

ASIA MINOR AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: THE ROLE OF THE PHOENICIANS AND ARAMAEANS IN THE TRANSFER OF CULTURE

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The consensus of opinion among scholars of ancient history at present is that the main aspects of Greek science, religion and literature, when not adopted directly from the Orient, at the very least were heavily influenced by oriental traditions.¹ This is not just purely an academic question, for European and thus the culture of the “New World” has a connection with the Orient as well—even before the expansion of the major world religions brought the next contact between Orient and Occident.

Important questions in this respect are:

- Who transferred the traditions?
- When were they passed on?
- In which geographic region did this cultural contact occur?
- What were the contents of this tradition?

While the sources of evidence to answer these questions are, as before, rather sparse, the little material that we do have at present must be evaluated. This naturally gives occasion to speculate. I will attempt to place the emphasis on the facts, though in this attempt at a synthesis, a speculative connection of these facts must also be presented.

1. Who imported the traditions of the Orient to the Greeks? In this regard, the sources concur: the Phoenicians. What however is not so clear is what exactly this term defines. Strictly speaking, there were no Phoenicians in the sense of a “peculiar people” in the ancient Near East. Only the Greek tradition maintains this, and even then the etymology of the term is controversial and mythically interpreted.² In reality, there were only Phoenician cities along the coast of the Levant, each of which had individual histories, only becoming a political entity, in the form of a province, during the Roman period.³

It is more probable that “Phoenician” means more than just a Roman province. Rather, it appears as if the Greek term “Phoenician” included all the inhabitants of the Levant, including those who did not speak Canaanite (Phoenician), but Aramaic.⁴ Therefore we can include the North Syrian states in our considerations. This is of importance in as much

¹ See W. Burkert's excellent synthesis, Burkert 1984.

² See Garbini 1975, 15f., and Huss 1985, 5f. with lit.

³ This, however, only occurred during the reign of L. Septimius Severus, who, after 198 AD, divided the former province of Syria into Syria Coele, to the north, and Syria Phoenice, to the south, the latter extending down to Homs and having Tyre as its capital.

⁴ See Guzzo Amadasi 1987. This view becomes even more credible in light of the fact that one of the oldest Aramaic inscriptions, the Bredj Stela, found near Aleppo (KAI no. 201), contains a dedication to Melqart, the chief deity of Tyre. For an examination of the text see Lemaire 1984; Lipiński 1985, 81f. (with bibliography).

as the northern part of Syria had been under the influence of the Mesopotamian cuneiform culture since ancient times. One need only consider the connections between Kiš in Northern Babylonia and Ebla/Tell Mardih that have come to light as a result of the spectacular discovery of the Ebla Archive from the second half of the third millennium BC.⁵ In this regard Emar/Meskene, and naturally Ugarit, are to be mentioned as centres of Mesopotamian cultural influence. On the other hand, the Phoenician coastal cities, as far as we can tell, seem to have been much more under Egyptian influence, so that a transfer of culture from there should display Egyptian traits. This however, as far as I know, is not the case.⁶

Nonetheless, the situation must be described somewhat more precisely, especially if we are to assume that the cultural contact, which after all is our topic, occurred at a specific point in time. Syria was always a land bridge between Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Egypt. Thus it assimilated manifold influences and processed them. Accordingly, a mixed culture developed here, one displaying its own characteristics through and through. The extent of this foreign cultural influence was however not the same at all times. During the second half of the second millennium BC, Syria specifically was controlled by the interests of the then superpowers. The multifarious small states that existed in this region, which is in addition geographically non-uniform, were partly under the influence of Egypt on the one hand, and Asia Minor on the other, where the Hittites had introduced their version of the cuneiform culture. That nevertheless cuneiform and the literature written in it controlled the field to a large extent is indicated by the fact that the correspondence of the Pharaoh and the Palestinian princes was carried on in Accadian written in cuneiform. Moreover Accadian myths belonged to the curriculum of the schools in Amarna.⁷ The archives of Ugarit/Rās Shamra on the Syrian Coast have taught us that, in addition to the local myths and epics handed down and written in the local language and script, a good deal of the Accadian cultural heritage was also passed on.⁸ With the fall of the Hittite Empire shortly after 1200 BC due to the onset of the Sea Peoples, Ugarit fell as well. It is, however, most unlikely that therewith all of the Mesopotamian cultural heritage was extinguished, for it was surely present in the Phoenician cities as well. These cities were apparently not so strongly affected by these ravages as Ugarit. Unfortunately we have no such evidence from these cities. In northern Syria as well, at least part of the tradition breaks off, according to our present state of knowledge. The Late Hittite principedoms such as Karkemiš continued to exist — and with a remarkable degree of continuity;⁹ but they are so incompletely documented at present, that we cannot determine whether they continued the Accadian (or Hittite) tradition or not. In any case, with the beginning of the first millennium BC new states were founded, mostly under the influence of the Aramaeans, who surely were under the influence of the Assyrians, and belonged consequently to the cuneiform tradition. That is why they used the cuneiform script along

⁵ With regard to the so-called “Kiš-tradition,” see Gelb 1977.

⁶ From the 7th century onwards, this changes considerably, as, e.g., G. Hölbl’s collection of material shows. For a synoptic overview, see Hölbl 1989.

⁷ It is well known that the myths “Adapa” and “Nergal and Ereškigal” as well as a tablet of the epic “šar tamhari” were found in the archive of Amarna.

⁸ Mostly published by J. Nougayrol (Nougayrol 1968), comp. the review by W. von Soden (von Soden 1969).

⁹ J. D. Hawkins has been able to prove that there was practically no break in the dynastic tradition at Karkemiš; see Hawkins 1986 and 1988.

with the much more convenient alphabetic script.¹⁰ This can only be explained by suggesting that they did not want to give up the cultural heritage of the cuneiform tradition. It is most probable that the tradition went from here to the West. But as to whether the tradition was transferred in an oral or a written form should be left undecided for the time being.

Another point that should be left open for the present concerns the persons who carried out the cultural contact. The scribes? The craftsmen? The merchants? Or even the princes? All of these theories have been put forward, and we shall examine them at this point.

First of all, we have no basis for the assumption that political or military events produced or furthered these cultural contacts. During the period in question, the 10th to 8th centuries BC, there were no political or military contacts between the Orient and the Occident, or none that we can demonstrate to make a great deal of interaction likely.

This observation is valid for the much over-rated al-Mina as well, whose actual character is unknown despite designations as a "Greek emporion, Greek commercial or trading town, Greek outpost, centre of Greek commercial activities."¹¹ Although most recently, H. Kyrieleis went so far as to postulate that Greek princes gave diplomatic gifts here,¹² such an idea is nothing more than a hypothesis. Neither Greek princes nor chieftains need ever have travelled to the Orient during the period under discussion. In any case, there is not the least basis for assuming political contacts.

There is no doubt that merchants of Phoenician provenance sailed the Mediterranean and traded at various points along the way. Our earliest and practically our lone witness in this matter is Homer¹³ — according to his works, it was their custom not just to trade their own wares, but to act as middlemen as well. Thus, manifold objects came to be traded by the Phoenicians — such as ivory instruments, purple fabrics, valuable vases and glass. It is most probable that it was through such merchants that objects that were originally not intended for export came into circulation (see below).

Craftsmen must also have gone abroad with the merchants.¹⁴ Once again, contemporaneous sources fail us almost completely. We cannot identify inscriptions by craftsmen which originate from Phoenician trading-posts. It is also questionable whether the craftsmen were able to write. Even when a Phoenician craftsman identifies himself as "Balsha, member of the founders (guild)" on a silver bowl said to come from Pontecagnano, Etruria (collection Tyskiewicz, Petit Palais, Paris), it does not inform us about Phoenician

¹⁰ A good example of this is the bilingually inscribed statue found a few years ago at Tall Faḥarija; see Abou-Assaf, Bordreuil and Millard 1982.

¹¹ Regarding the excavations at Al-Mina and their results, see Woolley 1937 and 1938; Beazley 1939; Robertson 1940. The (very brief) inscriptions found at al-Mina have been discussed by F. Bron and A. Lemaire (Bron and Lemaire 1983). Note, however, that J. N. Coldstream, among others, is of the opinion that the Greek influence at Tyre was much earlier (10th century BC) and of a greater intensity (Coldstream 1988, 2, 43). Yet it is out of the question that Tyre was ever a Greek emporion.

¹² Regarding the nose piece found at Samos, with an inscription from Hazael, he writes that "Die Träger des griechischen Orienthandels waren keine kleinen Händler, sondern adlige Condottieri, die sehr wohl mit den lokalen Herrschern Syriens ebenbürtige Beziehungen oder kriegerische Auseinandersetzungen haben konnten. Der Handel funktionierte sicherlich nur auf der Grundlage gegenseitiger diplomatischer Beziehungen und ... Austausch von kostbaren Geschenken..." Kyrieleis 1988, 57.

¹³ Comp. J. D. Muhly, Muhly 1970; W. Röllig, Röllig 1982.

¹⁴ The authority on this is Coldstream 1982.

craftsmen in Italy, as the bowl most likely was brought here.¹⁵ J. N. Coldstream among others, has correctly pointed out the strong influence of oriental craftsmanship on Greek objects of the same period, which is not conceivable if there were no long-standing contacts between Levantine and Greek craftsmen.

One further profession that may have played a role in the transfer of cultural heritage remains to be dealt with, the scribes.¹⁶ Since one of the major adoptions of the West from the East was the alphabetic script, the literate person must have consequently played a leading role in this cultural contact. Once again, the evidence that the scribe was the bearer of culture is rather scarce. Yet we shall see that there is material at hand which points to a leading role for this transfusion through cultural transfer. But first of all, we must deal with two further questions: when and where did the contact take place?

2. At what time did the oriental influences become especially noticeable? This question cannot be answered by the oriental material itself. Only the borrowing of the alphabetic script gives a clue. Due to the forms of the characters, we are reasonably sure that the borrowing could not have taken place before the 10th century and not later than the 7th century BC.¹⁷ Other indications allow scholars of Greek to pinpoint the 8th century BC as the "oriental epoch." This is the period in which Assyrian might had already penetrated into Syria and Asia Minor. The thesis that the Phoenician merchants, giving way to this pressure, expanded westwards has its roots here. It should be modified in as much as this westward pressure also had economic overtones in the search for raw materials.

I do not question the traditional dating of this interaction between Orient and Occident, but am rather of the opinion that additional points can fortify this time frame. The dating and interpretation of source material is complementary without a vicious circle being produced.

3. Where did cultural contact occur? Now here we are dealing with an important question, for with our answer, we will also decide who the bearers of oriental culture were that the Greeks met. Then we can determine what kind of material was transferred to them.

The traditional Phoenician hypothesis proceeds from the assumption that Phoenician merchants and craftsmen reached the Greek coastal cities by sea, possibly with intermediate stops at Cyprus and Crete, while vending their wares, disseminating ideas and visual art according to their respective backgrounds of myth and tradition, and ultimately the alphabetic script.¹⁸ Naturally, this is not just speculation. The earliest witness is Homer who offers such a model of culture contact, and more support comes from the fact that the earliest evidence of Greek writing stems from Euboea, Attica and Corinth. Also, the traditions regarding the founding of sanctuaries of Aphrodite (Astarte) and of Heracles

¹⁵ Garbini 1977; Garbini 1980; Guzzo Amadasi 1986, 108. Most recently discussed by Gras, Rouillard and Teixidor 1989, 145, fig. 137 and Teixidor 1990, 491-493, who read *blš' br hmk* "Beelsha fils de Hmk," and considers it to be in Aramaic. This however does not convince me. The reading of this inscription, which is in extremely small letters, is not certain. I now prefer the proposal of M. G. Guzzo Amadasi: *blš' bn hm(l)k*. Comp. Markoe, this vol., 78.

¹⁶ See the excellent compilation of material by C. Bonnet, Bonnet 1991.

¹⁷ I shall deal with these questions in a forthcoming article as recent publications by F. M. Cross, J. Naveh, B. Sass and M. Bernal have put forward rather controversial theses. See prel. Röllig 1985.

¹⁸ See Bunnens 1979 — the standard work which also considers the classical sources.

(Melqart) speak of Greek coastal sites, which more likely than not belonged to the sphere of influence of the Phoenician merchants. It is not purely by chance that a sanctuary such as the Heraion of Samos, which surely was visited by Levantine seamen, received a considerable quantity of oriental offerings.¹⁹

Excursus: A find made on the *via sacra* of the Samian Heraion a few years ago deserves particular mention.²⁰ It is a part of a horse's harness of cast copper of the finest Syrian craftsmanship. On it we see the typical motif of the naked goddess holding her breasts along with a lion emblem. This brow or nose shield carries an Aramaean inscription naming (King) Hazael (of Damascus), who reigned at the end of the 9th century BC. The piece can be dated precisely, and, while it was deposited in the ground in a *bothros* in the first half of the 6th century BC, it should have reached Samos in the 8th or 7th century BC. A bronze blinker with an identical inscription was found at Eretria in Euboea, deposited for sure in the 8th century BC.²¹ It looks as if the bridle to which these two pieces belonged reached the Aegean from Syria (i.e. Damascus) in the 8th century, possibly in consequence of Tiglatpileser III's capture of the city in 732 BC. Of course we cannot know how and with what original intention it was brought to Eretria and Samos.

In the meantime, there are ever more signs that point to a land route as one conceivable path for the spreading of goods and ideas. My reasoning proceeds from the fact that the use of the Phoenician and Aramaean script was not always limited to the Syrian coastal area; rather it spread quite rapidly into other areas as well. Strangely enough though, this occurred in an environment that was not at all Semitic (figs. 12, 13).

a. Already in 825 BC, King Kilamuwa (or rather Kulamuwa) — the name is undoubtedly Anatolian²² — had an inscription in Phoenician composed,²³ along with further versions in Hieroglyphic Luwian and Aramaic at Zincirli. Shortly afterwards, this site, the ancient Sam'al, had as its written language a local Aramaic dialect, named Ja'udic today.²⁴ All of this took place in an environment which was still under the influence of the Neo-Hittites.

b. Approximately one hundred years later (ca. 715), Phoenician was still being written in Hasan Beyli — at the foot of Mt. Amanus a few kilometers away from Zincirli. One inscription that survived the ravages of time, although not without being severely damaged, mentions Awarikku, king of Que, a contemporary of Tiglatpileser III, that is, of the decade 740-730 BC.²⁵ It is most probable that this is the same prince who is also mentioned in the Karatepe inscription.²⁶

¹⁹ See for example Jantzen 1972. Also useful are Kyrieleis 1979 and Furtwängler 1981.

²⁰ Kyrieleis and Röllig 1988. For a different interpretation of the inscription see Eph'al and Naveh 1989; Bron and Lemaire 1989 (I am not convinced by these alternative proposals).

²¹ Charbonnet 1986.

²² For vocalisation and definition ("die Wahrhaftigkeit des Heeres besitzend") see Starke 1990, 236, n. 806.

²³ KAI Nr. 24, discussed most recently by P. Swiggers, Swiggers 1983.

²⁴ Dion 1974.

²⁵ Newly edited by A. Lemaire, Lemaire 1983, 10-17.

²⁶ On this king, see Orthmann 1971, 215; Postgate 1973, 28f.

c. Since 1946 we have known of a long inscription from Karatepe in Rough Cilicia composed by a local prince with the good Anatolian name of Azitawanda written in Phoenician. It was placed at the entrances to his citadel as well as on the statue of his deity.²⁷ Once again the inscription was written in an area that had predominantly a Hieroglyphic Luwian tradition; hence the parallel version is written in this language. Here as well, most of the names, including those of the gods, are Anatolian. There is therefore no doubt that once again Phoenician was a foreign element.

d. Just a few years ago, another Phoenician document was found. In Ivriz near Ereğli, that is, in Cappadocia beyond the Taurus mountains, there is a rock relief of a king of Tuwana (Tyana) named Warplawa, who is depicted in front of the weather-god Tarhunt.²⁸ This is explained in a short Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription.²⁹ In the vicinity of this rock relief lies the karst-source of the Ivriz-su. During regulatory work in the gravel of the stream bed a stela was found, apparently depicting King Warpalawa.³⁰ In a long Hieroglyphic-Luwian inscription, his son, Muwaharna, is named as having commissioned the stela. This is apparently repeated in an abbreviated Phoenician version on the same stone. According to Assyrian sources, Warpalawa (Urballu) and his son Muwaharna lived around 738-710 BC (during the reign of Tiglatpileser III and until Sargon II).³¹ It appears that even in Cappadocia at the end of the 8th century it was still possible to write and understand Phoenician. This is surprising and significantly adds to our knowledge of the expansion of the Phoenician alphabet. And as a result we may ask: For whom were the inscriptions written? Were there political reasons for the use of Phoenician as a *lingua franca*? Where did the scribes and the stone masons who had command of the language originate?

e. Recently, another document inscribed in Phoenician was found — once again, in Cilicia, though this time on the coast near Çebel Ires-Dağı ca. 15 km. east of Alanya; it is a stone block recording a land deed.³² All of the parties involved had Anatolian names: that is, Aşulparna, governor of Yalbaş, on the one face, and Masanzimiš on the other.³³ Therefore, we are dealing with local inhabitants, though Phoenician was apparently the language of official records. The block is dated to the end of the 7th century BC. We may conclude that the Phoenician script and language were still in use in Asia Minor at this time.

f. Finally, six seals from Cilicia should be mentioned. They were engraved towards the end of the 8th century BC and bear inscriptions with typical Anatolian names in the

²⁷ Comp. KAI no. 26 and Bron 1979; Meriggi 1967. no. 24 (for the Hieroglyphic-Luwian inscription).

²⁸ See Orthmann 1971, 487, with bibliography.

²⁹ The inscription is to be found in Meriggi 1967, 15 f., no. 7.

³⁰ This monument will be published by A. and M. Dincol, M. Poetto and W. Röllig.

³¹ With regard to Warpalawa see Weippert 1973, 50 and n. 97; Postgate 1973, 28f.

³² Published by P. G. Mosca and J. Russell, Mosca and Russell 1987; comp. also Lemaire 1989.

³³ The text reads: 'šlprn skn ylbš; msn(')zmš. Men with names such as *mtš* and *klš* in *wrykly* and kings such as *'zwšš* and *wryk* are also mentioned.

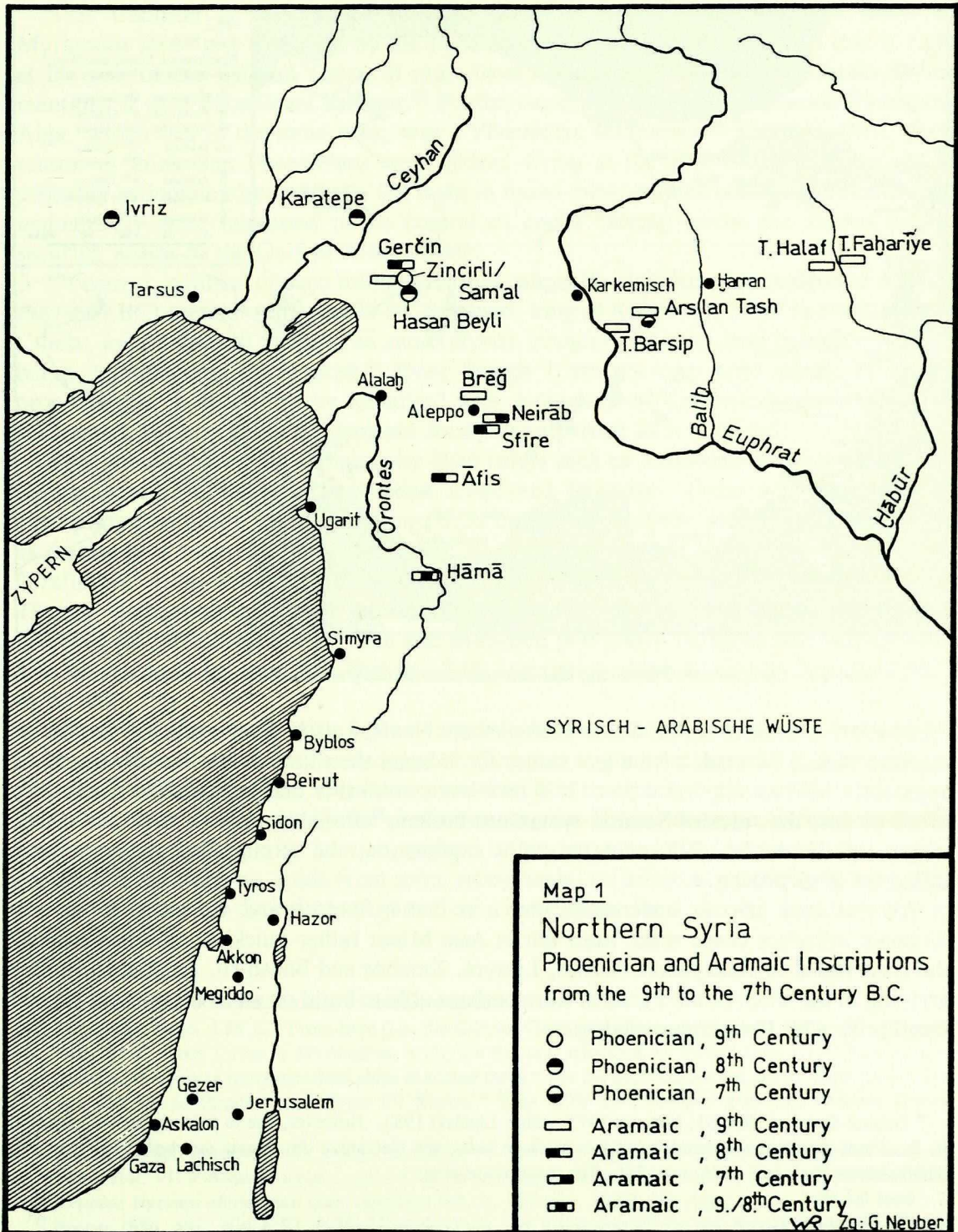


Fig. 12 — Northern Syria: Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions from the 9th to the 7th century BC

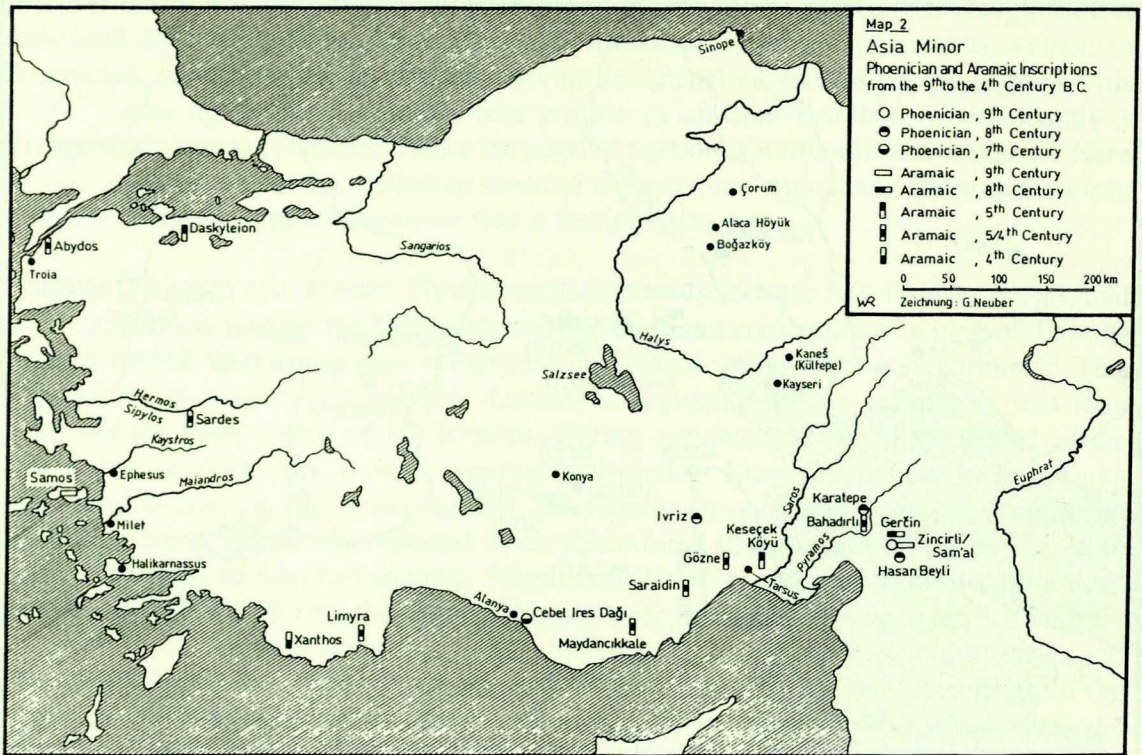


Fig. 13 — Asia Minor: Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions from the 9th to the 4th century BC

Phoenician-Aramaean script. Some examples are Naniš, Labaš, Muwananniš.³⁴ Particular mention should be made of the last name, for it bears the title “scribe,” as Muwananniš apparently held an important post. It is however remarkable that in this seal of a scribe, of all pieces, the rules of Semitic syntax are broken.³⁵ Possibly Luwian was the mother tongue of the scribe. Whatever the right explanation, the strong Phoenician cultural influence is surprising.

All this may help us understand why it is that in the 5th and 4th centuries BC an Aramaic influence could make itself felt in Asia Minor rather quickly — as illustrated by the texts found in Daskyleion, Sardes, Limyra, Xanthos and Bahadırli. Aramaean scribes arriving in the wake of the Persians were perhaps able to build on an existing tradition and familiarity with Phoenician writing.

³⁴ Dupont-Sommer 1950/51; Lemaire 1977; comp. Lipiński 1983. However, due to palaeographical reasons, P. Bordreuil doubts the authenticity of two of these seals, see *Catalogue des sceaux ouest-sémitiques inscrits* (Bibliothèque Nationale 1986) nos. 38f. The inscriptions read:

1. *lmnš lbš hbrk*
2. *l'sy hbrk hštm z*
3. *lphlš hbrk*
4. *lmwnnš hspř hbrk hštm z*
5. *l'šlthy hbrkt*
6. *htm m(?)sry*

See now Lemaire 1991, 133-146, in particular 134, note 6, for the problem of the authenticity of the seals.

³⁵ The use of the article before the title is peculiar, though one would expect the preposition *l-* to be repeated.

This tradition is documented in other ways as well.³⁶ Xenophon still knew of Myriandos as a “city inhabited by the Phoenicians”³⁷ located in Cilicia, and that is right at the exit of the Cilician Gates. It must have been near Alexandrette. Pseudo-Skylax mentions it as a Phoenician harbour.³⁸ Furthermore, according to Stephanos Byzantios, Aiga, which lies in the same area, was a Phoenician settlement.³⁹ There is, then, good reason to think that Phoenicians were indeed living at the foot of Mt. Taurus. Most probably economic circumstances led them to found these settlements. As merchants they undoubtedly were interested in the control of goods moving across the Taurus and in securing access to the Gulf of Alexandrette.

Of course, political or even military reasons cannot be excluded. Asarhaddon of Assyria (681-669 BC) mentions that in 676 BC Sanduari, king of Kundu and Sissû in north-eastern Cilicia, joined up with Sidon in an anti-Assyrian coalition. This resulted in both monarchs being captured and decapitated.⁴⁰ Even though I am not convinced of D. Hawkin’s proposal that Sanduari can be identified with Azitawada of Karatepe,⁴¹ the evidence of a Phoenico-Cilician coalition does not sound so surprising as it once did.

This however does not explain why local rulers such as Azitawada or Muwaharna had inscriptions written in the Phoenician script and language. Those who carved these inscriptions, or supervised the carving, must have been well-educated Phoenician scribes as the script is relatively clear and almost standardized. Scribes such as these, who were “craftsmen” (*ummânû*) in their own profession, were easily “rented” for special tasks. Thus a Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription mentions a “scribe from Tyre” who is not however mentioned by name.⁴² The seal discussed previously indicates that natives were also active as scribes, and the Cebel Ires Dağ₁-inscription also mentions an Anatolian *phl’š* as scribe.

Moreover, there must have been a literate public who could read and understand the language. This is not so easy to understand, though it might have something to do with the fact that a multilingual and a multiscriptual tradition existed in Cilicia over an extended period of time. During the Hittite predominance, the Hittite language, written in cuneiform, was used along with Luwian, written in hieroglyphs. To what extent this actually occurred is not clear as, aside from some stamp-seals, no bilingual inscriptions have been preserved from this period. At Arslan Tash, inscriptions from the 8th century are pre-

³⁶ See Garbini 1980; Lipiński 1985, 81-84; Lebrun 1987.

³⁷ Xenophon, *Anab.* I.IV.6: “From here (i.e. the Cilician Gates) a day’s march through Syria of 1 stathmos, i.e. 5 parasangs, took Cyrus to Myriandros, a city on the sea, inhabited by Phoenicians. This place was an emporion and there were many merchant ships at anchor there.” For the approximate site see P. Högemann, “The Western Achaemenid Empire from Cyrus till Xerxes,” Map B IV 23 (*Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients* [TAVO]).

³⁸ Pseudo-Skylax, *Periplus* 102. Comp. Herodotus IV.38 where opposite to the bay of Myriandos Phoinike is situated. *Hdt.* VII.9 mentions a place called Kilix, to be found in the same region, also founded by Phoenicians.

³⁹ *Stephani Byzantii ethnicorum quae supersunt* (ed. A. Meineke, 1849), sub Aiga.

⁴⁰ Borger 1956, 49f.: Nin A III 20-38: “Und Sanduari, der König von Kundu und Sissû ... vertraute auf das unzugängliche Gebirge. Er und Abdi-Milkutti, der König von Sidon, taten sich zu gegenseitiger Hilfeleistung zusammen und schwuren einander bei ihren Göttern Treue. Sie vertrauten auf ihre eigene Kraft, ich aber vertraute auf Assur ..., schloß ihn ein, holte ihn wie einen Vogel aus dem Gebirge und schlug ihm den Kopf ab. Im Tišri den Kopf des Abdi-Milkutti, im Adar den Kopf des Sanduari.”

⁴¹ See Hawkins 1979, 153 ff.

⁴² Karg. frgt. 18, see Hawkins 1975, 150f.

served which display parallel Assyrian, Aramaean and Hieroglyphic Luwian versions.⁴³ Even though the inscriptions originated a few hundred years after the downfall of the Hittite Empire, they might well reflect an older tradition. Thus, I suspect that it was in the interest of the rulers of the 8th and 7th centuries to make their inscriptions comprehensible even to those readers who could no longer master Hieroglyphic Luwian. To this end, they no longer had recourse to the Akkadian cuneiform system, but rather employed the easy-to-use Phoenician alphabet, and along with the script the language as well. The Greeks were the first to take the next step, namely to adapt the script to their own language, in the process transforming it into a fully phonetic script.

4. What were the contents of the oriental traditions that came to Greece and who brought them? Regarding the alphabet and pictorial images, one can only speculate. Neither Phoenician nor Aramaean literary texts have survived the ravages of time. It is conceivable that Mesopotamian thought reached Greece by means of this route. Walter Burkert has recently collected everything concerning images, magic and literature of oriental origin in a wonderful synthesis. To this, one should add technical and scientific traditions — nautics, metrics, astronomy and mathematics. If, as seems likely at present, at least part of the tradition traveled across Asia Minor, then Hittite or Hurrite adaptations of Mesopotamian ideas will have to be considered as well.

Apart from merchants and craftsmen, the scribes are certainly worthy of attention as bearers of culture, for by that time script and writing had become matters of great significance. Perhaps rhapsodies were part of the oriental tradition, whether in an oral or a written form. Moreover, the learned and multilingual *ummânu*, versed in more than one script, probably played a role, for instance, in the transmission of magical texts and practices, while he surely carried out more than one function.

The picture of cultural contact between the East and the West in the 8th century BC is therefore more complicated than when one held exclusively seafaring “Phoenicians” responsible for the transmission of culture. Surely, a rather complicated and many-sided model is closer to the truth, or agrees more with historical reality.

⁴³ These inscriptions were found on very eroded lion statues flanking the entrance. Their original place was at the various gates of the Aramaic provincial city of Ḥadattu, which during this period was controlled by the Assyrians; they are now on display in Aleppo and Raqqā. The inscriptions were ordered by an Assyrian governor named Ninurta-bēl-usur. They are being prepared for publication by Dr. Ali Abou Assaf, D. J. Hawkins and myself.