

Colonial Encounters in Ancient Iberia

PHOENICIAN, GREEK,
AND INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

EDITED BY MICHAEL DIETLER
& CAROLINA LÓPEZ-RUIZ



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The University of Chicago Press :: CHICAGO AND LONDON

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London
© 2009 by The University of Chicago
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Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-14847-2 (cloth)
ISBN-10: 0-226-14847-5 (cloth)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Colonial encounters in ancient Iberia : Phoenician, Greek, and indigenous relations / edited by Michael Dietler and Carolina López-Ruiz.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-14847-2 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-226-14847-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

I. Iberian Peninsula—Antiquities. 2. Phoenicians—Iberian Peninsula. 3. Greeks—Iberian Peninsula. 4. Tartessos (Kingdom)—History. I. Dietler, Michael. II. López Ruiz, Carolina.

DP44.C685 2009

936.6'02—dc22

2009017508

© The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

CONTENTS

Ex Occidente Lux: A Preface
Michael Dietler and Carolina López-Ruiz
vii

PART I *Theoretical Issues and Frameworks*

- ONE Colonial Encounters in Iberia and the Western Mediterranean:
An Exploratory Framework *Michael Dietler*
3
- TWO Colonial Relations and Social Change in Iberia
(Seventh to Third Centuries BC) *Joan Sanmartí*
49

PART II *New Perspectives on Phoenician and Greek Ventures on the Mediterranean and Atlantic Coasts*

- THREE Colonial Contacts and Protohistoric Indigenous Urbanism
on the Mediterranean Coast of the Iberian Peninsula
Maria Carme Belarte
91
- FOUR Phoenician Colonization on the Atlantic Coast of the
Iberian Peninsula *Ana Margarida Arruda*
113
- FIVE Greeks and the Iberian Peninsula: Forms of Exchange
and Settlements *Pierre Rouillard*
131

PART III	<i>Plant Resources, Agrarian Practices, and the Colonial Political Economy</i>	
SIX	Botanical and Archaeological Dimensions of the Colonial Encounter <i>Ramon Buxó</i>	155
SEVEN	Lumbermen and Shipwrights: Phoenicians on the Mediterranean Coast of Southern Spain <i>Brigitte Treumann</i>	169
PART IV	<i>The Question of Tartessos: A Debate Reframed</i>	
EIGHT	Phoenicians in Tartessos <i>María Belén Deamos</i>	193
NINE	Precolonization and Colonization in the Interior of Tartessos <i>Sebastián Celestino Pérez</i>	229
PART V	<i>Interrogating Colonial Texts and Imagined Landscapes</i>	
TEN	Tarshish and Tartessos Revisited: Textual Problems and Historical Implications <i>Carolina López-Ruiz</i>	255
ELEVEN	Iberia in the Greek Geographical Imagination <i>Javier Gómez Espelosín</i>	281
	Colonial Encounters in Ancient Iberia: A Coda <i>Michael Dietler and Carolina López-Ruiz</i>	299
	List of Contributors	313
	Index of Places	315

Michael Dietler and Carolina López-Ruiz

This volume offers the reader access to the most recent evidence and theoretical/interpretive perspectives guiding research on the complex series of colonial encounters that occurred in the far west of the Mediterranean during the first millennium BC. This was a colonial situation that not only transformed the Iberian Peninsula but also had significant implications for the entire history of the Mediterranean. Moreover, the vibrant multinational research front exploring these Iberian colonial encounters, which has expanded dramatically in recent years, holds valuable lessons for scholars working on similar issues in other parts of the Mediterranean and those working on colonialism more generally. Given these facts, and for reasons that are clarified further below, this book can lay claim to bringing new “light from the west” (as well as shedding new light *on* the west). This statement is more than a whimsical inversion of an old trope: it is an assertive claim of considerable significance in view of the traditional marginalization of the Western Mediterranean in classical studies, especially in the world of Anglophone academia.

The book began its life as an international interdisciplinary symposium convened at the Franke Institute of Humanities of the University of Chicago in November 2003. It was designed to transgress a variety of traditional disciplinary and political boundaries that have hampered a broader, more integrated understanding of the colonial history of ancient Iberia and of ancient Mediterranean colonialism more generally. The idea was to open a provocative conversation among a diverse mix of scholars who do not normally engage in dialogue. These included Spanish, Portuguese, French, American, and English archaeologists, historians, and philologists from disciplines such as classics, anthropology, and history working on such themes as Phoenician and Greek colonies in Iberia, indigenous Iberian societies, and the comparative anthropology of colonialism. As one Spanish scholar noted with amusement, a trip to Chicago was necessary for him to meet several colleagues from his own country for the first time. The original intention was to expand the comparative project even further by including scholars work-

ing on Roman colonization of the region as well. However, ultimately this seemed likely to prove unwieldy for an initial exchange, and it was decided that it would be more productive to defer consideration of this last, very different phase of the colonial encounter to a future symposium.

This volume represents the fruits of this effort to stimulate a fresh, cross-disciplinary engagement with the early history of colonialism in Iberia. But the book is also designed to present for the first time to an Anglophone audience a wealth of exciting new cutting-edge research that has generally remained hidden from view in regional journals and monographs published in a variety of languages.¹ Because so little has been published in English on the subject, the 1993 English translation of Maria Eugenia Aubet's (1987) book *The Phoenicians in the West* and the 1998 English translation of the (1993) book *The Archaeology of the Iberians*, by Arturo Ruiz and Manuel Molinos, have remained the principal references available in the Anglophone domain. These books are, to be sure, excellent and essential works of scholarly synthesis, but they are now well over a decade old, and in the interim there has been a great deal of very active research that has augmented and transformed our understanding of these early colonial encounters.² For example, as Ana Aruda points out in chapter 4, the amount of Phoenician archaeological material discovered in Portugal has tripled since the 1980s. Aside from presenting a wealth of new information, then, this volume highlights in particular the shifting perception of the relative role of Greeks and Phoenicians in Iberian colonial processes, as well as exploring new domains of research, such as the ecological/agrarian dimension of the encounter, and emphasizing new issues, such as indigenous agency and consumption.

The book does not pretend to offer a comprehensive global coverage of research on these colonial encounters, in the form of a textbook, a manual, or a “Noah’s ark”-style compendium. That would be both unrealistic and premature. The intention has been both more modest and more closely targeted: to produce a working document providing the reader with a selected series of cases that present a window into both the most recent data (archaeological, textual, philological) and the major competing positions in evolving interpretive debates on the encounter—that is, to present a realistic view of the current state of the field in all its complexity and theoretical plurality. As editors, we have specifically avoided imposing an artificial synthetic uniformity on the chapters or manufacturing a set of illusory general conclusions. This is an active, combative, rapidly transforming research domain, and the book is intended to convey a sense of that dynamism and diversity. For this reason, the contributions are loosely grouped in several general thematic sections. But the sections are merely organizational conveniences and are not meant

to suggest a comprehensive treatment of the particular themes: each paper is an independent unit and represents a particular aspect of a broader field. Some of these sections include a wide variety of topics, while others are more restricted.

The first section provides an introductory overview of some theoretical issues and frameworks guiding research on colonial encounters in ancient Iberia. Chapter 1, by anthropologist/archaeologist Michael Dietler, establishes a context for the volume by linking the ancient encounters in Iberia to broader theoretical debates about colonialism within the fields of anthropology and postcolonial studies, as well as situating the region and periods covered here within the history of ancient Mediterranean colonialism more generally. It also critically examines an evolving set of paradigms that have guided research on colonialism over the past several decades as a way of allowing the reader to situate and evaluate the theoretical positions taken (sometimes implicitly) by the various contributors to the volume. In chapter 2, archaeologist Joan Sanmartí offers a subtle and ambitious synthetic vision of the role of colonial trade in the transformation of indigenous Iberian societies in different regions. He emphasizes especially the complex, contingent, and regionally variable relations that developed among Phoenicians, Greeks, and indigenous peoples, and he stresses the mutually transformative nature of those relationships and the conditions of interdependence that emerged from them.

The second section comprises a set of three archaeological case studies exploring the Phoenician and Greek presence on the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of Iberia and the ramifications this had for indigenous societies and colonists. Chapter 3, by archaeologist Carme Belarte, tackles the complex, and contentious, issue of the role of the colonial encounter in the transformation of indigenous Iberian settlement patterns and especially in the variable process of urbanism that emerged in different regions. She stresses that changes in Iberian settlements in no way reflect an imitation of Phoenician patterns and shows instead how colonial trade affected indigenous economic and political structures and thus were indirectly responsible for regionally divergent changes in urban landscapes. Chapter 4, by archaeologist Ana Margarida Arruda, explores fascinating new information about an early Phoenician presence outside the Mediterranean, on the Atlantic coast of Portugal, from the end of the ninth century or early eighth century BC. In addition to offering a review of recent dating evidence for contact, she focuses especially on the multiple incentives for Phoenician movement to this area, the modes of contact with indigenous peoples, and the relations between colonists and natives. She tempers the traditional emphasis on the attraction of

metal resources by pointing out a variety of other products that would have drawn Phoenician traders and colonists to the region (such as salt, slaves, and agricultural products). In chapter 5, archaeologist Pierre Rouillard makes the case for the Greek contribution to the colonial situation and challenges a number of prior assumptions on the basis of recent excavations. In particular, he presses the case for “colonization without colonies,” arguing that the number of alien colonists in Iberia, Greek or Phoenician, was very small and confined to rather modest settlements of a distinctive type that he calls “Hispanic emporia.”

Part III consists of two chapters that explore natural resources and agrarian practices in the colonial encounter. In chapter 6, archaeobotanist and archaeologist Ramon Buxó traces recent evidence documenting long-term changes in the agrarian base of indigenous societies before and after the arrival of Phoenician and Greek colonists. In particular, he examines important new data concerning the development of indigenous wine and olive oil production and discusses the relationship of these practices to traditional grain-based agriculture. In chapter 7, historian Brigitte Treumann uses a wide variety of evidence to discuss the trans-Mediterranean demand for wood and to make the case for the importance of timber in explaining Phoenician interest in the Andalusian coast of Iberia, thereby challenging the traditional emphasis on metal resources as the defining vector in Phoenician colonial ventures in Iberia. She shows how changing geopolitical conditions in the Eastern Mediterranean would have drawn Phoenician merchants and shipbuilders to the rich timber resources of Spain.

Part IV is composed of two chapters that reexamine issues surrounding the legendary and enigmatic polity of Tartessos, which, by virtue of its prominence in ancient texts, has played a major role in debates about early Phoenician and Greek colonial activity in southern Iberia and about the nature of a purported “Orientalizing” effect on indigenous societies. In chapter 8, archaeologist María Belén Deamos provides an updated overview of ongoing archaeological research in the Guadalquivir area (Huelva, Seville, etc.), deploying a wealth of new data to challenge traditional interpretations of important sites such as El Carambolo (Seville) while stressing the deep level of interaction and cohabitation between local populations and colonists from the Eastern Mediterranean in this region. She carefully explores the implications of this new evidence, including the possibility of agricultural colonization and the integration of Semitic and indigenous cultic practices in a commercially active environment. Archaeologist Sebastián Celestino Pérez, in chapter 9, discusses critically the popular concept of “precolonization” and uses a

variety of evidence, including especially a series of stone stele of warriors, to evaluate Tartessian sociopolitical organization and the activities and interests of Phoenician colonists in the interior. He stresses particularly the changing economic and political relationships between different areas of the Tartessian domain and the implications they had for Phoenician activity in the region.

The last substantive section of the book (part V) groups together two works concerned with literary sources. First, philologist and historian Carolina López-Ruiz, in chapter 10, undertakes a detailed philological analysis of the numerous epigraphic and biblical references to Tarshish in order to evaluate the hypothesis of its identification with Tartessos and, thus, the potential of this term to represent the persistence of memories of this distant polity in Phoenician and Hebrew cultures at the other end of the Mediterranean. Finally, in chapter 11, historian Javier Gómez Espelosin undertakes an extensive textual analysis of ancient Greek perceptions of geography in order to understand the experience of early colonial traders and explorers who ventured to the shores of Iberia. He shows how, before the age of Strabo, Iberia was perceived through a cultural filter shaped by the combination of a hodological tradition of envisioning and navigating space and an imagined mythological landscape.

Finally, in a brief concluding coda the editors offer a few final reflections on the main themes that emerge from the book and on the direction of current and future research.

Improving our understanding of these ancient colonial encounters that reshaped the cultural landscape of the Western Mediterranean is important not only for their inherent historical interest. As Dietler (chapter 1) points out, they happen to constitute the initial episode in the colonial process through which the indigenous peoples of the territories that would eventually spawn two of the dominant early colonial powers of the modern world—Spain and Portugal—first became entangled with the Greco-Roman and “Oriental” worlds that would later come to play such an obsessive role in the collective ancestral imagination and imperial ideology of these nations. This makes it doubly important to subject these ancient encounters to intense analytical scrutiny. But as chapter 1 makes clear, it also raises a number of difficult epistemological issues that have hindered scholars in their approaches to this colonial situation for many years. Circumventing these problems, insofar as this is possible, requires vigilant self-conscious reflexivity as well as theoretical and methodological ingenuity. This book represents an attempt to generate movement in this direction through a direct confrontation of different national and disciplinary traditions.

The symposium that stimulated this book was made possible by the generosity of several institutions. Major funding was provided both by the Program for Cultural Cooperation between the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports and United States Universities and by the Franke Institute of Humanities of the University of Chicago. The project was also supported by various units of the University of Chicago, including the Committee on the Ancient Mediterranean World, the Department of Classics, the Department of Anthropology, the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, the Oriental Institute, and the Dean of Social Sciences. We are grateful to all of them for their contributions.

The success of the symposium was due also to the many colleagues and friends who participated in this truly international and interdisciplinary encounter. Special mention should be given to Christopher Faraone, who is responsible with the coeditors for the idea of a Spanish-American meeting and has helped all along the way in the organization and fundraising for this project. We also want to thank Sebastián Celestino Pérez for his help with the fundraising from the Spanish government and for helping to coordinate contact from the Spanish side. Special thanks go to Kathy Fox for her help with logistical and administrative tasks. Carme Belarte, who could not accept the invitation to be physically with us at the Chicago meeting, has nevertheless been kind enough to contribute a chapter to the volume. Jonathan Hall, although not represented in the book, contributed insightful closing reflections at the conference. The conference also benefited from the participation of Brien Garnand, who was, alas, not able to contribute a chapter to the volume. We wish to thank all the contributors, audience members, student assistants, and moderators of sessions for their enthusiasm and engaged participation in the wide-ranging and animated debate that flowed around the presented papers. The chapters have all been considerably reworked in light of both discussion at the conference and extensive, detailed, and very helpful comments made by two anonymous reviewers of the book manuscript, for which we are also very grateful. Thanks are due to the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California, where one of the editors (MD) was graciously supported as a fellow when the final revisions were undertaken. Finally, we wish to thank Susan Bielstein, Anthony Burton, and Ruth Goring, editors at the University of Chicago Press, for their care in shepherding this book through the editorial process.

NOTES

1. This point about the diversity and obscurity of scholarly publications on this theme was made also by Aubet in her 1993 book; from the Anglophone perspec-

tive, aside from her impressive synthesis, the situation has changed little since then despite a profusion of new research.

2. Since this book has been in production, two other recent volumes that offer complementary information for an Anglophone audience have been brought to our attention: M. R. Bierling and S. Gitin, eds., *The Phoenicians in Spain: An archaeological review of the eighth-sixth centuries B.C.E.; A collection of articles translated from Spanish*, trans. M. R. Bierling (Winona Lake, IN, 2002), and A. Neville, ed., *Mountains of silver and rivers of gold: The Phoenicians in Iberia*, Nottingham Studies in Archaeology (Oxford, 2007).