RIVISTA
DI STUDI FENICI

Edizioni Quasar

RIVISTA DI STUDI FENICI

FONDATA DA SABATINO MOSCATI

LII-2024

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FROM THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN TO THE OGLIASTRA. A PHOENICIAN AMPHORA FROM S'ARCU 'E IS FORROS (VILLAGRANDE STRISAILI, NUORO)

Maria Giulia Amadasi†, Enrico Dirminti, Tatiana Pedrazzi*

Abstract: The archaeological site of S'Arcu 'e is Forros (Villagrande Strisaili – NU), located along the routes connecting Ogliastra to the Gennargentu massif, has been the focus of numerous excavation campaigns since the 1980s. During the 2011 season, several fragments of a Levantine amphora (or storage jar) were uncovered, bearing an inscription on the shoulder, between neck and carination. Although the object was studied at the time of its discovery, it has since undergone meticulous restoration, providing an opportunity to re-evaluate both the archaeological and epigraphic data. This analysis offers some insights into the commercial interactions at the dawn of the Iron Age between the still developing Nuragic civilisation and its Levantine counterparts.

Keywords: Phoenician Amphora; Levantine Storage Jars; S'Arcu 'e is Forros; Long-Distance Trade; Nuragic Culture; Iron Age; Phoenician Inscription.

The site of S'Arcu 'e is Forros, located in Villagrande Strisaili (NU), occupies a crucial position along the ancient routes connecting Ogliastra to the Gennargentu mountains. The archaeological excavations carried out at the site have brought to light artefacts of various origins and cultural provenances, making it a key location for understanding the interactions between different ancient cultures in Sardinia. As a matter of fact, this site has been the focus of numerous excavation campaigns since the 1980s, revealing a rich archaeological context that sheds light on the region's complex past. A particularly significant discovery was made during the 2011 excavation season, when several fragments of a Levantine amphora with an inscription were uncovered and have since been restored and analysed.

This article revisits this find, offering a comprehensive re-evaluation of both the archaeological context and the epigraphic data. Through a detailed examination of the amphora in detail, this work aims to provide new insights into the commercial and cultural exchanges between the late Nuragic civilisation and its Levantine counterparts, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of Mediterranean interactions at the dawn of the Iron Age.[1]

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Fig. 1. Satellite image of S'Arcu 'e is Forros site (re-elaboration by E. Dirminti from ©Google Earth).

1. The Archaeological Context of S'Arcu 'e is Forros[2]

The archaeological site of S'Arcu 'e is Forros, near Villagrande Strisaili (NU), in central-eastern Sardinia, along the routes linking Ogliastra and the Gennargentu mountains, has been the subject of several excavation campaigns since the 1980s, promoted by the SABAP – *Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Sassari e Nuoro*.[3] The research carried out has revealed an extensive archaeological area of several hectares (Fig. 1), which includes a number of monuments characterised by a variety of architectural features already found in similar Bronze Age settlements in Sardinia, particularly in the Nuoro area (for example, Esterzili - Domu de Orgia, Bitti - Romanzesu, Dorgali - Serra Orrios).

Among the buildings found during the archaeological investigations, two temples that are considered to be *megaron* can be briefly mentioned. Both structures are characterised by a longitudinal development

2   The author of this section is Enrico Dirminti.

3   Fadda 1991; 1992; 1997; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2015; Salis-Tatti 2021.

with a kind of almost circular entrance hall, which was added as a result of the renovation of the monuments. There is also a sector that was probably used for smelting and processing minerals from the surrounding areas. In particular, two circular rooms, located next to each other, feature small entrances defined by stone slabs that run through the depth of the wall.[4]

The most recent excavations have focused on the central-eastern sector of the area, where at least two groups of rooms, arranged around an uncovered central space, have been brought to light, following the insula model.[5] Comparisons for both groups can be found in other Nuragic settlements on the island, including, for example, the settlement of Sa Sedda 'e sos Carros in the territory of Oliena.[6] Insula 2 was the focus of the excavation campaign conducted between 2010 and 2011, during which three of the twelve rooms arranged around a paved, open courtyard were investigated.[7]

Additional investigations were carried out in the area in 2016-2017, which partially uncovered a large stepped area to the west of the insula.[8] A stairway to the north follows the natural elevation and provides access to the stepped area. The space at its base is enclosed by a wall structure with at least three passages. A comprehensive study of this sector will help to confirm several working hypotheses regarding its intended function. Rooms 2, 3, and 4 of Insula 2 do not directly face the central courtyard but are connected to it by a vestibule accessed by a lower step. Excavations in this area in 2010-2011 revealed three storerooms, the presence of which underscores the significant economic, political, and social role of the site within its broader territorial context.[9]

In Room 2, to the north, two distinct hoards were identified. The first, located near the entrance to the room,[10] contained mainly locally produced iron and bronze artefacts, with some allogenic items, including a bronze *hydria* handle of Greek or Magna Graecia origin.[11] Hoard no. 2, in contrast, was found in a large ceramic vessel under the paved floor.[12] The third hoard was discovered in Room 4, in a niche on the east side, and included foreign materials such as two jugs with decorated surmounting handle and palmette motifs.[13] As for Room 2, the 2011 excavations identified a hearth in the centre of the circular room with a bench on the NE side. With regard to the material finds, in addition to fragments of askoid jugs and *ollae* with short cylindrical collars, fragments of bronze objects (chisels, axes), copper pans, a few fragments of bucchero and numerous sherds of a transport amphora (or storage jar) of Levantine origin were found in the layer above the paved floor;[14] the amphora bears a Phoenician inscription on the shoulder, between the rim and the carination.

This important artefact, already studied at the time of its discovery,[15] has recently been reassembled after a careful restoration, thus offering the opportunity to reinterpret both the archaeological and epigraphic data.

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4   Fadda 2012b, pp. 23-25.

5   Fadda 2012b, pp. 37-49 and pp. 49-55.

6   Salis 2015.

7   Fadda 2012b, pp. 49-55.

8   Salis - Tatti 2021, pp. 14-28.

9   Fadda 2012a, pp. 207-224, Fadda 2012b, pp. 56-80.

10   Fadda 2012a, pp. 207-209.

11   Salis 2016, p. 235.

12   Fadda 2012a, pp. 209-217, Salis - Tatti 2021, pp. 9-12.

13   Fadda 2012a, pp. 217-224.

14   Fadda 2012a, p. 205, Salis - Tatti 2021, p. 10.

15   Garbini 2012, pp. 227-234.
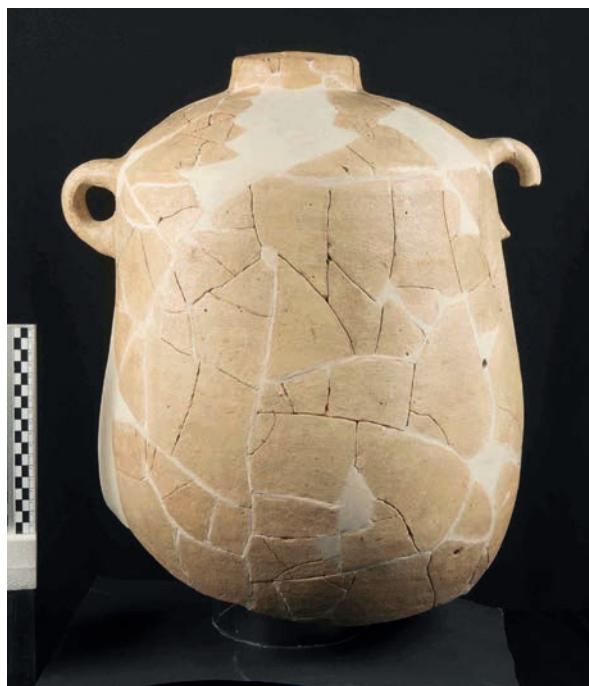
Fig. 2. Photo of the amphora from S'Arcu 'e is Forros, after restoration (photo by S. Sechi; *Italian Ministry of Culture - Archive Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Sassari e Nuoro*).
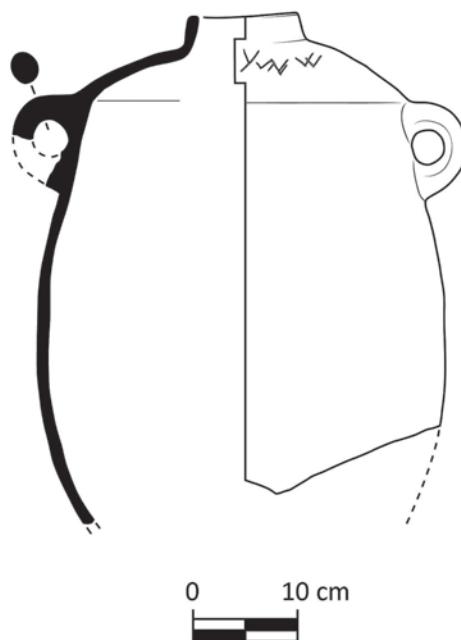
Fig. 3. Drawing of the amphora from S'Arcu 'e is Forros (drawing by A. Fresi and N. Lutzu, re-elaboration by A. Sanavia).

2. Preliminary Notes for a Morpho-Functional Analysis of the Phoenician Storage Jar from S'Arcu 'e is Forrus[16]

The autoptic examination of the amphora (Fig. 2)[17] allows us to make some very preliminary observations on the morphology and fabric, in order to propose some tentative suggestions on the provenance and possible dating, pending the publication of the analysis results.[18]

The amphora has a preserved height of c. 40 cm and a maximum width of c. 38 cm; the maximum diameter is in the lower half of the vessel.

An initial macroscopic analysis of the clay has shown that it has a compact, not very porous consistency, with a homogeneous colour that can be defined as very pale brown (Munsell Soil Chart 10YR7/3), with grey inclusions (predominant) and a few red ones. The outer surface is pinkish in colour (Munsell Soil Chart 7.5YR7/4). The inner surface, including the inner part of the neck, shows considerable traces of a dark grey coating (Munsell Soil Chart 10YT4/1); this is a patina that may be the result of an attempt at waterproofing, or it may be an effect of the firing of the vessel.

Morphologically, this transport amphora, or storage jar, belongs to a bellied, wide model, with the maximum diameter shifted to the lower half of the vessel (Fig. 3). It is a type defined as bag-shaped, char-

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16   This section was written by Tatiana Pedrazzi.

17   The autoptic examination was carried out by the author at the warehouses of the Centre for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage of Li Punti (SS), in August 2022.

18   Some preliminary analyses were carried out by Chiara Colombo, Maria Catrambone, Giulia Morabito, and Elena Possenti in a joint work between the CNR-ISPC and the University of Milan. The publication of the analysis results is forthcoming.

acterised in this case by a convex shoulder marked by a carination: the shoulder is short (approximately 1/9 of the overall height), which distinguishes this morphological type from other bag-shaped models, which typically feature a broader shoulder. The neck is short, straight, vertical, with a simple rim, and is set on the shoulder with a slightly marked transition point; the internal opening, i.e. the width of the mouth, measures approximately 9 cm, while the overall diameter at the rim is about 11 cm. The vertical, protruding handles with a subcircular opening (3x3 cm) have their upper connection positioned on the carination that marks the transition between the shoulder and the belly. Also relevant to a morphological analysis is the slight tapering below the shoulder and the handles. It should further be noted that the absence of the base prevents a more precise typological attribution, as some amphorae with a broadened bottom profile have a rounded base, while others feature a narrowing of the end of the base. The preserved part of the amphora from S'Arcu 'e is Forrus does not allow us to define precisely the original shape of the base.

Moving on to examine possible morphological comparisons, a morpho-typological analysis allows us to rule out the possibility that this amphora belongs to a Western type. For instance, when comparing this amphora with examples of the Ramon type T-1.1.1.1., a Carthaginian production from the 7th to early 6th century BCE,[19] it becomes clear that the rounded, collar-like rim characteristic of type T-1.1.1.1., along with the notable absence of a neck in the Ramon type, suggest that the amphora from S'Arcu 'e is Forrus does not conform to the aforementioned type.

Further examination of morphological comparisons within the central-western Mediterranean reveals another type with some similarities in body profile, namely Ramon type T-10.1.1. Produced in the Strait of Gibraltar area in the mid-8th century BCE and attested in the necropolis of San Montano in Ischia, this type has a broader and more rounded shoulder, along with a more elongated body profile. In addition, the rim is also different in this case.[20] Consequently, the typological attribution to Ramon type T-10.1.1 must also be excluded. Finally, the presumed morphological affinities with the Ramon amphora type T-13.2.1.1. are limited solely to the body profile.[21] In this Ramon type, however, the shoulder is shorter, and the neck is completely absent; the handles are also morphologically different from those of the amphora from S'Arcu 'e is Forrus (the handles in T-13.2.1.1. are positioned higher up).

The morpho-functional characteristics of our amphora, on the other hand, make it more comparable to certain morphologies of Levantine production dated to the Iron Age.[22]

Two types, characterised by a slightly carinated shoulder – one with a more elongated profile and the other with a broadened one – were widespread in the northern Palestinian area, between Galilee, the Jezreel Valley, and the Palestinian coast, during Iron II. In general, the amphora with the maximum diameter positioned in the lower part of the body does not appear in the Levant until the beginning of Iron II, that is, in absolute terms, from the late 10th or early 9th century BCE. Consequently, the amphora from S'Arcu 'e Is Forrus cannot be attributed to the Early Iron Age (Iron I or Early Iron Age) but rather falls within a chronological framework that can be generally defined as Iron II.

In the Levantine repertoire, the "transport" jar TJ-1 identified by Lehmann *et alii*[23] has a rounded and slightly carinated shoulder, that is very similar to the shoulder of our amphora. The body profile of TJ-1, however, is cylindrical, more elongated, and not bag-shaped; furthermore, the shoulder is more convex and

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19   Ramon 1995, fig. 1, p. 349; cat. n. 1.

20   Ramon 1995, fig. 108, p. 460; cat. nn. 389-390.

21   Ramon 1995, fig. 128, p. 487; cat. nn. 525-526.

22   Compared to the discussions held at the 10th International Congress of Phoenician and Punic Studies in Ibiza/Eivissa in October 2022 (currently being published in the congress proceedings), the observations presented here provide an updated perspective and propose a somewhat revised interpretation.

23   Lehmann *et al.* 2022, fig. 3, pp. 47-49.

the neck much shorter, compared to our jar from Sardinia. Other jars ascribed to type TJ-1 by Lehmann *et alii* have also been found in Cyprus (Salamis) and Egypt; this type (TJ-1), according to Lehmann *et alii*, dates to the Late Iron Age IIA.

Observing the storage jars attested in Tyre, two jars from Stratum IX of the excavations by Patricia Bikai[24] provide a useful comparison,[25] even if the morphological model is partially different from that of the amphora found in Sardinia; indeed, storage jar n. 12 published by Bikai[26] has a more pronounced narrowing under the shoulder, while storage jar n. 13 has a more curved shoulder than our Sardinian specimen. Stratum IX at Tyre corresponds, in terms of absolute chronology, to the first half of the 9th century.[27]

As far as Tyre is concerned, a similar jar is also attested in Stratum IV, the end of which is placed around the middle of the 8th century BCE. This jar (Fig. 4:a)[28] has a body profile similar to that of our specimen from Sardinia, although the latter is more bellied and expanded.

Thus, with reference to the Tyrian documentation (from the island), comparisons seem to belong to the Late Iron Age (Tyre Str. IV) and the Middle Iron Age (Tyre Str. IX). Also in the necropolis of al-Bass, a few storage jars with a baggy profile, published by F. Nuñez, seem to bear some resemblance to our amphora: in a first example considered (U237-1), however, the shoulder is wider, while the other specimen (U159-1), which is more closely comparable for its body profile, unfortunately lacks the neck and the rim.[29]

Turning to an analysis of storage jars from Galilee, some comparisons come from Tell Keisan, particularly among the jars uncovered in a small storage space (Locus 621) within a four-room dwelling in Level 7. This morphological type is characterised by a low, straight neck, a narrow base (usually with a bulbous bottom), and, most notably, a bellied shape with the maximum diameter positioned below the shoulder. It represents a development (with the maximum diameter pointed downwards) of the earlier Iron I jar, which had a slightly carinated shoulder.[30] A jar from Level 7 (Fig. 4:b)[31] is comparable to the amphora from S'Arcu 'e is Forrus, although it is difficult to compare the lower part of these vessels, since in the jar found in Sardinia lacks the base completely. Level 7 of Keisan has been dated by the excavators to the first half of the 9th century BCE. The parallels from Keisan, however, have a slightly less curved, more carinated shoulder: this same type, with a more clearly carinated shoulder, is also attested in the necropolis of Amathus (Loures) in Cyprus.[32]

Other comparisons from Iron Age Palestinian assemblages are found, e.g., in Lev. VII of Tel Mevorakh.[33] The jar from Mevorakh Lev. VII (contemporary with Keisan Lev. 8) provides an earlier comparison for our amphora from Ogliastra region. According to the proposed chronology, the Mevorakh specimen dates from the Iron IIA period, approximately the end of the 10th century BCE. Other significant comparisons, dated to the Iron II, come from Hazor, in Galilee (Fig. 4:c-d); these specimens from Hazor appear

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24   Bikai 1978, pl. XXI, nn. 12-13.

25   Bikai includes these amphorae, as well as many others of even more diverse shapes, in type SJ9, which is very broad and inclusive.

26   Bikai 1978, pl. XXI, nn. 12-13.

27   Núñez 2021; in press.

28   Bikai 1978, pl. XIV, n. 16 (storage jar n. 74111/166). The fabric of the Tyre specimen has a light red colour (Munsell Soil Chart 2.5YR6/8), with a grey core.

29   Tyre al-Bass cemetery: Núñez 2021, fig. 3A, U237-1 with a larger shoulder, and U159-1, very similar, although the neck is missing.

30   The Early Iron Age prototype corresponds to Type 5-5 in my typology: see Pedrazzi 2007. In particular, the storage jars from Level 9a-b at Tell Keisan are more elongated and less bellied.

31   Briend – Humbert 1980, pl. 50: 7 (storage jar no. 2966, with a brown fabric with a grey core, and white and brown grits).

32   Βιολάρης – Στεφανή 2017, fig. 10:γ.

33   Lehmann 2015, fig. 2.1.2., n. 7 (p. 116).

to be closely comparable with the amphora from S'Arcu 'e is Forrus, for the profile of the shoulder, the short neck, the shape of the handles and the lower part of the vase.[34] A good comparison for this bag-shaped jar storage model also comes from Dor (Area D2, phase 8c).[35]

The even more bellied and somewhat less elongated bag-shaped type, with a greater widening coefficient, as in the example from Tel Mevorakh,[36] is represented by specimens that were probably less adapted for transport but rather used in the context of domestic storage and short-distance transport. Other comparisons of this more bellied and less elongated type[37] come from Tell Abu Hawam on the Palestinian coast;[38] from Taanach;[39] from Tell Yoqneam (stratum XIV);[40] and from elsewhere.

Ultimately, the morphologically most significant comparisons come from Hazor (Fig. 4: c-d), dating from at least the early 9th century BCE, with some specimens possibly earlier. However, this type is probably attested until the mid-8th century BCE, as evidenced by the specimen from Stratum IV at Tyre. In any case, it is an elongated, bag-shaped type with a short neck which, in addition to these important morpho-functional characteristics, is notably marked by a lack of standardisation. In general, it is characteristic of the Iron II phase in the southern Levant, particularly in the region between Tyre and Northern Galilee.[41]
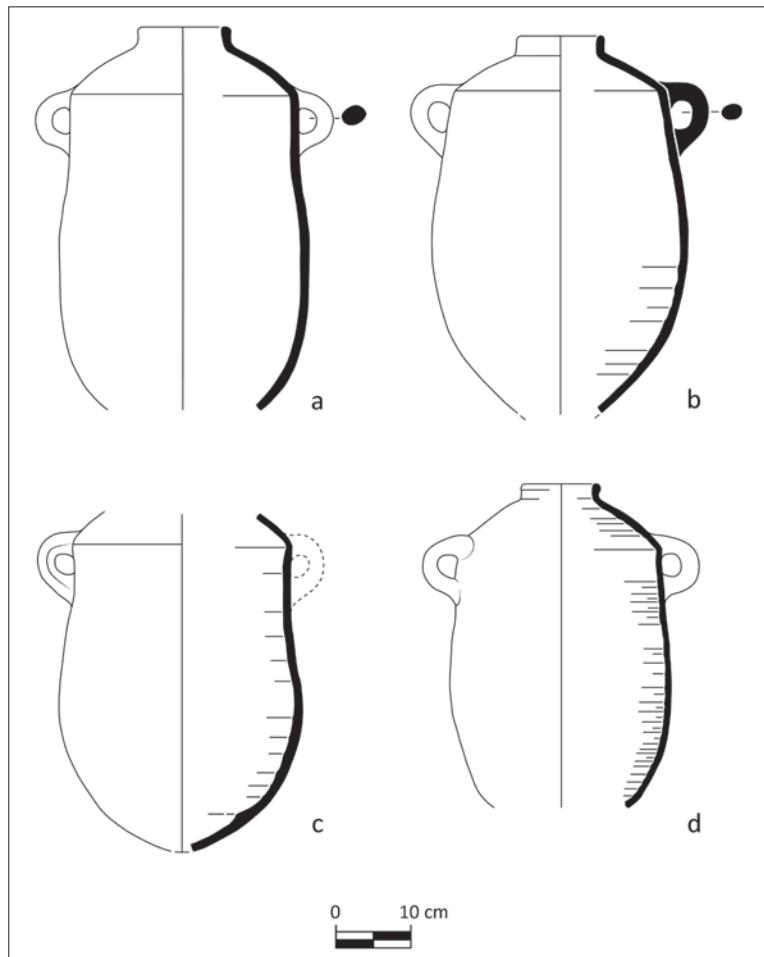
Fig. 4. Parallels from the Levant: (a) storage jar from Tyre, Stratum IV, from Bikai 1978, pl. XIV:16; (b) storage jar from Tell Keisan, Level 7, from Briend – Humbert 1980, pl. 50:7; (c-d) storage jars from Hazor, Strata X-IX, (c) from Yadin et al. 1961, pl. CCXI:2; (d) from Yadin et al. 1961, pl. CLXXII:11; see also Pedrazzi 2007, fig. 3.83: b-c, Type 16-3, Subtype 16-3-1; re-elaboration of the figure by A. Sanavia.

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34   Yadin et al. 1961, pl. CCXI: 1-2 from Str. X-IX; pl. CLXXII:11 from Str. Xb.

35   Mazar 2015, pl. 1.1.17, n. 4; Mazar 2015, pl. 1.1.17: n. 4, from Gilboa 2001. Pl. 5.62:12, Dor, Area D2, phase 8c.

36   Pedrazzi 2007, fig. 3.77.

37   Pedrazzi 2007, fig. 14-4.

38   Hamilton 1934, fig. XXIII: 23.

39   Rast 1978, fig. 34:1.

40   Ben Tor et al. 2005, fig. II.30:7.

41   Lehmann 2015, p. 117.

Fig. 5. Detail of the upper portion of the amphora (photo by S. Sechi; Italian Ministry of Culture - Archive *Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Sassari e Nuoro*).

Fig. 6. Detail of the inscription on the shoulder (photo by S. Sechi; Italian Ministry of Culture - Archive *Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Sassari e Nuoro*).

3. The Phoenician Inscription[42]

The restored amphora bears an inscription on the shoulder, of which at least 21 letters are preserved, engraved after the firing of the vessel (Fig. 7). The missing section does not allow for a complete reconstruction of the text, whose script and language were classified as Philistine when the amphora was yet to be restored – except for a three-letter fragment considered to be in Phoenician script, whose characters were read as YŠ.[43] The current restoration, however, reveals a text written entirely in Phoenician letters, which may have originally been continuous, but is now interrupted by several lacunae due to the fragmentation of the vase. The inscription probably begins with the relative particle 'Š, followed by a verb with the prefix Y- (Fig. 5): this is to be interpreted as the prefix of the simple imperfect or of a causative perfect (yifil) or, finally, of a reflexive-passive imperfect (nifal). I have assumed that this was the beginning of the inscription, given the free space that precedes it; I therefore propose that the pronoun refers to the object itself, i.e. the amphora (and its contents), according to a type of formula that is well attested, especially in dedications.[44] However, the reading of the verb, the penultimate letter of which is unidentifiable, is problematic: it can be interpreted either as M or as Š, the engraving of which, in both cases, seems to have slipped through the craftsman's fingers. Reading YMKR, I identify the verbal root *mkr* meaning "to sell",[45] the third person singular of the nifal imperfect of "to be sold"; followed by the preposition L- "to", "for", and the proper name 'BDSKN ('Abdsakōn) (Fig. 6); the presence of '*ain* as the first sign of the name is hardly visible, but seems very likely after an inspection of the inscription. The phrase would mean: "(This is what) is/will be sold to 'Abdsakōn". The name 'BDSKN "servant of God Sakōn" (a known but rare deity)[46] is attested in five Phoenician inscrip-

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42   This section was written by the late Maria Giulia Amadasi.

43   Garbini 2012, pp. 227-232.

44   Consider, for example, the 7th-century BCE dedication to Reshep from Paleokastro (Cyprus), RÉS 1214: see Yon 2004, no. 1143 (and references).

45   Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, pp. 625-626, s.v. *mkr l*.

46   Lipiński 1995, pp. 176-179 cites a Sidonian *Ab-di-siku*[*ni*?] of the 7th century BCE: see note 422, pp. 176-177.

tions, one from Egypt (Abu Simbel), one from Ele-
phantine, the others from Carthage.[47] According to
this interpretation, the inscription would indicate
the recipient of the amphora. The alternative read-
ing of the verb as YŠKR also gives an uncertain
meaning. The root *škr* occurs only once in Phoe-
nician with the meaning "to recruit" in the Kula-
muwa KAI 24 inscription ("I recruited against him
[the king of the Adanese] the king of Assyria").[48]

It could have the connotation of "give on
rent, in use" (Hebrew *śkr*). Again, to make a plausi-
ble sense and an acceptable construction, the verb
should be conjugated in the nifal and the expres-
sion interpreted as: "(This is what) is/will be rent-
ed/given in use to 'Abdsakōn".

If, on the other hand, the verbal root is
identified as the equivalent of the Hebrew *škr* "to
be drunk", in the piel (intensive-factitive) "to get
drunk", then the sentence would have to be in-
terpreted quite differently; moreover, the reading
would also have to be modified: the character in-

Fig. 7. Inscription in Phoenician characters, upper view (photo
by E. Dirminti).

tended as L would have to be the half of the irregular circle of an *'ain*, initial of the noun 'Abdsakon, which
would become the direct object of the verb.

The phrase, to be read ʾŠ YŠKR 'BDSKN, would mean: "(This is that) which will make drunk/makes/
has made drunk (?) 'Abdsakōn", with reference to the contents of the jar. The last word readable on the side
of the vessel (see below) seems difficult to connect with this possible interpretation, which instead seems
appropriate in relation to a wine jar, even though it expresses a tone never attested in Phoenician contexts.[49]

This is followed by the two characters ʾŠ. Attributed to an individual, they could identify him as be-
longing to a community: 'Abdsakōn would be designated as "man of" followed by a toponym, according to
a formula commonly used to express ethnonyms in Phoenician and Punic context.[50] The identification of
the possible toponym, however, is completely uncertain due to the break in the text: two letters NḤ (Fig. 7,
bottom) and traces of a preceding sign remain, which in turn are preceded by a break that may contain two
or at most three characters. This is followed by a large gap follows which makes it impossible to know if and
how the text continued.

Among the toponyms known so far,[51] most of which belong to North African places, the only one
I known of that contains the sequence -NḤ- is TḤPNḤS, which designates Daphne, today's Tell ed-Daf-

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47   See Benz 1972, p. 162 for the occurrences: Abu Simbel: CIS 112a; Elephantine: Krug 41; Carthage: CIS 3290.4 and 5969:
Cahiers de Byrsa X, 13. For Abu Simbel, with revised readings, see Schmitz 2012, pp. 32-42.

48   Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, p. 1135, s.v. škr1, which is the sole example in the epigraphy.

49   Cf. e.g. the relationship between the symposium and the inscription attested by the famous Nestor's Cup (albeit in quite dif-
ferent patterns); see Valerio 2017.

50   A frequent example is ʾŠ KTY "man of Kition", see e.g. ʾŠ KTY "man of Kition', CIS I, 9; KAI 57; CIS I, 117, 5997 etc. (see
Filigheddu 2006 [2007], p. 180).

51   Filigheddu 2006 [2007]; Bron 2014.

fānah, in Egypt,[52] in a Phoenician papyrus from Saqqara,[53] a letter dated in the 6th century BCE, in which the "gods of Taḥpaḥnes" are mentioned. The proposed rearrangement is completely conjectural: in particular, after the Ḥ engraved on the amphora, the surface, although small, does not seem to show any traces of another letter; the fragment of a stem preceding the Ḥ cannot be identified with certainty as a letter, but it is compatible with the lower stem of a *pe*.

This is therefore rather weak evidence to link the amphora graffito to an Egyptian Phoenician environment present in settlements in the West.

After a large gap in the surface, the reconstructed piece seems to show a group of only three visible signs, some of which are also of uncertain interpretation (Fig. 7, left). The first could be G (if the curved stroke is not closed); on the other hand, R (if the curved stroke is closed) or (more unlikely) D, given the length of the stem; R or D would follow again; and the last character is definitely Š. One possible reading is GRŠ, a verb that some have identified on the famous Nora stele[54] with the meaning of "to reject", "to expel",[55] although its identification on the stela is questionable.[56] However, the mark on the amphora appears to be closed by a horizontal stroke, which would allow the letter is *reš*. If, therefore, the first character is R, and the second D, as seems likely, the three letters, to be read RDŠ, do not appear to correspond to any known meaning.

However, the root DRŠ "to care, to research, to inquire" is well known and attested also in Punic;[57] but the length of the stems of the characters does not support this reading, nor does its assumption help to understand the overall meaning. The possible isolated verb that concludes the inscription, therefore, does not offer any means of clarifying its content; as a mere suggestion, we could interpret it as an imperative, which would indicate either that the object should not be stolen from ʿAbdsakōn, if he had bought or received it (reading GRŠ), or that ʿAbdsakōn, having obtained it or needing to obtain it, should take care of it (reading DRŠ).

It can therefore be transcribed as follows (the underlined letters are uncertain):

ʾŠ Y<u>M/Š</u>KR L ʿBDSKN ʾŠ [. .(.)] .ḤN[--------] GD/R/Š

As a highly tentative hypothesis, I propose the following possible reading of the graffito:

1. Reading YMKR or YŠKR (= Hebrew ŚKR "to recruit", "to take delivery of") and GRŠ ("to reject"): "(This is what) will be/is sold/assigned to/borrowed from ʿAbdsakōn, originally from [Taḥpa]nḥ[es] .... [Not] to be carried away! (obj. the amphora ???)// Take care (of it) (subj. ʿAbdsakōn; obj. the amphora???)".
2. Reading ŠKR (= heb. ŠKR "get drunk") and the last three uncertain letters: "(This is what) will/does make drunk/has made drunk ʿAbdsakōn, originally from [Taḥpa]ḥn[es ... ???"

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52   Near Pelusium, south-east of Port Said. The ancient city is also mentioned in the Bible, see Koehler – Baumgartner 1958: 65-66, s.v. Taḥpanēs; the stronghold would date back to Psammeticus I (reigned c. 662-610 BCE).

53   Aimé-Giron 1940; KAI 50.

54   KAI 46; Mosca 1917 with earlier bibliography; Puech 2020, p. 318.

55   See e.g. Krahmalkov 2000, p. 144, s.v. G-R-Š (not listed in Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995: 236 where a Moabitic attestation (Mesha Stele) is given).

56   Other readings and word divisions have been proposed: see Casti 2019.

57   Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995: 262 s.v. drš.

3.1 *Form of the Marks*

In accordance with the amphora type, the letters of the inscription exhibit archaic forms. The limited number of marks, compared to the entire alphabet – particularly the absence of letters with a characteristic development, e.g. Z, Q, and T – as well as the execution as a graffito, although accurate, do not allow us to propose a strict chronological range. However, the horizon to which the marks refer is remarkably clear, while the area of origin of the variety of writing remains uncertain.

The *alef*, which is very clear in two examples, has a well-established form, with a fairly elongated vertical stem and the two transverse strokes forming a rather narrow triangular loop. It is a form well attested in the 7th century BCE, but also known from the 8th century onwards.[58]

The *bet*, slightly tilted forward, finds comparisons in inscriptions dated to a broad period spanning from the mid- to late 8th to the second half of the 7th century BCE (Hassan Beyli,[59] Astarte of the Carambol, Malta CIS I, 123). The *dalet* and *resh* present no distinctive features, allowing for only a general dating. The *yod*, already almost horizontal in orientation, fits a type attributable to the mid-/late 8th to 7th century BCE (again Hassan Beyli, Malta, cup from Praeneste CIS I 164).

The letter identified as *ḥet* is difficult to classify because of its unusual shape. It has an irregular outline, in which the two vertical lines, right and left, instead of being parallel, converge at the bottom until they meet. The two parallel strokes connecting them, on the other hand, are considerably oblique, and the upper stroke does not seem to reach the right-hand stem; this is a feature that is present, for example, in the inscription of the so-called "medallion" of Carthage (KAI 73), dated to c. 700 BCE, but which J.C.L. Gibson places in the middle of the 8th century (perhaps too early a dating),[60] while the tomb where it was found (the Douimès necropolis in Carthage) is dated to the 7th century BCE.[61] More interesting, because it is rare in the Archaic period, is the type of K, which has on the left two transversal lines closed by a horizontal stroke. This is an uncommon form in the Archaic period compared to the more usual type with two smaller strokes diverging from the vertical stem: see, e.g., Kulamuwa, KAI 24, ca. 825 BCE; CIS I, 5 attributed to the 8th century BCE;[62] or the other variant, which is well attested in Phoenician inscriptions from the 8th century BCE in Anatolia: at Cineköy,[63] Incirli,[64] Karatepe,[65] where the *kaf* is characterised by a short downward curved stroke. In the East, the form attested on the amphora is occasionally attested on funerary stelae from Lebanon, in the Tyre area, which lack an archaeological context and are dated between the 8th and 7th centuries BCE on the basis of the script;[66] it is also present in the aforementioned Hassan Beyli inscription and, in a more schematic form with a much reduced triangle, on the inscribed ivory box found in Ur (KAI 29, dated to the mid-7th century BCE) and, in the West, on the inscription of the Astarte statuette from El Carambolo and on the later inscription from Malta, CIS I 123.

This shape is most likely a development of the first and oldest variant mentioned, but its origin remains unclear, while the earliest evidence does not seem to date beyond the mid-8th century BCE.

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58   In particular, see Astarte del Carambolo KAI 294, Hispania 14: chronology: Amadasi Guzzo 1993.

59   KAI 23; see also Lemaire 1983. The dating (as for the inscription from Karatepe) is slightly shifted earlier by Novák – Fuchs 2021.

60   Gibson 1982, no. 18: pp. 68-69.

61   Second half of the century according to Gras – Dubœuf, 2002.

62   Sznycer 1985.

63   Tekoğlu – Lemaire 2000. The chronology of the arrangement of the inscriptions is, instead, traditional. See, *contra*, Novák – Fuchs 2021.

64   Kaufman 2007.

65   Röllig 1999 = KAI 26.

66   Abousamra – Lemaire 2014, nos. 16, 23, 24, 29,40, 45. This type does not appear on the stelae published by Sader 2005.

Among the other letters attested, the supposed *mem* cannot be read with certainty; if it is accepted, its shape is not usual, because the zig-zag that forms its left side does not begin at the top of the stem, but somewhat further down. However, a similar shape is again attested on the inscription of the statuette of Astarte and the same tendency seems to be observed in the Hassan Beyli text. The letter *samek*, on the other hand, is not uncertain: indeed, it has been traced very precisely and it is of the vertical type, with parallel horizontal strokes intersecting the stem. It is also characterised by a lower horizontal stroke that is slightly longer than the others and slightly folded down at both ends, reflecting an individual variation. The type can be attributed with a fair degree of certainty to the 8th century BCE: from the 7th century BCE onwards the vertical stem is no longer intersected by the horizontal ones.[67] Finally, the šin with four broad lines is also of a type that was widespread in the 8th century BCE, but which survived into the 7th century.[68]

All these observations regarding the shape of the characters clearly point to a chronology for the inscription between the mid-8th and mid-7th centuries BCE. The type of the horizontal *samek* with the vertical stem intersected by the horizontal strokes suggests an early date, even around the mid-8th century BCE, while the *alef* and especially the *yod* indicate a later date, but do not, in my opinion, allow one to go beyond the last quarter of this same century.

Unfortunately, the actual meaning of the inscription remains uncertain. The text is completely different from the previously known inscriptions on amphorae, which indicate the ownership of the vessel and/or its contents. In the present example, a long text originally referred to the recipient or owner of the amphora, 'Abdsakōn – a rather rare name – to whom exhortations were addressed either about the ownership or the contents of the vessel, with a reference perhaps to the banquet tradition. The person mentioned was from a place that cannot be identified: if the restoration of the toponym TḤPḤNS is indeed correct, it would provide an indication of the role played in the West by the Phoenicians settled in Egypt in this early period. The clue, which ought to be mentioned, is however too tenuous to be taken into account in the reconstruction of the amphora's itinerary.

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68   Peckham 1968, Table VII.

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