

## **Zoomorphic Askos from Beatas Street Necropolis Preserved in the Museum of Malaga in Spain**

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*A terracotta figure which can be dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC coming from one of the burial areas documented in the city of Malaga (Spain) located in Beatas Street is described. The figure is currently being displayed in the Museum of Malaga and has remained unpublished up until now. It corresponds to a zoomorphic askos in the shape of a lion whose purpose would be to protect the tomb's owner for the afterlife. The representation of this animal in this pottery shape could be linked with Phoenician female goddesses, particularly Tanit, and it is not very common in the ancient Phoenician colonies around the Mediterranean, being the only finding in Malaca, which certainly sparks interest.*

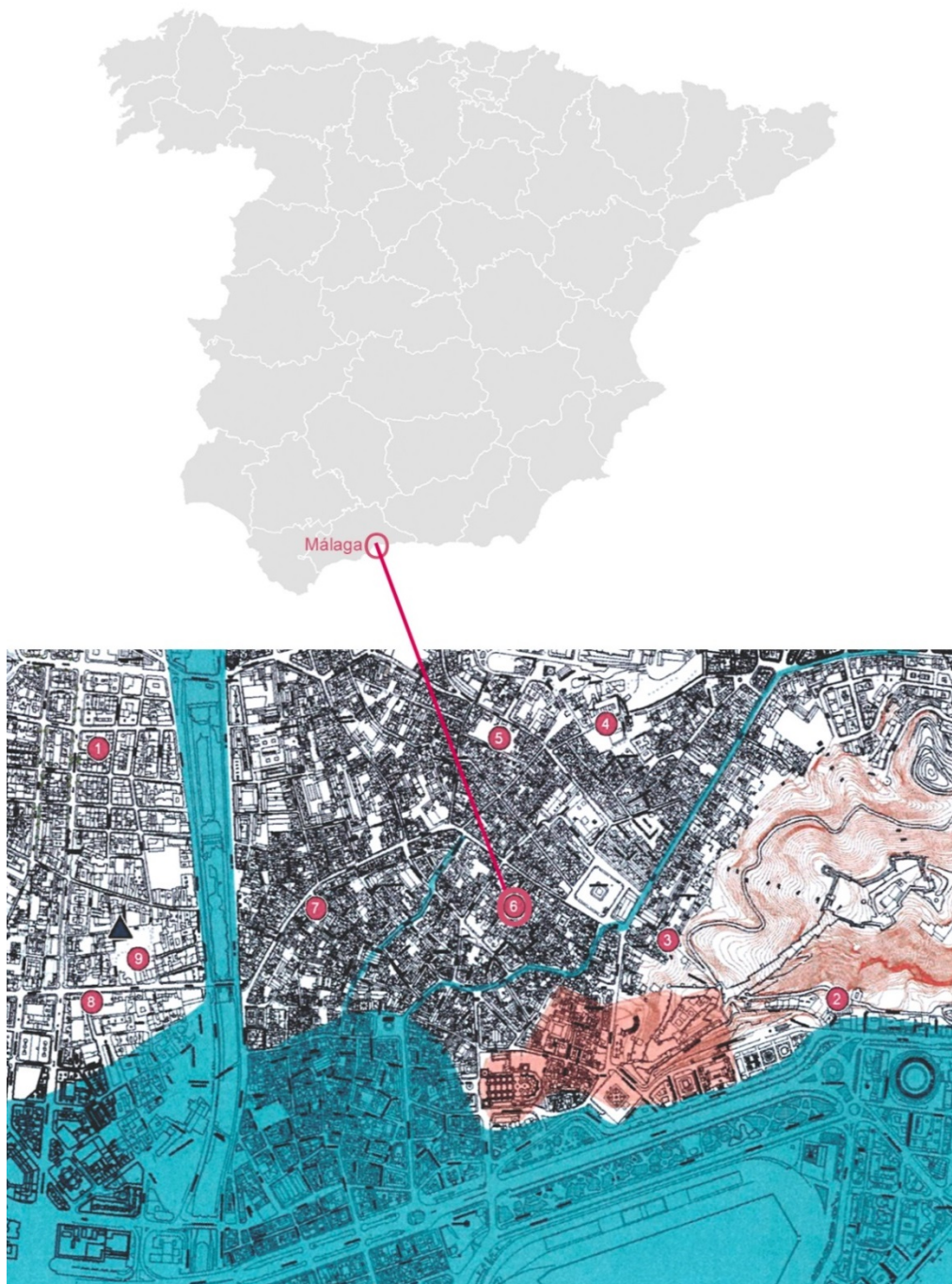
### **Introduction**

The terracotta that we are now analysing comes from some archaeological works conducted by Jose Mayorga Mayorga in 2002 on Beatas Street in Malaga (Spain) (Figure 1, number 6) where a new burial area was documented to increase the set of spots that were used for funerary purposes in this ancient colony founded by Phoenician navigators. Unfortunately, the results obtained during those works have not yet been published so most details about the related context are still unknown. However, we have some partial information on the grave objects which enables us to date the tomb. In addition, this piece offers a very interesting iconography by showing the figure of a lion, a very rare animal within the Western Mediterranean colonial area. Until now it turns out to be the only finding in the city of Malaga and consequently its publication offers unquestionable interest.

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**Figure 1.** Situation of Malaga within Spain and Location of Burial Areas: 1, Zambrana; 2, Campos Eliseos; 3, Mundo Nuevo; 4, El Ejido; 5, The Warrior's Tomb; 6, Beatas-Ramon Franquelo; 7, Andres Perez; 8, Marmoles; 9, Tiro-Zamorano; Ancient Malaca Site (red-shaded area); Ancient Coastline and Rivers (blue-shaded area); San Pablo Habitat (black triangle)

Source: López Chamizo.

Along the next sections, the scarce available information about this burial area will be explained before going on to describe the terracotta from Malaga, to later review the findings of this type of container in the Phoenician colonial sphere, and to end these pages the figure of the lion within the religious and symbolic sphere of this ancient society will be analysed.

As we have commented above, this *askos* remains unpublished since only a minimal reference to its discovery was made in some publications. It is currently kept in the Museum of Malaga where it can be contemplated by visitors in one of the rooms devoted to exhibit the materials from Roman times. We acknowledge the Museum Director Ms. María Morente as well as the rest of the Museum's staff for the assistance they have provided for its study and publication.

### The Necropolis

Unfortunately, the necropolis where this piece comes from is very poorly known since it has not been published in depth and therefore, we only have brief details about what was discovered. According to what has been scarcely published, the grave was located on a small hill not far from the old coastline (Figure 1). Four graves altogether were excavated in this hill although the extension of the funerary area is still not known due to the limitations of urban archaeology. The burials all consisted of very narrow pits that had been excavated in the bedrock of the hill. The remains of the cremated individuals, deposited and possibly burnt in an *ustrinum* located near the graves, were accompanied by the elements that made up the grave goods. The whole of the excavated set offers a date ranging from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD, always considering that future discoveries could extend this time scope.

Regarding the recovered grave goods within the burial area, only two Campanian pottery vessels consisting of a *pyx* and a plate (Figure 2) together with a couple of small coins -sextants from the 5a series of period III minted in Malaca during the 1st century BC- have been revealed<sup>1</sup>. Fortunately, we have some data related to this particular grave designated with number 1 where the terracotta appeared. Consequently, we can indicate that the grave goods consisted of a total of 13 glass paste necklace beads of the so-called "eye" type, two figa-type bone amulets as well as a clay spindle. There was also an unclassified coin, showing a central perforation to be set in a necklace, which had been partially fused to a silver and amber pendant. In addition to them, a shard from a grey clay small jar, a complete bulb Roman unguentarium corresponding to Oberaden 28 shape, a

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1. B. Mora Serrano, "La moneda en la ciudad de Malaca (siglos III a. C.-VI d. C.)," in *Moneda i vida urbana. V Curs d'Història monetària d'Hispania*, (MNAC, Barcelona, 2001), 127; P. Corrales Aguilar, and B. Mora Serrano, *Historia de la provincia de Málaga. De la Roma republicana a la Antigüedad Tardía* (Málaga: Cedma, 2005), 66.

shard from the mouth of another unguentarium and one more shard from a Mañá C amphora were unearthed<sup>2</sup>. All this together with the eight shards of the zoomorphic vase described here enable us to date this burial, and therefore the terracotta, to the 1st century BC.



**Figure 2.** *Campanian Pottery from Beatas Street*

Source: Corrales Aguilar, Mora Serrano, 2005.

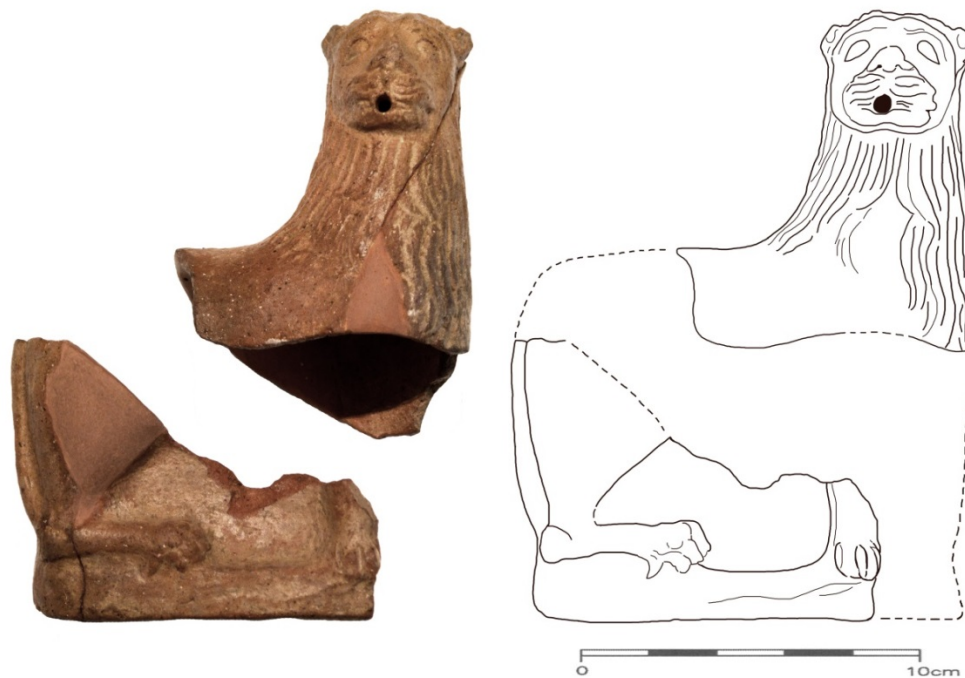
### **The Lion-headed Zoomorphic Vessel**

The piece is on show in the Malaga Museum with the display case number A-714. It has not been completely preserved since only eight shards were found. They have been restored into only two parts that, although not connected, enable us to get a fairly approximate idea of its original appearance. They belong to a

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2. J. Mayorga Mayorga, M. M. Escalante Aguilar, and M. I. Cisneros García, "Evolución urbana de la Málaga romana. Desde sus inicios hasta el siglo III d. C.," *Mainake* XXVII (2005): 150-151.

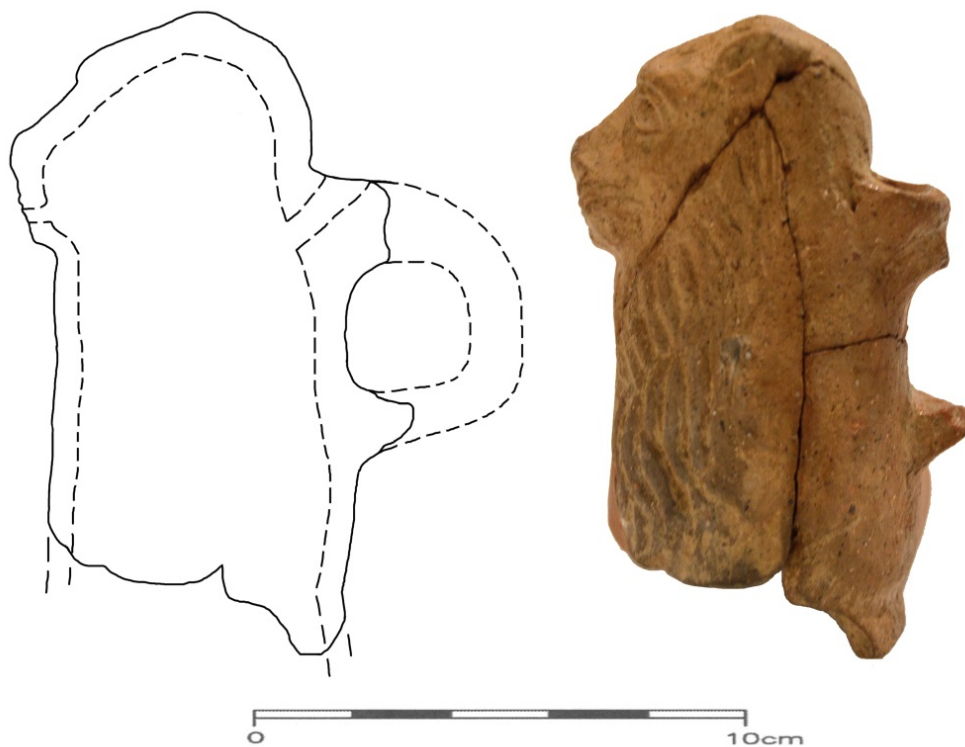
clay small vessel of the *askos* type, possibly mould-made, in the shape of a resting lion with its head turned towards the front. It was manufactured with reddish-orange clay including very tiny particles, and later covered with brown slip (Figure 3). The first shard corresponds to the upper front part of the animal measuring 109 mm high, 77 mm long and 53 mm wide, broken on its chest and the beginning of the back. From the rounded head a wavy mane was incised covering the neck and chest. Between the whiskers we find the mouth where a circular perforation designed to pour the liquid was made.



**Figure 3.** Zoomorphic Askos from Beatas Street  
Source: Museum of Malaga.

We can also see the snout and the downturned almond-shaped eyes, as well as small protruding ears. On the back of the lion the vertical handle is attached and a small hole is opened at its top to fill the interior (Figure 4). The other preserved shards correspond to the hind quarters that measure 65 mm high, 88 mm long and 53 mm wide, particularly corresponding to the right side, where the leg and its claw have been carefully marked, together with part of the right front leg and claws, in addition to the tail attached to the rear body. The figure rests on a rectangular base with rounded corners to provide a better support.





**Figure 4.** Profile of the Upper Part with Openings, One on Top of the Handle for Filling and One for Pouring from the Lion's Mouth

Source: Museum of Malaga.

Its modelling differs from the classic features shown by earlier feline specimens with Neo-Hittite reminiscences, characterized by its rigidity and frontal view showing a straight head with threatening open jaws and hanging-out tongue<sup>3</sup>. In this case we can appreciate that the way of shaping the animal's head is closer to a basalt sculpture from Byblos dated between the 6th-5th centuries BC<sup>4</sup>, represented from the same perspective although in the oriental case the two hind legs are located on the same side (Figure 5). Up to now within the Phoenician area in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, the appearance of two zoomorphic pots where lions were represented on their pouring spouts is the only attested evidence. It refers to two painted *guttus* (Figure 6) buried in the Cadiz necropolis which have been attributed to a date around the 4th-3rd centuries BC<sup>5</sup>.

3. J. M. Blázquez Martínez, "El arte neohitita y los orígenes de la escultura animalística ibérica y turdetana," *Goya* CXX (1974): 345-348.

4. E. Gubel, "Sculpture," in *Dictionnaire de la civilisation Phénicienne et Punique* (Paris: Brepols, 1992), 401.

5. M. D. López de la Orden, L. C. Zambrano Valdivia, and E. García Alfonso, "Guttus del Museo de Cádiz procedente de la necrópolis fenicio-púnica," *Albahrí. Entre Oriente y Occidente. Revista independiente de estudios históricos* 1 (2015): 45-50.



**Figure 5.** *Lion Sculpture from Byblos*

Source: Gubel, 1992.

These animal-shaped receptacles appeared in the Near East back in the Bronze Age or even earlier, subsequently showing a wide distribution in Phoenician areas such as Crete, Cyprus or the Aegean where black-glazed or red-figured Attic *askoi* have also appeared. They display a certain formal variety because, in addition to representing different species of animals, they can stand on the flat bottom of the vessel, on its four legs or on a raised base. Focusing on the Phoenician area analysed now, we must point out that they are well known in the North African sites with outstanding examples of *askoi* discovered in Carthage, Thapsus, Bulla Regia, Hadrumentum, ChercHELL, Tipasa, Gouraya, Rachgoun and Siga. Such vessels are often painted with geometric motifs offering some early dates from the second half of the 8th century BC and depicting a variety of animals such as dolphins, bears, rams, birds, horses, hedgehogs and dogs, but never lions up until now<sup>6</sup>.

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6. P. Bartoloni, "Viaggiando nel tempo 2: sulle tracce degli askoi di Pierre Cintas," *Cartagine. Studi e Ricerche* 3 (2018): 3-10; S. Giardino, "Vases zoomorphes phéniciens et puniques de l'Afrique du Nord: comparaisons, fonctionnalité et symbolisme," in *Cartagine. Il Mediterraneo centro-occidentale e la Sardegna. Società, economia e cultura materiali fra fenici e autoctoni* (Sassari: SAIC, 2020), 48-53.



**Figure 6.** *Guttus* from Cadiz

Source: López de la Orden, Zambrano Valdivia, García Alfonso, 2015.

They have also been found in the Phoenician sites on the island of Sardinia<sup>7</sup> where Tharros, Tuvixeddu and Sulci can be included in the list of findings. With an initial date of the 6th century BC, figures of horses, frogs, ducks and pigeons sometimes showing pictorial decoration but, as just commented for the North African area, lion images are not represented.

Although the oldest specimens reach the Iberian Peninsula at a very early date -in Huelva their chronology reaches the last decades of the 9th century BC<sup>8</sup>- it will be well into the second half of the millennium when their number increases, although it must be admitted that they are not very abundant in the pottery collection of these colonial sites. Most findings of this type of zoomorphic vessels appear in funerary contexts such as those discovered on the island of Ibiza, within the necropolises of Puig des Molins, Can Berri den Sergent and Ca na Jondala, buried in the second half of the 5th century BC, with the absolutely unusual feature that one of them shows the name of its owner painted on its surface<sup>9</sup>. Notwithstanding, those from the Cadiz necropolis are found in later tombs, since their presence in dates earlier than the 3rd century BC is very scarce, although the two *guttus* with lion-shaped spouts mentioned above appear a

7. M. Medde "Askoi zoomorfi dalla Sardegna," *Rivista di Studi Punici* 1 (2000): 160-168.

8. F. González de Canales, L. Serrano Pichardo, and J. Llopart Gómez, *El emporio fenicio precolonial de Huelva (ca. 900-700 a. C.)* (Huelva: Biblioteca Nueva, 2004), 53-54.

9. J. M. Fernández Gómez, and M. J. Fuentes Estañol, "Una sepultura conteniendo un askos con inscripción púnica," *Aula Orientalis* 1 (1983): 173-190; J. H. Fernández, M. J. López Grande, A. Mezquida, F. Velázquez, B. Costa, "Una sepultura con askois zoomorfos y una punta de lanza de la necrópolis de Ca na Jondala (Sant Josep de Sa Talaia, Ibiza)," in *Entre los mundos. Homenaje a Pedro Barceló* (Paris: PUF, 2017), 313-316.



century earlier. The same dates apply to the Cadiz pottery kilns, showing that zoomorphic containers were surely manufactured locally<sup>10</sup>.

As for the animals represented, they include birds -pigeons and hens or roosters<sup>11</sup>-, although in Ibiza the variety of species is greater as we find pigeons, rams, hedgehogs, deer and horses<sup>12</sup>. Also in Rusaddir, the ancient Melilla, three vessels were found, one of them totally unknown to us, the other two with the images of a dog and a dolphin that still had traces of red paint on its surface<sup>13</sup>. However, both the Cadiz and the Ibizan specimens are supported on small bases or on the legs of the animal thus showing a different model from the Malaga piece which is supported on a rectangular base resembling more to the *askoi* from Melilla, also with the same filling hole over the handle in the back of the dog, and from Cerro del Mar, representing a bear whose date or context is not known<sup>14</sup> (Figure 7).

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10. D. Bernal, J. J. Díaz, J. A. Expósito, A. M. Sáez, L. Lorenzo, and A. Sáez, *Arqueología y urbanismo. Avance de los hallazgos de época púnica romana en las obras de la carretera de Camposoto (San Fernando, Cádiz)* (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 2003), 129, 186 and 192.

11. A. Muñoz Vicente, "En torno a seis *askoi* zoomorfos de la necrópolis púnica de Cádiz," *Boletín del Museo de Cádiz*, V (1992): 8-9; A. M. Sáez Romero, "Uso y producción de *askoi* en Gadir. Una posible evidencia del culto a Tanit," *L'Africa Romana* XVI (2006): 1972-1973.

12. J. H. Fernández, *Excavaciones en la necrópolis de Puig des Molins (Eivissa). Las campañas de D. Carlos Román Ferrer: 1921-1929* (Eivissa: Museu Arqueològic d'Eivissa i Formentera, 1992), 73-76.

13. P. Fernández Uriel, and J. M. Saéz Cazorla, "Un guttus inédito procedente de Rusaddir," *Cartagine. Studi e Ricerche* 5 (2020): 8-10; P. Fernández Uriel, R. Gutiérrez González, and J. M. Sáez Cazorla, "Vaso (guttus) en forma de delfín procedente de Melilla en el MAN," in *El norte de África en época romana. Tributum in memoriam Enrique Gozalbes Cravioto* (Salamanca: Signifer Libros, 2020), 272-275.

14. J. A. Martín Ruiz, *Catálogo documental de los fenicios en Andalucía* (Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, 1995), 77.



**Figure 7.** Zoomorphic Askoi from Cerro del Mar and Rusaddir  
Source: Martín Ruiz, 1995; Fernández Uriel & Saéz Cazorla, 2020.

Regarding the functionality that these pieces had, we must admit that the topic is still subject to speculation due to the lack of analysis made to their content. As a general rule, it has been accepted that it must have been some liquid or ointment that would slowly drop out of the pot. Even though *askoi* have been contemplated as possible baby bottles<sup>15</sup>, the truth is that in Ibiza they have not

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15. A. Rodero Riaza, *Colección de cerámica púnica de Ibiza en el Museo Arqueológico Nacional* (Madrid: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 1990), 20.

appeared associated with any children's tombs<sup>16</sup>. This belief has also been questioned, especially if we bear in mind that the position of the spout is not the most appropriate for this purpose, and also that some of them are painted which could be harmful to the babies' health<sup>17</sup>. However, it has been argued that these vessels did not only have a single function, but rather that their use could vary from one society to another and also over time. Consequently, it has been discussed that they could have been used not only as symbols of divinity to spread liquids in rituals carried out during burial, but also with other functions that are unknown to us<sup>18</sup>.

### The Lion in the Phoenician Funerary and Religious Sphere

Since the Bronze Age, the lion was related to the Eastern ideological sphere by representing strength and fierceness, being one of the animals preferred by kings and aristocrats for hunting, as would also be in Pharaonic Egypt. For this reason, it does not seem strange that it was finally assimilated to very diverse divinities, generally feminine. As for the Phoenician sphere, it was represented in numerous elements such as sculptures, terracotta, bronze and ivory objects, etc.

Even though it has been pointed out that these zoomorphic images should not always be linked with religious items, since both the manufacturer and the buyer could have ignored this circumstance and have made or acquired them only for artistic or decorative purposes<sup>19</sup>, it is generally accepted that among Phoenicians this animal was related to a female divinity imitating what is attested in different Mesopotamian societies. However, there is not complete agreement about who this goddess could be. Consequently, while some authors opt for Astarte<sup>20</sup>, many others point out Tanit<sup>21</sup>.

Its appearance in graves is explained by being considered an effective protective element, understanding it as a guardian of the tomb. This fact has well been established at least since the end of the II millennium BC as reflected by the

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16. Fernández, op. cit. in note 8: 74.

17. Medde, op. cit. in note 9: 168-169.

18. S. Alfaye, "Usos y contextos de los vasos plásticos zoomorfos en la Céltica hispana: verter, sacrificar, alimentar, silbar," *Saldvie* 7 (2007): 71-91.

19. Giardino, op. cit. in note 8: 60.

20. M. Belén, and M. C. Marín Ceballos, "Diosas y leones en el período Orientalizante de la Península Ibérica," *Spal. Revista de Prehistoria y Arqueología* 11 (2002): 172-186.

21. Sáez Romero, op. cit. note 6, 1983-1984; R. Marlasca, "Tanit de las estrellas," in *El mundo púnico. Religión, antropología y cultura material* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2001-2002), 125-127; Fernández, López Grande, Mezquida, Velázquez, Costa, op. cit. in note 7: 327; M. D. Simón Vallejo, J. J. Rubia de Gracia, M. Belén Deamos, and E. Ferrer Albelda, "Un santuario tardopúnico en Mijas (Málaga)," in *IX International Congress of Phoenician and Punic Studies* (Mérida: Junta de Extremadura, 2020), 245-246.

lions sculpted on the famous sarcophagus of King Ahiiram I of Byblos, or those that were located in the corners of the funerary monuments of Puente de Noy (Almuñecar, Granada) (Figure 8) and Pozo Moro (Chinchilla, Albacete) dating from the 7th and 6th centuries, respectively<sup>22</sup>. Considering its religious character, its presence is also confirmed in Western Phoenician cult centres such as the Mijas sanctuary where terracottas with this shape have been found, possibly corresponding to offerings made by the faithful<sup>23</sup>, or the Ibizan Cap des Llibrell that revealed the remains of a stone altar decorated with two lion heads<sup>24</sup>, both dated between the 2nd-1st centuries BC.

The elaboration of terracottas has been attested in Malaga where only the claw-shaped foot of one piece has been unearthed<sup>25</sup>, although it is not known what type of object it belonged to. It has been stated that it corresponds to a clay tripod similar to another from Toscanos settlement that has been dated back to the 7th century BC<sup>26</sup>. However, the lack of clay analysis prevents us from determining if this *askos* could have been manufactured in Malaga.

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22. M. Almagro-Gorbea, and M. Torres Ortiz, *La escultura fenicia en Hispania* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2010), 172-178.

23. Simón Vallejo, Rubia de Gracia, Belén Deamos, Ferrer Albelda, op. cit. en nota 22: 248.

24. J. Ramón, "Investigaciones arqueológicas en el santuario púnico del Cap des Llibrell," in *Atti del V Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici* (Università degli Studi di Palermo, Palermo, 2005), 1395-1397.

25. A. Arancibia Román, C. Chacón Mohedano, and B. Mora Serrano, "Nuevos datos sobre la producción anfórica tardopúnica en Malaga: el sector alfarero de la margen derecha del río Guadalmedina (Avda. Juan XXIII)," in *La etapa neopúnica en Hispania y el Mediterráneo occidental: identidades compartidas* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2012), 411.

26. H. Schubart, and G. Maass-Lindemann, "Toscanos. El asentamiento fenicio occidental en la desembocadura del río de Vélez. Excavaciones de 1971," *Noticiero Arqueológico Hispánico* 18 (1984): 149.



**Figure 8.** *Lion from Puente de Noy (Almuñecar, Granada)*  
Source: Martín Ruiz, 1995.



## Conclusions

The piece that is analysed in these pages corresponds to a zoomorphic *askos* in the shape of a lying lion with its head turned towards the front, being the first example of this type of vessel that has been found in Malaga. It shows an animal species that has only been attested in the Phoenician westernmost sites, as it has not appeared either in the eastern settlements of the central Mediterranean or in North Africa. Fortunately, despite the scarcity of data on these burials, we know the elements that make up the grave goods that enable us to certainly date it to the 1st century BC. There are not many similar vessels portraying lions within Phoenician contexts either in the shape of *askoi* or *guttus*. This animal is possibly related to the goddess Tanit and the only evidence has been found in Cadiz.

Thus, it is well documented that the person cremated in this grave, whose sex and age is unfortunately not known due to the lack of paleoanthropological analysis, was buried with a wide range of elements intended to guarantee their protection in the afterlife. Such a fact occurs not only, as we have seen, with the very image of a lion that this pottery vessel depicts, but also with the two figa-type amulets and the glass paste necklace beads, intended in both cases to try to avoid evil eye<sup>27</sup>. Regarding its content, the findings in Ibiza lead us to question its possible use as a baby bottle, although it was likely to contain perfumed substances, especially considering that the bore of the spout is extremely small, which would prevent the liquid from coming out fluently.

These receptacles usually appear in funerary contexts in the westernmost Phoenician area such as in Cadiz, Melilla or Ibiza, and perhaps also in Cerro del Mar because it had been preserved in one piece, in the same way as the *askos* that we are now presenting was found in one of Malaga's burial sites.

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27. A. M. Vázquez Hoys, "El ojo de la envidia: la magia de las cuentas y colgantes fenicio-púnicos de vidrio," in *Magia y superstición en el mundo fenicio-púnico* (Museu Arqueològic d'Eivissa i Formentera, Eivissa, 2007), 143-167; E. Verdú Parra, "Burlarse de la muerte. Un nuevo amuleto de la necrópolis de l'Albufereta," *MARQ. Arqueología y Museos* 6 (2015): 81-85.

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