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## TRADING AND ANCHORING NEXT TO THE AFRICAN PILLARS OF HERCULES. LATE PUNIC AND ITALIC AMPHORAE FROM UNDERWATER SITES AROUND CEUTA (SPAIN)

*Since the 1970s, numerous ancient amphorae have been recovered from the deep sea in Ceuta, especially for the work carried out by Juan Bravo. Almost 50 years after these findings, the re-study of these late Roman-Republican transport containers found at different sites around the Bay of Ceuta has made it possible to update their typology and compare them with the cargo of other shipwrecks located in the western Mediterranean. This new study clarifies the role and relationships of the Ceuta coastline in the Roman Republican period in the context of the Strait of Gibraltar and adds another indicator to the study of maritime trade routes in the central-western Mediterranean and the distribution of certain groups of containers (T-7.4.3.0, Dressel 1, Lamb. 2) in land areas on the north-eastern side of the future Mauretania Tingitana.*

Amphorae – shipwrecks – trade – maritime routes – Ceuta

### Introduction

In the 1970s, an important collection of ancient anchor stocks and amphorae from various shipwrecks was recovered in the waters off Ceuta. This meant a notable impulse for the underwater archaeology of Ceuta, especially after the research work of Juan Bravo (1963; 1964; 1966; 1968; 1975, etc.), who focused most of his scientific production on these materials, especially the reconstruction and classification of Roman and Punic amphorae according of Dressel's and Mañá's charts, and the detailed study of ancient anchors and their evolution (a anthology of his work in Bernal 2004).

In addition to the material salvaged during the first explorations, there have been donations of pieces found fortuitously, given the interest generated by these investigations among the local population and various collaborators of Juan Bravo, who continued with his lines of research. Though in the last third of the 20th century several scholars tried to place the area within a much broader context of the ancient Mediterranean and North Africa (Gozalbes 1987; López 1987; 1996), from the turn of the century onwards, new evidence of archaic Phoenician settlement in the area came to light (Villada 2006; Villada, Ramón and Suárez 2010) and also a greater knowledge of the local Roman fish processing facilities (Villaverde and López 1995; Bernal and Pérez 2001; Villada, Suárez and Bravo 2007) thanks to the intensification of preventive archaeological activity in the terrestrial area.

In this context, remains dating back to the end of the 8th and beginning of the 7th century BC have been found, and a residential sector with several rooms and wide streets, typical of Levantine urban patterns, can be dated in the mid-7th century BC. In the area, other structures could be tentatively related to industrial activities (Villada 2006: 265-266; Villada, Ramón and Suárez 2010). However, there is currently no evidence of any continuity of the settlement after mid 6th

century BC, throughout the Punic/Mauretan period until the late 1st century BC, when several salting factories were identified (Bravo et al. 1995; Villada, Suárez and Bravo 2007).

The study of amphorae materials has received greater attention with regard to this later period, focusing on salted-fish production, which dates from the early Imperial period until its end in Late Antiquity (Bernal 1995; Bernal et al. 1996; Bernal and Pérez 2001, among others). Nevertheless, an accurate and up-to-date study of the material previously found in the underwater milieu has not been completed, and the amphorae classified as Dressel 1 are the ones for which the least information has been provided, lacking a detailed analysis since the work of Fernández García (1983).

After almost 40 years of research and the addition of new data of the regional production and consumption of transport containers, it is possible to provide a renewed approach to this amphora collection. Through its examination, the aim of this study is also to reflect on the role of the Ceuta region in the context of the so-called 'Circle of the Strait' during this period, considering aspects such as the still very limited presence of this type of finds in the terrestrial area of Ceuta, and the commercial maritime traffic that circulated between the Atlantic coasts and the main Mediterranean port hubs of reference.

### Mixed cargoes in the late Republican Era. Ceuta and the Western Mediterranean.

Juan Bravo's work resulted in an increase of the amphorae material found off Ceuta's waters (fig. 1), which was finally stored in the "Sala Municipal de Arqueología de Ceuta". In contrast to the Imperial and Late Roman amphorae, the containers from the Republican period remained in the background. Their study implies facing a double difficulty in relation to their historical interpretation: the lack of precise

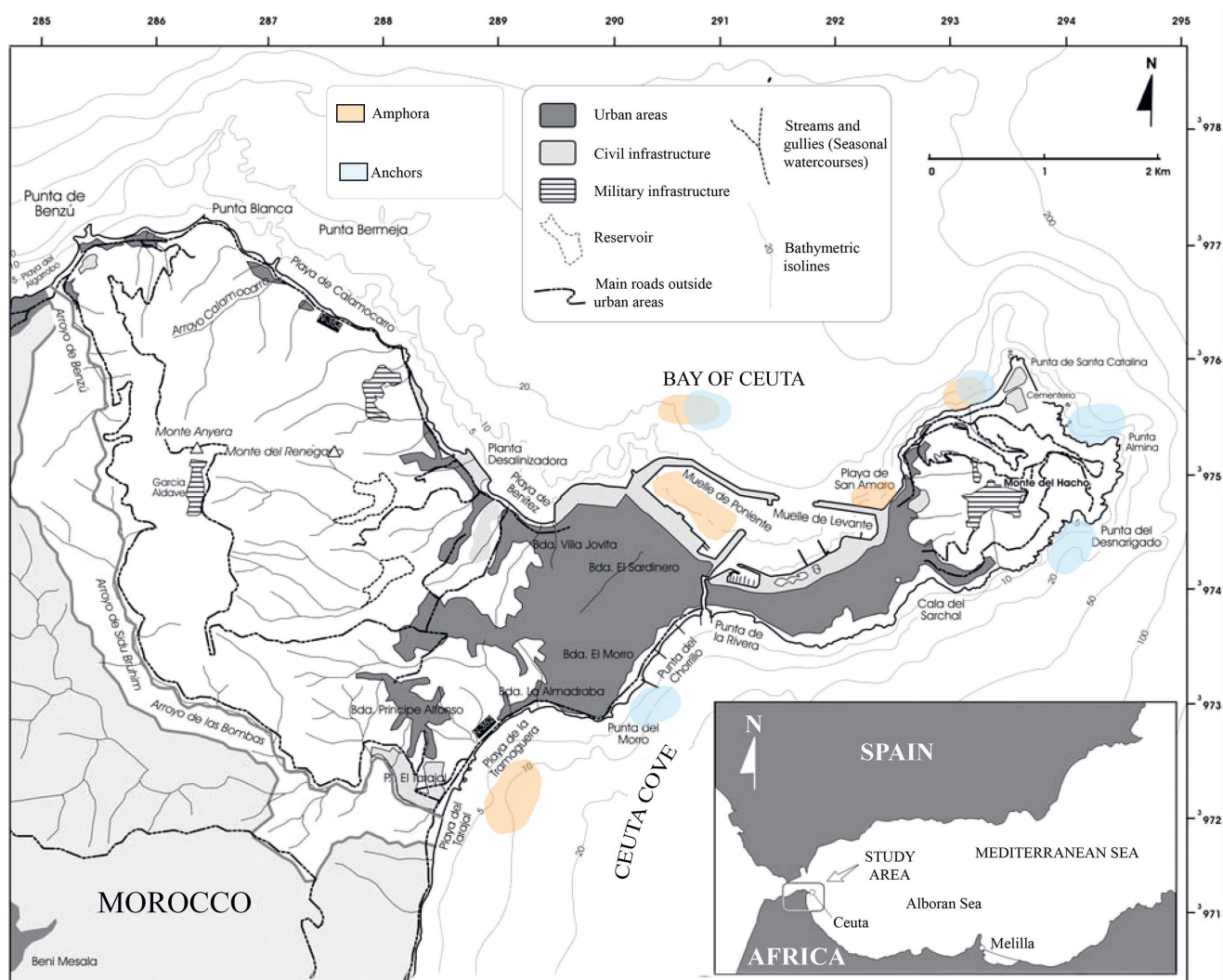


Fig. 1. Area of provenance of the main underwater finds around Ceuta (based on Bravo and Bravo 1972).

information on the contexts in which they were found, and their lack in the land contexts.

Our research<sup>1</sup> on the amphorae stored in the collections of the “Sala Municipal de Arqueología de Ceuta” has identified at least 12 Italic amphorae from the Republican period. The largest group (10 examples) are those identified as Dressel 1, but in most cases it is challenging to decide whether they correspond to the variants 1A or 1B (fig. 2, 1), as the part of the neck/mouth or toe is not preserved (the exception is an unique, almost complete, specimen identified as Dressel 1C; Inv. No. 116).

The examples of Dressel 1A that are in the best preserved condition have an outward-facing triangular rim with a maximum inclination of 45° and oval handles that are slightly curved inwards. The body is cylindrical in shape with a marked hull in the upper area, although some pieces

have been eroded by underwater conditions. The fabrics are brown and sometimes reddish, with medium-sized tempers, generally black inclusions that could be linked to volcanic rocks from the Campania (or central tyrrhenian area).

The Dressel 1C (fig. 2, 2) specimen has tall-triangular shaped rim with a 90° inclination, a slightly conical neck and more curved handles. The fabric ranges from reddish-brown to greyish-brown, with abundant small, predominantly black, temper.

Also, two complete examples of the Lamboglia 2 type have been identified. Both of them have an ovoid body with an outward-facing triangular rim, vertical handles with a circular section that end on the marked carination of the upper part of the body, and a conical toe, only partially preserved. The example that had less marine concretions and has been examined more thoroughly (fig. 2, 3) shows a light-brown fabric with medium-sized tempers, although the Adriatic area of provenance cannot be specified at this stage. It has been possible to identify a rectangular stamp on the rim, although it is practically indecipherable due to marine erosion.

Another group of Late Punic amphorae found around Ceuta can be classified withing SG-7.4.0.0 of Joan Ramón

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Torres' classification (1995), and belong to the same underwater context and period. This group is characterized by a cylinder-shaped body, a neck with a concave shape and a cylindrical pivot, which ends in a closed pointed base. Three variants of this group have been identified according to the shape of the neck-mouth and the fabric:

The first correspond to the type T-7.4.3.3 (**fig. 2, 4**), produced in the workshops of the Cádiz area between the second half of the 2nd century and the first half of the 1st century BC. These examples have rims with different ring-shaped mouldings and hollow undersides (inv. no. 2226 and SN 1) or simpler and smoother ones (inv. no. SN 5). They have very long necks with a concave profile. The fabric is yellowish ochre, with little medium-small, almost refined temper (Ramón 1995: 212-213; Sáez 2008; 2018). A fourth example may belong to this group (inv. no. 169), which has only the cylindrical body.

The second group can be related to type T-7.4.3.2 (inv. nos. 2221, 163 and 114), showing rims with a horizontal projection and necks with a markedly concave profile (**fig. 2, 6**). The fabric is reddish-brown with abundant medium-sized temper, which indicates a provenance from the coast of Málaga, probably produced between the late 2nd and first half of the 1st century BC (Ramón 1995: 211-212; Sáez 2008; 2018). The particular typological features of this group suggest that the type could be a Malaga adaptation of the Tunisian prototypes and that would be a different and parallel series to the Cádiz type T-7.4.3.3 (Sáez and Luaces 2021).

Finally, a single vessel (**fig. 2, 5**) could perhaps correspond to a Tunisian production of the type T-7.4.3.1, dating slightly earlier than the previous ones, from the end of the 3rd century or more probably the first two thirds of the 2nd century BC (Ramón 1995: 210-211). It has a rim with different overlapping rings of varied profile with a shallow concavity on the outer face and a neck with a pronounced flexion in the concave projection of the upper wall. The fabric is reddish in colour with hardly any temper and with a light engobe on the surface.

Although the information on the contexts in which these containers were found is very limited, it is not possible to dismiss that both groups of containers (or at least some of the vessels) could have belonged to the cargo of the same wreck/s, since in the western Mediterranean numerous examples of wrecks show a mixed composition of their cargo.

The wreck of Miladou (Dumontier and Joncheray 1991: 151-163), found between the islands of Port-Cros and Bagaud, was carrying a cargo of a large number of Dressel 1A and 1B amphorae, Dressel 1C in smaller quantities, and a single example of amphora T-7.4.3.3 possibly produced in Cádiz area (Luaces 2008: 98-99).

At the site of La Chrétienne, nearby the island of Eves, several ancient wrecks were located. The one identified as M2 was carrying a cargo of Dressel 1A and 1C amphorae produced mainly in southern Hispania (Gades and Malaca) together with 19 Late Punic containers of the type T-7.4.3.3 also manufactured in Cádiz/Málaga workshops (Briquel Chatonnet, Hesnard and Pollet 2004; Luaces and Sáez 2019). A lead anchor stock with a cartouche containing Neopunic names was also located in the site, a piece quite similar to another lead stock with cartouche discovered by Juan Bravo

(1976: 8) in the waters around Ceuta (the item is currently being studied as part of our project).

The cargo found in the cove of Pharo (Marseille) is also remarkable. The site provided a significant number of fragments of 'Mañá C2' amphorae that were collected together with a single example of Dressel 1 (Ximénès and Branger, 2013). Near the coast of Corsica a the Late Republican wreck was identified in the site of Moines 2, with a cargo composed mostly of Dressel 1A and 1C, along with several examples of amphorae T-7.4.3.3, all produced in the 'Circle of the Strait' region (Luaces and Sáez 2019).

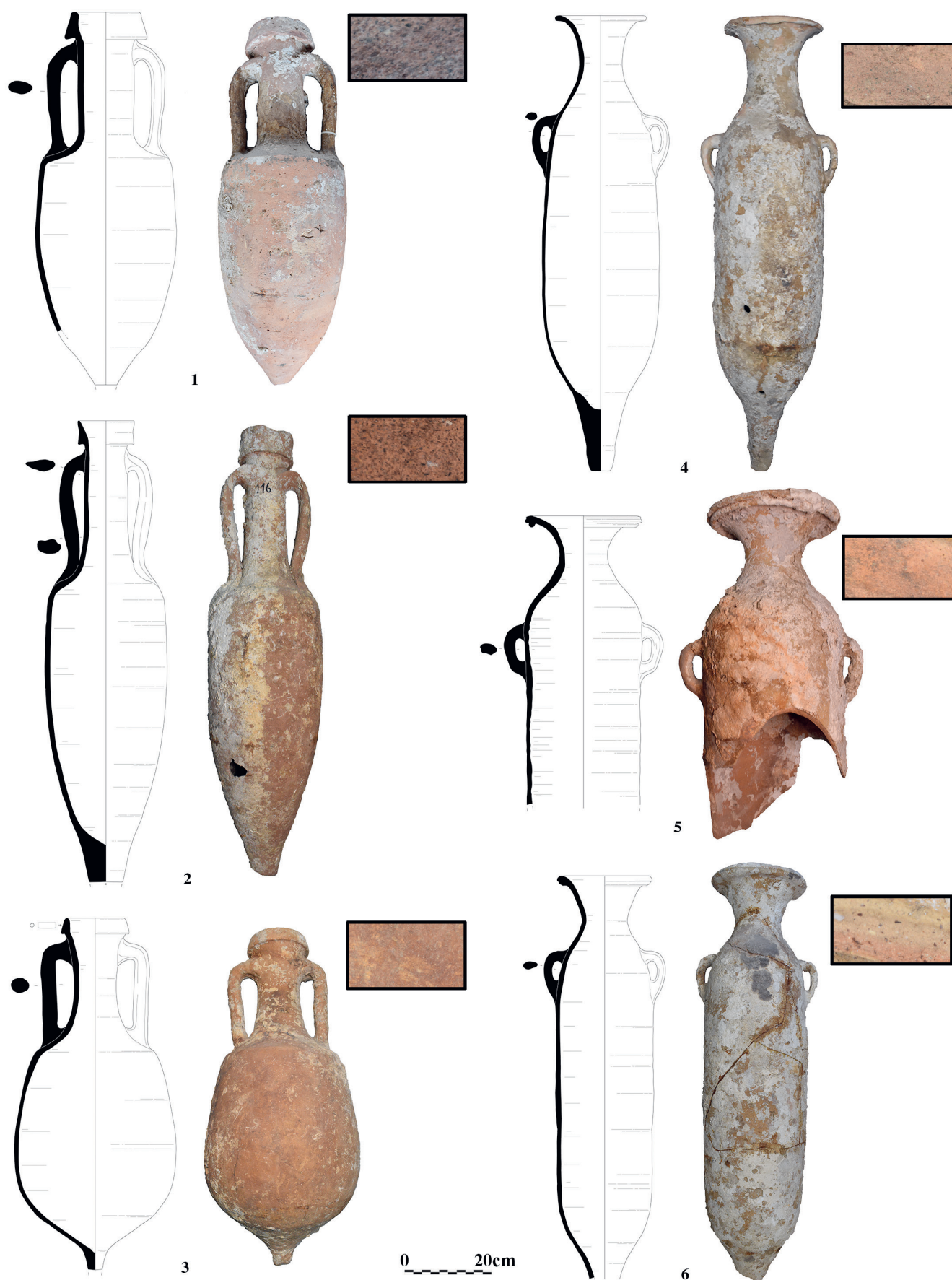
Another wreck was found at Cap Negret in the early 1960s (Company 1971: 88-89) consisting of a large number of Dressel 1 of unknown provenance together with containers of type T-7.4.3.3 (stamped, probably from Cádiz area). The cargo is similar to another wreck found in the port of Pisa (the so-called 'Hellenistic vessel'), which provided a large number of late Greco-Italic and Dressel 1 containers together with a Punic amphora of the T-7 group (Barreca et al 2006, although in this case it is not certain that they are containers of western production). Finally, much closer to Ceuta, in the Strait of Gibraltar and a short distance from Tarifa, a ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) captured images of the cargo of another shipwreck, which included a large number of T-7.4.3.3 amphorae (García and Alonso 2007; the deep wreck has not been surveyed and no material has been collected so far).

The limited data available on regional seaborne trade suggest that both groups (Italic Dressel 1 and T-7.4.3.0) had a really broad distribution, probably coexisting in the holds of many ships during the 2nd-1st centuries BC (regional overviews can be found in Ramón 2008 and Mateo 2016). For example, in the Bay of Cadiz, the main regional harbour, hundreds of amphorae were recovered at the port area of La Caleta (Sáez, González and Higuera-Milena 2016), including many Dressel 1 and T-7.4.3.3 examples, suggesting that these local/regional and Italic items were distributed in significant quantities through the port of *Gades* (probably in all directions, maritime and fluvial).

The flow of merchant ships with cargoes of Italic containers together with others carrying Late Punic amphorae (specifically, variants of T-7.4.3.0) on the routes that linked *Gades* and the Atlantic with the main harbours of the central Mediterranean is therefore a well attested fact by the wrecks mentioned above and can also be attested considering the amphorae studied in consumption or port contexts. In any case, shipments of Italic containers of diverse provenance and typologies must also have been frequent, both operated by Italics and western merchantmen, and filling the holds of western products on their return journeys. The amount of these imports into *Hispania* apparently multiplied since the middle of the 2nd century BC, gradually decreasing throughout the first half of the 1st century BC (Nolla and Nieto 1989).

For the Iberian Peninsula, after the central decades of the 2nd century BC an exponential increase in the number of wrecks with a dual cargo of both Italic and Late Punic amphorae can be observed. This tendency drastically fluctuates between the end of this century and the central decades of the 1st century BC, a period in which the wrecks shows cargoes that mostly, and sometimes exclusively, included Italic Dressel 1 amphorae. In the same way, this commercial





**Fig. 2.** 1. Dressel 1A (Inv. No. SN 3); 2. Dressel 1C (Inv. No. 116); 3. Lamboglia 2 (Inv. No. 120); 4. T-7.4.3.3 (Inv. No. SN 5); 5. T-7.4.3.1 (Inv. No. 2546); 6. T-7.4.3.2 (Inv. No. 114).

dynamic is reflected on many land sites, where imported Italic containers could be up to 60% in the amphorae assemblages of this period (Asensio i Vilaró 2010: 31).

It should be noted that, unlike what has been stated for the Hispanic coasts and southern Gaul, there is little data available that would allow estimating this maritime traffic in the western Mauretania, and only a few key urban hubs of the northern area can be considered (Lixus, Zilil, Kuass, Tamuda or Melilla), as all of them have provided relatively large amphorae assemblages dating to these Late Republican contexts. In any case, the items found off Ceuta match with the information provided by these sites, suggesting that Mauretania at the time was closely connected with the Hispanic and Mediterranean maritime routes and that it received commodities packaged in amphorae, in the context of the trade promoted from the Italic area and from the main ports of Hispania Ulterior.

### Notes on the role of Ceuta in the maritime trade of the 2nd-1st centuries BC

The data currently available for the case of Ceuta regarding the Late Mauretanian/Late Roman-Republican period are still very limited, and unfortunately do not allow an assessment with the local underwater finds, since the oldest remains that can be related to the city of *Septem* date to the Late Republican-Augustan period, mainly linked to the fish-salting facilities and kilns excavated in the area (Villada 2006; Villada, Ramón and Suárez 2010). Therefore, based on the archaeological evidence available at present, it does not seem that Ceuta between the mid-6th and mid-1st centuries BC was an urban enclave.

In and under the sea the situation is completely different, and the findings tell a different story. Despite the fact that no systematic surveys have been conducted around the coastline of Ceuta, a significant quantity of late Republican containers of Italic and southern Hispanic provenance have been found, as well as a significant number of stone and lead stocks/anchors (more than seventy), which have been generally dated in the Roman period. This significant quantity of anchoring items contrasts with the lower volume of transport containers found, since if they all belonged to shipwrecks, this would have been much greater.

Nevertheless, we must treat these findings with caution, as we cannot forget the fact that these finds do not have an archaeological context to which they can be attributed, so they could come from different shipwrecks or chronological periods within the Late Republican period.

The frequent visits of the coast of Ceuta, as reflected by amphorae and stocks from the Phoenician-Punic period and continued in the Late Republican era (Bravo 1975), could be an indicator of the sporadic/seasonal use of these bays for fishing-salting activities, and even the installation of *almadrabas* (tuna traps) or systems of fixed nets that could have been weighted with stone or metal stocks. This would help to explain the contrast between the relative abundance of underwater remains and the lack of evidence of permanent habitation on land during the 5th-1st centuries BC, and show certain coincidences with other underwater finds from the

Mauretanian shore of the Strait (Trakadas 2009). This frequentation, perhaps linked to the seasonal exploitation of certain resources (tuna, cetaceans, etc.), may have been similar to that which occurred during the Punic and Republican periods on the coast of *Bolonia/Bailo* (Tarifa, Cádiz, Spain), leading to the establishment of fish-processing facilities during the 2nd-1st centuries BC, and later contributing to the definitive transfer of the population to the coast by founding the city of *Baelo* (Bernal, Arévalo and Sáez 2007; Prados et al. 2012).

On the other hand, the use of the coastal areas of Ceuta as an anchorage during the period of initial 'Romanisation' in this area of the Strait of Gibraltar should be emphasised, since both bays of Ceuta, where most of the items were found, provide favorable anchoring settings and allow ships to protect themselves from the rough winds and currents (Bravo and Muñoz 1965: 6). In this case, the territory of Ceuta would have been a crossing spot on the trade routes that connected the Mediterranean regions with the Atlantic coasts, and vice versa. It seems likely that it was part of the maritime route that, after crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, ran along the North African coast, connecting Atlantic Mauretania with Sicily and the Tyrrhenian area.

These commercial circuits of the 2nd-1st centuries BC also seem to fit in with the pattern of imports that has been documented in port and inland settlements in the great fluvial valleys of Mauretania, with evident parallels in various amphorae assemblages found at sites such as Tamuda, Kuass, Zilil, Lixus, Banasa, etc. In any case, it is difficult to attribute these commercial flow of Italic Dressel 1 imports exclusively to the activity of Roman (Italian) merchants and traders, despite the continuous and important presence of Italic colonisers or the movements of the army (and navy) that took place throughout the 2nd-1st centuries BC in the western Mediterranean area, particularly on the Hispanic shore. The transport of goods from the main south Hispanic harbour cities (Gades, Malaca, etc.), but also from some Mauretanian urban hubs, may also have contributed to generating these consumption patterns, as evidenced both by the finds from Ceuta and by their parallels in neighbouring African sites.

This is a very complex and far-reaching question on which this paper just contributes to a few data through the study of the amphorae found in the waters off Ceuta, and also some remarks on maritime trade relations in the western Mediterranean during the Republican period. Clearly, this is a topic on which there is still much to discuss, and further fieldwork research (no wreck of this period has been excavated yet in the regional setting) and also the revision of many underwater and on-land old finds and assemblages is pending.

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