

MELQART, *HERCULES GADITANUS* AND *HÍPPOS* ON HADRIAN AUREI

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[Eudoxos] ... He brought the end of the prow to the market and show edit to the shipowners, who realized that it was Gadeiran, for although their merchants sent out large ships, poor men would have small ones that they called “horses” from the devices on the prows, and would sail in fishing voyages around Maurousia as far as the Lixos River. Some of the shipowners recognized that the end of the prow was from one that had sailed rather far beyond the Lixos River and had not survived (Strab. II 2,4 [Roller 2014]).

Abstract: Worth highlighting among the depictions on the reverses of Hadrian aurei dedicated to different divinities are those of *Hercules Gaditanus*. These representations combining a victorious image of the Emperor depicted as a god with what was the fictitious limit of the known world are charged with potent symbolism. This study focuses on aurei (RIC II/3 572-578 and 555) bearing the image of *Oceanus* accompanied by a ship's prow marked by a distinct adornment. Apart from the more basic reading of this detail that reinforces the well-known oceanic vocation of *Gadir/Gades*, this study delves into the possibility of interpreting the scene from a Hispano-Phoenician viewpoint linked to the key role played by the iconography of the ship. The ship/híppos represents a key element in the Phoenician-Punic imaginary with a bond to the god from Cadiz, whose likeness can be traced through this Roman coinage which was especially beloved by the emperors of Hispanic origin.

Keywords: *Hercules Gaditanus*; Melqart; *Gadir/Gades*; Hadrian Aurei; *Híppos*.

The depiction of *Hercules Gaditanus* in the series of aurei minted under Hadrian's third consulship between AD 121 and 123¹ has been the subject of numerous comments either from a general perspective, from within the iconographic program developed by the Emperor on his coins, or from an approach linked to the Province of Hispania.² A point that is highlighted in research on Hadrian monetary iconography is his close relationship with Hispania, especially *Gades*, the origin of his mother *Domitia Paulina*.³ Recent studies bolster the interest of delving into of this compelling assemblage of monetary iconography (FIG. 1).

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1 The new chronological timeframe of the RIC II/3 substituting the earlier (c. AD 119-122) is relevant to the interpretation of the depictions of *Hercules Gaditanus*. See RIC II/3 pp. 42-43, 114-115.

2 Much has been written about this god and his celebrated Roman sanctuary. García y Bellido's classic study, although from 1963, remains essential. The idea behind the current article in fact stems from a conference celebrating the *Day of García y Bellido* at the University of Cádiz attended by, among other colleagues and friends, Ramón Corzo and M^a. P. García-Bellido, authors of key works on the subject, to whom we are greatly indebted.

3 González Conde-Puente 2021, pp. 150-155.



FIG. 1. Hadrian aurei depicting *Hercules Gaditanus* from c. AD 121-123 (The Trustees of the British Museum: a. 1861,1105.1; b. 1864,1128.269; c. R.8048; d. 1844,1008.147).

This is the case of the recent and meticulous iconographic analysis of the reverses of several of these types of aurei RIC II/3 555, 572-578 (FIG. 1)⁴ where the two female figures are identified as Africa and Hispania flanking the main image of *Hercules Gaditanus*.⁵ This iconographic interpretation, which clarifies or refutes earlier more conservative readings, hinges on observations of other better preserved examples. It identifies a mural crown with a figure wearing a headdress to the right of the god and a female figure on the opposite side donning an elephant headdress or *exuviae elephantis*. The scene forms part of an architectural setting that is difficult to read, notably what appears to be a *naiskos* or perhaps a distyle (RIC II /3 572, 575-78) (FIG. 1c) or tetrastyle temple. This last option is hinted at by another Hadrianic coins likewise dedicated to *Hercules Gaditanus* (RIC II/3 573-74) (FIG. 1d) whose identification with the celebrated *Herakleion* is broadly accepted.⁶ It is also not possible to rule out that it references another type of religious edifice dedicated to the god or, as thought to be the case for similar examples, a generic allusion to a cultic space.⁷

The interest of this new iconographic reading reinforces from a numismatic standpoint the role played by *Gades* as the centre of a geographical paradigm highlighted by literary sources ranging from the Principate of Augustus through Strabo's vision of the city.⁸ Since its opportune defection from the Carthaginian band at the end of the Second Punic War, the role of ancient *Gadir* began to expand, assuming as its own the Roman interests in the region yielding a significant impact in economic and urban terms. From the legal point of

4 Hadrian coinage follows the numbering and chronology of the recent RIC II/3 edition.

5 García-Bellido 2020, pp. 139-140, figs. 1B-C.

6 It is often very difficult to interpret these structures as real buildings. It is in fact more likely to view them as fictitious or at least highly stylised features.

7 This interpretation cannot be discarded for the representation of the tetrastyle building (RIC II/3 573-574) (García-Bellido 2020, p. 139, n. 11).

8 Cruz Andreotti 2021, pp. 626-628.

viewpoint, its role as a *municipium civium romanorum* led to the promotion of the social and political ascent of its elites, evidenced by the paradigmatic case of the *Cornelii Balbi*.⁹

The famous “confidants of Caesar” along with the Latin and Roman citizens who frequented its busy port undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the former Phoenician colony in the Empire’s future capital.¹⁰ This fame did not simply stem from its rich and thriving economy but was exemplified by its many inhabitants exceeding the census required of the *equites*, as well as its myths whose main milestone remained Melqart-Heracles. This god, immersed in a process of Hellenisation, laid down the path for the transformation of *Gades* into the epicentre of the cult of Hercules.

The Hellenisation of this Phoenician god, initially more apparent than effective,¹¹ as evidenced by the coins issued by the city either from the end of the 4th or the outset of the 3rd century BCE,¹² spread under the protection of the growing internationalisation of this cult promoted by the political program of the Barcas¹³ which ultimately culminated under the patronage of Rome.¹⁴

Hercules was likewise integrated into this cultural *koiné*. This stems from his Hispanic connection and Graeco-Phoenician mythological likeness linked to the exploration and control of the ancient frontiers of the *oecumene*. It can be recognised in the *Ara Maxima*, the most celebrated monument erected in his honour in the *Forum Boarium*. Legend has it that Hercules in this strategic enclave serving as a meeting point for Etruscans, Latins, Greeks and Phoenicians confronted and killed the giant Cacus when he attempted to steal Geryon’s oxen on his return from Iberia.¹⁵ The success of his task in Iberia/Hispania and the victorious confrontation explains why Hercules was given the epithets *Victor* and *Invictus*, linking him to the *imitatio Alexandri* in the East whose Western echoes reinforce the Hellenising propaganda of the Barca lineage. In turn, the special relationship that the great Roman figures maintained with the god from Cadiz contributed decisively to the *imitatio Herculis* cherished by Scipios, Pompey and Caesar, all great benefactors of *Gades*.¹⁶ Thus, it is not surprising that during the reign of Augustus, the role of *Gadir/Gades* in the vast southern Hispanic and North African territory far exceeded its status as the capital of the *conventus* that bears its name.¹⁷ It is difficult to separate its economic and political relevance from its tight link with the Imperial Court evidenced by the new coinages by the former Phoenician colony, now a Roman municipality. These correspond to multiple sestertii and dupondii that broke with the city’s conservative monetary policy with the sole exception, the direct allusion to *Herakleion* and, above all, the representation of the god already venerated by many as the Hercules of *Gades*.¹⁸

9 Rodríguez Neila 2006, pp. 134-148; Cruz Andreotti 2021, p. 625, n. 7.

10 Padilla Monge 2010, pp. 267, 289.

11 Marín Ceballos 2001; Corzo 2005. For a perspective from Tyre after Alexander’s conquest see Nitschke 2013, pp. 264-271 and Bonnet 2014, pp. 294-297.

12 Moreno Pulido 2019, pp. 57-62.

13 Bendala Galán 2015, pp. 158-166; Machuca Prieto 2019, pp. 173-177.

14 A key detail is the subtle but significant change of the hairstyle of Melqart-Heracles on the obverse of the coins minted during the Roman hegemony. At this point, the new stylistic treatment manifested by the *leonté* covering the god reveals part of his hair arranged on his forehead based on a marked loop of his locks reminiscent of the renowned Alexandrian *anastole*. This new iconographic element falls in line with the existence in the sanctuary of a sculpture of Alexander, also celebrated for its role in the visit of Julius Caesar (Mora Serrano 2011, pp. 81-82; Moreno Pulido 2019, p. 63).

15 Torelli 2006.

16 López Castro 1998, pp. 96-100; Marco Simón 2018, pp. 198-200.

17 It is in fact possible to refer, albeit with skepticism, to the continuity of the concept of “Cadizisation of Ispania” (Chic García 2004).

18 García y Bellido 1963, pp. 137-138.



FIG. 2. Augustan coinage from *Gades* (a. SNGCop 451; b. Instituto Valencia de Don Juan 3273; c. Real Academia de la Historia 2066; d. Museo Arqueológico Nacional. Madrid 2762).

It must be borne in mind that this case does not resemble other examples of ancient Hispanic coinage, especially of Phoenician tradition, notably the long-standing cases of *Sks* (RPC 123A), *Abdera* (RPC 124-126), perhaps *Malaka* (ACIP 784) and, above all, *Ebusus* (RPC 481). This coinage in fact represents a specific predominantly commemorative series evidenced by its great number, the most substantial Roman-provincial minting issued during the time of Augustus in the *Baetica*.¹⁹ The focus of this study is not to delve into the reasons that justify these coinages between 27 BCE and the turn of era. In any case, this coinage took place at a moment somewhat later than the outset of the great urban development experienced by the city²⁰ and its surroundings (*Portus Gaditanus*) promoted by the Balbus as reported by Strabo (III 5, 3). It was contemporary at least in part to Balbus the Minor as it is based on one of the coinages commemorating his pontificate in 20 BCE (RPC 85-86) and he still lived in 13 BCE.²¹

This coinage was initiated with a series dedicated to the patronus of the city, Agrippa, combining either his portrait (RPC 80-81, 83-84) or him seated (RPC 77) on their obverses with the head of the Cadiz god covered in *leonté* with a club resting on his shoulder (RPC 78-79, 82) (FIG. 2a). The reverses reveal an *acrostolium* to the right or left in certain cases accompanied by a six-pointed star. The god also appears on the obverses of the issue dedicated to Balbus the Minor, associating his name and commemorating his pontificate of 20 BCE to the representation of instruments of the Roman sacrificial ritual, at times including a star (RPC 85-87) (FIG. 2b). Similar issues in the name of Tiberius combine his portrait (RPC 88-90) with the effigy of the god of Cadiz (RPC 91) (FIG. 2c) on its obverses, and a *simpulum* and allusive inscription on the reverses.

19 Ripollès 2010, p. 22, fig. 6.

20 See Lara Medina 2022, pp. 69-114, for a recent overview of the archaeology and topography of Roman *Gades*.

21 García y Bellido 1963, p. 136; Rodríguez Neila 2006, p. 131.

These sacrificial instruments have been linked to the respective pontificates of each character, although such an association is compatible with other readings at the local level, that is, related to the enhanced cult of Hercules of *Gades*²² that could also be insinuated by the representation of the tetrastyle temple on the obverses and reverses of the coinages of Augustus (RPC 94-95). Disregarding an unlikely representation of *Herakleion*,²³ it appears appropriate to connect this topical allusion to a place of worship to the association between Augustus and the ancient Phoenician divinity, already assimilated into the Roman pantheon and, especially, to the political program connecting the image of the Emperor to Hercules and Jupiter.²⁴ This is clearly observed in the coinages that combine a head with leonté and the brandishing a club on the obverse with the winged *fulmen* on the reverse (RPC 92-93) (Fig. 2d).

This Herculean connection with the Roman emperors includes the participation, as noted above, of the god of Cadiz. It is thus not a coincidence that Hercules does not appear again in a notable manner until the reigns of the two Hispanic Emperors, Trajan and, especially, Hadrian, both born in Italica. Indeed, although literary sources point to the close relationship between Hercules and the Emperor Domitian (*Mart. Epigr.* IX 101-102), Trajan and Hadrian can be linked more directly and explicitly with the god. This is specifically *Hercules Gaditanus* whose likeness is intended to convey the image of a powerful, wise and civilised ruler.

Although it is certain that the introduction of his cult in Rome²⁵ is due to Trajan, his worship was only consolidated under the rule of his successor, Hadrian. This also marks the completion of the modelling of the iconography linked to the god emphasising or, better yet, re-emphasising Western aspects, specifically *Gades* and its “Círculo del Estrecho”.²⁶ Coin iconography is essential in grasping this as the depictions allow, first of all, to pinpoint the key nuances regarding the varying means of exploitation of the personality of each god by the different emperors. Trajan, imbued by his Dacian and Parthian triumphs (the latter posthumous) insisted on the epicleses *Victor* and *Invictus*. This is precisely the image that can be recognised among the rich Herculean iconography that the Emperor associated with the god through literary, archaeological and numismatic sources.²⁷

But if, as previously noted, there are doubts as to the identification of the numismatic representations of Hercules under Trajan, these disappear among that those of Hadrian. The maximum exponent are the well-known aurei dating from AD 109 when Hadrian took on his third and last consulship. This aspect has been studied by M^a.P. García-Bellido who emphasised the singularities of the renewed iconographic program of *Hercules Gaditanus* such as the personifications of Hispania and Africa through two Herculean pillars or the imaginary geographical landmarks linked to *Gades-Lixus*.²⁸ These personifications are framed by the recurrent figure of *Oceanus* represented either as a reclining male following the model of the Nile-Tiber (RIC II/3 575) or as a frontal view of a mask (RIC II/3 574) with parallels in Roman archaeology in the

22 See López Castro 1998, pp. 101-102. It is likewise possible in any case to assume a polyvalent interpretation.

23 We share the skepticism as to the plausibility of the temple depicted on the coins (García y Bellido 1963, p. 102; Mierse 1993, pp. 38-42, 45) where the model is disassociated from a probable relationship with the ancient Phoenician sanctuary. See also Moreno Pulido 2019, pp. 240-244.

24 López Sánchez 2018, pp. 78-82.

25 See Palagia 1986, p. 146. Another matter is the identification of iconographic representations of the god reproduced among the Trajan coinage bearing the cult statue of *Hercules Gaditanus*. This dated proposal (Hill 1985, pp. 82-83) is today the subject of discussion notably by Marco Simon (2018, pp. 202-204) and García-Bellido (2020, p. 137). Yet this does not precisely imply that since the reign of Trajan the Hercules of the *Ara Maxima* recovered its old connection with Melqart-Heracles by emphasising his tasks in Iberia.

26 Barry 2011, pp. 22-23.

27 Garzón Blanco (1988, pp. 257-258), Hekster (2005, pp. 206-207, 209), Barry (2011, p. 21) and Marco Simón (2018, p. 203, fig. 1) develop this aspect and emphasise the connection of Hercules with the fragmented statue of Trajan in the Palazzo Massimo in Roma.

28 Moulay Rchid 1989; Fernández Camacho 2014, pp. 200-201; García-Bellido 2020, p. 144.

“Círculo” of the Strait of Gibraltar that are logically connected to the new space that thanks to the symbols of Melqart-Heracles (and subsequently Hercules) were integrated into the *oecumene*.

Along with the unique pavilion or *naiskos* that frames either a solitary depiction of *Hercules Gaditanus* (RIC II/3 574) or the god in company of the two females (RIC II/3 575) is another very compelling motif, a ship’s prow. This is represented with greater detail in an aureus that, devoid of an architectural frame, depicts the god accompanied by *HERC – GAD* (FIG. 1a-b), one of his most famous epicleses. Such an interesting inscription, hitherto unknown in other non-numismatic media, is almost redundant since it is precisely the timeframe of the reign of Hadrian that saw the establishment of the form and attributes of iconography of the god adapted to the peculiarities of the location²⁹. It is of interest that this new iconography, potentially evoking the innovations of his cult promoted by Hadrian, gave rise to one of its better parallels, notably the famous bronze statuette inscribed with the brief but explicit *H-G* on its belly from, like other votive offerings, the site of Sancti Petri, near *Heracleion*.³⁰

The association of Melqart-Heracles/Hercules with the Ocean, although not new,³¹ undoubtedly increased during the reign of Hadrian when the Empire was at its height and had surpassed the western limits of the known world exemplified by a renewed figure of *Hercules Gaditanus*.³² This maritime scene is completed with a depiction on various aurei (RIC II/3 572-578) of great interest to the current study, notably the prow of a ship accompanying *Oceanus* represented either by a frontal view of his head or in a reclining position. The scene is highlighted even more on the reverse of a coin of the same series (RIC II/3 555). This depiction reveals the indubitable bond of *Oceanus* with *Hercules Gaditanus*³³ as well as with the geographical context of Cadiz. The riveting scenes it depicts potentially line up with both the likeness of the key port infrastructure of the city, even emulating the celebrated Nero sestertius portraying the Port of Ostia,³⁴ as well as the well-known geographical (Atlantic access) and economic (fishing) references characteristic of opulent *Gades*.³⁵

These earlier interpretations require focusing on another aspect, notably the question of identity, complementary to those cited above. This new factor is that the prow of the vessel presumably represented on these Hadrian aurei can be interpreted as a depiction of the typical ship from Cadiz. This stems from a description by Strabo in his “tales from Cadiz” citing an episode related to Eudoxus of Cnidus. The passage referring to the south of Hispania, cited as a preamble to this text (Strab. II 2,4), alludes to a distant shipwreck in African waters identified as originating from Cadiz. This is based on the unique shape of the ornament (protome) of its prow in the form of a horse.³⁶ This type of vessel cannot be any other than the famous *hippos*, as will be seen, closely linked to Melqart. Moreover, the type of ornament represented either

29 Paraphrasing a passage from Vitruvius (*De arch.* VII 5,6) cited by Cadario 2020, p. 5512.

30 It is precisely one of the more recent and complete studies of this statuette that advances the notion that its depictions on aurei served as a prototype for reproduction among other media (Leon Alonso 2016, p. 385; Corzo 2004, pp. 53-54).

31 These go back to the oldest myths shared by Phoenicians and Greeks (Álvarez Martí-Aguilar 2019). It is also not possible to ignore that its vast commercial projection allows speaking of an *Oceanus Gaditanus* (Mederos Martín – Escribano Cobo 2015). On its presence on coins of the “Círculo” of Cádiz, see Moreno Pulido 2019, pp. 218-222.

32 Marco Simón 2018, pp. 205-206; López Sánchez 2018, p. 78.

33 Barry 2011, pp. 22-23; García-Bellido 2020, p. 139.

34 See López Sánchez 2018, pp. 78-81, for additional evidence emphasising its probable military use.

35 García-Bellido 2020, pp. 138-139.

36 The critical opinions of the authors Mederos Martín and Escribano Cobos (2015, pp. 241-242) differ as they consider the tale to be a literary artifice, putting in doubt the arrival of vessels from Cadiz to the coasts of eastern Africa. The current study nonetheless highlights that it was the recognition, if not the popularity, of the ships of Cadiz in increasingly late contexts such as those, for example, of the Augustan period that emerge from Pliny’s account (*N.H.* LXVII 168) when describing the African expedition of Gaius Caesar and Juba II.

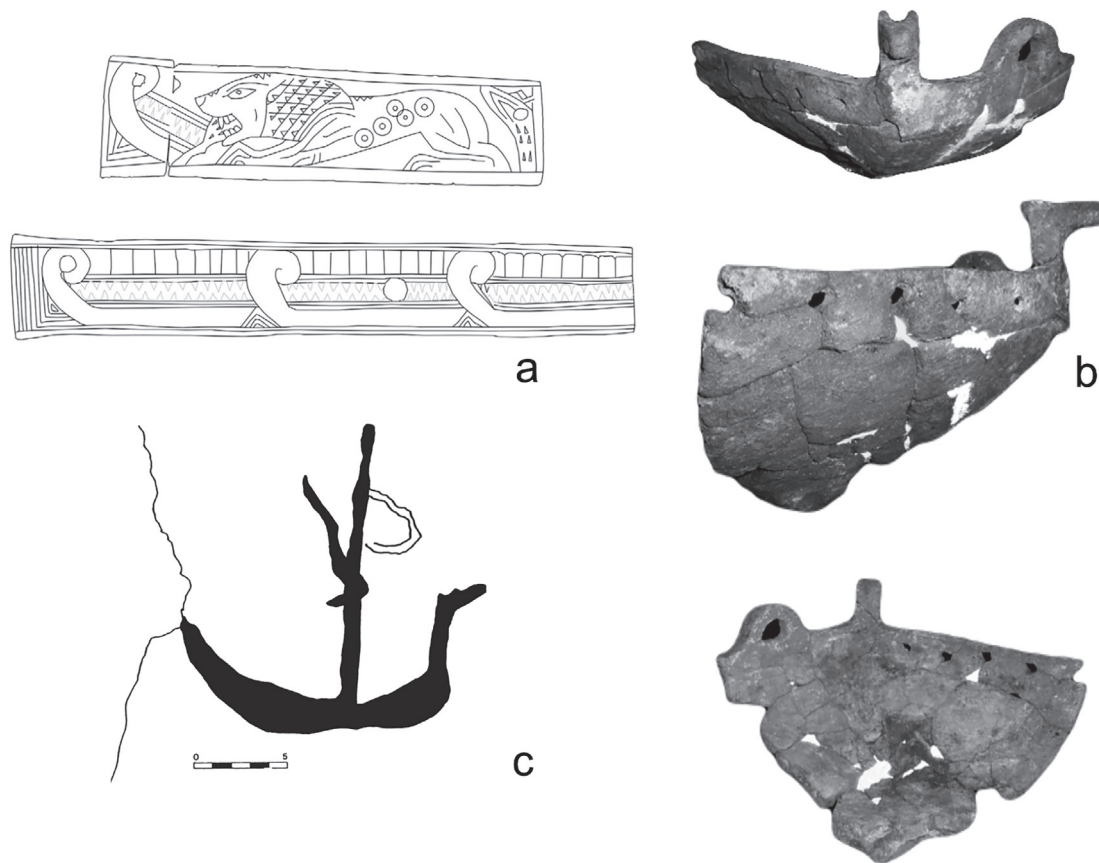


FIG. 3. a. Panel of the ivory and wooden box from Turuñuelo (Guareña, Badajoz) depicting naval scenes (after Rodríguez González – García Gardiel 2020, fig. 5c); b. Terracotta vessel in the form of a *hippos* from the Sanctuary of El Carambolo (Camas, Seville; after Escacena Carrasco – Fernández Flores – Rodríguez Azogue 2007, figs. 2-3); c. Schematic engraving of a *hippos* from La Baranda (El Sauzal, Tenerife; after Mederos Martín – Escribano Cobo 2015, p. 413, fig. 13.13).

completely or in a frontal form is recurrent among Phoenician commercial and war ships and bears clear symbolic and identity implications.³⁷

Focusing on the repercussion of these naval iconographies in the extreme Western Mediterranean, and more specifically the zone to the south of the Iberian Peninsula,³⁸ has led to examining certain finds of unquestionable interest such as the luxurious ivory and bone box discovered at the orientalising site of Casas del Turuñuelo (Guareña, Badajoz). One of its four panels depicts a procession of vessels sailing through the waves (FIG. 3a). According to its discoverers, the scene is clearly of oriental inspiration and bears distant parallels with Phoenician coins, specifically from Sidon.³⁹ Furthermore, its discoverers indicate that it is

37 In the sense that this and other types of crafts such as freighters or *gauloi* were identified as typically Phoenician by other peoples to the point of becoming markers of identity Ballard *et al.* 2002, pp. 158-166). It is likewise necessary to consider the funerary connotations of certain of these depictions, especially those on Carthaginian stelae (Bartoloni 1977).

38 See Rodríguez González – García Gardiel (2020) for an overall interpretation taking into account the most recent finds.

39 Rodríguez González *et al.* (2020, pp. 55-56, 68) clearly sees an oriental inspiration due to the association of a lion on two of its panel attacking a cervid or bovine. The scene is common among the celebrated reliefs of Persepolis and is spread throughout the

necessary to highlight that the inwardly curved design of the finials of the vessels differ from those of the numismatic models, as well as from other iconographic parallels such as the famous Assyrian reliefs from Nineveh or Khorsabad.⁴⁰ In any case, these features distance themselves from the shape of the top of the stem with an *akroterion* ending in the form of an animal protome, notably a lion, a mallard, or especially a horse, the creature of most interest to this article as it appears on the vessels of the Hadrian aurei.

This does not occur, however, with the votive boat or ritual vessel from a *bothros* associated with phase IV of the El Carambolo sanctuary (Camas, Seville), one of the better recorded Phoenician religious spaces in the Iberian Peninsula. This not only refers to its architecture and features highlighted by pavements of shells and altars in the form of bull skin, but also to its religious aspect as it is dedicated to Astarte and Melqart, the most often recorded divine couples in the Iberian Peninsula and patrons of the Tyrian metropolis.

Although the distinct disproportion between its breadth and length justifying the functionality of the large container from the Carambolo sanctuary is problematic (also intended to be viewed from only one side), its identification as a *hippos* hinges on the finishing of the stemposts in the form of a protome of a horse (FIG. 3b).⁴¹ This represents the most versatile of Phoenician ships, measuring between eight and ten meters in length,⁴² that served for cabotage and river navigation as well as sailing the open seas. This notion is founded on literary (Strabo quoting Eudoxus of Cnidus) and potentially on archaeological sources, that is, engravings in the Canary Islands. Noteworthy among the Canarian engravings are two from La Baranda (El Sauzal, Tenerife) presumably representing the popular *hippoi* that surely arrived from Cadiz (FIG. 3c).⁴³ To this can be added certain Phoenician wrecks identified as *hippoi*, notably two crafts in the Bay of Mazarrón (Murcia).⁴⁴

It must be noted that the meaning of artefacts bearing naval motifs cannot always be gleaned from their iconography. This is why it is essential to establish their archaeological context. The find of the *hippos* of the Carambolo terracotta in a sanctuary is therefore compelling as it associates the symbolic role of the vessel, and specifically the *hippos*, with the ritual of the cult of the divinity or divinities venerated at the site.

The link in this case stresses the seafaring vocation attributed to different Phoenician gods, either primarily or supervening, as could be the respective cases of Astarte and Melqart. The first was protector of

Levant on coins and other media. Certain of the shekels of Byblos are good parallels (Johananoff – Tal 2021, pp. 108-109). There are also specific lion/warship associations (Rodríguez González – García Gardiel 2020, pp. 8-9). Moreover, the obverse of a Sidonian coin dated to the last quarter of the 5th century BCE depicts a ship against the background of a walled city below two lions facing opposite directions (Johananoff – Tal 2021, p. 113). The editors of this coin also note, based on their presence on Sidonian coinages, that lion heads served as figureheads on Phoenician ships.

40 See the complete repertoire of Friedman (2015, pp. 24-25). A possibility, perhaps somewhat forced, albeit not impossible as the vessels of the procession overlap and the case to the extreme right is incomplete, is to interpret the features as sterns and not the prows, more in accord with curved or aplustre finishings. It cannot be completely ruled out that these boats featured symmetrical bows and sterns, with curved finishings on their stems and sternposts, perhaps linked closer to smaller vessels or river boats (Guerrero Ayuso 1998, pp. 98-99) that logically fit very well in this context. See Rodríguez González – García Gardiel 2020, pp. 11-13 and table 1.

41 An article (Escacena Carrasco – Fernández Flores – Rodríguez Azogue 2007, pp. 8-14) cites numerous parallels. Discussion has likewise brought up the possibility that another head, very similar to that topping the aforementioned *hippos*, formed part of the same ship denoting the symmetry of the prow and stern with equine protomes. Many symmetrical examples are known on both oriental and Iberian vessels (Rodríguez González – García Gardiel 2020, pp. 4, 7 and table 1). The interpretation by Guerrero Ayuso (2008, pp. 97-100) of the function of this piece as a ritual vessel and not as a simple votive offering better justifies this reconstruction.

42 Medas 2000, pp. 87-88; Guerrero Ayuso 2008, pp. 87-89.

43 See Mederos Martín – Escribano Cobo 2015, pp. 430, 433 figs. 13, 13. However other authors highlight problems with this iconographic reading (Guerrero Ayuso 2008, pp. 110-116).

44 Friedman 2015, pp. 29-30. As different authors have pointed out, their identification as *hippos* derives as much from the decors of the figurehead in the shape of the head of a horse as from their naval architecture (Guerrero Ayuso 2008, pp. 89-90, 98).



FIG. 4. a. Shekel from Tyre with depiction of male character (Melqart?) riding a seahorse. 4th century BCE (The Trustees of the British Museum 1906,0713.1); b. AE of *Solunto/Solus* linking Melqart with a seahorse respectively on the obverse and the reverse. 4th century BCE (Numismatica Ars Classica A.o-L.1381. 13.05.2004); c. Plaque of the terracotta of Kerkuán (after Almagro Gorbea 2010, fig. 80); d. AE of *Salacia (Beuibon)*. 1st century BCE (MAN 1993.67.7606).

navigators while the second was the patron of both the founding of the Tyrian colonies and the catch and trade of prized tuna.⁴⁵ This evokes the marked religious significance behind the news provided by Arrian (*Anabasis of Alexander II* 24,6) concerning the vessel consecrated to Melqart in Tyre.⁴⁶ Although devoid of any description, it cannot be ruled out that its prow was topped by a horse protome given the indirect evidence that in this sense allows associating this *hippos* with the patron god of the Phoenician city. This refers to the compelling, albeit complex, identification of the male figure that appears on the obverses of the first coin issues of the city under Persian rule. Bearded and donning a peculiar headdress, the character holds a bow and quiver in his left arm while his right hand clutches the reins of a seahorse (FIG. 4a).⁴⁷

This scene is completed by sea waves above a dolphin, a setting already present among the first coinages of the city. The scene's aquatic nature is unquestionable, as is, above all, the association of the seahorse with the figure whose identity, still the subject of debate, is most likely is a representation of the Baal of the city, in this case Melqart.⁴⁸ This connection cannot be firmly interpreted as seahorses are common to other Phoenician coinages such as those of Byblos and Arwad.⁴⁹ There is nonetheless the option that these bonds could have been capitalised on by Tyre, therefore linking them to its main god. It is thus plausible to identify the Phoenician *hippoi* with the image of seahorses, whose horse head and also frequent fish tail can be recognised on the stern.⁵⁰

The connection of the seahorse with Melqart, as in the case of the link of this god to the popular Phoenician vessel, has been commented and can be traced to other Phoenician coins such as *Solunto/Solus* (FIG. 4b). One example reveals the head of the god donning a *leonté* while its reverse depicts a seahorse accompanied by a dolphin or seashell (SNGANS 739var), which also, as commented, alludes to oriental, and more specifically Tyrian, parallels.

The conservative monetary policy of *Gadir*, also evident in its metrology and palaeography, can potentially explain the non-inclusion of the seahorse in its monotonous iconography that focused on depic-

45 Brody 1998, pp. 33-37; 2021, pp. 10-11; Ruiz Cabrero 2007, p. 98; Fumadó 2012, pp. 14-15, 19-22.

46 Also related to the well-known passage about the founding of insular Tyre and the legend of the Ambrosial rocks is the idea that Melqart ordered the building of a boat – the first vessel – to attain the wandering islands (Bijovsky 2005, p. 829).

47 Johananoff – Tal 2021, p. 110, figs. 4-5.

48 Johananoff – Tal 2021, p. 112; Betlyon 1983, p. 46.

49 Johananoff – Tal 2021, pp. 108, 115, figs. 1, 10.

50 Brody 1998, pp. 70-71; 2021, p. 18.

tions of tuna and dolphins and, above all, the head of Melqart-Heracles donning leonté and wielding a club. This association can be indirectly recognised in the reference by Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* V 4) when stating that an effigy of Melqart riding a seahorse was burned during the annual *égersis* or festivals in his honour.⁵¹ Far in geographical terms but not in the sense of appropriating the Herculean myths, and popularised without a doubt by the widespread representations on coins circulating from Cadiz, stand out the depictions from the Portuguese mint **Beuipo-Salacia* associating Melqart-Heracles with a *skyphos* (ACIP 982) and a seahorse (ACIP 985-987) (FIG. 4d).⁵² It is even worthwhile to consider whether a parallel can be drawn between this association and features of travels, specifically the maritime voyages of Melqart and Heracles, with the seahorse representing the first and the cup the second. The play of words *hippos* and *skyphos* likewise forms part of Graeco-Roman poetic metaphors.⁵³

In any case, there is no simple justification for the possible arrival in Rome of the narratives regarding Cadiz, and specifically their introduction to the imperial circle charged with determining and designing the iconographic representations on coins (notably those of Hadrian). This idea cannot be supported solely based on either the Hispanic origin of the Emperor or the fact that his mother, *Domitia Paulina*, was from Cádiz. Other factors must have played a role, notably family ties and, above all, the intrinsic profile of the Emperor, deemed to be, according to certain sources, a *curious* and *cultured traveler*. Qualified as *omnium curiositatum explorator*,⁵⁴ his tutor *Acilius Attianus*, also of Baetican origin and benefitting from a solid education, most likely assumed a decisive role in his humanistic training. His instructor was also able to instil a particular interest in the young heir in the geography and mythical history of *Turdetania* and, especially, of the Strait of Gibraltar,⁵⁵ indisputably linked to the figure of *Hercules Gaditanus*, whose powerful cult reinforced the ties to the Baetican elites in Rome.

Far from being satisfied with imitating the model of his predecessor Trajan, Hadrian incorporated modifications into the cult, favoured otherwise in the Cadiz epicentre due to being granted the right of inheritance, that must have entailed a process of recording and consulting of sources such as those of Strabo and Pliny. These authors were certainly known to the Emperor, and that he might have even enriched these modifications with his own knowledge.⁵⁶ As noted, the revision of the iconography of the god was momentous in this Hadrianic update of *Hercules Gaditanus*.

Thus the aurei studied here lay the foundation of a mythical landscape undoubtedly marked by regional references. The most sophisticated of these landscapes depicts a shrine and two female figures recently identified (correctly from our standpoint) as Hispania and Africa. The landscape also includes two other

51 This is possibly the celebrated scene on the plaque of the terracotta of Kerkuán (Almagro Gorbea 2010, p. 102, fig. 80; Mora Serrano 2013, pp. 148-149. See FIG. 4c.

52 In this case the seahorse is associated with an ear of corn between a crescent moon (ACIP 985-987). There is no doubt that the effigies of Melqart-Heracles are one of the main types of the mint, together with a bearded or beardless male head accompanied by a trident and topical iconographic motif such as tunas and dolphins (ACIP 969, 974, 978). See Mora Serrano 2011, p. 92.

53 This is not exclusive to *skiphos/skaphos* as it is one of the most frequently associated with *symposium* (Beaulieu 2016, pp. 180-181) in spite of its connection in this case with the figure of Dyonisus. In any case, the reference by Macrobius (*Sat.* V 21,16) is clear when regarding the relationship between Heracles-Hercules and *skyphos*, and there is no shortage of references to his presence, together with a club, linked to his cult in the *Ara Maxima* (Barry 2011, pp. 20-21).

54 Marco Simón 2018, p. 210.

55 Here I agree with the approach of M^a. P. García-Bellido (2020, pp. 140-141) that Hadrian's stays with his family during childhood and adolescence left a great mark as they undoubtedly entailed learning Iberian chorography both from Greek geographers and from direct observations of the landscape.

56 Practically nothing is known as to the direct presence of Hadrian in Gades or whether he visited *Heracleion* (González-Conde Puente 2021, p. 150; López Sánchez 2018, p. 79). It cannot be ruled out that he embarked at Gades to sail to *Mauretania* in AD 123 due to the revolts in that province (García-Bellido 2020, pp. 138, 141). Returning to earlier proposals, the new chronology proposed for these aurei by R. Abdy (RIC II/3, p. 42) enriches the discourse.



FIG. 5. Reconstruction of a view of the *Halieutic Testaccio* of *Gades* (after Bernal Casasola – Vargas Girón – Lara Medina 2019, fig. 56).

iconographic elements of extraordinary significance whose origin may stem from old mythical-geographical traditions generated in a Cadiz sanctuary itself in pre-Roman times. These notions, assumed and disseminated by Graeco-Roman geographers and historians,⁵⁷ made perfect sense at this time.

Thus, the recurrent presence of the Ocean in different forms, as well as a ship's prow with a singular and elongated ornament evoking the traditional forms of the vessels of Cadiz, heirs of the Phoenician *hippoi*⁵⁸ (FIG. 5), serve as evidence of the ancestral Mediterranean and Atlantic maritime domain of old Melqart-Heracles. If the iconographic reading proposed here is valid, then it serves as just one more good example of the dialogue between Roman concepts and local traditions embodied in this case in depictions on coins,⁵⁹ a theme that is in fact well-recorded in local and provincial coins in the East (albeit to a lesser extent among those of imperial nature).

57 Fernández Camacho 2014, p. 198.

58 Due to the lack of archaeological and literary evidence we can only offer the hypothesis that the *Gades* shipyards maintained the tradition of figurative, zoomorphic in this case, ornaments. Illustrating this are the recreations of maritime landscapes of Cadiz from Roman times where certain boats evoke the famous *hippoi* (Bernal Casasola – Vargas Girón – Lara Medina 2019, p. 309).

59 Moreno Pulido 2019, pp. 39-41; Machuca Prieto 2019, pp. 351-353.

It is certain that the literary references to *Herakleion* and other topics related to Cadiz such as those of particular interest here are founded on ancient sources such as Artemidorus and Poseidonius... They are nonetheless in line with the timeframe when Strabo and, above all, Pliny penned their narratives. It is these accounts that nurtured the enlightened interests of the Roman elite⁶⁰ and that of the equally erudite and elitist Hadrianic iconography disseminated by these gold coins, albeit not by their bronze counterparts that in due course had a lesser propagandistic impact on the provincials.⁶¹

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⁶⁰ They were probably aware of the exotic features that the cult of *Hercules Gaditanus* still retained (Oria Segura 2012, pp. 175-178; Nitschke 2013, pp. 272-273), not only in Hispania.

⁶¹ We share the moderate view of Howgego (1995, pp. 70-71) as to the propagandistic value of the iconography of Roman imperial coinage.

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