

Phoenician Trade: An Overview

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Introduction

In the eyes of those around them, trade is what the Phoenicians did best. As they come into view pictured on the bronze reliefs of the Balawat gates, sung about in the Homeric epics, and chastised by Israelite prophets, we see them busy at work, loading and unloading ships, funneling goods through their emporia, and making deals.¹ The Phoenicians did little else but trade, it seems, and they were very good at it, inspiring both the awe and resentment of their Iron Age contemporaries; centuries later not much had changed.² Their outward success at trade, and the ubiquity of their presence across the Near East and Mediterranean, have encouraged scholars to talk of an early Phoenician (or Tyrian) “commercial empire”,³ perhaps an overstatement, but one that underscores the centrality of trade to perceptions of who they were and what they did.

Even so, it is no easy task to pinpoint what exactly we mean by “Phoenician trade,” an oft repeated phrase and one that serves as necessary shorthand for a topic that is geographically, chronologically, and theoretically vast. Among many things the phrase implies a unity of purpose and action that rarely if ever existed among the Phoenicians’ Levantine cities. Never united as a nation,⁴ they were instead often in conflict with one another over territory and resources, pursuing their own agendas to secure goods and wealth through exchange with outsiders. This autonomous pursuit of goods and wealth was even more manifest in their settlements overseas.⁵ But despite the individuality, discerning Tyrian from Sidonian from Kitian trade, for example, proves difficult in practice, thus the “Phoenician” ambiguity persists.⁶ Likewise, “trade,” already an

¹ For the 9th century BCE Balawat gates see Curtis and Tallis 2008; Homer, *Od.* 13.264-292; 14.310-355; 15.444-527; Israelite prophets: Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26-28.

² Cf. Kritoboulos’ awe at a 4th century Phoenician merchantman (Xenophon, *Oec.* 8.11-19).

³ E.g., Aubet 2001: 43.

⁴ Aubet (2014) comes close to implying that they were, however, suggesting that in Iron Age II (900-600 BCE) “Phoenician history was aligned with the history of Tyre, which took the initiative in transforming Phoenicia into a commercial, territorial and colonial power.”

⁵ Pilkington 2013: 77-80.

⁶ In a model case study, Fletcher (2004: 59-61) has detected specific Tyrian and Sidonian trading patterns in the distribution of Egyptianizing amulets.

imprecise word, here embraces several dissimilar modes and mechanisms of exchange, and ways of conceiving the space through which things travelled from producer to consumer. These dissimilarities, in turn, touch on how we characterize the *things* Phoenicians traded, which is far from straightforward. The categories of “gift”, “commodity”, “luxury”, and “staple” typically found describing things in Phoenician trade, for example, or a particular form of their trade, are not ontologically fixed, but are contingent upon the way in which things are offered or consumed in a particular place and time.⁷ Your luxury gift, in other words, is my staple commodity.

Besides these overarching definitional issues, our ability to understand Phoenician trade is also hampered by the nature of the evidence for it. What the Phoenicians might have written about their motivations for and methods of exchanging things with others is completely lost to us. Instead we depend upon the words of others and upon things excavated from various contexts, including cities, graves, and shipwrecks. There is a great abundance of Phoenician things found in excavations as far afield as the Iberian peninsula and Mesopotamia, but tracing the line back from where these things were found through the hands that traded them to the producer is impossible. Nor should we expect that line to be a straight one anyway: older arguments that “pots equal people”, for example, that Phoenician pots found in Iberia were carried there by Phoenicians, who acquired them from Phoenician producers, have long been demolished, reminding us that what appears to be Phoenician trade possibly wasn't, and could in fact be anyone's, or vice versa.⁸ In Iron Age emporia like Pithekoussai in the west and like Al Mina in the east, and even in more narrowly ethnic places like Tyre itself, people of many cultural backgrounds lived and worked together, mixing knowledge, skills, blood, and cargos. The result was a commingling of commerce so pronounced that it generally rules out assigning a single ethnic identity to shipwrecks, or to some emporia.⁹ At the production

⁷ See the now classic studies of Appadurai 1986 and Kopytoff 1986. For further discussion of these categorical problems within the context of ancient exchange see Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; Foxhall 1998; Morley 2007: 39-43; van Alfen 2011 and 2015.

⁸ Gill 1988; Morris and Papadopoulos 1998; Aubet 2007; cf. Robinson and Wilson 2011: 3.

⁹ See Polzer this volume. A number of 6th and 5th century letters written on lead found in excavations in North Eastern Iberia vividly illustrate the multi-cultural character of seaborne commerce; for overviews and bibliography see Sanmarti 2009: 67-68 and Malkin 2011: 165. For the long debate over the ethnicity of Al Mina see Hodos 2006: 37-40.

end of the line, our attribution of objects as “Phoenician,” let alone “Tyrian” or “Sidonian,” is typically far from certain. Things seemingly produced in one of the Phoenician home cities, for example, sometimes were not; crafts(wo)men left home and produced “Phoenician” goods overseas.¹⁰ The widespread phenomenon of imitation— “Phoenician” things produced by non-Phoenicians— further complicates our interpretation of origins.¹¹ And in fact, Phoenician produced things might not have been a significant component of Phoenician trade anyway, if, as has often been stated, their role in international commerce was primarily that of intermediaries, the consummate middlemen.¹² Regardless, the ways in which the various things, Phoenician or not, were produced and distributed compounds the difficulties we have in identifying Phoenician trade as something qualitatively different from the trade of others.¹³ Equally problematic, however, is the fact these things say next to nothing about the modes and mechanisms of exchange that brought them to their final resting place.

Texts written by contemporary Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Israelites, and Greeks, offer insights into the modes and mechanisms of Phoenician trade, but many of these were composed with distorting agendas: Assyrian texts regularly brag of conquest and tribute, Israelite texts moralize, and Greek texts simply entertain. Thus the glimpses we have of Phoenician trade from these sources lies somewhere between agenda-driven

¹⁰ Homer (*Il.* 6.289-291), for example, mentions Paris returning from Phoenicia with Sidonian women weavers who produced textiles at Troy; Markoe (1996: 11; 2000: 150; 2003: 213-215) has suggested Phoenician craftsmen were producing silver bowls in Etruria; Coldstream has suggested that items found on Euboia and on Crete were produced by resident Phoenician craftsmen (summarized in Kourou 2012: 35-36; cf. Markoe 2000: 173; 2003: 212; Feldman 2014: 157). For the possibility of Phoenician carved ivory production in the Nile Delta see Aruz 2014: 123; for ivory production in Iberia see Quesada Sanz 2014; for Phoenician glass production on Rhodes see Caubet 2014: 167; cf. Bisi 1987. The most detailed overview of Phoenicians abroad remains Lipinski 2004.

¹¹ See Hodos 2006: 76-77 for imitation Greek wares in the Iron Age Near East; Boardman 2006: 198 for imitation Levantine wares in the west; Lawall and van Alfen 2011 for the problem of imitation generally in ancient commerce.

¹² E.g., Master 2003: 57; Sommer 2007: 101; Aubet 2014.

¹³ Fletcher (2008: 104-111), for examples, uses “Levantine” rather than “Phoenician” to describe aspects of western Mediterranean trade because of the inability to distinguish Phoenician activity from that of others from the Levant, such as Arameans. Cf. Fletcher 2004: 65; Dietler 2007: 249.

make-believe and real observations.¹⁴ Extremely rare are the unembellished documents of trade—contracts, tax registers, letters, etc.—that mention Phoenicians.

Elusive in many respects then, and vexed by definitional issues, we can nonetheless explore several of aspects of Phoenician trade. Of these, I consider here four—networks, mechanisms, goods, and traders—which together provide an overview of current approaches to the topic. Chronologically, the focus is primarily Iron Age I and II (c. 1200–600 BCE), the period in which new Phoenician identities began to emerge from the wreckage of the Bronze Age and before Punic identity and activities in the west began to pull away from those in the east. Arguably, in the Persian and Hellenistic periods that followed, Phoenician trade became still more enmeshed within larger eastern Mediterranean trading systems and so must be considered as one part of many within those larger structures.

Networks

Understanding the relationship between spaces and places and the movement of people and things poses theoretical difficulties. With the Phoenicians, these are exacerbated by the incredible geographical spread of their activities abroad, and by the vast spread of the activities of some contemporaries, like the Euboeans. The activities of these long-distance rovers overlapped and intersected with each other, but also with the activities of countless others who moved themselves and things about in a more restricted fashion. Connecting the dots between places, peoples and things reveals the rat's nest of intertwined, sprawling, and dynamic connections that shaped the spaces of Iron Age trade. Concepts like routes, zones, and networks can help us to untangle this and to map it, which in turn helps us to think about how traders managed to move things across physical and manmade barriers. Each of these concepts, and their accompanying maps, have played a key role in discussions of Phoenician trade; each starts with links between people and places, but builds upon them differently.

Parsing trade routes has long been a key feature of trade studies. Lines drawn on a map linking far off places show the likeliest path that ships sailed or caravans walked,

¹⁴ See especially Winter 1995, Dougherty 2001, and Peacock 2011 for views of the Phoenicians and their trade in Homer and other Greek literature.

following the prevailing currents and winds, and the contours of geography. They also imply a great deal more than just passageways. Presumed Phoenician trade routes, particularly those extending across the Mediterranean Sea, are no exception.¹⁵ One familiar route, for example, makes a counterclockwise circuit around the Mediterranean: the outbound branch from the Levant heads north to follow the contours of modern Turkey, Greece, Italy, and France, finally arriving in Spain; the inbound branch starts at Gibraltar heading east along North Africa towards Egypt and eventually back home.¹⁶ As Pilkington has recently argued, however, this route was the invention of an earlier generation of scholars whose views on Phoenician colonization and trade required that ships leaving the Levant hit all the major colonial ports in a grand trading tour before returning home; he proposes instead eliminating the southern return portion of the traditional route, thus minimizing a role for Carthage, and some other western Phoenician settlements generally in long distance east-west trade before the 6th century BCE.¹⁷

Whichever route, and view, is correct, the long lines running across the map from Tyre to Gadir signify month-long journeys covering thousands of kilometers; they also imply a particular form of directed, long-distance trade. Biblical accounts state that there was a direct and habitual link between Tarshish (Iberian Tartessos) and the Levant in the 10th-9th centuries, one reaffirmed for the late 7th century by Ezekiel.¹⁸ While the existence of such long-haul “high-commerce” has never been in doubt, its relative importance compared to short-haul “low commerce” has been challenged, especially in the wake of

¹⁵ While Ezekiel 27 makes it clear that goods came overland to Tyre from far away (cf. Aubet 2001: figs. 29-30), it is unclear to what extent the Phoenicians themselves were engaged in long-distance overland trade. Oppenheim (1967) suggests they were involved, especially in bringing things east to the imperial capitals, while Elat (1991), discussing the same evidence, is more hesitant; cf. Aubet 2001: 118. For Levantine regional trade in agricultural and other goods involving Phoenicians see Geva 1982; Bikai 1985; Singer-Avitz 2010; Faust and Weiss 2011. Noonan 2011 discusses the possibility of regional “trading colonies” established by Phoenicians.

¹⁶ Cf. Aubet 2001: 186-191, and fig. 40.

¹⁷ Pilkington 2013: 95-96.

¹⁸ E.g., II Chron. 9.21: Hiram of Tyre’s ships returned every three years from Tarshish (Tartessos) loaded with gold, silver, ivory, and apes. Cf. Ezekiel 27.12. Lopez-Ruiz 2009 reviews the biblical evidence for Tarshish/Tartessos. Herodotus (1.163) recounts a king of Tartessos, Arganthonios, giving silver to the Phokaians in Asia Minor to build walls, implying a long standing, habitual relationship. The historian also relates (4.152) how Kolaïos of Samos returned home from Tartessos, then an “untouched” emporion, with a hugely valuable cargo. His journey was by chance, not design, however.

Horden and Purcell's major study of Mediterranean connectivity.¹⁹ In terms of the overall volume of things being moved, in other words, the occasional grand trading ventures over the horizon were inconsequential compared to neighborhood excursions taking place continually and almost at random. Pilkington, for example, argues that at most there was only sporadic Phoenician long-distance east-west contact before c. 600 BCE; in the west and elsewhere local trade in bulk agricultural commodities was far more important.²⁰ Little if any Iberian silver was making it to the Levant in Iron Age II in this view then, which downplays long-running theories about the purpose of Phoenician activities in the far west, namely to acquire (precious) metals for Levantine kings and tribute hungry Assyrians.²¹

While it remains unclear how much long-haul trading the Phoenicians were actually up to, there is little doubt about their short(er)-haul activities.²² Here the concept of zone is sometimes employed. Zones, in contrast to routes, describe a more restricted area within which certain things generally circulated but not others, or certain people interacted but not others; the exclusion area of zones might be larger or smaller depending on geographic, cultural, or political factors.²³ A number of zones involving Phoenicians have been identified in studies of the distribution of various excavated things, mostly fineware ceramics and amphoras, particularly in the Central Mediterranean and the Iberian peninsula.²⁴ One problem, however, with the zone concept, which builds

¹⁹ Horden and Purcell 2000: chp. 5, and pp. 365-372. Cf. Robinson and Wilson 2011: 4-5.

²⁰ Pilkington 2013: 78-79, 84; Dietler 2007: 269.

²¹ Pilkington 2013: 89. The metals motive, forcefully argued by Frankenstein (1979), has been downplayed in other recent studies of Phoenician activities in the west as well, e.g., Aubet 2001; Neville 2007; Fletcher 2008, esp., pp. 128-131; Fletcher 2012; Dietler 2009.

²² Winter 1995: 253 suggests that "there may have been more than one class of Phoenician trading vessel plying the Mediterranean: ships with extensive inventories including raw materials touching major ports, while others, with more limited inventories, doing the rounds of smaller, less resource-rich ports."

²³ A report written in 732 BCE to Tiglath-pileser III by Qurdi-Assur-lamur on Tyre and its vicinity (SAA 19 022), for example, notes a zone established by the Assyrians outside of which the Tyrians are not allowed to sell cedarwood; Esarhaddon's treaty with Baal of Tyre (SAA 02 005) from a number of decades later further describes where and under what conditions seaborne trade can take place; the first treaty between Rome and Carthage in 509 BCE recorded in Polybius (3.22.1-13) demarcates trading zones and rules of conduct.

²⁴ Fletcher (2008), for example, illustrates a number of such zones; most striking is the clear division of trading activities between western Phoenician and eastern Greek Sicily; cf. Garcia I

upon evidence for local or regional trade, is resolving the relationship between local and long distance trade. How, for example, did things move across the Mediterranean then? One step at a time piggy-backed on scores of other local cargoes? That is, of course, a possibility.²⁵

The short versus long distance tension might also be resolved by thinking of the links not as part of a route or zone, but as a network, which offers greater flexibility across various distances. Studies of Phoenician trade regularly discuss networks, or circuits, but these are generally conceived as linking numerous points on a map, often as a collocation of routes, or as center linked to various peripheral sites.²⁶ More recent conceptions of networks and network analysis are moving beyond such representations, however.²⁷ Conceived not on a two dimensional map with the lines of routes and zones fixed in place, networks instead are viewed as dynamic, fluid, three dimensional socio-spatial entities. They may be formed simultaneously around a number of different personal or institutional connections at greater and shorter distances, with clusters of links developing around certain nodes, which may be physical places like cities or temples, or they may be individuals. Links may be broken and new ones formed in a short bit of time giving the whole system life, and at the same time making it difficult to map it in a traditional fashion. The advantage, however, to this concept is that it allows maximum flexibility for understanding the flow of Phoenician trade. People and things could theoretically move in countless ways, at longer and shorter distances, along different parts of the network, limited only by the current status of the nodes and links.

Rubert and Gracia Alonso 2011 for Phoenician incursions in what has long been thought a Greek zone in the north east of Iberia.

²⁵ Such, for example, has been proposed for Attic black gloss and red figure wares found in the 4th century El Sec wreck found off Ibiza; see Robinson and Wilson 2011: 3; cf. Pilkington 2013: 97.

²⁶ E.g., Liverani 1991; Garcia I Rubert and Gracia Alonso 2011; Aruz 2014; Polzer 2014. The core-periphery network models derived from World System Theory have been discussed in relation to Phoenician trade, positively by Sommer 2004; negatively by Fletcher 2008: 128-137; Fletcher 2012.

²⁷ For an overview of network analysis and applications to archaeological studies see Brughmans 2013; Leidwanger et al. 2014 provide an overview of network analysis and its application to ancient maritime trade.

Few studies to date have applied this type of network analysis to Phoenician trade.²⁸ But, as Ezekiel's account of Tyre's trading relations illustrates, the convolution of these connections is not easily captured by recourse to routes, zones, or two dimensional networks.²⁹ Much has been written on this passage, which lists nearly two dozen suppliers of goods to Tyre, some near by, some on the far side of the known world.³⁰ Explaining the channels by which all of these people and goods moved towards Tyre requires an approach that recognizes the density and complexity of the problem, but also its frequent and all-too-human randomness.

Mechanisms

Gift-giving, barter, and monetized market exchange all were used in Phoenician trade as voluntary mechanisms of exchange.³¹ The operation, interaction and primacy of these mechanisms are less than clear, however. While some have argued for an evolutionary development—from barter and gift giving to markets—it is equally possible that all mechanisms were in use at the same time, if not in the same place, and from an early date.³²

Gift exchange figures prominently in the correspondence between Late Bronze Age rulers as seen, for example, in the Amarna letters. Dated to c. 1350 BCE, this well-known archive of 382 cuneiform tablets found in Egypt consists primarily of letters written to the pharaohs Amenhotep III and Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) by the great kings

²⁸ E.g., Sommer 2007; Irad Malkin's (2011) study of archaic Greek networks in the western Mediterranean demonstrates the possibilities and includes discussions of Phoenician networks; cf. also Hodos 2006: 19-20; Dietler 2007: 269.

²⁹ Aubet (2001: 124, fig. 29), for example, attempts to illustrate the connections by means of "bands" of places producing certain types of products.

³⁰ E.g., Liverani 1991; Dianokoff 1992; Greenberg 1997; Aubet 2001: 120-126.

³¹ Since it was not voluntary, I do not discuss tribute as a mechanism for exchange here; for an overview of Phoenician tribute to their eastern overlords and what it says about Phoenician wealth see Bunnens 1985.

³² The (r)/(d)evolution of economic and exchange systems in the Iron Age Near East and Mediterranean is a contentious topic, in part because of the long shadow that Karl Polyani's views on (dis)embedded economies have cast; see Powell 1999; Monroe 2005; Renger 2007; Aubet 2001: 99-104; Aubet 2013: 17-40. Here I do not engage with these issues, but rather adopt, as Powell, Monroe, Renger, and Aubet have done, a viewpoint that allows for multiple types of economies and mechanisms to have existed concurrently since the Early Bronze Age.

of the Near East.³³ Greeting-gifts (*Šulmānī*) play an important role in these relations, ensuring goodwill and mutual support between ‘brother-kings’, who provide in some instances much needed and requested goods, including (precious) metals, but also manufactured goods, foodstuffs, and raw materials, sometimes in impressive quantities. The Uluburun shipwreck, dated to around the time of the Amarna letters, may be the remnants of a large gift sunk in transit. On a voyage that began someplace on the Syro-Canaanite coast (Ugarit?) and was perhaps destined for a Mycenaean center in the Aegean, the ship was carrying an astonishing quantity of copper and tin ingots, raw glass, and dozens of other types of raw and manufactured things.³⁴ Parallels between this cargo and lists of items in the Amarna letters are easily drawn; few think that this was a shipment of commodities destined for market.³⁵ If Homer is to be believed there were still entire ship-loads of elite-gifts plying the Mediterranean in his 8th century world, some that may have originated in Phoenicia.³⁶ On a more modest scale, Homer also recounts the giving of single, yet obviously valuable items, like Sidonian-made silver vessels and textiles.³⁷ Various prized objects—Phoenician (or Levantine) jewelry, objects influenced or imported from the Near East, as well as a vase from Sardinia — dating to the (late) 10th century found in elite graves on the island of Crete at Knossos may be evidence for Homeric-like small-scale gift-giving between elites.³⁸

Besides regulating the affairs between elites and rulers, gift giving probably served other purposes as well. Traders—not necessarily elites themselves (see below)—could have presented gifts to indigenous rulers in order to obtain permission to trade within their jurisdiction. Homer might illustrate one such attempt: Phoenicians presenting a silver mixing bowl to Thaos to seek permission to trade unhindered at Lemnos.³⁹

³³ Bryce 2003 provides a readable overview of the letters and their contents; Cochavi-Rainey 1999 offers details of the types and quantities of material exchanged.

³⁴ For a recent description of the ill-fated ship and its contents see Pulak 2005.

³⁵ Bachuber 2006.

³⁶ Odysseus departs from the Phaeacians (*Od.* 13.5-25) with gifts of gold, bronze cauldrons, and textiles, “more than he would have ever taken out of Troy”; both Paris and Menelaus had sojourns to Phoenicia and departed with gifts (*Od.* 4.80-84; 6.289-290).

³⁷ Homer *Il.* 6.286-294; *Od.* 4.615-619; 14.286-287; 15.115-119.

³⁸ Kotsonas 2006.

³⁹ Homer *Il.* 23.740-749; cf. Peacock 2011: 11.

Similar mechanisms have also been suggested for Phoenician items appearing in Sardinia and elsewhere in the western Mediterranean.⁴⁰

Undercurrents of barter—the coincidence of wants settled by the exchange of more or less equally valuable items—and even commerce surface in accounts of gift-exchange. Among the earliest literary depictions of Phoenicians and exchange, for example, those found in the Bible, we are told of the 10th-century rulers Hiram of Tyre and Solomon of Judah exchanging cedarwood for an annual shipment of 20,000 *kors* of grain and 20 of oil (I Kings 5.6-11); in another account Hiram provides timber and 120 talents (c. 3,000 kg) of gold in exchange for 20 cities in the Galilee (I Kings 9.11-13). As often occurs in the Amarna letters, one party, Hiram in the case, complains that his gift is not to his liking, indicating that Hiram did not consider the exchange to be of equal value. Indeed, as Bryce notes about the Amarna letters, “gift-exchange amounted to an elite form of trading between royal courts.”⁴¹

This grey area between gift giving, barter, and even market exchange comes to the fore in the (probably fictional) tale of Wenamun.⁴² Set at a time roughly contemporaneous with Hiram and Solomon, Wenamun, commissioned by the High Priest Herihor of the temple at Egyptian Karnak, sails in a Phoenician ship to Byblos to obtain cedarwood for the construction of a ceremonial barge for the god Amun. He embarks with a gold cup weighing 5 deben (c. 455 g), four silver cups weighing a total of 20 deben (c. 1,820 g), and a sack of (cut?) silver weighing 11 deben (c. 1,000 g), all of which are stolen from him en route. The precious metals were to be exchanged for the cedar; Leprohon (2004) estimates that there was enough to obtain 1,000 cubic meters of wood. Arriving empty handed, Wenamun is ultimately forced to send to Egypt for additional “gifts,” once Zakarbaal, the Byblian king, makes it clear he needs them to conclude the deal. These new “gifts,” Zekarbaal’s price for his cedarwood, include gold and silver, but also linen, papyrus, oxhides, rope, lentils, and baskets of fish.

Elsewhere, precious metals play a role in barter exchange. Herodotus (4.196), for example, relates a story of silent trade told to him by Carthaginians: on the Atlantic coast

⁴⁰ Van Dommelen 1998: 107-08; Fletcher 2008: 105; Suter 2011: 223.

⁴¹ Bryce 2003: 94.

⁴² Goedicke 1975. For a recent overview of the dating problems and function of the tale see Sass 2002.

of Africa, traders deposit their wares on a beach for natives to inspect. Once the natives set out enough gold for the wares, both parties depart satisfied. Such practices might not have actually existed,⁴³ but the episode raises other questions: when does precious metal become money in exchange, and when is it simply a thing in exchange?

Despite evidence for monetized long-distant market exchange operating already in the Near East from the Bronze Age onward, the notion of the continuation of both money and price-setting markets into the Iron Age has met with considerable resistance.⁴⁴ One oft repeated theory identifies elite gift giving as the primary form of long distance exchange well beyond the Bronze Age, which was then superseded by barter and eventually by monetized markets, this final development taking place only towards the end of the 6th century when coinage began to make its appearance, at least in the Greek world.⁴⁵ The reality was no doubt a great deal more complicated than this evolutionary schema insists as observations on early Phoenician markets and money indicate.

Although the Phoenicians did not begin producing coinage until the mid- 5th century, they had long been using precious metals as money, as had their neighbors.⁴⁶ Excavations at Dor, a Phoenician enclave south of Tyre, for example, produced a hoard of Hacksilber weighing 8.5 kg buried in a Tyrian (?) Bichrome Ware jug.⁴⁷ The date of burial was likely the late 11th or early 10th century, roughly the time of Wenamun's journey. The pieces of silver inside had been divided into 17 pre-weighed and sealed bags, a practice known from Hacksilber hoards found elsewhere in the Levant and one that facilitated the use of silver as money much in the same way coinage did.⁴⁸ The hoard represents considerable purchasing power, if Wenamun's tale offers any guidance, and hints at the vast amounts of monetary silver already in circulation within the 10th-century Phoenician world, which was only to increase over time.⁴⁹ Centuries later, for example, the Assyrian conqueror Tiglath-Pileser III was able to boast of tribute paid to him in 733

⁴³ Curtin 1984: 12-13.

⁴⁴ The various problems and viewpoints are summarized in Aubet 2013: 117-156.

⁴⁵ E.g., Tandy 1997; Sommer 2004; Hodos 2006: 85.

⁴⁶ For Phoenician coinage see Betlyon this volume. For Assyrian and Babylonian use of silver as money see Bongenaar 1999; Powell 1999; Radner 1999b; Venhoof 1999 and Jursa 2010.

⁴⁷ Stern 2001.

⁴⁸ Thompson 2003.

⁴⁹ See Thompson 2003, table 2, for a list of 34 12th-7th century Hacksilber hoards found in Cisjordan; see also Gitin and Golani 2001.

BCE by the Tyrian king Metenna, which included 150 talents (c. 3,900 kg) of gold and 2,000 talents (c. 52,000 kg) of silver.⁵⁰ This must have been only a portion of the Tyrian's wealth in precious metals, which no doubt had been accumulated over a period of time through direct trade, as with Ophir, or taxation on trade.⁵¹ Rulers were keen to collect import and export taxes in precious metals as well as in kind; a tax register dated 475 BCE from Persian-held Egypt, for example, lists both silver and goods in kind paid as taxes by Phoenician ship captains.⁵² Such practices had existed for centuries.⁵³

While Phoenicians and other traders might have needed precious metals for tax purposes, it is less clear how much was needed to conduct trading itself. Some portion of large volume, wholesale trading might have been money-less in the sense that debts and offsets were recorded in account ledgers as goods changed hands without the immediate need for precious metal to change hands as well; forms of barter may have been employed to avoid having to carry large amounts of gold and silver overseas, which as Wenamun's tale shows, were more liable to theft than bulk cargoes. Ezekiel's (27) depiction of exchange at Tyre suggests that goods were traded directly for other goods. But the prophet's portrayal is highly contrived and other early 6th century documents recording commodities in overland trade between someplace in the Levant and Babylonia indicate a role for silver, if not as medium of exchange then certainly as a money of account.⁵⁴

Goods

There are conflicting, if not incomplete views of both the nature of Phoenician trade and the primary types of goods found in it.⁵⁵ One view, for example, focuses on excavated metalware, carved ivories, and tridacna shells attributed to Phoenician

⁵⁰ Tadmor and Yamada 2011: no. 47.

⁵¹ Ezekiel 28.4-5 makes explicit the connection between the amassed gold and silver in Tyre and trade; for Solomon and Hiram's joint venture to Ophir in the Red Sea primarily to acquire gold, see I Kings 9.26-28.; II Chron. 8.17-18; for a discussion of Ophir and its location see Lemaire 1987; Lipinski 2004: chp. 6.

⁵² Yardeni 1994; Briant and Descat 1998; note also the tolls paid by Phoenician ships to Assyrian port authorities in Esarhaddon's treaty with Ba'al of Tyre (SAA 02 005).

⁵³ II Chron. 9.14, for example, notes that Solomon collected tolls on travelers and on merchants' goods.

⁵⁴ Oppenheim 1967; Elat 1991.

⁵⁵ Fletcher 2012: 212-214.

workshops, and their counterparts mentioned, along with textiles, in Homer and the Assyrian annals, and so pictures the Phoenicians as specialists in the production and trade of luxury goods for foreign elites and potentates.⁵⁶ At the same time, Homer's mention of a Phoenician crew spending a year trading *athyrmata* (trinkets) for *biotos* (foodstuffs?) at Syrie suggests an entirely different kind of trade, one occurring at a sub-elite level.⁵⁷ Yet another type of trade, this one in bulk foodstuffs, including grain, oil, and wine, is shown by excavated material in the Levant and in shipwrecks.⁵⁸ Additionally, the cedarwood trade had been a Phoenician specialty since the Bronze Age, as highlighted in Wenamun's tale. The motivations offered for the trade in particular items are equally varied. Frankenstein's (1979) thesis, for example, that Assyrian tribute pressures drove the Phoenicians to sail their ships unimaginable distances in search of silver and other high value materials has been highly influential. Trade in agricultural products is seen both as a means of topping up what the Phoenicians could not grow for themselves, and as a way to capitalize on the overproduction of their neighbors by exporting the surplus overseas.⁵⁹ The one ubiquitous and indiscriminate motivation, of course, was simply profit, the desire to get and to have more.⁶⁰ Phoenician merchants and traders, it would seem, handled just about every type of thing available, and probably did so motivated by an equally broad set of impulses, not all of them kosher, as it were. No single characterization of Phoenician trade, its goods, or its motivating factors is therefore possible, or really necessary. The nature of Phoenician trade was instead mixed, much like the mixed cargos found on many of the shipwrecks attributed to them.

To date, no complete account of the things produced or traded by the Phoenicians has been attempted, in part because of the encyclopedic scope required of such a project, but also due to the difficulty, mentioned above, of differentiating Phoenician trade from that of others. A handful of close studies of Ezekiel 27 have tried to determine exactly what was being shipped to Tyre and from where, but those things enumerated by the

⁵⁶ Aubet 2001: 54-55; 79-80; Aruz 2014.

⁵⁷ *Od.* 15.444-527; cf. Winter 1995: 253.

⁵⁸ Ballard, R. et al. 2002; Faust and Weiss 2011.

⁵⁹ Ballard, R. et al. 2002; Faust and Weiss 2011.

⁶⁰ The Phoenicians are often pictured by the contemporaries as being ruthlessly greedy: e.g., Homer, *Od.* 15.416; Ezekiel 28.4-5. See also Winter 1995; Dougherty 2001: 111-117; Peacock 2011.

prophet must have been only a fraction of all that passed through the city.⁶¹ Numerous other scholars have examined individual types of artefacts—Phoenician metal bowls, carved ivories, glass pendants, amphoras, etc.—but rarely are the results of these disparate studies fused to provide a global overview.⁶² There are a small number of studies that have aggregated large amounts of archaeological and textual data about commodities that Phoenicians produced, shipped, and consumed, but these focus on only component parts of the overall picture. One such study devoted to the commodities in trade between the Aegean and Levant from the Late Bronze Age to Persian period (c. 1400 to 400 BCE) found both textual and archaeological evidence for a general increase in the number of types of goods in trade over time; a considerable differential in the number of goods moving west-to-east versus east-to-west (3:1), and a preference for manufactured goods to go east versus the raw materials and semi-processed goods going west. Given the nature of the evidence, not much more than this rather crude picture of the totality of goods in motion is possible.⁶³ Another more concentrated study of c. 38,000 archaeologically excavated items that had been imported to the Greek, Etruscan and Phoenician parts of Italy, Sardinia, and Sicily from the Aegean and the Levant between c. 800 and 500 BCE, provides a finer grained picture of east-west trade in durable goods.⁶⁴ Among other things, this study describes numerous regional and localized pockets where specific types of goods were imported, like Ionian B2 cups, and diachronic shifts in the patterns of where things, like Ionian ceramics in general, are found. While such observations allow for solid conclusions to be drawn about the consumption of durable goods and the constantly evolving nature of trade in such goods, the picture of trade as the totality of the supply and demand of all things in trade is still incomplete. We do not know from the conclusions, for example, what proportion of the total volume of goods in trade at any given moment were durables versus non-durable items like textiles. Or how the demand, and thus patterns of distribution for textiles differed from ceramics.

⁶¹ Liverani 1991; Dianokoff 1992; Greenberg 1997; Aubet 2001: 120-126.

⁶² Aruz, Graff, and Rakic 2014 provides a good, current overview of many of these artifact types, with some notable exceptions, amphoras, for example, for which see Regev this volume.

⁶³ Van Alfen 2002.

⁶⁴ Fletcher 2008.

Increasingly, studies of Phoenician trade are exploring not just the supply of things, which often preoccupies studies of trade, but also the more difficult aspects of demand as a factor of consumption. Difficult because consumption is as much an outward social and communicative act as it is a manifestation of inward, personal desire; consumption, in other words, it is less economics than it is cultural, social, and psychological.⁶⁵ It is what determines the registers of “luxury” versus “staple” noted earlier, and so helps to reproduce or negate social hierarchies. It is also what drives the demand side of the supply-demand equation and so is an exceedingly powerful force in trade, one that can kill off, refresh, or reorient entire trade networks, and can wither an industry overnight while giving birth to a new one. Knowing how consumption affected ancient societies and how it fueled and shaped trade requires a great deal more evidence than we generally have available for the Phoenicians. As a result, it is unlikely that nuanced studies of Phoenician consumption and consumerism, like those dealing with contemporary Greek desires, will ever be possible.⁶⁶ Studies to date on consumption and Phoenician trade have necessarily focused on archaeological finds alone, both those things, like fine Greek ceramics related to wine drinking that the Phoenicians themselves consumed, and the things that they brought for others to consume, like silverware.⁶⁷ But without the voices to tell us what an Attic cup meant to a Tyrian, or a Sidonian silver bowl to an Iberian, we can do little else than speculate about their vanished yearnings.

Traders

Egyptian, Assyrian, Israelite, and Babylonian Iron Age texts regularly stress the interest that state institutions—temples and palaces—had in acquiring goods from afar. Presumably, Phoenician state institutions had similar interests. In order to meet their demands for manufactured prestige objects, raw materials, and foodstuffs, Near Eastern state institutions organized trading ventures for themselves. The scale of the venture varied depending on what was needed and the urgency. We have already seen, for example, a smaller scale venture described in Wenamun’s tale. Larger ventures might

⁶⁵ Trentmann 2012.

⁶⁶ E.g., Davidson 1997 and 2012; Foxhall 1998; van Alfen 2015.

⁶⁷ E.g., Fletcher 2008; Hodos 2006.

require a flotilla of ships and international cooperation, as, for example, the 10th-century expedition to Ophir organized jointly by Hiram of Tyre and Solomon of Judah in order to obtain 450 talents (c. 11, 700 kg) of gold among other things.⁶⁸ The “many servants” of Hiram and Solomon who journeyed to Ophir undoubtedly included a number of agents, like Wenamun, to oversee and conduct the enterprise on the kings’ behalf. Less clear is what the relationship was between these “servants” and the state, or their social status. The Assyrio-Babylonian *tamkarum* (pl. *tamkaru*), often translated as “merchant,” may provide a suitable analogy.⁶⁹ Typically of high social status, and closely linked to the palace or temple, but often still independent, the *tamkaru* fulfilled a number of roles including organizing and financing trading ventures, and even conducting merchandise abroad. The more successful or powerful *tamkarum* might employ his own agents. As specialist traders they possessed the appropriate knowledge, skills, and contacts to obtain what the palace or temple needed. As a state agent empowered by a warrant, they were allowed by the king or temple priests to gather supplies and capital for ventures from storehouses, and to act as a representative overseas as a quasi-diplomat. While on state-directed ventures, *tamkaru* could and often did engage in trade for themselves, blurring the line between public and private trade; and indeed public trader and private entrepreneur were often the same person, working both sides at the same time. Evidence for private traders, not *tamkaru*, appears in Neo-Assyrian records,⁷⁰ but there may be additional, earlier evidence for private Phoenician(?) entrepreneurs involved in long-distance maritime trade. The proto-Phoenician shipwreck found at Cape Gelidonya on the southern coast of Turkey, for example, dated to c. 1200 BCE, roughly a century after the Uluburun wreck, is thought to have been operated by an independent trader.⁷¹ If this is correct, individuals like this trader were to play an increasingly important role in Phoenician politics and trade policy.

Although *tamkaru* generally appear to have had a high social status, that of

⁶⁸ II Chron. 8.17-18, 9.10; I Kings 9.26-28; cf. Lipinski 2004: chp. 6.

⁶⁹ Radner 1999a; Hafford 2001; Aubet 2001: 105-108; Aubet 2013: 136-144.

⁷⁰ Radner 1999a and 2004.

⁷¹ Bass 2012 notes “that the ship was Near Eastern in origin, probably Syrian or Canaanite or Syro-Canaanite or proto-Phoenician (although the exact term is not important).” For the Cape Gelidonya wreck as evidence of private entrepreneurship see Muhly et al. 1977.

independent, especially maritime traders is less certain. While much has been written on the social status of contemporary Greek maritime traders, and the bearing that they had on politics and trade, it unclear what, if any parallels can be drawn between Greek and Phoenician traders. The Greek sources depict Homeric warrior-trading kings, like Odysseus and Menelaos, who led flotillas and sought to enhance their already impressive wealth mostly through gifts or by violence, and occasionally by barter, eventually giving way to the mostly non-elite, often poor, market driven traders familiar from Demosthenes' speeches in the late 4th century.⁷² There is no evidence for Homeric-like warrior traders among the Phoenicians, although it would appear that elites engaged in trade. The prophet Isaiah (8), for example, rails that at Tyre the merchants are princes and the traders are the earth's honored men. Much has been made of the implications of this passage. Maria Aubet, among others, have argued that over the course of several centuries, from c. 1200 to 900 BCE, state directed Phoenician trade began to wane in the face of growing private initiative, which in turn gave rise to a "commercial aristocracy" as a distinct socio-economic class.⁷³ The ensuing "merchants' oligarchy" in Phoenician cities managed to wrestle control of trade policy away from the monarchs and so oriented the cities' governance towards enhancing personal profits.⁷⁴ Although such a scenario is plausible, the evidence is rather thin. At the same time, Homer's various nameless Phoenician traders appear of indeterminate, if not sub-elite status, suggesting a wholly different world of activity. Those who came to Syria, for example, were engaged in barter or buying/selling, but not gift exchange and so were probably non-elites, which low status scampering off with stolen goods and a kidnapped boy would seem to reaffirm.⁷⁵ Odysseus himself also claims to have been the guest for a year at a Phoenician's trader's unremarkable house before joining him for an ill-fated voyage to Libya, where the trader intended to sell his houseguest into slavery, perhaps an indication of financial

⁷² See Tandy 1997; Reed 2003. Popham and Lemos 1995 suggested that the 10th-century Greek elite buried in an elaborate grave at Lefkandi in Euboia was a "warrior trader" on the Homeric model.

⁷³ Aubet 2001: 113-119.

⁷⁴ Liverani 1991; Aubet 2001: 113; Sommer 2010.

⁷⁵ *Od.* 15.444-527; cf. Winter 1995.

desperation.⁷⁶

As this episode suggests, trade did not always lead to riches and instead could easily lead to financial and other ruin. To be sure, long distance trade, particularly the kind involving expensive ships and their enormous carrying capacity, entailed both considerable outlay to get underway, and great risk once en route. Piracy/robbery and shipwreck/accident were constant threats at sea or on the road, as Wenamun's tale and Homer remind us. Both the great capital needed to acquire cargoes and the risks of losing everything were often too great to endure alone, especially for those of less than royal standing. To mitigate risk and to leverage modest holdings traders formed associations or partnerships. The recorded activities of contemporary Assyrian partnerships, for example, organized for overland trade, included spreading risks and profits according to shares in the partnership, and taking out loans to purchase goods for trading ventures, which spread the risks farther still.⁷⁷ Tantalizing evidence for Phoenician partnerships, *hubur*, appear twice in Wenamun's tale: Zakarbaal mentions that 20 ships in Byblos trade in association (*hubur*) with King Smendes of Egypt, and another 50 ships are in *hubur* with an individual named Warkatil(i), possibly an Anatolian.⁷⁸ The nature of these partnerships is less than clear, however, and may have been less about minimizing risk and leveraging means than organizing trade for certain commodities or within a certain network for the benefit of powerful individuals. Later Phoenicians, in the 4th and 3rd centuries, continued to form associations, which appear to have had greater compass than the more limited partnerships. These organizations, which among other activities built temples and erected bi-lingual steles in foreign cities like Athens, probably served as nodes within larger ethnic networks providing, among other things, information about current prices and trading conditions elsewhere; legal and financial support; and refuge in times of need.⁷⁹

Conclusions

Phoenician trade, of course, continued vigorously on well beyond the Iron Age.

⁷⁶ *Od.* 14.310-355.

⁷⁷ Radner 1999a.

⁷⁸ Aubet 2001: 114-115; Lipinski 2003: 109.

⁷⁹ Ameling 1990.

But with the fall of Tyre to the Babylonians, the rise of Carthaginian power in the west, and the domination of the Near East by the Persians all taking place within a few decades in the early 6th century, the larger context within which the Phoenicians traded changed fundamentally. By the 4th century, the Phoenicians, no longer major players in western Mediterranean trade, became far more integrated into Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean trading networks than ever before; their merchantmen were, for example, now making regular appearances in the Athenian port of Piraeus, where resident Phoenicians erected a temple, received honors for their services to the Athenians, and left behind bilingual grave markers.⁸⁰ By this time too, Eastern Mediterranean trade had become still more cohesive and expansive,⁸¹ with Phoenician kings, like Straton I, actively pursuing trade relations in the Aegean to further their own political ambitions.⁸² These trends towards an Eastern Mediterranean trading *koine*, of which the Phoenicians were just one part, gelled at last when the Romans gave Delos back to the Athenians in 166 BCE and declared it a free port, effectively making Delos the epicenter of Eastern Mediterranean trade. The Phoenicians already there had long since been participating in Greek games and cults like the other residents of the island.⁸³

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⁸⁰ Baslez 1987; Lipinski 2004: 169-173.

⁸¹ Van Alfen 2002, 2015.

⁸² Elayi 2005.

⁸³ Lipinski 2004: 166-167.

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