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► To cite this version:

George Koutsouflakis, Max Luaces, José Angel Zamora López, Antonio Manuel Sáez Romero. A Fresh Approach to Seaborne Trade and Maritime Connectivity Between the Levant and the Aegean in the Classical and Hellenistic Periods. MANUFACTURERS AND MARKETS. The Contributions of Hellenistic Pottery to Economies Large and Small, Nov 2019, Athènes, Greece. pp.241-254. hal-03840725

HAL Id: hal-03840725

<https://hal.science/hal-03840725>

Submitted on 9 Nov 2022

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A fresh approach to seaborne trade and maritime connectivity between the Levant and the Aegean in the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

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1. Introduction

Ancient sources report regularly the existence of intense economic relations between the Levant and the cities of ancient Greece. Indeed, many texts give a prominent place to the Levantine merchants in the development of the economic activities of archaic Greece, particularly concerning the metal trade, be it the Iliad or more other classical textual references (Sauvage 2012, 110-124; Wathélet 1974). A significant set of archaeological and literary data also attests the development of these trade links from the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age (Leonard Jr. 2003). The Uluburun shipwreck, dated in the 1300s BC, can be considered a paradigmatic case that confirms the early occurrence of maritime routes frequented by the Phoenician ships heading to the Aegean, loaded with a variety of commodities, amphorae and ingots most of all (Bass 1991; Pulak 2010; Sauvage 2012, 86-87). After a time of less intensity of these connections, again during the Geometric and the Archaic periods grave goods, sanctuaries and other contexts provide evidence that

suggest the reactivation of the commercial contacts between the Levant and the Aegean since the 9th-8th centuries BC, even if most of the documentation is still coming from the Levantine coast (Huber 2017; Mazar – Kourou 2019)

These exchange networks continued in operation during the Classical and Early Hellenistic periods. Peter Van Alfen's work based on literary evidence demonstrated that between 600-300 BC many different commodities, manufactured items, foodstuff and raw materials, were imported from the Ancient Near East and in particular from the Levantine port cities (Van Alfen 2002; 2016). At the same time, the maritime, economic and cultural connections have been emphasized due to a significant consumption of Greek pottery in Cyprus and the Levant, and particularly in the sanctuaries and necropoleis at Kition, Byblos and Sidon (Chirpanlieva 2002, 169-199; 2019). Nevertheless, despite the contribution of these literary and archaeological records, the remains of this Levantine-Greek connection found in the Aegean for the Classical and Hellenistic periods are still quite scarce, especially those related to the distribution of transformed products packaged in amphorae, such as wine. On the other hand, the data from the Levantine coast allow to draw up a picture in which extensive trade networks connected with the exchange of manufactured commodities linked up mainland Greece to the Levant, most of all in the case of fineware artifacts (Chirpanlieva 2014). The apparent lack of correspondence between literary and epigraphic testimonies and the scarcity of tangible remains has led most scholars to put in doubt the consistency and importance of these relations within the framework of the main economic circuits of the Eastern Mediterranean (Baslez – Briquel-Chatonnet 2003; Elayi – Sapin 1998, 12-32). The economic weight of trade relations with the Syro-Palestinian coast has been reexamined, but in most of the academic literature a compartmentalized vision of the ancient Mediterranean is still in place, a perspective

based on an alleged antagonism between the Greeks and the Phoenicians (Aubet 2007, 447; Braudel 2001, 250-282).

This perspective had some lasting influence on our understanding of the economic and geopolitical dynamics during the Classical and Hellenistic periods. However, new material data describe a more diverse scenario, verifying the intensity of these commercial relations between the Levant, and more broadly the Phoenician world and the Greek sphere. Our present contribution aims to bring together different sources, integrating old and new data into a single narrative, and thus to provide an updated perspective regarding the Phoenician and Greek trade relationship. In order to achieve that goal, we will first examine the most significant data coming from a group of Phoenician inscriptions that attests the social and economic role played by some Phoenician communities in certain Greek cities. Also, several archaeological finds and contexts will be discussed, focusing on amphorae and wrecks of the Classical and Hellenistic periods. The combined study of the literary and epigraphic evidence, and of the amphorae and shipwrecks, will allow us to draw some preliminary conclusions, but most of all to open new avenues of research on this topic¹.

2. The Phoenician inscriptions and the connection between the Levant and the Greek area

Phoenician inscriptions found in mainland Greece and in the Aegean islands are an interesting element for the analysis of the relationships established between the Levant and the Aegean during the 1st millennium BC. Even leaving aside some controversial

¹ This subject will be addressed in the next few years within the scope of the GREPURE Project, of the University of Seville and the BBVA Foundation, which is focused on the compilation and study of any evidence of Phoenician-Punic trade in the Aegean throughout the 1st millennium BC.

documents, more than thirty Phoenician inscriptions have been identified in continental Greece and the Aegean insular milieu. Not surprisingly, they come from important trade hubs: in very early times, from Crete and Euboea; during the Classical and Hellenistic periods, from other important islands in the maritime routes linking the Levant and continental Greece (such as Rhodes, Delos, Naxos, Kos) or from port cities in continental Greece as Demetrias or, specially, Athens. This epigraphic corpus can be dated throughout the late 10th to the 2nd century BC, although the available evidence is more comprehensive and numerous for the later periods, confirming a more intense and stable Phoenician presence in Greece during the late Classical and Hellenistic times (from the 4th to the 2nd century BC). Then, Phoenician inscriptions on stone monuments (not only votive texts, but also funerary or official documents) suggest that Phoenician communities were settled and somehow integrated in some Greek cities. Significantly, an important portion of these Phoenician texts was indeed part of Greek-Phoenician bilingual inscriptions.

Beside the interesting epigraphic finds from the islands and from the city of Demetrias, the most famous Phoenician inscriptions found in Greece come from the Attica. Several inscriptions from the Hellenistic era attest the significant role played by the Levantine – or rather Phoenician – communities in the civic life of Athens and its port Piraeus. Together with other inscriptions belonging to the corpus of Athenian legislative sources (Allen 2003), the Phoenician inscriptions confirm the presence of these Levantine merchants in Athens, as well as the importance of their commercial activities.

A good example is a late 4th century BC “decree” from the Piraeus (KAI 60), a Phoenician text followed by a short summary in Greek. The Phoenician text is dated in an official manner, but according to the Sidonian calendar (“The fourth day of the marzeah, in the

fourteenth year of the People of Sidon”). It registered, following Greek models and expressions, the decision of “the members of the Sidonian assembly” to concede an honorific gift to an individual, “Shembaal, son of Magon”, head of a group contributing to the maintenance of a Phoenician temple, and the appointment of the group as responsible of the temple, taking money “from the treasury of the god Baal of Sidon” to sustain its duties by means of Sidonian funding. A Greek text follows, providing just an essential translation: “The association (*τὸ κοινὸν*) of the Sidonians to Diopieithes, Sidonian” (with the name of the honored man “translated” in Greek). That short and secondary Greek text seems to show that the whole inscription was directed first and above all to Phoenician speakers in the area, but wanted to communicate with local Greeks too.

Thus, we see the presence in the Piraeus of a well-organized and quite integrated group of Sidonians, a real community living (and dying, as we will also see) in Athens and its port (and also active in other Greek places: see for example the bilingual inscription from Kos, KAI 292). They had their own institutions, associations and temples; they maintained strong links with their mother city, but were also used to the customs and legal procedures of the place where they were living in.

This kind of epigraphic information complements the evidence provided by Greek sources, which inform about the well-integrated and appreciated presence of Phoenicians in the Greek social and economic spheres of the Hellenistic period (Le Dinahet-Couilloud 1997; Yon 2011). Besides the Sidonians, an important group was coming from Kition (Cyprus), as shown by their recurrent presence in Phoenician (see below) and Greek inscriptions. Another important group came from Tyre: inscriptions from Rhodes show indeed that Tyrians played a relevant role in the development of artisanal activities, and that they could have obtained the local citizenship (Badoud 2011).

Phoenician funerary inscriptions provide further evidence of this kind of stable presence of Phoenicians among the Greek communities. One of the most important groups of evidence comes again from the Piraeus and the city of Athens. Most of the texts are quite plain or preserve apparently limited information. For example, a damaged stela with the name of the defunct in Greek and Phoenician (Masson 1969), mentions a man with a Phoenician name (presented in a sort of transliteration in Greek) whose origin was Kition. Thus, even if he was identified as a foreigner, he was locally buried by people able to prepare for him a proper burial (including a funerary stela readable both by local Greeks and Phoenicians present there). In the same way, another stela from Piraeus conserves well a Phoenician and a Greek funerary text (KAI 57). The first text is the Phoenician version “I [am] Mehodesh, son of Pansemelt, man of Kition” followed by a shorter Greek version, where the name of the deceased is in this case “translated”: “Noumenios, Kitian”. The position and length of the Phoenician text, together with the identification of the defunct as Kitian, underlines the foreign origin of those involved in the burial; but it also shows the will to communicate with the local Greeks in their language. It is possible too, that the Greek version of the name was used by the Phoenician when alive, again an eventual sign of his integration in the place. A couple of more Phoenician steles from the Piraeus, not so well preserved, confirms both this kind of integration and the importance of the Kitian community in the place (a community that some other Phoenician inscriptions show also active in other Greek ports, see the bilingual funerary inscription from Rhodes², CIS I 117).

² Note that also two Phoenician dedicatory inscriptions (3rd–2nd cent. B.C.) come from a sanctuary in the island (KAI 44-45).

Phoenician funerary inscriptions also confirm the important presence of Sidonians in the Piraeus. One of the documents consists of a Phoenician text (CIS I 119, KAI 59: “I [am] Asept, daughter of Eshymshalem, Sidonian; this is what erected for me Yatonbal, son of Eshmunshelah, chief of the priests of god Nergal”) followed by a shorter Greek version, this time transliterating the names: “Asepte, daughter of Eshmunselim, Sidonian”. The deceased was thus a woman, identified by her patronymic and foreign origin, honoured by an important Phoenician man that was aware of the Greek funerary customs. Note that another “bilingual” stele from the Piraeus (CIS I 120, KAI 56) corresponds to a deceased female too: it includes a Greek text first (“Erene, Byzantine”) followed by the Phoenician version (“Herene, citizen of Byzantium”). This time, the woman has a Greek name and a Greek origin, but was clearly buried by someone (probably her Phoenician husband, a man with clear links and some degree of integration with Greek people) interested to address the text of the stela also to the Phoenicians in the area.

The city of Athens provides other Phoenician-Greek funerary inscriptions showing the same kind of presence and integration of Phoenicians (specially from Sidon and Kition). One document (CIS I, 116; KAI 53) gives in Greek the identity of the defunct, including its patronymic and origin (“Artemidoros, son of Heliodoros, of Sidon”) whereas the Phoenician text follows perfectly the formulae and language of the Phoenician inscriptions of the period: “Stela of the memory among the living of Abdtinnit, son of Abdshemesh, the Sidonian”. A second stela (CIS I, 117; KAI 55) repeats the same elements: a good Phoenician funerary text (in this case appearing first: “Of Benhodesh³,

³ The same name appears in a Phoenician-only votive inscription found at Piraeus (CIS I, 118; KAI 58): a man called Benhodesh, the son and grandson of high ranked officials, dedicates an altar. He was unfortunately not identified by his origin.

son of Abdmilqart, son of Abdshemesh, son of Tiganesh, from Kition”) and a short Greek version (this time in a sort of translation of the name of the deceased, as seen before: “Noumenios, Kitian”) showing again the “precedence” of the Phoenician version, but also the will to communicate (and to be identified) with the local Greeks in their language. Last, but not least, a third funerary stela found in Athens, the well-known “Antipatros’ stele”, offers a vibrant example of the integration of certain individuals of Phoenician origin among the local Greek population (Stager 2005). It includes an original iconography and a Greek epigram (composed in an imperfect way, possibly by a non-native speaker) both picturing and telling that the defunct was killed by a lion, his corpse rescued by friends and buried in Athens. A short funerary Greek text informs that the defunct was “Antipatros, son of Aphrodisios, from Askalon” (thus adding another link with the Phoenician motherland) and that the dedication was made by “Domsalos, son of Domano, from Sidon” (confirming Sidonian’s preeminent role in the Attica of this time). A Phoenician text (CIS I, 115; KAI 54), in good language but not following the most common Phoenician formulae, seems to be a translation of the Greek one (where the names of the Phoenicians mentioned are both “translated” and “transliterated”): “I (am) Shemay, son of Abdashtart, the Ascalonite. This is the stele which I, Domshaleh, the son of Domhano, the Sidonian, erected”.

Other isolated or set of finds have received less attention so far, such as some graffiti on pottery sherds and other non-monumental items. In the next coming years, the GREPURE Project intends to systematize this type of information, mostly unpublished, which will probably contribute important nuances to the picture offered so far by official and funerary epigraphy. In any case, there is no doubt that these written testimonies certify the presence of Phoenicians linked to maritime trade in some of the most important port cities, and that their quantity and role grew in importance since the 4th century BC.

To conclude regarding the epigraphic evidences, Phoenicians inscriptions found in Greece – in particular the group of Greek-Phoenician bilingual inscriptions coming from some of the most cosmopolitan Greek cities and specially the documents found in Attica (in the city of Athens and in its port Piraeus) – show the well-established and integrated presence of Phoenicians in the area between the 4th and 2nd cent. B. C. One important group, considering their recurrent presence in the inscriptions, was of Kitian origin (a group also active in other Greek ports). However, the most relevant, well organized and quite integrated group was the one of the Sidonians, a real community living and dying in Athens, and especially in its port. They had their own institutions, associations and officers, their own temples; they maintained strong links with their mother city, but were also used to the customs and legal procedures of the place where they were living in. It is quite possible that this community was connected with the intense commercial activity carried out by Sidonians in the Athenian port, an activity eventually supported by a growing and more established community.

This information is coherent with the evidence provided by Greek sources, which informs about the well-integrated, well-appreciated presence of Kitians and Sidonians in the Athenian social, intellectual and political life of the period, and also evidently in the economic sphere.⁴

⁴ It is worth to note the philosophical schools of Zeno of Kition and Zeno of Sidon. Several decrees – in favour of the Sidonians (367 BC) and the Tyrians (ca. 330 BC) (IG II², 337; IG II², 342-43) – prove this officially recognised presence and activity. Greek sources also confirm that the close links existed at the top of the political relationships: the case of Straton I of Sidon (ruling during the middle of the 4th century B.C.), a philhellenic king who established an alliance with Athens (IG II², 141), can be considered paradigmatic in relation to these high-level interactions. In the economic field, we know the existence of trade delegations and lending groups. There were also workshops and even Phoenicians working on agricultural activities (Lipiński 2004, 169-170).

3. The maritime trade: first results of some unpublished underwater contexts.

The epigraphic and literary evidence suggest that the Phoenician communities established in the Greek mainland and insular port hubs played a significant role during the Hellenistic period. Their presence was linked in particular to the economic activities based in some of those ports (Piraeus-Athens and Delos). However, the archaeological evidence available concerning such activities was scarce until now. Recent archaeological surveys undertaken by the Hellenic Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities (HEUA) around several areas of the Aegean Sea have revealed some new documents in relation to the regional distribution of Phoenician commodities, dating to the Late Classical and the Hellenistic periods. Several underwater discoveries are currently being studied, of which we present in this preliminary work only a brief preview of results from two of them. The first dataset is connected with the commercial activities of the Levantine cities and can be linked with the epigraphic information discussed before. The second assemblage that we will briefly consider in this paper is the cargo of an unpublished shipwreck found near the Levitha Island. The surveys conducted up to date allowed a preliminary sampling of the cargo that the ship was carrying and to get a first comprehensive picture of the volume and arrangement of the ship's cargo. Levantine (Phoenician) and Punic containers were a substantial part of the goods loaded on the ship, together with at least one Rhodian amphora and one Greco-Italic vessel, provide key information about the maritime routes and commercial relations established among the Ptolemaic Kingdom, the Phoenician port cities, Carthage and the Aegean during the 3rd century BC.

3.1. An isolated amphora from the Aegean Sea.

A significant finding, which unfortunately cannot be associated with a distinct context, is an isolated amphora raised from the Aegean waters and handed afterwards to the HEUA. Although its precise place of discovery is still unknown, it is for the very least an unpublished evidence of the maritime trade of Phoenician products through the Aegean Sea. Indeed, it offers some suggestive supplementary evidence to the literary and epigraphic accounts by documenting a type of seaborne import that until now has been rarely identified in the archaeological records, given that it could possibly be coming from the waters around the Attica (Lawall 2006). In any case, it is a complete object that allows us to learn some typological information and raise some hypothesis on its provenance area (figure 1). The amphora has the typical carinated profile, and is 44 cm long, 23.5 cm wide (maximum diameter, in the central section of the body) and has a narrow triangular rim (10 cm), small handles and a conical lower part of the body (without toe). The morphological features suggest a close relation with the Phoenician productions of the Late Classical era and the beginning of the Hellenistic period, such as a Bettles' type A1 (Bettles 2003, 104-108), Sagona's type 6.3 (Sagona 1982, 80-82) or Lehmann's types 7 and 12 (Lehmann 1998, 23-25, pl. 10.1; see also Regev 2004, 341-345). It should be dated between the 5th and 4th centuries BC, whereas the examination of the fabric suggests that it could be coming from the area of Sidon (see Bettles 2003: 139-196 for a detailed discussion regarding fabrics 1A and 2A). Even if there are still some uncertainties regarding this type's contents, most of the data available indicate that it must have been wine (again, see Bettles 2003: 262-270). It is worth to note that at least one example of the type has been found at Ialysos in Rhodes (tomb 174, see Sagona 1982: 82), and also that a significant number of these Levantine containers have been unearthed within tombs of the Classical and Late Classical period at Marion, Vouni and particularly Kition (for the later, see Hadjisavvas 2012). Even though it is an isolated amphora, its singularity

and importance lies in the fact that it was retrieved from the Aegean sea, with a chronology that could even be older than the earliest stela and decree known to date (which date back to the 4th-3rd centuries BC). Also, the amphora is an indirect evidence of the maritime trade that connected the Levantine cities and some Aegean ports, since at least the 5th century BC. Finally, this item offers us a typological and chronological link with other more recent discoveries from the Hellenistic period, being a limited evidence of the continuity of these maritime connections during the Late Classical period.

3.2. The Levitha shipwreck: new data from the southeastern Aegean area

Although the findings discussed in the previous section are lacking context and therefore provide suggestive but incomplete data, in the case of the shipwreck located off the island of Levitha the situation is completely the opposite. In this case, the surveys conducted in recent years by Dr. George Koutsouflakis and the HEUA team have allowed to gather limited but very precise information, an exceptional snapshot of a very specific moment in the maritime contacts established between the Levant, the Ptolemaic kingdom and Attica. The work completed up to date has revealed that the island was a key place to stop over along the maritime routes linking Rhodes, Kos, the central Aegean (probably Delos) and Attica (figure 2). One of the shipwrecks identified and explored, whose study is currently underway, offered a very peculiar cargo, which included hundreds of Levantine amphorae (main cargo), some Punic (Carthaginian) vessels and also a few Greek amphorae (Rhodian and Greco-italic, the last coming presumably from Sicily).

The fabric of the two Levantine vessels raised to the surface in the first phase of the survey suggest that the amphorae might have been fired in the southern Levantine coast, or in particular in the Tyre region (figure 3). Macroscopic and microscopic examination of the fabric from both amphorae indeed suggests a connection with the FC 1C fabric group,

which seems to be linked to workshops located in the Southern coast of modern Lebanon (Bettles 2003, 159-165). Their morphological features match with the evolution of the Levantine production of transport vessels after the siege of Tyre (332 BC) and during the Early Hellenistic period, as suggested by Bettles (2003, 270-271) for the case of a “carinated-shoulder amphora with a sack shape and a knob at the base” found in Stratum 2a at Tell Keisan. This first sample of the main cargo of the ship revealed the presence of two typological clusters: the first, quite similar to the one from Tell Keisan (see Lehmann’s *Assemblage 8*, dated ca. 360-300 B.C.; in Lehmann 1998, 25-28, fig. 12.5; and also Regev 2004, fig. 4.11), but also to Ramon’s types T-13113 and T-13121, produced in the 4th-3rd centuries BC at Carthage (see Ramon 1995, 241-242, pl. 213-214); in turn, the second individual belongs to a group closely linked to Bettles’ type A6 (Bettles 2003, 113), perhaps to Sagona’s type 10 (Sagona 1982, 85, pl. 2.11) and to some vessels from Sidon and Tell Keisan included by Lehmann in his *assemblage 8* dated ca. 360-300 BC (Lehmann 1998, 25-28, pl. 12.2-3). The link between these amphorae and earlier prototypes suggest that they would have been probably related with the Phoenician wine trade. The wreck is as well so interesting as it was loaded with some amphorae from the Punic central Mediterranean area (Ramon T-6112/3 and T-4210), a Rhodian vessel and also a Greco-Italic amphora (figure 4), so the shipment could have been gathered or at least completed in Rhodes itself before sinking off Levitha. Regarding the Punic amphorae, the most complete vessel can be linked with the T-6112/3 types, a group produced both in Carthage and western Sicily (Bechtold 2015, 17), and has an incised mark (cross) below the handle, probably a potter’s mark. The Sicilian contexts related to this type point to a production during the first half of the 3rd century, a date that matches with the data from the Levitha shipwreck. We should note that the T-6112/3 group was a variant of other more widespread series among the Carthaginian repertoire of the time.

The T-4210 amphora proves to be relatively damaged, but its characteristic morphology leaves no doubt as to its typology. This tubular like container was connected with a long Carthaginian tradition and was widely disseminated among the western Mediterranean contexts, but its contents had not been clearly identified for now (Ramón Torres 1995, 187-190, 264)⁵. The preliminary examination of the amphorae from the Levitha wreck suggests that the sinking of the ship can roughly be dated between the 270s and the 260s BC, in particular taking into account the Rhodian amphorae, that belong to the Grace's Early Rhodian group (Grace 1963), Monachov's Type I-B Koroni variant (Monachov 2005, 74-75) or Rh I.3-II series (Palamida et al. 2016, 140-141), and also the Greco-Italic vessel, being Gr.-Ita. Va variant (Cibecchini – Capelli 2013, 434-436), also known as the MGS V type (Van der Mersch 1994, 78).

Consequently, this shipwreck provides suggestive evidence (for the 3rd c. BC) about the maritime trade route that connected the Levant and the Aegean, which included some main stopovers in Cyprus (Kition), Rhodes and Delos, before arriving to Attica and the mainland. From Ashkelon, Tyre or Sidon, ships were loaded with wine amphorae, sailed off Cyprus (Demesticha 2012), before heading to Rhodes (Dobosz 2013) and towards the Attica and other main cities of the central and northern Aegean. However, an alternative route for the peculiar cargo discovered at Levitha cannot be dismissed, as the amphorae might also have been initially assembled in Alexandria and subsequently held during a stopover in Rhodes before setting sail for the Cyclades and Attica (for the Delta-Rhodes connection see Gabrielsen 2013). In this second scenario Alexandria and other Ptolemaic ports would have played a key role for a Mediterranean-range connectivity as hubs during the 3rd century BC (Strootman 2019), linking this regional eastern circuit to the long-

⁵ The only evidence pointing to the transport of food preparations based on meat products (Ramón Torres 1995, 264).

distance Punic trade (developed by the Carthaginians towards the Eastern Mediterranean at least since the late 5th and early 4th century BC, as certified by findings at Corinth; see Fantuzzi et al. 2020).

3.3. The Fournoi island deposit

The environs of the Fournoi Island were surveyed in the last years and have also revealed significant data concerning the maritime distribution of Levantine commodities in the eastern Aegean. Located between the islands of Samos and Icaria, it should be considered a stop-over to Athens. The study of the material is still in progress and, as a consequence, it is not possible to provide detailed information about this assemblage. As well, the surveys conducted up to date have not clarified yet if the amphorae raised to the surface were connected part of a wreck or if they are just isolated testimonies of overboard disposed cargo from a passing ship that frequented Fournoi as an eventual anchoring spot. Despite the lack of information, the first examination of the amphorae suggests typological similarities with some of the vessels found at Levitha (figure 5, A). Several Levantine amphorae (three were collected during recent fieldwork), can be connected with Bettles' type A6 (Bettles 2003, 113), dated around the 4th century BC in this instance. In addition to these Levantine amphorae, at least two other example of Aegean containers have been found in the same deposits. The first one could be connected with the "conical" type from Akanthos or the Kassandra peninsula, dated around the second quarter of the 4th century BC (figure 5, B). The second one, note presented here, was dated around the second half of the 5th century AD. The connection between these amphorae and the Levantine cluster is not assured, even for the most recent one. However, in the current state of the research, we should at least mention their existence. However, the parallel of these finds with the cargo of the Levitha wreck is quite encouraging, and the typological

features of the items points to a date between the Late Classical times and the Early Hellenistic period. A more in-depth study of these amphorae is underway and will allow a more precise dating, and to assert with certainty if they were indeed parts of the same assemblage. In any case, this deposit provides additional evidence of the existence of a regular maritime traffic between the Levant and the Aegean Sea.

4. Conclusions

A substantial set of literary, epigraphic and archaeological data attests the importance of the Levantine trade towards ancient Greece, and the continuity of these trade contacts and networks throughout the Early Iron Age until the Hellenistic period (Bourogiannis 2012; 2018). The available data suggest that Delos, Athens and Piraeus were home to significant Levantine communities (in particular after Alexander), mostly merchants who mastered Greek and the Greek way of life, but at the same time that kept alive the link with their homeland in the Levant or Cyprus. According to the literary data and inscriptions, most of those Phoenicians would have come from Sidon and Kition, and in minor quantities from other southern Levant port cities, like Tyre (Baslez 1987; Raptou 2000; Baslez – Briquel-Chatonnet 2012).

The literary and epigraphic data suggest that these merchants were engaged in the trade of various raw materials (metals, resins, etc.), fine handicraft items, textiles and timber (Apicella 2004, 230-234; Van Alfen 2002; 2016; Kron 2015). The commerce of wine transported in amphorae, although more visible in the archaeological record, must have been an important activity but less lucrative. Even so, the findings discussed in the previous sections are quite significant as they confirm the existence of such connections evidenced by the texts. In particular, the wreck found near Levitha Island provides an unexpected and fresh novelty to approach this puzzle, providing an accurately dated pillar

for the study of these maritime connections during the 3rd century BC. The final report on the shipwreck and its cargo, which is currently in progress, is expected to provide insights on specific episodes of the Aegean-Levantine relations after the Persian period, on the Ptolemaic intervention in the maritime trade of the time and, above all, on a hitherto almost unexplored aspect such as the role of Carthage in the Egyptian-Eastern Phoenician trade of the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods.

Although this is a very interesting and stimulating scenario, the available archaeological and epigraphic data is already scattered in a great number of works of no less different orientations. There are some key issues that must be addressed in the near future to improve our understanding of the regional maritime and economic connections discussed in this presentation. On the one hand, the finds from Aegean Sea emphasize the need of further study on the Levantine amphorae, as some variants and fabrics are still difficult to be accurately classified from a typological and archaeometric point of view. On the other hand, the information gathered up to date also opens up new avenues for the study of the Levantine trade in ancient Greece, particularly with regard to its true importance from an economic perspective, but also concerning their connection with the Punic ancient packaging, their chronological span and the connection of the finds with historical events. Levitha also open a very stimulating discussion on the consumption and distribution of Phoenician wine in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 3rd century BC, and to what extent Carthage and the Punic cities of the central Mediterranean were involved in these regional economic circuits.