

their daily catches, it was only natural that they put into port at neighboring fishing villages from time to time to escape inclement weather or to make repairs. As was the custom, they would use these visits to also trade a few of their fresh fish for objects of value: a bit of colorful cloth for their wives, or some wine for the dinner tables.

At some later date, when a new dress was needed or the table wine ran dry, it was not a haphazard visit but rather a purposeful one that took them to the neighboring village, and the desired trades were made. Nor were the people of Byblos the only ones doing this. Any fisherman had the same opportunity to make calls at neighboring villages and make a trade for what he might need or desire.

However there was one thing that set the people of Byblos apart, and it made all the difference. They had the huge, straight logs of cedar from hillsides above their town. And those logs were readily hewn into aromatic and highly durable timber for building boats and homes. It was true that this cedar was only of modest interest when their sailing trips took them northward, since many other types of evergreen and hardwood were available on the well-watered hills in that direction. But when they sailed to the south, where the low hills had dried out and were becoming covered with drifting sand, the response to their visits was completely different. The huge pieces of lumber hewn from cedar logs caused a measure of excitement, and large amounts of goods were offered in trade.

This eventually became a profitable sideline for the fishermen of this cedar-blessed town, but it also presented them with a daunting amount of work. Felling trees, dragging the huge logs downhill, and then hewing them into lumber required different skills and disciplines. It was not at all like their main trade of sailing: knowing the likely movements of fish, and patient trawling to pull in a good catch. No doubt there were some at Byblos who specialized in the culling of wood and the building or repairing of boats, but they would not have been great in number in these early years. Cedar weathered so magnificently and the local population grew so slowly that there would rarely have been a need to commission a new boat.

All of these considerations naturally led to the next reasonable step in their trade: building boats for others. Some fishermen in other villages, particularly in the wood-poor south, certainly would have

traded for lumber and tried to build their own boats. Yet as we have already seen, this required a different set of skills than most people possessed. Moreover it would have been quite expensive to buy those materials log by log, even before all the work began. It was much easier to trade something they had in surplus or could make easily—cloths, olive oil, wine, jewelry, handicrafts or anything else of value—in exchange for a boat, and leave the boatbuilding to those who did it for a living.

The people of Byblos, with their virtually unlimited supply of majestic cedars, became those boatbuilders. And to what an incredible level of virtuosity they raised this skill! It is almost stunning to consider, so many years later, what beautiful works of art these watercraft were. Shipwrecks preserved at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea at places like Uluburun on the southern coast of Anatolia reveal the intricate shape and construction of these vessels in many centuries BC.

Good fortune brought me to Tyre in Lebanon just as the harbor's boatmaster was finishing a handmade vessel of Phoenician design that



*Fig. 8 Newly built boat in Tyre of Phoenician design*