

## POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW PHOENICIAN CHRONOLOGIES

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The establishment of new radio-carbon dates for the beginning of the Phoenician expansion to the far west of the Mediterranean forces us to re-consider the theory that the founding of the colonies in the West was conditional on the policy adopted by the Assyrian Empire in the East.

Nowadays, the earliest presence of Phoenician material in the West is documented within the precinct of the ancient city of Huelva, where an important assemblage of Phoenician pottery, associated with Greek Geometric, Cypriot, Italic and Nuraghic ceramics of the tenth and the first half of the ninth century BC documents the presence of Levantine and central Mediterranean people in the Atlantic area from the start of the Iron Age.<sup>1</sup> These finds are related to others made a while ago in the Tartessian zone, which had remained without context for want of information, such as the Sardinian pottery found in Cadiz and Carambolo<sup>2</sup> or the Attic Middle Geometric II pyxis from Huelva.<sup>3</sup> The high proportion of Phoenician pottery among the new material found in 1997 in the Plaza de las Monjas in Huelva argues in favour, not of a few first sporadic contacts in the zone, but of a regular presence of Phoenician people from the start of the ninth century BC.

The recent radiocarbon dates from the earliest levels in Carthage situate the founding of this Tyrian colony in the years 835–800 cal BC,<sup>4</sup> which coincides with the dates handed down by Flavius Josephus and Timeus for the founding of the city. The presence of Sardinian and Greek ceramics and of amphorae from southern Spain in the first occupation strata at Carthage indicates the complexity of the inter-regional relations that characterise the first days of Phoenician colonisation.

<sup>1</sup> González de Canales, Serrano and Llompart 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Torres 2004; Nijboer and Van der Plicht 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Gómez 1989; Brandherm 2006, p. 10; Nijboer 2004, p. 541.

<sup>4</sup> Docter, Niemeyer, Nijboer and Van der Plicht 2004; Nijboer 2004, p. 530; Nijboer 2006, p. 259.

On the other hand, the dates for the founding of Carthage coincide with dates established for the Phoenician colony of Morro de Mezquitilla, which situate the most ancient occupation levels (Strata B1a and B2) in the years 807–802 cal BC.<sup>5</sup> The founding of the Phoenician colony of Toscanos would have come a bit later; its earliest levels (Strata I/II) would date from the years 805–780 cal BC.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the founding of the first Phoenician colonies at the end of the ninth century coincides with the radio-carbon chronology attributed to the most ancient Phoenician imports recorded in the indigenous Portuguese settlements and in the south of Spain, like Acinipo, Alcáçova de Santarem or Cerro de la Mora.<sup>7</sup> At these same dates, if not earlier, the first colonial contacts with the indigenous Sardinian world would have to be situated, as witness the finds at Sant’Imbenia.<sup>8</sup>

The new dates reveal a much more ancient and gradual process of contacts and subsequent colonisation than had previously been assumed. That process would have consisted of an initial horizon of the recognition and exploitation of metal resources in the Atlantic area in the first half of the ninth century, followed by the founding of the first permanent colonial establishments, starting in the last quarter of the ninth century BC. From all this, we can deduce three significant aspects concerning the beginnings of the Phoenician expansion to the far West:

1. Contacts between East and West were never entirely interrupted at the start of the Iron Age. The Greek and Cypriot elements identified in Sardinia around 1000 BC would have been followed immediately by regular contacts between the East and the Atlantic world of Huelva, directed specifically at its rich bronze metallurgy, its copper and silver resources and its important strategic position between the Atlantic circuit and the Mediterranean.
2. The Phoenicians arrived in the Huelva area and the bay of Cadiz, not taking advantage of the slump in the so-called Atlantic Late Bronze Age, as has been suggested,<sup>9</sup> but at the height of activity of an indigenous metallurgical centre, featuring an intense circulation of manufactured metal objects and scrap metal, linking south west France, the Huelva region, central Portugal, Atlantic Morocco, Sardinia and the Italian peninsula.
3. The beginnings of the Phoenician presence in southern Iberia are clearly connected with activities of metallurgical exploitation and production, which confirms the importance of the metals in the origins of the Phoenician expansion into the western Mediterranean. This is emphasised by the huge amount of slag, nozzles,

<sup>5</sup> Pingel 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Pingel 2002; Brandherm 2006, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Aubet 1997, pp. 317–323; 2001, pp. 372–377; Torres 1998; Arruda 1999–2000; Botto 2004, pp. 583–585.

<sup>8</sup> Bafico, Oggiano, Ridgway and Garbini 1997; Oggiano 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aubet 2000b, p. 35.

crucibles and smelting moulds found in the pre-colonial horizon in Huelva, linked with intense copper, silver, lead, tin and iron metallurgy,<sup>10</sup> as well as the beginnings of iron smelting in the earliest level at Morro de Mezquitilla.<sup>11</sup>

To sum up, originally, the Phoenician commercial and colonial enterprise revealed a strategy that was perfectly programmed and organised, far removed from the traditional idea that saw the start of the Phoenician expansion as a surge of refugees from the East improvising as they went along, in line with the dictates of political events in the Orient. The new chronologies thus oblige us to correct certain matters relating to the events taking place in the metropolis between the tenth and seventh centuries BC.

#### TYRE AND THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND TO THE PHOENICIAN EXPANSION

For a long time, the dominant theories suggested two possible alternative explanations for the origins of the Phoenician expansion into the Mediterranean: colonisation by a highly prosperous Tyre and a peak in the demand for raw materials (tenth century BC), or an expansion arising from the flight and displacement of population in response to Assyrian economic and military pressure (eighth–seventh centuries BC).

The traditional chronology, based on the association of the first Phoenician ceramics in the West with Late Geometric Greek ceramics, placed the beginning of the first colonies — Morro de Mezquitilla, Cadiz, Carthage — at the height of Assyrian pressure on the Phoenician cities, at the end of the eighth century BC, and attributed a markedly demographic character to the Phoenician expansion, linked to the fleeing of artisans, farmers and traders to the West, where — following the Greek colonial model — they would have sought refuge and reproduced the economic and social structures of the metropolis.

Of particular interest in this connection is the study carried out by Susan Frankenstein in the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Based on an analysis of the conditions and development of the Phoenician cities in the East, the author saw the Phoenician colonisation as a projection westward — to the periphery — of the political and economic system of the Phoenician city-states integrated into the Assyrian Empire — the centre — through relationships of tribute and vassalage. In exchange for political independence and preferential trade relations, the regular imposition of tribute would have forced Tyre and Sidon to channel raw materials and precious metals from the colonies into a kind of parasitic regional economic system under Assyrian dominion.

<sup>10</sup> González de Canales, Serrano and Llopart 2004, pp. 145–156.

<sup>11</sup> Schubart 2006, pp. 85–96.

<sup>12</sup> Frankenstein 1979; Frankenstein 1997, pp. 148–211.

The Frankenstein model continued to be valid for the period of Assyrian expansion into the territories lying to the west of the Euphrates. However, the new chronologies in the West push the origins of Tyre's Mediterranean expansion into periods much earlier than the Assyrian pressure on the Phoenician city-states.

*The Beginnings of the Iron Age*

Although the eastern sources barely mention Tyre or the Phoenician city-states in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BC, Egyptian and Mesopotamian documents of that period nevertheless grant Byblos a certain pre-eminence among the Phoenician cities, as is indicated by the account of Wen Amon (c.1070 BC) and the annals of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–076 BC); they evoke the existence of trade between Byblos and the Delta in the middle of the eleventh century and a recognition of vassalage to this Assyrian monarch on the part of Byblos, Arwad and Sidon, whose representatives had come to pay tribute near Homs in Syria. Tyre appears not to be mentioned in these texts or else it figures as a second ranking city. Nevertheless, the archaeological evidence points to the presence of a Tyrian population in the south east of Cyprus around 1050 BC, as is inferred from the finds in the necropolis of Palaeopaphos.<sup>13</sup> After this date and until the ninth century BC, the Assyrian texts make no further mention of the Phoenician cities.

*The Period of the First Expeditions: the Dynasty of Hiram I (970–910 BC)*

In the period in which the earliest finds in Huelva are placed, non-Assyrian eastern sources mention the city of Tyre for the first time. In these sources, king Hiram I (c. 970–936 BC) is described as the builder of the kingdom of Tyre and responsible for transforming the city into a regional power, whose sphere of influence reached as far as Galilee, the bay of Akko and Cyprus. This is also the period in which legend connects this monarch with long-distance trading expeditions to the Red Sea and the south of the Arabian Peninsula. Both biblical sources and the annals of Tyre, collected by Flavius Josephus and other authors, place the start of the history of Tyre in the tenth century BC, a period in which the archaeological record documents the presence of Phoenician merchants and products in Kommos (Crete), in the area of Knossos and very soon in Lefkandi. The news that Hiram had put down a rebellion by the Itykaians in the Kition zone,<sup>14</sup> suggests a certain Tyrian political and commercial dominion over the eastern zone of the island of Cyprus.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Bikai 1987, p. 70; Aubet 2000a, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> Flavius Josephus *Contra Ap.* I 119.

<sup>15</sup> Katzenstein 1973, p. 84.

After the death of Hiram I, hardly anything is heard of the history of Tyre; all that is known is the list of the last kings of that dynasty. It is likely that the first expeditions to Huelva took place in the period of Hiram I or his immediate successors, Balbazer (935–919 BC) and Abdastratus (919–910 BC). On the death of the latter, a tyrannical regime lasting 22 years usurped the throne, causing the exodus of aristocratic families from the city.<sup>16</sup>

*The Colonial Period: Ithobaal I and his Dynasty (887–774 BC)*

A priest of Astarte, Ethbaal or Ithobaal I (887–856 BC), put an end to the tyranny and set about re-structuring the kingdom. To Ithobaal I is attributed the transformation of the city-state of Tyre into a prime political and commercial power, “perfect in beauty” celebrated by the prophets of Israel; her hegemony would spread over all the Phoenician cities, from Byblos to the bay of Akko and Cyprus. And, most importantly, Ithobaal figures as the first monarch of Tyre to be credited with the founding of overseas colonies: Kition, Auza, Botrys, Myriandros.<sup>17</sup> This is the time when the archaeological evidence shows a considerable increase in the population of Tyre,<sup>18</sup> and her international trade stretched from the Aegean to Memphis, Samaria, Damascus and the north of Syria.

From the beginning of the ninth century BC, the Assyrian annals and inscriptions echo the power and wealth of the city. The luxury products from the Phoenician cities that figure in the lists of tributes or gifts to the Assyrian monarchs are invariably headed by the precious metals — gold and silver — followed by coloured fabrics, tin, copper, precious stones, ivory, skins, articles made of wood and essences.<sup>19</sup> Tiglath-Pileser III would manage to collect the sum of 150 gold talents in Tyre, almost 4300 kg! In the Assyrian tribute lists, the largest quantities of gold and silver undoubtedly came from Tyre<sup>20</sup> and, generally speaking, the monarchs of Tyre always figure at the head of the coastal kings rendering tribute or vassalage to the Assyrian Empire. Particularly interesting is the frieze on the bronze gates of Balawat, dated 858 BC, where the king of Tyre, Ithobaal, is represented before the gates of his city dispatching his servants who are carrying tribute to Shalmaneser III. The products carried in the boats include metal bars — probably ingots — and ivory tusks.<sup>21</sup>

The reign of Ithobaal I and his successors coincides with the renewal of Assyrian military campaigns to the west of the Euphrates. For the Assyrian monarchs, the

<sup>16</sup> Katzenstein 1973, p. 128.

<sup>17</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* VIII 324.

<sup>18</sup> Aubet 2004, pp. 449–466.

<sup>19</sup> Zaccagnini 1984; Bunnens 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Jankowska 1969, p. 255.

<sup>21</sup> Katzenstein 1973, p. 165.

Phoenician cities were not the main objective. The Assyrians saw the west more as territory for hunting and tribute rather than having a systematic plan of conquest. They re-appear on the coast in the ninth century BC with Assurnasirpal II (883–859), who reached Til Barsip and Carchemish, crossed the Orontes and got as far as the sea where, in 876 BC, he received tribute from Amurru and the “kings of the coast”, from Tyre to Arvad. The tribute must have been paid very near the mouth of the Orontes, probably in the recently founded Tyrian colony of Myriandros.<sup>22</sup>

Once again, his successor, Shalmaneser III (858–824), crossed the Euphrates and reached the Orontes and the plain of Amuq. On the Orontes in 858 BC he received the tribute of Tyre, Sidon, Arwad and Byblos, consisting of silver, gold, tin, bronze, bronze vessels, ebony and ivory. It is obvious that this monarch only went to the coast to collect tribute and at no time did he threaten the Phoenician cities. Proof of the good relations maintained with the Phoenician cities is that, of all the cities of the coast, only the kings of Tyre and Sidon were invited to take part in the festivities held on the occasion of the inauguration of the new royal palace in Calhu/Nimrod.

Three significant aspects of Assyrian political and economic strategy concerning the territories in the west must be emphasised:

1. In the lists of tributes from the Phoenician cities, Tyre now occupied the first place among the cities of the coast, thanks, no doubt, to the political and economic restructuring undertaken by its monarch Ithobaal. The city remained on the fringe of the events that occurred in north Syria and there are no signs of submission or subordination to the Assyrian Empire. In the Assyrian annals, Tyre is mentioned as a far away place whence come the ships carrying tribute to the mouth of the Orontes.<sup>23</sup>
2. The conquest of Til Barsip by Shalmaneser III in 856 BC and its transformation into a provincial capital suggests that Assyria held absolute dominion over the middle Euphrates. This monarch changed the name of the new capital to Kar-Shalmaneser, that is, ‘port’ or ‘market place’ of Shalmaneser, with the aim of reinforcing its commercial role in symbiosis with nearby Carchemish, 20 km away.<sup>24</sup> Carchemish kept a certain autonomy as a market giving access to Anatolian metals and the roads to Cilicia, Phrygia, Egypt and Urartu. The situation of Carchemish indicates that annexation of the great interregional trading centres did not figure among the interests of the Assyrian Empire, rather it was concerned to protect them in their capacity as intermediaries between external trade and the Assyrian market. The case of Carchemish is very similar to what would happen in Tyre a century later.

<sup>22</sup> Kestemont 1983, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> Kestemont 1983, p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> Frankenstein 1969, p. 271; Radner 2004; Roobaert and Bunnens 1999.

3. The only known references to the founding of colonies by the Assyrian monarchs come from the days of Shalmaneser III. After the conquest of Til Barsip, the Assyrian annals mention the founding of various *karu* — a station or commercial port — in the valley of Antioch, the aim being to ensure an uninterrupted flow of products and merchandise, either by way of tribute or else through “enforced exchange”.<sup>25</sup> In any case, compared with other periods, it is clear that the ninth century is basically a colonial period.

#### *The Assyrian Decline in the Years 824–744 BC*

After the campaigns of Shalmaneser III, there followed a period of silence in the Assyrian and eastern sources.<sup>26</sup> All that is known of Shalmaneser III’s successor, Adad-nirari III (810–783 BC), is that he demanded a greater quantity of tribute from the kings of the coast,<sup>27</sup> at the period in which the radiocarbon chronology situates the founding of Carthage and of Morro de Mezquitilla. In any case, the founding of Carthage and the first Tyrian colonies in the West coincided with a significant decline of the Assyrian Empire, between the late ninth and mid–eighth centuries BC. This is the period in which the biblical sources place the zenith of Tyre’s commerce, when the city dominated a vast territory that included Sidon and the island of Cyprus, and the influence of the Phoenician script and the prestige of its monarchy and religion extended to the north of Syria, Moab, Israel and Judah. In the ninth century all international trade flowed towards Tyre, which had become, in the words of Ezekiel, the premier Mediterranean port of the day.<sup>28</sup>

Of Ithobaal I’s dynasty we know the names of his immediate successors, Baal-azor II (855–830 BC), Mattan I (829–821 BC) and Pygmalion (820–774 BC), all undoubtedly implicated in the colonial enterprise in the West, particularly the latter, famous for the episode involving his sister Elissa, who founded Carthage in the seventh year of that monarch’s reign.

#### *Assyrian Expansion from 744 to 627 BC: the Zenith of the Phoenician Colonies*

Until Tiglath-pileser III the Assyrians did nothing that might seriously damage the interests of the Phoenician cities, which, despite having to pay tribute, had remained independent. With this Assyrian monarch, a new era in Assyrian history began, henceforth characterised by the systematic annexation of territories, the deportation of populations and the economic, cultural and ethnic integration of the conquered

<sup>25</sup> Tadmor 1975, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Gaal 1982, p. 354.

<sup>27</sup> Garelli 1983, p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Jankowska 1969, p. 255; Katzenstein 1973, pp. 141, 159.

territories.<sup>29</sup> Assyrian military campaigns ceased to be a question of prestige and became the means of direct intervention in the economic affairs of the coastal cities. As the Assyrian armies spread westward the Phoenician cities became more and more important for Assyria as intermediaries between Mediterranean trade and Mesopotamia.<sup>30</sup>

For a long time this period has been considered to be the beginning of the end of Tyre, with the initiation of military and political pressure, which would have stifled the Tyrian economy, causing a kind of lethargy that would have benefited the autonomy of the overseas colonies. The written and archaeological evidence, however, appears to confirm the hypothesis of Frankenstein and Kestemont, that the most interventionist period in Assyrian history helped up to a point to consolidate the economy of Tyre and Sidon, being accompanied by protectionist measures aimed at maintaining and promoting the economic growth of Tyre and her colonies.<sup>31</sup>

The strategy of Tiglath-pileser III had consisted in a gradual domination of the Phoenician cities, first incorporating the cities of the north — Simirra, Arqa, Usnu, Siannu — into the Assyrian province of Simirra in 743–738 BC, with its southern frontier at Gubla/Byblos, and later, in 734–732 and onwards, imposing its dominion on the south coast as far as Gaza. Just like Carchemish before her, Tyre did not enter into the plans for conquest, had lost her continental territories but not her independence, since her international trade served the Assyrian interests.<sup>32</sup> Assyria kept a certain administrative control over the commercial affairs of Tyre, appointing customs officials and inspectors in the ports of Tyre and Sidon to collect taxes and supervise the trade in cedar wood.

Not even various attempts at anti-Assyrian rebellion on the part of the Tyrian kings Hiram II (738–734 BC) and Metenna (734–727 BC) led to territorial annexation. The most difficult years for Tyre came with the successors of Tiglath-pileser III, who were responsible for the gradual subjection of the southern Phoenician cities. But although Sargon II (721–705 BC) attacked Israel and the Philistine cities, he did not touch Tyre.<sup>33</sup> A particularly interesting episode relating to this monarch is described in detail in the royal annals and inscriptions. At the request of his faithful vassal, king Sihlta of Tyre, Sargon had conquered Iadnana (Cyprus) in the year 707 BC with the submission of seven of its monarchs.<sup>34</sup> The king of Tyre's request was the result of the Cypriot kings having refused to pay tribute to Tyre; this shows that a large part of the island of Cyprus was still under Tyrian hegemony at the height of Assyrian pressure on the cities of the coast. Furthermore, the episode reflects the good relations that existed between Tyre and Assyria at that time.

<sup>29</sup> Oded 1974, pp. 39–41; Larsen 1979, p. 86; Liverani 1979; Weippert 1982; Parpola 2003, p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> Bunnens 1983, p. 171.

<sup>31</sup> Frankenstein 1979; Kestemont 1983, pp. 77–78.

<sup>32</sup> Cogan 1973; Oded 1974, p. 47; Na'aman 1979, pp. 83–84; Na'aman 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Na'aman 1995a, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> Saporetti 1976; Na'aman 1998, p. 242; Na'aman 2001, p. 360.

The first to attack Phoenicia as the main objective of his campaigns was Sennacherib (704–681), who had punished the rebellion of king Luli of Tyre, laying waste its continental areas and conquering Sidon, Sarepta, Ushu, Akhziv and Akko, that is to say all the cities of the kingdom except the island capital. At this time, the crisis of the Phoenician cities in the south began. In 676 Asarhaddon (680–669 BC) converted more than half southern Phoenicia into an Assyrian province and sited the capital at Kar-Assarhaddon (Sidon). The treaty between this monarch and king Baal of Tyre, signed in 675–674 BC, guaranteed to the king of Tyre free access to all the ports along the coast, including the ‘Assyrian’ ports of Dor and Akko, in exchange for supplying the Assyrian armies with goods and basic necessities and maintaining Assyrian officials in the city charged with the supervision of commercial affairs.<sup>35</sup> Although the treaty left the commercial system in Tyre virtually intact, in practice it entailed the first step in the submission of the city, which occurred in 639–637 BC, in the time of Asurbanipal.<sup>36</sup>

Even when things were at their worst, we see that the Assyrians were able to subjugate a territory without destroying its economic structure or its commercial relations. We have to ask ourselves whether the strategy of the last Assyrian kings had direct repercussions on the international trade of Tyre and her colonies. The seventh century BC coincides in the West with the zenith of the commercial activity of the Phoenician colonies and Assyrian pressure on Tyre does not appear to have had any effect on her interregional exchange relations. In this sense, a few recent archaeological data concerning Assyrian domination in the Levant are worth considering. So, for example, excavations in the Philistine city of Tel Mique/Ekron, conquered by Sargon II in 712, have shown that this centre achieved one of its periods of greatest prosperity under Assyrian dominion in the seventh century BC, when it was transformed into an industrial city specialising in large scale production of olive oil, accumulated vast quantities of silver in its storehouses and reflected a strong Phoenician influence in many of its cultural manifestations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Garelli 1975, pp. 151–160; Pettinato 1975; Kestemont 1983, p. 77; Na’aman 1979, p. 84; Na’aman 1994, pp. 7–8; Na’aman 1995a, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Elayi 1983, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Gitin 1995, p. 2003.

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