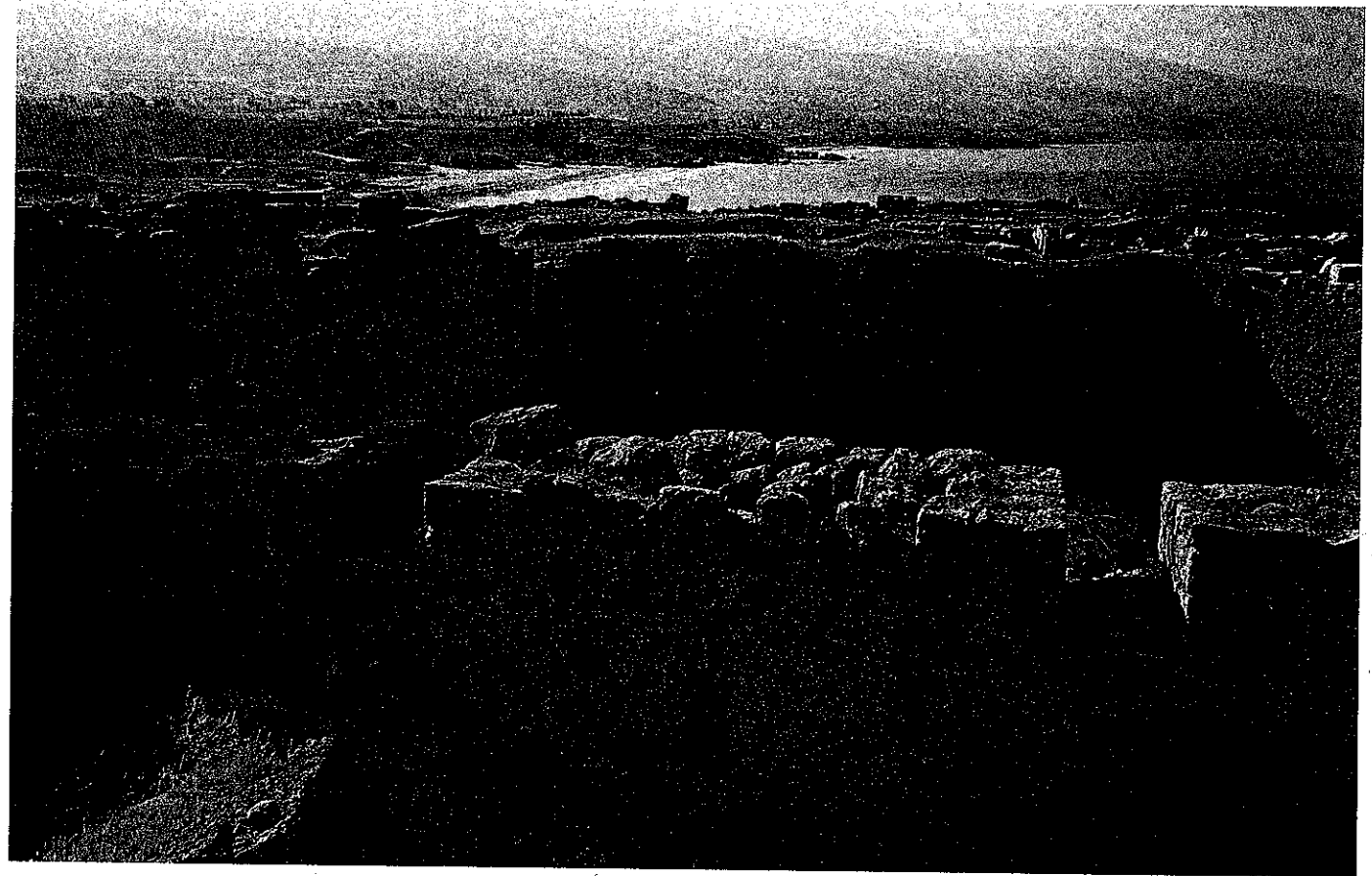


## Phoenicians

1. Where is Phoenicia? What modern day countries make up Phoenicia?	
2. What tribe of people did the Phoenicians evolve from?	
3. What was the most prized resource of the Phoenicians? How did they get their name?	
4. How did the Phoenicians become leaders in maritime trading?	
5. What cities did they set up throughout the Mediterranean? Which is the most famous? Where is it?	
6. Which other ancient civilization did the Phoenicians make an alliance with and help? How did they do this?	
7. What kind of resources did the Phoenicians trade?	
8. What were the religious beliefs of the Phoenicians.? What gods did they share with other cultures?	
9. What are some other achievements of the Phoenicians?	
10. What invaders ended Phoenicia's power? Who eventually is responsible for ending Phoenicians legacy of maritime trading?	

# PHOENICIANS



**T**he Phoenicians were a nation of great seafarers and traders from the shores of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. No one knows where they came from originally, but they probably arrived in the Mediterranean region about 3000 B.C. Their homeland there was a narrow coastal strip now divided among Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The Phoenicians were renowned as merchants, navigators, skilled boatbuilders, and gifted craftsmen. They were also famous for their learning, inventing an alphabet that was adopted by the Greeks and later formed the basis of all the alphabets used in the West today.

The name Phoenicia comes from the Greek *phoinix*, meaning red-purple. The Greeks called the Phoenicians *Phoinikes* (the red-purple men) because of their most important product, a purple dye that was used to stain cloth. The Phoenicians called themselves Canaanites and were descended from the Bronze Age people of Canaan (ancient Syria and Palestine). Canaan also means "land of purple" in the Semitic language.

## THE CANAANITES

During the early Bronze Age (3000–2000 B.C.) the Canaanites built a number of great cities, including the ports of Byblos and Ugarit, which became important trading centers between 2000 and 1500 B.C. However,

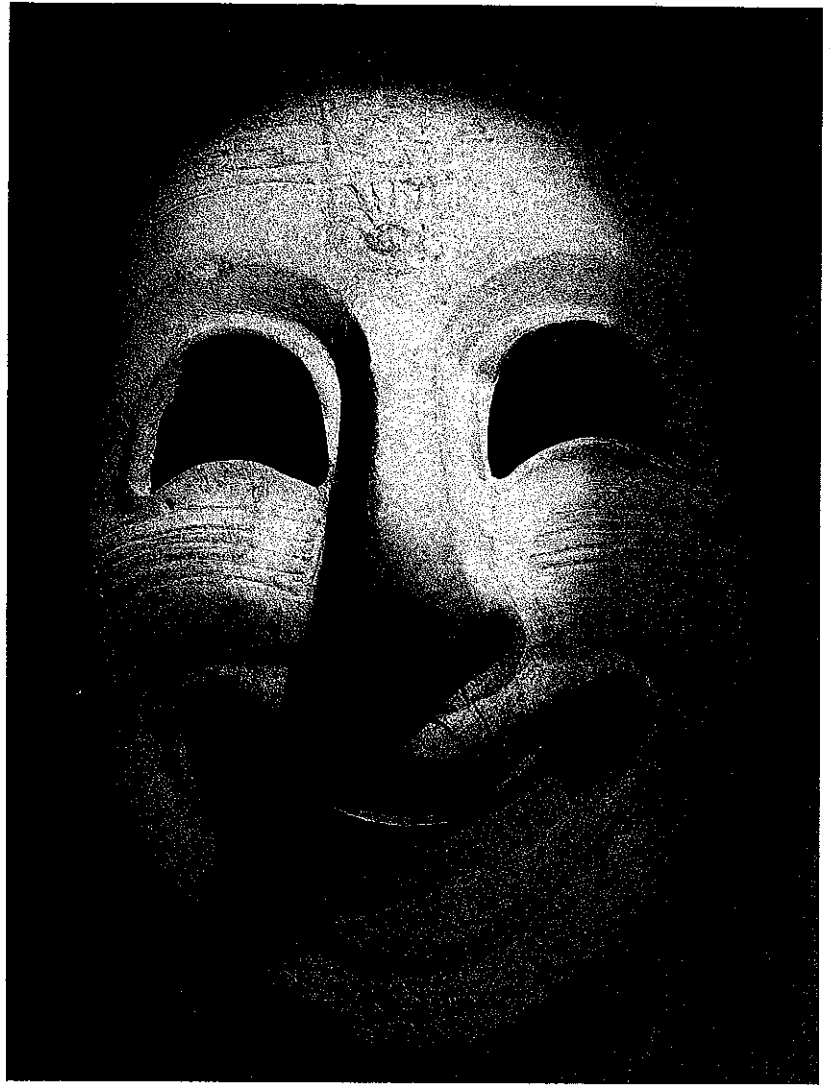
▲ *The ruins of the city of Byblos as they are today. On the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, Byblos was the Phoenicians' main port for the export of cedarwood. It remained a great trading center well into Roman times.*

after 1550 B.C. the cities of Canaan were conquered and ruled by a series of foreign powers, including the Hittites, Egyptians, and Mycenaeans.

The history of Phoenicia really begins around 1100 B.C., when the Phoenicians seized an opportunity to gain their freedom. At this time the civilizations of southern Europe and western Asia were threatened by invading tribes called the Sea Peoples. These fierce warriors attacked the Egyptians, conquered the Hittites, and contributed to the downfall of the Mycenaeans in Greece. The Mycenaeans had dominated sea trade in the Mediterranean since the 1600s. The weakening of all these nations gave the Phoenicians the chance not only to reclaim their independence but also to win control of sea trade in the region.

### PHOENICIAN INFLUENCE

Over the next 250 years Phoenician power and influence spread throughout the Mediterranean region. Their cities set up trading stations, then colonies, in Cyprus and western Sicily, and at Gades (modern Cadiz) in Spain. Carthage, a port on the north coast of Africa, was another important colony. It was founded in 814 B.C. by the city of Tyre. Tyre and Sidon, in particular, grew into wealthy cities and centers of learning. Built on two offshore islands, Tyre was especially powerful because it was very difficult to attack. Nebuchadnezzar,



king of Babylon, laid siege to it without success for 13 years during the 500s B.C.

During the 900s B.C. the king of Tyre made an alliance with the Hebrews under King David and his successor, Solomon. According to the Bible King Hiram of Tyre provided

▲ *This pottery funerary mask was found in Sardinia, which was one of Phoenicia's trading colonies.*

## ROYAL PURPLE

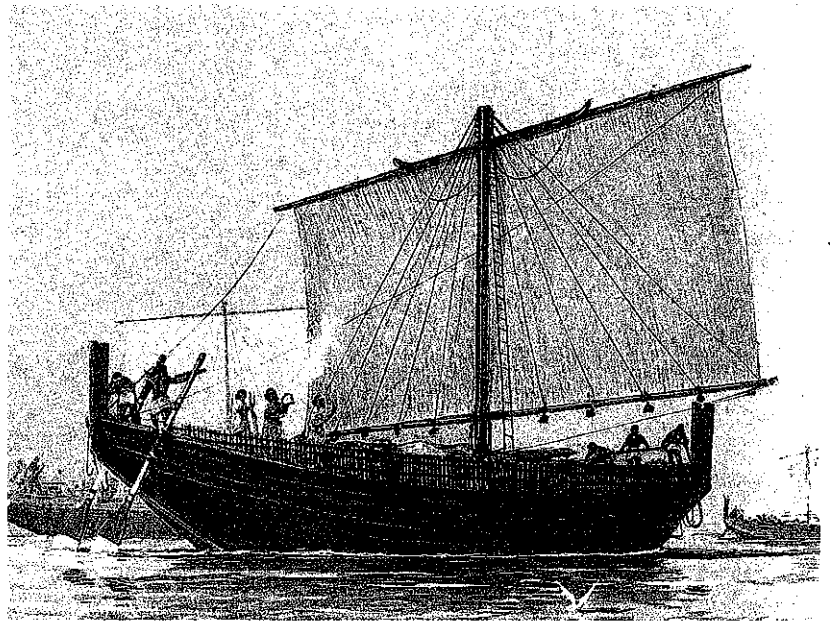
Phoenician purple cloth was in demand throughout the Mediterranean region because purple was the color worn by kings. To make the purple dye, shells of murex snails (found in the sea) were cracked, and the soft creatures inside removed. Their rotting bodies yielded a yellow liquid that darkened to purple when boiled and processed.

Tyre and Sidon were notorious for the stench given off by the rotting snails. Each snail produced only a tiny drop of liquid, so up to 60,000 mollusks were needed to make 1 lb. (450g) of dye. Skilled dyers could produce a range of colors, from pale pink to deep purple. Tailors then fashioned some of the cloth into ready-made robes.

cedarwood and craftsmen experienced in working “gold and silver, iron, stone, and wood, as well as purple, violet, and crimson yarn and fine linen,” to help build Solomon’s temple. Hiram sent shipbuilders to establish a Hebrew fleet on the Red Sea. From there Solomon’s ships, manned by Phoenician sailors, went out on trading missions. Once every three years, the Bible tells us, “this fleet of merchantmen came home, bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys.”

**EXPLORATION**

By about 850 B.C. the Phoenicians had colonized the Mediterranean islands of Corsica, Sardinia, Malta, and Gozo, and possibly also parts of the Greek mainland. They controlled the Strait of Gibraltar, where the Mediterranean Sea narrows to a distance of 8 miles (13km) as its waters mingle with the vast Atlantic Ocean. Daring Phoenician sailors ventured beyond this strait to visit the Azores and possibly Cornwall on the southwest tip of England, a center for tin mining. Later, during the 600s B.C. Phoenician seamen led an Egyptian expedition that sailed all the

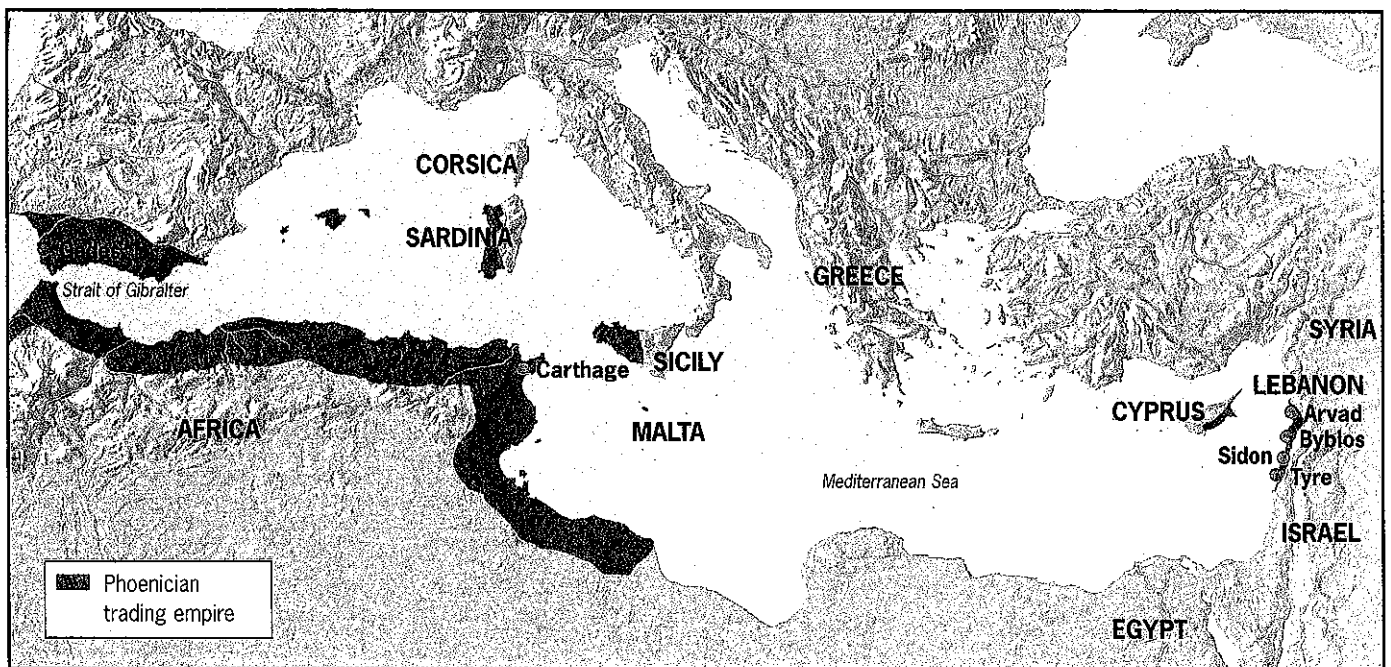


way around the African coast, a voyage that lasted three years according to the Greek historian Herodotus.

The development of Phoenicia was influenced by its geography. To the west the waters of the Mediterranean Sea formed a natural boundary. To the east the mountains of Lebanon made another protective barrier between Phoenicia and its powerful neighbors inland. The great cities of Phoenicia —Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, Berytus (Beirut),

▲ *An artist’s impression of a Phoenician trading ship. It had a wide hull to hold plenty of cargo.*

▼ *The extent of the Phoenician trading empire.*



and Arvad—began as small sea ports that grew rich on trading profits. But miles of rugged coastline separated these settlements and prevented Phoenicia from becoming a unified kingdom. Instead, it flourished as a chain of powerful city-states.

Although small, Phoenicia held rich resources. Cloth and timber formed the basis of Phoenician trade. The shallow waters offshore were a rich fishing ground and the source of the murex snails that produced the famous purple dye. Inland the coastal strip was well watered by streams and rivers. In this fertile soil farmers grew wheat, barley, grapes, and olives, and pastured their herds. But Phoenicia's greatest

## A NEW ALPHABET

The Phoenicians spoke a Semitic language related to Hebrew and Babylonian. From the Babylonians they also learned cuneiform writing, a script of wedge-shaped symbols. Around 1200 B.C. they developed their own alphabet of 22 letters (all consonants). It was an immense improvement since the cuneiform scripts in use at this time could have as many as 600 different symbols. Later the Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet, adding vowels. From them the alphabet passed to the Romans, and through the Romans it became the basis of all Western alphabets. Some Phoenician words still survive in English and other European languages. The English words "bible" and "bibliography" (a book list), for example, are derived from the name Byblos, the Phoenician port famous for its trade in papyrus, the writing material of the ancient world.



◀ *This elegant glass container for perfume or ointment was made by Phoenician craftsmen in the fifth century B.C. using the sand-core method. They poured layers of molten glass over a shaped sand mold, and when the glass coating set, the sand was emptied out. Colored glass was then dripped onto the vessel, which was rolled on a flat surface before the glass cooled.*

asset lay in the mountains—the mighty forests that grew on the steep hillsides. The cedars of Lebanon were prized for their hard, long-lasting timber. The Phoenicians used the wood for their own shipbuilding and also sold large quantities for export.

## TRADE GOODS

Phoenician merchants sold agricultural produce such as grain, oil, wine, and raisins. They also acted as middlemen, selling crops and goods produced by other peoples. Traders imported metals and other raw materials from around the Mediterranean for Phoenician craftsmen to make into beautiful objects. Smiths cast and hammered gold, silver, and bronze into tools, weapons, and jewelry. Ivory brought from Africa was carved into delicate panels to decorate chairs, beds, and chests. Glassworkers made glass from silica-rich sand and wood ash. They shaped molten glass around a sand or clay mold and allowed it to set before destroying the mold. Later Phoenicians may have invented glassblowing.

The Phoenicians shared some of their gods and goddesses with other



ancient civilizations, including Egypt and Babylon. They worshiped the Egyptian sun god Re and the goddess Hathor, and the Mesopotamian god of storms, Hadad. The Phoenicians usually called their deities simply Baal (lord) or Baalat (lady). On altars called *tophets* they offered animal sacrifices. Some historians believe that they may also have sacrificed young children.

In 842 B.C. Phoenicia was conquered by the Assyrian Empire. For 200 years Phoenician cities suffered under harsh Assyrian rule. During the 600s B.C. they passed first into the hands of the Babylonians, then the Persians. The Persians allowed the civilizations they conquered many freedoms, so the cities prospered again, especially Sidon. The Phoenician fleet fought for the Persians

in their wars against the Greeks, only to be destroyed by the Greek navy at the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C.

In 330 B.C. Phoenicia was conquered again, this time by Alexander the Great of Macedonia. Under his successors Phoenicia thrived as a center of culture and commerce until 64 B.C., when it became part of the Roman Empire and ceased to have a separate identity.

**SEE ALSO:**

- ◆ ASSYRIANS
- ◆ EXPLORATION
- ◆ NAVIGATION
- ◆ PERSIAN EMPIRE
- ◆ SHIPS

▲ *A sacrificial altar in the city of Carthage. The Phoenicians used altars like this to sacrifice small animals. Some historians believe that parents may also have sacrificed their first-born child to the gods, although the extent of this practice may have been exaggerated.*