

The Phoenician Mediterranean: a space for communication, transmission and sharing

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ABSTRACT

Archaeology and history play a very important role in understanding the development of the contemporary Mediterranean economy. To give an example of ancient Mediterranean Blue economy, this article focuses on the Mediterranean people par excellence in antiquity: the Phoenicians. In fact, the themes of the 2021 Conference (fishery, development of ports, green shipping), along with certain basic concepts of contemporary economy (e.g. networking, globalisation, glocalization, goods and brain circulation, etc.) and sociology (migration, socio-economic gaps, etc.), perfectly fit with the Phoenicians who spread from the Levantine coast as far as the Atlantic coast of modern Portugal.

KEYWORDS: Phoenician archaeology, ancient Mediterranean networking, glocalization.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we do not plan to focus on the importance of archaeology and history in the development of the Mediterranean economy (a theme largely illustrated in the CNR's book *Mediterraneo*, 2019), but rather on the Mediterranean people par excellence in antiquity: the Phoenicians (Bondi et al., 2009; Doak & López-Ruiz 2019; Bonnet, Guillon & Porzia, 2020).

The preliminary question is why to talk about the past in a conference on the development of the contemporary economy of the Mediterranean maritime world? Because we like to think that the economy should not only be evaluated in terms of the wealth produced but also in terms of the happiness created. According to World Health Organization (WHO) data, happiness, or a sense of mental and physical wellbeing and good health, is positively influenced by cultural welfare. Therefore, a presentation on the history of the Phoenician Mediterranean is perfectly suited to our session on the Blue Planet Economy (BPE)¹. Looking back to that time could be a starting point for profitable investments, and a way to bring people closer to well-being and health and, therefore, to “the Blue Mediterranean economy of happiness”.

The themes of this Conference (Fishery, the Development of Ports, Green shipping), along with certain basic concepts of contemporary economy (e.g. networking, glocalization, etc.) and sociology (migration, socio-economic gaps, etc.), perfectly reflect the Phoenicians who spread from the Levantine coast as far as the Atlantic coast of modern Portugal. Among those peoples who sailed in the ancient Mediterranean, Phoenicians are certainly those most frequently associated with the sea. They were skilled navigators (the discoverers of Polaris), shipbuilders, builders and hunters of ports, experts in numerous economic activities linked to the sea (trade but also fishing, salt pans, purple dye). We can safely claim that the Phoenicians were the unaware champions of a sustainable Blue Economy: like all pre-consumer societies, they were recyclers and left a minimum impact on the sea – although the same cannot be said of their impact on the metal mines of Spain or on the cedars of Lebanon! At the same time, they were a Blue-Economy-aware people in pursuing the Blue economy goals: great opportunities for growth and development for the territories, employment and professional training deriving from the sea and the industries that gravitate around it.

We will focus on a few closely interconnected topics, in order to recognise antiquity's pivotal role in the development of Blue economy projects: Phoenician networking, the circulation of goods and brain power, globalisation and glocalization. This is also a fil rouge combining the many Mediterranean archaeological missions of the Institute of Heritage Sciences, which cover different themes, thanks to the variety of regions and chronologies².

2 ANCIENT NETWORKING

If the main components of economic networks are joint ventures and partnerships, both written and archaeological sources authorise us to describe the Phoenicians as true networking champions. Just consider the legendary joint venture between Solomon and Hiram of Tyre in the land of Ophir, not to mention the active partnerships in the commercial networks that the Phoenicians created throughout the Mediterranean. Corporations of Phoenician merchants opened offices in different areas of the Mediterranean (e.g. the merchant Urkatel in Egypt, mentioned in the Wenamoun's papyrus; Betrò, 1990; Sass, 2002). They acted as the fil rouge among different territories, setting up partnerships among diverse peoples and different forms of economy (e.g. the palatial system of the Phoenician cities, the élites of Latium and Etruria, the Nuragic and Tartessian economy). In this way, each Mediterranean people benefitted from their own “diversity”, another keyword of the sustainable economy.

¹ CNR: *Case Histories in the Blue Planet Economy*. Rome, October 8, 2021. Cf. <https://www.blueplaneteconomy.it/cnr-case-histories-in-the-blue-planet-economy/>

² https://www.ispc.cnr.it/it_it/

3 THE CIRCULATION OF GOODS AND BRAINS

When merchants moved, objects and goods obviously moved too. So did artisans, to Etruria and Spain for example, along with their technologies, experience and ideas, such as iron working, silver cupellation, improvements in vine and olive culture, new breeding (such as roosters and donkeys), building techniques, urbanization and new iconographies.



Figure 1. Slide 13 from Oggiano's presentation at BPE European Maritime Forum, 2021.

4 GLOCALIZATION

Strictly linked to networking and globalisation glocalization was defined in 1980 by the sociologist Roland Robertson as “the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies” (1997, p. 4). Archaeology demonstrates that Phoenicians adapted their international products to different contexts and tastes, creating a strong link with local workshops that adapted them to new markets (some examples: amphorae but also precious materials, like metals and ivories).

5 INSTITUTE OF HERITAGE SCIENCES AND THE PHOENICIAN AND PUNIC RESEARCH GROUP

The Italian National Research Council's interest in studying the Phoenicians dates back to 1969, with the creation of the Istituto di Studi Fenici e Punici. Nowadays, this tradition of studies is still well represented by the Phoenician and Punic Research Group, one of the research groups of the Institute of Heritage Sciences³. Its goal is a multidisciplinary investigation of the Phoenician and Punic world, encompassing East and West, with missions in Lebanon, Sardinia and Tunisia. The project entitled “Transformations and Crisis in the Mediterranean” focuses on the much-debated concepts of identity, interculturality and “hybridization”, so important for the ancient and contemporary Mediterranean (Garbati & Pedrazzi, 2015; 2016; 2021).

Archaeological missions in Lebanon and Sardinia are good examples for studying the relationship between the coast and the hinterland. The coast, in fact, does not separate the sea from the countryside, but they are both part of a unique development process involving ports,

³ <https://www.ispc.cnr.it/it/2021/01/26/phoenician-and-punic-research-group/>

anchorages, rock-cut coastal installations and rural centres, whose economies are oriented to the sea.

5.1 Kharayeb Archaeological Project (KAP) between sea, river and rural hinterland

The Kharayeb region features a complex ecological and cultural system, where coastal, fluvial and terrestrial economies are concentrated in the area at the mouth of the Litani river⁴ (figures 2-4).

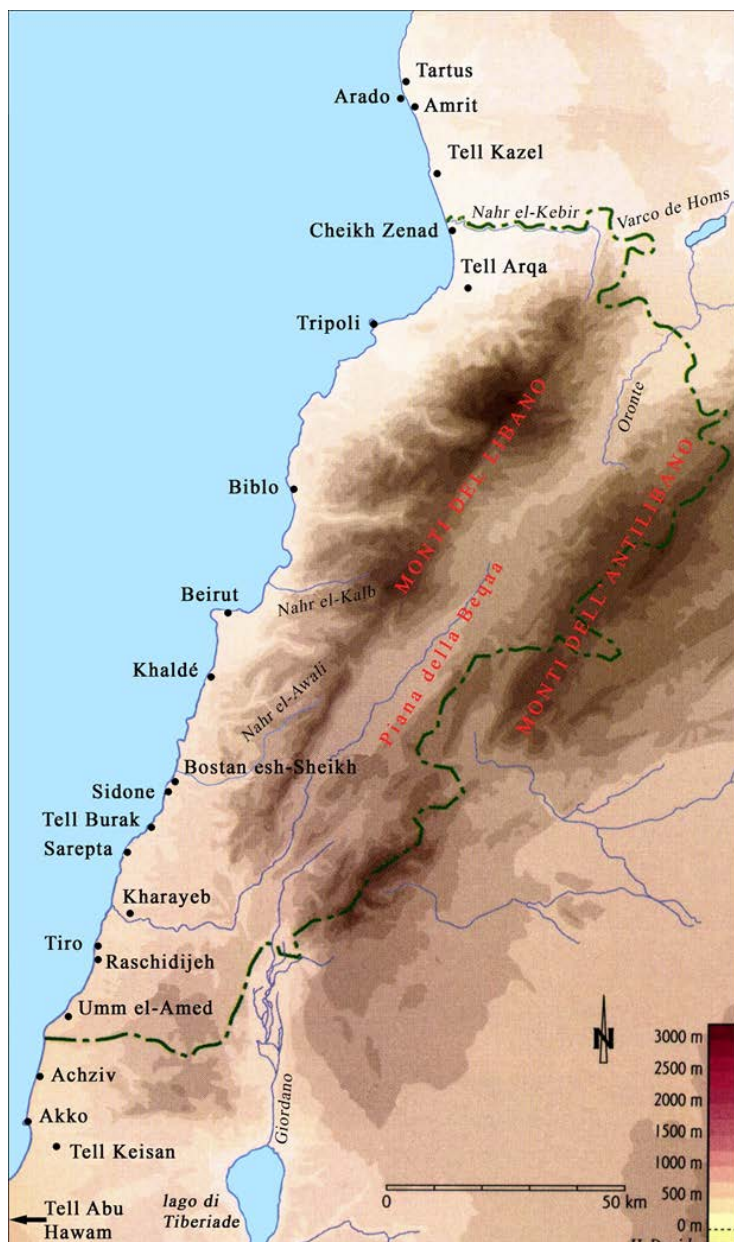


Figure 2. Map of Lebanon (Jomier,1998 reworked by Laura Attisani).

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9KfXyywtw4>



Figure 3. The mouth of Litani (Photo Tatiana Pedrazzi).

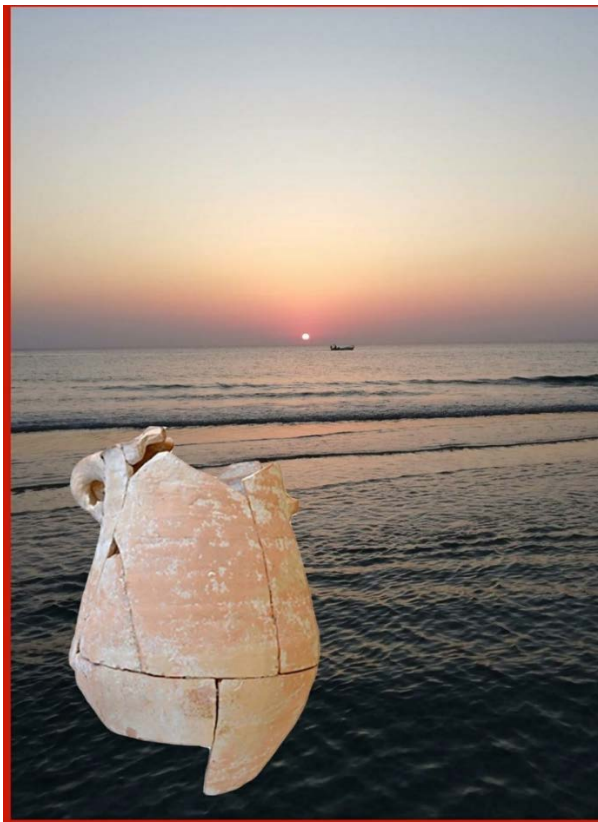


Figure 4. A Persian period commercial amphora and the sea in front of Kharayeb (Photo Ida Oggiano).

The goal of the KAP is to analyse this system with an interdisciplinary approach: archaeology, geomorphology, underwater activities, etc⁵ (figure 5).

⁵ <http://www.kharayebarchaeologicalproject.cnr.it>

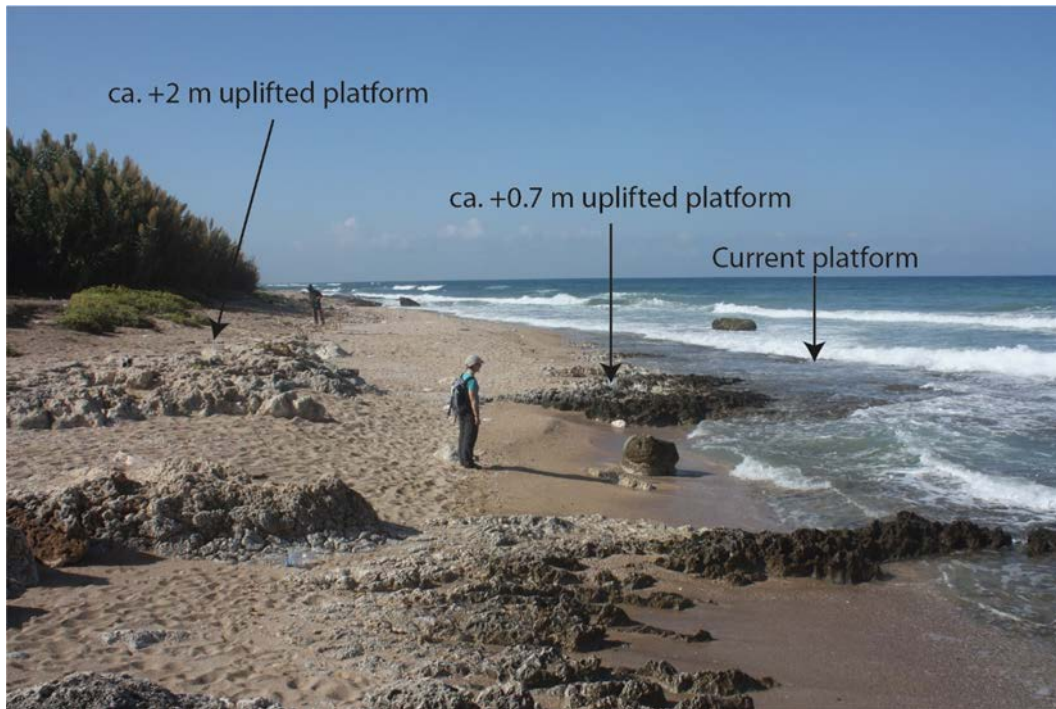


Figure 5. Geomorphological studies of the area at the mouth of Litani (Photo and elaboration Nicolas Carayon).

The overall philosophy is to look at the past to project the future: excavating the ancient port of Qasmyie goes hand-in-hand with requalifying the local beach. The landscape is beautiful, but the Litani and the sea are polluted, and the municipality is trying to develop activities with local schools to clean up the beach (Oggiano, 2015).

The ancestral relationship with the hinterland is testified by the site of Jemjim, which was a highly productive centre from the second millennium to the Persian period. Its products were distributed all over the area and reached the port of Qasmyie (Oggiano & Khalil, 2020. Figures 6-8).



Figure 6. The Kharayeb coastal plane with banana cultivations (photo Ida Oggiano).



Figure 7. Productive basin at Jemjim (Photo Ida Oggiano).

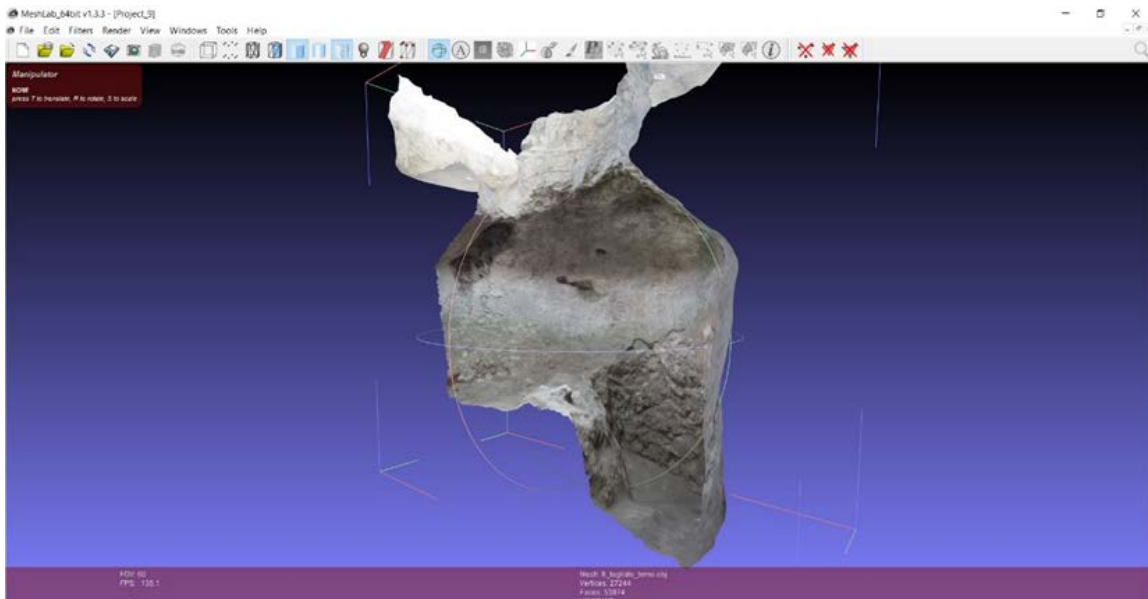


Figure 8. 3D relief of the plastered cistern ai Jemjim (Carlo Baione).

5.2 Sardinia: Pani Loriga. A link between the hinterland and the Sulcis ports

A different situation existed at Pani Loriga, in the Sulcis region, a site founded by Phoenicians at the end of the 7th century BCE and with an urban flourish in the Punic period, from the second half of the 6th century BCE. The site is not on the coast, but it is a typical example of an “interface” economy connecting the coast with the agricultural hinterland, and it played an important role in commercializing products from the rural hinterland through the coastal ports (figures 9-10).



Figure 9. Location of the Pani Loriga hill in the South Western quadrant of Sardinia (Botto, 2017).



Figure 10. Areal view of the Pani Loriga hill (Photo Giovanni Alvito, Teravista; graphic elaboration of Federica Candelato).

In the case of Pani Loriga, biochemical analyses have documented that wine, olive oil and honey were locally produced, and they are still important resources for the region today (Botto & Candelato, 2021; Botto et al., 2021; Madrigali & Tirabassi, 2020. Figure 11).

Both these archaeological activities are not only devoted to research but also to wider cultural interaction and enhancement, thanks to their close collaboration with public and private institutions in the areas where they operate.



Figure 11. Commercial amphora from area B of Pani Loriga.

6 THE ALPHABET, WRITING AND THE BASE OF KNOWLEDGE

We conclude with the alphabet, a fundamental invention for the past, the present and the future of every discipline, with which we can move to contemporary literature and to the Lebanese writer Amin Malouf, who is so passionate about ancient Mediterranean history. From *Les Échelles du Levant* he moves to our troubled present in *Le naufrage des civilisations*. Climate change, environmental degradation, land use, urbanization, water crises, scarcity of resources, loss of

biodiversity, political-social contrasts, demographic pressure, migratory movements, socio-economic gaps: how can studying the past help us to avoid all this?

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