

# The Middle East: The Phoenicians

The Phoenicians lived in small city-states along the Mediterranean coast in what is now Lebanon from about 2000 B.C. to 800 B.C. Two famous Phoenician cities are Tyre and Sidon. The people were originally Canaanites, but the Greeks named them Phoenicians. It is thought the name Phoenician comes from the Greek word *phoinikes*, meaning "purple men." The Greeks gave them that name because the Phoenicians developed the process of making purple dye. The dye was beautiful, but it was so expensive that only the wealthy could afford it. Roman emperors wore purple togas, and over time, the color purple became associated with royalty.

Dye was not the only Phoenician product that was prized throughout the Mediterranean. Fine glassware made into vases, bottles, goblets, and beads was treasured as well. The Phoenicians learned glassmaking from the Egyptians, but they improved the process. While Egyptian glass was cloudy, the Phoenicians used sand rich in quartz from their own country. The abundance of quartz in the sand made the Phoenician glass clear. Both clear and colored glassware made by Phoenician craftsmen were treasured objects. Beautiful ivory and wood carvings, pottery, cedar wood, wine, wrought metal objects, and embroidered cloth also made Phoenician traders wealthy.

By 1250 B.C., the Phoenicians had established themselves not only as excellent craftsmen and traders, but as outstanding navigators and sailors as well. Their sailing skill was developed as they looked for new markets and raw materials for their products. They sailed all over the Mediterranean world, and according to a Greek historian, may have even sailed around Africa, which would have been about 2,000 years before Europeans accomplished this feat. Phoenicians were among the first people to learn to sail at night by navigating by the stars.

The Phoenicians traded their goods with many nations and set up trading posts in many places in the Mediterranean. The most famous trading post was in Carthage in northern Africa, which became a power in the Mediterranean by the seventh century B.C. There were other important trading posts at Utica near Carthage, Cadiz in southern Spain, and on the islands of Cyprus and Rhodes. While Phoenicia had many posts and colonies in different places, it is not accurate to call Phoenicia an empire. All of the city-states in Phoenicia and the colonies in other countries were independent.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the Phoenicians was the invention of the alphabet. Earlier civilizations had developed forms of writing based on pictures. While these were great advancements in communication, these writing systems were pictographs. The Phoenician alphabet was better because each symbol represented a sound. Since there are about 30 different sounds in speech, this means that any word can be written using a system of 30 letters or less. The Phoenician alphabet used 22 letters. Since the Phoenicians traveled to so many places, their alphabet spread to other countries. The Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet and called their first letter "alpha" and their second letter "beta." Combining these two letters gives us the word "alphabet." Today all modern languages are written with the alphabetic system.

<p align="center"><b>PHOENICIAN CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE</b></p> <p><b>WHERE:</b> West Asia</p> <p><b>WHEN:</b> 2000 B.C.—800 B.C.</p> <p><b>ACHIEVEMENTS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invented the alphabet and a writing system; most early writing systems were based on pictures</li> <li>• The greatest traders of the ancient world</li> <li>• Talented craftsmen known for their ivory carvings</li> <li>• Developed the technique of glassblowing</li> <li>• Excellent navigators, sailors, and shipbuilders.</li> </ul>
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Phoenician Civilization Quiz

Shown below are a number of sentences. Some are true and some are false. If the sentence is true, write "true" in front of the sentence. If the sentence is false, write a term that could replace the word in bold type to make the sentence true.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Phoenician glass was **opaque**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The Phoenicians developed the process of making a **purple** dye.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Two famous Phoenician **kings** were Tyre and Sidon.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Over time, the color purple became associated with **peasants**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The Phoenicians' greatest accomplishment was the invention of the **rudder**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Phoenician **sailing** skill was developed as they looked for new markets and raw materials for their products.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The Phoenician purple dye was beautiful and **cheap**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. In the Phoenician alphabet, each symbol represented a **syllable**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Pictographs are writing systems using **sounds** to represent ideas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Phoenicians were originally called the **Sumerians**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Phoenicians were excellent **navigators**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. It is not accurate to call the Phoenician culture an **empire**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Phoenician comes from a Greek word meaning "**bearded men**."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Phoenicians lived in city-states along the **Mediterranean** coast.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. The Phoenicians learned glassmaking from the **Venetians**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. The **Romans** named the Canaanites "Phoenicians."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. The Phoenicians had important **forts** at Utica near Carthage, Cadiz in southern Spain, and on Cyprus and Rhodes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. **Dye** from Phoenicia was prized throughout the Mediterranean.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. The Phoenician culture existed from about 2000 to 800 **B.C.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Sand from Phoenicia was rich in **coral**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. The Phoenicians **marched** all over the Mediterranean world.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Phoenicia had many **posts** and **colonies** in foreign countries.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. Phoenician city-states and the colonies were **independent**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. The Phoenician traders were **healthy**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. Phoenicians were among the first to navigate by the **compass**.