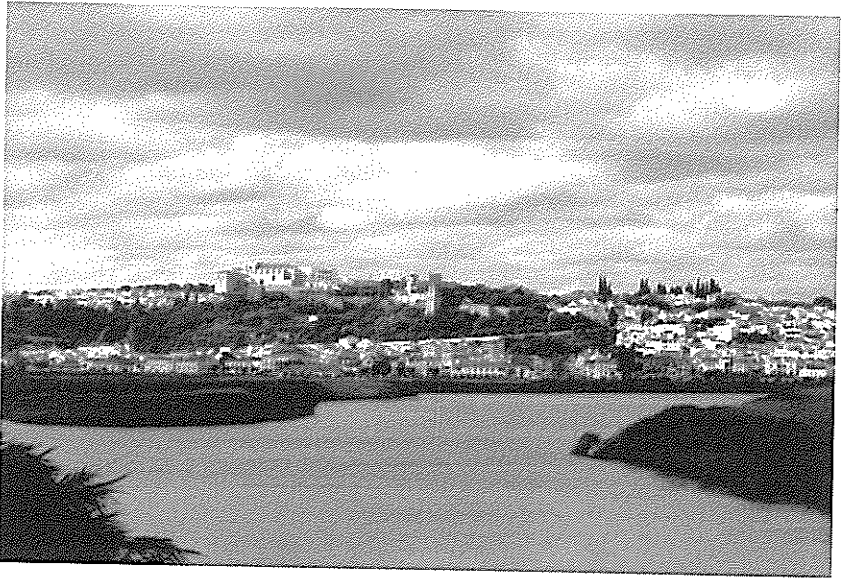
The first set of sites consists of elevated settlements (Conímbriga, Santarém, Almaraz, Alcácer do Sal, Castro Marim, Tavira, and also Lisbon and Setúbal) clearly visible on the landscape, which have good natural defense conditions and visually overlook vast stretches of territory. Almost all are located on elevated positions that dominate rivers, thereby controlling fluvial transit (figs. 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6).

The available data seem to support the conclusion that the regions first touched by Phoenician presence were the Tagus and Mondego estuaries and that before settlement in *ex-nihilo*-founded-sites there were contacts with the indigenous world. In effect, the typology of the red-slip ceramics of Santarém and Conímbriga, and even the radiocarbon dates for the lower levels of the first sites, show that the path of the Phoenician navigators was not a linear upstream line (see ceramics in figs. 4.8-4.9 for Santarém, figs. 4.10-4.11 for Conímbriga, 4.13 for Castro Marim). Nor does there seem to have been any progressive occupation of increasingly remote territories. The arrival of Eastern populations did not follow a south-north pattern—on the contrary, it appears that from the very beginning there was a desire to reach certain areas—in this case, ones located at the center of the Portuguese western coast. This pattern demonstrates, I believe, that these arrivals were not at all random, haphazard occurrences but, on the contrary, were determined by a set of goals and a previously established project.

The Santarém citadel offered two radiocarbon dates for the levels corresponding to the first orientalizing occupation (fig. 4.7). The materials found in these levels (plates with a narrow rim and ample diameter in a red-slip ware, R1 amphorae, type 10.1.1.1, and abundant hand-modeled ceramics) seem to point to a date around the eighth century BC, and the carbon-14 dates, two sigma calibrated, point to a period between 898-765 cal BC (ICEN 532: 2640 ± 50 BP) and 920-770 cal BC (BETA 131488: 2650 ± 70)—in other words, between the end of the tenth and the first quarter of the eighth century BC.<sup>3</sup> Both interception points are located at the end of the ninth century,



*Figure 4.3* The medieval castle of Lisbon, where an orientalizing presence has been detected.



*Figure 4.4* Alcácer do Sal from the Sado River.



*Figure 4.5* Citadel of Santarém, view from the Tagus River.



*Figure 4.6* The hill of Castro Marim.

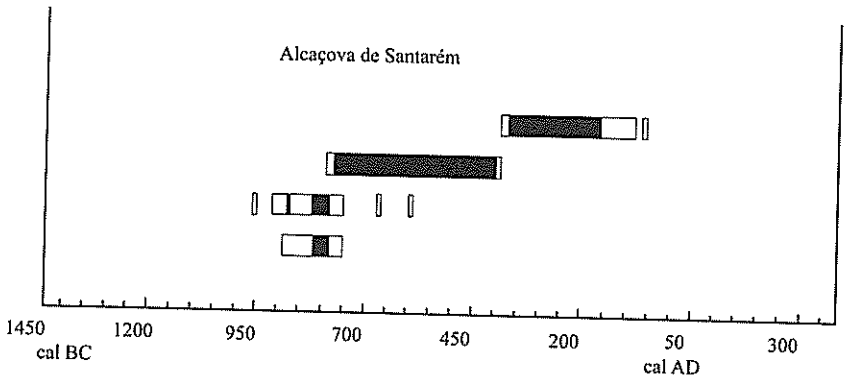


Figure 4.7 Santarém: the radiocarbon sequence of the Iron Age.

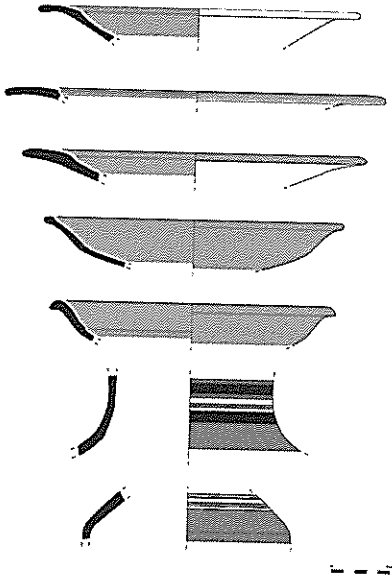


Figure 4.8 Red-slip ceramics from Santarém (ancient levels, eighth century BC).

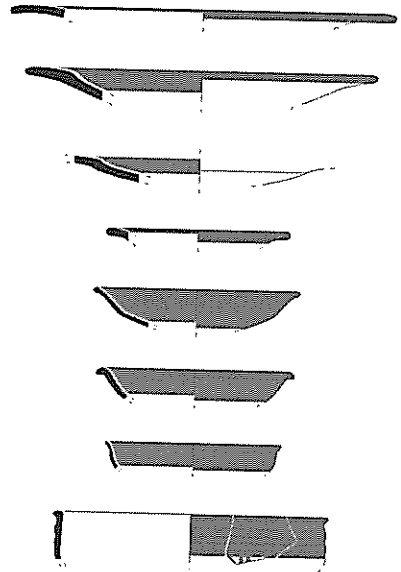


Figure 4.9 Red-slip ceramics from Santarém (eighth-seventh centuries BC).

804 and 805 BC respectively. The two dates are close to ones from the Andalusian Mediterranean coast, more specifically for level 1 of Toscanos<sup>4</sup> and for the second phase of Morro de Mezquitilla, and they are also close to dates that seem to correspond to a second moment of contact between Phoenician colonizers and the indigenous populations of the Málaga hinterland, for example at Acinipo and Cerro de la Mora.

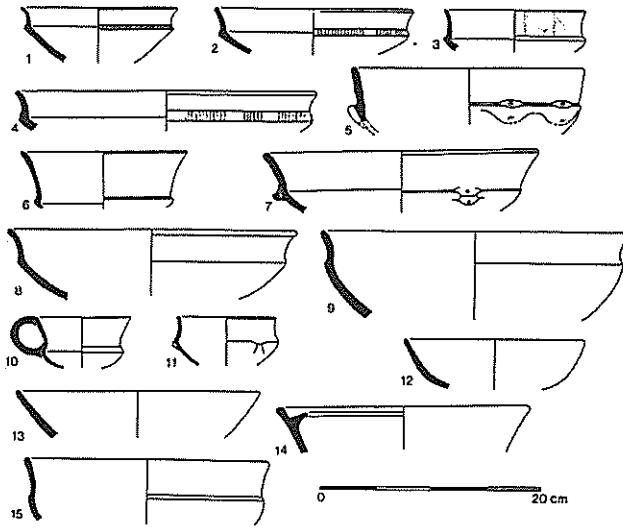


Figure 4.10 Bronze Age ceramics from Conimbriga.

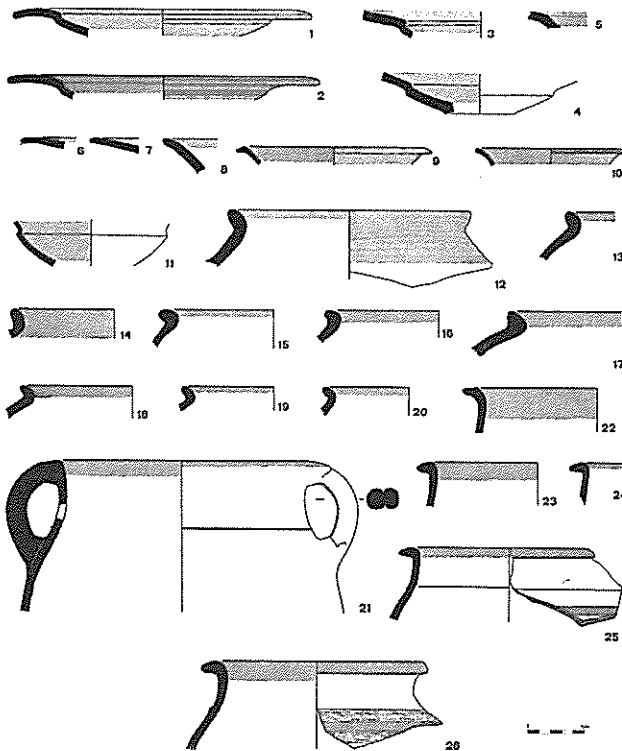


Figure 4.11 Ceramics from Conimbriga, eighth to sixth century BC (after Alarcão et al. 1976).

In regard to the chronology of the ancient settlement of Santarém, I would like to emphasize that there is a high degree of coherence between the stratigraphic sequence and the ensemble of radiocarbon dates obtained (fig. 4.7).

In the same  $3 \times 3$  meter area, the analyzed carbon samples were derived from three clearly superimposed archaeological levels that also provided finds that can be typologically distinguished. The radiocarbon sequence was as follows:

PHASE I (Deep levels) ICEN 532:	2640 + 50 BP—898—765 cal. BC
PHASE I (Deep levels) BETA 131488:	2650 + 70 BP—920—770 cal. BC
PHASE II (Medium levels) ICEN 525:	2470 + 70 BP—799—396 cal. BC
PHASE III (Upper levels) BETA 131487:	2200 + 60 BP—396—60 cal. BC

The materials discovered in the strata from which the dates that correspond to phase I were obtained can be placed easily in the middle or second half of the eighth century BC (in traditional or historic chronology). The results of carbon-14 analyses have allowed us to extend the chronology that concerns the first contact of Phoenician populations with the Tagus estuary further back, toward the end of the ninth or beginning of the eighth century BC.

In relation to the Mondego estuary, it seems reasonable to defend a degree of antiquity for the orientalizing period of Conimbriga. Even if it is true that the vast majority of materials belong to the seventh century BC,<sup>5</sup> the fact remains that some objects, namely the red-slip plates (fig. 4.II), can be dated as far back as the second half or end of the eighth century BC. It should also be pointed out that the site was occupied at least during the Late Bronze Age and that numerous remains dating from that period have been found there.<sup>6</sup>

We can thus conclude that between the foundation of Morro de Mezquitilla and the first contacts with the Portuguese coast there is only a twenty-five-year gap. This chronology must be associated, therefore, with a boom in oriental settlement on the Iberian Peninsula, a moment that coincides with the foundation of Toscanos and Cerro del Villar, and also with the arrival of Phoenicians in eastern Spain and certain areas of Andalusia, Extremadura, and inland Alicante.

Even though it seems clear that the regions touched first by Phoenician commerce are the Tagus and Mondego estuaries, there are still other elements that, in both cases, should be evaluated.

Investigations carried out by João Carlos Senna-Martinez in the Beira Alta region, a place that is reached precisely via the Mondego River, are in this context of the utmost importance. In the Beijós Castles (Outeiro dos Castelos de Beijós),<sup>7</sup> a Late Bronze Age site, five fragments of forged iron were discov-

ered, three of which form part of a small curved knife. It was also possible to subject this to carbon-14 dating (SAC—1539—2960+45), and a two-sigma calibration pointed to a period that stretches between the years 1310 and 1009.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the Tagus, there are elements that allow us to detect an early settlement of Near Eastern populations in the region. Some curved iron knives were also found here in a Late Bronze Age context. An example is the Quinta do Marcelo (Almada), located next to the left margin of the estuary, for which a carbon-14 date was obtained (ICEN—924: 27000+70) that, calibrated at two sigma, indicates a period lying between the years 994 and 783 cal BC.<sup>9</sup>

In the Beira Baixa region, known for its resources in tin and other metals, archaeological projects led by Raquel Vilaça in Moreirinha and Monte do Frade also discovered iron knives associated with dates between the eighth century and the end of the tenth century BC.<sup>10</sup>

At the Cachouça site, in Idanha-a-Nova, Raquel Vilaça was also able to retrieve archaeological materials that demonstrate the arrival of oriental influences in the Beira interior region.<sup>11</sup> In strata where typical Late Bronze Age hand-modeled ceramics are abundant, wheel-made pottery of gray fine-grained polished clay was discovered, as well as blades of iron knives, glass necklace beads, and a polychrome fragment of the same material. These ceramics have several morphological similarities to those found at Medellín and on the Tagus estuary, namely at the Santarém citadel. These strata were radiocarbon dated and they delivered two dates, two sigma calibrated, which provide a timeframe of 1025–845 and 893–602 cal BC.<sup>12</sup>

One must not forget that it is via the Tagus that access is gained to the Beira interior region, which can also serve to explain not only the presence of very early iron pieces in the region but also the precocity of a Phoenician presence in the estuary and the antiquity of Cachouça.

All the evidence shows that the Portuguese Atlantic coast was a target of occasional and episodic visits by populations from the Eastern Mediterranean at a moment that can be traced to the period—in radiometric chronology—between the eleventh and tenth centuries. These travels, proven by some iron objects collected in the Beira interior region, fit into what Jaime Alvar has called the “non-hegemonic mode of contact.”<sup>13</sup> The tin and gold of the Beiras region certainly suggest that it was the Tagus and Mondego estuaries that granted access to these metals and thereby indicate that it was on the banks of those rivers that a more permanent settlement of occidental Phoenicians took place.

At an undetermined time during the ninth century BC (still in radiometric chronology), very likely toward the end of it—which corresponds to the

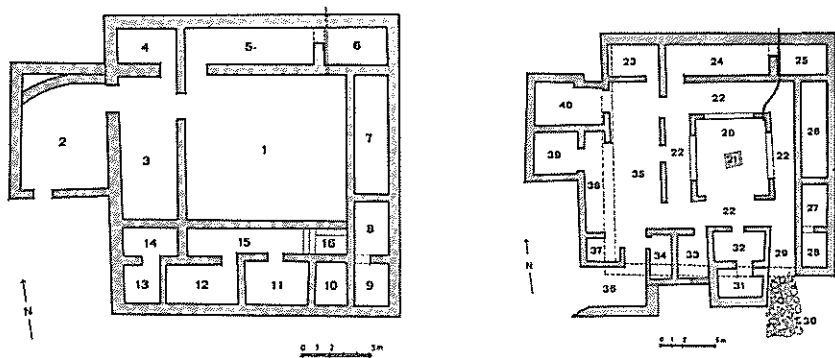


Figure 4.12 The two phases of Abul.

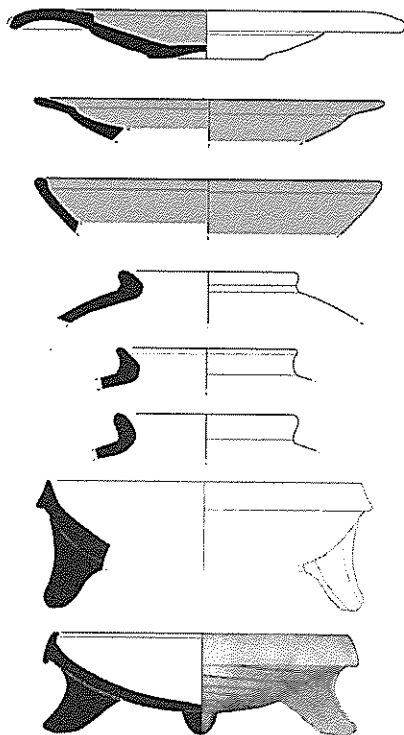


Figure 4.13 Orientalizing Iron Age ceramics from Castro Marim.

second half of the eighth century BC in traditional chronology—Near Eastern navigators began to travel systematically to the west coast of Portugal. They then very possibly settled in some indigenous settlements, such as Santarém, Almaraz, and Conímbriga. This new situation corresponds to what Alvar called the “systematic mode of contact.”<sup>14</sup>

From the seventh century BC (traditional chronology) onward, the area explored by the Eastern populations grew progressively, and it is clear that only after the beginning of that century did the Sado estuary and east Algarve become integrated into the Portuguese orientalizing *koiné*. During the seventh century BC, oriental sites were founded, as is the case of Abul (fig. 4.12) on the Sado River and Santa Olaia on the Mondego River, although the functions that each of these carried out may have been distinct. In fact, the layout of the former, the existence of an altar, and its small size lead to the conclusion that in this case we are dealing with a religious edifice located between two important, strongly orientalized indigenous settlements, Alcácer do Sal and Setúbal.

Conversely, at the same time, incursions inland occurred via the Tagus. The Mediterranean culture was strong at the time in Conímbriga, Santa Olaia, Lisbon, Almaraz, Santarém, Abul, Setúbal, Alcácer do Sal, Tavira, and Castro Marim.

During the sixth century BC, a series of small sites were founded on the Tagus and Mondego estuaries, neighboring large settlements such as Lisbon, Almaraz, and Santa Olaia; and it appears that this situation derives from a process of internal colonization that was a response to the alimentary needs of the populations living in the larger settlements. In fact, the topographic position, the location on soils of good agricultural capacity, and the reduced dimension of these sites support this hypothesis.

### *The Motives and Modes of Contact*

I do not intend to enumerate or discuss the several theses concerning the reasons that brought Phoenicians to the Far West. It must be noted, however, that the singling out of peninsular metalliferous resources as the most common cause for the phenomenon of Phoenician colonization of the Iberian Peninsula has been progressively questioned and that other explanations are emerging.

In 1998 a polemical text by J. D. Mulhy questioned the validity of the expansionist model based on the demand for metal resources,<sup>15</sup> and some other authors, long before that, had been looking for other western resources that could justify Phoenician interest. We must not forget that since 1988 C. Wagner and J. Alvar have been defending the idea that the agricultural resources

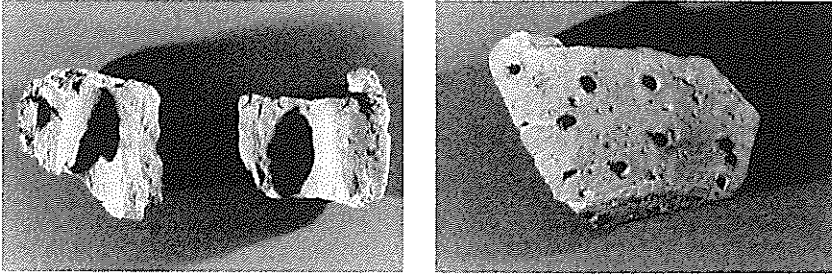
of the Guadalquivir Valley were central to the occupation of those territories by Eastern populations.<sup>16</sup> Nor should it be forgotten that F. Moreno Arrastio has suggested that the decorated stele of the Late Bronze Age may indicate that the recruitment of slaves was also a considerable attraction.<sup>17</sup> The exploitation of marine resources, namely fishing and the production of salt<sup>18</sup> and purple dye<sup>19</sup>—production of the latter having been indirectly documented in Almuñécar, Toscanos, and Mezquitilla—have also over time been added to the list of activities related to the presence of Phoenicians in the Far West. In this volume (chap. 7), Brigitte Treumann shows the importance of timber exploitation by the Phoenicians in the Iberian Peninsula.

Again, this is not the place to discuss all these proposals. However, the agricultural dimension of the Phoenician colonization of what is today Portugal should not be neglected, even if it was not the decisive factor in the occupation of specific territories. It seems certain that the Phoenician occupation contributed decisively toward a transformation of the landscape that accommodated colonial commerce. An introduction of vineyards and an increase in cultivable land—in the Tagus Valley at least—have been established for a period that coincides with the arrival of Eastern populations.<sup>20</sup>

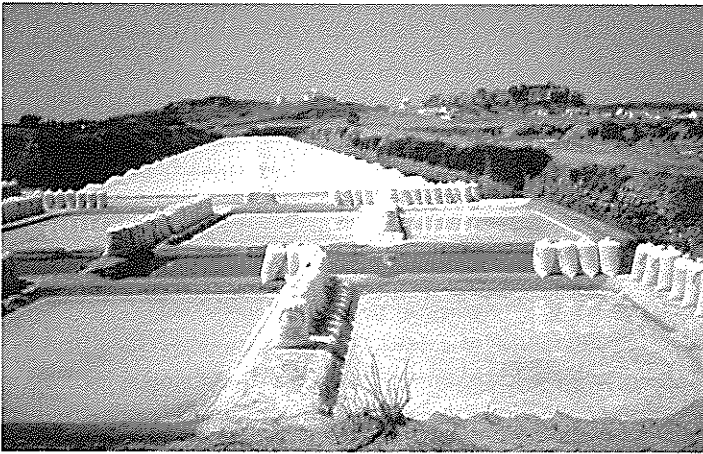
On the other hand—and like many other places in the Mediterranean, and even in the North African Atlantic, where the presence of Phoenician populations has been demonstrated (for example at Mozia and Lixus)—the vast majority of oriental and orientalizing sites on the Portuguese coast are located in areas where salt exploitation has been practiced almost continuously up to the present day. Even today, saltpans surround Castro Marim and Tavira and the salt of the Mondego and Sado rivers has been systematically exploited (figs. 4.15). This is no simple coincidence, despite the fact that once again it is debatable whether the exploitation of sea resources was a decisive factor in stimulating voyages to the European Atlantic or, on the contrary, it was merely one of the direct consequences of such voyages.

I must confess my particular sympathy for Moreno Arrastio's proposal concerning the recruitment of slaves (whether reflected in the above-mentioned stelae or not); I would add that slave labor would be essential not only in mines, for salt exploitation itself would certainly require the same kind of labor force.

I do believe, however, that the metalliferous resources of the Iberian Peninsula cannot be considered a minor feature in the whole of the western Phoenician colonial process. This is true even if a Phoenician presence is increasingly being documented in Anatolia for the period between the sixth and eighth centuries BC<sup>21</sup> and even though it is clear that Cyprus was from an early time under Tyrian control.



*Figure 4.14* Evidence of metallurgic work in Santarém. Scale 1/2.



*Figure 4.15* Salt pans near Castro Marim.

If we keep in mind that in classical texts the Iberian Peninsula is referred to systematically because of its metal resources, it seems reasonable to suggest that the archaeological data on this issue are practically unquestionable. To be sure, the large majority of Phoenician settlements in Mediterranean Andalusia were not located in areas where there were metalliferous resources, and archaeology has shown the importance of agriculture, fishing, and livestock husbandry in the economy of those places. But settlements at the mouths of navigable rivers permitting access to mineral-rich regions should not be forgotten. Evidence for intense metallurgic activity in Huelva and its territory (Cerro de Salomón, San Bartolomé de Almonte, and Peñalosa en Escacena), and in Doña Blanca shows the importance of that activity in the context of Phoenician colonization of the West.

The data from Portugal can aid in advancing this debate. In the first place,

it should be remembered that the regions touched first by Phoenician commerce seem to be the Tagus and Mondego estuaries, and there are features of both that must yet be appreciated. The exploitation of metalliferous resources by Phoenician settlers is also very well documented in Santa Olaia, which lies precisely on the Mondego river-mouth.<sup>22</sup> There, in the site founded by Phoenicians during an advanced stage (seventh century BC), a set of metallurgical furnaces that extends throughout an area of 960 square meters was discovered. The activity of processing metal was very intense there, but it is curious to note that no crucibles or molds have been found. This suggests that the activity was limited to transformation and purification of metal and did not include production of objects. It thus seems reasonable to suppose that the metal processed here was mostly destined for exportation.

Metallurgical activities were also detected in Almaraz, also in the Tagus area, where crucibles, tuyeres, and foundry remains are abundant. However, it should be noted that the double-spring fibulae found there, in every way typologically identical, reveal two distinct groups of metallurgical techniques. These may correspond to two origins: one foreign and the other local.<sup>23</sup>

In the Santarém citadel (fig. 4.5), two small combustion structures were associated with metallurgical practices, such are the quantities of tuyeres and cupels identified in their immediate vicinity. Due to the presence of cupels it seems reasonable to conclude that the metal at stake was silver (fig. 4.14).<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the modes of contact, the diffusionist perspective has tended to dominate analysis of colonial phenomena in general and, more specifically, studies on the Phoenician presence in the Far West. This is still the case despite the fact that in recent years new theoretical approaches have been developed.

Local groups have continually been looked upon as passive agents in the constructive process of their own history—as mere receptacles of Eastern cultural influences. Indeed, if during the first half of the twentieth century the colonizers were regarded as transmitters of “culture” and “civilization,” it is fair to say that the dualist perspective did not fade away, especially given that in the second half of that century indigenous groups are referred to as “noble savages” and innocent victims of a process that socially destabilized a kind of Garden of Eden, a lost paradise. With the diffusionist perspective—which was dominant during the nineteenth century and for a considerable part of the twentieth—largely forgotten in studies of ancient colonialisms (since this perspective in a way justified modern colonialisms), an *indigenist* version, born in the 1960s, ended up paradoxically strengthening the dualist vision. In the postcolonial era in which we live, this must be rigorously called into question.

It is my belief that ancient colonialisms involved a real subordination of the colonized to the colonizer and that the latter wished to exploit economically the resources of the former. However, from my perspective there was a significant interaction between the elite of both parties, which allows us to speak of *hybridization*. It also seems evident that within colonial contexts, the colonizers “recurrently need to redefine their social positions, thus contributing to an articulation of local indigenous situations in the wider colonial context.”<sup>25</sup>

The Phoenicians who came from the Straits of Gibraltar arrived at the mouths of the estuaries of the Tagus and the Mondego and found human communities with their own interests. The reasons that the native populations inhabiting Conímbriga, Santarém, Alcácer do Sal, Tavira, and Castro Marim engaged in regular and continued exchange with the colonialists, integrating some of their social practices and products into their daily lives, can only be elucidated as concrete cases of colonial phenomena are studied in more depth.

I believe the data currently available and the new contours and dynamics of the colonial phenomenon allow us to shift the theoretical debate, since it seems clear that the settlement of Phoenicians on the west coast of the Iberian Peninsula was preceded by prior contacts. One must remember that this settlement depended on the existence of resources that justified it and the capacity to exploit them. These elements therefore imply not only knowledge of the region but also direct contact with the inhabitants—and it is obvious that only the indigenous inhabitants could grant access to the resources and in some way guarantee the success of the exploitation. It seems out of the question to assume that foreign populations that envision exploitation and exportation of local resources could settle in any territory without previous consent from its inhabitants, except for instances in which settlement follows military occupation, which manifestly does not seem to be the case here.

The Phoenician presence in Portugal is a phenomenon of colonial character. I use the concept “colonialism” here in regard to the presence of a human group alien to the region, of distant origin, that maintains asymmetric and unequal economic and social relations with the native communities of the colonized region. Inequality and asymmetry occur because the original social systems and technological developments of the respective communities are radically different. I must underline, however, that I seek to distance myself from the view of colonialism according to which colonial situations are a permanent confrontation between two separate entities. But the social realities are not necessarily homogeneous, and there may well be divergences of interest between the two communities. “Indigenous” and “colonists” are

not realities with an absolute coherence, and divergences can exist within both. But this is now another kind of history, where individual attitudes gain importance. Only many archaeological studies and excavations can help us to understand the role of agents in this process.

## NOTES

1. Tavares. 1993.
2. Arruda 1999-2000.
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5. Alarcão et al. 1976; Correia 1993.
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7. Senna-Martinez 2000.
8. Ibid., 54.
9. Ibid.
10. Vilaça 1995.
11. Vilaça and Basílio 2000.
12. Ibid.
13. Alvar 2000:28.
14. Ibid.
15. Mulhy 1998.
16. Wagner and Alvar 1989.
17. Moreno Arrastio 1999 and 2000; cf. other interpretations in Celestino and López-Ruiz 2006.
18. Manfredi 1992; Wagner 2000.
19. Fernández Uriel 2000; Wagner 2000.
20. Arruda 2003.
21. Botto 1988.
22. Pereira 1997.
23. Araújo et al. 2004.
24. Arruda 1999-2000:215.
25. van Dommelen 1997:308.

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