TRENDS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE PHOENICIAN COROPLASTIC PRODUCTION DURING THE IRON AGE AND PERSIAN PERIOD

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Abstract: This paper offers a scenario on the Phoenician imaginary through the analysis of the local coroplastic production between the Iron Age and the Persian period. The aim is to give an order to the many coroplastic subjects according to a macro-chronological subdivision based on archaeological contexts and manufacturing techniques. Two distinguished phases are thus identified, the Phoenician I and Phoenician II productions. More general issues are also addressed regarding the possible use of these figurines in various contexts, their geographical distribution, and a semantic analysis of the represented subjects. The paper also seeks to trace the dynamics of continuity and discontinuity in the local coroplastic art through the identification of two non-local productions, i.e. the Cypro-Phoenician and Graeco-Phoenician productions.

Keywords: Phoenicians; Terracottas; Iron Age; Persian Period; Levant.

1. Introduction

This paper presents some data of an ongoing research project on the coroplastic production in the Phoenician homeland between the Iron Age and Persian period. The aim is to study the socio-cultural background and development of these figurines in a long-term perspective. The following preliminary results are based on a corpus of 1000 figurines from 60 sites including both Phoenician and non-Phoenician outposts.

Nevertheless, before dealing with the main topic of this paper, one must begin by shortly addressing what is meant here by "Phoenician".[1] Indeed, there is not solely one idea of Phoenician culture. We can speak about more Phoenician material cultures or as Vella recently called it "Phoenicianness".[2] This is the reason why the Black-on-Red pottery has been often labelled as "Cypro-Phoenician",[3] a label denoting a rush in defining its geographical limits and origins. This also indicates an outdated methodological approach based on the association of classes of artefacts to one or more sites only because they were the first places where those artefacts were excavated. The analysis of quantitative data over time has shown how often certain classes have a regional, if not inter-regional, spread. An opposite process can be instead observed for art historical anal-

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1 About the debate on the Phoenician question and the ambivalence on the adoption of terms "Phoenician" and "Canaanite", see the latest literature with related references in Pedrazzi 2012, pp. 140-146; Garbati – Pedrazzi 2019; Quinn 2019, pp. 16-43; Schmitz 2019, pp. 9-10; Vella 2019.

2 Vella 2019, pp. 29-28. This is one, but not the only one, of the many testimonies on the use of the Phoenician term. For instance, Quinn (2019) and Martin (2017) prefer to adopt "Phoenicianism". These neologisms must be distinguished from the ethnonym "Phoinikes". Cfr. Ercolani 2015.

3 Although this designation has been adopted for other kinds of artefacts too, see Schreiber 2002, pp. XX-XXI.

yses. For instance, when an international taste is generally assigned to the Phoenician art[4] as if "eclecticism" can be considered a safe labelling category.[5] When dealing with Phoenician artefacts, it seems much easier to state what is not Phoenician rather than the opposite. Indeed, scholars tend to use the term Phoenician in an artistic sense, often ignoring the problematic origin of objects.[6] Thus, according to this approach, a clay figurine wearing an Egyptian-style wig must be Phoenician,[7] while a faience male head with a long beard would be a typical royal Semitic figure.[8] This phenomenon is easily explained by the fact that, within the Phoenician-related sphere, artefacts pertain to two macro-categories: objects produced by Phoenicians within their homeland, and Phoenician-related objects produced abroad either by Phoenicians or other peoples.[9] This important distinction, however, has not always been respected, especially in the art-historical field. So that today we still tend to attribute certain Levantine metal bowls or worked ivories to Phoenician craftsmanship, although none of these objects was ever found in Phoenicia.[10] Another example to mention is the case of Phoenician clay masks, whose classification's attempts have been based upon specimens from both the homeland and the western colonies.[11] To this complicated scenario, one must add that the Phoenicians were not a compact group, their territory was not defined through time,[12] and communities were not even static. Because identities can change with changing circumstances and societies decide to be more or less resilient to external factors. These factors may influence the contraction or expansion of a determinate culture. Oggiano expresses it perfectly, the Phoenician society "at the level of images, it is a 'curious' society that, rather than preserve its own identity in the form of conscious resistance to external stimulations, chooses to enrich it through its contact with 'the other' ".[13]

2. Classification and Periodization

In light of the mentioned premises, the methodological approach adopted in this study takes into account geographical and chronological variations. Geographically speaking, one cannot consider anymore the Phoenician area of influence as the traditional Lebanese coast nor its southern borders can be fixed with the site of Tel Dor. The reason is that the spread of material culture does not necessarily follow tentative political borders. This is particularly true for clay figurines, which can appear in non-Phoenician sites, as well as be missing in traditionally considered Phoenician outposts.[14] From a chronological point of view, as already

4 Feldman 2006, pp. 25-58; 2014, pp. 178-179; 2019, pp. 372-374.

5 See Nitschke 2015, pp. 213-214. On the meaning of Phoenician art during the Hellenistic period, see also Nitschke 2011.

6 As we are reminded by Lehmann, the Phoenician material culture has been artificially constructed upon the bases of decontextualized objects from private collections and the black market. Lehmann 2019, p. 465. See also Nitschke 2015, p. 211.

7 The reference is to the so-called *Dea (Tyria) Gravida* which instead is thought to wear a typical Phoenician "side coil air" hairstyle. Culican 1969, p. 37. On the misleading influence of Egyptian art towards Phoenician artefacts, see Markoe 1990, pp. 16-18; Martin 2017, pp. 27-28, 67-71.

8 The reference is to the recently discovered specimen from Abel Beth Maacah. Cfr. Yahalom Mack 2019.

9 On a critic about art-historical approach on Phoenician and Greek art, see Martin 2017, pp. 18, 169-170. On the foreign versus local components in ceramic studies, see also Pedrazzi 2016.

10 Martin 2017, pp. 28-29, 89-90.

11 See the typologies proposed in Cintas 1946; Picard 1965-1966; Stern 1976. Please note that in this preliminary notes, Phoenician clay masks have been not considered since they are subjects of a new in-depth analysis by Orsingher. Orsingher 2014, 2018, 2019a, 2019b.

12 About the shaping of the Phoenician territory through time and space, see Elayi 1982; Pedrazzi 2012, pp. 147-150; Garbati 2016, pp. 139-141; Oggiano 2009; Porzia 2018.

13 Oggiano 2015a, p. 519.

14 In this sense, Pedrazzi reminds that, according to the anthropological practise, boundaries that matter are those self-produced for social purposes, those created by "social actors" for their own self-representation. Pedrazzi 2012, p. 145.

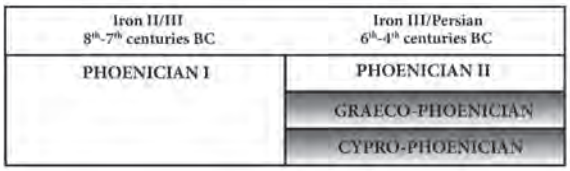

Fig. 1. Classification of Phoenician and Phoenician-related terracottas according to relative chronology and geographic origin.

pointed out by Nitschke,[15] wider timeframes are preferred to precise chronological limits, which can be instead preserved for *intra-situ* analyses. If we consider the entire coroplastic production during the Iron Age and Persian period, one can observe a great variety in subjects and manufacturing techniques with some occasional "regional accents".[16] However, one must also state that we cannot talk about a Tyrian or Sidonian coroplastic tradition because Phoenician figurines are spread within a diffused territory. Thus, one can instead affirm that we do have a territorial pattern. To define this pattern, there are at least three factors to bear in mind. First, the Phoenician coroplastic produced in the homeland greatly depended on socio-economic factors affecting local populations. Factors that led to the contemporary presence of autochthonous and allochthonous coroplastic subjects. In the second instance, intercultural contacts among Phoenicians and other peoples within the Eastern Mediterranean caused great experimentation in manufacturing techniques of local productions.[17] The third factor is related to figurines' users and their agency, because types produced during the same period may have had different purposes as well as diverse recipients. Indeed, an innovative aspect of the Phoenician coroplastic is the contemporary attestation of figurines in urban and rural sacred places.[18] This distinction is not perceptible within the Iron Age society, but it begins and progressively increases from the mid-6th century BC. Following this perspective, on the bases of the quantitative stratigraphic data and the manufacturing techniques, we can tentatively classify the coroplastic art within four groups: two locally made (Phoenician artefacts) and two imported (Phoenician-related artefacts) (Fig. 1). The here renamed "Phoenician I" is the first group. This is composed of all those specimens produced between the 8th-7th centuries BC. Indeed, one cannot see a real pattern before the 8th century BC, so that means we cannot securely identify Phoenician figurines dating from the Iron I as well as the Iron IIa period. Aegean or Aegean-related local figurines, which are diffusely spread all over the Levantine coast in the Iron I, are not considered part of the Phoenician-related material culture. As rightly affirmed by Elayi and Killebrew,[19] the Sea Peoples did not have such a great impact on Phoenician centres. At the same time, apart from very sporadic finds, one cannot distinguish any coherent production during the 9th century BC.[20] This is a historical period marked by the first expansion of Tyre in the Western Mediterranean[21] and directly reflected in a new settlement pattern within the Levantine homeland.[22] Archaeologically speaking, this period follows the destruction phase between Iron I and Iron IIa encountered in several sites on the coast.[23] A period likely characterized by an administrative renewal of some centres,[24] which might have favoured a reorganization of local cultic activities and, consequently, some years later, the rise of a new coroplastic produc-

15 Nitschke 2015, p. 212.

16 See for instance the Akkar Plain local production. Gubel 2019, p. 354.

17 This aspect has been already discussed in detail in Nunn 2000.

18 This social phenomenon has been explained in Oggiano 2015a, p. 514, 2015b, pp. 245-246, 249, 251.

19 Elayi 2018, p. 91; Killebrew 2019, p. 51.

20 This is due to technical and stratigraphic reasons because several specimens of this period present a mixed manufacturing technique. In particular, the use of moulds seems to appear only in the 8th century BC, Press 2012, pp. 171, 198.

21 Aubet-Semmler 2019, pp. 75-76.

22 For instance, for the Akko Plain, see Lehmann 2011, pp. 75-76; 2019, p. 469.

23 Lehmann 2011; 2019, p. 469. For the high chronology, see the latest contribution by Mazar (2011) with related references.

24 Lehmann refers to the increase of agricultural areas in the Akko Plain aimed at sustaining Tyrian economic expansions. Lehmann 2019, p. 469.

Fig. 2. Distribution patterns of Phoenician terracottas during the Iron Age, Phoenician I production (graphic by the author).

tion. So that we attest to the rise of the Phoenician I group only at the beginning of the Iron IIb, likely not before the 8th century BC,[25] a group that lasted until the end of the Neo-Assyrian period. With the first Neo-Assyrian incursions in Phoenicia, we observe a first expansion and then extinction of part of this earlier production. At the state of the research, it is rather difficult to state if the Phoenician I group already disappeared within the Neo-Assyrian destruction phase or, instead, if it persisted until the Neo-Babylonian siege, namely the end of the 7th century BC.

During the 6th century BC, while the Phoenician I group disappeared, we see the appearance of new coroplastic types to be included in the so-called "Phoenician II" group. The rise of this new group can be perhaps linked with some technical and stylistic influences derived from the contacts with the Greek world. It is not indeed by coincidence that towards the 6th century BC, we start seeing the contemporary presence of the Phoenician II group with two Phoenician-related productions. These are the "Graeco-Phoenician" and "Cypro-Phoenician" figurines, that were likely imported into the Levantine coast from the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore, they are not included in the local *repertoire*.[26] These two allochthonous groups appeared in several sites on the Levantine coast during the 6th century BC, with some specimens lasting until the end of the Persian period. The very late chronology is mainly given by the nature of some contexts like ritual *favissae. Favissae* that often returned mixed coroplastic specimens belonging to different groups, reflecting a never-before-seen cultic prosperity towards the beginning of the Persian period.

25 Curiously, the rise of an Iron Age coroplastic tradition in Phoenician centres seems to have occurred several years after the first expansions in the Mediterranean area.

26 These two groups are not described in this paper since they are both non-local coroplastic *corpora,* but their attestation on the Levantine coast is of crucial importance for the technological development of the Phoenician coroplastic as well as their ritual use.

3. Phoenician I

3.1. *Classes*

Proceeding in chronological order, the Phoenician I group is mainly attested in the "Phoenician Core" with substantial differences among subjects (Fig. 2). The most common are the bell-shaped characters, namely male and female figurines with wheel-made bodies, a handmade assemblage, and moulded facial features (Fig. 3a). These varied characters represented worshippers and musicians as suggested by their offerings – mainly doves – or musical instruments that they hold in their hands.[27] The bell-shaped specimens are often associated with the typical horse-rider figurines known as "Akhziv type" horses.[28] (Fig. 3b). The horse-rider figurines of this period are fully handmade with only sometimes the facial features of the rider impressed through a mould. Horse-rider figurines are quite centralised with a few sites located at distant centres, like the northernmost Al-Mina[29] and the southernmost Ashkelon.[30] To this larger group also belong other distinguished productions, such as the boats, shrines, and daily life scenes miniatures (Fig. 3d-f). Boat models are completely handmade, and a mixed manufacturing technique can be observed within shrine models and daily life scenes. Indeed, in these two last classes, the adoption of moulds is limited to the rendering of human facial features in an analogous way as the bell-shaped characters. As for their distribution pattern, boat models are attested in the same area of the horse-rider figurines, while shrine models and daily life scenes are focused along the coast.

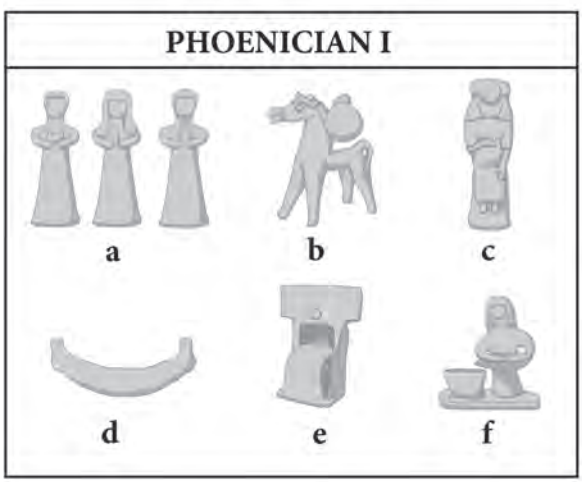

Fig. 3. Examples of coroplastic subjects of the Phoenician I production: a. bell shaped-characters; b. horse-rider; c. *Dea (Tyria) Gravida* – earliest type; d. boat; e. temple; f. daily life scene – bread maker (drawings by the author).

3.2. *Semantic*

Regarding a general overview of the coroplastic subjects, one might observe a quite balanced situation of the two sexes with respect to neighbouring regions.[31] Indeed, male and female specimens appear in the same approximate percentage. Specifically, the male sphere is represented with at least three public roles. Horse-rider figurines portray warfare activities as well as works related to the Phoenician craftsmanship with some very rare donkey figurines.[32] This interconnection among civil works and military service is also expressed in boat

27 Besides there is at least one male figurine from Akhziv holding a female figure in his hands, but it is difficult to say whether it is meant to be a small statue or a real human being, cfr. Moscati 1970, fig. 71.

28 Both types have been found within same contexts at the cemeteries of Akhziv and Tyre, while it is more difficult to distinguish Iron Age types in Sarepta. Cfr. Pritchard 1975, fig. 57; 1988, fig. 14.

29 Woolley 1938, Tavv. X, XI, MN97-98, 151.

30 Cohen 2011, cat. nn. 24, 84; Press 2012, cat. nn. 106, 164, 175.

31 See, for instance, the Middle Euphrates production where one can see a predominance of male-related subjects. Bolognani 2020a, pp.209-210, 218; 2020b, p. 44, fig.1. The contrary is observable in the Judean area with the rise of the Judean Pilllar Figurines. Kletter 1996, p. 65, 1999, p. 28.

32 From Akhziv, see Mazar 2004, fig. 20, photo 99.

models, where sometimes we can see portrayed groups of sailors. To these, one should also add that boats could even have had a possible cultic-related function.[33]

From a semantic point of view, the cultic sphere is the predominant one. This sphere is represented in shrine models, which can be a stylized representation of simple cultic shrines or with an enthroned divine figure within them. The cultic sphere is also evident in the bell-shaped musicians and worshippers. Nevertheless, for this last case, the major proportion of figurines represents female characters. The same can be stated for daily life scenes, in which we can find potters, bread makers, bathroom, and childbirth scenes. As recently suggested by Oggiano,[34] individual sexual features are rarely stressed because from the Iron Age onward there is a tendency to dress clay figurines. Figurines cupping their breasts – typical of preceding periods – occasionally occur in contact areas in the mature 7th century BC. This is the case of some bell-shaped figurines with pronounced breasts, especially attested in the south, specifically at Tel Akko, Ashkelon, Megiddo, and only in a single specimen in the north in Kharayeb.[35] The pronounced breast is, in fact, a typical feature of the contemporary Judean Pillar Figurines, from which these latest specimens probably derived a strong influence. The influence between the two most popular productions in the Coastal Levant was likely reciprocal as testified in some female specimens in the Judean area, at Tel Miqne (Ekron), Tel Erani, and Tel Jemmeh.[36] In this respect, the most striking example comes from Tel Lachish, where we find a specimen with a typical Phoenician bell-shaped body, but whose face-mould derives from the well-known Judean prototypes.[37]

Another detail that is often ignored in literature is the colourful character of this production, in which we can detect a widespread use of red and black paint, while much rarer are the use of white, yellow, and blue. The variety of colours in Phoenician figurines should not have had only an aesthetic value, but it was aimed at detailing individual subjects, perhaps to stress personal choices. This, for example, can be seen in the alternated use of black and red or simple geometric patterns such as lines, grids, and dots to reproduce textile decorations.

3.3. *Contexts*

As for the contextual evidence, clay figurines in primary use contexts have been mainly recovered in funerary areas, specifically, as previously mentioned, in Tyre and Akhziv cemeteries. However, terracottas during this period have been found in numbers within cultic contexts too, like those from Sarepta[38] and Kharayeb.[39] A few specimens were also recovered in fortifications, such as those from Tel Kabri.[40] Unfortunately, even though a few of these specimens were found in stratified contexts, nothing certain can be said about their diversified use or the ideological association among subjects. Nevertheless, one must point out the attestation of sites presenting more than three figurines classes within the same phase, likely suggesting widespread cultic centres along the coast. This phenomenon is observable at least in Sarepta, Tyre, Akhziv, and Ashkelon. At the same time, as previously mentioned, we can detect an increase of this production towards the 7th

33 See the connection between Phoenician seafaring and maritime religion reconstructed in Christian 2013, 2014.

34 Oggiano 2020, pp. 271-275.

35 For Tel Akko, see Olson *et al.* 2013, fig. 4d. For Ashkelon, see Press 2012, cat. n. 37. For Megiddo, see May 1925, M2213. For Kharayeb, see Oggiano 2015b, fig. 2, upper left.

36 For Tel Miqne, see Gitin 2005, p. 212, fig. 4; for Tel Erani, see Yevin 1961, Tav. II, third and fourth left; for Tel Jemmeh, see Ben Shlomo *et al.* 2012, fig. 17.3g.

37 Cf. Kletter 1999, p. 86, fig. 4.5.

38 Pritchard 1975, figs. 41-42, 46, 56-57; 1988, ch. 2.

39 Chéhab 1951-1952, 1953-1954; Kaoukabani 1973. See also Oggiano 2016, pp. 206-210 and 2018, pp. 18-30 for a review of the Iron Age phase.

40 Oren 1994, fig. 20; 2002, fig. 10.

century BC, when specimens are recovered in non-Phoenician sites like Megiddo[41] or Ashkelon.[42] This is a fact that cannot be ignored since it presumes both movements of people and cultic practices in a region where the Phoenician influence is less rooted. Concerning a general ritual function of this earliest production, one cannot see any physical or symbolic connotation in human characters that can lead to their identification as divine figures. On the contrary, the variety of costume decorations, performed gestures, and associated items are clear indicators of their human nature. In particular similar bell-shaped characters holding doves, as well as shrine models with the disc-crescent symbol are coroplastic types diffusely attested in Cypriot sanctuaries.[43] In the Levant, the iconography of the dove has always been associated only with female goddesses.[44] Within the Phoenician context specifically, it has been suggested a possible connection with the lady of Byblos (Baalat Gubal), to be likely identified with Astarte.[45] That is to say that the use of some of these figurines within worship activities devoted to Astarte is highly feasible, yet we cannot exclude they might have served for the cult of other deities of the Phoenician pantheon.[46]

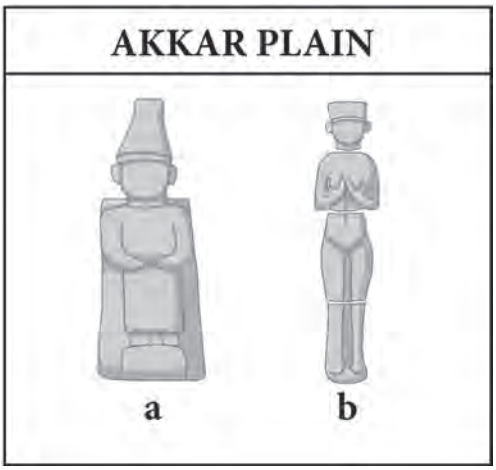

Fig. 4. Examples of coroplastic subjects of the Akkar Plain: a. enthroned male character; b. tentative reconstruction of the so-called "Breast Astarte" (drawings by the author).

Finally, within this period, particular attention should be devoted to one micro-regional production, that of the Akkar Plain. At Tell Kazel,[47] Tell Arqa,[48] and Tabbat al-Hammam,[49] two coroplastic subjects rose and fell into disuse between the late 9th -end 7th centuries BC.[50] These are a seated male character wearing a *lebbadé* hat and a standing lady cupping her breasts with a squared *polos*, renamed in literature as the "Breast Astarte" (Fig. 4a-b). These figurines – likely due to cultic reasons – are often found with only their heads preserved, a fact that did not allow their proper classification. Indeed, some of these heads were wrongly interpreted as belonging to male or female priests,[51] whose bodies have never been found. The evidence suggests their identification with only two types, with the female counterpart finding a direct prototype with LBA figurines from

41 May 1935, Tavv. XXIII-XXIV.

42 See n. 32.

43 See Culican 1976a and Poma 2013 for a reassessment.

44 Cfr. Poma 2013, pp. 181-182.

45 On the association of the lady of Byblos with Astarte see Bonnet 1996, pp. 19-20.

46 A correct observation has been advanced by Bloch-Smith, when she objected the trend to consider Levantine female figurines whether dressed or naked as representation of Astarte, when no local inscription to this goddess suggests a nearby dedicated cultic building. At the same time, there are temples dedicated to Astarte, such as that of Sarepta, which might have served for the cult of other deities. Bloch-Smith 2014, pp. 167, 177.

47 Dunand *et al.* 1964, pp. 8-10, Tavv. VI.1-4, VII.1-2; Badre *et al.* 1990, pp. 46, 50-51, 53-54, figs. 25a, 27d-g, 29b, 30g, 1994, pp. 266, 274-215, 293-294, figs. 6c, 14, 15, 26; Badre – Gubel 1999-2000, pp. 130, 133,185,193, figs. 4e-h, 44; Capet – Gubel 2000, pp. 446-451, figs. 21-26; Gubel 2008, pp. 458, 463, figs. 4, 6, 8; 2010, pp. 411-412, fig. 10.

48 Thalmann 1978, pp. 80-81, figs. 21f-g,30.

49 Braidwood 1940, pp. 195, 197, fig. 9.

50 Cfr. contextual data from Tell Kazel, n. 46.

51 Cfr. Gubel 2008, p. 458.

the Southern Levant.[52] With these two subjects, one can also see occasional bell-shaped figurines with bichrome patterns,[53] which are slightly different from those spread all over the Levantine coast. Thus, despite the geographical location of the Akkar Plain, its coroplastic tradition seems to be isolated. Figurines produced in this small territory are territorially radicalized[54] and do not spread throughout Phoenicia. The same phenomenon is found in the Syro-Anatolian productions with the exception of the Middle Euphrates valley, where there is a partial dispersion of figurines due to migratory phenomena under the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[55] The Akkar Plain coroplastic production seems strongly tied to local cultic traditions and this is fully manifested at Tell Kazel, where clay figurines appear especially within the temple of Area 2.[56] At the same time, apart from a few cases,[57] one cannot observe many clay figurines belonging to the coastal tradition in this territory. This is a circumstance that could perhaps explain stronger political/social relationships with the Neo-Syrian states and, therefore, one might tentatively link the local coroplastic to this tradition rather than to the coastal one. This hypothesis seems to match with the tentative attribution of this land under the Kingdom of Hamat,[58] as well as with the attestation of part of the pottery horizon resembling a Syrian tradition (Tell Afis, Hama, Khan Sheikhoun).[59]

4. Phoenician II

4.1. *Classes*

In the Phoenician II group, we observe a shift from the handmade to the moulding technique, with a remarkable preference for the monovalve mould.[60] Indeed, in the 7th century BC along with the appearance of the bell-shaped characters in many Phoenician outposts, one can also see some enthroned ladies (Fig. 3c). These are examples of the well-known *Dea (Tyria) Gravida,* a coroplastic subject that lasted until the 5th-4th centuries BC.[61] This is the only Phoenician figurine for which we can trace a chronological *continuum* between the Iron Age and Persian period. So that one can attribute this figurine to both periods with some substantial differences in the figurine's shape for later types (Fig. 5a).[62] Only towards the 6th-5th centuries BC,[63] the enthroned ladies appear with two enthroned male characters with different headdress: one with Atef-crown and the other with a squared hat (Fig. 5b-c). During the Persian period, a renewed importance is devoted to animal figurines, when we see the appearance of a new type of horse-rider specimens with hollow bodies in Kharayeb,[64] somehow resembling the Iron Age prototypes (Fig. 5d). To these, one must add

52 Cfr. Kletter *et al.* 2010.

53 Gubel 2008, pp. 457,463, fig. 8.

54 Gubel 2008, p. 457.

55 Bolognani 2020a, pp.216-217; 2020b, pp. 46-47, fig.3.

56 Cfr. Gubel 2008.

57 Badre *et al.* 1994, fig. 15b,f.

58 Klengel 1982, p. 13; *contra* Gubel 2008, p. 455.

59 Capet, Gubel 2000, p. 432, n. 13.

60 According to Stern, the change in the manufacturing technique is a chronological marker between the Iron Age and the Persian period productions. Stern 2003, p. 313.

61 Some scholars have suggested a full 8th century BC as the earliest attestation of this type, but this data is not fully supported by the stratigraphic evidence. Stratified figurines from Shrine 1 in Sarepta would propend for a full 7th century BC dating. Pritchard 1988, p. 54.

62 For a recent proposal about the attested types and the dating see Bolognani (forthcoming).

63 See Sarepta for the earliest attestation. Pritchard 1988, p. 47, n. 60.

64 One must also highlight a bull figurine with the same manufacturing technique. Kaoukabani 1973, Tavv. XII.1-4, XIII.1-2. At the same time, some doubts are reserved for the horse-rider figurines from Beirut, for which a local origin is not granted. Cfr. Lehmann-Jericke 1997, figs. 11a-b.

other mammals like baboons, cats, bears, and rams (Fig. 5e-f). The new manufacturing technique is also extended to shrine models (Fig. 5g). Here the application of refined moulds allows these models to be less schematic[65] and consequently one can see a proliferation of religious symbols. The earlier daily life scenes with high cultic value are now proposed again in the form of composite figures, such as the sphinx thrones supporting a figure (with lira?) from Kharayeb and Sarepta[66] (Fig. 5h). Or the single bread makers are now replaced with detailed reproductions of the ritual's phases.[67] In these last examples, we can also detect a transition between the hand/wheel/mould-made techniques typical of the bell-shaped characters and the new monovalve technique. In this period, we see the rise of completely new coroplastic subjects which are often reproduced in other materials (stone, ivory). These are the Bes (Fig. 5i), the Ptah-Patek, the squatting lady, and the so-called "temple boys" figurines. Finally, only towards the 5th-4th centuries BC, one can see the appearance of the pillar-shaped characters (Fig. 5j), occasionally made with a double mould.[68] This class has been renamed by Stern as the "eastern-style" group to distinguish it from other contemporary productions presenting marked Greek elements.[69] These pillar-shaped characters present standardized features typical of mass productions and their sizes range from about 15 cm to nearly half a metre. Pedestals supporting these figurines are shaped in multiple forms. So, one could count round or squared examples, low or high, single or double, with or without moulding, and sometimes with small gaps at the lower edges to resemble low feet. The use of the pedestal together with the addition of purple-red paint only on the frontal side and on the anatomical features suggest that they were meant to be displayed. Within this class, great experimentation is attested in Kharayeb, where one can see male and female subjects performing diversified gestures, wearing specif-

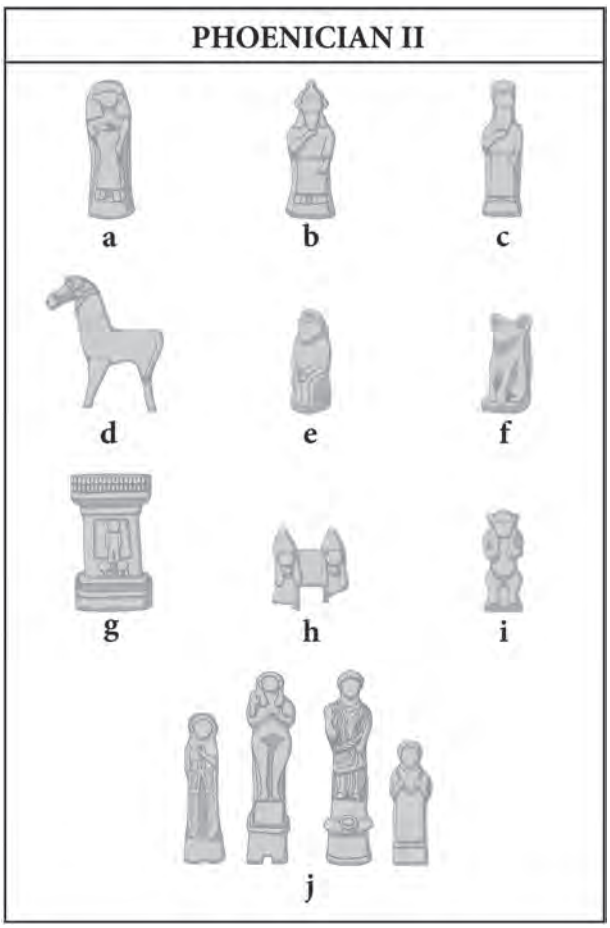

Fig. 5. Examples of coroplastic subject of the Phoenician II production: a. *Dea (Tyria) Gravida* – latest type; b. enthroned male character with *atef*-crown; c. enthroned male character with squared hat; d. tentative reconstruction of a horse; e. baboon; f. cat; g. temple; h. daily life scene – sphinx throne; i. Bes; j. pillar-shaped characters (drawings by the author).

65 Cfr. Gubel 1986, cat. nn. 51-52.

66 For Kharayeb, Oggiano 2015b, fig. 3a; 2016, fig. 11.1; For Sarepta, Pritchard 1975, figs. 42.2-3; 1988, figs. 11.21ad, 28a-b.

67 Cfr. Culican 1976b, Tavv. XII-XIV.

68 The different manufacturing technique might be due to chronological reasons.

69 Stern's distinction between an "eastern" and "western" group is not considered valid anymore, but part of Stern's "western group" has been here classified under the Graeco-Phoenician production. Cfr. Stern 1982, pp. 158-182; 2001.

Fig. 6. Distribution patterns of Phoenician and Phoenician-related terracottas during the Persian period (graphic by the author).

ic costumes, and holding a set of cultic-related items.[70]

4.2. *Semantic*

In the Phoenician II production, as already seen, we can observe a gradual replacement of polychromic patterns in favour of a diffused use of the red colour both to underline attires and anatomical features. The attention to particularize slowly falls into disuse, perhaps as a sign of increasingly standardized production. At the same time, while one can still see both male and female characters, from now onwards female characters are represented in multifaceted forms and tend to prevail in terms of numbers of finds. A proliferation of other zoomorphic and "mythological" subjects must also be stressed. It is difficult to explain the phenomenon from a social point of view, but perhaps we could interpret it as a willingness to diversify prayers/wishes/intentions through the material support, likely reflecting widespread participation to rituals. For instance, ritual practises connected to the greater fertility theme seems to be fostered again by the manipulation of different subjects. Along with the revival of the naked female figurines cupping their breasts conceptualizing youthful pre-conception anxieties, we see the rise of clothed enthroned women showing other desires related to maternity. Furthermore, aside from the clearly pregnant status of these figurines, according to Lipiński,[71] the gesture of the enthroned male specimens of grasping their beard would recall a prayer of adult men asking for a son. Their iconographies halfway between the divine and the human sphere[72] also suggest a different approach to worship, perhaps to indicate a greater specificity or preference towards one or more divinities.[73] A preference which is expressed through the material media (*ex voto*) and not only in the intimate intention.

70 These features are characteristic of the Kharayeb coroplastic *corpus* and they are observable in the Hellenistic period production too. On the variety of the social *substratum* represented in this temple see again Oggiano 2015a; 2015b; 2020.

71 Lipiński 2003, p. 204.

72 Oggiano 2005, p. 206.

73 This statement does not mean that they must be perceived as a divine couple nor that they can be univocally associated to common cults. Indeed, the female version appear much earlier and both types are not every time found within the same context.

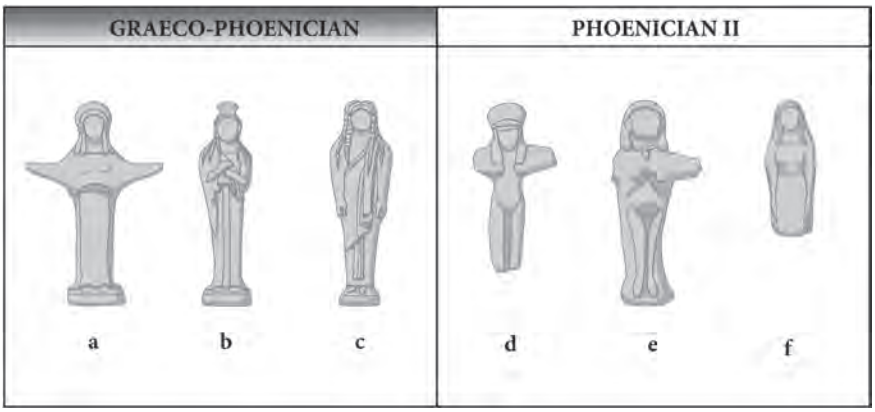

Fig. 7. Examples of coroplastic subjects of the Graeco-Phoenician production (left) and Phoenician II figurines inspired by Greek prototypes (right): a. *kore* with outstretched arms; b. alabastron in the form of a *kore*; c. *kouros*; d. naked lady performing a double gesture from Beirut; e. naked lady performing a double gesture from Tel Megadim; f. local *kore* from Greek mould (drawings by the author).

Simultaneously, the representation of common worshippers seems to continue. With this regard, the pillar-shaped characters represent the development of the earlier bell-shaped characters. This time, however, worshippers are often portrayed performing blessing gestures, apart from their offerings. Sometimes a small offering plate is placed in-between their feet (Fig. 5j, third from left).[74] Common opinions maintain that these figurines mostly represented naked pregnant ladies, and thus they were only connected to fertility rituals devoted to the goddess Tanit, due to her symbol impressed upon some of them.[75] As a matter of fact, the assemblage looks much more heterogeneous because although female subjects are predominant, young and adult male characters are quite numerous[76] and the use of the Tanit symbol is not systematic.[77] Furthermore, the fact that female figurines are represented both naked and dressed performing analogous gestures led us to reconsider the interface of worshippers upon the cult of Tanit. In other words, as for the case of the enthroned characters, are those figurines a multifaced representation of the divine attributes of Tanit or they rather should be interpreted as an identification of worshippers with the goddess herself depending on individual needs? And to what divinity were male subjects destined if we exclude Tanit?

Finally, regarding the slight predominance of female figurines, how do we explain the recurrence of nudity? As shown in Fig. 6, along with the production peak of the Phoenician II group, one could also see the attestation of imported specimens from Eastern Greece and Cyprus. The addition of Greek *korai* and *kouroi* figurines to the local *repertoire* during the 6th century BC stimulated the reappearance of naked or partially naked female figurines as symbols of Levantine beauty and youth enhancement. In this period, along with imported Greek prototypes (Fig. 7a-c), one can observe locally made figurines portraying young characters manufactured with moulds created from original Greek figurines. Examples, in this case, can be found in Kharayeb, Tel Sippor, or Tel Dor.[78] Specifically, regarding naked figurines, those that are not made from original Greek moulds somehow resemble them. This is the case, for instance, of the naked female figurines that contemporarily outstretch their arms and cup their breasts, namely two gestures are portrayed

74 For a specimen with all these features, see Raban – Kahanov 2003, fig. 8.

75 These scholars also see in these figurines a representation of the goddess herself. Stern 1989a, p. 29; Stieglitz 1990, p. 108; Castellvi *et al.* 2007, p. 93; Arie 2017, p. 66; *contra* Lipiński 2003, p. 303. The Tanit symbol appeared only on female specimens and it was positioned on the pedestal or upon the belly in the form of a sort of ribbon. Some specimens also presented the image of a dolphin on the pedestal.

76 Cfr. Tyre, Gubel 1986, nn. 53,56; Seco-Alvarez 2011, figs. 1-12; Kharayeb, Kaoukabani 1973, pl. III.3; Tel Sippor, Negbi 1966: nn. 64-65; Akhziv, Karlin – Mazar 2013.

77 See the most recent review on these finds in Artzy – Sheizaf 2019.

78 For Kharayeb, see Oggiano 2015b, fig. 4a-d; 2020, fig. 3f. For Tel Sippor, see Negbi 1966, nos. 3-4,7. For Tel Dor, see Stern 2010, figs. 19.1, 20.4-5, 21.8, pl. 7, fig. 14.3, pl. 12, fig. 19.1, pl. 13. figs. 20.5, 21.3, 21.8, 21.9.

in a single subject (Fig. 7d-e). Dozens of examples of these eclectic figurines are found in Beirut[79] as well as in southern Phoenicia at Tel Megadim.[80] The same moulds, but without outstretched arms, are then used to render naked pillar figurines in Akhziv, Tel Dor, Kharayeb, and Tel Sippor (Fig. 7f).[81]

4.1. *Contexts*

As for the contextual evidence, the deposition of clay figurines in funerary contexts fell into disuse[82] in favour of a full cultic function. Indeed, all the above-mentioned types – when in context – are attested in *favissae* (Kharayeb, Tel Sippor, and the tentative Tel es-Safi and Tel Dor, etc.).[83] This is also the main reason why this production has a significantly extended chronological range. During this period, figurines are also found in an unusual type of context. Indeed, especially the pillar-shaped types have been recovered underwater in the seashore of Tyre, Haifa, and Shavei Zion.[84] For this reason, for years some scholars used to talk about exceptional finds due to ancient sunken shipwrecks.[85] However, nobody was able to explain the reason why clay figurines were part of ship cargos and where those ships were bound. Others believed that those figurines were deposited in maritime *favissae*, supposing a use of the sea as diffused cultic context.[86] Even this interpretation fails to consider one important detail: *favissae* are secondary-use contexts and given their function, they cannot exist without a delimited cultic area. Thus, conceptually speaking, maritime *favissae* are an archaeological oxymoron. The only possible explanation for the recovery of these figurines close to the seashore should be found in the use of the Phoenician coastline. Indeed, apart from the already-mentioned figurines found some hundred metres from the coastline, one must also mention the discovery of other specimens mixed with fragmentary pottery in a sounding inside the Sidonian harbour of Tyre.[87] This discovery was again interpreted by the excavators as the remains of a sunken shipwreck,[88] although any boat remains were never recovered. No logical explanation was provided about under which circumstances a boat can sink within a harbour.

On the contrary, the massive production of this class of figurines, the use of paint, the presence of pedestals and evidence of sunken ancient harbours due to sea-level fluctuations[89] would lead us think for another hypothesis. Those figurines were likely to be displayed in dedicated areas along the seacoast, perhaps within the harbours.[90] In other words, it is here proposed that Phoenician harbours did not only have commercial functions. The systematic cultic use of these figurines is further attested by the discovery of some fragments in hinterland temples,

79 Lehmann Jericke 1997, figs. 11d-f.

80 Broshi 1993, p. 1002.

81 For Akhziv, see AO1847, Musée du Louvre. For Tel Dor, among the many, see Stern 1989, p. 13. For Kharayeb, see Kaoukabani 1973, pl. VII.1-3. For Tel Sippor, see Negbi 1966, n. 11.

82 The only site with figurines in funerary context is Akhziv. Cfr. Mazar 1996, pp. 25, 103; 2004, p. 79.

83 For Kharayeb, see Chéhab 1951-1952, p. 12; for Tel es-Safi, see Bliss – Macalister 1902, p. 140-141; for Tel Dor, see n. 25; for Tel Sippor, see Negbi 1966. Please, also note that not all previously interpreted pits are *favissae* and the phenomenon today should be re-dimensioned. Cfr. Oggiano 2005, p. 203; Martin 2009, p. 4; 2014, p. 294.

84 For Tyre and Shavei Zion, see all references in Artzy – Sheizaf 2019, pp. 156-158 and Edrey – Erlich – Yasur-Landau 2020. For Haifa, see Zemer 2009, figs. 41-43; 2016, pp. 84-90.

85 Cfr. Linder 1973a; 1973b; Seco-Alvarez – Nourredin 2010; Seco-Alvarez 2011.

86 This possibility was first proposed by Culican 1976b, p. 119. See also Raban – Kahanov 2003, pp. 69-71.

87 Castellvi *et al.* 2007, pp. 79-93, figs. 22-29.

88 Castellvi *et al.* 2007, p. 96.

89 See the submerged ancient harbour of Tyre. Castellvi 2011 with related references.

90 A similar interpretation to the cultic use of these figurines was given in a recent reanalysis of the Shavei Zion *corpus*. In this case, however, the authors proposed a ritual casting of the *ex voto* directly within the sea. Thus, considering the sea as the worship place. Cfr. Edrey – Erlich – Yasur-Landau 2020.

as at Tel Sippor or Makmish.[91] While their univocal connection with Tanit should be now reconsidered, as well as their sole identification with the goddess herself. By parallels with the Western Punic world, such as the Grotta Regina cave in Sicily or the many pilgrimages caves recovered in Western Spain,[92] we might tentatively suggest an association of these figurines with seafaring local cults. Cults where we can find Tanit as the primary deity, but also other deities characterizing the Phoenician pantheon, such as Reshef/Melqart, known to be a patron deity of Phoenician sailors.[93] At the same time, one must reject Artzy and Shiezaf's theory[94] about a possible dedication of some of these figurines to Eshmoun. This wrong interpretation was caused by the presence of the inscription "Eshmoun Yeten"[95] on one fragmentary specimen. Indeed, that inscription did not state the name of a divinity, but a well-attested personal name.[96] Therefore, we should interpret the find as a dedicatory inscription of a human being – the producer or the dedicant – to an unmentioned deity,[97] which instead testifies the involvement of male agents along with female devotees beyond the cultic use of this production.

5. Conclusions

This introductory paper has highlighted some general characteristics of the Phoenician coroplastic between the Iron Age and Persian period (Fig. 8). It has been also possible to distinguish one local exception (Akkar Plain) and two non-local productions (Cypro-Phoenician, Graeco-Phoenician). From a chronological point of view, we have seen as the greatest expansion of the Phoenician coroplastic happened towards the 7th centuries BC. An expansion not only favoured by the economic flourishing of some Phoenician centres but perhaps also by more general social phenomena, such as the impact of the Neo-Assyrian Empire throughout the Levant. In this period, we observe an incredible increase of horse-rider figurines in Levantine productions. This proliferation, however, is rather mild within the Phoenician production, perhaps to indicate a lower involvement of this population in the Neo-Assyrian army. The local coroplastic art instead focuses on the colourful representation of individual social elements as part of participating communities at the level of the single city or a wider territory. The sanctuaries of Sarepta and Kharayeb are perhaps the best examples of these active communities, whose coroplastic tradition in many ways resembles those contemporaries of the Cypriot sanctuaries. Figurines are however attested in other types of contexts, such as cemeteries and fortresses, probably suggesting diversified cultic forms. The nakedness, popular during the LBA period figurines is abandoned. Much attention is devoted to individualism expressed through the varied surface decorations both in colours and patterns.

	PHOENICIAN I	PHOENICIAN II
Manufacturing tecnique	hand, wheel, single mould	single/double mould, hand
Surface treatments	slip, burnish	slip
Surface colours	red, black, white, yellow, blue	red
Surface patterns	lines, grids, dots	none
Contexts	cemeteries, temples, fortresses	temples, marine

Fig. 8. Comparing of the characterizing features of the Phoenician I and II productions.

91 Negbi 1966, nn. 62-64; Avigad 1960, tavv. 10c, 11c.

92 Cfr. Christian 2013, pp. 183-187; 2014, pp. 380-383.

93 On this topic see the detailed contributions by Brody 2005, 2008; and Christian 2013, 2014, p. 386.

94 Artzy – Sheizaf 2019, p. 158.

95 Cfr. Seco-Alvarez – Nourredin 2010, pp. 5-6, fig. 10; Seco-Alvarez 2011, fig. 11, n. 512.

96 Cfr. Benz 1972, pp. 71-72, 'ŠMNYTN. I would like to thank Fabio Porzia for his linguistic assistance in clarifying this important matter.

97 The inscription was in fact rightly interpreted by the discoverers of the figurine, who also suggested a common use of this personal name only during the 5th century BC. See Seco-Alvarez – Nourredin 2010, p. 5; Seco-Alvarez 2011, p. 87, n. 5.

Towards the end of the Iron Age, at a certain point, one can detect a shift in manufacturing techniques, when we observe a preference for the use of large moulds. The handmade technique is then reduced only to the assemblage of the figurines or minor details. This change seems to have been dictated by the need for a new mass production when we also detect less care for surface's decorations. In the Persian period, we see a proliferation of coroplastic subjects. While one can still see the continuation of some of the Iron Age themes, important novelties are expressed in the figurines' semantics. The fertility and nudity themes became popular again. Fertility, in a purely reproductive and non-sexual sense, seems to be introduced already by the early appearance of the *Dea (Tyria) Gravida* and probably by the later enthroned males. The typical Levantine motif of the naked lady as a symbol of youthful beauty instead seems to be correlated to the imbalance in the sexes' representation. Indeed, female figurines became more popular and some of these female figurines seems to have been inspired by Greek prototypes. The new pillar-shaped figurines with their pedestals and occasional offering plates show us a mass involvement of worshippers, as well as new forms of cultic practices involving the Phoenician coastline.

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