



INTRODUCTION

In 2004 the *National Geographic* magazine published an article that presented what is generally known about the Phoenicians. The whole telling was accomplished in a scant twenty-four pages, and ended—as all articles and books on the Phoenicians have done to one degree or another—with the researcher saying, “They came. They traded. They left. I guess that only adds to their mystery.”

More than two thousand years after the Phoenicians walked the shores of Lebanon and sailed from its ports to the far ends of the Mediterranean Sea, these ancient people have remained a mystery. Now, after thirty years of research by myself and others, it is finally possible to present the most complete picture of Phoenician history ever assembled. Some of the findings that emerged are quite surprising, while others are reassuringly familiar. Since their lives were so deeply intertwined with those of the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and others, we find many of the surprising elements verified by familiar ancient sources.

How, then, is it possible that this history could have remained untold for so many years? Part of the answer is the normal suppression that occurred as conquerors swept across their country. Between conquests by Greeks and Romans, Arabs and Crusaders, Mamluks and Turks, the early history of the Lebanese people was reduced to tatters.

In addition, as Martin Bernal revealed in *Black Athena*, there appears to have been a strong bias by historians against the Phoenicians and Egyptians, which peaked in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries AD. Unfortunately, this also seems to have continued to some degree to the present day, due to the repeating of old statements even in the face of clarifying evidence.

Yet fairness requires acknowledgement of one other factor that contributed to reducing Phoenician heritage into the shadows: The Phoenicians were not writers of histories. This was a conscious decision they made in line with their long-held desire for privacy. In clear contrast the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Persians and many others wrote detailed histories, and lauded their own role in virtually every event they recorded. In some ways they could not avoid it—this was a very human thing to do. The net result was that we were presented with a grand march by all these other societies, complete with triumphal arches, carved statues, engraved inscriptions and glowing writings. Yet the Phoenicians produced virtually no memorabilia of this nature.

An unfortunate occurrence that accompanied this process was the degrading of opponents, and especially of conquered lands. It was a true compliment to the deep and lasting impression that Phoenicians made on all these other societies that—despite the degradation their heritage suffered—enough facts, clues, pictures, descriptions, and archaeological finds remained so that it was possible to reconstruct a revealing image of this unique society and its numerous awe-inspiring accomplishments.

It should be noted that the process of bringing forward this treasure-trove of information is proceeding simultaneously on two fronts. The first is the traditional presentation of academic papers that I and others are currently producing. This will continue for many years until all of this history has been laid out with the appropriate annotations and citations. This will clearly identify the small steps and well-documented trail that form the backbone of academic historical record. This process is relatively slow and ponderous, but very necessary work.

As a companion to this process, the current volume you now hold is the broad flow of this epic story painted in bold strokes. It is well

known that there are often several opinions on what actually happened at each event in history, and in scholarly papers one is apt to identify various opinions with the pro and con of each, and then conclude with support for one opinion. Yet to cover three thousand years of history and hundreds of significant events in one volume using that approach would require perhaps two thousand pages, and likely result in the dreaded death by footnote. Therefore, the approach used here is to separate out the analysis and simply present the explanation of each event that is best supported by all available historical and archaeological data. This is an infinitely clearer presentation of the events that occurred and turns out to be quite accurate. However, it is certainly not perfect. As new research and archaeological finds come to light, the weight of professional opinion may shift to a different explanation for an event. This would need to be absorbed in a future edition after such facts are discovered.

Similarly, if we know a series of voyages took place to a particular city or island, it might be described as if it was experienced by one individual or particular group of people in order to bring in more evidence about that time and place. This is a method often used in public history programs and similar writings to present dry, factual material in a more interesting manner, and should be understood in that light.

For a detailed analysis of each event, please see the academic papers that continue to be presented. These include the one I presented in 2005 to the World History Association conference in Ifrane, Morocco, on the subject of *Sea Peoples and the Phoenicians*. This paper, which is available on the web at www.phoenician.org, has ten condensed pages of information packed with forty-six source citations. It provides a solid base upon which others can build a better understanding of these events in 1200 BC which destroyed virtually all civilizations in the Mediterranean—except for the Phoenicians. The current book also treats this subject, but without the specific academic citations. All of the relevant sources, however, are included in the bibliography of this book.

One benefit that comes from the broader view taken here is the discovery of how intimately the Phoenicians were involved with the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and other societies of their day. Filling in

the Phoenician part of the picture gives us a clearer view of those other societies as well. It is as if we had been listening to a conversation between two people, but only been able to hear one of the participants before. When we hear the missing part, the proceedings begin to make a great deal more sense.

One other unexpected thing begins to happen. We come to realize that this Phoenician society was not made up only of words written on papyrus, nor of stones assembled into buildings. It was made up of people like ourselves who happened to live in extraordinary times, and who developed an amazing way of dealing with that fresh, fertile and dangerous world. While other civilizations measured their lifetime in hundreds of years before falling into decay, the remarkable Phoenician society endured for three thousand years. There may be some things we can learn from these extraordinary people.

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