

A History of the Phoenicians

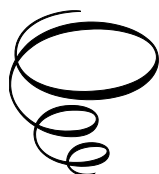
A History of the Phoenicians:

*From Ancient Origins
to Modern Legacy*

By

Adam P. Richardson and Stephen A. Imbeau

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“If I remind my own of our Phoenician forefathers,
It is because we were, at the gate of history,
Before becoming Muslims or Christians,
A single people united in the same glory”.

(Holst, 2021, 6 – from the Foreword by Antoine Khoury Harb, taken from
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The idea for this book has been a long time coming. Since April 2013, Dr. Imbeau has been a regular columnist for the Florence Morning News, Florence, SC, and SCNow. Imbeau wrote for a series called “the Citizen Columnist Corps,” with about 20 other Florentines over these years, resigning in late 2022.

In the early Fall of 2019 Imbeau was starting to run out of column ideas, and in the course of a lunch with Morning News Editor Donald Kausler, Imbeau mentioned his dilemma. Kausler suggested a new and long series recording Imbeau’s previous travels to cities and sites outside the United States to follow on from previous columns about the United States, collected into two books “Going My Way?: Tales of Travel” and “Going My Way? Around the World,” Credo Publications, 2019 and 2024. Imbeau agreed, particularly since he had visited up to 46 countries and could certainly produce other articles. Thus, Imbeau was also able to pursue his long-term love of both history and geo-politics.

Adam Richardson and Imbeau became friends over the last 13 years and have co-authored several other books. And thus, the collaboration on this book, particularly since Richardson is an historian, British trained.

We thank our wives, Heather and Shirley, for their help and support along the way, including their editing and doses of “common sense.” We also thank Kevin Yokim, Ron Bennett, Don Goetz, and Louise Imbeau for their important and thoughtful edits.

The motivation and original idea for this book on Phoenician History comes from the ever-fertile brain of Louise Imbeau.

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Thanks to all and a BIG thanks to our readers.

INTRODUCTION

Possibly the most important people of all time are the Phoenicians. These people engendered travel and trade, a simplification of language and alphabet, a flurry of art and artistry, trade and commerce and its accounting, plus mining and manufacturing. And yet, and yet our modern world barely knows they existed. Their history is unknown to most of us; to the rank and file of the world, they never existed. What happened to them? Why were they so important and yet now, so obscure? What happened to all their achievements, their wealth, their power, and their importance in the world?

Let's take a look.

There is a body of literature about the Phoenicians, but most written before our current millennium include Homer (about 900 BCE, but even earlier, if you think he lived in Egypt at the time of Ramses II), Herodotus (about 450 BCE), Strabo (about 30 BCE), Philo (about AD 50), Josephus (about AD 100), and Hebrew-Greek Biblical Scripture (from about 2500 BCE to AD 90). Apparently Phoenician history deserved serious ancient study, even Emperor Claudius I wrote a seven-volume series on the Phoenicians about AD 50. George Rawlinson's work in 1889 (eBook in 2018), *The History of the Phoenician Civilization*, remains an important tome. More recent writings include a variety of work by Sanford Holst (see the official Sanford Holst web site: <https://sanfordholst.com/>) including his master web site and several books (in 2005 *Phoenician Secrets* and in 2021 *The Phoenicians*). Other modern authors include Pamela Odijk (in 1989 *The Phoenicians*), Robert Miles (in 2011 *Carthage Must be Destroyed*), the Charles River series (in 2012 *The Phoenicians*), Josephine Quinn (in 2017 *In Search of the Phoenicians*), Josette Elayi (in 2018 *The History of the Phoenicians*), Lisa Marston (in 2019 *The Phoenicians*), and the Oxford Handbook Series (in 2022 *The Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean*).

The destruction of Tyre in about AD 1290 is well described by Muslim writers.

The word "Phoenician" has debatable sourcing. But most commentators agree it has a Greek root, going back to at least 1500 BCE, confirmed by

Egyptian carvings at Karnak, and by Homer, to be used in the context or meaning of “Canaanite” from the land of Canaan (the Hebrew and Egyptian words for “Canaanite” are equivalent to “carpenter,” fitting the Phoenicians), or “Palm Tree,” for the “Land of Palm Trees” (approximately describing Lebanon), or “red or crimson” describing the relative color of Phoenician skin as sailors, or “purple dye” describing one of the Phoenician major products. As is often the case with ancient history, the original words included meanings for all these interpretations. It remains an historical oddity that the Greeks imprinted the Phoenicians with their very name or calling, given the future patterns of both cooperation and competition between the two groups. Thus, millennia later historian Josephine Quinn spoofs the Phoenicians for not even having established their own identity (Quinn, 2018, 172-224). Over time the Greeks turned the word “Phoenician” into a slang pejorative, describing their Phoenician business and trade rivals thus as “slick business folks;” “too slick;” apparently, the Phoenicians were not fair to the unsuspecting, maybe even dishonest, but honest with the wise ... or the Greeks wanted to demean and slur their commercial rivals. The Romans continued the negative Phoenician attitude with the Latin phrase “Punic fides”.

The underlying reasons for Phoenician modern obscurity are many and complex and will never be fully or universally accepted. Despite their geographic scope, intelligence, great wealth, diligence and ingenuity, the Phoenicians did not leave behind much writing, even though they had enormous influence on alphabet and language. They built no great monuments like the Egyptians, no public literature like the Greeks or the Egyptians, no great libraries like the Greeks or the Romans, no reliefs or other great works of art, no gripping tales like the Greeks, nor common communications like the Greeks. They organized themselves into regions and City States, eventually all around the Mediterranean, and so had no great land holdings, no great empire to impress and rule, and thus also no great single symbol of status, excellence, wealth, or power. For the most part they were peoples of the City State, not an Empire, and thus in their view there was no “Phoenicia,” no organized country nor empire; instead, they were citizens of Tyre, Sidon, Carthage, etc. Quinn makes this point in her lengthy discourse, based on multiple antidotes and stories; but she ignores most historians before AD 1900, including the Bible, implying these old sources of Phoenician history were biased, inconsistent, or too trusting of even older stories and tales.

Instead of Empire, the Phoenicians built wealth, business leverage, and business influence by trade and manufacturing; their records were

business/accounting records, not very exciting nor imaginative, and sometimes secretive. They had no great stories to tell since they were acting quietly as businessmen usually do; they did not want excitement or adventure to bestir their commerce, their sometimes-secret connections, and their business operations. The Carthaginians did build empire, but it came late in the Phoenician era. In general, the Phoenicians often built vaults in their homes and cities; Holst thinks their libraries may have been secreted therein and thus lost to the future. In addition, once to wealth and influence, Tyre and Sidon began keeping much of their records in Crete (nobody knows why this location was chosen), but the records have all disappeared, assumed to have been destroyed over time by natural disaster, or by decay, or by conquest. Another loss to history. Furthermore, as the Romans came through the gates and over the roof tops, in the last days of Carthage, the priests and political leadership destroyed all the records they could.

The Phoenicians preferred to be behind the scenes. Although we can see some flashes of arrogance, pride, and great wealth seeking some place in the Sun, seeking some due honor, in the histories of Phoenician Cyprus, Carthage, and Tyre.

In particular, the Phoenicians did not share the glamour, the glitter, and the dominative ambition of the four great gentile empires: Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. We think of these Empires and those similar in China (the Chin), in Africa/India (the Indus, the Maharaj and the Egyptians), and in South America (the Incas and the Aztecs) when we think of greatness, empire, wealth, and dominance...not the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians do not capture our imagination, nor our modern literature, as do these other, better-known empires. Furthermore, since the Phoenicians built city states for centers of trade, business, and mining, they had no great conquests, no great military campaigns, or exploits (except temporarily, the Carthaginians, losing the Punic wars, who out of character were very war-like and expansion oriented). The Phoenicians did not really intend to build famous, lasting cities; they came ashore for trade, for commerce, for mining, and for some manufacturing; not longevity.

So, there was no great fodder for exciting Phoenician war stories. The Phoenicians did not conquer or invade, they did not amass territory; rather they built ships, they explored the "seven seas," pushing onward to even North America for the purpose of adventure, trade, natural resources, and manufacturing-commerce. They built up an important network of individual city-states. They became very rich, but not famous. Only Hannibal is

remembered, but even he is usually not identified as Phoenician. But they did provide walls and important, organized defenses for their cities—defending themselves from the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Turks. Furthermore, they usually did not get involved in local wars, beyond those with Assyria, Turkey, and Rome, although from time-to-time they assisted their neighbors, as with Israel in some of their civil wars with Judah, and in particular with Persia in the Greek City State Wars. The Persian navy in the time of Xerxes I was heavily dependent on the Phoenicians for ships, maintenance, craftsmanship, and sailors—up to 1200 Phoenician war ships sailed in the second Persian invasion of Greece. (Rawlinson, 2018, 95)

Even though language and, as we will see later, an alphabet, are stars in the Phoenician heavens, they did not keep records well—no great libraries, no great literature, no great histories. History and its study were not their passions. Unlike the Chinese, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Hebrews, the Greeks, and the Romans they left little written record and had little passion for its creation, or its study or its safe keeping. In addition, at least at Carthage, they deliberately destroyed their records as the Romans came into the city. Phoenicia did not have a Confucius, a Moses, a Julius Caesar, a Cicero, a Pliny, nor a Josephus. Furthermore, much of their records were kept in Crete, which eventually ended up in Greek hands, thus any Phoenician records facing destruction. They did not have the Hebrew passion for Torah or Talmud study, almost as if religious studies were a Jewish vocation (see the movie “Yentl” (United Artists, Barwood Films and Ladbroke Entertainment, 1983). Their City State edifices were palaces and temples, not libraries nor universities, although they made important advances in architecture with the use of headers, recessed doors, and windows—in fact some scholars think, based on their skill with huge stone works and transport of huge objects, they helped to build the Great Pyramids at Giza, as sub-contractors for the Egyptians—humorously, maybe they were the actual aliens of the stars (Holst, 2021, 73-93 and 122).

Scattered around the world are several collections of Phoenician script on steles, coffins, and other artwork: The Louve, The British Museum, the Met, in Marseilles, on Cyprus, in Sardinia, in Cardiz and in Beirut; but not much. Specific Phoenician script includes a Creation Story translated by Philo (some scholars doubt Philo’s claims), “Periplus” by Hanno of Carthage, from Esmunazan of Sidon and from his father Tabnit, from Jehavmelek of Gebal; the Inscription of Marseilles; the Inscription of Um-El-Awamid; the Inscription of Carthage; the Inscription of Malta; the Inscription of Cyprus; and the Inscription of Larnaka.

A reason sometimes overlooked for the “disappearing Phoenicia” is the effect of the Romans. Rome took almost “personally” the Carthaginian invasion of Italy, and the success of the Phoenician city states and other settlements around the Mediterranean. In effect there was only room for one “Big Man on Campus,” and Rome was determined to be “it”. After all, Rome had successfully already bested the Sabines and the Etruscans, often ruthlessly, by the time of the Punic Wars. There was room for only one Master of the Mediterranean. Phoenicia was not aggressively “empire minded,” but Rome was. Rome prevailed. The Romans viciously destroyed Carthage and surrounding cities with tremendous slaughter killing hundreds of thousands of citizens (Holst, 2021, 332). After the Punic Wars, Rome, over time, removed Phoenicia from the Mediterranean map (although temporarily Carthage arose again at the direction of Julius Caesar and Emperor Augustus), while adapting their ships, some of their art and architecture, politics (regional autonomy), trade routes, and commercial practices. The Phoenicians faded away, but Tyre lived on, even successfully, compliant with the Roman overlords, and then the Turks, up till the late Muslim age. Then the Muslims and the Ottoman Turks, like the Romans before them, seemed determined to wipe out any remaining evidence of Phoenicia in their territories, whether for religious, or for military, or for political reasons, we do not know.

And in addition, even though pagan themselves, the Mediterranean World seems to have become disgusted with the religious excesses of the Carthaginians, in particular the Spring Rites to Baal, Ashtoreth/Tanit, and Melqart (Hercules and Adonis). Was this a reason in part for Rome to wipe out the Carthaginians? Or later the Muslims, at both Tyre and Carthage? Or was there a demonic oracle in Carthage similar to the Oracle of Ammon in Egypt/Libya (most likely a “real” shrine of Baal-many mystics (and modern Hollywood) thought Ammon was a “real” portal between the underworld and earth for Baal)? and thus fit for destruction? There was a temple to Ammon (Saturn) in Carthage, but the Melqart temple was more prominent. We do not know.

Over their 4000-year history the Phoenicians built ports, berths, towns, cities, and recreation centers in about 300 sites around the Mediterranean world, even a few westward, beyond Gibraltar.

Here is a list of major Phoenician colonies/sites/cities:

Lebanon

Tyre - One of the two leading-city states of Phoenicia and one of the most important ports in ancient Phoenicia, and Lebanon, today

Sidon - One of the two leading city-states of Phoenicia

Ampi, Amia, Arqa, Baalbek, Botrys/Beirut (capital of Lebanon)

Gebal/Byblos (One of the oldest sites of civilization), Sarepta, Tripoli

Syria

Arvad, Ugarit, Amrit, Carne, Latakia/Ramitha

Palestine/Israel

Achziv, Acre, Atlit, Belus, Tel Tanninim, Dor, Elyakhin, Kabri, Michal, Joppa/Joffa/Jaffa, Haifa (Tel Shikmona), Reshef, Caesarea, Tell Abu Hawam, Tel Mevorakh

Eastern Mediterranean

Turkey

Myriandus, Sam'al (Cilici) - a fortress city protecting the trade route to Anatolia

Karatepe, Finike (historically known as Phoenicus), Rhosos (according to Malalas chorography the city was founded by Cilix, son of Agnenor, the Phoenician King), Tarsus

Crete

Knossos, Malia, Phaistos, Sitic, Kato Zadros, Kommos, Poros, Amnissos. Malia, Kato Zadros, Phaistos

Cyprus

Amathus, Kition, also known as Citium (in Latin), Paphos, Dali, Golgi, Salamis, Lapethos, Tamassos, Idalium

Rhodes

Lindos, Italysus, Camirus

North Africa***Egypt***

At one time, a major port at Pharos Island and significant warehouse space at an inland port at Memphis

Algeria

Tipaza, Russicada, Icosium, Hippo Regius, Algiers - capital city

Libya

Oea, Sabratha, Leptis Magna (major city on the Libyan coastline)
Tripoli - capital

Morocco

Lixus, Mogador, Tangier (capital), Mehidya/Thymaterion, El-Jadida/Gytte, Oualidia/Melitta, Agadir

Tunisia

Carthage - the most powerful of the Phoenician settlements, eventually destroyed by the Romans

Utica (earliest settlement in Africa), Hippo Diarrhytus (now Bizerte, the northernmost city in Africa), Hadrumetum, Ruspina, Leptis Parva, Thapsus, Kerkouane, Zama Regia (the last place Hannibal fought and the place where his first and only major defeat occurred), Vaga

Morocco or Mauritania

Cerne (Unknown whether Cerne was in Morocco or Mauritania)

Europe

France

Aleria, Marseilles

Greece

Santorini Island (Akrotiri, Eleusis) and Thasos Island (Thasos)

Italy

Motya, Soluntum, Lampas (Lampedusa), Kosyra (Pantelleria), Olbia
Sardinia Island –Caralis/Cagliari, Nora, Bithia, Sulcis, Tharros, Barumini
Sicily Island- Palermo (capital of Sicily), Lilybaeum/Marsala, Syracuse,
Drepana/Trapani, Eryx/Erice, Mazara del Vallo, Soloeies

Malta

(Bormla/Cospicua/Soldanis/Abela/Achille Ferris), Medina, La Valetta,
Rirgu, Marsa, Rabat, Burmula, Melite

Monaco

Monaco

Portugal

Lisbon – capital city

Spain

Cadiz (Gades) /Tarshish—earliest Phoenician settlement in Spain
Cartagena—Hamilcar Barca’s of Carthage capital city in Spain
Kartuba, Almunecar, Rusadir, La Fonteta (Guardamar del Segura),
Trayamar, Baria-Villaricos, Abdera, Malaga, Huelva, Ibiza, Lebrija,
San Roque, Barcelona

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS

Whence came the Phoenicians? What are their origins? Nobody knows for sure. The ancient Greeks were told they came to the Mediterranean coasts about 3000 BC, from the area of Arabia and the Persian Gulf, thus about 500 years before Abraham's migration to the Levant. We have no idea about why the move, although in those days weather changes, famine, and local war/conflicts were usually the reasons for migrations. The Greeks wrote that earthquakes motivated the Phoenicians to move westward. Noah's descendants of course at first gathered in the area of Mt. Ararat, a range of mountains (not a single mountain) and lands touching on modern Russia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Iran. Scholars describe the Phoenicians as "Semites"—descendants of Shem; but a close look at the Noah genealogies in Genesis 10 show that Phoenician root names and words occur in the lineage of ALL THREE of Noah's sons, Not just Shem—so the Phoenicians are not really Semites. Note that ancient names were sometimes forgotten, misinterpreted or even mis-transcribed, and certainly not unique. But the upshot is that even though eventually described as one of the Semitic peoples of Canaan, the Phoenicians were ethnically diverse, descendants of all three of Noah's sons.

How did they coalesce into a group? If, in fact, they did, and how did they stay together? How did they migrate together?—assuming that they did migrate. We do not know for sure and modern scholars love to debate the issues. Recent web pages (<https://phoenicia.org> and <https://phoenician.org>, accessed April 6, 2025) claim the Phoenicians continued on even after the Turkish defeat and that they did not migrate from Arabia or the fertile crescent, as held by most scholars, rather they were "home grown" along the Eastern Mediterranean Coast.

Linguistic research keeps them in the Semitic Camp (generally other Semitic peoples include the Assyrians, most Babylonians, the Arameans, the Syrians, the Arabs, the Moabites, and the Hebrews). The Phoenician ancestors spent lots of years moving; first around the area of Mt. Ararat, then the Fertile Crescent, and then the lands of Arabia and the Arabian

Sea. Many scholars believe earthquakes, weather and famine determined these migrations, moving people across the Fertile Crescent and the Black Sea environs, often in a circular pattern, as agricultural conditions changed, with famines. Over the millennia Babylonia developed a huge canal system for irrigation from the rivers of the Fertile Crescent, but even those canals sometimes failed, forcing these circular migrations. (Jotheri, 2025)

And so, the Phoenicians eventually came westward to Northern Canaan somewhere between 3300 BCE and 3100 BCE. We should note that some scholars dispute the old Greek historians on this story of Phoenician origins; modern Lebanese historians and archaeologists believe they were already “there” as indigenous peoples of the Levant (Holst, 2021, intro). At first they worked with the indigenous peoples, offering them employment, teaching farming techniques and helping them to build villages along the coast. Some local artifacts have been dated from very ancient times, before our dates above. The immigrants found some of the locals living in caves and some living in rounded huts with limestone floors and partial walls of stone, mostly living off agriculture and fishing. As the Phoenicians prospered they also turned some of the local, malleable peoples into slaves, but eventually fully absorbed the locals, freeing all slaves. Their first major city was Sidon, although some credit Byblos. (Rawlinson, 2018, 8-19).

The Phoenicians settled along a rather narrow strip of what we now call “Lebanon”—the Lebanese strip was only 15 miles wide (range of 5 to 30 miles)—leaving the mountains, some rising to 10,000 feet, as buffers between themselves, desert, and the Syrian peoples. But as they occupied cities and suburbs, City States, they did not claim the land between as theirs. By the time of the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III (the Pharaoh of the Hebrew Exodus, about 1450 BCE), Egypt was ironically trying to occupy the region despite the already well established Phoenician cities of Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, Gebel, Ames, Simyra, Arka, Sarepta, Berytus, Aka, Arwad, and Ullasa, even though Egypt was dependent on them for trade around the Mediterranean and up the rivers into the Fertile Crescent. The Egyptians finally struck up business and trade agreements with the Phoenicians, rather than conquest. (Rawlinson, 2018, 26-31).

The favorite geography for a Phoenician city or settlement became characteristic: on a bluff or cliff, near small off-shore islands (or at first on the islands), a ready source of fresh water (river, lake, stream or spring, even if underground—although as we will see later, they invented

desalination using leather pipes), at least one natural harbor (two even better), on a promontory or peninsula and with a nearby fertile plain (Holst, 2021, 11-13).

Since at least the middle years of the 18th dynasty of Egypt, the traditional Egyptians rebuilt their influence north into the Levant to contain the Hittites, who had moved more southward during the Hyksos years, and had eyes on even Egypt itself. So that Egypt came to consider Lebanon in its sphere of influence although not really willing to conquer it or rule it. See some discussion about these politics in the Amarna Letters (Pritchard, 1958, 173-187 and 215-218) in the time of Amenhotep III. But even earlier, the Pharaohs of the Great Giza Pyramids left writing samples behind in Byblos, so they had been coming into the northern Levant from very early times, from at least 2800 BCE. The Phoenicians and the Egyptians arrived at a mutual understanding that was good for the fortunes of both: Egyptian oversight, but Phoenician local rule and control, and of course freedom for Phoenician trade and commerce (Shaw, 2000, 481). Curiously, even going forward, the Egyptians were timid about Mediterranean travel, preferring their rivers. Ramses II (1280 to 1213 BCE) was able to use routes northward through Lebanon undisturbed as he successfully fought to contain the Syrians, the Hittites, and the Assyrians. Ramses' famous victory over the Hittites, at Kadesh (1274 BCE), not far away from Lebanon in Syria, sealed Egyptian primacy over the Levant for decades. (Breasted, 1906, 317).

After the death of Ramses II, the Phoenician cities became more assertive, establishing regional hegemony, particularly Sidon, obtaining influence and control over many of the cities previously sought by Thutmose III. Sidonian shipping and trade enabled Phoenician supremacy over the Greeks (more about the Greek competition, later) and even for a time, they took on the Philistines along the south coasts of Israel, unsuccessfully, but for the Phoenician supremacy over Dor. For a time, Sidon "was" the face of Phoenicia—so much so that in the Trojan War, very expensive silver awards and victory metals proffered by Achilles and Menelaus to sports contest victors among their compatriots (from Homer, *The Iliad* 23,740–quoted by Holst, 2021, Intro) were attributed directly to Sidon manufacture, rather than to Phoenician. For a time, proximate to the Judge Jephthah, the Sidonians occupied some northern territories of Israel. And so it is, that most likely the earliest Phoenician sailors to launch from Lebanese shores were from Sidon (some scholars claim it was from Byblos). The Sidon sailors were the first to sail at night, thus conserving important time, learning to navigate by the stars. (Rawlinson, 2018, 96).

The Phoenician Lebanese settlements were between the 32nd to the 36th parallels, in a land already known for its palm trees. The boundaries, north to south, were basically Mt. Cassius (the Syrian border) to Mt. Carmel, about 380 miles apart (the Israeli border). As we see in the biblical book of Joshua some of the southern territory, north of Mt. Carmel overlapped with later Hebrew lands, but the invading Hebrews often left the pre-existing Phoenicians undisturbed (Judges 1:27-31). South of Mt. Carmel the Phoenicians did not penetrate inland along the coast much, coming up to Joppa (modern Tel Aviv), thus reducing the length of the contiguous coastline by about 80 miles (Rawlinson, 2018, 26-31). With the coming of the Philistines in about 1150 BCE, the Phoenicians were pushed even more northward, along the Mediterranean coastline from Mt. Carmel to Beirut. Mt. Hermon was an eastern boundary marker. The coastline topography was mostly serene with a nice bay at Mt. Carmel, but northward from Beirut, the coast became much more rugged. Conveniently, the Phoenicians and the Philistines both preferred low-lying coastal lands, while the Hebrews preferred the hill country (their shepherding background might have played into Hebrew preferences), thus allowing the three groups to coexist in awkward peace.

The total land occupied by the Phoenicians was about 4500 square miles. Important later, the sand, although in a narrow band, was full of important silicates. Several lush valleys, rich in soil, are along the way, with plentiful streams and rivers (the most famous and picturesque, the Litani and the Kadisha), and great stands of important cedar trees, until logged off. The Cedars of Lebanon have been remembered down through the ages, serving important roles in shipping and ship construction with important inclusion also in temples and palaces. Villas and tombs in Egypt (maybe even the ancient Giza pyramids), Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, Assyrian palaces, and the Temple to Diana in Ephesus, all include these famous timbers. The rich farm and forest lands just east of Tyre and Sidon were very important in the long run, obviously. Similarly, rich plains and valleys surround Beirut, Lebanon's modern capital. Lebanon's mountains, mostly running conveniently north and south, were important for defense, but also water, beautiful flower strewn meadows, and limestone or sandstone quarries. The mountains are riddled with caves, at least 2000 of them, used by the very ancient indigenous peoples for housing. The Phoenicians built villages with huts, but eventually sophisticated cities with buildings up to five stories tall. Phoenician engineering skills could compete with the much later Romans. Each Phoenician city was usually walled as well. (Holst, 2021, 8-23).

Farming and hunter-gathering was important in the early years. Lebanon is generally blessed with olives (oils), figs, dates, fruit trees, some tree nuts, herbs, and the capacity for silk horticulture. In addition, early crops included grapes, melons, cucumbers, wheat, barley, mullet, indigo, cotton, corn, and tobacco. Early minerals included iron and limestone. Shellfish were very important as a source of the famous Phoenician purple dyes, to eventually become eagerly sought, and thus very expensive, found within the shells of genus "*Murex brandaris*" in the shellfish sacs or veins. Ancient mounds of discarded shells are often common near ancient Phoenician archaeological sites. (Rawlinson, 2018, 25).

Holst (Holst, 2021, 351) attributes the Phoenician long-term success to what he calls the "Seven Principles:"

- “Peaceful Resolutions of Conflict
- Negotiation Skills
- International Trade
- Religious Tolerance
- Creation of Partnerships
- Respect for Women
- Equity “

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND ALPHABET

The key to human civilization is communication and language. Even the animals and birds communicate (see the biblical Job chapters 38 and 39). The indigenous people of the Amazon jungles communicate with each other; the Amazonians can also communicate with the animals and the birds, learning the language of the jungle (Johnson, 2023, 223).

In early Genesis of the Bible the leader, Emperor Nimrod is recognized as a “Mighty Hunter,” (Genesis 10:8-9), but he is best remembered now for the empire and the cities he built, what we now call “Babylonia”. Nimrod organized the peoples and built important cities as he, Genghis Khan like, moved to develop and build the original Babylonia. Such empire expansion and building projects obviously required communication-language, architectural plans, logistics with exact instructions, and communications. The early Ziggurat at Babylon/Bel, a huge undertaking, clearly required expert communication.

We have no knowledge of the original languages from very ancient times, nor the precise ones used after the civilization of the Golden Crescent, but assume they were all precursors of our modern languages. These communications depended on accurate memorization and passage of stories and facts from person to person. Specially trained people could pass on these important ancient communications; many of the ancient myths and histories, the stories of Homer about the Trojan War and its aftermath, for example, come to us today that way. The expert can carefully recite long passages of prose, but most of us cannot because of the “telephone game” phenomenon-even with only ten people in a line, the simple phrase “Jack called home” becomes impossibly and humorously garbled as it passes from one person to the next.

Writing and transcribing is thus mandatory for a civilization to advance and also to maintain its identity, its history. A written record is critical. But not required so much if there is only one, unified language; so, it makes sense that the history of the alphabet traces back to very ancient times,

starting from about 4000 BCE. It is not easy to decide where writing began, now so many years later, but it was most likely in Sumer. The early writing was not only to help information cross between several languages, but was also required as agriculture, commerce, and trade grew more sophisticated, and careful records were expected. Keeping track of commodities trading and the labeling of primitive art were the early uses of writing. Furthermore, documenting/describing religious and legal documents was a critical need as society grew in numbers and sophistication.

Etchings and art have been found from ancient times, usually in caves, but also on ivory tusks (mammoth-Mesopotamia) and turtle shells (China); we do not describe these art forms as writing.

The early writing that sprang up in about 4000 BCE, either independently moved across the world or moved by some migration now unknown; basically, the writing was cuneiform in the Fertile Crescent, Hieroglyphs in Egypt, Syllabaries in China, and Indian Devarajan in India. The Sumerian cuneiform was at first narrow wedges pressed into pottery or jars and eventually clay tablets and sometimes metal sheets. But all these artistic symbolisms for writing were difficult to write, required a specially educated class of scribes, with supreme memory, often religious based, and were not easily stored. For the Egyptians and the Chinese, the discovery of papyrus, parchment, and paper helped some, but expressing language and thoughts as pictures or mathematical forms or patterns was laborious and not at all ideal. The physical storage and preservation of large numbers of clay tablets and stone monuments was also difficult. Papyrus and parchment were subject to decay.

Enter the Phoenicians. Enter the idea of the alphabet.

Alphabet is a powerful communications tool. Alphabets allow for language phonics, so that speech and writing can be matched; alphabet allows for sounds to have words and for words to have sound. Alphabets allow for rhyme and rhythm, for complex ideas to be expressed in words, for description of nature, people, places, or ideas, for cadence, for poetry, and other literature. Alphabets allow for consistent vocabulary and meaning—when I write a sentence in words with the letters of a mutually understood alphabet, you know the meaning. Alphabets allow for translations of other languages. Alphabet allows for storage of language. Alphabet allows, depending on the available technology, printing, or copying, of documents

and thus the uniform distribution of important records, books, and other literature.

The Phoenicians developed from a rich genetic, ethnic stew. But once settled on the Lebanon coast (from about 3000 BCE) they were immersed in and surrounded by Semitic peoples. Furthermore, their previous migrations around the Fertile Crescent and then the Persian Gulf, also exposed them to mostly Semitic peoples and languages. The point here is that the Semites more or less used the same or similar language as the Phoenicians. It was for this language set that the Phoenicians crafted and promulgated an alphabet. As Phoenicia grew or spread around the Mediterranean world, so did its alphabet, finding its way and influence into non-Semitic languages.

But the actual origins of the Phoenician alphabet we still cannot say. The Phoenician alphabet basically became the Semitic alphabet, and of course the Phoenicians predated many of their surrounding Semites, particularly the Hebrews, Abraham and his band coming to the Mediterranean world about 500 to 600 years after the Phoenicians. Most scholars attribute some Hittite, Cypric, and Egyptian influence on the Phoenician alphabet. As the Phoenician peoples arrived in Lebanon they learned the alphabets of the Egyptians, later watching these alphabets evolve into Hittite (Turkey), proto-Canaanite, and proto-Syrian scripts. These scripts provided the next step of change and simplification and moved away from the difficult, pictorial Egyptian Heliographs. The Phoenicians provided the next step, a simple, unidirectional alphabet. In fact, the power of the Phoenician script was its relative simplicity: elite scribes were no longer needed—the common people could all learn a language with a simple alphabet, and then learn to write it and to read it.

The Phoenician alphabet contained 22 consonants, and few if any vowels. It was written right to left. Early versions often did not separate words and allowed for run-on sentences. Later, blank spaces, small dots or triangles, would separate words and/or sentences. It is not considered a perfect alphabet, since some sounds have no letters, some sounds are represented by more than one letter, and some sounds are redundant.

A curious association between the Phoenicians and the Hebrews: over time the Phoenician and Hebrew alphabets basically merged. The Mishnah includes some essays on the Phoenician and Hebrew alphabets (from [Judaism.stackexchange](https://www.judaism.stackexchange.com/), 2018). Aside from numbering systems, Hebrew and Phoenician letters, words, sentences, grammar, and pronunciation