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Maria Eugenia Aubet

Excerpt

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Introduction

Nowadays anyone intending to embark for the first time on a study of the Phoenician colonization of the Iberian Peninsula, or keen to know the state of archaeological investigation in that field, will come up against three types of difficulty: one of a technical nature, another of a methodological nature and a third concerning the question of subjectivity in reading the historical testimony.

Among the difficulties of a technical or instrumental nature, it is worthwhile pointing out the lack of up-to-date reports which provide a critical assessment of the archaeological data obtained in the past twenty years in the western Mediterranean; the vast literature that exists on the question is scattered in a multitude of articles in specialist journals, or in the proceedings of meetings not always accessible to students of the ancient world; lastly, there is the relative confusion in the way the terminology in use is handled: the words 'Phoenician', 'Punic' and 'orientalizing' are bandied about indiscriminately without establishing clear differences between them, or at times contradictory or incoherent terms are used, such as 'Iberico-orientalizing', 'Phoenicio-Punic' or 'Punico-archaic'. Obviously this does not help to make things easy for the reader, since behind this terminological confusion lie much more complex methodological and conceptual problems.

As regards the difficulties of a methodological nature, it must be emphasized that a reconstruction of the history of Phoenician trade in Spain, or in the Mediterranean in general, must of necessity be based on two types of documentary sources or instruments of analysis, which very often disagree with each other: the written testimonies handed down to us by the classical historians and the archaeological record proper. The divergences between these two categories of data raise a host of difficulties for investigators and these are not always easy to resolve. Thus, for example, the discrepancies that occur

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between the historical dates given by the classical historians and the chronology established by archaeological investigation have fuelled, among other things, the prolongation of a controversy already endemic among orientalist; it began in the nineteenth century and concerns the dating of the first Phoenician foundations in the far west. This is a controversy that will probably be resumed in the coming years when the methods of absolute dating, that have been in use for years in prehistoric archaeology (see Appendix III), begin to be applied to the archaeological record of the Phoenician settlements.

The classical sources are of vital importance in an analysis of the Phoenician question if they are handled prudently. It must not be forgotten that certain legendary aspects concerning Phoenician colonization in Spain were picked up by Greek and Roman historians many centuries after the events took place and the only contemporary written sources for the Phoenician diaspora – the Assyrian annals and the Biblical texts – make no mention of anything that happened further away than the island of Cyprus. Even so, the classical texts contain valuable information concerning the Phoenician expansion westwards. It is on how these sources are managed that the historical reconstruction of the past depends to a large extent. Archaeology, on the other hand, provides us with information that is basically empirical, a kind of general framework that can be used as a starting point for working hypotheses. Nowadays, any explanation of the Phoenician colonial phenomenon is likely to be analysed on the basis of new theories and from new methodological perspectives. Given that hypotheses cannot advance without some previously determined theoretical framework, we do not claim in this book simply to revise or update the subject of the Phoenicians in the west, but rather to raise a series of questions about the whole subject and, as far as possible, to give answers as well.

The third difficulty presented by a study of the Phoenicians in the far western Mediterranean lies in the inevitable subjectivism, not to say ideology, of those interpreting the data. The role played by the Phoenicians in the west has rarely been judged objectively. At times, they have been considered to have had very little effect on the internal cultural dynamics of the native Spanish communities, and their socio-cultural importance in the process of development that was to culminate in the realm of Tartessos in western Andalusia has been played down. Logically, this leads to an over-valuation of the part played by indigenous Iberians or of the specific influence of the later Greek colonization in nurturing the economic power of Tartessos.

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At other times, the Phoenicians are ascribed more importance than they had in reality and they are portrayed as the only protagonists in the cultural process which gave rise to the Tartessian cultural group and the formation of the state in the west. This view undervalues the indigenous peoples in favour of the idea that the Phoenicians arrived in a territory inhabited by a few passive, receptive communities – the Tartessians – who were ignorant of the enormous economic potential of their territory. Thanks to the ‘eastern miracle’, it is thought, Tartessos set about exploiting its abundant mineral and agricultural resources.

On the other hand, the treatment meted out to the Phoenicians in the classical texts, and even today on the part of some historians, does not exactly give us an impartial and objective picture of their historical and cultural standing. In a way it is understandable that, for political reasons, the classical authors branded the Phoenicians as pirates, as cunning navigators, and held them responsible for introducing greed and luxury into Greece. It is equally acceptable that the Romans should show outright hostility towards them, speaking of ‘perfidious Punica’, its proverbial cunning, its disloyalty and low moral sense. What is less understandable is the reason why even today some historians insist on the poor quality of Phoenician art, its lack of originality and that, unlike the Greeks, the Phoenicians were more interested in making profits than in producing poets, artists and historians.

However, the Phoenicians’ principal legacy to the history of the west – the alphabet – is now unanimously acknowledged. The signs and names used by the Phoenicians to designate the letters of the alphabet – alef, bet and so on – have been preserved down to our own day, thanks to the mediation of the Greek world.

The Phoenicians did not just give us a system of writing, they incorporated the Iberian Peninsula into the Mediterranean trade routes of the period, which for more than two hundred years tied many Mediterranean territories into an organizational structure and to certain institutions that were basically oriental. For a long time, the Phoenicians were the principal intermediaries between east and west and this role of mediators smoothed out to a considerable extent the socio-economic imbalances which existed previously between those states said to be ‘civilized’ and the ‘barbarian’ peoples. On their arrival in the Iberian Peninsula at the turn of the eighth century BC or a little earlier, the indigenous Andalusian communities were deeply rooted in

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prehistoric economic structures that had grown out of the Bronze Age. When they left, at the beginning of the sixth century BC, the Peninsula was an integral part of that 'History' that bore their mark, and the indigenous cultural process had, by acculturation, acquired other ways of attaining more complex, in other words more 'modern', socio-economic levels.

This book will attempt to bring the reader and the student interested in the Phoenician question a synthesis of the present state of investigations and an outline of a new hypothesis about the Phoenicians and their colonial enterprise in the west.

The study covers the colonial period proper, that is to say, the ancient horizon of the eighth to sixth centuries BC. Consequently we shall not deal here with the so-called Punic horizon of the sixth to third centuries BC, a period in which many of the old colonial enclaves came into the orbit of Carthage. In reality, the Punic period corresponds to a quite distinct socio-political context, in which the geopolitical circumstances of the western Mediterranean experienced considerable transformations which would demand a separate study of their own.

To enclose or define the function and category of the Phoenician settlements in the west and in Andalusia within a particular macro-economic and historical model requires, logically, an analysis of those political and economic factors in Phoenicia in general, and in Tyre in particular, which would have made this diaspora to the west possible or would have fostered it. In our judgement, only a critical examination of the economic, political and social situation in the city state of Tyre – mainly responsible for the colonization – and of its mercantile policy could help us to gauge the category and economic function of the centres in the west. That is why we give priority to a study of the political and economic situation in the Phoenician cities before, during and after the period of expansion through the Mediterranean.

The question of who the Phoenicians were seems to us a good starting point if we are to place the circumstances that prompted this people to organize a commercial enterprise on such a scale at the beginning of the first millennium BC in their historical and geographical context. Consequently, the first chapters are devoted to analysing the identity of the Phoenician people, starting from ethnic, linguistic, geographical and historical factors. These are followed by a section devoted to the way in which the Phoenicians organized their trade and

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navigation during the period of colonization, so as to be able finally to tackle the study and interpretation of the colonial enclaves in the central Mediterranean and the Iberian Peninsula, equipped with the elements appropriate to forming a judgement.

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==== I =====

Who were the Phoenicians?

THE NAME: CANA'ANI, PHOÍNIKES, POENI

A study of the terminology used to define a community or population is a question that goes far beyond a simple exercise in historical erudition when, as in the case of the Phoenicians, not all the ethnic, linguistic, geographic or cultural implications appear with sufficient clarity. The theme of the name by which antiquity knew the Phoenicians provides a starting point of undeniable importance for determining the features that identify this eastern population.

The name by which history knows the Phoenicians is a word of Greek origin, which appears for the first time in the period of Homer and Hesiod – in the ninth to seventh centuries BC – and has no known equivalent in the eastern languages.

The original name *phoinix* and its derivatives, the feminine *phoinissa* and the plural *phoínikes*, are a Greek invention and nobody but the Greeks used the term to designate this eastern people and certain cultural features connected with them. The word used to designate the country of the *phoínikes*, *Phoiníke*, comes rather later and refers to the coastal territory between Aradus (Arvad) and Mount Carmel, with boundaries corresponding roughly to those of modern Lebanon (Fig. 1).

The root of *phoinix* is neither Phoenician nor Semitic and at present the etymological problem of the origin of the Greek word has not been solved. What does seem to have been verified is that the Phoenicians never called themselves 'Phoenicians'. Already in antiquity, the Greeks were trying to find an explanation for the origin of the name, connecting its ethnic meaning with other semantic equivalents of the same word. Among other meanings of *phoinix*, we would single out that of 'red', a colour that probably would have alluded to the purple textile industry, for which the Phoenician cities were famous in Homer's time.

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According to this etymology, ‘Phoenician’ would be derived from the Greek *phoinós*, a word of Indo-European root indicating ‘red’, ‘blood’, ‘to stain with blood’, ‘death’ or ‘crime’. Greek lexicographers linked the origin of the word with the manufacture of purple textiles and also with the dark complexion of the Asian peoples, and the majority of modern authors keep to that explanation. According to them, when maritime contacts between Greece and the Levant were renewed in the time of Homer, the Greeks would have begun to call the inhabitants of a country which was held to be the most powerful centre for the manufacture of purple cloth in the whole Mediterranean ‘reds’, or ‘phoiníkes’. So Phoenicia would mean ‘the country of purple cloth’.

Another theory concerning the origin of the word ‘Phoenician’ postulates a connection between that word and the eponymous hero *Phoinix*, to whom legend attributes the invention of the purple dye that was to colour wools and fabrics. This legend, picked up by Pliny, tells of the chance discovery near Tyre by a shepherd and his dog that by biting a mollusc – no doubt the murex – he had stained himself red; the dog was brought before the king of Tyre, Phoinix, who is thought to have adopted the colour purple as a sign of royalty and an emblem of the monarchy. After that, purple could only be worn by kings. That this legend is Phoenician in origin would be shown by the fact that some coins from Tyre carry the image of the famous animal.

In other myths, Phoinix appears as the father of the Phoenicians and eponymous with the territory, the ‘Phoiniké’. He is also frequently considered to be one of the brothers of Europa; during his travels in search of his ravished sister, he is believed to have settled in a country to which he gave his name, as did her other brothers: Cadmos in Thebes, Syros in Syria and Cilix in Cilicia.

As can be inferred from all these myths and legends, Phoinix, the eponymous hero of the country, is none other than the king of Tyre, who combines in his person all the characteristic attributes that give authentic identity to the Phoenician people: the purple, the alphabet (the *phoinikeia grammata*, also invented by the hero) and the date palm, another emblem of Tyre’s coinage, called *phoinix* in Greek.

In Homer, Hesiod and Herodotus, the word *phoinix* also designates a musical instrument similar to the lyre (also invented by Phoinix), a place name frequently found in the eastern Mediterranean and, lastly, a fabulous bird with red wings, the *ave fenix*, of unknown origin. All these meanings of *phoinix* are said to be derived from their country of origin,

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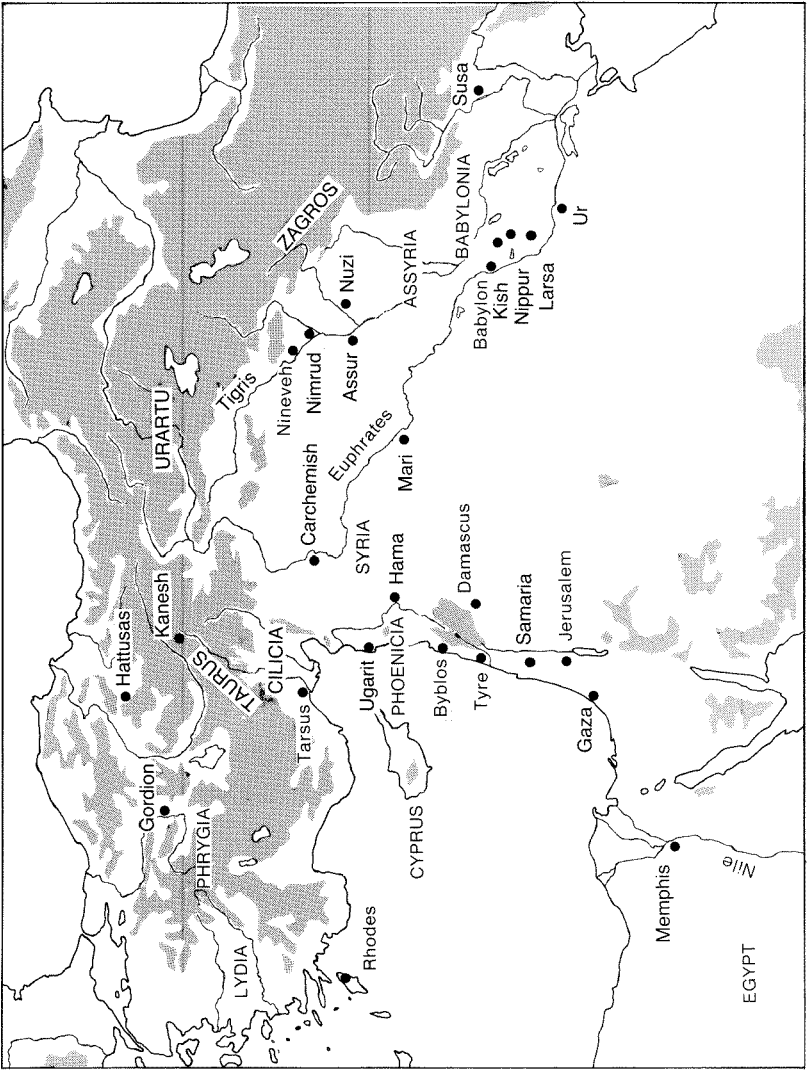


Fig. 1 The Near East

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Phoenicia, which in turn had taken this name from the Greek word used for the colour dark red. Moreover, it is surprising that the name given to an industry or its colour should lie at the origin of the name of the territory and its inhabitants. Why should the opposite not be true?

That the origin of the term is confused can be seen in those same Homeric texts, where the Phoenicians are also called *sidones* or *sidonioi*, that is Sidonians. Nor can the use by Homer of the term *sidonian* as a synonym for *phoinikes* be explained, since, in the days of the poet, the most powerful Phoenician city was not Sidon but Tyre. In short, all this indicates the difficulties the Greek world found in drawing up an ethno-political definition of the Phoenicians: a people without a state, without territory and without political unity.

Other theories deny any connection between ‘Phoenicians’ and *phoinós* (‘red’) and claim to derive the Greek word from the Mycenaean *po-ni-ki-jo* or *po-ni-ki*. This word, which is documented in Linear B texts from Knossos and Pylos, refers to an aromatic herb or condiment of eastern origin – perhaps Pliny’s ‘herba phoenica’ – and also to elements used in decoration, presumably red in colour, and seems to have been coined at the end of the second millennium BC, a period when contacts between the Aegean and the Levant were most intense and when the legends of Cadmos, Phoinix and the rape of Europa are likely to have emerged. However, we must point out that none of the Mycenaean texts mentioned seems to refer explicitly to a country, its inhabitants or the colour purple.

The origin of the Greek *phoinix* has been sought with equal lack of success in Ugaritic or Hebrew words like *puwwa* or *pwt* – ‘dye’, ‘substance’ – and even in Egyptian *fnhw* whose similarities to the Greek ‘Phoenician’ are purely accoustic. The word *fenkhu*, documented from the ancient Egyptian empire, has no connection whatsoever with Phoenicia, which the Egyptians in fact called ‘Retenu’ or ‘Ĥa-rw’.

From all that has been said, we deduce that the only clear evidence we have is the Greek name *phoinikes* with which, from the time of Homer, the Greeks designated the peoples of the Levant and in particular the eastern traders who were beginning to frequent the waters of the Aegean. The origin of the Greek term is still unclear today.

We know that the Phoenicians called themselves *can’ani*, ‘Canaanites’, and their land Canaan. This term is of eastern Semitic origin and very probably indigenous to the country. The etymology of the word, starting with *kn’n*, however, is just as obscure and controversial as the Greek *phoinix*, if not more so.

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In Genesis (9:18, 10:15) Canaan is the son of Ham and father of Sidon, that is of the Phoenicians, like the eponymous Phoinix. The biblical texts use the name *kena'anîm* or *kananaioi* to designate the inhabitants of the great coastal plain to the north of Israel, which doubtless implies a relatively uniform geographic, linguistic and cultural reality. On occasions, however, the term Canaan refers to a more restricted territory, confined to the area round Tyre (Isaiah 23:11). The Phoenicians were also frequently called by the name of their city of origin – Tyrians, Sidonians, Giblites – or simply, in biblical and Assyrian documents, *sîdonim* or *sidonioi*, as in Homer. The king of Tyre is also called 'king of the Sidonians', a very significant fact which doubtless reflects a specific geo-political situation, particularly during the tenth to eighth centuries BC, which we shall examine in the next chapter.

In Hebrew, *cana'ani* or *kina'nu* also means 'merchant', so Canaan would have been synonymous with 'land of merchants'. Yet again, a profession that made the Phoenicians so renowned would have lent its name to a territory. And so the hypothesis that the name of the territory ended by designating one of the most characteristic activities of the inhabitants, that of trade, would again be the most convincing.

Some linguists claim that the Greek *phoinix* is no more than a simple translation of the Akkadian *kinabhu*, a word which appears in texts of the fifteenth to fourteenth centuries BC found at Nuzi. In these documents the term alludes indiscriminately to the country of Canaan and to its most important export, red-coloured wool or *kinabhu*. According to that, the Hurrite texts of Nuzi seem to show not only the semantic parallel existing between 'canaanite' and 'purple' but also a direct association between the name of the country and the colour purplish red, both in Akkadian and in Greek. However, this does not solve the problem of who gave the name to whom, whether the territory to the colour or vice versa. All the indications point to the first possibility.

Indeed, ever since the middle of the fifteenth century BC, in other Levantine and Egyptian texts and inscriptions, we meet the name of the country Canaan without it being in any way associated with the colour red. Thus it is mentioned as *kn'ny* in texts from Ugarit, as *ki-in-a-nim* in texts from Alalakh and as *kn'nw* in inscriptions of Amenophis II. So too in texts from Mari, the Canaanites are mentioned with a strictly ethnic meaning and in the famous letters of El Amarna, dated to the first half of the fourteenth century BC, the inhab-