

Scaraboid seal of the “Lyre-Player Group” at the Huelva Museum

L. Serrano Pichardo, F. González de Canales Cerisola, J. Llopart Gómez y A. Montaña Justo

ABSTRACT:

The corpus of L-PG (Lyre-Player Group) seals, so far constrained to the East-Central Mediterranean area, is now enriched with a new piece connected to the founding depository of an Archaic phase from a Phoenician

sanctuary excavated in the city of Huelva, Spain. This milestone, read in Phoenician key, is ascribed to a dense trade network of small objects of furniture art.

KEY WORDS: Lyre-Player Group seal; Phoenician Sanctuary; Phoenician Trade.

RESUMEN:

El *corpus* de sellos L-PG (“Lyre-Player Group”), constreñido hasta la fecha al espacio mediterráneo centro-oriental, se enriquece con un nuevo ejemplar vinculado al depósito fundacional de una fase arcaica del santuario excavado en 1998 en el solar Méndez

Núñez 7-13 / Plaza de las Monjas 12 del centro histórico de Huelva. Este hito, leído en clave fenicia, se adscribe a la densa red comercial de pequeños objetos de arte mueble.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Sello del “Grupo del Tocador de Lira”; santuario fenicio; comercio fenicio.

Leonardo Serrano Pichardo | Huelva | 1leoserrano@gmail.com

Fernando González de Canales Cerisola (CEFYP) | Huelva | fgonzalezdecanales@yahoo.es

Jorge Llopart Gómez | Huelva | jorge-llopart@hotmail.com

Aurelio Montaña Justo | Madrid | aureliomontano@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The type of seal we are presenting is a Lyre-Player Group product considered as one of the guide fossils used to recognize the commercial exotic elements with which Late Greek Geometric ceramics arrived in southern Italy and Etruria on the second half of the 8th century BC. The L-PG denomination, coined by E. Porada in 1956, highlights the recurring scene of an anthropomorphic figure strumming a lyre over other decorative motifs.

Identified in Lindos (Rhodes) by Chr. Blinkenberg (1931, 161 fig. 19, 164-5), L-PG seals are subject to a

confronted and open debate based on origin attributions, factory centers and artistic styles. In any case, all these hypotheses have brought light to the study, depending on the finding sites in the Anatolian Peninsula and Syro-Palestine coast, Greek Islands and mainland Greece or southern Italy and Etruria, geographical landmarks to which Huelva, in the far Occident, is now added (fig. 1) endorsing the lucid hypothesis of Shefton (1982, 342), based on ceramic materials found in the city, which scales up the archaeological reality of its extensive and complex Phoenician trade.

2. THE SCARABOID SEAL OF THE HUELVA MUSEUM: CONTEXT, TYPE OF STONE AND MANUFACTURE, SHAPE, MOTIF AND ICONOGRAPHY, PARALLELS AND CHRONOLOGY

The seal was found in the course of emergency works undertaken between March and May 1998 on the site of Méndez Núñez St 7-13 / Las Monjas Sq 12, at the historic center of the city of Huelva, Spain, by Osuna, Bedia and Domínguez (2000), and it is now deposited in the city Museum. According to the invaluable information provided by Mrs. Ana Domínguez Rico (co-director of the works), under the wall 131 (fig. 2) at -2.45 m from ground level, an offerings pit, 40 cm deep by 25 cm diameter, appeared. In the ashes, filling the pit, three fragments of a dark blue vitreous paste vessel, decorated with yellow and light blue zigzagging lines, were found containing a dusty cobalt blue substance. The L-PG seal impregnated in such dust was attached to the bigger vitreous fragment. The known results of the excavation suggest a tri-phasic sacred space of long chronology between the late 8th century and beginning of the 4th century BC (Osuna, Bedia and Domínguez, 2000, 178). The vessel and its contents could conveniently certify an offer of the founding phase detected in the sanctuary. Mrs. Ana Domínguez also indicated the existence of another pit, much bigger and deeper, not far from the other one, containing ashes and animal bones. Both eventualities report patterns of a sacred rite at the site.

The artisans of the Lyre-Player Group preferably used

in their manufacture two kinds of magnesium silicate of different color shades easy to etch: steatite and, above all, serpentine (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 42). In lack of petrographic analysis and relying on Devoto and Molayem (1990, 192-4), the Huelva piece, handcrafted on a dark red stone, follows the cutting and scabbling steps necessary to obtain the oval morphology of the scaraboid of convex back and short wall base which, after smoothing and polishing with an abrasive substance suspended in oil sprinkled on a lathe, ends with an intaglio of basal plane. Compared to prototypes checked, this scaraboid shows differentiated features and its shape resembles a scarabaeus in a scheme where protome, elytra, extremities and thorax are missing. Its metrology is as follows: 2.05 x 1.55 x 0.85 cm and weight 2.77 g. A lengthwise perforation 0.30 cm in diameter allowed to fix it. The zoomorphic motif expressed, wrapped in a perimetric incised line in clypeus mode (fig. 3), perhaps represents a hunting scene with a passing lion and an ungulate, of L-PG proper technique and style consistent with the sophisticated repertoires and artistic concepts of the Levant, over which the craftsman emphasizes the appropriate characteristics of every species shown: fore claws, erect mane and tail and excessive horns in the ruminant. From an iconographic standpoint, the lion, a solar animal par excellence, repeats certain constants in

Parallels for this piece (fig. 4) may be documented in the Central and Mid Mediterranean. At the San Montano necropolis (Pithekoussai) there are two close examples in tombs 500 (Buchner, 1964, fig. 5d; Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 11, 12 fig. 17.14, 13 fig. 18) and 943 (Buchner, 1982, 278 fig. 1). Another parallel, of extraordinary proportions, is given by the necropolis of Macchiabate in Francavilla Marittima (Boardman, 1990, 5 figs. 7-8, 12 n° 44). An Etrurian seal at the Paris National Library (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 24 fig. 30.40, 25) can also be considered. In the Aegean area the most remarkable analogies come from the Athenaion Temple in Ialysos, Rhodes (Rizzo, 2009a, 55 fig. 46, 57 fig. 51, 58 fig. 54). From the Levant we can report a piece acquired in Beirut and conserved in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford (Porada, 1956, 192, 201 fig. 20, 208, 210, pl. XVII.20), one of the facets of the Karkemish prism in the British Museum (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 32 fig. 42.107b, 33) and another one from a prism assigned to Phoenicia at the National Museum of Copenhagen (Porada, 1956, 192, 201 fig. 19, 208, 210, pl. XVII.19).

While there is no unanimity when evaluating its workshop and origin, the opposite occurs relative to its temporary production period aiming at the second half of the 8th century BC (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 60;

Boardman, 1990, 1; 1994, 96; Ridgway, 2000, 235). For the Huelva seal we propose the second half of the 8th century BC based on the parallels of tombs 500 (Buchner, 1964, fig. 5d) and 943 (Buchner, 1982, 278 fig. 1) of San Montano, highlighting materials associated to the L-PG scaraboid of tomb 500: a Protocorinthian khyatos (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 11, 13 fig. 19), a locally made three foiled jug copying an LG model (Ibidem, 4 fig. 4, 11), a Johansen type achromatic aryballos (Ibidem, 11; Martelli, 1988, 105, 106 fig. 2 lower left; 1991, 1050, 1052 fig. 2b), another one locally made, six fibulae –five with a covered arch, one of which is made in iron and the rest in bronze, just like the sixth one of leech type–, another L-PG seal with zoomorphic motifs (caprine and ornithic) and chevron (Buchner and Ridgway, 1993, 648-50) and a scarab of Egyptizing steatite mounted on a silver earring with the legend “Khonsu who yields life” (De Salvia, 1993, 798 fig. 8.662-13, 802 n° 662, 808 fig. 12.662-13). These materials are dated to the third quarter of the 8th century BC and are ascribed to the first Late Geometric phase. The proposed date seems adequate to the Huelva seal. Not far away from the terrains where the scaraboid was found an EPC kotyle and two Euboean skyphos, one of which LG I (fig. 5), attributed to Phoenician trade (Cabrera, 1990, 44-6, 87 fig. 1, 2-4; 1998, 90, 273) were documented.

3. ORIGIN ATRIBUTIONS, MOTIFS, MORPHOLOGIES AND SOURCES OF L-PG SEALS.

Taking into account the type of rock in which most of the pieces are made, the artistic designs they depict, as well as their schematic art, Blinkenberg (1931, 165-8) concluded that these seals were neo-Hittite and pointed at a specific space between the southeast of Turkey and northern Syria. This spatial and cultural location was shared by most authors (Buchner, 1964, 270; Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 61; Boardman, 1986, 86-7; 1990, 1; 1994, 96; 1996, 338; Ridgway, 1992, 65; Shepherd, 1999, 295; Mirimanoff, 2001, 31). Boardman suggested its liability with the zone's art and Dusinberre (2005, 43-4) extended it to the Phoenician-Levantine area. In contrast, E. Porada (1956, 192) calls for Rhodes within a Semitic current immersed in the Palestinian blob-style (Ibidem, 195, note 35). This genesis would be favored by the

assemblage of seals from the votive deposits of the above mentioned Ialysos temple (Martelli 1988, 110-1; 1991, 1050; Rizzo 2009a, 38-9) and the existence of glass rock planoconvex lenses (fig. 6) used by master craftsmen in order to get closer to the carved motifs (Rizzo 2009a, 42-3, note 19, figs. 13-15), who might well be Phoenicians residing in Rhodes (Coldstream, 1969; 1982, 269). To the same authors could be attributed certain categories of ceramic vessels and glass paste ornithomorphic beads (“vogelperlen”) or, else, with protrusions located in the Eastern and Central Mediterranean (Martelli, 1991). Irene J. Winter (1995, 266-7, note 39), leaning on the style, iconographic uniformity and their parallels with the Carmona's Phoenician ivories proposes Phoenicia as the manufacturing place. In connection with this proposal,

1 - Notamos que la numeración de la tumba responde a la asignada en la excavación. Las correspondencias definitivas se publican en *Pithekoussai* I, 1993: v.g. n° 500 de excavación = n° 662 de publicación.

Hodos (2006, 67) recalls a bronze sculpture of an 8th century lyre player found in Tyre. At the same direction aim the graphites shown in the seals of San Montano and Macchiabate necropolis, provided the graph is Phoenician instead of Aramean.

Above, we have mentioned the predominance of an anthropomorphic figure carrying a lyre which gives sense to its denomination. In her catalogue, Porada (1956, 189-91) differentiates other zoomorphic, phytomorphic and geometric decorative motifs, such as Buchner and Boardman (1966, 45-59), and recently Martelli (1988, 111) and Rizzo (2009a, 65, figs. 73-75), astral motifs. It is also to be remarked the depiction of mythical and fabulous beings (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 2 fig. 1.4-5, 36 figs. 47-49), most elaborated scenes (Boardman, 1990, 8 fig. 16; Huber, 1998, 114-5 fig. 2; Giovanelli, 2008, 75, 84 fig. 1; Cerchiai and Nava, 2009, 100 fig. 8b), although Rizzo (2009b, 137-8) casts some doubts over its connection to the seal Group assigned by Boardman and Giovanelli, to the motif combinations (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 24 fig. 30.42-43, 35 fig. 43; Rizzo, 2009a, 49-50, figs. 25-27) and to the ancillary motifs (chevrons, volutes, palmettes...) integrated within the scene (Blinkenberg, 1931, 161 fig. 19x) (fig. 7). Generally speaking all pieces show a sort of schematic and synthetic art in which the artisan emphasizes the intrinsic features of each designed species on the base surface.

The formal dominance of these carved stones is held by the scaraboid discriminated by Blinkenberg's Group 4 (Blinkenberg, 1931, 159, 165), of ovoidal shape, composing a high vertical wall podium ended in a calotte (Huber, 1998, 115 figs. 3-4; Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 42, 43 figs. 67-68; Zazoff, 1983, 53 fig. 24i). A lesser number is represented by scaraboids

depicting the anatomy of the scarabeus sacer, extant in some pieces from Etruria (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 25 figs. 31-32, 42), Monte Vetrano (Cerchiai and Nava, 2009, 100 fig. 8a,c-d) and Eretria (Huber, 1998, 115 fig. 2), extensible to a variation recognized in lalysos, although Rizzo (2009a, 67 figs. 84-86) doubts whether or not they should be included in such a group. Both cases show a lengthwise perforation. Finally, the four facet prism is a rare shape seldom seen in L-PG seals of which just three specimens are known: the ones already mentioned (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 32 fig. 42a-d, 33 n° 107), the one assigned to Phoenicia (Blinkenberg, 1931, 162F-J; Porada, 1956, 187, 199 fig. 3, 201 figs. 17-19, 208, 210, pl. XVII.3, 17-19) and a third one from the lalysos Athenaion (Rizzo, 2009a, 43-8, figs. 16-20) with two lengthwise perforations also extant in the Phoenician one. More recently, a faceted prism from Cancho Roano, Spain, has been released which recalls L-PG seals showing on their face B a supposedly 8th century Phoenician letter (Almagro-Gorbea et al., 2009, 76-8, fig. 6). The authors of the latter work perceive that piece most likely as Syrian art related to either Late Geometric or Early orientaling prototypes.

We shall conclude remarking that the most frequent finding ranges of L-PG seals in the Levant respond to urban contexts (Hodos, 2006, 68); and in Cyprus, the Aegean Islands and Greece they are found in Sanctuaries (Huber 1998, 114-8; 2003, 91-2; Mirimanoff 2001, 31), with a votive function; whereas in the Central Mediterranean they have a talismanic character and they are found in necropoleis, as amulets protecting the deceased (Buchner, 1964, 270-1; Buchner and Boardman, 1966), whose maximum expositive is the San Montano cemetery (Pithekoussai) where they reach a great historical and archaeological significance in harmony with other material associations.

4. LOS AGENTES DE INTERCAMBIO

The first steps of Phoenician expansion to the West are found in the 11th century BC in Cyprus (Bikai, 1987, 58-61, 69), reaching several Aegean realms in the next century, including Rhodes, where a long lasting Phoenician community was established (Coldstream, 1969; 1982, 269). The Semitic trade components are also tracked in Egypt, as it is witnessed by the materials

from Heracleopolis Magna (Padró, 1991) proving stable ties since at least the second half of the 10th century BC. Likewise, the pre-colonial ceramic assemblage of Huelva (González de Canales, Serrano y Llopart, 2004, 31-94, 199, pls. I-XIX, XLIV-LIX.1-4) records the material footsteps of these early Phoenician activities which came along with Greek Geometric pottery.

As far as the Central Mediterranean is concerned, Phoenician pre-colonial visits are attested by the Nora Stele and the Bosa (Sardinia) fragment, dated to centuries 9th to 8th BC (Amadasi, 1993-94, 229-34; Del Castillo, 2003, 16-20, with an extensive bibliography), and an abundant exotica as remarked by Martelli (1991) and Nijboer (2008), amongst others. Like in the Levant, Cyprus and Huelva these activities could also be reflected in the imported Greek Geometric ceramics reaching Lazio, (Sant’Omobono), Etruria (Quatro Fontanelli), Campania (Pontecagnano), Sant’Imbenia (Alghero, Sardinia) and the Sicilian necropolis of Villasmundo, with representations of Euboeo-Cycladic pendant semicircles skyphos type 6 of Kearsley (1989, 98-104), or type 5 in the case of Sant’Imbenia (Ridgway, 1995, 80). Owing to the proximity to Pithekoussai’s foundation, ca. 760 BC, more difficulties are raised when considering the oldest phase of the Cuma necropolis, as shown in Osta’s tomb 3, yielding a Geometric vessel decorated with chevrons (Domínguez Monedero, 1991, 158, 160 fig. 4), and the fragments of a krater and four skyphos from the Pithekoussai acropolis which Coldstream (1995, 252 n° 2, 257 n° 57-58 and 61-62, 258 fig. 2.57-58 and 61, 260-1, 266) ascribes to MG II-LG I.

There is a historiographic trend which gives protagonism in the transportation of Middle Attic Geometric and Euboean-Cycladic Subprotogeometric ceramics to the Euboean Greeks while skipping certain alternatives. According to this interpretation, the diffusion of L-PG seals could be explained by Euboean trade (Buchner and Boardman 1966, 62; Huber 2003, 92). This contingency causes serious problems, as stated

by Martelli (1988, 111-2; 1991, 1049-53), when trying to evaluate certain orientalia categories (glass, metallic vessels, ivories, glyptic, pottery...), which induced Cabrera (1994, 21) to propose the compromise of accepting the combination of Greek and Phoenician interests towards mid 8th century BC. Consequently it seems compulsory to reconsider the commercial vectors paying attention to the above indicators (Rizzo, 2009b, 139-40) and to the objective fact of epigraphic data contributed by some pieces and other graphed materials which, apart from the discussion about its Phoenician or Aramaean nature (Buchner, 1978, 142; Garbini, 1978; Amadasi, 1987, 36-8; 1993-94, 228-9) witness the stable presence of Oriental immigrants socially integrated in Pithekoussai during the second half of the 8th century and beginning of the 7th century BC as it is reflected in the funerary rituals (Docter, 2000, 147).

It is increasingly evident the early development of a rich, dense and broad exchange network due to the Phoenicians whose westernmost point is testified by the Huelva pre-colonial materials, assuring the affiliation of the trade agent who, later on, towards the second half of the 8th century BC yielded the L-PG seal and the documented Late Greek Geometric pottery. At the same time, in agreement with Boardman (1996, 338), may we remark that an L-PG seal in a “neat” Phoenician context had never been documented before. At least for this site a hypothetical Greek intermediation could be discarded, although according to written sources and Archaic ceramics, it would be at the center stage a century later.

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FIGURAS

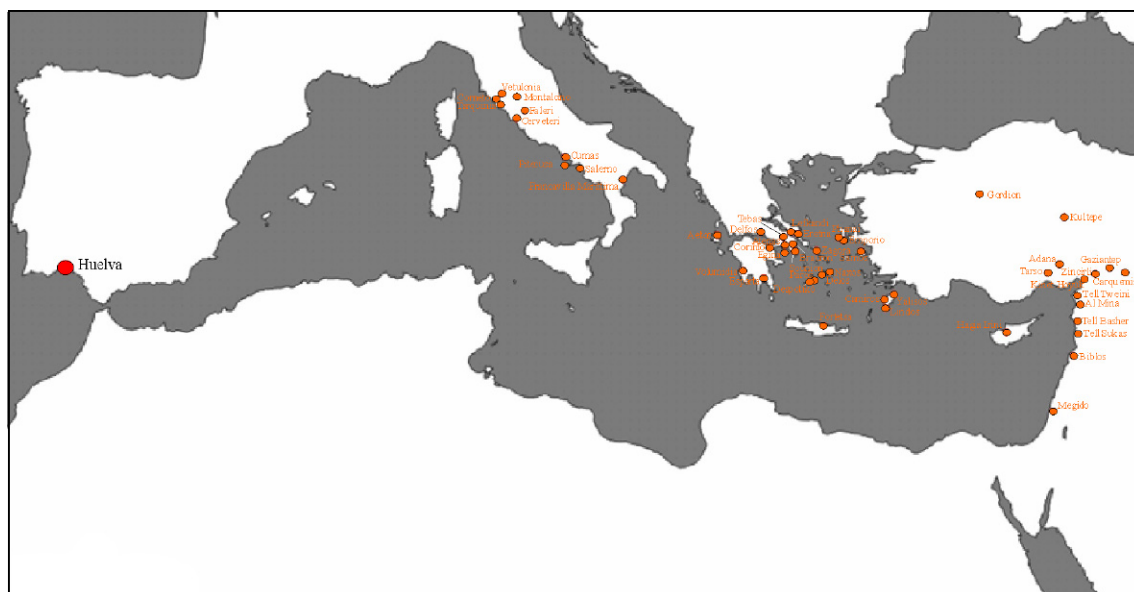


Figure 1. Range of the Lyre-Player Group seals.



Figure 2. Structure of the Méndez Núñez Temple indicating wall 131 (Huelva Museum, photomontage by D. Moreno Patiño, 1998).

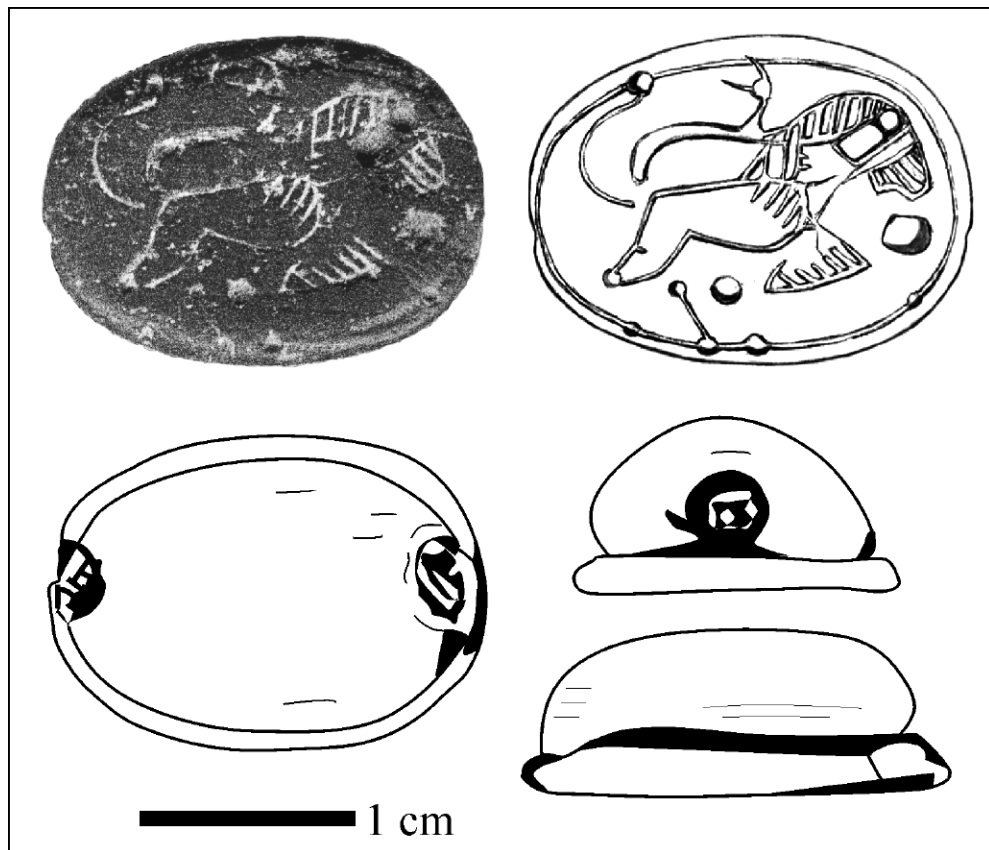


Figure 3. Huelva L-PG scaraboid.



Figure 4. Parallels: 1. Pithekoussai (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 12 fig. 17.14); 2. Macchiabate (Boardman, 1990, 5 fig. 8); 3. Etruria (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 24 fig. 30.40); 4. Ialysos (Rizzo, 2009a, 55 fig. 46); 5. Ialysos (Rizzo, 2009a, 57 fig. 51); 6. Karkemish (Buchner and Boardman, 1966, 32 fig. 42.107b).



Figure 5. Euboean Skyphos (Huelva Museum pic.).



Figure 6. Planoconvex lens of lalysos (from Rizzo, 2009a).



Figure 7. Motifs: 1. Lyre Player, lalysos (Rizzo, 2009a); 2. Zoomorphic, Pithekoussai (Buchner and Boardman, 1966); 3. Phytomorphic, lalysos (Rizzo, 2009a); 4. Geometric, Pithekoussai (Buchner and Boardman, 1966); 5. Astral, lalysos (Rizzo, 2009a); 6. Fabulous, Pithekoussai (Buchner and Boardman, 1966); 7. Elaborated, Monte Ventrano (photo: Soprintendenza archeologica di Salerno); 8. Combinations, Pithekoussai (Buchner and Boardman, 1966); 9. Ancillary, assigned to Greece (Blickenberg, 1931).