

André Carneiro, Cláudia Teixeira and Paulo Simões Rodrigues
(Editors)

An Empire of many faces



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INTRODUCTION

The volume titled *An Empire of many faces* is a direct result of the activities within the project *BioRom – Rome our Home. The (Auto)biographical Tradition and the Formation of Identity(ies)*, specifically its task 3, focused on the problem of regional and local identities.

The various papers that compose it present case studies that, as a whole, reinforce the idea that the construction of cultural identities in the provincial and local environments was based on a set of relationships and dynamic negotiation processes, both in the time(s) and space(s) where Roman culture encountered other cultures. Following postcolonial studies – which brought to light a new way of looking at the relations between the occupying powers and the colonised peoples and, consequently, promoted the systematic distancing of the vision of Roman identity from an essentialist perspective – this volume's papers address the problem of the construction of identities in the context of the continuous and multiple interactions that determined the life of individuals and communities in the spaces where Roman culture became global, thus arguing for the complex character of these interactions and their consequences. We should never forget that the theoretical framework that fostered this new way of approaching the complex problem of the formation of identities on the provincial and local scales of the Roman world was supported by archaeological evidence and data relating to material culture. In this context, studies such as those by Greg Woolf (*Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*, Cambridge, 2000), Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (*Rome's Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge, 2008), Richard Hingley (*Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire*, Routledge, 2005) and Louise Revell (*Roman Imperialism and Local Identities*, Cambridge, 2008) have explored how material culture was a key element in the construction of Roman identity in the provinces. It is no coincidence that all the above titles, essential for setting new paradigms in the perspectives of these research fields, were published within eight years, at a time when the challenges of the third millennium have led us to think decisively about these issues.

Such studies, among others, highlighted the potential of Archaeology for the reconstruction of the mosaic of cultural processes that took place in the various parts of the Empire, insofar as the information provided by material culture makes it possible to understand and evaluate the complex processes – not only of cultural

assimilation, but also of resistance and counter-culture – that took place in the Roman world. These findings have also changed the role of Archaeology, which is no longer seen as a science that corroborates the grand systemic visions that historiography and literature have conveyed over the centuries, but as a science that raises new problems for History. In fact, if, on the one hand, the evidence gathered allowed us to prove that the dynamics between the dominators and the dominated peoples comprised a multitude of complex and non-homogeneous processes, on the other hand, it brought to light an unknown world, as it was ignored by most literary sources, which focused above all on the great historical facts and agents.

This new perception ran in parallel with the theoretical perspectives formed within post-colonialism, which shifted the analysis from the monolithic identities of colonial empires to the processes of acculturation that determined the way in which the Others perceived themselves and were perceived in the multi-relational framework of the societies they were part of. Archaeology was fundamental to this repositioning of perspectives regarding the debate on the Roman world and, consequently, to the development of other perspectives of analysis centred on the Other and on its revaluation. The redefinition of the Other, or rather of the various Others who inhabited the Empire, was made possible by two circumstances: firstly, because the archaeological record allows the inclusion of all segments of society and, for the first time in a consistent way, of ethnic minorities, gender elements, and the excluded and marginalised; secondly, because the archaeological record brought to our knowledge a body of material and non-material evidence that tells us “genuine stories” of what occurred in everyday social experiences, a subject until then excluded from the great historical and literary narratives. In this regard, it should be stressed that the “archive of time” that Archaeology aims to restore and understand includes not only the world of the living, but also the complementary funerary world, which shows the intention to integrate all the moments that express social practices.

However, if archaeological information has the potential to contradict the narrative of the *Big History*, revealing other aspects that might go against the established discourse, the truth is that, like any other record, the archaeological one should also be subject to a hermeneutic process, in order to produce knowledge that goes beyond models, typologies and listings. The great potential that archaeological information presents must be questioned in a thorough and creative way, so that material culture may reveal all the stories contained therein – not only in terms of the structural elements that have reached us, but also in what concerns the huge information that has been lost and can be recovered indirectly or by cross-referencing data.

For this reason, Archaeology itself has changed: today we are less interested in recovering great monumental structures, opulent constructions, or centres of power, and it has become equally or more relevant to recover the small spaces of life and death made of humble waste such as rubbish dumps, layers of dumping and debris,

capable of bringing us fundamental information to know objectively all the elements of historical reality. Thus, more and more "detached" from the narrative of the *Big History*, Archaeology progressively seeks to record the spaces where the agents who created the lively and dynamic societies lived and were buried.

Starting, therefore, from the assumption that the realities evidenced in relation to the construction of this Romanised world do not reveal a monolithic and watertight character, the papers in this volume examine contexts of interaction that highlight the multiplicity and flexibility of the processes, focusing, on the one hand, around the mediations intended to promote the supra-unification of Roman culture and, on the other, on the multiple responses that occur within the framework of these interactions.

The contributions in this volume express the immense wealth of approaches that Archaeology, starting from material data and confronting them with literary records, allows itself to use for the construction of knowledge. The collected papers show a wide diversity of data, from the reading of humble ceramic fragments to the iconographic and informative potential of coins, or even by the statues that remained, allowing us to compare the figures. They allow us to recover the role of the "people without history", understanding phenomena of counter-cultural resistance conveyed in the identity forms of claiming the past against the new powers or, on the contrary, how military and diplomatic treaties recognise otherness. The journey is long, starting from the pre-Roman world as a remaining substrate, passing through the forms of identity construction and the creation of new connections brought about by the Empire, considering the various expressions of the material culture found in dwelling places and funerary environments, until we end up with the identity connections in a time when the Empire was becoming a mere memory.

The variety of approaches expresses the way in which we can extract the full potential of material culture. In the first section ("The incorporation of the Other: images, representations and material culture in the dynamics of imperial development"), **Jesús Bermejo Tirado** gives voice to the "people without history", analysing the testimonies of peasant communities and identifying them as essential agents in the construction of territories.

We then move forward into history, but back to the past: we see how, in two areas, the claim to be the original is taken as an instrument of differentiation in frameworks of identity homogenisation. **Francisco Machuca Prieto** shows us how the *Phoenician past* is used as an instrument of statement within a community, similarly to what **Mauro Puddu** writes regarding the claim to memory among the communities of Roman Sardinia. These are two examples of how tradition can be used against the current of uniformitarian movements.

In contrast, we see how the iconography established by imperial programmes was used for the construction of a collective identity. We know well how the Empire masterfully used the power of images in order to create a common conscience, bringing together distant communities, blurring their own notions and seeking to create images and iconographies that worked as a reference for the collective. This is how we find in two studies the way certain forms were seen as vital for such strategy: **Aura Piccioni** shows us one of the most emblematic, for statuary has the power to bring us face to face with the key players who, from afar, ran the Empire. Bronze statues were the tangible power of the imperial administrators while, on another level, coins would be the example of the dissemination of economic domination and, so, **Helena Gozalbes García** and **Noé Conejo Delgado** analyse the way in which the provincial coinages reflect the conveyance of images in one of the most effectively devices used by imperial power.

The second section of the book (“The fragmentation of unity and the loss of identity cohesion: between texts and material elements”) deals with the subject of identity in moments of loss of imperial cohesion. The way in which different communities claim and bind themselves to new groupings is studied by **Pilar Diarte Blasco**, who confronts literary information with known material data, increasingly bringing us new identities, whether from a religious or a cultural point of view.

At another level of analysis, ceramics also captures the changes of the *Big History*: **Mónica Rolo**, **Ana Martins** and **André Carneiro** study the circulation processes of ceramics in different routes of the Lusitanian territory, as well as the ongoing socio-political phenomena that had repercussions on material culture. For a specific universe, the funerary world, **Mónica Rolo**'s contribution shows us how the last resting place is, frequently, the space for full praise and claim to each person's identities. Finally, and contrasting this field of the individuality of the deceased with the more conventional sphere of diplomacy and military strategy, the study by **Rodrigo Gomes** leads us to understand how the Other was seen, in a period in which, in a progressive and unstoppable way, the Roman Empire was becoming increasingly distant, and the stage was now taken by protagonists who were paving the way for the medieval world.

In short, we have a series of approaches that show how the various dimensions of material culture can be addressed in order to include the immense diversity of the past in historical and literary discourse, proving how Archaeology has become a privileged area of knowledge for showing us the great diversity of cultural and social identities.

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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTS AMONG THE PHOENICIANS IN ROMAN HISPANIA: THE ROLE OF PAST AND TRADITION

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the cultural and ethnic dimensions of the process of integration of the Phoenician communities of the south of the Iberian Peninsula into the structure of Rome, from the end of the Second Punic War in 206 BCE to the last quarter of the first century CE. Roman imperialism in Hispania clearly resulted in struggles over territory, power and cultural identity, but the archaeological and literary evidence points to a reality different than that underlying much of old narratives of opposition. Usually, those struggles have been conceptualized as Roman versus local identities, but not as a generational choices involving old and new practices. In the case of Phoenician communities of southern Hispania, the survival of cultural elements rooted in traditions prior to the arrival of Rome does not indicate an active and hostile resistance to Roman customs. On the contrary, this continuity is seen as a way of giving free rein to integration without renouncing the particularities, and putting emphasis on the past and the tradition. This phenomenon, equivalent to what is known as “symbolic ethnicity”, could be linked to the need for legitimation of the local elites, immersed in the complex game of identity oppositions and aggregations that held the ideological structures of Rome, rather accommodating concerning the integration of the conquered peoples.

Keywords

Ancestors, ethnicity, coins, Hellenism, *Gades*, Tyre, Melqart-Heracles, cultural continuities.

1. INTRODUCTION: ROMANIZATION, IDENTITIES AND GLOBALIZING FEATURES

In the last three decades ethnic and identity related subjects have attracted particular interest from scholars dealing with the Roman world. This issue may be explained to a large extent by the fact that long-held views concerning the traditionally so-called “Romanization” were gradually dropped in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. Classical approaches had contended that the process of Romanization resulted, as is well known, in a uniform culture throughout all the territories incorporated into the Roman Empire.

In the early 1990’s, however, leading research focused not only on the effects of Roman rule over conquered communities but also, and primarily, on ascertaining the role played by these very communities. Initially targeting the elites¹, researchers soon began to delve into other social layers including “subaltern” groups—harder to trace and less explored by historiography². Networks, contacts and bidirectional transformations at play in the Mediterranean from the third century BCE onwards were also the subject of analysis. Against this background, interest emerged and consolidated in the study of regional ethnic and cultural identities within the Roman Empire. Romanization itself, if this term may actually still apply³, can easily be perceived nowadays as a process of permanent and multidirectional social and identity change.

Identity and ethnic analyses in the Roman world remain, nonetheless, far from trouble-free. Despite their massive potential for contributing to an improved understanding of the social and cultural changes that took place as the process of province integration unfolded, the risk of applying a limited viewpoint that only celebrates diversity for its own sake exists, creating biased notions and essentialist constructs⁴. It must therefore be pointed out that just as Romanization cannot be interpreted in the traditional manner as a civilizing process, systematically considering any disruptive element to the ideal integration model as a successful instance of resistance and/or opposition to Rome from local populations is equally erroneous.

As opposed to both models, this paper defends the idea that the continuity of cultural elements going back to stages prior to the Roman period in the southern Iberian Peninsula does not necessarily involve an active and antagonistic resistance to Roman models. On the contrary, the process of ethnic revitalization noticed in the aforementioned territory from the arrival of Rome onwards, specifically amongst well-known Phoenician origin communities settled on the Mediterranean shore and

¹ See, e.g. *The Romanization of Britain: An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation* (Millett 1990), which was to become one of the first works on the subject.

² Webster 2001.

³ About this debate, e.g. Woolf 2014.

⁴ Pitts 2007.

around the Straits of Gibraltar, with the leading city of *Gades* (Fig. 1), may be interpreted as a means to propitiate their integration within the Roman world without renouncing their own cultural identities. These identities, which have a strong ethnic content, eventually became a source of legitimacy. In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that, usually, the memory of ancestors and the foundational stories have the function to express the identity and social cohesion of the group. The symbolic connection with the past, represented mainly through the figure of Melqart-Heracles, could have been used to enhance the legitimacy of the ancient Phoenician communities in the new Roman context.



Figure 1. The major cities of Phoenician origin of Hispania.

Indeed, not only did Phoenician communities in the Iberian Peninsula continue to exist after the arrival of the Romans, but they underwent a period of great cultural vitality and economic boom. The Phoenicians of what is today the southern coast of Spain continued to shape their own cultural and political destiny, at least for a couple more centuries, despite the impact of Roman rule. The Roman presence in Hispania clearly resulted in struggles over territory and identity, but archaeological and literary evidence indicates a reality quite different from that underlying narratives of civilization and stories of opposition. It must be recalled that the Roman world may well be considered “a structured system of differences that was highly differentiated, by region, class, social locale, age and gender among other dimensions of variability”⁵. Roman imperialism, already deployed in the western Mediterranean by the time of the Republic, eventually resulted in global rule over an increasingly interconnected

⁵ Woolf 1997: 341.

scenario where diverse ethnic identities overlapped between unity – “the global” – and diversity – “the local” – within a supple legal-political framework. In this context, the model which had already been tested by Hellenistic monarchies in the East promoted what may be called “diversity within unity”: under the cultural and ideological umbrella of ruling Hellenism in Rome an endless number of peoples and local communities strived –for the sake of their prestige and honour – to display older and more original traditions, be they real or putative⁶.

2. ROME AND THE PHOENICIAN COMMUNITIES IN HISPANIA

Available sources concerning Phoenician communities in Hispania report the gradual and intense political shift of these communities, especially their trading oligarchies, towards Rome’s interests already after the Second Punic War and the Roman victory over the Carthaginians. The *foedus Gaditanum* (206 BCE), known to us mostly through Cicero (Cic. *Balb.* 34)⁷, constitutes the best instance of this fact. This pact of alliance granted *Gades*, formerly the Phoenician city of *Gadir*, significant privileges including wide-ranging political and economic independence. Strabo claims that the city achieved massive prosperity thanks to its unrelenting adherence to Rome (Str. 3.1.8).

This early approach to Rome, however, does not seem to have involved any major cultural transformation. From an archaeological point of view, in the entire southern Peninsula significant changes are not attested until the change of era as has been pointed out even beyond the Phoenician context⁸. As a matter of fact in some places, such as the Roman-Republican necropolis of *Gades*, a sort of Phoenician revival has been noted⁹. The material record of other southern necropoleis, such as *Carmo* – in the Guadalquivir valley – and *Baelo Claudia*, shows deep cultural hybridity during the High Empire, resulting from interrelations between local and increasingly dominant Roman traditions¹⁰. Moreover, the city of *Malaca* is also known to have maintained a typically Phoenician urban layout by the time Strabo wrote and constituted a major port and market for North Africa and the Numidians (Str. 3.4.2). In addition, we are now in a position to claim that Phoenician trade thrived in the Atlantic and Mediterranean contexts in the second and first centuries BCE, as evinced by the rich Gaditanian and Phoenician amphorae record in Portugal’s Algarve, Gaul’s southern coast and Pompeii¹¹.

Furthermore, extensive data suggest the continuity of the neo-Punic language and script throughout southern Hispania. They both remained active up until the imperial

⁶ Cruz Andreotti & Machuca 2022.

⁷ See also López Castro 1991.

⁸ Keay 1992; Machuca 2019.

⁹ Niveau de Villedary & Martelo Fernández 2014: 170-171.

¹⁰ Jiménez 2008.

¹¹ Sousa 2017; Bernal-Casasola & Sáez 2019; Luaces 2021.

period according to the legends on coins minted in the Roman period in Phoenician mints such as *Gadir/Gades*, *Seks/Sexs*, *Malaka/Malaca* and *Abdera* (Fig. 2). This latter city minted coins up until the period of Tiberius with legends in the original Phoenician-Punic alphabet and Latin¹². The only mint whose coins featured exclusively Latin legends was *Carteia*, re-founded as *colonia Latina libertinorum* by the Roman Senate in the year 171 BCE (Liv. 43.3.1-4). In addition to this coin epigraphy, neo-Punic graffiti exist on fragments of Roman ceramics both on Campanian pottery and *terra sigillata* unearthed precisely in the cities of *Malaca* and *Sexs* dated to the second and first centuries BCE¹³. Further instances of Phoenician cultural continuity may be found on the iconography of coins, totally monopolized by the effigy of Melqart-Heracles on the obverses and related motifs on the reverses such as tuna fish, dolphins, bulls, altars, vines, wheat ears and various astral symbols¹⁴. Coins produced in Phoenician mints in the Iberian Peninsula, however, do not lack Roman elements either in terms of epigraphy or iconography which eventually resulted not only in remarkable instances of bilingualism – as may be noted on coins from *Abdera* – but also in what has been interpreted as “dual discourses”, especially in the case of *Gades*¹⁵.



¹² *RPC* I 124-125.

¹³ Machuca 2021: 163-164.

¹⁴ Mora 2007.

¹⁵ Chaves 2009.

Figure 2. Phoenician bronze coins from the Iberian Peninsula. A) *Gades* (200-101 BCE; Alfaro 1988, serie VI.A.1; CNH 86, 35): head of Melqart-Heracles with lion skin and club on the obverse, Punic legend *mp'1 / 'gdr* – “minted by *Gadir*” – on the reverse. B) *Malaca* (175-91 BCE; CNH 101, 14): neo-Punic legend *mlk'* and head of Chusor-Ptah/*Vulcanus with Phrygian cap* on the obverse, radiate head of Helios – Ba'al Hammon – on the reverse. C) *Sexs* (100-1 BCE; CNH 106, 23): bearded head of Melqart-Heracles on the obverse, prow of ship and neo-Punic legend *sk's* on the reverse. D) *Abdera* (14-37 CE; RPC I 125): TI. CAESAR. DIVI. AVG. F. AVGVSTVS with laureate head right of Tiberius on obverse, Latin legend ABDERA between the columns of a tetrastyle temple with two center columns in form of tuna fish and neo-Punic legend *'bdrt* in the pediment on the reverse. E) *Gades* (c. 19 BCE; Alfaro 1988, serie VII.A.1 = RPC I 85): head of Melqart-Heracles with lion skin and club on the obverse, Latin legend PONT. BALBVS with pontifical knife, *simpulum* and axe. Photographs: CER.es (<http://ceres.mcu.es>) – Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid, Spain).

In terms of religion, literary testimonies – e.g. Porphyry of Tyre's narration of the attack waged by King Bocchus of Mauretania (111-80 BCE) on the *Herakleion* in *Gades* – suggest that *Gades* essentially kept its ancestral cults and Phoenician ritual practices (Porph. *Abst.* 1.25). The rites performed in the temple of *Gades*, by the way, were closely linked to those of Tyre, the ancient metropolis¹⁶. Porphyry's narration, in which the Melqart-Heracles of the sanctuary of *Gades* manifests himself through dreams, is undeniably redolent – in terms of elements and structure – of the myth of the foundation of the city of Tyre reported by the Late Antiquity poet Nonnus of Panopolis Nonn. (40.423-539). Both legends describe an oneiric oracular revelation with the presence of a bird which is sacrificed of its own volition. Porphyry's passage reveals not only the existence in the temple of Melqart-Heracles in the Roman city of *Gades* of a mainly Phoenician ritual based on the narration of its founding myth – a replica of the founding myth of Tyre – but also the fact that this legend could have become consolidated already prior to the Hellenistic period, pointing at Melqart as the genuine founder of the city through the oracle, as in the case of Tyre¹⁷. It should be noted that various Greek and Latin writers in the Roman period, such as the aforementioned Strabo as well as Pliny, Diodorus Siculus and Pomponius Mela repeatedly refer to the Tyrian origin of *Gades* and the significance, prestige and antiquity of its temple dedicated to Melqart-Heracles (Str. 3.5.5; D. S. 5.20.1-3; Plin. 19.63; Mel. 3.6.46; App. *Iber.* 2). The recurrent reference to this topic from the Hellenistic period onwards indicates that the prominence of the temple

¹⁶ Ribichini 2000.

¹⁷ Álvarez 2014: 25-26.

remained intact under Rome's rule, as is also demonstrated by the fact that it was visited by eminent Roman figures such as Fabius Maximus Aemilianus or Julius Caesar (App. *Iber.* 65; D. Cass. 37.52.2; Suet. *Caes.* 7.1). On the other hand, the survival of the genuinely Phoenician foundation myth points out the importance among the Phoenician communities in Hispania of the link with the past, seen as a source of prestige.

It is therefore hardly surprising that despite having approached the Roman orbit from the onset, the Phoenician communities in the Iberian Peninsula under Roman rule were always keen to defend their cultural diversity and the signed terms of the respective *deditiones* which were unquestionably negotiated once those communities were subdued in the context of the end of the Second Punic War¹⁸. The revolt in Hispania in the year 197 BCE points exactly in this direction (Liv. 33.21.6-9). In this revolt took part, in a way that remains unclear, both *Malaca* and *Sexs* as well as *Carmo*, whose Phoenician background has been clearly stated¹⁹. The reason behind the rebellion rests on the dissatisfaction of the subdued populations of Hispania, including the Phoenicians, due to the abusive and unjust administration due to a lack of Roman planning in terms of political structuration and integration of the conquered lands. It was not a properly anti-Roman revolt but the result of Rome's failure to meet the expectations generated amongst communities and peoples who had supported Rome in the war against the Carthaginians. *Gades* constitutes, once more, a paradigmatic instance. Earlier, in 199 BCE, the city had staged an act directly linked to the defense of its full political autonomy by protesting before the Roman Senate at the presence in the city of a *praefectus* contrary to the terms of agreement by the *foedus* (Liv. 32.2.5). The complaint was accepted, and the Roman magistrate was removed without any further issues. Although these two episodes referred – the rebellion of 197 BCE and the *Gades*' demand – have a different nature, both were blatant attempts to preserve their identity, as far as possible, in a situation in which it had been challenged.

None of the above, however, must be interpreted as a lack of success of the integration process or open resistance against it. In fact, from a legal point of view, towards the end of the Republic and during the first century of the Empire, the Phoenician cities of the southern Iberian Peninsula, all *ciuitates peregrinae* except *Carteia*, which was a Latin *colonia*, permanently became *municipia*. This was fundamentally due to the support they showed Rome, and more specifically Caesar during the civil wars²⁰. *Gades*, for example, became a *Roman municipium* with full rights in 49 BCE, appearing in the sources as an *oppidum ciuium Romanorum* (Liv. Per. 110; Plin. 4.119). *Carteia* became a *municipium* under Augustus. Finally, the concession of *ius Latii*, thanks to the promulgation of Vespasian's famous *edictum* of

¹⁸ López Castro 1995: 95.

¹⁹ Belén Deamos et al. 2000.

²⁰ López Castro 1995: 243-251.

Latinity in 73-74 CE, must have led to the remaining Phoenician cities of the Iberian Peninsula becoming *municipia* with Latin rights. The best known and documented case is that of *Malaca*, thanks to the partial preservation of its *lex municipalis* on a bronze plaque, the *Lex Flavia Malacitana* (*CIL* II 1964).

At any rate, from a cultural point of view it would be more appropriate to talk about “silent resistances” a concept which includes both “dual discourses” and the phenomenon of hybridity. The so-called “silent resistance” is usually perceived as a means to reassert local ways. Nevertheless, this would not involve an explicit renunciation of the foreign culture which could be occasionally used by the colonized communities, particularly by their leaders, to attain power or to maintain it within the new order. The nature of such resistance is determined by the mechanisms of control and the power struggles that produce and reproduce inequality at all levels: rather than mere opposition to changes, resistance stems from daily practises and – unbalanced – negotiations between two or more involved groups. Power cannot be solely exercised through coercion and open violence, nor can resistance. Consequently, such “resistance” may assume different shapes other than violent response or cultural rejection, as suggested by several analyses dealing with the hybrid practices and transformations undergone by Roman material culture through the local interpretation in other historical contexts in the Mediterranean such as, for instance, Sardinia²¹.

Evidence therefore exists that integration within the Roman provincial world does not conform to one single model and cannot be explained in terms of unidirectional change. Romanization does not result in the overall replacement of ancient local cultures in the provinces with “Roman culture”, which was also never homogenous, but in the appearance of a new network of social and identity relationships. For this reason, Strabo’s claim that the Turdetanians “have completely changed over to the Roman mode of life” (Stb. 3.2.15) does not contradict his own words a few lines earlier where he stated that “these people became so utterly subject to the Phoenicians that the greater number of the cities in Turdetania and of the neighbouring places are now inhabited by the Phoenicians” (Stb. 3.2.13). This means that, in the time of Strabo – second half of the first century BCE – there were still in southern Hispania certain communities with distinctive cultural traits that could be identified as Phoenicians despite the fact that the Roman rule was already fully extended. The Roman phenomenon in the provinces occurs in a context of mutual cultural adjustments: the combination of their own and alien elements produces new categories of belonging, new and reformulated identities, with the ultimate purpose of adapting, uniting and creating legitimacy. It is not a minor matter that generally in the Roman world and throughout the Hellenistic framework, the legitimacy and prestige of a community often derive from cultural traditions and past and ancestral origins²².

²¹ Van Dommelen 2001.

²² Bickerman 1952.

3. PAST, TRADITION AND MEMORY: SOURCES OF PRESTIGE AND LEGITIMACY

The fact that these phenomena are highlighted does not cancel the power and deep significance of the process of cultural, political and legal integration attached to so-called “Romanization”, quite on the contrary, its complexity and distinct nature are even further exposed. In the context of the southern Iberian Peninsula, protocols of unity and diversity occur which eventually result – in the specific case of ancient Phoenician communities – in what has been branded as “a Phoenician way of being Roman”, that is, a particular form of integration based on local components stemming from the legitimacy attached to their historic past and prestige in the framework of Mediterranean Hellenism²³. A phenomenon comparable to “symbolic ethnicity”, which has also been described amongst Phoenician communities under Roman rule in the East²⁴. This type of ethnicity refers to the consumption and use of ethnic symbols – e.g. clothing, cuisine, music and dances, rituals, festivities – in circumstances that do not imply “committed” modalities of ethnic affiliation²⁵. It constitutes a nostalgic allegiance towards a cultural tradition which is perceived and experienced as one’s own without generating disruptions in the main culture or in the hegemonic identity framework, in this case, Rome.

Reports of Phoenician economic vigour, the fame of the temple of Melqart-Heracles in *Gades* and its great age or its links with Tyre date from the second century BCE onwards, already within the Roman period. These accounts could therefore respond to the wish of the Phoenician oligarchs in the cities to celebrate their position rather than reflect reality in the colonial period²⁶. Similarly, early dates are reported for several colonial foundations in the western Mediterranean, such as *Gades*, Carthage, Utica or *Lixus*, at times expressed in terms of competition²⁷. Defending a specific origin and ancestral cultural traditions must have been an exceptional form of gaining prestige within the complex framework of identity oppositions and aggregations that held the ideological structures of the *imperium romanum*. For example, in the Late Republic and High Empire placing monuments, festivals, zoomorphic representations and cult images on coins was a common way of defining local identities in such ways²⁸.

Thus, when entering the Roman orbit Phoenician communities in the Iberian Peninsula resorted to their origins to construct a common history and ethnic identity placing the figure of Melqart-Heracles and his civilizing attributes in a central position. The ultimate goal of the process of identity construction and/or

²³ Machuca 2019.

²⁴ Kaldellis 2019.

²⁵ Gans 1979.

²⁶ Álvarez y Ferrer Albelda 2009: 182.

²⁷ Presedo 1981.

²⁸ Kaldellis 2019: 687.

reformulation was to present themselves before the new ruler, Rome, as a people with a robust memory and rich history going back to the very city of Tyre, an emblem of their prestige and ancestry. It is at this point, in the second and first centuries BCE following the example set by *Gades*, when the aforementioned effigy of Melqart-Heracles appears on the obverse of numerous southern coins, minted even in locations whose origin may not be strictly considered Phoenician, but which were under Phoenician influence²⁹. The appearance of a “Phoenician identity” must therefore be located mainly in the Roman period, not earlier, when the city constituted the pivot in terms of identity³⁰. Additionally, this phenomenon may respond to the aspirations of these communities and of their elites to secure the best possible position in the relocation of power and social status within the Roman political system, flexible enough to incorporate provincial oligarchies into its network.

The *Cornelii Balbii* in *Gades* constitute the best possible instance. Lucius Cornelius Balbus Major, who had a close personal relationship with Caesar, became consul in the year 40 BCE, and his nephew of the same name was not only a *quaestor* in the *Uterior* province in 44-43 BCE under Asinius Pollio, but was eventually appointed proconsul in the times of Augustus³¹. During his office, Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor fought against the Garamantes, defeating them in the year 19 BCE for which he received a triumph (Plin. 5.36-38; *Acta triumph. capitolina* 37). He was also a *pontifex maximus*, as a group of commemorative coins minted in *Gades* reveal: the serie VII.A, typically featuring Melqart-Heracles on the obverse, shows genuine Roman ritualistic elements on the reverse and the Latin legend PONT. BALBVS, a clear instance of the above-mentioned “dual discourse”³².

Indeed, the recurrent image of Melqart-Heracles on Phoenician coins from Hispania emanates mainly from his quality as the founder of cities. His description as *archēgētēs* goes back to Phoenician tradition, even prior to the syncretism of Melqart and Heracles³³. A well-known passage in Strabo states that the oracle of Melqart in Tyre played a central part in what was known in the Hellenistic period as the legend of the foundation of *Gades* (Str. 3.5.5). Based on Strabo’s account Melqart could also have been the founder of *Sexs* and *Onuba*. Consequently, the myth of the origin, linked to Tyre and to the city’s main deity, Melqart, could act in the Roman period as an element of ethnic identity and memory, adding an element of prestige to the process of integration.

In the context of diverse ethnic identities in the southern peninsula, Rome’s political organization basically revolved around the *ciuitas* as the nucleus of administration. This approach had an unquestionably positive effect on the need for

²⁹ Arévalo & Moreno 2011.

³⁰ Ferrer Albelda 2013: 676-677.

³¹ Rodríguez Neila 2011.

³² Alfaro 1988, 153-154; *RPC* I 85-87.

³³ Bonnet 1988; Álvarez 2014.

legitimation of the elites of Phoenician tradition communities. At the same time, however, both in northern and southern Hispania, Rome would adopt strategies of control that vastly exceeded the scene of the *ciuitas*. In the first two centuries of Roman implantation the ethnic group, wherever affinity existed as well as an overall similar tradition, also became an established framework which contributed to filling gaps in the administrative network³⁴. The *Uterior* province, especially in coastal areas, was a territory where the Phoenician presence was still significant in terms of demography and culture by the change of era. Yet, the ethnic name “Phoenicians” is practically absent in the ethnic-geographical literature until the Late Republic. The most habitual name is *Bastuli* (Stb. 3.1.7; Plin. 3.8 and 3.19; Mel. 3.3; Ptol. 2.4.6), though sources also refer to other hybrid ethnonyms like *Blastophoenicians* (App. *Iber.* 56) and *Bastuli-Poeni* (Marc. 2.9). It has been suggested that “Tartessians” is also a designation with strong links to *Gades* and the Phoenician areas of the Strait of Gibraltar and lower Guadalquivir³⁵. The gradual implantation of Roman rule could have therefore triggered a series of joint identity strategies and mechanisms of self-recognition amongst Phoenician communities in the Iberian Peninsula based on their common past and history – including the ethnonym “Phoenicians” – which served as the main element of legitimation.

Instead of opposing “Roman identity” this new “Phoenician identity” was perfectly incorporated within the former. The defence of “Phoenicianness” must not be understood as a reaction against “Romanness” but as the clear expression of a “Phoenician way of being Roman”. The local re-elaboration of a common past to be defended with pride in Roman times constitutes, in our opinion, one of the reasons behind the long-term continuity of some Phoenician cultural traits in the southern Iberian Peninsula as those traits were used – either deliberately or not – in the construction and consolidation of an identity through which Phoenician-origin communities managed to maintain their ties with their past. Identity is not asserted against Rome but within Rome. Consequently, the Phoenician cultural traits which were preserved or even promoted could be nowadays considered elements of “symbolic ethnicity”. In an increasingly global Roman world fully immersed in the Hellenist ideological context, counting on one’s own past was a good, probably the best, tool to achieve legitimation and prestige. The instance of Peninsular Phoenician communities reveals that cultural contact, transformation and assimilation processes attached to Romanization did not necessarily result in the replacement of ancestral ethnic identities with a Roman identity. Instead, it indicates that the clearest outcome of the integration process is the emergence of a new identity that incorporates a variable amount of local elements. In this case, the local identity features both Phoenician and Roman elements and is therefore not alien to the global framework.

³⁴ Cruz Andreotti 2011.

³⁵ Álvarez 2009.

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