Carolina López-Ruiz, *Phoenicians and the Making of the Mediterranean*

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This book naturally expands on the concluding remarks drawn a few years ago by Sebastián Celestino and Carolina López-Ruiz in a work on the interactions between the Tartessians and Phoenicians in Iberia: “we hope that this volume will stimulate scrutiny of the Orientalizing phenomenon in similar scenarios throughout the Mediterranean, and our different assumptions about what it means in each culture”[1]. The creation of a globalized Mediterranean world in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, where proto-urban elites from Greece and Etruria to Sardinia and Iberia became enmeshed in the expanding Phoenician and Greek trade networks and appropriated unifying cultural elements from the more prestigious societies of the Near East, is a historical perspective briefly exposed in the previous volume[2], but only examined in full in this new book. More interestingly, the comparative “exploration of the Orientalizing phenomenon” (p. 314) is only conducted in the second part of the new book, “Follow the Sphinx” (p. 91-317). The first part, suggestively called “Beware the Greek” (p. 21-89) is devoted to a deeper inquiry into another idea previously expressed in a cursory manner: our modern views on Orientalization are still being distorted by a Hellenocentric approach based on the Greek and Roman quasi-monopoly on the literary information on this phenomenon, the high prestige of Classical culture and its fundamental role in shaping modern Western identity[3]. The result of this approach is that López-Ruiz is able to not only describe and assess Orientalization in different Mediterranean contexts, but to vigorously maintain that its primary agents were the Phoenicians, a conspicuous outcome that had not been anticipated in her previous contribution. The importance of the Phoenicians resides not only in the fact that they were the principal carriers of Orientalizing elements throughout the Mediterranean, but also that they created the synthesis – “the Orientalizing kit,” in the words of López-Ruiz – that the Mediterranean local elites were ready to selectively embrace as being illustrative of the prosperous and technologically advanced Near East.

In the *Introduction* (pp. 1-19), in addition to listing the elements of this Orientalizing kit – symbolic and decorative motifs; pottery technologies, shapes, and decoration; ivory carving and metalwork; techniques, motifs, and votive use of terracottas; monumental stone sculpture; masonry techniques and architectural innovations; burial forms and rituals; industrial developments and farming innovations; alphabetic writing; mythological themes and literary models (pp. 3-4) –

[1] Celestino & López-Ruiz, 2016, p. 307.
[2] Celestino & López-Ruiz, 2016, pp. 137-148.
[3] Celestino & López-Ruiz, 2016, p. 307.

López-Ruiz also deals with the topic of describing and defining the Phoenicians themselves. She aptly shows that they hold an ambiguous place in modern studies, "lost among disciplines" such as Classics and classical archaeology, Near Eastern archaeology, Mediterranean studies and colonization studies (pp. 4-9), as well as in ancient accounts (e.g., although the Phoenicians play a significant role in Herodotus' "Histories", they do not receive an ethnography and a history of their own, like other Eastern peoples). However, she finds no proper ground for denying the existence of a Phoenician ethnic identity, similar to that of the Greeks, as maintained in the past few decades by several notable scholars, and most recently by Josephine Quinn[4] (pp. 15-19).

This polemic discussion allows López-Ruiz to delve into another issue where double standards were used by modern scholars who dealt with the Greek and Phoenician agency in the Iron Age Mediterranean: the colonizing movement. In Chapter I, "Phoenicians Overseas" (pp. 23-43), she deconstructs the ideological reasons and the academic mechanisms that artificially transformed Phoenician colonization into a contrasting category to the Greek one, by consolidating the stereotypes of the exclusive commercial and naval dimension of the Phoenician enterprises and the limited cultural influence that the Phoenicians exerted over the indigenous communities encountered on Mediterranean shores. The author pleads for admitting the existence of stronger Phoenician settlement on an "axis running from Phoenicia to Iberia", with most of the evidence coming from the latter region, deftly arguing "that Greeks and Phoenicians constituted comparable networks of merchants, migrants, and colonists" (p. 32).

In addition, in Chapter II, "From Classical to Mediterranean Models" (pp. 44-62), López-Ruiz denounces the additional double standards set up when assessing the agency and presence of the Greeks and Phoenicians in places such as Al Mina, Lefkandi, Pithekoussai, Eleutherna, Corinth and Perachora. She polemicizes vigorously against classical views promoting Greek exceptionalism as the key driving force behind the creation of a Mediterranean *koinē*, such as those of John Boardman and Robin Lane Fox[5]. A mild polemic is carried out against post-colonial network-based Mediterranean perspectives, too, advocated by Peregrine Horden, Nicholas Purcell[6] and their followers, which overwhelmingly emphasize connections and transfers but, generally,

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[4] Quinn, 2018.
[5] Boardman, 1999; Lane Fox, 2008.
[6] Horden & Purcell, 2000.

underestimate agency – and Phoenician agency, in particular.

Chapter III, "The Orientalizing Kit" (pp. 63-82), contains a sophisticated discussion on the value of the concept of 'Orientalization', whose history is briefly sketched, from its first appearance in the 19th century to the remarkable contributions of Walter Burkert, Sarah Morris and Martin L. West[7] in the 1990s and the more recent art historical works of Thomas Brisart, Ann Gunter and Martin Feldman[8]. López-Ruiz states that the term is valuable if separated from modern notions of Orientalism and used to describe the process whereby many local Mediterranean groups – not only the Greeks – selectively adopted Levantine-inflected cultural traits mainly by contact with the Phoenicians. A recurring idea throughout the book asserts that the outcomes of the process are determined by the different choices made by indigenous groups from the "Orientalizing kit" promoted by the Phoenicians. Although "Phoenicianization" is a valid option for describing the process, given the conspicuous role played by the Phoenicians, "Orientalization" is still preferred for its allusiveness.

The particular cases examined in the six chapters of the second part of the book – Iberia, North Africa, Sardinia, Sicily, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and partially even the Levant itself – are typically structured in short geographical and historical descriptions of these Mediterranean regions, considerations on the nature and the extent of the Phoenician presence in the respective areas and reviews of the elements adopted by each culture from the Orientalizing kit.

Chapter IV, "The Far West", focuses on the complex interactions between southern Iberian groups – particularly the Tartessians – and the Phoenicians who intensively colonized this geographical region (pp. 93-116). According to López-Ruiz, the quality and quantity of archaeological evidence, freed from Hellenocentric bias because of the quasi-absence of Greek colonies, renders Tartessos a privileged case for rightly assessing the importance of the Phoenicians in the process of Orientalization. The Tartessians were eager recipients of most elements of the Phoenician "Orientalizing kit", from pottery making, metalworking, and ivory carving, to funerary and religious practices, monumental sculpture and alphabetic writing. They stand out in marked contrast with the North African tribes that, oddly, rejected their integration into the pan-Mediterranean networks and were consequently only touched by "Orientalization" late into the second half of the first millennium BC (pp. 116-120).

Among the central Mediterranean regions in focus in Chapter V,

[7] Burkert, 1992; Morris, 1992; West, 1997.
[8] Brisart, 2011; Gunter, 2009; Feldman, 2014.

Iron Age Sardinia (with a significant and exclusive Phoenician presence on its western and southern shores, both in colonies and *enoikismoi*) developed a hybrid culture that was similar in many ways to that of Tartessos, but with notable exceptions in ivory carving or alphabetic appropriation (pp. 121-131). A much more complicated situation developed in Sicily, where an authentic middle ground for bipartite and tripartite interactions between the locals, the Phoenician and the Greek colonists that ultimately resulted in Orientalization, particularly in the field of religion and religious architecture, was only established in the 6th century BC (pp. 131-141). Special consideration is afforded to Etruria (pp. 142-171), where strong Orientalization in art, industry and religion is deemed to have taken place through the mediation of Phoenician individuals and small groups established in Etruscan communities. Thus, the established view that the Greeks played a more significant role is contradicted.

The chapters on the Phoenician influence exerted over the Greeks – Chapters VI, "The Aegean" (pp. 173-225) and VII, "Intangible legacies" (pp. 226-248) – are valuable both for their succinct and accurate description of the current state of the art in the fields of material culture and of intangible items such as the alphabet and mythology, and for their clever and courageous suggestions, like those on the existence of a significant and direct Phoenician influence found in formerly unexpected areas, such as in monumental religious buildings and monumental sculpture (*kouroi*), where an Egyptian origin had been advanced before. A wholly deserved special attention is paid to the decorative motif and the mythological character of the sphinx – created in Egypt, reinterpreted in the Levant and later transmitted across the whole Mediterranean, and in Greece in particular – as it epitomizes the operational model of Phoenician-mediated Orientalization (p. 218-225).

In the chapter dedicated to Cyprus (Chapter VII, pp. 249-280), the author partially adheres to the autochthonist perspective on the Iron Age Cypriot culture. She rejects, however, the preeminence of the Greek element in the local melting pot until late in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, instead emphasizing the local entanglements with the Phoenician culture, which deeply rooted in the southeastern area of the island, mainly through the Tyrian colony of Kition. A very compelling case for the Phoenician impulse is made through reference to the appearance of the monumental Cypriot limestone statues, which until recently have been considered a result of Egyptian influence (pp. 272-279).

The underlying idea of the final chapter (IX, "The Levant", pp. 281-313) is that the role played by the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean reflects the important and singular role they played in the broader Levant

as well. As proud heirs of the Late Bronze Age Canaanite cultural capital in a region dotted by new Aramaic and Israelite states, prosperous and having been freed from the grip of external empires for several centuries, the Phoenicians emerged as the bearers of the most prestigious culture in the Levant and south-eastern Anatolia. They were thus enabled to negotiate a privileged status for themselves with the Assyrian Empire, and instill the desire to emulate their prosperity and cultural achievements in the Mediterranean proto-urban elites. The author ingeniously employs a variety of pieces of evidence to reinforce her point, from the spread of alphabetic writing to the use of Phoenician as a *lingua franca* in the Iron Age Levant; from the Biblical information on the relations between Tyre and the Israelites to the ubiquity of the volute ('pre-Aeolic') capitals, considered a typical Phoenician architectural achievement.

This volume will assuredly prompt both laudatory and contrarian responses. The scope of its investigation is so broad, and there are so many contested topics discussed throughout the book, that it is virtually impossible to avoid negative comments on specific details, as already admitted by the author herself (p. 315). Attributing some artefacts to Phoenician workshops, maintaining that some objects display a certain degree of Phoenician influence or advocating the Phoenician presence at certain sites may easily come under academic fire. It will, of course, be grossly unfair to judge the volume based on such disputed issues, or on minor inaccuracies (e.g., Amasis II did not move Greek mercenaries to Naukratis in the mid-6th century BC, as stated at p. 35, but to Memphis – cf. Hdt. 2.154.3, 178.1; the Carthaginians did not almost bring the Roman *Empire* to its knees, as maintained at p. 315, but the Roman *Republic*) and typographical errors (e.g., "*oinichoe*" p. 154).

For a synthesis of this kind, it is more just and productive to assess whether its main underlying ideas are more convincing after reading it, and whether they warrant further investigation. On both accounts, my assessment is positive. I agree with the view that the creation of an interconnected Mediterranean in the 8th and 7th centuries BC is indissolubly tied to the gradual Orientalization of many local groups, from Cyprus to Tartessos. I also concur that the Phoenicians were the main driving agents of this phenomenon, at least before the Greeks themselves built complementary solid networks. Moreover, it is tempting to envisage the Greeks as the finest of learners among the local groups that accepted Orientalization – a consequence of several concurring factors among which their geographical proximity to the Near East played no minor part – and, subsequently, as agents of Orientalization themselves. The advice to "Beware the Greek" should be followed: it is undeniable that our

massive gaps in the available evidence on the Phoenicians, coupled with the "unfair competition" on the part of the Greeks and Romans, obscured the essential role played by the former in the creation of a connected and partly Orientalized Mediterranean. However, I would add the *caveat* that certain other agents, such as the Neo-Hittite states in northern Syria and southeastern Anatolia whose existence was brutally brought to an end by the Assyrians before their own memory could have received a place in Greek traditions, are in an even more disadvantageous historiographical position than the Phoenicians. In truth, it is possible they could also account for part of the Orientalizing influence exerted upon the Greeks. Moreover, the Anatolian connection, through Phrygia and Lydia – themselves powerful Oriental kingdoms that, at times, emulated the Assyrian Empire and developed close contacts with the Greeks – should likewise not be ignored.

In the end, this synthesis deserves a positive assessment not only due to its fruitful historical and historiographical ideas, but also because it is both an implicit and explicit argument for a broader methodological and theoretical approach, as throughout its pages as well as in its Epilogue (pp. 315-316) it consistently promotes "building bridges between scholarship on the Levant, Classical studies, and the Western Mediterranean" and "the diachronic study of interactions [...] in the Mediterranean".

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