



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Narrowing the scope: A critical analysis of the label 'Phoenician'
Koeman, Myrthe

Citation

Koeman, M. (2024). *Narrowing the scope: A critical analysis of the label 'Phoenician'*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3800054>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Narrowing the scope: A critical analysis of the label 'Phoenician'



By Myrthe Koeman

Photograph: Myrthe Koeman

Narrowing the scope: A critical analysis of the label 'Phoenician'

Myrthe Koeman

S3316807

Thesis BA3 1083VBTHEY

Dr. M.E.J.J. van Aerde

University of Leiden, Faculty of Archaeology

Alkmaar 14/06/2024

Final version

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction	3
2. The current state of research	5
2.1 The term 'Phoenician'	5
2.2 The focus of past research compared to the new	6
2.3 Sources	7
3. Historical context	9
4. Case studies	13
4.1 Silver gilded bowl	13
4.1.1 An oversight	13
4.1.2 The provenance of the materials	13
4.1.3 Iconography	14
4.1.4 Usage	17
4.2 Glass alabastron	19
4.2.1 The production	19
4.2.2 The shape	20
4.2.3 The label 'Phoenician'	22
5. Discussion	23
5.1 Results	23
5.2 Limitations	24
5.3 The next step	24
6. Conclusion	25
6.1 The research questions	25
6.2 Further research	26
Abstract	28
Reference List	29
Bibliography	29
Figures	32

1. Introduction

For many years the Phoenicians have been seen as an elusive people due to how little is known about them. Yet at the same time, the efforts to study them have not yielded much information, in part because scholars focused on studying the texts of other cultures which tended to be very biased. This bias stemmed from the fact that many of the writers like the Greeks and Romans considered the Phoenicians enemies and competitors. On top of that, the Phoenicians were never considered to be as interesting as the Greeks and Romans, which were studied endlessly by academics. In the end, the Phoenicians ended up being shoved in a corner to be forgotten about for years until interest sparked up once more. The focus shifted away from the texts, however, one thing stayed consistent; the debates regarding the label 'Phoenician'. This label is meant to encompass all items which belonged to the Phoenicians, however, because there is still a debate regarding who the Phoenicians are this label is also under discussion. The details of this field and the current debates are discussed further in the current state of research chapter of this bachelor thesis.

This debate about the label 'Phoenician' brings us directly to the heart of the issue. There is no consistent description of what 'Phoenician' means or which people it covers. As such the label and its usage need to be examined to look at what purpose it has in academic research and whether the current usage is accurate or not. It is important to be aware of the implications of a label when it is used in academic texts, because of this labels such as the label 'Phoenician' should be examined when they are at the heart of a current debate. In archaeology, terms are often replaced by more accurate ones in order to minimise bias and to describe the subject more accurately. Examining the terms which are used is a vital first step in this process because it reveals whether a term should be replaced and what the issues are with the term currently. This will help us later on if a replacement term is needed to come up with a new term which does not have these issues. In this research, I aim to study objects which are labelled as Phoenician and how this label informs us about the Phoenicians.

To structure the research, I will be focusing on the following question: How does the label 'Phoenician' help us understand the Phoenicians?

In order to answer this question, the following sub questions will be examined to come to a conclusion at the end of the bachelor thesis.

- How is the term 'Phoenician' used?
- In what sense is the term accurate or inaccurate?
- How do Phoenician objects inform us about the Phoenicians?

These questions will be answered based on a literature review combined with two case studies which will be used as examples. The literature review will focus on how the Phoenicians have been studied over time and how the definition changed for different publications. The case studies will be more grounded examples of how the term 'Phoenician' is used to describe objects in museum catalogues. Each case study will focus on an object made from a different material. The two case studies were chosen for their materials in order to examine the origin of the materials as well as the techniques used to make them. The focus will be on specific objects while also discussing the type of object in a broader sense to get a specific answer to the research questions while also relating it to items of the same type. The case studies will examine how the objects were made from an archaeological perspective and which aspects relate to the Phoenicians. This will shed light on why the label 'Phoenician' was used for the items. The discussion

chapter will then place the conclusions in the academic context and compare how the label 'Phoenician' was used in both case studies.

Since this is a bachelor thesis there are some limitations that should be discussed. First and foremost, the length of the thesis. The length limitation of this thesis limits how much depth can be added to the research and the number of case studies which can be discussed. The same can be said due to the limited academical interest in the Phoenicians which has resulted in a scarcity of sources on the subject. On top of that, not all sources are accessible for a student doing this research so it is possible that relevant texts and research could not be examined and added to the current state of research chapter and the discussion. As for the choice of case studies, it has to be acknowledged that museums label many items as 'probably Phoenician' rather than 'Phoenician' as they are often uncertain about whether they are truly Phoenician. As such one of the two case studies, the glass alabastron has been labelled as 'probably Phoenician' yet it will still be discussed with the premise that it has a relation with the Phoenicians. The last limitation that would be noted is the time limit that is imposed on a bachelor thesis. Due to the hard deadline, the amount of time that could be invested in this thesis is also limited.

This introduction is followed by a chapter which focuses on the past research and how it has led to the current state of research to show the current debates and how they are relevant to the subject. Most notably examining the definition of Phoenician which will be used in this thesis. That chapter is followed by one detailing the history of Phoenicia for the historical context in which the items of the case studies are situated. The case studies are discussed in the chapter right after the historical context. Finally, in the discussion, everything is placed in the wider context and in the conclusion all the conclusions of the thesis are summarised and explained.

2. The current state of research

2.1 The term 'Phoenician'

One cannot discuss the Phoenicians without defining this group and discussing the many controversies regarding the 'Phoenician' label. For a long time, there has been academic debate as to what 'Phoenician' means as it is a label originating from Greek sources (Quinn, 2017, p. xviii). The Greeks themselves were not very familiar with the area where the Phoenicians lived so to them the term 'Phoenician' referred to a strip of the Levantine coast that they threw together under this label. The Canaan and Near Eastern sources attribute a larger area to the Phoenicians stretching inland to the river Jordan. However, for both, they used this label based on a geographical location rather than to describe one specific culture. Especially the Greeks were unfamiliar with the political divides and how there were multiple kingdoms in this area rather than only one (Sader, 2019, pp. 2, 3).

Perhaps because of this the meaning of the word 'Phoenician' is also still under debate. There is a consensus that Phoenicia is derived from the Greek term *phoinix* which comes from the root *phoinos* and means red. The debate is rather what this term refers to. Multiple theories have been proposed, such as the red actually referring to the purple colour, referring to the red-winged bird, to a palm tree or to a sort of cithara. There was also a suggestion that it could mean red-faced people as this was a term often used by the Greeks to refer to people from the Levant. The Metropolitan Museum of Art suggests that the word Phoenician is derived from the Greek word *phoinix* instead, pointing to a purple-red colour. They theorise that it might be inspired by the purple dye the Phoenicians were known for (Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, n.d.). There are also a few academics who think that the origin of the word might be Egyptian instead. They say that the term 'Phoenician' can come from the Egyptian term for woodcutters. However, there are not many who defend this theory as it mainly relies on phonetic similarity to make its case. However, there is no definite conclusion to this debate and no consensus has been reached about what this Greek label is based on (Sader, 2019, pp. 1, 2).

Even the ethnogenesis of the Phoenicians remains an open debate. There is no proof that all the people who were labelled as 'Phoenicians' by the Greeks had the same culture and identified as a group. Some scholars argue that the label should include the Bronze Age coastal peoples from the third and second millennia, however, even regarding this, there has not been reached a consensus (Killebrew, 2019, pp. 38, 40, 42). Another suggestion entails that the term should refer to a new political economic model which emerged during the late second millennium when state-controlled international trade collapsed. Which is a completely different starting point (Killebrew, 2019, p. 42). Because of these debates, it is also still unclear from which date or period onwards we can speak of Phoenician material culture as there is no defined start for this 'Phoenician' label (Lehmann, 2021, p. 294). Jigoulov (2022, p. 23) agrees with that notion writing that because Phoenicia hardly ever existed it would be impossible to figure out its origins. One popular take on this situation is quite different from the others. It suggests that we have to question the term 'Phoenician' rather than trying to struggle to define a label which was placed on the Phoenicians by outsiders who were not familiar with their region and culture. After all, there is no proof that the Phoenicians identified as one ethnic or cultural group and neither that they referred to themselves as Phoenicians (Killebrew, 2019, p. 42). Neither did they use any generic names for the region in which

they lived. On top of that, they also were never politically united as one entity or nation (Sader, 2019, pp. 2, 3). They did not act in collective terms above city level at all (Quinn, 2017, p. xviii). Instead, they identified themselves based on which city or community they were from such as 'Byblians,' 'Sidonians,' or 'Tyrians'. Unfortunately, this has not been transferred to the way scholars refer to the Phoenicians. There are many finds and objects attributed to the Phoenicians, however these lumped together with little to no regard for these people. Their identities and material culture are all thrown together under the label of 'Phoenician' instead of attributing them to the specific culture or community which they were from. Because of this, we get fairly little insight into how these societies differed and how they developed (Lehman, 2021, p. 273).

Due to the nature of the Phoenicians having cultural and ethnic differences, it is interesting to compare them with 'the Greeks' (Lehman, 2021, p. 273). With the Greeks, we are aware that there are clear cultural differences and as such we refer to their material culture often by city or community such as Euboean or Corinthian. The Phoenicians do not get this treatment. Instead the term 'Phoenician' is loosely applied for any items from that region (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 184). As such Phoenician objects are often decontextualised and studied like art instead of taking the context into consideration when describing and labelling the objects (Hayne, 2019, p. 505).

The concept that the Phoenicians formed one group can also be attributed to nationalist ideologies which had the intent to create a nation even though it did not exist. Due to this Quinn (2017, p. xviii) suggests that modern nationalism invented this ancient nation, however, if this were the case I see this as a continuation of the Greek original concept of what 'Phoenicia' was as both lump all the Phoenician cities together as one group or nation.

2.2 The focus of past research compared to the new

Historically speaking the Phoenicians have always been understudied and underappreciated by classical scholars. Their focus was always turned towards the Greeks and Romans instead (Quinn, 2017, p. xv). This was a direct consequence of the Hellenistic perspective scholars used to have around the twentieth century (Hayne, 2019, p. 505). At the same time, classical scholars studied the past often by focusing on literature. The Phoenicians were deemed irrelevant to them as they mostly studied Greek and Latin texts (Quinn, 2017, p. xv). These historians excluded communities without written records as they saw writing as a sign of 'civilized' peoples (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 79). Since the Phoenicians literature did not survive the test of time that meant that there was nothing for these scholars to study (Quinn, 2017, p. xv), thus resulting in them dismissing the Phoenicians as uncivilised.

Because of all this, the scholars focused on a Greek and Roman perspective, not bothering to look further than the Greek label for the Phoenicians. As a result of this Phoenician studies started with identifying items as 'Phoenician' without looking for the context to truly understand the full story of those objects (Hayne, 2019, p. 505). In 1977 there was a renewed interest in the Phoenicians since it had been established that the Phoenicians had been present on the coast of Andalucia. This sparked renewed interest with ancient historians leading to more studies on the Phoenicians (Vella, 2019, p. 24)

Recently the view on the Phoenicians has been broadened. Instead of restricting themselves to Greek perspectives scholars now look at connectivity and the fluidity throughout the Mediterranean, in which the Phoenicians played an important role as they were known for their trading (Elayi, 2018, p. 122) (Hayne, 2019, p. 505). They are moving away from concepts like 'Hellenization' which focuses on the imposition of

Greek influences and were criticised more and more. These critics argue that scholars should focus on networks, and cultural and economic exchange instead (Jigoulov, 2022, p 42). Now they study the world more as a complex web of interactions. As a result of this, the role of the Phoenicians had to be reassessed, now leading to scholars studying their importance in Italy. However, since this approach is fairly new there have not been any results of this new approach yet (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 184) (Hayne, 2019, p. 506). With the focus on connectivity in these networks of interaction (Hayne, 2019, p. 505), the focus is however turned away from the Phoenicians themselves. In this sense, they are more regarded as a cog in the machine or a driving force and as a result of this the gaze seems to turn away from the Phoenicians themselves and their identity.

The renewed interest has given us more insight into the Phoenicians by giving us a new perspective however. This progress lies in the role of the Phoenicians in their homeland and between the Phoenicians themselves (Winter, 2010, p. 602).

2.3 Sources

Even still in the current papers the Phoenicians are considered to be elusive, hard to understand and define. This is in great part due to which sources have been used to study them and their scarcity (Sader, 2019, p. 23). The literary works were most likely written on papyrus and parchment which were degraded over time until there was nothing left for us to find (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 80). Due to this absence, the writings of classical texts and the Hebrew bible were often used to gain an understanding of the Phoenicians (Quinn, 2017, p. xv) (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 57) sometimes combined with Assyrian and Egyptian archives. The narrative was heavily influenced by these texts even though reconstructing the truth from them proved to be incredibly difficult (Bunnens, 2019, p. 56). These writings from classical scholars have become part of scholarly tradition which makes it very difficult to deconstruct them in the present now we are attempting to create a narrative with fewer biases (Sader, 2019, p. 27).

Attributing objects to the Phoenicians was mostly decided based on the style of these objects since they were often found outside the Phoenician homeland (Winter 2010, pp. 609-610). Many of these objects came from collections and antiquity markets which resulted in a loss of context making it even harder to gather more information about the Phoenician identity and culture (Lehmann, 2021, p. 273).

Because of the lack of context and historical record, the focus on archaeology became more present in order to fill the gaps and obtain facts that were not distorted by the opinions of other cultures (Lehmann, 2021, p. 307) (Sader, 2019, p. 28). However, archaeological evidence from the Phoenician homeland remains scarce (Sader, 2019, p. 23). Due to this and the low numbers of excavations in Phoenician colonies scholars who attempt to study the Phoenicians have to work with data which is very fragmented (Johnston & Kaufman, p. 401).

Archaeologists have been looking for remains of the Phoenician cities, however many of them failed to identify Phoenician settlements. Maurice Chéhab and Maurice Dunand both attempted to find the Phoenician cities but failed to demonstrate solid stratigraphic sequences and because of this, their results were not published (Sader, 2019, p. 28). Röllig proposed an explanation as to why this might be the case. He reasons that the important settlements were constantly being rebuilt because they were located in such a favourable location. In the end, none of the Phoenician capital cities were found. One project focusing on a smaller settlement was a success however. The Sarepta project in Lebanon managed to locate a smaller settlement and excavate it. The hopes that this would encourage the Lebanese authorities to protect coastal sites in

Lebanon turned out to be in vain. Many of them got lost during and after the civil war due to the anarchic urbanisation in the country. Now only one portion of the coast remains unexplored, the part stretching from Byblos to Jiyeh (Sader, 2019, pp. 29-31).

To define the Phoenicians for this paper I will use the more modern definition based on the cultural and ethnic identities rather than the geographical location (Lehmann, 2021, p. 273). This is mainly because the territory of the Phoenician kingdoms fluctuated often depending on the political circumstances of the time (Sader, 2019, p. 5) and because of the remarkable cultural continuity that the Phoenicians displayed. I use the term Phoenicians while being very aware of the drawbacks and history of the term. However, due to the lack of more precise research, it is currently only realizable to study these cultures under their umbrella term. In order to clarify the differences between the Phoenician cities and their history together the historical context chapter will provide a brief oversight of the history of the Phoenician cities.

3. Historical context

Phoenicia, if we lump the later city-states all together, was only a small strip of land at the coast of the Levant. Spanning from southern Syria to northern Palestine (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 16). The area which is generally considered to be the Phoenician homeland is depicted in Figure 1.

The first artefacts from this area are splinters of flint which are from the Late Palaeolithic period dating to around 700,000 years ago. They were found at Borj Qinnarit near Sidon. At that time the early societies consisted primarily of hunter-gatherers who made use of caves, rock shelters, and open-air sites to stay (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 17), most commonly in the south of Beirut. During the Neolithic revolution (between 12,000 and 9000) and with the development of agriculture, the first sedentary villages pop up, one of them at the site of the later Phoenician city of Byblos around 5300 BCE. These societies around the coast also traded raw materials like obsidian from eastern Turkey laying down the foundations for further trade networks (Elayi, 2018, pp. 27-29).

This developed further in the Chalcolithic period, known for further structure like their communication routes which can be seen in Byblos, Beirut, Dakerman and other villages in the region (Elayi, 2018, pp. 30 & 85).

At the beginning of the Bronze Age Egypt Dakerman was abandoned and the inhabitants settled in Sidon, one kilometre to the north (Elayi, 2018, p. 85). During this period the influence of Egypt on the region grew stronger, especially visible in Byblos, the first Proto-Phoenician city to develop (Elayi, 2018, p. 32), as Egypt mainly kept trading relations with Byblos (Elayi, 2018, pp. 30 & 85) rather than the other cities such as Tyre and Sidon which also traded with Egypt but received no such interest (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 19). Egypt dominated the region both directly and indirectly, in the case of the Tyre and Sidon allowing the kings to govern mostly autonomously (Elayi, 2018, pp. 60 & 61). The Proto-Phoenician cities benefited from these trade networks gaining access to metals and obsidian while Egypt got the timber, wine, olive oil and resin they sought for their mummification (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 19) (Elayi, 2018, p. 34).

During 1200 BCE however the trade networks collapsed and the entire region was restructured, allowing the Phoenician city states to rise up (Killebrew, 2019, p. 39) (Elayi, 2018, p. 89). At this point, the Phoenician cities were divided into two groups, one affiliated with Egypt and the other with the Hittite Empire. As such the cultures and political institutions were very different (Elayi, 2018, pp. 84-85) and should never been heaped together.

This upheaval resulted in the Egyptian influence dwindling and even the fall of the Hittite Empire (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 24-25). At the time populations were on the move, most notably the 'Sea peoples' as they were described in Egyptian records (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 24) who fled mostly due to socio-political motivations (Elayi, 2018, p. 89). The city-states at the coast weathered these events well as seen by a relative lack of destruction and the remarkable cultural continuity (Killebrew, 2019, pp. 39, 43 & 48)



Figure 1 A map of Phoenicia. This map shows the location of the most important Phoenician cities. (Gore, R. (2004). [Map]. Democracyinlebanon. [http://www.democracyinlebanon.org/documents/cdl-documentaries/phoenicians\(natgeo\).htm](http://www.democracyinlebanon.org/documents/cdl-documentaries/phoenicians(natgeo).htm)).

(Jigoulov, 2022, p. 25) (Elayi, 2018, p. 95). Though Ugarit got destroyed many other cities like Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, Byblos, and Tripoli showed no signs of destruction (Elayi, 2028, pp. 89 & 91). Their resilience and innovation allowed them to expand and widen their influence on trade (Killebrew, 2019, p. 50) (Elayi, 2018, p. 95). The cities were once again economically, politically and culturally independent allowing them to rise in importance of the regional power structure (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 25).

While the Phoenician city-states were left to their own devices, they started to become like business centres in the trade networks (Brunnens, 2019, p. 60). The Phoenicians slowly took over the maritime trade routes and established harbours in practical locations in search of precious metals (Semmler, 2019, 77). The locations of these colonies are depicted in Figure 2. Not all of these Phoenician settlements were founded peacefully (Elayi, 2018, p. 100 & 122) and some have traces that go back until the Late Bronze Age (Semmler, 2019, p. 78). However, in many cases, the colonisation process had been started long before that. The first stage of the process is the appearance of Phoenician items in Mediterranean sites, followed by a strong cultural influence. Finally, the third stage was colonisation or the foundation of permanent settlements (Elayi, 2018, p. 123) as these are not synonymous. The start of this process has been attributed to Tyre (Semmler, 2019, 74). One of the cities founded by Tyre is Carthage, said to be founded in 775 BCE (Semmler, 2019, p. 78).

While the Phoenician city-states held this influence the influential powers tried to find a balance between influencing domination and a mutually beneficial relationship to benefit the economy. This was especially the case for the Assyrians as the Phoenician city-states paid them tribute in order to preserve their autonomy. This allowed Assyria to focus on their other enemies during the ninth and early eighth centuries BCE (Brunnens, 2019, p. 66). Despite these wars, the Phoenician city-states seemed to be unafraid of both Assyria and the other major power in the Near East, Egypt (Elayi, 2018, p. 109). However, from the mid-eighth century BCE onward the Assyrians wanted to tighten their control over the Phoenician region and subjugated the cities of the Syrian coast and northern Phoenicia (Brunnens, 2019, p. 67).

As the Phoenician cities were taken, they continued to pay tribute, the colonies of Tyre helping them to meet the Assyrian demands (Elayi, 2018, p. 140). However, the Assyrian rule was not completely oppressive. The king of Tyre could still trade using the



Figure 2 The Phoenician colonies. This map shows the colonies of Phoenician cities and the areas their settlements controlled. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. (n.d.). Phoenician settlements and trade routes [Map]. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/>).

ports even though the governor warned Sidon not to trade with the Philistines and the Egyptians (Brunnens, 2019, p. 68). The influence of Assyria began to dwindle in 627 BCE as a family feud around the throne left the empire vulnerable. Regions broke away one by one until the capital Nineveh was sacked by the forces of Babylonians and Medes in 612 BCE. This led to the fall of Assyria when Babylonia triumphed over the forces of both Assyria and Egypt in 605 BCE. This gave the Phoenician cities time to recover until the next empire turned its gaze to the city-states (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 29).

This next empire turned out to be Egypt as the king took advantage of the situation and managed to take Palestine in 609 BCE. The Phoenician cities were not bothered by this occupation as it was a lighter burden than the Assyrian occupation. Due to this, the relations with Egypt remained amiable (Elayi, 2018, pp. 185-185).

This period of relative independence and muted Egyptian influence came to an end with the Babylonians. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II set out to conquer the region, inspiring enough fear for the Phoenician cities to offer tribute to him as a sign of submitting to his rule (Elayi, 2018, pp. 190-191). The Babylonian period was relatively quiet for the Phoenician cities, they traded with Babylon and their artisans worked at the royal court. There was also no significant change in the material culture, meaning that they maintained their own culture during this time (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 29, 34). The Babylonian occupation was less of a burden than the Assyrian occupation, except for Tyre which refused to give up the island and suffered through two sieges losing their supremacy. Sidon, Byblos and Arwad suffered little from the Babylonian occupation. Sidon even took advantage of Tyre's weakening influence to take the lead. Byblos managed to remain neutral, balancing their relations with Egypt and Babylon to avoid offending either of them (Elayi, 2018, p. 216).

Babylon was eventually captured by the Persian Empire around 539 BCE. For the Phoenician cities, this was a smooth transition as they submitted to the Persian empire (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 36) (Elayi, 2018, p. 255). In the following years, the Phoenician cities assisted with Persian warfare, making up the brunt of the Persian fleet. This granted Sidon in particular more influence due to their support. However, the Phoenicians refused to wage war against Carthage, claiming that they could not act against 'their children' which the Persians respected (Elayi, 2018, p. 225) (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 36). Yet again the cities were left to be mostly autonomous while still being under the control of the Persians and producing their fleet (Elayi, 2018, p. 228). Since the control was not as intense the Phoenician cities saw new commercial opportunities in Greece and the West, leading to them orienting themselves more towards Greece for trade (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 36). The Phoenician forces shared the victories and losses with the Persians, however after the attack by the Athenians in 459 BCE and multiple Persian defeats the production of ships could not keep up with the demand for new ones (Elayi, 2018, pp. 240-241). This situation also resulted in economic difficulties for the Sidon which motivated them to rise up against the Persians in a revolt along with all the other Phoenician and Cypriot cities. The Persian king set out to squash this revolt immediately, crushing Sidon and successfully scaring the Phoenician cities into submission (Elayi, 2018, p. 271-272).

The next shift in power happened when Alexander set out to conquer the Phoenician cities (Elayi, 2018, p. 278). This is generally considered to be the end of the Phoenician history and the start of a Hellenistic period in the area. In general, the shared history of the Phoenician cities can be summarised as managed autonomy as Jigoulov (2022, p. 39) describes it quite accurately. Even when the Phoenician cities were under the influence of other empires, they managed to maintain their own culture

and a degree of autonomy. Because of this degree of consistency in their material culture, we can study their items as Phoenician rather than Assyrian or Egyptian. In the next chapter, the influences of other cultures on two Phoenician items will be discussed in more detail.

4. Case studies

4.1 Silver gilded bowl

The bowl from this case study, as depicted in Figure 3, shows both Egyptian and Assyrian influences in the depictions on the inside of the bowl. It is on display at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, though the site of the museum provides more information about the bowl than the plaque next to it. Before diving into the influences on the depictions of this bowl we will first dive into the significance and materials of the bowl.

4.1.1 An oversight

The most popular type of merchandise the Phoenicians dealt in were luxury objects. These were especially popular due to the quality, both on a technical and artistic level (*Fenicische Schaal - Rijksmuseum van Oudheden*, n.d.). This preference for valuable merchandise is quite characteristic of the Phoenicians as precious metals were some of the first materials they sought to gain access to with their trade.

The Phoenician bowls are considered the top of their craftsmanship and they were found all over their trade networks, in Cyprus, Italy, Iran, Syria, Spain and beyond (Jigoulov, 2022, p. 150). The current typography of what is considered Phoenician is not specific as to which Phoenician city the item is from. The process of attributing a bowl as Phoenician is based on an exhibition called 'The Phoenicians' at the Palazzo Grassi at Venice in 1988. As such the classification is quite dated and deserves to be looked into more. The attribution of the exposition still throws all the Phoenician cities together without any concerns for the cultural differences between these cities. The classification of Phoenician iconography is based on the items having a central medallion and one or more circle layers around it.

Even though all the bowls are thrown on one heap they vary vastly in style and themes. The earliest bowls appeared around 700 BCE and were mostly made of bronze. These were followed by silver bowls, often gilt like the case study which is the focus of this chapter (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 150-151).

4.1.2 The provenance of the materials

The metals that were needed in order to make these bowls were the foundation for the trade networks of the Phoenicians in a way. The need for metals was one of the primary reasons for the Phoenicians to travel westward and establish these connections. The Phoenician colonies and settlements tended to be near locations with metal sources or on the route to such places. Almost all Phoenician settlements in the Western Mediterranean have shown evidence of metallurgic activities (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, pp. 401 & 406). The Phoenicians already had economic connections all the way to South Asia around the eleventh to tenth century BCE. These connections granted them access to ivory, copper, tin, iron, lead, silver and gold. With the materials they were able to create luxury items for the elites and the Phoenician artisans could learn to perfect their craft. Their ability to trade their merchandise over long distances over sea also allowed them to spread their craft far and wide. Because of this, the Phoenicians were



Figure 3 Phoenician bowl. The Phoenician bowl of this case study in its entirety. (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Inventory number B 1943/9.1, <https://www.rmo.nl/museumkennis/oude-nabije-oosten/de-voorwerpen/fenicische-zilverschaal/>).

at the centre of the flourishing silver trade in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE as silver functioned as a sort of currency in the Near East, especially when the demand for silver got stronger due to the collapse of the Late Bronze Age trade networks (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, pp. 405, 408-409).

In order to get the silver that was needed the ores often had to be treated, because lead and silver occur in many of these ores together. The process of separating the two was called cupellation. This involved oxidation and due to that lead and lead oxide are good archaeological indicators for places with silver production. Pliny also mentions that the recovery of silver would not be possible without the addition of lead. Because of this the Phoenicians also needed lead for their silver production.

The silver and the lead needed for silver production were often sourced from the Iberian Peninsula, Spain and Laurion while tin and gold were gathered in Portugal. The local Iberian population was already familiar with bronze smithing, but they had not mastered silver cupellation before the arrival of the Phoenicians. So even though the Phoenicians were traveling this far to gain access to the materials they needed they also aided with the spread of metallurgy knowledge around the Mediterranean. This is supported by the domestic production of silver in the region. By the late eighth century BCE large amounts of silver were being produced in the Iberian Peninsula and the silver was shipped off to the Near East. The production and shipping of silver seemed to be a collaboration between the Phoenicians and the local population.

Gold was sourced in its pure state or as an alloy with silver, electrum. However archaeological evidence for the sourcing locations is absent and we don't know much about the processing (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, pp. 405-406, 409-10). Gold seems mostly to have been imported from already existing trade networks in Africa according to classical sources. These came from West Africa or the Sahara, however there is almost no archaeological evidence to support this. Phoenician sailors did get their hands on large amounts of gold based on the many golden items produced by Phoenician artisans, though archaeological proof is still needed in order to know where it came from for certain (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, p. 412).

Tuscany and Etruria were rich in copper and iron, playing an important role in the metal trade around the Iron Age. This drew the attention of the Phoenicians though there were no Phoenician settlements found in the area. The influence of the Phoenicians is still visible in the Etruscan mining districts (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, p. 411). Perhaps meaning that the Phoenicians saw them as trading partners. The Phoenician bowl found in an Etruscan king's burial at the very least establishes that there was a link between the two cultures.

4.1.3 Iconography

As for the scenes that are depicted on these bowls, they often show flowers, animals and battles. In these scenes, Phoenician bowls often reveal Egyptian and Assyrian influences. Some say this is a result of their wide trade network (*Fenicische Schaal - Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden*, n.d.), while others argue that the artisans picked specifically Egyptian and Assyrian-inspired depictions for prestige. This prestige was meant as an aesthetic appeal for export. Presumably to make their creations worth more. The focus on export stems from the fact that none of these bowls have been found in the Phoenician homeland even though they were widely distributed. There is no single explanation as to why none of these bowls have been found in Phoenician cities. However, it might be affected by how few excavations have been done in the Phoenician cities. In an attempt to explain what might have been the case four hypotheses have been proposed.

The first hypothesis states that the bowls were produced in the Levant area as the iconography and influences are from the Near East. Then the bowls were distributed through the trade networks all over the Mediterranean. However, the lack of bowls found in the Levant makes this hypothesis unpopular.

The second hypothesis proposes that the bowls were produced where they were found, having been produced by Phoenicians living outside Phoenicia or by local artisans. However, that would mean some of these bowls would not be considered Phoenician as they were found in other settlements belonging to other cultures and it raises the question of how Phoenician the bowl is if it is not made in Phoenicia.

The third hypothesis assumes that the bowls were spread by the process of trade, tributes and spoils of war. The bowls would be passed down and travel from location to location after being traded along. These being prestige items most likely meant that they were being driven by their value and the imbued status. It takes the fact that people at the time were in contact with each other exchanging ideas and knowledge all the time into account, which makes the theory easy to adapt to a wide trade network just like the one the Phoenicians were a part of. At the same time, it also accounts for the combination of styles, as this would make the product more widely desirable. This hypothesis does not state much about why there would be no bowls found in the Levant, though the explanation of these bowls being only manufactured for export in combination with the relatively few excavations focusing on the Phoenicians in the area would be a fitting explanation as to why these might never be found there.

The fourth and last hypothesis explains that the bowls were made by travelling artisans. The artisans would be some Phoenicians who settled down away from Phoenicia as the Phoenicians were exploring the seas to find new sources of precious metals (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 151-153). This would explain the lack of bowls in Phoenicia, though as these shops have not been found either there is no definitive proof for this theory. The idea that the shops could not have been in Phoenicia relies heavily on the idea that the lack of finds in Phoenicia proves that the bowls were not produced there. While in the meantime the lack of in-depth research of Phoenicia as a region is ignored. The lack of finds may very well be attributed to the low number of excavations in the area. Due to this the hypothesis cannot be proven or disproven in good faith until there is more data to base this conclusion on. It is too soon to make claims like these and more research needs to be done in order to understand whether these bowls were produced in the Phoenician cities or not. Until then all reasoning should come in the form of hypotheses to be proven or disproven by future research rather than making bold claims now.

The concept of multiple influences coming together in objects is considered typical for merchandise made by the Phoenicians. However, that does implicate the meaning of what is considered 'Phoenician'. Nicholas Vella (as cited in Jigoulov, 2022, p. 153) states, "Calling the metal bowls 'Phoenician' should only serve as shorthand to understand the mobile and mutable world that was the Mediterranean in the Archaic period." In this sense, the term 'Phoenician' has nothing to do with the Phoenicians themselves and only shows off the interconnectivity of the Mediterranean. While in the case of the metal bowls that is easy to see considering that they seem to only be present in the trade network and not in the Phoenician homeland, it is strange to use a term describing a people for the trade system. As much as the Phoenicians were part of the trade system, they were a culture on their own rather than a combination of all the cultures they interacted with. The usage of this term insinuates that they are merely a distribution system instead of their own culture and people. So, while the bowls were

most likely made by Phoenician artisans, they do not depict anything that is considered Phoenician on their own. Out of all Phoenician merchandise, these bowls are considered to have the least Phoenician iconography (Hayne, 2019, pp. 511-513). This further supports the idea that they were not in use by the Phoenicians themselves and were most likely made for export only.

Phoenician art often displays themes like the dish-palmette, inverted palmette, Hathor head, headbands on the depicted people and lion combat (Culican, 1971, pp. 6, 8). Out of these, only the lion combat can be seen on the bowl.

On the bowl of this case study the humans are not shown with headbands and also do not feature a Hathor head. There does seem to be lion combat on the bowl, though it could also be interpreted as the taming of a creature. The experts of the museum do interpret the scenes in the middle ring as lion combat which seems to be the most popular interpretation (*Fenicische Schaal - Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden*, n.d.). The appearance of lion combat is considered to be Phoenician, however, it has also been interpreted as a signature of Assyrian art. So, the only aspect of the bowl depictions that could be interpreted as Phoenician can also be attributed to the Assyrians. This makes the bowl a very good example of why these silver bowls are considered to show the least Phoenician imagery (Hayne, 2019, pp. 511-513).

The Egyptian style and iconography on the Phoenician bowls usually come in the shape of women wearing Egyptian clothes, Egyptian gods, papyrus boats, scenes with reeds and nonsensical hieroglyphics (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 151-152). The Egyptian influences mostly depict the marches of the Nile Delta. This was where Phoenician settlers learnt about the local Egyptian motifs (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, p. 356). However, it is unlikely that all the artisans who created these bowl decorations had come to visit the Nile Delta themselves. The stories about the marshes of the Nile Delta and Egyptian art most likely found their way to these artisans instead due to the connections of traders and people.

As for the bowl of this case study, we can see Egyptian influences, especially in the style of the centre circle, shown in Figure 4. It depicts a gazelle taking care of a welp in an environment of papyrus reeds with two flying birds (*Fenicische Schaal - Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden*, n.d.) which is reminiscent of the Egyptian Nile delta. The



Figure 5 A close-up of the centre ring. (Photograph: Myrthe Koeman).



Figure 4 A close-up of the stele of Herihor. An Egyptian carving with a reed similar to the one displayed on the bowl. (Photograph: Myrthe Koeman).

way the reeds are shown is very similar to the way they are shown in Egyptian carvings as shown in Figure 5. There are no gods shown on this bowl, however, there are more Egyptian details in the way the people shown on the bowl are depicted. The positions of the people shown is typical for Egyptian imagery. It shows parts of the body from the side, like the head, and parts of the body as if perceived from the front, like the torso, resulting in a not completely realistic image, however, it is one that can easily be distinguished as a human. Besides that, there is one more Egyptian detail in the outer ring, which is shown in Figure 6. At the top it shows two carriages, which would have been a common sight in the region as the Assyrians are also known for having those, however, there are two people riding the carriage on the right. One of the two is shown to be at least twice as large as the other, quite similar to how in Egyptian art the more important figure in a depiction is shown to be inhumanly large. This seems also to be the case on this bowl.



Figure 6 A close-up of the carriages on the outer ring. (Photograph: Myrthe Koeman).

The stylistic trend changed during the eighth and early seventh century BCE while the Egyptian influences remained present. The depictions on the bowl contained stronger narrative elements in the rings around the centre circle of the bowl. These show all kinds of combat and processions with sacred boats (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, pp. 357-358). However, none of that seems to be the case for this specific bowl.

While the Assyrian elements consist of winged sphynxes, hunting scenes (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 151-152) and lion combat (*Fenicische Schaal - Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden*, n.d.). The hunting scenes and sphynxes are not shown on this bowl, however, the lion combat is present as discussed before. With this lion combat scene in particular the man with a bow next to the lion is wearing clothes that seem Assyrian, making the scene most likely more inspired by Assyrian art rather than Phoenician art. The way the mountain in the middle row is shown is also interpreted to be Assyrian (*Fenicische Schaal - Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden*, n.d.).

The later bowls also reveal Etruscan influence on the production of the bowls (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, p.358). This may have been related to the Phoenician influence in the Etruscan mining districts as while the two cultures were in contact with each other for commercial purposes they both enacted influence on the other party.

4.1.4 Usage

The Phoenician bowls were used for banquets and for libations in sanctuaries. During this they would be displayed on a bronze stand, sometimes decorated with drooping leaf shapes (Johnston & Kaufman, 2019, p. 358).

The Phoenicians most likely came to the Italian peninsula by following the routes of the old Mycenaean network. These links had been kept up by the Cypriots with whom the Phoenicians were in direct contact from very early on. Travelling alongside the coast from south to north. The reason for Phoenician interest in Etruria is still debated since it must differ from the usual explanation of the Phoenicians looking for

metal sources. Because the areas they first arrived in were not known for mineral wealth. Instead, they were renowned for having fertile land and a large population. This makes it possible that the Phoenicians came there for agricultural products or human resources instead. Fletcher proposes that the Phoenicians had a preference for complex societies while looking for metals as this would create a more equal relationship with both parties rather than colonizing the land. If this is the case Etruria would be the perfect example since the metals weren't prevalent and the society was developed at the time, however, the theory is not proven to be right or wrong.

The local elites the Phoenicians met in Etruria were interested in these newcomers in order to attempt to gather more wealth and power for themselves. So there was definitely a mutually beneficial relationship being built regarding their trade rather than one party taking advantage of the other party.

The contact between the Phoenicians and the local community made the Phoenicians adapt to the needs of the local people. Both to fit in and be accepted without causing issues, but also to adapt their wares and profit off the trade. Knowing your customers' needs is very valuable to merchants. This allowed them to cater to these needs and create products solely for export which would be popular with their trading partners. At first trading in smaller trinkets for favours, but later turning this into a luxury product trade (Hayne, 2019, pp. 507-508, 510, 512).

The influence of Phoenician traders is especially evident in Etrurian cemeteries of the late eighth and seventh century BCE where their exotic goods were displayed. Many of these goods on display are related to banquets and the prestige of the elites that were buried. This luxurious display was part of Etrurian tomb rituals. The silver bowls were often found in these tombs, usually of male Etrurians. This makes sense as the bowls seem to have been made especially to appeal to them. Many of the Phoenician bowls depict warriors and fighting scenes. This would be of interest to the Etrurians as their funerary material culture shows that they had an interest in rituals of warrior ideology ever since the late Iron Age (Hayne, 2019, pp. 511-513). We can also see those on the bowl of this case study, it shows multiple groups of soldiers and fighting scenes in the outer and middle ring.

The bowls are considered Phoenician even though it is uncertain where they were produced since the term was used first to tell that these prestige objects were made for a foreign market so the use and depictions could be adapted to what was desired locally. Due to this, these export products are not characteristic of Phoenician material culture, therefore not much information about Phoenician culture can be discerned from these bowls. However, it does show how adaptive the Phoenicians were when it came to making a profit on the market (Hayne, 2019, pp. 511-513).

Banquets were a ritual and social activity which are understood to be a common feature in Mediterranean communities. This signalled involvement in trade networks and perhaps allowed the Phoenicians and the Etrurians to find common ground in their rituals. The evidence of drinking ideologies in Italy is often combined with Phoenician influence. Some scholars suggest that the Phoenicians introduced the local communities to wine drinking in the eighth century BCE, however, they could have been consuming other alcoholic drinks before that. These drinking ideologies might not have been taken over by the Phoenicians or Greeks. Instead, the merchandise might have added more value to the local funeral rituals along with some appropriation of Phoenician practices (Hayne, 2019, pp. 513-515).

4.2 Glass alabastron

The second case study is centred around the glass alabastron shown in Figure 7. It is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, however, it is not currently on display. This bottle was found in Cyprus and is labelled as 'Probably Phoenician'. Most likely because of the role the Phoenicians played in the distribution of glass objects and techniques from Egypt to Cyprus (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, n.d.).

Glass in the Mediterranean has always been strongly associated with the Phoenicians. Pliny the Elder even claimed in the first century BCE that the Phoenicians invented glass. However, this has been proven to be incorrect. Regardless, the strong associations between the Phoenicians and glass mean that they contributed to the rise in the popularity of glass. Perhaps due to their role as distributors (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 146-148) or their role as the ones introducing the Greeks to the art of making glass vessels in the late eighth century BCE (Lightfoot & Fino, 2001, p. 19).

The earliest glass products were made for local distribution, however, as the quality of these glass objects grew better the exportation around the Mediterranean also increased. The most common glass items associated with the Phoenicians are the alabastron bottles and hemispherical vessels. They also produced a myriad of other glass products like amulets, charms, faience and glass inlaid on wood which were all in wide use around the Mediterranean. These were mass-produced in Phoenician workshops or on Cyprus or Rhodes (Jigoulov, 2022, pp. 146-148).

4.2.1 The production

The glass of the bottle in this case study was described as colourless with a pale green tint (Lightfoot, 2017, p 28). This colour was meant to resemble rock crystals. Similar vessels were also made out of semiprecious hard stones and these glass versions were less expensive while they were still considered to be luxury items (Lightfoot & Fino, 2001, p. 19). In the glass there are tiny bubbles present and the glass is quite weathered. There are patches of white weathering and markings of dulling and pitting. The bottle also seems to have been broken and repaired (Lightfoot, 2017, p 28).

Glass was made with a material containing silica (oftentimes sand), lime and soda or potash (Caubet, 2014, p. 167) (Da Costa et al., 2021, pp. 1-2). The silica-containing material would be melted and the other ingredients were mixed into it at a temperature around 1200 degrees Celsius. The materials all fuse together at this temperature and the mix becomes a liquid, which is allowed to cool until it solidifies. In the softened form it is very malleable and easy to handle, allowing the artisans to sculpt it or to roll it into sheets. The composition of ingredients has not changed much over time and is still similar to the recipe of antiquity (Caubet, 2014, p. 167). Phoenician and Punic glass was soda-lime-silica natron-based glass. The sand used for the silica came from the coastal



Figure 7 Glass alabastron from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Lightfoot, 2017, p. 29, CAT 3).

regions of the Levant and is considered to be rather pure (Da Costa et al., 2021, pp. 1-2). This sand is mostly made up of quartz, yet it also has been shown to contain minor amounts of additional minerals. Based on glass analysis this type of glass was made using sand which came from weathered upper continental crust granite-type rocks. All this research backs up that the sand used for these beads came from Levantine coasts (Da Costa et al., 2021, pp. 12, 14). The soda was traditionally added by using soda-rich plant ash, however this was gradually replaced by natron after the first millennium BCE. This natron was found in Egypt, Syria, Armenia and Macedonia. It was also the most common fluxing agent for glass in the west of the Euphrates River from the fifth century BCE onwards. The Phoenicians were involved with this early natron glass and are considered to have played a large role in the production and spread of this type of glass (Da Costa et al., 2021, pp. 1-2). As for the glass used to make this bottle some decolourants, which seem to have been antimony-bearing minerals (Da Costa et al., 2021, p. 8).

The methods used to make glass were invented in Egypt and the Near East in the second millennium BCE. However, the methods used to shape the glass into the desired form did evolve. In late antiquity, it was discovered that the glass they made could be blown as a bubble by using a pipe. A different common technique was core forming. It was used predominantly in the second millennium BCE. With this technique, the glass would be wrapped around a clay core in order to shape it. Another technique was invented in the second millennium BCE. The glass would be cut into slices from rods that were arranged into patterns. By using this technique, the artisans could make mosaic glass. Glass casting was invented around the eighth century BCE. With this technique, the molten glass would be poured into a mould. Once it had cooled down it would be sanded and finished off.

At the end of the second millennium BCE, there was a moment when glass production dropped for a while. By the ninth century BCE, it was picked up again in the Near East. The artisans responsible for this revival were most likely living in the Levant. Soon after this during the late ninth or eighth century BCE there was a new discovery; by adding antimony oxide to the glass the glass could be made transparent as the antimony oxide acts as a clarifier and bleaching agent. By using this glass could be used to imitate the looks of rock crystals instead of only the precious stones they had been able to imitate before this. The first of these imitations are often attributed to the Phoenicians and Assyrians or Phoenician artisans living in Assyria (Caubet, 2014, p. 167).

This bottle was first cast in a mould as a blank. After this, it would have been cut and drilled. It would be ground and polished until it resulted in the current shape of the bottle. This bottle in particular would have been one of the earliest examples of these methods being used with clear glass (Lightfoot, 2017, p 28) (Caubet, 2014, p. 168) (Lightfoot & Fino, 2001, p. 19).

4.2.2 The shape

The primary glass workshops which created the raw glass to create glass objects were based in the Levant and Egypt, however, a number of Phoenician glass finds show signs of being recast, making it possible that the glass was recycled and reused after it was first made. These secondary locations remain unknown and could have been spread quite far and wide (Da Costa et al., 2021, p. 14).

At the end of the sixth century BCE Rhodes gained new production centres. It has been theorised that this was perhaps started by exiled Phoenician artisans. The products made on Rhodes are characterised by the shape of their vessels. They

resemble Greek vessels, a Greek alabastron is shown in Figure 8. These glass products were spread around the Mediterranean and they were used as religious objects and funeral offerings (Caubet, 2014, p. 167).

The glass bottle is described to have a sloping horizontal lip which points outwards at the rim. The neck is shaped like a funnel getting narrower as it points downwards. The diameter of the rim is about 3,3 cm while the diameter of the body below is 6,7 cm. This body is described to resemble an elongated oval, however, the bottom of the bottle is visibly wider than the top making the shape at the lower half of the body resemble a teardrop shape more than an oval. The bottom of the bottle is round and the only additional decorations on the bottle are two protrusions pointing outwards on the upper side of the body. These are said to be handles in the shapes of hemispheres (Lightfoot, 2017, p. 28).

The alabastron is 17,8 cm high which is considered to be exceptionally large for an alabastron (Caubet, 2014, p. 168). Small glass vessels like this one which could be closed off were made to store perishable liquids. They might have held oil, perfume, condiments or medical substances. Especially the core-formed jars were common personal belongings and not a rarity. The shape of this alabastron bottle was specifically designed for this purpose as the narrow neck and the rim of the bottle help the user to pour out the contents in a controlled manner (Caubet, 2014, pp. 167, 169).

The glass vessel of this case study is an alabastron, owing its name to the Greek term for a variety of calcite 'alabaster' (Caubet, 2014, p. 169). The shape of this bottle also looks similar to examples made of alabaster (see Figure 9), which was a local type of calcite in the area (Lightfoot, 2017, p 29). The alabastrons were made using many different materials, however, like precious stones, glass and Egyptian blue (Caubet, 2014, p. 168). The cylindrical bottles like the one in this case study seem to have been copied specifically from Egyptian alabaster vessels like the one in Figure 9 (Myres, 1914, p. 504). Many of the stone examples were found in Cyprus, often dating to the sixth to fifth centuries BCE. However, this glass variant was more expensive than such a stone container (Lightfoot, 2017, p 29). A number of the alabastrons found in Cyprus had inscriptions of Persian or Assyrian rulers. While that did not indicate ownership those labels would have made these items luxury goods (Caubet, 2014, p. 168).

The alabastrons are known for their long body, narrow neck and round base. They are mostly found to be from the eighth century BCE and the Hellenistic period. According to Caubet (2014, p. 169) this vessel shape was also used in Egypt for large funerary vessels and in Greece, where they had some similar vessels which were painted showing ritualistic scenes. A painted Greek alabastron vessel is shown in Figure 8. However, no other source mentions large

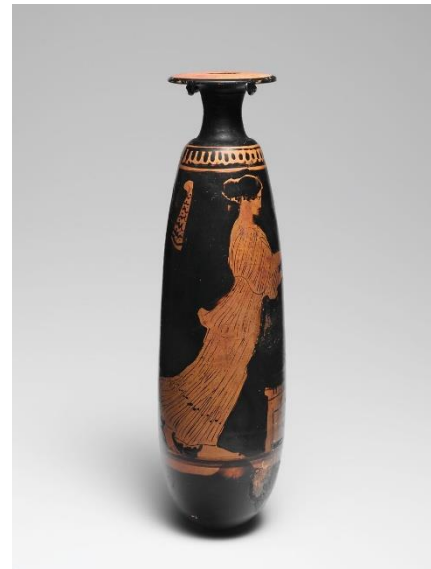


Figure 8 A Greek terracotta alabastron. (collection, accession number 06.1021.150, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collecti on/search/247314>).



Figure 9 An Egyptian alabaster alabastron (accession number 1991.113, https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/asset/AWSS35 953_35953_42271103).

Egyptian alabastron-shaped funerary vessels. While alabaster was a material often used in Egyptian products like alabastrons there do not seem to be any records of large alabastron-shaped vessels at all, neither made from alabaster nor made from a different material. The only Egyptian vessel which has a vaguely similar shape to an alabastron which I could find is the one in Figure 10. Though the shape of this vessel differs from the characteristic shape of an alabastron. The fact that Caubet does not provide citations in this piece makes this even worse. There is no way at all to tell what this claim is based on. It is possible that there was some confusion based on the mentions of alabastrons used in a funerary and ritualistic setting (Kelder et al., 2018, p. 8), however, those are not described as large alabastrons.

However, these mentions do not describe where the alabastron shape originates from. It is not difficult to conclude that the Phoenicians would have been inspired by either the Greeks or the Egyptians as they are so well known for taking inspiration from other cultures. However, it would be baseless to come to this conclusion without proper evidence. The similarities could also stem from the shape being very useful for this purpose.

4.2.3 The label 'Phoenician'

The interpretation of this bottle as Phoenician seems to be based on the age, the glass components and the shape. Not a single source has mentioned Phoenician typology or any specific shapes or kinds that were known for being Phoenician. It is very fortunate that we can trace the materials back to the Levant and trace how the Phoenicians were involved with the development of new glass manufacturing techniques, however, it still throws all the cities on one heap. Of course, they were all interconnected by the trade networks, but by regarding the Phoenician cities as one unit we might miss a lot more nuanced information.

The bottle might have been imported from Assyria rather than Phoenicia according to the museum's catalogues (Lightfoot, 2017, p 29) (Caubet, 2014, p. 168). However, even as the museum raises this possibility the object is still catalogued as probably Phoenician. Most likely because of how involved the Phoenicians were with the glass-making processes, or due to the Phoenician artisans staying in Assyria. Another possibility is that these bottles had a standardised shape in the region, making it hard to distinguish them. In that case, their involvement in the trade networks might have led to the Phoenicians being credited for this. They were known for being involved with the trade of these glass alabastron bottles while also spreading their own glassware (Bukovčan, 2015, p. 80). But whether this bottle was made for export or was very popular within the Phoenician cities remains unconfirmed. Resulting once more in an object that seems to have been involved with the Phoenicians, but cannot tell us much more about them without a more in-depth typology.



Figure 10 An Egyptian vessel. (collection, accession number 36.3.164, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collect ion/search/548872>).

5. Discussion

5.1 Results

After examining the meaning of the term 'Phoenician' it became clear that there is no constant definition or an agreed-upon period for what is considered to be Phoenician. It is quite common that terms in academia are often discussed and altered. However, since there is no consensus on how accurate the term Phoenician is in regard to the people, it rings hollow in the end. If these people did not see themselves as being part of one culture there is no reason to throw all of them together under the name of one group, the Phoenicians.

However, even if grouping all of the cities together does not work for their differing cultures, there is a use in grouping certain cities together in order to study them. If we want to study the Phoenician cities in regard to their relationship with trade as a whole grouping them together can serve as an easy shorthand. It is still important to do more research and eventually be more specific about each colony or object and which city they belong to. However, with the current studies, it is not yet possible to discern the material cultures from the different Phoenician cities so the group term of 'Phoenician' still serves a purpose even if it should be phased out and replaced with more precise labels in the future.

This is unfortunately not the only weakness the term has. If we compare the two case studies, which are both items labelled as 'Phoenician', we see that they relate to the Phoenicians in a completely different way. The metal bowl was most likely produced by Phoenician artisans and produced for export rather than being a product meant for the internal market. These bowls are known for containing the least Phoenician imagery than all the other objects the Phoenicians traded in. So rather than informing us about Phoenician culture and iconography this bowl only tells us about how good the Phoenicians were at adapting to the desires of their trading partners. This is quite different compared to the glass alabastron bottle from the second case study. It is not sure where this bottle was made so that was not why the item got the label 'Phoenician'. Instead, the label was given to the object due to the find location and because it most likely ended up in Cyprus because it was traded by the Phoenicians. The focus is again more on the trade the Phoenicians partook instead of them producing the item. However, in the case of the glass alabastron, it could very well have been made in a Phoenician city and could have been sold internally as well. Unfortunately, not enough research has been done in the main Phoenician cities to draw conclusions in regard to what items the Phoenicians themselves used to own.

This means that more research is needed in order to come to better conclusions about where these objects came from and what their significance was to the Phoenicians rather than only the culture where they ended up. Due to the focus on the location of where these objects were found the Phoenicians tend to only be interpreted as the means for the item to travel to its destination. That would disregard the role they played in the object's creation and usage. On top of that, there is no distinction between the Phoenician cities as to which city the items could be from. Nor any mention of the debates regarding the term 'Phoenician'.

In regards to the literature which is written about the Phoenicians the lack of consistent definitions means that in every publication it needs to be specified which definition of 'Phoenicians' is meant when writing about them. Museum catalogues

should specify why an object is classified as 'Phoenician' since the label is not specific enough to inform people about how the object is related to the Phoenicians.

5.2 Limitations

The size of this research and the number of samples is quite small while this subject has proven to be very broad and intricate. In this entire text, only two case studies could be described in detail. As such it is impossible to draw conclusions regarding how the label 'Phoenician' is used to describe objects on a larger scale or to compare how this label is used for different objects. Examining these larger themes is necessary in order to see whether these labels and definitions have been used accurately. As for the two case studies that were discussed, these are not representative pieces for all objects with the label 'Phoenician' of their respective material. There are many different items made of glass and metal, each with their own story and reasons why they carry the label 'Phoenician'. Due to this, a larger study is needed in order to gain a broader understanding of these other object types.

When choosing objects to study it should be taken into account that museums use the label 'Phoenician' in their catalogues, but more often than not the items are labelled as 'probably Phoenician' rather than with a straightforward interpretation. This is the result of the Phoenicians being under-researched and the lack of a clear Phoenician style. The basis of calling an object is often the combination of different styles rather than iconography which is considered uniquely Phoenician. As such there is a possibility that the item was made somewhere else. Because of this, it is important to stay critical when discussing an item which is labelled as 'probably Phoenician' and it is another reason why further research is needed. However, because of the number of objects labelled as 'probably Phoenician' rather than 'Phoenician,' it cannot be avoided that some of these objects will be studied as Phoenician while it is not completely certain whether they were related to the Phoenicians.

Due to the short length of this bachelor thesis, it can only draw attention to the lack of information and cannot provide an in-depth alternative. Instead, it draws attention to an under-researched subject and calls for more research in order to reform the terminology used to describe the Phoenicians.

5.3 The next step

Further research is needed especially in the mainland of the Phoenicians in order to gather information about the archaeological record of the cities. This would allow us to research where their items were being made and to establish whether some products were made for local use or export.

The research of how the label 'Phoenician' is used should also be continued as there are many different types of items and materials that this bachelor thesis could not discuss. In order to create a more accurate terminology all these need to be critically evaluated as well. Only after establishing what is missing from the current labels can we create more accurate labels to describe these items.

This bachelor thesis can be the first step in that direction, to call attention to the lacking terminology and to call for further research to create better labels. Because the current state of research leaves many gaps of knowledge which are waiting to be filled.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has been written to answer the question; How does the label 'Phoenician' help us understand the Phoenicians? In order to answer this question, there are some sub questions that need to be answered in order to formulate an answer to the main question. The following sub questions were posed:

- How is the term 'Phoenician' used?
- In what sense is the term accurate or inaccurate?
- How do 'Phoenician' objects inform us about the Phoenicians?

By using these questions, we aim to understand how the label 'Phoenician' came to be and how it has been used in the past and in current item descriptions. This will lead us to the conclusion of how this term and label furthers our understanding of the Phoenicians as a people. This was done by doing literary research on papers which mention and study the Phoenicians. This was followed by an oversight of the history of the Phoenicians and how they interacted with the other cultures around them, most notably when they were being dominated by them. Then two objects were used as case studies as examples of how the label is used by musea. These chapters also discussed how the Phoenicians were involved with the creation and trade of the objects since the degree of this changes depending on the item that was being discussed even though both of them were labelled as 'Phoenician' in the same manner. The discussion chapter then compared the findings and raised concerns about how this label is used without a clear distinction between the different cities and without any mention of the many debates regarding throwing all Phoenician cities on one heap.

6.1 The research questions

How is the term 'Phoenician' used?

The term Phoenician stems from the Greeks as they were unfamiliar with the details of all the different cities in Phoenicia. They threw all these different cities together under the same name: Phoenician. This term continued to be used by scholars due to their focus on the Greeks and because Greek texts were often used to study the Phoenicians, laying the basis for all later studies about the Phoenicians. However, debates about how to define the Phoenicians remained. This resulted in a myriad of different definitions, varying from being based on material culture to time or on the area which was under their influence. Currently, the definition based on the cultural and ethnic identities is the most prominent and popular and it seems to be consistently the dominant definition for a while.

Musea however use this label based on other characteristics. Items are often given the label 'Phoenician' based on a combination of styles rather than one specific Phoenician style. They seem to be aware that this is not a very stable and fool-proof method. This can be seen in the way they decide to label most of the items they attribute to the Phoenicians as 'probably Phoenician' instead of calling them Phoenician without a doubt. In their catalogues, they also describe by which other cultures the item could also have been made. Even in the case of the alabastron, it is still very likely that the item was traded by the Phoenicians regardless of whether it was made by Phoenician artisans or not. In short for the musea, it seems like the label 'Phoenician' is given to any item which has come into contact with the Phoenicians, whether they made it or not. However, the label 'probably Phoenician' is used more, indicating a high level of uncertainty and insecurity of the musea about whether their interpretation is correct.

In what sense is the term accurate or inaccurate?

The term and label 'Phoenician' can be considered inaccurate due to many reasons. The most important one is that the Phoenician cities never formed a group or alliance. Their cultures were never one and the same either. Each city had their own culture and ethnicity so throwing all of them under the same label is inaccurate.

However, even if they never formed an alliance or a single group there are many qualities and historical events that apply to all the Phoenician cities. The geography in the area where they are located is similar and they are all known for their naval feats. Their artistry and level of skill at art are often also seen as being on the same level, however, that could be a result of how prominent the label 'Phoenician' used to be. Hence why it should be examined more closely before drawing a conclusion in that regard. This does point to the term having some accuracy and some use in studies. Regardless, it is impossible to study any Phoenician city while avoiding the label 'Phoenician' since it is so established in academia. As such the term is accurate and useful as a basis of some traits and historical events, but should not be used as consistently and generatively as before. However, for not it is not possible to not use this label when discussing a Phoenician item or city so the term has a use until better labels and terms are established.

How do 'Phoenician' objects inform us about the Phoenicians?

Objects which are labelled as 'Phoenician' can still inform us about the Phoenicians even if they were not found in the main Phoenician cities. The gilded bowl shows us that the Phoenicians were masters of their craft and were also very aware of the desires of their trade partners. The bowl was made for export specifically, which means the Phoenicians made it specifically to trade it. They show that they were very familiar with the desires of the Etruscans and specifically made an object like this to make a profit.

As for the glass alabastron, it is not exactly clear whether it was made by Phoenician artisans, but regardless their involvement in trade with items like these shows us how they played a role in the distribution of such items and how they again played the game of commerce well.

How does the label 'Phoenician' help us understand the Phoenicians?

The label does help to establish some big lines in the history of the Phoenicians. Mainly their expertise in trade and mastery of their crafts. However, since that is the only thing that we can establish based on the case studies alone that is a clear oversimplification of what those people were like. The objects are forcefully pushed into a mould that does not fit them and as a result of that, there is little we can learn about the Phoenicians based on the label 'Phoenician' alone. If we wish to truly understand them, we will need labels that fit them better and not try to throw different cultures together under one common denominator.

6.2 Further research

The label 'Phoenician' does not suit the Phoenician cities, it only serves as a generalising term which does not help us understand the intricacies and details of the Phoenician cities in their own right. As such more research is needed in order to gather more information about the Phoenicians as stated in chapter 5.3 The next step. However, in addition to that, specific terms are needed in order to specify which Phoenician city a

research is discussing and where an object is from. The field will have to establish these terms and slowly phase out the use of the label 'Phoenician' as far as possible. It is likely that there may still be objects that cannot be categorised under one city due to how little information there currently is about the material culture of each Phoenician city and how they differ.

Abstract

This paper examines the meaning of the label 'Phoenician' in the context of how it has been used in previous studies. It looks into how the usage has changed and how it is used in current studies as well as how the label is used to describe objects in musea. This is done by taking two case studies. Both the objects of the case studies have been labelled as Phoenician by the musea that write about them. By examining how the label 'Phoenician' describes them this paper aims to get a better understanding of how the label is used in the setting of musea as this is often not the same as in academia. After taking these definitions into account this paper aims to establish how the label 'Phoenician' helps us understand the Phoenicians.

The literary review revealed that the definition of the Phoenicians as a people has been debated for a long time and still has not been fully resolved. The root of the issue lies in the fact that all the cities which are generally considered Phoenician are not culturally or ethnically the same group. The label 'Phoenician' was placed upon them by outsiders who did not know the differences between the cities. This caused issues for scholars to define the group. Musea turned out to be rather careful with the label 'Phoenician', choosing to label many objects as 'probable Phoenician' instead. Though at the same time, their reasoning to call objects Phoenician are rather vague and seems to include all objects that most likely interacted with the Phoenicians at any point in their lifecycle rather than only the objects that were made by them.

The results of this study reveal that the label does have its uses when studying the Phoenicians right now, simply because there is no way to avoid the term. However, due to the inaccuracies, it would be best to develop more specific terms and labels for this field. Before establishing these new labels, the current labels should be examined further to re-evaluate them and to avoid making the same mistakes.

Reference List

Bibliography

- Aruz, J., Graff, S. B., Rakic, Y., & Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) (Eds.). (2014). *Assyria to Iberia: at the dawn of the Classical Age*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Bukovčan, L. R. (2015). The ancient Egyptian glass collection in the Mimara museum. In M. Tomorad, *A history of research into ancient Egyptian culture in Southeast Europe* (Vol. 8). Archaeopress.
- Bunnens, G. (2019). Phoenicia in the Later Iron Age: Tenth century BCE to the Assyrian and Babylonian periods. In B. R. Doak & C. López-Ruiz (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (pp. 56–73). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190499341.013.5>
- Caubet, A. (2014). Phoenician and East Mediterranean glass. In J. Aruz, S. B. Graff, Y. Rakic, & Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) (Eds.), *Assyria to Iberia: at the dawn of the Classical Age* (pp. 167–170). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://library.metmuseum.org:443/record=b1838783~S1>
- Costa, M., Barrulas, P., Arruda, A. M., Dias, L., Barbosa, R., Vandenabeele, P., & Mirão, J. (2021). An insight into the provenance of the Phoenician-Punic glass beads of the necropolis of Vinha das Calças (Beja, Portugal). *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences*, 13(9), 149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12520-021-01390-5>
- Culican, W. (1971). A foreign motif in Etruscan jewellery. *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 39, 1–12.
- Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art. (n.d.). *The Phoenicians (1500–300 B.C.)*. The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phoe/hd_phoe.htm

Elayi, J. (2018). *The history of Phoenicia* (A. Plummer, Trans.). Lockwood Press.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11wjrj>

Fenicische schaal. (n.d.). Rijksmuseum van Oudheden. Retrieved April 3, 2024, from

<https://www.rmo.nl/museumkennis/oude-nabije-oosten/de-voorwerpen/fenicische-zilverschaal/>

Glass alabastron (perfumbottle) | Probably Phoenician | Archaic. (n.d.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved March 14, 2024, from

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/239897>

Gubel, E. (2019). Art and iconography. In C. López-Ruiz & B. Doak (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (pp. 249–369). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190499341.013.23>

Hayne, J. M. (2019). The Italian peninsula. In C. López-Ruiz & B. Doak (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (pp. 504–519). Oxford University Press.

Jigoulov, V. S. (2022). *The Phoenicians: Lost civilizations*. Reaktion Books, Limited.

Johnston, P. A., & Kaufman, B. (2019). Metallurgy and other technologies. In C. López-Ruiz & B. Doak (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (pp. 401–422). Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190499341.013.26>

Kelder, J. M., Bricault, L., & Schneider, R. M. (2018). A stone alabastron in the J. Paul Getty Museum and its Mediterranean context. *Getty Research Journal*, 10, 1–16.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/697381>

Killebrew, A. (2019). Canaanite roots, Proto-Phoenicia, and the Early Phoenician Period: Ca. 1300–1000 BCE. In C. López-Ruiz & B. Doak (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the*

- Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (pp. 38–55). Oxford University Press.
- Lehmann, G. (2021). The emergence of Early Phoenicia. *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology*, 1, 272–324. <https://doi.org/10.52486/01.00001.11>
- Lightfoot, C. S. (2017). *The Cesnola collection of Cypriot art: Ancient glass*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Lightfoot, C. S., & Fino, E. V. (2001). Greek and Roman art. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 59(1), 18–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3269165>
- Marchetti, N. (1999). A Middle Bronze II alabastron from Tell es-Sultan/Jericho and a Syro-Palestinian class of alabaster vessels. *ISIMU* 2, 305–312.
- Myres, S. J. L. (1914). *Handbook of the Cesnola collection of antiquities from Cyprus*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Picón, C. A. (2007). *Art of the classical world in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Greece, Cyprus, Etruria, Rome* (Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), C. A. Picón, & R. D. De Puma, Eds.). Yale University Press.
- Quinn, J. (2017). *In search of the Phoenicians*. Princeton University Press.
- Sader, H. (2019). *The history and archaeology of Phoenicia*. SBL Press.
- Semmler, M. (2019). Tyre and its colonial expansion. In C. López-Ruiz & B. Doak (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (pp. 74–87). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190499341.013.6>
- Vella, N. C. (2019). Birth and prospects of a discipline. In B. R. Doak & C. López-Ruiz (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (pp. 23–35). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190499341.013.3>

Figures

- Figure 1 A map of Phoenicia. This map shows the location of the most important Phoenician cities. (Gore, R. (2004). [Map]. Democracyinlebanon. [http://www.democracyinlebanon.org/documents/cdl-documentaries/phoenicians\(natgeo\).htm](http://www.democracyinlebanon.org/documents/cdl-documentaries/phoenicians(natgeo).htm)). 9
- Figure 2 The Phoenician colonies. This map shows the colonies of Phoenician cities and the areas their settlements controlled. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. (n.d.). Phoenician settlements and trade routes [Map]. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/>). 10
- Figure 3 Phoenician bowl. The Phoenician bowl of this case study in its entirety. (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Inventory number B 1943/9.1, <https://www.rmo.nl/museumkennis/oude-nabije-oosten/de-voorwerpen/fenicische-zilverschaal/>). 13
- Figure 5 A close-up of the stele of Herihor. An Egyptian carving with a reed similar to the one displayed on the bowl. (Photograph: Myrthe Koeman). 16
- Figure 4 A close-up of the centre ring. (Photograph: Myrthe Koeman). 16
- Figure 6 A close-up of the carriages on the outer ring. (Photograph: Myrthe Koeman). 17
- Figure 7 Glass alabastron from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Lightfoot, 2017, p. 29, CAT 3). 19
- Figure 8 A Greek terracotta alabastron. (collection, accession number 06.1021.150, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247314>). 21
- Figure 9 An Egyptian alabaster alabastron (accession number 1991.113, https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/asset/AWSS35953_35953_42271103). 21
- Figure 10 An Egyptian vessel. (collection, accession number 36.3.164, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548872>). 22