

PHOENICIANS AND THE
MAKING OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

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To Antonis, por todo

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INTRODUCTION

Orienting the Reader

Think of the year 700 BC or thereabouts. There is much that we do not know about the most advanced societies thriving around the Mediterranean at that time. But we do know this: you could not travel from Tyre to the Straits of Gibraltar or “Pillars of Herakles” without noticing a remarkable interconnectedness among distant communities. And you could not go on this journey without coming across Phoenician harbors, ships, and towns along almost every step of the way. Through technological advancements of a kind unseen since the Neolithic revolution, diverse societies along this axis had joined a pan-Mediterranean “class” of urban, literate, and sophisticated elites, whose affinities were articulated through common visual, cultural, and economic modes. The new shared aesthetics bore the clear imprint of the Near East. This phase, period, or trend of the eighth to seventh centuries BC is commonly called “orientalizing” in modern scholarship. The encounters that produced this shared culture are the subject of this book.

This period is usually seen as an artistic “renaissance” that followed long after the collapse of the Late Bronze Age palatial economies and international cultures in a period between circa 1200–1100 BC. In the subsequent fractured map, lines of communication between the Aegean and the Levant were broken or much more intermittent than before. But as the Iron Age progressed, especially during the eighth century, a burst of economic dynamism produced a global transformation, with the effect of setting the central and western Mediterranean into direct contact with the Levant. Access

to cultural assets as well as new markets, with their opportunities and risks, was now within the grasp of local kings, artisans, merchants, farmers, sailors, and soldiers. New forms of writing facilitated a growing and dynamic merchant class. Fast, high-capacity sailing boats transported not just goods but people and new cultural models. And at the helms of those boats were, above all, Phoenician mariners, settlers, traders, and explorers. This book will argue that it was these Phoenicians who set in motion the new connectivity networks and to a great degree created a first, truly interconnected Mediterranean. They paved the way for peoples east and west to join in this very first proto-urban, Mediterranean-wide koine of the Iron Age, and ultimately to stride onto the stage of history, even if in many cases we have lost those groups' testimonies and so cannot easily hear their voices.

We also know that the Phoenicians' commercial and then colonial expansion, reaching as far as the Atlantic coasts of Iberia and Morocco, was not undertaken at random. It was driven and sustained by the city-states of the Levant (especially Tyre). They sought areas rich in metal resources (especially copper, silver, and iron), either in areas that they could directly exploit or where they could tap into local networks and gain access to resources farther afield, such as Atlantic tin or African ivory, but they were also seeking resources such as timber, murex, and salt, and finding good harbors and farmland was crucial for sustaining their long-distance networks. Following in their wake were Greek sailors, especially Euboians, but also Cypriots, Cretans, Rhodians, and others, who made their own contributions to this new emerging koine.

It is only at this point that we can really talk about the first *global* Mediterranean. Despite earlier phases of connectivity among neighboring regions, such as the Aegean and the Near East in the Late Bronze Age, it is not until the eighth to seventh centuries BC that proto-urban cultures around the entire Mediterranean coalesced in an unprecedented way. Coinciding with the end of the so-called Dark Ages and the start of the archaic period in the Greek world, transnational networks formed around the axes of Phoenician and Greek colonial expansion, stimulating the transmission and adaptation of cultural forms, both tangible and intangible, including artistic modes of expression and motifs associated with Near Eastern royal and divine imagery, new technologies, including alphabetic writing, alongside mythological themes and religious ideas and practices. Greeks, Etrus-

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cans, Sardinians, and Iberian peoples readily fashioned their own versions of this international culture, referred to as “orientalizing” because it conspicuously followed Near Eastern models, and yet was not itself “Oriental,” but a series of local imitations and innovations inflected differently in each context.

Despite increasing interest, the so-called orientalizing phenomenon is rarely treated comparatively on a pan-Mediterranean scale, and even more rarely integrated systematically within the framework of Phoenicians and local commercial and colonial relations across a vast geography. This book takes on that task, and puts the Phoenicians at the center of this development, where they belong. I make the case that their agency, more than that of any other Near Eastern group, explains the rapid spread of new technologies and artistic styles that characterize orientalizing culture. As communities from Cyprus to Iberia emulated the Near Eastern patterns peddled by the Phoenicians, they become visually and economically interconnected in an unprecedented manner. The Phoenicians profited from the export of a modifiable package of orientalizing goods and cultural capital, which I have called an “orientalizing kit.” The common denominators of this tool kit span material luxuries and new technologies across regions. I discuss this phenomenon on a case-by-case basis in Part II, and the concept and interpretation of orientalizing materials in Chapter 3. But to give the reader a preliminary sense of it, these are the types of innovations that I consider part of this repertoire:

- symbolic and decorative motifs, most commonly lotus flowers, rosettes, the tree of life, sphinxes/griffins, lionesses, Mistress/Master of Animals figures, and so on
- pottery technologies, shapes, and decoration
- ivory carving and metalwork including jewelry (engraving, filigree, and granulation)
- techniques, motifs, and votive use of terracottas (esp. female Ashtart/Astarte-type figures)
- monumental stone sculpture (e.g., Greek *kouroi-korai*)
- masonry techniques and architectural innovations (quadrangular buildings and urban grid, wall-building measures and technologies, etc.)

- burial forms and rituals (cremation with urns, deposits of Near Eastern, orientalizing, and traditional indigenous items)
- industrial developments (metallurgic, fishing, salting) and farming innovations (domestication and processing of Mediterranean species such as the olive and the vine)
- in some areas, the introduction of wine culture (social and ritual banqueting)
- alphabetic writing
- mythological themes and literary models (where preserved)

Lost Among Disciplines

Growing attention and interest in the Phoenicians are undeniable, ranging from general books and exhibits to a legion of specialized articles and conference proceedings. It might seem strange, then, that the study of the Phoenicians is still extremely fragmented, striving to find a space of its own. This is in part because the Phoenicians are caught between several disciplines and theoretical trends.¹ At the most obvious level, the Phoenicians fall between the geographical and chronological fractures of classics and Near Eastern studies. This divide makes it difficult to attain a coherent, overarching view of the Phoenicians' role in this period. Ancient Near Eastern history and archaeology revolve around different "classical" eras, not aligned with the interests of the classical Greco-Roman world. In the Near East, the early first millennium BC, when the Phoenicians extended their commercial and colonial networks, is the period of the rise of new empires (Neo-Assyrian, 934–610 BC), only at the end of which the Greek poleis really enter the international stage. In other words, the turn of the first millennium is an important historical phase within Near Eastern/Levantine history and archaeology (Iron Age IIA-B: ca.1000–700 BC), and the Phoenicians have their own place in it. They produced written texts and appear in the texts of others (e.g., Assyrian, Egyptian, biblical), and their sites are becoming better known archaeologically.² But this phenomenon is only peripheral in Aegean archaeology of the protohistorical "Dark Ages," and the archaeology of Greece does not easily engage with this broader framework. This divide is then built on the artificial dichotomy between the Greek and Near Eastern worlds.

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To the degree that we project onto these ancient worlds, imagined as noncommensurate, our own imagined divisions, between “oriental” and “western,” between Indo-European and Semitic, we perpetuate the scheme of a “clash of civilizations.” As many have noted before, these dichotomies were created by modern geopolitical circumstances and ideological discourses, but do not explain much about the ancient world dynamics.³ In this book, we will set the Greeks side by side with other Iron Age and archaic civilizations that responded to similar stimuli when they entered the orbit of the Near Eastern cultures through Phoenician trade. This is the only way to decenter the narrative from an imagined Greek core and gain an integrated view of the early Mediterranean. We can then better appreciate the unique character of each region and the effects of the encounter with the Levantines in their particular cultural trajectories.

The rigid lines imposed by periodization, as well as the idea of the later “Axial Age” also obstruct the study of this cultural-historical phenomenon. The orientaling trend falls awkwardly between archaeological and historical periods. As J. G. Manning noted, the eighth–seventh centuries BC resist periodization: this key period falls between the “Dark Ages” of the earlier Iron Age and the archaic period in Greece, barely at the dawn of the famed “Axial Age,” and far removed from the developments of fifth–fourth century Athens, which constituted the heart of the classics discipline.⁴ We can break through this dead end by looking into the earlier first millennium through historically minded (and not only archaeologically minded) lenses, and integrating the history of Phoenician commercial and colonial expansion within the archaeological trail of Levantine exotica and orientaling local developments. The Phoenicians provide a unique opportunity to escape the pull of this Axial Age schema. They also bridge Aegean (and European) “prehistory” and Near Eastern history, as they interacted with Greeks and others who were just emerging from the isolation of the “Dark Ages” and entering the historical record.

This book pulls together strands from different types of evidence and disciplines: archaeological materials, literature and mythology, art history, and the regional archaeologies of Greeks, Etruscans, Iberians, and others. Although several fields have focused on cultural exchange in this same period, their angles and goals vary and do not often focus on the Phoenicians. In this book, engaging with all these fields, I situate the Phoenicians at the crossroads of ancient Mediterranean encounters, and, in a way, as

connectors across disciplines and trends themselves. These are, in broad strokes, the main strands I am referring to:

- **Classics and classical archaeology:** The combination of preserved literature and attractive plastic arts from ancient Greece forms a package that shines more brightly for the broader public than the fragmented legacy of the earlier Iron Age cultures, among them the Phoenicians. The traditionally narrow purview of the “classics” curriculum in turn promotes the old narrative of the “Greek miracle.” This view highlights their innate talent for artistic and intellectual excellence, thanks to which the Greeks improved upon Near Eastern art and technologies. It is inconceivable, then, that they would hold any sort of cultural “debt” to others, since so many, such as the Romans and ourselves, are in debt *to them*. The Phoenician agency is instead diffused in vague discussions of “Near Eastern” or “Levantine” models adopted by the Hellenic genius.⁵ In a late twentieth-century turn toward a more inclusive model, important works have shifted our attention to the archaic period and the “orientalizing revolution,” and helped us to compensate for the dark areas that the blinding “classical” light produces around it.⁶ Shifting our lens to the Phoenicians, instead of the Greeks, for the early first millennium (that formative period of “western” culture), not only offers some correctives to the story perpetuated by scholarly and ideological inertias but can result in quite a different story altogether.

- **Studies of ancient colonization:** For similar reasons, these studies tend to prioritize Greek colonization, and double standards are often applied to the treatment of Greek and Phoenician settlements and enterprises. In general, because of the wealth of written sources and the inevitability of our Hellenocentric education, the overwhelming attention to Greek colonization reinforces the impression that therein lies the key to the interconnected Iron Age Mediterranean.⁷ Lately, scholars have zoomed in on the colonial relations among Phoenicians, Greeks, and locals, especially in the western Mediterranean.⁸ Indeed, when study of ancient colonization moves away from the Hellenocentric framework, it overlaps in scope with Mediterranean archaeology.

- **Study of the western Mediterranean Iron Age:** By contrast, in these accounts, evidence is mostly archaeological and Phoenician colonies are well attested and not overshadowed by Greek colonization. This means that their presence is analyzed more freely from Hellenocentric models; scholars

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have more easily adopted a postcolonial stance, focusing on the negotiation between indigenous peoples and Semitic newcomers in a variety of scenarios.⁹ The Phoenicians loom large here, but these contexts of contact are rarely if ever compared directly with those in the eastern Mediterranean, to illuminate the developments we see in Greece in the same period. One of the main goals of this book is to help bridge this gap. If anything, the recognition of the civilizatory role of the Phoenicians in the western end of the Mediterranean has been so overwhelming that it has created internal divides: some local archaeologies verge on denying the existence of relatively advanced and organized local cultures at the Phoenicians' arrival (e.g., Tartessians), while others have stressed the native agency and pushed against the "ex oriente lux" narrative limiting the Phoenicians' influence beyond the coasts, if never quite squeezing them out of the picture.

- **National (and nationalistic) narratives:** These accounts have also determined approaches to the Phoenicians. In particular, a strong Hellenocentric pull has shaped national or regional narratives about this period. Whereas in Spain and Sardinia, for instance, there is no particular attachment to the Hellenocentric narrative and the Phoenicians are essential in the discussion about local transformations in the Iron Age, in mainland Italy the term "orientalizing" is used almost exclusively to define a "period," and the cultural ramifications of the phenomenon as such are generally avoided.¹⁰ Little agency is ascribed to the foreign participants in the cultural process that occurs during this period, that is, until the Greeks enter the scene in the later phase of the archaic period, being the preferred external influence. In Greece itself, the idea of Greek exceptionalism is still quite dominant, and in Cyprus a nativist approach has pushed back against the narrative of Phoenician colonization on the island. In other words, the disparity in the treatment of interaction with these Levantines is determined not only by discipline; it is also determined regionally or nationally. Each country's heritage affects its reception of "classicism" in an age of postcolonial reckoning.

- **Mediterranean studies or "Mediterraneanization":** The twenty-first century has seen a rising interest in the Mediterranean as a transhistorical framework of cultural contact.¹¹ This historiographical trend makes this book timely, but it also exposes a blind spot when it comes to the Phoenicians, as these studies adopt a diachronic perspective and are not usually devoted to the Iron Age or the Phoenicians, with rare exceptions.¹² Recent economic and environmental histories of the Mediterranean have focused

on areas and times for which classical sources are available, mainly classical and Hellenistic times,¹³ and sometimes they leave out the Near East and North Africa altogether.¹⁴ The Iron Age Mediterranean has also been studied in terms of global theory, which is perhaps the most useful working model for the Phoenician networks, as it highlights the interdependence of global, regional, and local dynamics.¹⁵ Although there are insights to be gained from all these pan-Mediterranean perspectives, “Mediterraneanism” is usually not particularly interested in the role of specific agents, institutions, states, or empires, and avoids historical debates about the “winners and losers” of ancient globalizing movements;¹⁶ this debilitates the framework’s capacity to fully engage with underrepresented actors, such as the Phoenicians.

- **Orientalizing art and culture:** The term “orientalizing” is applied to the arts and technologies of this period. It has traditionally been used to describe the appropriation (mostly by the Greeks) of an eclectic set of cultural motifs loosely associated with the Near East. As I discuss in Chapter 3, the label itself has been criticized for vagueness and orientalist connotations. In the end, the phenomenon and the name remain diffuse, its interpretation fragmented across disciplines and regions. Since the early 2000s, there have been valid efforts to pull together the strands that come together under this category.¹⁷ But the output in collections of case studies about different materials and regions is not easy to integrate into an overarching view. Part of our difficulty with the term “orientalizing” is its vagueness. We become frustrated because the category “orientalizing” obscures the diverse origins of the alleged Near Eastern models. If we are to keep using this convention (which seems likely in the absence of a different viable proposition), however, we can find ways to reconstruct its use and meaning. One way to do this is to turn the vagueness in “orientalizing” into an asset. To put it briefly, modern efforts to locate the *origins* of the different oriental models distract us from two facts: first, that Phoenician culture had itself appropriated Canaanite, Assyrian, and Egyptian traits, which formed part of Phoenician art and culture; what we might see as an amalgamated, eclectic art had its own coherence, and lies behind many of the orientalizing adaptations. Second, the recipient cultures did not always need to distinguish among (or care about) the ultimate “original” roots of the new cultural artifacts, since they were getting them largely from one source (whether Phoenicians or others), and soon they created local versions of them anyway.

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These very different approaches to essentially the same phenomenon, namely, a reaction to contact with the Levantines we call Phoenicians, often reveal our teleological view of the Mediterranean, in which the European idea of “classical history” and the focus on Greeks and Romans tend to overshadow other important historical actors and forces. Pulling together archaeological and historical information, my book offers a way out of the orientalizing conundrum, and proposes a viable reconstruction of this trend of cultural innovation, which fully integrates the Phoenician presence around the Mediterranean. If we look at the orientalizing phenomenon from a distance, a clear pattern emerges: what we see as orientalizing cultures overlap with interaction between Phoenicians and emerging cultures across the Iron Age Mediterranean that strove to “catch up” to the older urban and literate Near Eastern civilizations. This study is driven by a search for those particular interactions and the place of Phoenicians in the making of this first interconnected Mediterranean.

I hope my work shows the Phoenicians not only as “vectors,” as they are often qualified, but as active agents, even “makers” of pan-Mediterranean networks and cultural trends. A pan-Mediterranean view of the orientalizing phenomenon with the Phoenician expansion as the working framework accomplishes several goals at once: it shortens the gap caused by poor communication between the various disciplines involved; it contributes to the ongoing dismantling of the clash of civilizations narrative and the ideological (anti-Semitic) exploitation of a linguistic-based dichotomy; and it responds to the recent study of Mediterranean economic and environmental histories that transcend traditional periodizations, modern political boundaries, and European Hellenocentrism.

Finding the Phoenicians

*Bringing Egyptian and Assyrian things by way of
merchandise, they [the Phoenicians] arrived,
among other places, to Argos.*

(HDT 1.1.1)

This is how the Phoenicians make their entry in Herodotos’s *Histories*. They are the third dramatis personae of the work, after the Greeks and Persians. Herodotos begins by saying that according to the Persians, it was

the Phoenicians who began the long chain of conflicts that culminated in the Persian Wars. The economic transaction that sets the narrative in motion is rather simple: these Phoenicians “lay out” their cargo by the harbor and sell it to the local women, among them Argive elites. They then kidnap the Argive princess Io, which incites the Greeks to kidnap the Tyrian princess Europa, after which these east–west aggressions expand, including the stealing of Medea from Colchis and Helen from Sparta,¹⁸ leading to the Trojan War, the background of the Persian offensive. Herodotos is careful to note that this Persian tale differed from what the Phoenicians themselves said about Io’s kidnapping, which he does not report.

The Phoenicians are central to Herodotos’s record of the very first exchange between Near Easterners and Greeks. After this, the Phoenicians appear throughout his unfolding account of how the Persians entered into conflict with the various peoples they conquered. Herodotos provides background on these peoples’ earlier history, as far back as he can trace it, usually to the seventh–sixth centuries BC, but not for the Phoenicians. They receive no ethnography or history other than the brief mention that, according to some tradition, they migrated from the “Red Sea” (probably the Persian Gulf) to settle in the coastal land they now inhabit.¹⁹ They are hidden in plain sight. Instead of receiving their own separate history, they are part of nearly everyone else’s story, including the Greeks. Phoenicians appear frequently in the *Histories*, whether as a group or by their separate cities (Tyre, Arwad, Sidon, Byblos, Carthage, Gadir/Gadeira, etc.); they are long-distance sailors and merchants, the core force in the Persian navy, literate people whose script the Greeks adopted, founders of cities, sources of religious knowledge and rites, inventors and bringers of new technologies, and engaged in exchange with Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, Anatolians, Iberians, and others.²⁰

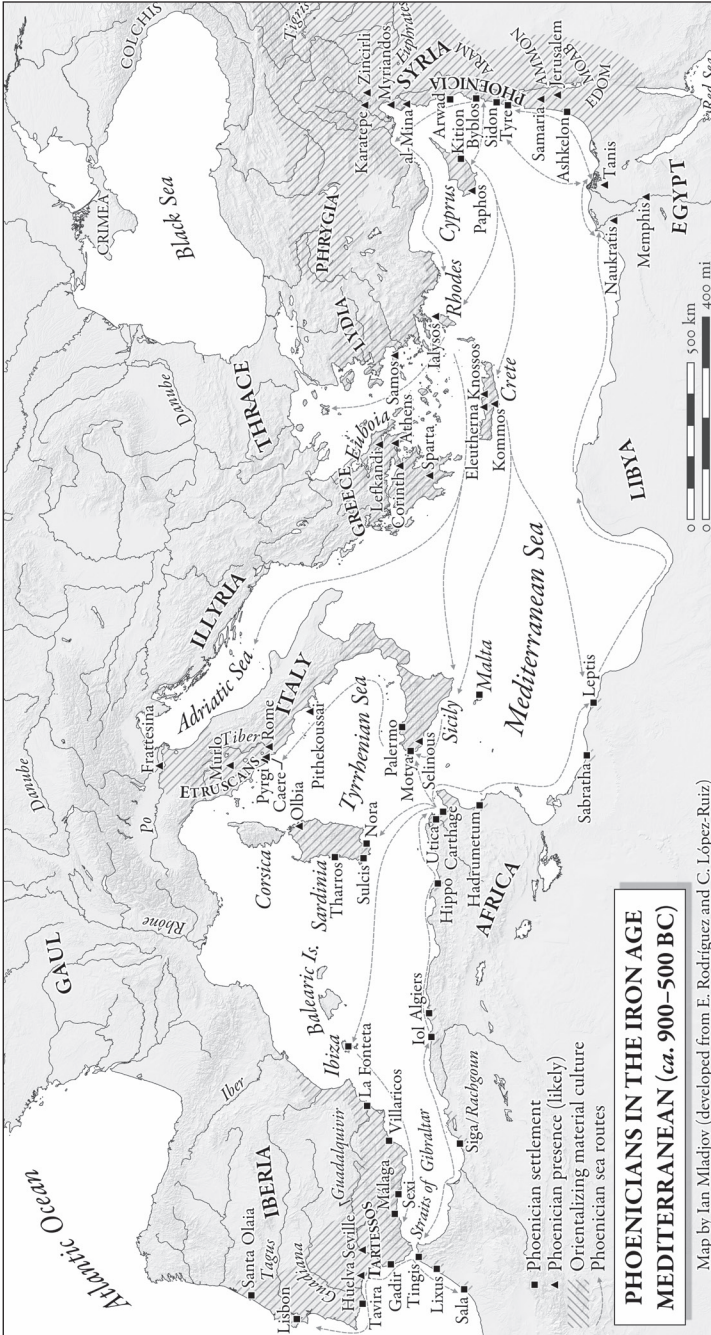
In short, the ancient Greeks regarded the Phoenicians as integral to the transformations that marked their own early history. But it is more difficult for us to imagine them in that position, and we do not give them the same prominence when we tell the same story. But *who* really were these Phoenicians? And are we allowed to talk about them without quotation marks and “hedging” definitions and caveats?

A general, agreed-upon definition is not difficult to find. Quoting Brett Kaufman, “The Phoenicians [. . .] were essentially seagoing Canaanites from the Lebanese coastal cities such as Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos, distinct

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from other Northwest Semitic groups . . . mostly because of the gods they worshiped and their maritime, metallurgical, and other technological or craft expertise.”²¹ The Phoenicians emerged around 1000 BC as a distinct group among those who broke off from the common Syro-Palestinian Canaanite background of the Late Bronze Age. These groups included Phoenicians, Israelites, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Aramaeans (see Map I.1). They each had distinct languages, distinct scripts that stemmed from the Phoenician one, and distinct cultures and religious systems, functioning as discrete ethnic groups against a shared distant background.²² The Phoenician group coalesced around several city states along the coastal strip on the outskirts of Mount Lebanon, their main towns reaching from Arwad in the north to Akko in the south, that is, slightly north and south of the modern country of Lebanon, where their settlements concentrated.

The territory of the Phoenician homeland in the Levant was for most of its history structured around four main states that controlled the territory and smaller settlements around them, as documented in Near Eastern and Greek sources. These are (from north to south): Arwad, Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre. Most historical sources from the first millennium BC concentrate on southern Phoenician cities, Sidon and Tyre, which were more active overseas and for most of the ninth–eighth centuries seem to have constituted a joint polity ruled from Tyre.²³ Around the turn of the millennium, Tyre emerged as a maritime commercial powerhouse in the central Levant (see Chapter 9). Over the course of the ninth century, Tyre expanded its economic and political base, controlling areas of northern Israel and establishing its first settlements abroad. The first Phoenician sites overseas are attested on Cyprus, in North Africa (from Morocco to Tunisia), and in southern Iberia, with small settlements from about 800 onward spreading along the coasts of southern and southeastern Iberia and up the Atlantic coast from the Algarve to Lisbon and farther north in today’s Portugal. Phoenician sites appear on Sardinia, in western Sicily, and on the Balearic Islands during the eighth–seventh centuries, thus completing a well-connected network in the central western Mediterranean (Map I.1). The reasons for this wave of colonization, its modes of settlement, and level of coordination are not well documented (less so than those of Greek colonization), but this process was not the result of a random disorganized migration. The Phoenicians established a network that gave them sustained access to metal exploitation and trade routes, as they especially looked for



MAP I. 1

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sources of silver, gold, copper, and Atlantic tin, while also exploiting agricultural and other resources to supplement their own natural resources in the homeland in a densely populated territory. We also know that this program of settlement abroad was not triggered by Assyrian demands or oppression, as had long been thought. Tyre's networks, we now know, well predate the Assyrian domination of the city.

The Phoenicians were organized into city-states, a model they transferred to their colonies, at least the larger ones. Besides the capital cities with their principal harbors (sometimes on islands mirrored by urban centers across in the mainland), there were fortified enclaves to protect agricultural products and key communication passages inland, and smaller villages.²⁴ Tyre must have become quite dependent on its overseas networks, and promoted strong bonds with its western colonies, as we know from Gadir and Carthage, a relationship articulated through their shared worship of Melqart, the main Tyrian god, as a foundational figure.²⁵ Tyre thrived as the maritime outlet of the Assyrian overlords for most of this time, and did not receive the same harsh treatment that other Levantine cities did.²⁶ In the sixth century the “motherland” lost its privileged position when it fell to the Babylonians in 574 BC. Tyre's isolation produced a ripple effect that changed the geopolitical dynamics in the western Mediterranean. The first Carthaginian–Roman treaty dates to 509 BC, marking a time when Rome's military and economic power was growing regionally, its commercial interests partially overlapping with those of the western Phoenicians.²⁷ The treaty documents that one of Tyre's western colonies, Carthage (“New Town”), had emerged as a maritime powerhouse in the central Mediterranean and also gained control of Phoenician trade from Iberia and hence the Atlantic.

The two expanding forces, Rome and Carthage, clashed in the First and Second Punic Wars during the third century (264–241 and 218–201 BC). By the end of that century, Carthage had lost its grip on the Phoenician territories of Sicily, Sardinia, and Iberia, while for the winner, Rome, these gains were the basis for imperial expansion outside Italy. Only after this point did the Mediterranean become increasingly a Roman sea, their *mare nostrum*. Rome silenced the “threat” of Carthage when it razed the city to the ground and dispersed its people in 146 BC, the same year that they destroyed Corinth. The history of the Phoenician cities in the Levant followed

a different path, outside this Carthaginian–Roman drama. By 323 BC (the year of Alexander’s death), Greek power had spread like a blanket over the multiple peoples previously governed by the Persian Empire, triggering lasting transformations. The eastern Phoenicians became Greek speakers and part of the Hellenistic Near East. Still, the Phoenicians preserved features of their religion, language, and cultural identity until they entered the Roman Empire (sometime later), both in the Levant and the western Mediterranean.²⁸

The Phoenician language and script span this east–west axis of Phoenician settlement and trade, with over ten thousand inscriptions recovered so far, ranging from the tenth century to the Roman period. In North Africa the language was alive alongside Latin even into the fifth century CE.²⁹ Phoenician religion is also well attested and is distinct from other religions of the Levant. Even with local and regional variations, the range of Phoenician gods is well-known: versions of the gods Baal and Ashtart tend to dominate the local pantheons—for instance, Baal-Hammon, Baal-Shamem, Baal-Saphon, Melqart, Adonis, Baalat Gubal (“Lady of Byblos”), and Tanit. These share the cult of additional gods such as Eshmoun, Sid, Pumay, the Egyptian Bes, and others. Personal names and funerary formulae are well documented epigraphically and they follow set patterns. These documents convey information about the religious and civic universe of the Phoenicians. Names follow conservative tendencies, as they are mainly theophoric (formed after divine names) and recurrent, and inscriptions also mention religious and civic institutions to which the individual belonged, all of which reflect consistent traditions that lasted for many centuries and tied these communities together culturally.

Phoenician sacred spaces varied in architectural plan, but their cultic installations were held in common, including, among other features, sacrificial altars, lustral basins and other water installations, cult statues and aniconic baetyls, benches for votive deposits, and an array of symbolic decoration tied to their religion.³⁰ Although there is some variety by period and place, funerary monuments and rituals are also homogeneous and recognizable, and marked by the deposits of Egyptianizing and other types of amulets, banqueting ware, ostrich eggs, oil flasks, and other goods related to funerary practices. The Phoenicians consistently used symbols that denoted a shared belief in the afterlife strongly shaped by Egyptian culture

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and symbology. More aspects of Phoenician culture will emerge in our survey of their encounters with other groups.

It is important to keep in mind that Phoenician culture is recognizable despite its wide geographical and chronological spectrum. Scholarship of the Levant has increasingly emphasized the continuities between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age culture of the region. In turn, in the western Mediterranean, the distinction between Phoenician and Punic is artificial. This is a historiographical, not an ethnocultural convention. *Poenum* (pl. *poeni*, adj. *punicum*) is simply the Latin name for “Phoenician(s),” from the Greek *phoinikes*, and has become the standard term for the Carthaginian realm after around 500, when the Carthaginians became a main concern of the Romans.³¹ Hence it is the convention to use “Punic” for the western Mediterranean after the sixth century, with Carthage assumed as dominant, while for the earlier period, the western Phoenician settlements (including Carthage) are still part of the eastern Phoenician network. In reality, “the terms Canaanite, Phoenician and Punic depict aspects of a single nation’s historical course, with common ethnic, linguistic and religious roots but differentiate it in terms of chronological and geographical criteria,” as Giorgos Bourogiannis remarked.³² I will use “Phoenician” by default for all periods and areas, unless the distinction is relevant, for instance when referring to specific scholarship on the “Punic world” or to the Carthaginian realm of influence.

In short, a Greek or a Roman could recognize a Phoenician by specific traits, which are backed independently by a convergence of archaeological and epigraphical materials. Still, some modern historians are skeptical that we can treat the Phoenicians as a group, even if ancient onlookers did. It is important to dispel some of these concerns before proceeding with my analysis.

Moving on from Phoenicoskepticism

A recent trend in historiography posits that the Phoenicians cannot be considered an ethnic group or even a valid historiographical category.³³ That trend is most prominently represented by Josephine Quinn’s 2018 book *In Search of the Phoenicians*, but it has been explicitly articulated by others

as well.³⁴ This position has created a certain uneasiness when scholars use the category of Phoenicians, even if they are not engaging directly with the issue, perhaps apprehensive to use an allegedly unnuanced category.

The recent Phoenicoskepticism (sometimes even Phoenikodenialism) argues that the Phoenicians did not constitute a coherent group, at least not in the early first millennium BC; that they would not have been distinct from other Levantines, or that in sources that talk about Phoenicians, from Homer or Herodotos to Roman authors, we are dealing with a sheer literary construct. Moreover, the Phoenicoskeptics argue, the ancient construct was overlaid with a modern scholarly construct. Since we do not have proof of an internal ethnonym for the Phoenicians, the Phoenicoskeptics highlight the fact that our subjects identified themselves with their cities (Tyre, Sidon, etc.), and their religious and family groups, but not as part of a larger ethnocultural continuum.³⁵ An added concern, which does not necessarily deny the Phoenicians' existence as a group, is the way in which the modern study of the Phoenicians was shaped by the Italian school of Phoenician archaeology led by Sabatino Moscati.³⁶

These positions are not always expressly stated, but underlie much Hellenocentric and Eurocentric scholarship of the twentieth century. As Nota Kourou has put it, views on the Phoenicians swung from the pre-World War II uncritical assumption of their presence in the Aegean to a point at which "Phoenicia as such was in practice pushed out of focus in the study of interconnections between the Aegean and the Near East and the term Phoenician was kept mostly as a generic definition of Near Eastern people and styles." Phoenician art was considered eclectic and derivative and sources of inspiration for the orientalizing Greek art were sought in the more prestigious realms of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Within this trend, she notes, "contacts between Greeks and Phoenicians in the Early Iron Age were confronted with skepticism and everything about Phoenician presence in the Aegean had to be followed by a question mark."³⁷ As I discuss in Chapters 1–2, double standards are still often applied to Greek and Phoenician settlement abroad, and the Phoenicians are superficially represented as a vague collective, as "sea peoples" bound, if at all, by commercial interests, their westward expansion as uncoordinated and inconsequential, in implicit or explicit contrast to the Greeks' civilizing agency. The counternarrative has never been absent, of course, and has gained momentum in recent years thanks to the publication of archaeological data

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for the Phoenician enterprise, and to recent interest in pan-Mediterranean perspectives.³⁸

The deconstructionist argument is built *ex silentio*. The lack of internal narratives for the early period, barring inscriptions, makes it difficult to define the contours of this group in terms of emic ethnic and group identity. But the silence is in fact not that deafening. There is enough internal evidence for an identifiable Phoenician culture, if we combine archaeological and epigraphical materials. The only real problem is that we do not know for sure how our subjects referred to their collective cities and networks, but this is not enough to deny a group identity. At any rate, there is some evidence that they may have used the terms “Canaan/Canaanite” as a self-referent. The name was used by the Canaanites of Phoenician cities (Tyre, Sidon) in the Amarna Letters at least when corresponding with others. *Cn’/Cn’n*, and a derived form *kinabhu* in Akkadian, was a West Semitic name for Syria-Palestine deployed amply since the Bronze Age (we have testimonies in Akkadian, Hittite, Hurrian, Egyptian, and Hebrew), probably meaning “sunset land/west” (like “occident”), the same meaning as the name Amurru/Amorites used for the region too. The term was also tied in Akkadian and other languages to the purple dye/color associated with the specialized technology and with Canaan. The Greek name *phoenix*, in turn, means “purple/red” (and also “palm tree”), and already appears in association with this industry in Mycenaean texts. A likely linguistic hypothesis is that the Greek term either translated the Semitic word for the industry/color, or derived it from a different Semitic root for purple/purple dye extracted from a plant. Then, *phoenix* would have become more narrowly used for the Canaanites they knew best, the Phoenicians.³⁹ There are a handful of testimonies, scattered through the centuries, of the use of Canaan/Canaanite for their collective or their language (an inscription of third–second century BC North Africa, a New Testament reference, Philo of Byblos’s *Phoenician History*, and St. Augustine’s testimony).⁴⁰ Perhaps more tellingly, from at least the fifth century BC, Phoenician communities and individuals recognized and used the Greek and Roman terms “Phoenicia” and “Phoenician/Punic” to project that collective identity in international or multilingual contexts. The most visual representation of this is in the first Carthaginian coins, issued in the fifth century, which bore the palm tree (in Greek also called *phoenix*) as a symbol of Phoenician self-representation on the international stage.⁴¹ These are small bits from a limited epigraphic

corpus and an all-but-vanished literary one, but they are the crumbs we have to work with.

Be that as it may, we can recognize the Phoenicians as a distinct collective by external indicia, and so could the Greeks, Romans, and others. It is difficult to imagine that they themselves did not. We are talking about inhabitants of a set of interconnected cities and settlements, who shared distinct forms of material culture and art, who worshipped the same gods, followed the same rituals, spoke the same language, dressed in the same way (which Plautus made fun of), and specialized in the same occupations. The Phoenicians also sustained ritual bonds and tight commercial networks among their communities and responded to international conflicts as a unit, as when Tyre refused to join Persia's plan to attack its own "sons" at Carthage (τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἑωυτῶν [*sic*]), invoking their oaths and their kinship.⁴² The Carthaginians banked on these ancestral bonds as they took over Tyre's leadership in the western Mediterranean, and Hannibal exploited his association with Melqart as a shared Phoenician symbol that connected Tyre and the west. In short, Phoenician identity was not only shaped or defined by the perceptions of others (as all identities are to some extent) but also based on the curation of a collective past strongly marked by a common link to the Tyrian inheritance.

The Phoenoskeptics lean on the fact that there was never a Phoenician "unified state."⁴³ Indeed, as María Eugenia Aubet put it, we can say that the Phoenicians were "a people without a state, without a territory and without political unity."⁴⁴ Aubet's statement rightly acknowledges that peoplehood and statehood are not coterminous concepts or realities (modern examples abound). Phoenicians and Greeks were organized similarly in independent city-states. The Greeks were not politically unified until the Macedonian conquest by Alexander the Great forced them into it in the late fourth century BC. Aristotle reflected on the diversity among the Greeks, and remarked that "the *ethnos* of the Greeks" had "the potential to rule everybody else if only it happened to be a single state."⁴⁵ This is not used as an argument to deconstruct Greek culture or ethnic identity, however. As for the idea that the Phoenicians identified themselves by their cities and families or religious institutions, true as that may be, again this is exactly what we find in Greek epigraphical evidence. This individual or small-group identity is not exclusive of broader levels of ethnic or group identity, all of which are culturally construed and articulated.⁴⁶ But the argument is ap-

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plied indiscriminately to the Phoenicians and not to the Greeks. As Herodotos had already noted, the Greeks recognized each other by their “shared kinship and shared language, as well as the common shrines and sacrifices for the gods and our similar customs.”⁴⁷ And yet, were it not for these rare discursive historiographical reflections (a privilege of the Greco-Roman textual tradition), the sense of shared identity of the Greeks of the archaic or even classical period would remain elusive. In short, the city-state organization and internal fragmentation of the Phoenician cities is not incompatible with a sense of shared cultural heritage and kinship, the basic elements that hold together all ethnic groups. As far as we know, by all reasonable measures, a Tyrian, a Sidonian, or a Carthaginian was no less Phoenician than an Athenian, a Corinthian, or a Syracusan was Greek (while they could recognize each other as both “kin” and enemies, of course). The Phoenicians were also not simply “Levantine,” just as the Greeks were not simply an “eastern Mediterranean” crowd. There was no such thing as a monolithic Panphoenicianism, just as there was no monolithic Panhellenism. It is more useful to think of a “practice of being Greek,” as Tamar Hodos put it, which was varied and idiosyncratic, but nonetheless sufficient to make the Greeks mutually and externally recognizable.⁴⁸ The same applies to the Phoenicians.

There is simply too much evidence that the Phoenicians were both perceived as a distinctive group by others and acted as one. The apparent silence is broken from too many directions and types of materials. With all the nuances and caveats called for by any historical reconstruction, we *can* talk about Phoenicians as much as about other Iron Age groups whose culture we recognize through a critical mass of coherent external and internal evidence.

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