

Pedro Maldonado Portillo

Dr Steven Notley

Land Of the Bible

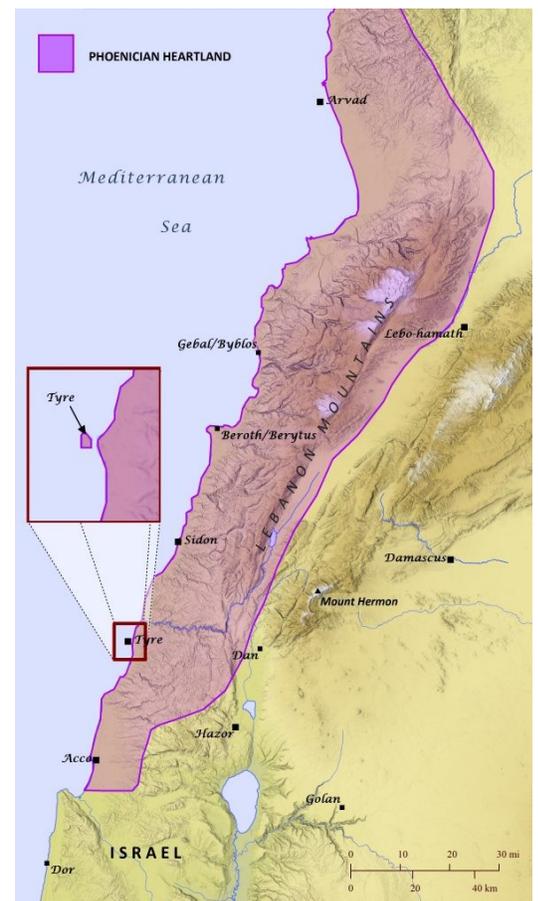
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Tyre

Laying on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, in the modern-day country of Lebanon.

The ancient city of Tyre has always been a city with a rich background in history and culture. Just 50 miles south of modern-day Beirut. The city was once home to a great ancient civilization known as the Phoenicians. So great an empire that mentions them is even found in the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh. Their presence in the Tanakh, however, is no mere coincidence. What the book of Kings and Chronicles states demonstrates just how vast and influential the Phoenicians truly were. More importantly, how their trading and what they traded had a big impact on the Near East and most specifically, the Levant. The city itself is also mentioned in several parts of the Tanakh, including a prophecy of destruction against it.

Founded by Phoenician settlers in the 3rd millennium BC, the city was home to a great trading centre. Their name is unique and debated among scholars. Some claim that *Phoenicia* “derives from, the Greek term Phoenix, from the root *phoinos*, meaning ‘red’”. Sader however, argues that “Phoenicia is a foreign, Greek designation of the Levantine coast” (Sader 1). In the report of Wenamun, by an Egyptian official, “the



records suggest that the Phoenician cities were well-established urban centres with local royal dynasties in the 11th-10th century BCE” (36 Sader). Though they were ruled by Egypt in the 14th century, as Egyptian influence declined, it became more independent. Later being under no foreign ruler, the Phoenicians were “four independent kingdoms, Arwad, Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre which never formed a united political entity, except for temporary union of the kingdoms of Sidon and Tyre” (2 Sader).

Tyre, one of the capitals of the empire, was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and the path of the Via Maris trade route. Geographically, the city's economy relied solely on trade. "Like the Minoan civilization that preceded them in the eastern Mediterranean, the Phoenicians based their success on trade" (737 WMA). Formerly known as the Canaanites until 1200 BCE. The Phoenicians "centered on the cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut" (737 MWA). Names of Tyre included Akkadian *Ṣurru*, Phoenician *Ṣūr* (𐤏𐤍), and Hebrew *Ṣōr* (צור)



Trading with nations located in all corners of the Mediterranean, "Tyre established outposts or marketplaces in western Cyprus and in southern Crete, and shared interest in Sardinia with Sidon" (67 Peckham). The Phoenicians might not have been a great militaristic empire, but their influence was seen in all corners of the ancient world. So, it should come as no surprise that the Phoenicians depended on treaties with surrounding nations. Treaties included Solomon and Hiram, Assyrian king Esarhaddon and Baal I, the king of Persia, and Egypt. Further evidence of these peaceful treaties is highlighted in the Aramaic stela of Breij, in the writings of Josephus, and in the Old Testament.

Despite these treaties, however, Empires such as the Assyrians held control of the rich trading cities often attacking and demanding tribute. King Nebuchadnezzar II and Alexander the Great both laid siege to the city with Nebuchadnezzar II holding an unsuccessful 13-year siege (176-177 Garstad). Control was then in the hands of the Persian empire until their defeat by Alexander the Great. The siege of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE destroyed the mainland of Tyre. With the rubble, he constructed a causeway (picture) making Tyre a Peninsula. Angry at his 7-month siege, Alexander put to death 10,000 inhabitants and 30,000 were enslaved. “This was the last significant military action by the Phoenicians; after Tyre was conquered, it and the rest of Phoenicia were largely subsumed into Hellenistic Greece. By Roman times, little of traditional Phoenician culture survived” (738 WM&D).

Being a centre of trade, Tyre moved goods such as metalwork, wine, embroidery, salt, dried fish, glazed faience, textiles, luxurious purple dye and primarily timber (737WMA). Their primary trading good is even described in the Bible; “...to the far recesses of Lebanon; I felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses; I entered its farthest lodging place, its most fruitful forest” 2kgs 19:23. Additionally, Assyrian texts attest that Tiglath Pileser I travelled; “to Mount Lebanon to cut cedarwood for the building of the temples of the gods Anu & Adad” (Sader 34). The Biblical text of Ezekiel is even used to highlight “the fame of the Phoenicians as daring navigators, shrewd merchants, and skilled traders” (Sader 249). Ezekiel 27, a prophecy of destruction for Tyre, sheds a light on four trade belts or circuits (Sader 49). Despite King David’s and Solomons's efforts for establishing a secure relationship with Tyre. It was not until Ahab married the Tyrian princess Jezebel, that this diplomatic relationship was sealed (263 Sader). With this marriage, however, came the influence of many things Phoenician, including the worship of Baal, the storm god.

Though viewed negatively in the Biblical texts, the influence of the Phoenicians was not entirely bad. “Perhaps the most influential of Phoenician innovations was their system of writing, early samples of which date from the 15th century B.C.E.” (737 WM&D). Sader however, discredits this notion stating that “the so-called Phoenician alphabet is considered today by the overwhelming majority of scholars to have been developed in Egypt by West Semitic-speaking people” (152 Sader). King Solomon was said to be a surrogate of Tyrian king Hiram (86 Peckham). “The temple was orchestrated by King Hiram of Tyre... Foreign trade was the warp and woof of the Tyrian network to which Solomon’s Judah may have aspired” (Peckham 86). Hence, we can see the great influence of Phoenician culture and religion in the making of the Solomonic temple. “Judah, as biblical and epigraphic sources reveal, was in the service of ’El and ’Ašerah, archetypal Canaanite Gods, but it adopted as symbol of its destiny the God Yahweh, patron of the Davidic Dynasty and the aboriginal, outlandish (proto–South Arabian), Amphictyonic God of the tribes of Israel” (Peckham). Learning much from the history of the Israelites, however, is no doubt that despite their worship of YHWH. It was not uncommon for them to have statues of Baal or other gods in the mix.

Though there have been some archaeological excavations at Tyre and its surrounding Phoenician cities. There has not been much popularity given that most are focused on Greek, Roman, and Jewish structures. The few items that have been found are pottery, idols, structures deemed to be temples, and some metalworks dating to the late bronze period. Most recently a Roman temple has been found that dates from 31BC to 193 AD. Though a precise date cannot be stated, the temple was made of several materials including limestone and sandstones. Typical Roman columns were found that measured 26 feet. Most interestingly, however, are the countless figurines found in the sea near Tyre. In other surrounding cities, figures of their deities

were also common. A cemetery where the Phoenicians buried their dead has also been of much scholarly discussion. Including over 100 jars that were discovered and said to be a storage place for bones. Again, there have been several excavations, and more are being done every day. The popularity, however, is not as big as other excavations done in parts of Israel/ Lebanon.

Though there is much to continue saying regarding this ancient city of Tyre and its great inhabitants, the Phoenicians. This quick survey must come to an end. Tyre was a great city that first settled back thousands of years. The city was a great location for maritime trading and had access to a major trade route, the Via Maris. Being located in such a strategic location, Tyre was able to be influential to all parts of the ancient world and establish an economy, unlike other city-states in the Levant. Sources for Tyre and its inhabitants could be found in Assyrian, Egyptian, Roman (Herodotus), and even Biblical texts. Thus, great was the influence of this small yet wonderful city. Every day more is uncovered below the earth that provides scholars with another glimpse into the lives and culture of this great empire.

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Department of Humanities, MacEwan University, Canada.