

Phoenicians and the Making of the Mediterranean. Carolina López-Ruiz. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021. 426 pp. \$45. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9780674988187.

The Phoenicians inhabited cities on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea, in the Levant, in the region that is now modern Lebanon, along with the areas just to its north and south. They emerged around 1000 BC as one of a number of groups which were part of a Syro-Palestinian Canaanite society in the Late Bronze Age. They are depicted in the Homeric epics and in the *Histories* of Herodotus, but no Phoenician literature has survived. In this book, Carolina López-Ruiz argues that the Phoenicians played a crucial role in the cultural development of the Mediterranean in the earlier part of the first millennium BC, but that their importance has been overlooked largely because of the way classicists have studied the ancient Mediterranean. She presents a robust critique of existing approaches to the topic and a substantial survey of the activities of the Phoenicians and their cultural legacy across the Mediterranean world, with a particular focus on the eighth and seventh centuries BC, traditionally referred to by classicists as the “orientalizing period.”

The book is divided into two parts. The three chapters of Part I, “Beware of the Greek,” challenge current (and historical) scholarly attitudes to the significance of the Phoenicians in the ancient Mediterranean. Part II, “Follow the Sphinx,” then surveys the evidence for Phoenician activities in the region, moving eastwards over six chapters from the Far West (Iberia) via the Central Mediterranean, the Aegean, and Cyprus to the Levant. The chapter on the Aegean includes a substantial discussion of the Sphinx as a symbol, and it is followed by a chapter called “Intangible Legacies” which focuses on the influence of the Phoenician alphabet and of (now entirely lost) Phoenician literature.

The first two chapters address the tendency of classicists to push to the margins the contribution of non-Greeks to the development of the Mediterranean in the eighth century. There is an assumption, not justified by evidence, that Greek settlements overseas (in Sicily, southern Italy and north Africa in particular) were intended as agricultural settlements and came to represent a “civilizing mission” of the Greeks, while in contrast, Phoenician settlements were never intended to be more than trading posts. This contrast between Levantine semitic traders and “European” settlers reflects unspoken prejudices. But at the same time classicists (Sir John Boardman and Robin Lane Fox are identified as exemplifying this view) deny the Phoenicians any agency even in the movement of goods and ideas. The assumption is that where non-Greek artistic goods were being transported across the Mediterranean, this was being done by Greeks: “The Greek and Near Eastern cultures portrayed in [Lane Fox’s] *Travelling Heroes* meet not to find common ground, but to provide ground for the brilliant adaptations by Greeks of an alien incomprehensible world” (46). López-Ruiz offers some hope for the future, identifying recent work that has moved on, and that “[p]ostcolonial, network-based, and pan-Mediterranean perspectives break these tired models” (61). The final chapter in Part I turns to the notion of “orientalizing,” a term particularly prominent in art history, used to describe the adoption of a particular set of motifs in Greek art from the late eighth century. López-Ruiz notes the preference of historians for this geographically vague term, when in reality these motifs can generally be identified as specifically Levantine, that is Phoenician.

The critiques of traditional approaches to the Phoenicians are brought up again over the course of Part II, but the main purpose of its chapters is to present the evidence for Phoenician activity. Starting the survey of evidence of Phoenician activity at the western end of the Mediterranean, López-Ruiz demonstrates that the influence of classicists on the interpretation of this material is not universally felt. Iberian archaeologists, working in areas where the presence of Greek cultural material is minimal, are more interested in examining the relationships between the Phoenicians and indigenous communities. Indeed, López-Ruiz suggests that perhaps too much credit has been given to the Phoenicians for cultural developments in Iberia and that the importance of interactions between the indigenous population and incomers has been downplayed. One of the features of interactions between Phoenicians and others discussed in the chapters that follow is its variety. In North Africa there was Phoenician settlement without much local adoption or adaptation of Levantine elite culture, while in Etruria and the Aegean there was significant creative adaptation of Phoenician cultural models even in the absence of colonization. In Iberia and the larger Mediterranean islands (Sardinia, Sicily, Malta, Cyprus) both things happened. These arguments are well-supported throughout with descriptions of the surviving archaeological evidence, including architectural development as well as luxury goods and changing pottery styles.

This is an important and substantial contribution to our understanding of the development of the Mediterranean in a crucial period. It is illustrated with five maps and twenty-six black-and-white illustrations – there is no list of these provided. Much of the material culture is simply described. While this is understandable given the cost of illustrations, I wish that it had been possible to provide more pictures, some at least in colour. The period this book explored is also covered in Chapter Ten of Cyprian Broodbanks's *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World* (2013), and that chapter has forty-eight black-and-white illustrations and twelve in full color in its seventy-nine pages. A book that does so much to bring out the significance of Phoenician cultural production deserves to have its message reinforced by a more generous use of pictures.

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