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Cyprus and the



Phoenicians

by Patricia Maynor Bikai

The very strong relationship between Cyprus and Ugarit was based on the trade of copper.

With a little prompting, a fisherman in Tyre or Sidon will give instructions on how to reach Cyprus in a small boat: "You go north as far as Tripoli, then turn west. Soon you will be able to see both the mountain of Lebanon and the Troodos. Keep going, and in the morning you are in Larnaca." This recital has the ring of antiquity. Surely it is very ancient, for no later than 1650 B.C.E. there were organized trade contacts between the Canaanite city-states and the ports of Cyprus. The basis of the trade was copper. The very strong relationship between Cyprus and Ugarit, the major Canaanite port of the Late Bronze Age, was undoubtedly based on that trade.

After the upheavals that began the Iron Age and destroyed Ugarit, the descendants of the Bronze Age inhabitants of Canaan (the Phoenicians of the Greeks) retained political

This chalice-shaped vessel was probably a stand for an ostrich egg, which for the Cypriots was imbued with strong religious symbolism. The stand dates to the eighth century B.C.E. Photograph courtesy Vassos Karageorghis and the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus.

power over only a narrow coastal strip between the sea and the Lebanon range. Soon, however, their influence extended across the Mediterranean. For many years it was thought that this expansion did not begin until about 800 B.C.E. because very little early Phoenician material had been found overseas. A few years ago, tomb excavations at Palaepaphos-*Skales*, near modern Paphos, yielded quantities of eleventh-century-B.C.E. Phoenician pottery—evidence of more than just rare visits (Bikai 1983). It is significant that *Skales* is not on the side of Cyprus facing the mainland but at the western end of the island. Phoenician ships calling there were probably already using Cyprus as a staging base on a route leading farther west.

Phoenician Activity on Cyprus

The finds at Palaepaphos-*Skales* serve as a warning that all the evidence isn't in yet on the activities of the Phoenicians in Cyprus or elsewhere in the Mediterranean. However, it now seems likely that at the beginning of the Iron Age entrepreneurs from the major Phoenician ports—Arwad, Byblos, Sidon and Tyre—moved into markets that had been opened by the fall of Ugarit. No later than the tenth century, trade between Phoenicia and Amathus, near modern Limassol, was flourishing. Again, the finds at Palaepaphos-*Skales* consisted mainly of ceramics in tombs, but their presence in many different tombs suggests a trading station.

Most of the ceramics found in the tombs at Palaepaphos-*Skales* and at Amathus are of three main types—storage jars, jugs, and pilgrim flasks. All of these vessels can be closed, so they probably contained

oils, spices, or wines that were important in Cypriot funerary rites, important enough to be purchased from foreign suppliers. One tomb at Amathus yielded a unique vessel that may have been a stand for an ostrich egg. In funerary rites ostrich eggs undoubtedly carried the same symbolism—rebirth—as the modern Easter egg. There is evidence from around the Mediterranean that the Phoenicians not only used these eggs in their own rituals but that they also had an economic interest in the trade in decorated eggs.

Ostrich eggs may seem an exotic commodity to be trading, but the



Two examples of ivory plaquettes dating to the seventh century B.C.E. **Opposite:** This sphinx, with blue paste cloisonné decoration, was found in the throne excavated at Tomb 79 in Salamis. **Above:** This piece shows floral decorations and was also found in Salamis. Finds such as these represent some of the best examples of Phoenician art found on Cyprus.



Phoenicians had to be creative when it came to exchange goods. Except for timber, the Lebanese coast had relatively few natural resources; Cyprus, on the other hand, had copper, but it, too, was heavily forested. Phoenician merchants wanting copper had to have something else to give in trade, so they manufactured finished goods—jewelry, carved ivory, cloth dyed with Tyrian purple, bronze table vessels, and bottled oils. They probably also supplied services, particularly as architects, a role we know they played from the contract King Solomon gave them to build the temple at Jerusalem. Today the

Lebanese serve a similar role in the Middle East; they supply luxury goods as well as technical skills in insurance, banking, engineering, and architecture.

By the ninth century B.C.E. the mainland traders had established just such a relationship with Salamis, for the royal tombs there contained Phoenician luxury imports dating to the eighth century and beyond. David W. Rupp (1987, 1988) has proposed that the formation of Cypriot states on the oriental kingship model resulted from economic pressures from the Phoenicians for large quantities of materials. He also pro-

During the Iron Age, the role of the Phoenicians in Cyprus shifted from trade to outright colonization.

posed that the ostentatious grave goods found in the Salamis tombs should be seen as “conscious political statements” by the first Cypriot kings (1987: 156). Not everyone agrees with this interpretation. Anthony Snodgrass (1988: 10–11) has written that the tombs may be the statements of long-established dynasts rather than “a bid for legitimacy by *arriviste* monarchs.” Whatever their political significance, these grave goods are some of our finest examples of Phoenician art, including exquisite ivory carvings (Karageorghis 1973).

From Trade to Colonization

The Phoenician role in Cyprus may have been confined initially to regular stops by ships from Tyre and other mainland cities. Ship captains probably dealt directly with Cypriot merchants or, in time, with Phoenician middlemen living in Cypriot ports. At some point in the Iron Age, however, the strategy shifted from trade to outright colonization. We may never know what the immediate cause was, but we can speculate that several factors came into play.

The first may have been that the excellent economic condition of the Phoenician city-states combined with centuries of peace led to overpopulation, a potential catastrophe

A two-handled bronze bowl from Amathus, also dating to the eighth century B.C.E.



for a people with so little land. Island Tyre during this period covered no more than about 40 acres, yet had to feed a growing population. There were two possibilities: acquire a larger agricultural base on the mainland or expand into other markets in order to acquire capital to buy food—the economic strategy of modern Hong Kong. Phoenician city-states seem to have considered land acquisition as more trouble than it was worth (Frankenstein 1979: 268). Thus in 1 Kings 9:10–14, Hiram rejects Solomon's offer of 20 towns in Galilee in favor of payment with 120 talents of gold, presumably because gold doesn't need to be governed. Earlier he had accepted payment in the form of wheat and oil (1 Kings 5:8–11; see 2 Chronicles 2:10); in a later period Tyre would make similar arrangements with Herod (Acts 12:20).

Another possible impetus for colonization was that the Assyrians to the east were beginning to menace

the Phoenicians with demands for tribute. The Phoenicians seldom fought invaders, preferring instead to pay tribute and go on about their business. The rare instances when this wasn't so were, of course, spectacular. Diodorus of Sicily reported that 40,000 Sidonians in effect committed mass suicide in 351 B.C.E. by burning their city to resist an attack by the Persian king Artaxerxes III (*Library of History*, 16.45.3–6; see Welles 1963). Tyre's brave stand against Alexander the Great in the summer of 332 B.C.E. resulted in 8,000 deaths according to Arrian (*Anabasis Alexandri* 2.24.4; see Robson 1967) and the transformation of Tyre from an island into a peninsula. The more common response was to pay the tribute then cover the loss by expanding trade with the tribute-takers. Ensuring access to new sources of raw materials to sell to the Assyrians may have led to colonization (Frankenstein 1979).

Finally, although we now talk about Phoenicia as we might refer to Assyria or the Roman Empire, there never was such a single entity on the coast. Each city-state had its own king and was jealously independent. In a later period, for example, ships from Arwad, Byblos, and Sidon participated in Alexander's siege of Tyre.

Competition among the city-states may have led to a desire to protect overseas markets from each other with permanent representatives. The evidence to date on this is very sparse, but it may be that while Tyre claimed the eastern part of the Cypriot market, merchants from Sidon, Byblos, and Arwad were more active in other areas. For example, an inscription dating to the fourth century B.C.E. (Gjerstad 1979: 243) associates the gods of Byblos with a temple in Lapithos, a site in the north; the same inscription mentions a dedication to Osiris, who is also associated with Byblos. Some finds at Amathus, such as a large anthropoid sarcophagus (Karageorghis 1988: 165), have closer parallels at Sidon and Arwad than elsewhere. Additionally, Phoenician pottery from sites such as Amathus and Ayia Irini is not as specifically Tyrian as that found at Kition and Salamis. This (now very slight) evidence may hint at a competition among these Iron Age multinational corporations that led to colonization.

Tyre was probably the first of the coastal city-states to make this move, as there is a tradition passed down through Menander of Ephesus and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, 8.146, see Thackeray and Marcus 1950; and *Against Apion*. 1.119, see Thackeray 1961) that Hiram I of Tyre had to put down a rebellion of the Itykaians at the beginning of his

Most scholars now identify Itykaia with Kition in Larnaca rather than Utica in Tunisia.



reign, or around 969 B.C.E. Most scholars now identify Itykaia with Kition in Larnaca rather than Utica in Tunisia (see Katzenstein 1973: 84–86). If this is correct, a Tyrian colony at Kition may have been in existence as early as the eleventh century. Excavations by Marguerite Yon at the site called Kition-Bamboula in Larnaca have turned up materials that may date to the tenth century (Bikai 1987: numbers 70, 586–87). Ongoing excavations by the French will probably yield materials that will clarify the relationship between Tyre and Kition in this early period. The colony

seems to have prospered, as in the ninth century it expanded to encompass a nearby temple site at Kition-Kathari, which the local population had abandoned years before. Excavations by Vassos Karageorghis (1976) have shown that the Tyrians rebuilt the Bronze Age temple and used it for half a millennium.

The Phoenician Temple and Colony at Kition

The temple at Kition is the largest Phoenician temple ever found. Parts of the earlier structure were reused and probably influenced the archi-

tecture; nevertheless, it may illustrate some features of mainland temples built by Tyrians such as the temple of Solomon at Jerusalem and the temple of Melqart at Tyre. The temple at Kition (roughly 110 feet by 72 feet) measures 33.5 meters by 22 meters and thus is larger than the one at Jerusalem, which measured 27 meters by 9 meters (roughly 88 feet by 29 feet).

The Jerusalem temple was divided into three sections: the vestibule or *ulam*; the main room or *heykal*; and the holy-of-holies or *debir*. The temple at Kition (Karageorghis 1976: 96–100), has no real *ulam*, and the *heykal* consists of a large, pillared room with a roof on the north and south but open in the center. There is a holy-of-holies with three doors at the western end. This *debir* is 22 meters wide but only 2.5 meters deep (approximately 72 feet by 8 feet); its floor was about 1 meter higher than the floor of the *heykal*. At one time it may have contained three statues that were reached by steps. There was a raised floor also at Jerusalem, but the *debir* was 9 meters (about 29½ feet) square. Both temples had an altar for offerings in front of the *debir*.

Outside of the center entrance to the *debir* at Kition were two free-standing columns. According to Herodotus (The Histories 2.44; see Sélincourt 1954), the temple of Melqart at Tyre, which Hiram I built, had two columns, “one of pure gold, the other of emerald, shining with great brilliancy at night.” (It is interesting to note that the fishermen who travel today from Tyre to Larnaca continue a tradition that says the gold column from the temple of Melqart is in the sea; each insists his grandfather or some other relative

In the first part of their history, the colonists at Kition were not independent of Tyre.

A view from the southeast of the temple of Astarte at Kition. The altar and holy-of-holies, or debir, are at the far end.

actually saw it.) Perhaps the two columns were outside of the temple, as indicated in a relief from Nineveh (Harden 1962: plate 50). Further, H. Jacob Katzenstein (1973: 87) has suggested that the shining emerald column (probably glass or crystal with lights inside) functioned as a lighthouse; if so, it would have been useless unless it was situated outside.

The temple at Jerusalem had two bronze pillars named Boaz and Jachin. 1 Kings 7:15–22 does not indicate where they were located, but in a sixth-century prophecy about the restoration of the temple, Ezekiel 40:49 locates them on the outside. Most reconstructions of the Jerusalem temple incorporate that suggestion. Finally, several small models of shrines have two pillars on the outside (for example, Karageorghis 1976: figure 106).

The pillars at Kition are therefore a puzzle. The builders of the Kition temple knew the temple at Tyre, and one would expect them to have behaved in the imitative manner of emigrants, particularly in regard to religious architecture. Perhaps the Nineveh relief and the small models should be interpreted as portrayals of a *debir* and not of an entire temple. Further, perhaps both Ezekiel's description and Katzenstein's suggestion about a lighthouse should be disregarded in favor of the evidence from Kition that the sacred pillars were not outside the temple.

Sacrifices at Kition, as at Jerusalem, took place on a large altar outside of the eastern entrance. When the numerous gifts that wor-



shippers had brought to the site had accumulated, they were buried in large pits with the bones of the sacrificed animals. The buried offerings at Kition and those at the Phoenician shrine of Sarepta are quite similar—figurines, beads, and Egyptianizing amulets (Karageorghis 1976; Pritchard 1988).

Only small parts of the habitation and industrial areas around the Kition temple have been excavated, but metallurgy was likely the most important activity of the colony. The industrial quarter must have been busy with copper workers making jugs, bowls, tools, and armaments. Evidence of such activity elsewhere in Cyprus comes from a Phoenician inscription found in a fifth-century tomb near Alassa, a copper-producing region near Limassol. It refers to a metal worker called Melekram, a name related

to Melqart, the city-god of Tyre. Melekram apparently was a Phoenician working near the source of his raw materials (Gjerstad 1979: 243–44). Many decorated metal bowls and plates produced by Phoenician craftsmen working in Cyprus and sold locally as well as overseas have been preserved. These bowls display the mixture of Egyptian and Assyrian motifs that is the hallmark of Phoenician art (Markoe 1985).

In the first part of their history, the colonists at Kition were not independent of Tyre, as we have learned from an inscription that refers to “the governor of Qarthadast, servant of Hiram.” Qarthadast, the “new city,” is usually identified as Kition, and the Hiram involved is Hiram II of Tyre who reigned from around 739 to 730 B.C.E. In contrast, an inscription from the fourth century mentions a “minister or ambassador

of Tyre whose name was Eshmoundon" (Karageorghis 1976: 115). So until late in the eighth century, Tyre controlled Kition directly; soon thereafter the Assyrians became more directly involved, as inscriptions in Assyrian carved on a stela of Sargon II found in Larnaca have shown. Tyre gradually lost direct control of this colony, and from the seventh through most of the fourth century B.C.E. Kition was an independent Phoenician kingdom.

This does not mean that Cypriot relations with the mainland declined. They continued, as demonstrated by pottery found in both Phoenicia and Cyprus that is so similar the term *Cypro-Phoenician* is often used to describe it. The pottery, in fact, shows that cultural forces were moving in both directions.

Phoenician Influence on Cyprus

Lacking large-scale excavations in Lebanon, we are as yet uncertain what influence Cyprus had on the mainland, but we know that Phoenician influence on Cyprus extended to areas other than pottery. Shrines and tombs across Cyprus reflect Phoenician influence in architecture, the goods found in them, and, most important, the deities to whom the shrines were dedicated (Karageorghis 1988: 162–63; Gjerstad 1979: 241–48). At Meniko, for example, a shrine was dedicated to Baal Hammon, a god particularly associated with Carthage. At Komissariato in Limassol a sanctuary was used by a fertility cult; in it were found votive figurines similar to those from the western Phoenician colonies. These two examples indicate that, during this era, Cyprus interacted not only with the mainland ports but also with their west-

ern colonies. Greek influence on Cyprus was also on the rise. Snodgrass has pointed out that, contrary to the portraits of conflict often painted by modern scholarship, "there are plentiful signs of friendly relations between Greek and Phoenician" peoples (Snodgrass 1988: 19–20).

Unlike the earlier mainland kings, the later kings of Kition acquired land; by the fourth century the area of the former colony grew to include Idalion and Tamassos. During the Persian period, other Phoenician dynasties ruled at Lapithos, Marion, and briefly at Salamis, but Phoenician political control came to an end soon after Alexander the Great crushed the Persian empire in the second half of the fourth century B.C.E. The strong relationship between Cyprus and the mainland continued, however, and continues to this day. The Larnaca airport is often Lebanon's main link to the outside, but the only way to get there from Lebanon is by boat. The fishermen of Tyre and Sidon have made many trips to Larnaca in recent years.

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