

## ORIENTALIA AND ORIENTALS ON ISCHIA

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Giorgio Buchner's splendid *Pithekoussai 1* and his colleague, David Ridgway's wise summary and commentary in *The first Western Greeks* have revealed the most challenging data yet recovered from any Greek colonial site<sup>1</sup>. They challenge our understanding of Greek, Italian and eastern archaeology, our ability to forge history from objects, and not least our skills in allowing for the as yet unknown and the unknowable. This paper could only have been written after the appearance of the great volume, and it tries to assess the reliability of the assertions and deductions that many of us have already drawn from the evidence presented, dwelling especially on the evidence for Levantine presence, be it of objects or people. It is possible to be optimist and sceptic at the same time! – indeed, it is safer so, when scholars seem often now driven more by enthusiasms than by the available evidence. *Pithekoussai 1* could encourage extremes and deserves far better use.

Generalisations from the published tombs have to be tempered by some simple facts, well laid out by Buchner in various articles and by Ridgway in his book (Ridgway 1992, pp. 45-9 and fig. 5). «No more than 10% of the [San Montano] cemetery's verified extent» has been excavated. Of the 1300 tombs uncovered only the 723 from the area excavated in 1952-61 are now published fully, and of these just 493 are Geometric. The yield is very rich but far from representative of the town's dead. 43% of the graves had no grave goods at all; 66% of the graves were of children. The children's graves account for over 70% of those with grave goods and 76% of the grave good items catalogued. A very high proportion are children and of the adults many «did not rank high in Pithekoussan society». We seem then to have a corner of the cemetery dominated mainly by graves of the very young and the poor, with a few richer exceptions,

of which there are further examples in the other sector dug but as yet unpublished, and any really rich graves remain elusive. Two main periods are distinguished, running through what we conventionally regard as the last half of the eighth century – Late Geometric I and II (LG I, LG II).

As soon as orientalia were found on Ischia they were seen to echo the role of the founding Greeks, the Euboeans, east and west, and the site was seen to be one of potential importance for the passage of eastern ideas to the mainland of Italy, though direct eastern influence there had long been apparent. Later it was recognised that there was an eastern presence and we are used now to speaking of easterners living beside Greeks on Ischia, presumably in amicable coexistence. The evidence for this has been well rehearsed by Ridgway (Ridgway 1992, 111-8). In considering it briefly here I dwell on some problems of identification and interpretation. Not least important is the question of the source or sources of the eastern objects and people. Many baldly call them Phoenician, since the purple men are at the moment the most favoured Levantines, for various reasons, not all of them academic. But in effect three sources need to be considered: first, Cyprus, where there had been some contacts with both Greece and the eastern mainland throughout the Greek "Dark Age", where there was a Phoenician presence since the mid-ninth century at Kition, and subjection to Assyria in the later eighth. Secondly, the major Phoenician city-ports, living very much in the shadow of Assyria in our period (a reason for travelling west?)<sup>2</sup>. Thirdly, to the north, what is conveniently called North Syria – in effect a disturbed but culturally distinct area of neo-Hittite states (notably Que and Unqi), which had become Assyrian provinces in the eighth century. These had included a substantial Aramaean population since about 1000, whose language had become the sec-

<sup>1</sup> My main debt in this paper is to these publications. I have also profited from discussion with Andrée Gorton whose thesis on scarabs in the Mediterranean is being prepared for publication

and am deeply in her debt; also from the comment and correction of David Ridgway.

<sup>2</sup> W. Culican, in *CAH* 3<sup>2</sup>, 2, 1991, ch. 32, esp. pp. 461-70.

ond language of the area to Akkadian in our period<sup>3</sup>. This was, as it were, the western vestibule of Assyria, Mesopotamia and Urartu, the outlet to the Mediterranean being the Orontes valley past Bronze Age Atchana and Iron Age Al Mina, or a more northerly approach past Tarsus. North Syria has sites rich in Greek pottery of the second half of the eighth century, the period which most concerns us. The pottery is more plentiful there, compared with local wares, than in Phoenician cities, though these at present have priority in date for import (Tyre). North Syria shared a degree of material culture with Phoenicians, with whom there is non-archaeological evidence for trade, but local products, as those of their hinterland, are distinctive. They used a version (Aramaic) of the Phoenician script which philologists can distinguish from Phoenician, but for a non-Phoenician language. Their script was copied and adjusted by Greeks by around 750<sup>4</sup>.

One numerous group of orientalia on Ischia is of the Lyre Player seals which I had the privilege of studying with Giorgio Buchner, and returned to later with addenda from other sources. 36 examples were found in 28 tombs. Our studies showed that they were made in North Syria (on grounds of style, material, distribution), and the Ischia grave contexts showed that they were commonest in LG I and early LG II<sup>5</sup>.

Another group of seals is comprised of scarabs, some of steatite and some of faience. The fullest account of them, by De Salvia, appears in the new volume, and they have also been studied by Hölbl (Hölbl 1979, esp. pp. 215-21) and Gorton. They have been omitted so far from serious consideration à propos of eastern presence, yet they are more numerous than the Lyre Player seals. The 24 steatite scarabs are from LG I and LG II tombs; they are all Egyptian in origin, of types well met also in Cyprus and on Rhodes. 8 of these tombs also held Lyre Players. 3 frit scarabs in an LG I tomb (592, with one steatite) remain unclassified, but are likely to be Egyptian (cf. Hölbl 1979, pp. 204-6). 23 faience scarabs come from 20 LG II

tombs. None share a tomb with a Lyre Player, though since there are only 6 LG II tombs with Lyre Players (and 3 called LG I/II) this need not be significant. A third of the faience scarabs are egyptianising of a clearly defined type which seemed destined for the Greek market and are commonly thought to have been made on Rhodes<sup>6</sup>. They are found in many Greek sites, especially Perachora, and continued in production well into the seventh century, when odd examples are found also in Carthage and other Punic sites; they are virtually unknown in the Levant, Cyprus and Egypt, although the Naucratis factory may be regarded as their successor<sup>7</sup>. Another third carry register compositions in late Egyptian style. These are better known in the Punic west, mainly after 700, and in Cyprus and Rhodes, either of which might be the source for many of them<sup>8</sup>. The rest, with the three of blue frit, may be Egyptian. The whole assemblage, especially with the addition of the Lyre Players, is not at all typical of eighth-century Phoenician sites in the west, which are better served by the homeland as well as Egypt, though broadly matched elsewhere in Italy. The most assured Phoenician scarabs – hardstone with egyptianising devices and sometimes inscribed – are lacking<sup>9</sup>.

The faience scarabs and Egyptian steatites are mounted (if at all) on round silver hoops and bands of eastern type (*Pitbekoussai* 1, p. 774); the Lyre Players on oval silver hoops with suspension tubes (Buchner-Boardman 1966, pp. 42-3; Boardman 1990a, p. 4). Neither resemble the distinctive west Phoenician scarab settings, in hoops with transverse or twisted loops.

It has often been remarked that the Lyre Players and scarabs have been found largely in children's graves. This evokes comparison with the Egyptian and Levantine, rather than Greek, habit of depositing seals in tombs, and their special association in life with the protection of women and children. We may contrast the usual (but not invariable) findplaces of the Lyre Players and scar-

<sup>3</sup> See J.D. Hawkins, in *CAH* 3<sup>2</sup>.1, 1982, ch. 9 for the Neo-Hittite states.

<sup>4</sup> Perreault 1993, p. 68, regards my publication of an inscribed Greek sherd from Al Mina as part of my defence of a Greek presence at Al Mina, but the publication (in *OJA* 1, 1982, pp. 365-7), far from making such a claim, declares that we do not know where the graffito was added.

<sup>5</sup> Buchner-Boardman 1966; Boardman 1990a, where there is the latest distribution map (fig. 20).

<sup>6</sup> Gorton Type XXII. Hölbl 1979, pp. 212-4, concurs and doubts Phoenician involvement.

<sup>7</sup> Hölbl 1979, p. 210 finds significant differences between the "Perachora/Rhodes" scarabs and the Naucratis in subject though they are identical in technique. He possibly underestimates the chronological differences, the former being mainly produced before the foundation of Naucratis.

<sup>8</sup> Gorton Types XI-XIV.

<sup>9</sup> Remarks on these in B. Buchanan - P.R.S. Moorey, *Catalogue of Near Eastern seals in the Ashmolean Museum*, 3, 1988, pp. 37-9.

abs on homeland Greek sites – in sanctuaries, not tombs. So the Ischia tombs with them might be of immigrants. This is not impossible but it should also be remarked that 19% of the Lyre Player tombs, and 14% of those with faience scarabs were for adults, of whom half were male (who had presumably managed to survive, with their amulets), and that at any rate 70% of all the tombs with grave goods were for children. It may be that the eastern custom was being imitated in Ischia with a slightly less restricted usage, but surely inspired by eastern example<sup>10</sup>.

We turn to pottery. There are at least 79 examples of the KW flasks (Kreis-und-Wellenband, or "spaghetti" flasks; as Ridgway 1992, p. 61, fig. 13.5 and 79, pl. 5 bottom centre) in 20 LG II tombs (and a few later) with two local imitations and two in related shapes. Two tombs (145 and 483) had as many as 9 in each, but in tomb 483 there were just as many Greek aryballoi, as well as many other Greek vases. They are usually side by side and there are no complexes which might be described as of a dominantly eastern character<sup>11</sup>. Over half the tombs with flasks also contained faience scarabs, and 2 of the 6 LG II tombs with Lyre Players had KW flasks. These vessels are almost certainly of Rhodian manufacture, imitating an eastern type of flask, a practice of Rhodian potters which is well attested for shapes of Cypriot, North Syrian and Phoenician origin<sup>12</sup>. This has been well documented by Coldstream (Coldstream 1969) who takes the KW flasks to be the products of immigrant Phoenician perfumiers in Rhodes. But the eastern decoration that they copy is Cypriot, not Phoenician, with the concentric, multiple-brush circles broken and continued freehand. It appears on flasks of the same shape in Cypriot White Painted IV<sup>13</sup>. I would expect an immigrant Phoenician to copy his native shape with its native decoration, not with a well-established Cypriot

one. Whatever the effect of Phoenicians in Cyprus may have been on local shapes and perfumery, the KW flasks on Ischia attest immediate relations with Rhodes rather than any remoter source, and those on Rhodes, with Cyprus<sup>14</sup>.

Of other LG II oriental pottery on Ischia we find 8 plain flasks (4 in LG I tomb 166), and one with an appliqué head on its neck (Ridgway 1992, p. 60, fig. 12 and p. 115, fig. 30): a type recognised as North Syrian. And there are two plain flasks (globular, with drip rings) and one with fine Phoenician Red Slip (Ridgway 1992, p. 79, pl. 5, right)<sup>15</sup>; and 12 plain amphorae, 5 of them Phoenician.

We come now to inscriptions and a small number of crucial graffiti on pottery. Here orientalist seem mainly to agree that the scripts are Aramaic (north Semitic) rather than Phoenician. One appears on what is declared a locally made Greek cup, a clear instance of an easterner on Ischia (Ridgway 1992, pp. 116-8, fig. 31 below, which is inverted; *Pithekoussai* 1, pp. 289-90, 232\*-1). Despite the poor condition of the pottery from the tombs we must trust the excavators' skill in determining local products and probably ignore the fact that a Greek epigraphist (M. Guarducci) thought the inscription Greek<sup>16</sup>.

An imported Greek amphora (Ridgway 1992, pp. 111-3, fig. 29; tomb 575-1) bears Aramaic graffiti relating to metrology of contents. It has also a complex graffito including a triangle with extended sides (fig. 1). This is declared a version of the familiar Semitic Tanit sign associated with sanctuaries and burials elsewhere. A problem is posed by the fact that the usual components of the Tanit, horizontal crossbar and handle, are missing. Fig. 2 is from Falsone's article<sup>17</sup> on these signs which is cited as proving the significance of the Ischia graffito. Moreover, the latter seems to have been added or attached to another geometric and indecipherable sign on the vase, a divided rect-

be copies of real Phoenician shapes and decoration, as there are in Crete. Here a true Phoenician presence is attested most clearly at Kommos (where it seems short-lived), the other orientalist styles and oriental immigrants being more likely of North Syrian origin (shields, goldwork, some grave types, etc.).

<sup>15</sup> And cf. the inscribed fragment of a Red Slip dish, Ridgway 1992, p. 117, fig. 31 above, inverted.

<sup>16</sup> Archaeologists need guidance but should, in the end, be their own epigraphists of graffiti, having better understanding of the media and techniques which might constrain writing, and more experience of non-literary scratching. A cautionary example is the inscribed (*sic*) Lyre Player seal from Francavilla: Boardman 1990a, pp. 6-7. For the evaluation of pottery graffiti photographs are essential.

<sup>17</sup> G. Falsone, 'Il simbolo di Tanit a Mozia e nella Sicilia punica', in *RSF* 6, 1978, pp. 137-51, drawing in fig. 3.

<sup>10</sup> See F. De Salvia, 'Un ruolo apotropaico dello scarabeo egizio nel contesto culturale greco-arcaico di Pithekoussai (Ischia)', in *Hommages à M.J. Vermaseren*, Leiden 1978, pp. 1003-61, p. 1029 for some statistics.

<sup>11</sup> Ridgway 1992, p. 62, reports 40 KW flasks in a tomb from the second series of excavations.

<sup>12</sup> J.N. Coldstream, *Greek Geometric pottery*, London 1981, pp. 275-7; including copies of the North Syrian flasks with faces on the neck, as one found on Ischia.

<sup>13</sup> The shape has more in common with Early Protocorinthian globular aryballoi, which may themselves be derived from it. The KW flasks of Rhodes are discussed by K.F. Johansen, in *Exochi*, Copenhagen 1958, pp. 155-61, giving a telling Cypriot parallel (fig. 224).

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Helen Raftopoulou for discussion of the significance of the KW flasks. There are on Rhodes what seem to

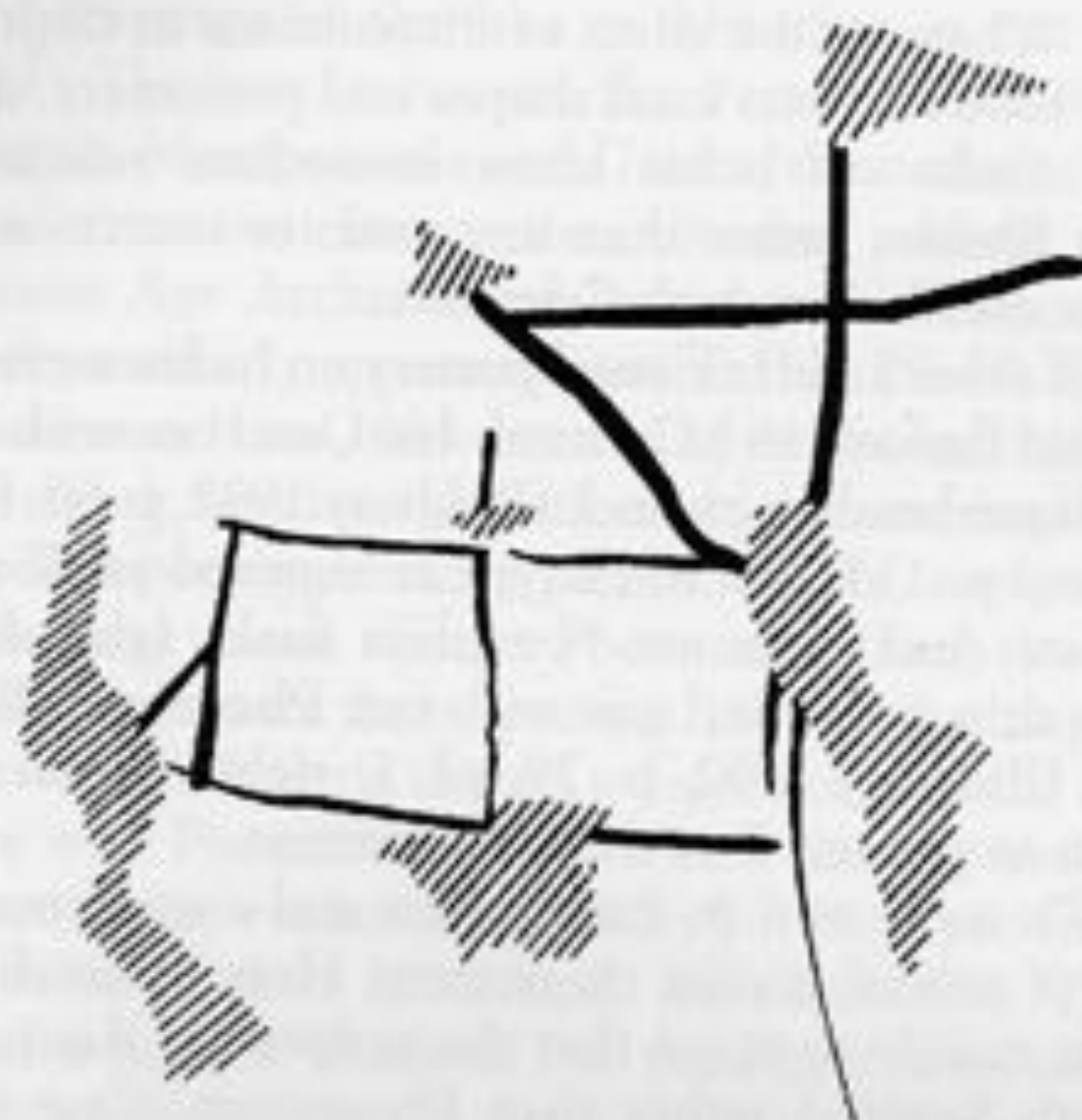


Fig. 1 - Graffito from amphora shoulder (after Ridgway 1992, p. 112, fig. 29).

angle<sup>18</sup>, and is set at an angle to it. I find it very difficult to accept it as a local Levantine addition indicating the funerary status of the Greek vase. At least the other graffiti on the vase demonstrate that a Levantine handled a Greek container, probably somewhere in the east.

Burial rites are not helpful. The common practice of depositing a single unburnt jug in cremations is explained as either for dousing the pyre or to serve the thirsty dead (Ridgway 1992, pp. 49-50; Boardman 1988, p. 173) – in either case more Greek than anything, and for burials which have their shares of eastern objects too. But comparable single jugs are found with inhumations also, though less commonly (in 44% of cremations); some of the other pottery with inhumations might have served a comparable purpose, of course.

The overall impression one gains from this survey of orientalia reinforces the observation I made in 1990 and demonstrated in a map (fig. 3) about the flow of goods and influence from the North Syrian area into the Greek world and beyond, but *not* into the Phoenician world farther west in the eighth century<sup>19</sup>. Both Cyprus and especially Rhodes are

important places en route and/or sources. The distinction implicit in this map helps explain why the Greek orientalising revolution depended almost wholly on North Syrian example and import, while the Etruscan, with more direct Phoenician access from Sardinia, had also a very strong Phoenician element, especially in the early period in northern metal-rich cities such as Vetulonia.

The only extra factor to take into account on Ischia is the strong original Egyptian element, emphasised by Hölbl (Hölbl 1979, pp. 201-2, 207, 217-8, 221). It is not easy to explain this wholly in terms of Phoenician carriers, especially since there seems clear evidence of strong egyptianising production on Rhodes. We need perhaps to take more seriously these signs of Greco-Egyptian work in the east Greek area, and from an early date, remembering the finds on Rhodes and Samos, and that there had been long and direct contact between Egypt and

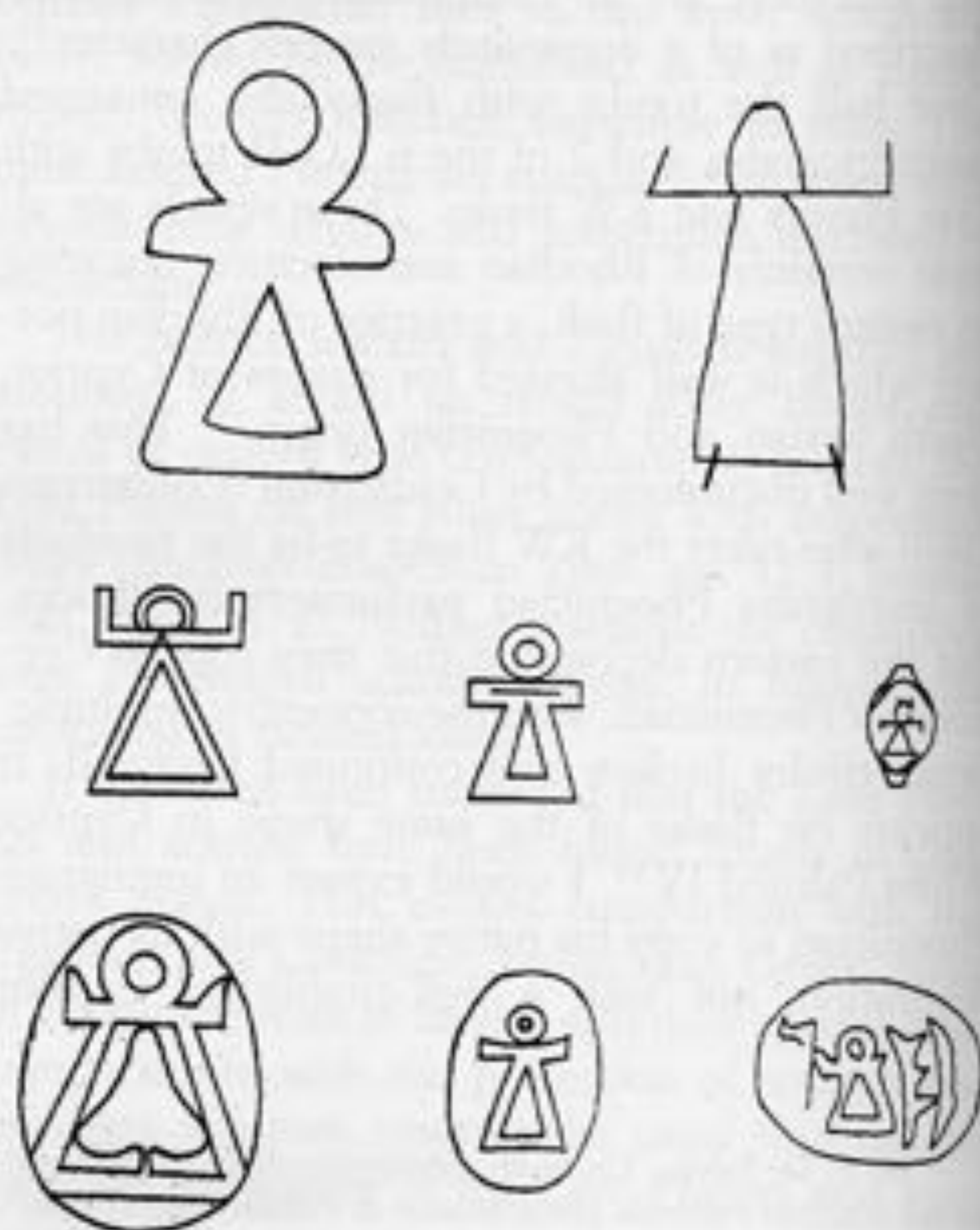


Fig. 2 - Tanit signs from Motya (after Falsone [see n. 17], fig. 3).

<sup>18</sup> Ridgway 1992, p. 114, says this is a numeral, but the numerals are on the handles, and there is a word («double») on the shoulder of the vase. The rectangle and triangle are not recognisable characters, unless they are *bet dalet: beta delta* (or *rbo*).

<sup>19</sup> The same applies to the glass bird-beads: O.-H. Frey, in *Zur geschichtlichen Bedeutung der frühen Seefahrt*, H. Müller-Karpe (ed.), Munich 1982, p. 33, fig. 8; and cf. H.G. Niemeyer, in *JRGZ* 31, 1984, pp. 28-9. Unlike the Lyre Players, they have not so far

been found in Greece, except for Rhodes, nor in Ischia. They may be slightly earlier than most of the seals and certainly would survive less well; very little glass was recovered at Ischia – less that we might have expected for the date and in comparison with mainland Italian sites. It may be that – 1) glass beads, 2) Lyre Players, 3) KW flasks and faience scarabs – should be treated as three roughly successive phenomena, not contemporary.

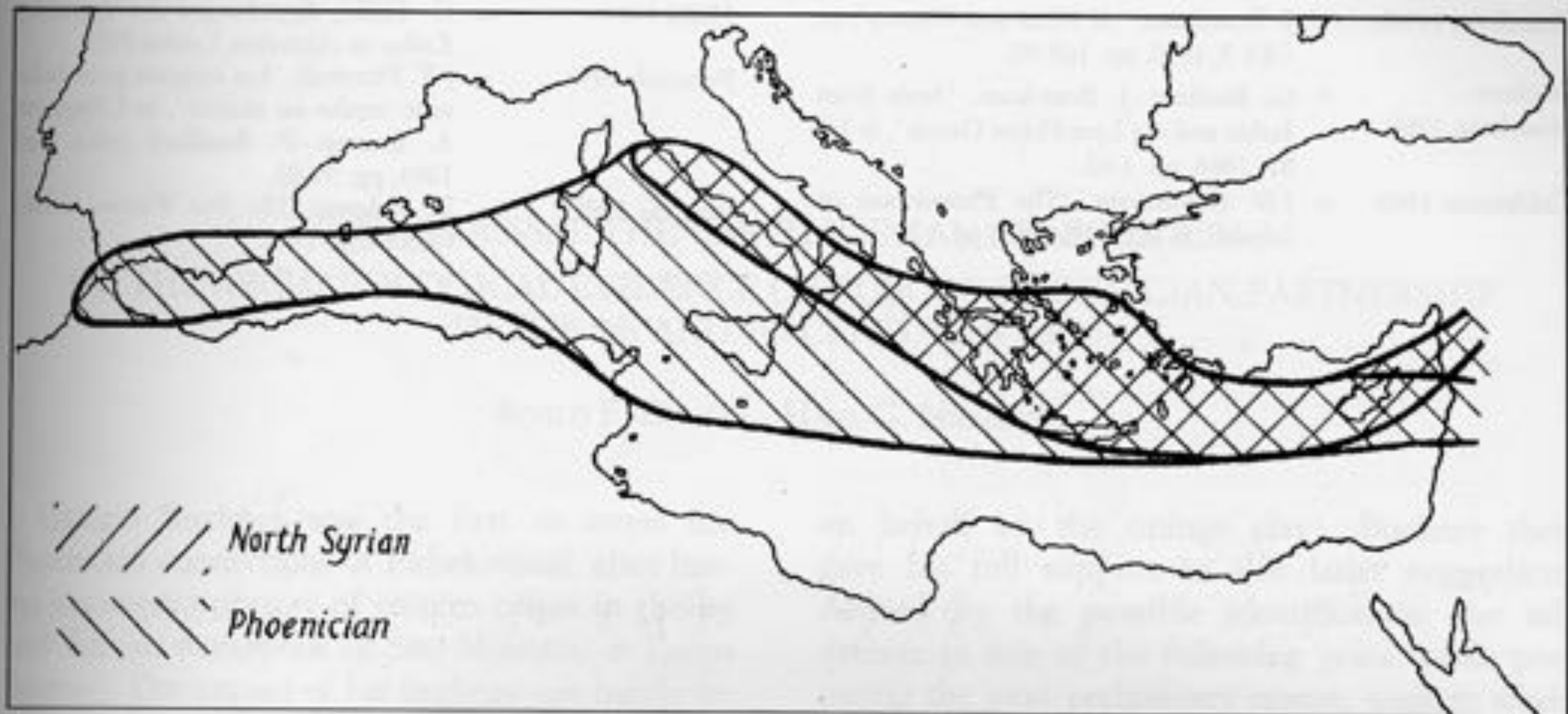


Fig. 3 - Map of trade flow (after Boardman 1990b, p. 180, fig. 2).

Cyprus (as there was also to be later), not apparently or always dependent on coastwise traffic. That Phoenicians may have been involved in some way or other is certainly possible, but much might be explicable in Cyprus where there was also strong Egyptian import, and not only at Kition. We are dealing with one of those rare periods when the rulers of Egypt were outward-looking.

Who, then, are the Levantines? (Buchner and Ridgway have been careful in recent publication to use the term Levantine in preference to Phoenician). That there was a presence seems highly probable, though not exactly for the reasons usually given. Barely 2% of the vases in *Pitbekoussai 1* are eastern: a similar proportion of Greek vases in a foreign cemetery would not, I am sure, lead most scholars to support a substantial Greek presence, and we ought not to use double standards in these matters<sup>20</sup>. I find the scarab and seal usage more compelling, as well as arguments based on simple plausibility, given the common presence of early Greek goods (some of Ischian manufacture as on Sardinia and in Carthage), with Phoenician orientalia farther west and from the earliest period. But to judge from the material imported the commonest visitors to Ischia ought to be from North Syria, not Phoenicia; otherwise the pattern of imports would have been quite different and more like that of other early west Phoenician sites. The North

Syrians, either neo-Hittites or Aramaeans, do not enjoy much of a record as merchants rather than as producers and purveyors of highly influential objects for the Greek world, but we may underestimate native Cypriot contribution to this flow, or be misled by the lack of major Phoenician-type city-harbours, rather than river-mouth anchorages, on the coast north of the main Phoenician coastal strip. We can hardly rule out the possibility that the Euboeans themselves were responsible for a major part of the carrying.

We need to be discriminate in our accolades for easterners and as precise as we can in identifying them. There were several eastern (and south-eastern, perhaps north-eastern) windows through which light was shed into the Mediterranean world. The range of the Ischia finds, however unrepresentative they may prove to be of the whole site, has made it possible to make more progress in this matter than hitherto, principally through the quality of Giorgio Buchner's publication, which we salute.

#### Supplementary abbreviations:

- Boardman 1988 = J. Boardman, 'Sex differentiation in grave vases', in *AION ArchStAnt*, 10, 1988, pp. 171-9.  
 Boardman 1990a = J. Boardman, 'The Lyre-Player Group of seals: an encore', in *AA* 1990, pp. 1-17.

<sup>20</sup> I give proportions of Greek pottery from eastern settlement sites of this period: Boardman 1990b, p. 175. For the Al Mina figures J.Y. Perreault seems either to distrust my ability to reco-

gnise and count Geometric pottery or my veracity (Perreault 1993, p. 67).

- Boardman 1990b = J. Boardman, 'Al Mina and History', in *OJA* 9, 1990, pp. 169-90.
- Buchner-Boardman 1966 = G. Buchner - J. Boardman, 'Seals from Ischia and the Lyre-Player Group', in *JdI* 81, 1966, pp. 1-62.
- Coldstream 1969 = J.N. Coldstream, 'The Phoenicians of Lalysos', in *BICS* 16, 1969, pp. 1-8.
- Hölbl 1979 = G. Hölbl, *Beziehungen der ägyptischen Kultur zu Altitalien*, Leiden 1979.
- Perreault 1993 = J.Y. Perreault, 'Les emporia grecs du Levant: mythe ou réalité?', in *L'Emporion*, A. Bresson - P. Rouillard (eds.), Paris 1993, pp. 59-83.
- Ridgway 1992 = D. Ridgway, *The first Western Greeks*, Cambridge 1992.



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