

**Dalit Regev. *Painting the Mediterranean Phoenician. On Canaanite-Phoenician Trade-nets.*** Equinox Publishing: Sheffield, 2021. 246 Pages. \$125 hardcover. ISBN 978-1781798256.

The stated purpose of this synthetic volume is to build a complete history of the Phoenicians as traders from the rise of the Egyptian timber trade at Early Bronze Byblos to the Roman conquest first of Carthage and then of the Levant. In this, the volume is largely successful. Taking a diachronic perspective of nearly 3,000 years allows for an appreciation of the remarkable continuity of culture and trade in the cities of coastal Lebanon across three millennia. The result is a clearly written volume of high production values that will appeal to both specialists and general audience readers.

The author first examines the question of who is a 'Canaanite' and who belongs to the sub-group called 'Phoenicians' by ancient Greeks and by us today. The term 'Phoenician' in scholarly literature has typically been used to describe the people of coastal Lebanon only from the Iron Age onwards, since that is what the Greeks called them from the advent of writing with the Iron Age Phoenician script in the 9<sup>th</sup> c BC. The author rightly argues that the major continuity from the Bronze Age demonstrates that cities like Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre were the home of the same 'Phoenicians' in those earlier times. These populations called themselves first by their city name and then identified as Canaanites, not 'Phoenicians.' The author notes that the root word 'fenkhu,' meaning 'ship-builder' in Egyptian, applied to Canaan generally in texts from the Old Kingdom era of Egypt onwards. The greatest of the Canaanite shipbuilders lived on the Lebanese coast and made use of the cedar forests still iconic in Lebanon today, therefore 'Fenkhu' or Phoenicians seems an appropriate scholarly term for those city-dwellers in both the Bronze and Iron Ages. This would seem to be the origin of the term, later passing into Greek as 'phoinikes,' which happened to be similar to the Greek word for red (and leading to a number of false etymologies).

The author also adopts a very broad geographical definition of Canaan allowing for some ambiguity on whether Canaan is a place or a people, just as ancient sources are ambiguous on that point. The Transjordan is included here in 'Canaan' due to cited DNA analysis showing continuity with the population west of the Jordan (and presumably also the similarity in languages). Levantine Syria is also included in 'Canaan' here based on glosses from the Classical Period (sources external to the Levant), but no mention is made of the native Amorites of western Syria with their distinctive 'Old Syrian' material culture.<sup>1</sup> Late Bronze Ugarit, listed here as a Canaanite city, spoke and wrote in a language thought to be the only surviving example of an

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Trevor Bryce, *Ancient Syria, A Three Thousand Year History* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2014) 16-17; Peter M.M.G. Akkermans and Glenn M. Schwartz, *The Archaeology of Syria* (Cambridge World Archaeology: Cambridge 2003) 289-291; Marguerite Yon, *The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra* (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, Indiana 2006) 16-18.

Amorite language, related to but not Canaanite.<sup>2</sup> Cities such as Alalakh, Aleppo, and Mari contain Akkadian texts with names and grammatical constructs also thought to be Amorite, and the Old Syrian material culture can be found in the Orontes valley as far south as Qatna.<sup>3</sup> This would seem to place the cultural, linguistic, and geographical northern border of Canaan on a line from Tell Arqa to Kadesh, similar to the border between Lebanon and Syria today. Ultimately, as the focus of this book is on Mediterranean Sea trade and thus on the coastal cities of Lebanon, the difficulties in defining a greater Canaan do not detract from the study. The term ‘Canaanite-Phoenicians’ is adopted to represent the specific coastal region responsible, in the author’s view, for initiating and maintaining circum-Mediterranean trade networks (abbreviated as ‘trade-nets’).

In building a theoretical framework for this analysis of Phoenician trade history, the author prefers the definition of trade as multiple exchange patterns given by David and Kramer 2001 and the network theory advanced by McGeough 2007 and Broodbank 2013 where the social union between actors is fundamental to a trade network. The author disputes, however, the proposition in these works that one source or actor cannot be the organizer and authority over a trade network. In fact, the author proposes that the Mediterranean Sea trade network was largely the result of Phoenician incentive and was mostly organized and controlled from the royal houses of Phoenician cities who provided capital to start up new trading ventures. According to the author, the trade routes of the Mediterranean were under Phoenician state supervision rather than networks of independent actors. Little consideration is given to the possibility that the different Phoenician cities may have competed with each other for trade goods and control of the trade routes. The Phoenician cities are treated throughout as a single entity for the purposes of trade analysis. This analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative, with a review given for each site outside Canaan where Phoenician trade goods are found, and does not involve computer-generated network analysis.

A ‘Phoenician trade diaspora network’ is proposed with three phases. The first proposed phase encompasses the Bronze Age, when cities such as Byblos first became rich and economically sophisticated through Early Bronze Age sea trade with Egypt. In this phase, trade is proposed to have been initiated and tightly controlled by the palace institutions of Phoenician cities that provided the startup funding, administrative tools, ships, and traders. By the Late Bronze Age (LBA), a ‘koine’ material culture had developed in Canaan that was used for diplomacy and social relations as well as for

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<sup>2</sup> See Alexander Andrason and Juan-Pablo Vita, “Amorite: A Northwest Semitic Language?” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 63/1, 2018, 18–58.

<sup>3</sup> For MBA ‘Old Syrian’ ceramic culture see Lorenzo Nigro, “The Middle Bronze Age Pottery Horizon of Northern Inner Syria on the Basis of the Stratified Assemblages of Tell Mardikh and Hama,” in M. Al-Maqdissi, V. Matoian and C. Nicolle (eds.), *Céramique de L’Âge du Bronze en Syrie I. Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique* 161 (Beirut: Institut Français D’Archéologie du Proche-Orient 2002) 97–128. For LBA Syrian ceramic culture see, in the same volume, Stefania Mazzoni, “Late Bronze Age Pottery Production in Northwestern Central Syria,” 129–150.

profit trade. Known as the International Style, and encompassing pottery, luxury goods, art and architecture, metal crafts, and more, this koine is widely distributed by seaborne trade from the beginning of the LBA.

The second proposed phase begins in the early Iron Age and peaks in the 8<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC when Phoenician traders dominated much of the Mediterranean. This phase is characterized by the founding of colonies consisting of artisans, emigres, and refugees from the Assyrian conquests of Phoenicia. Due to the trouble at home, Phoenician royals and elite families working in trade began to keep their trade proceeds offshore to avoid Assyrian taxes. At this time, Phoenician traders were peddling an assortment of decorative objects made in an ‘Orientalizing’ style blending Egyptian and Mesopotamian motifs indiscriminately. The author proposes that the startup of industries such as Orientalizing pottery in Corinth were in fact funded and managed by Phoenicians, who were also the primary distributors of the product. While plausible, it is again impossible to prove with the current state of the evidence.

The third proposed phase comes after a trade hiatus caused by the Persians commandeering the Phoenician homeland fleet to use as a navy. This break in the network allowed the Phoenician colonies in the central and western Mediterranean to emerge as controlling interests in the trade, eventually leaving Carthage as the center of a new Phoenician network. This third phase is centered in the Hellenistic and no longer includes the wide range of Orientalizing luxury goods. Trade is focused instead on agricultural products and on fine pottery, specifically Eastern Sigillata ware typical of Canaan that was mass-produced in Carthage.

Such a ‘Phoenicio-centric’ view of Mediterranean trade across three millennia has both potentials and pitfalls. Taking the long view highlights the continuity of Phoenician activities and their large role in seaborne trade, bringing secondary development to cultures in the central and western Mediterranean. On the other hand, such a focus denies agency to other cultures and overlooks evidence for trading ships originating in Cyprus, the Aegean, and further west. The hypothesis that these areas only entered into the superregional trade routes because of Phoenician initiation of contacts, and operated under control of Phoenician royalty, is difficult if not impossible to prove with the current state of the evidence. Seafaring was the norm in the Aegean even before the Early Bronze Age, as the spread of agriculture, population movements, and the trade in obsidian reflects. The ‘thalassocracy’ of Crete is briefly considered and characterized as minor compared to contemporary Phoenician sea trade. Evidence for direct trade contacts between Crete, western Cyprus, and Hyksos Egypt in the Middle Bronze Age is not considered.<sup>4</sup>

The author also does not consider the presence of Late Bronze ‘Sea Peoples’ such as the Sherden and Shekelesh, who are recorded as being traders, mercenaries, and

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<sup>4</sup> For discussion see W. Vivian Davies, and Louise Schofield (eds.) *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant : Interconnections in the Second Millennium BC* (British Museum: London 1995)

pirates by the Egyptians and others.<sup>5</sup> Some see parallels between ‘Sherden’ and Sardinia, and ‘Shekelesh’ and Sicily. If that were true, and Handmade Burnished ‘Barbarian Ware’ pottery found at 12<sup>th</sup> century sites suggests it is, sailing traders from the central Mediterranean were involved in LBA trade networks and ought to be considered in any network analysis. Their presence need not upend the author’s model, as the opportunistic ‘Sea Peoples’ might be seen as a reaction against Phoenician control of the trade network.

Overall, this is a well-conceived general volume with a novel and productive approach to Phoenician trade history over 3,000 years. The most detailed analyses are those of Hellenistic trade in food products, with beautiful maps illustrating the fish-spawning areas of the Mediterranean in relation to amphora manufacture and distribution. Such maps and also illustrations of artifacts and ceramics would have enriched the earlier chapters and made discussions of Canaan’s borders easier to follow.

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<sup>5</sup> For a thorough new synthetic treatment of Sea Peoples, see Carlos Roberto Zorea, *Sea Peoples in Canaan, Cyprus and Iberia, 12th to 10th centuries BC* (Madrid: Complutense University of Madrid 2021)