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“The Phoenician Peace Challenge”

Phoenicia, the hinge between East and West

The Phoenician expansion in Mediterranean basin and the activation of the caravan route, connecting the Arabian peninsula, mark a change from the Late Bronze Age trade routes after the invasions of the Sea Peoples. But the role of the Phoenician cities in those long-distance trade is also an element of continuity between the second and first millennium BC, during the great empires of the Near East. Phoenicia was an element such

as a hinge connecting the East and West, supplying goods in the Near East and spreading westwards oriental products. Through this network, the Phoenicians were placed as carriers of ideas and men around the Mediterranean, becoming the architects of a peaceful and continuous dialogue, balance and coexistence among different and distant cultures.

1 - The study of trade in the Phoenician history

Information about the Phoenicians, their origins and their cities are not many. For this reason, approaching the history of this people and his movements in the Mediterranean during the first millennium BC, the study of the trade network may be essential. The Phoenician trade, in the middle of long-distance flows of goods, was essentially an external exchange (import and export), although the distinction between internal and external trade in the Ancient Orient was not always clear, since political entities did not always coincide with cultural ones, which were often very blurred. From the development of the first cities of the fourth millennium BC until the birth of the great empires of the Iron Age, the long-range contacts in the Near East have changed because of social needs, cultural interaction and diversified distribution of resources in the territory. The main

elements of the geographical context, the Arabian Desert, the river plains of Mesopotamia, the system of valleys Wadi Arabah-Jordan-Orontes, the mountainous areas of Turkey, Lebanon and Iran, the Syrian-Palestinian coast, have influenced the establishment of multi-centric economy. The exchange system was set on the interaction of different distribution models and networks of relationships developed by the different cultures involved. During the first millennium BC the field is expanded from Spain to Central Asia, from southern Arabia to India. The exchanges took place through highly mobile groups, involving distant and different contexts. In this system of contacts and traded commodities, the Phoenicians have assumed a primary role, which has gradually changed over the centuries.



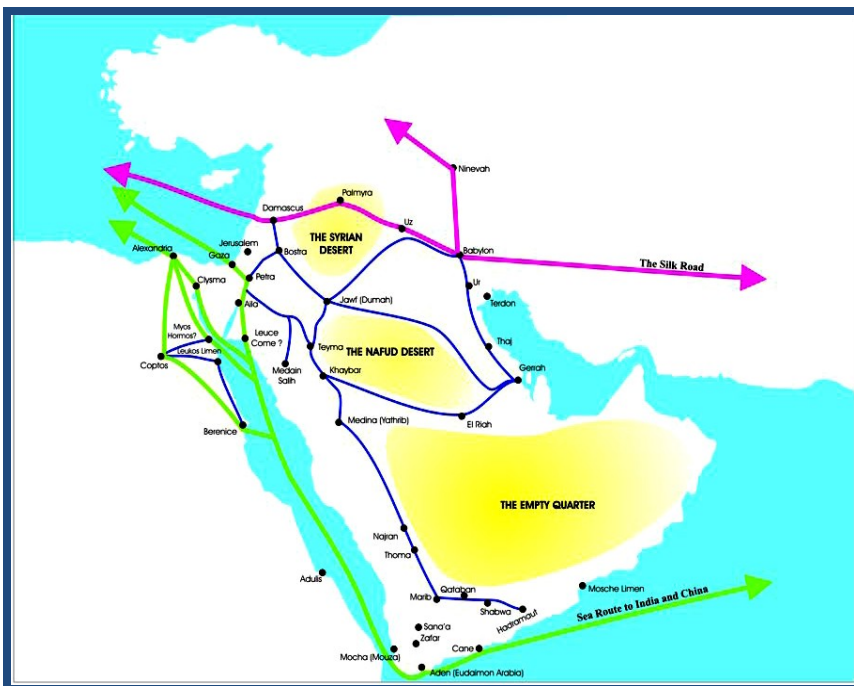
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2 - Resources and trade routes in the Near East, between the Bronze Age and the first millennium BC

In the Near East, the management of the surplus, the foundation for commerce, has grown from a centralized public forms of the first Mesopotamian cities, to a more structured organization of trade with the rising of the proto-state cultures. During the Bronze Age, the growing need for metal favored more structured international relations, with an increasingly important role of intermediaries. After the crisis of the thirteenth century BC, with the transition to the Iron Age and the political reorganization of the Near East, new

nation-states took form in the territories of Syria and Palestine. The Phoenician city-states, the heirs of the Canaanite and Cipro-Syrian commercial traditions, played a key role. The emergence of the great empires in the political multi-centrism and the Greek and Phoenician expansion in the Mediterranean, promoted the globalization of trade. Communications networks were formed by water and land routes and integrated, according to direct and indirect trade, depending on the availability of local resources.



Map of the main trade routes in the Near East, during the 1st millennium BC, from the Indian Ocean and from central Asia.

The cultural and commercial contacts with the Nile Valley through the Sinai and by sea, were intense and constant since the third millennium BC. The coastal sea routes touched the traffic nodes closer to Phoenicia (Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete) and then the Aegean Sea and the North

African coast. The identification of the Phoenician trade with colonization, shifts the focus to the West, leaving the contact between sea network and land network and the role of the Phoenicians along the caravan routes, which instead had to be particularly high.



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3 - The Phoenician expansion in the western Mediterranean

The field of nautical techniques had already a remarkable development in the Mediterranean during the Bronze Age, thanks to the continuous exchange of information between the main shipbuilding centers of Egypt and of the Canaanite, which fostered innovation and refinement of knowledge and techniques consolidated in the first millennium BC with the Phoenician ships. The reputation of the Phoenicians as skilled navigators was universally recognized by the contemporary peoples. The navigation in the Mediterranean was not a novelty Phoenician. In the ancient Mediterranean, especially before the Punic wars, ethnic groups were not divided by oppositions of principle, but lived together in a regional balance, which changed according to situations, with a redistributive trade. The Phoenicians were adapted differently to economic trends of regional trade (from the Aegean to Spain), even in river contexts (Nile, Euphrates). Between the eighth and seventh century, Greeks and Phoenicians began to move westward, in Italy and the southern Mediterranean, intensifying the exchange between the main western populations (Etruscans, Sardis, Iberians) and Eastern cultures.

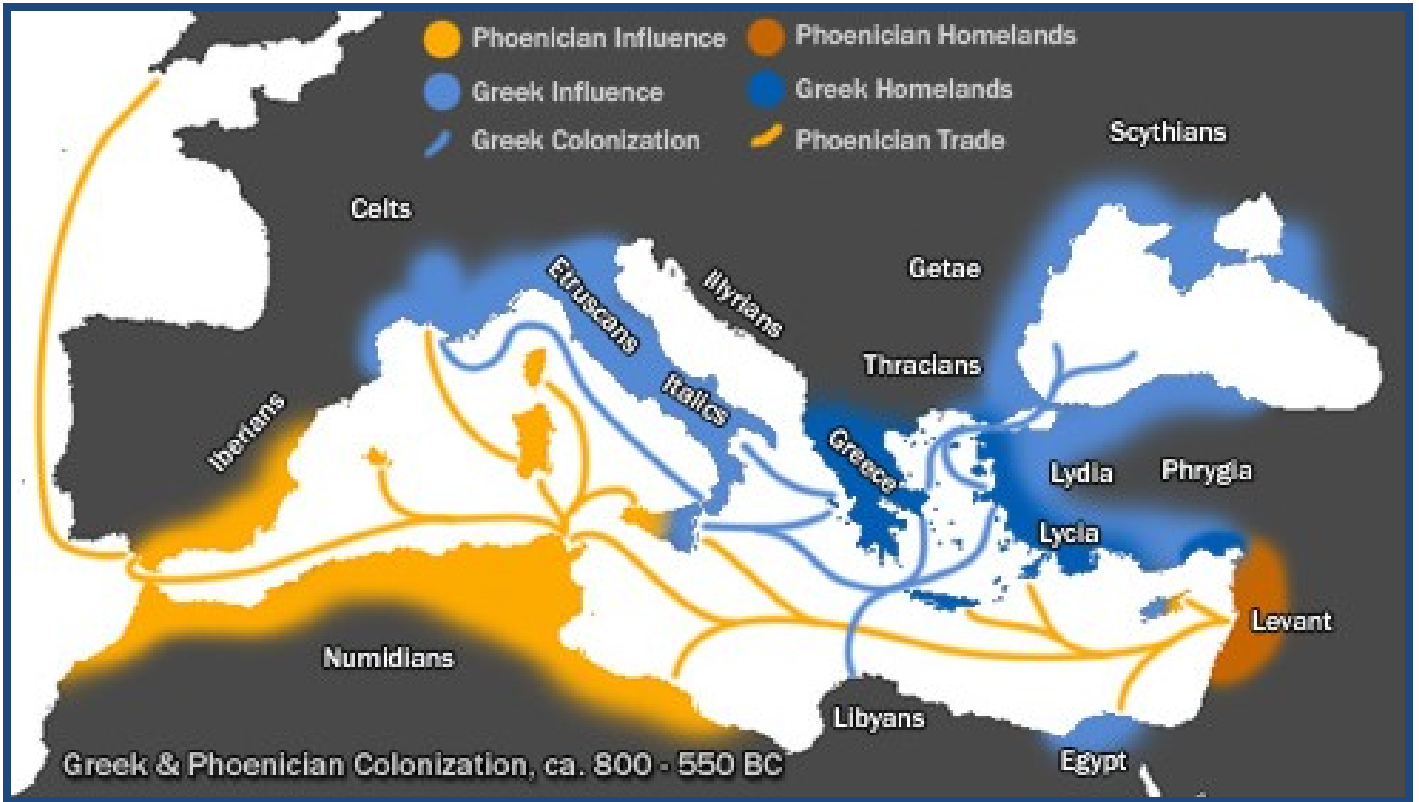
The link between trade and colonization is one of the main issues in the current debate. The reality was much more heterogeneous and it is difficult to distinguish the colonization actions from the commercial ones, or to identify the priorities in the arrival of the Greeks and Phoenicians in some Mediterranean areas (Italy, Spain). There are many hypotheses about the reasons for Phoenician westward expansion, political issues

but also economic pressure. Some scholars point out, as a precondition, the cultural predisposition to the expansion of settlements along the coast, between the Nile delta and the Gulf of Iskenderun. The prosperity of the Phoenicians was linked to the control of trade in metals, the role of intermediaries with the eastern empires and the production of luxury craft. Compared to these three sectors of activity, the likely reduction of land due to pressure from Assyrian, the population growth and the increasing demand for raw materials (especially metals) may have represented a series of concomitant causes for the expansion. One of the aims of the Phoenicians was to obtain minerals, without participating in the extraction phases. From this point of view we can understand the high density of Phoenician sites in areas with considerable mineral resources (Cyprus, Sardinia, Andalusia). For other sites such as Utica, Carthage itself, or Sicily, is much more difficult to trace the reasons for landing. The creation of stable port settlements for mediation in foreign lands has not only economic reasons but is part of a wider sphere of anthropological and cultural interactions between resident peoples and foreign merchants. In the debate on public or private status of the Phoenician expansion initiatives, the most likely hypothesis is that of an initial role of the homeland sovereigns in a state trade, followed (between ninth and eighth centuries) by a growing long distance trade of the private aristocracy, with offices scattered along the whole Mediterranean coasts.



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4 - Geography of Phoenician network and phases of the expansion

According to sources, the Phoenician expansion in the Southern Mediterranean (mainly determined by the initiative of Tyre) can be schematized in two stages: A first set of foundations, dating from the twelfth century BC, as Cadiz, Utica and Lixus, which probably remained unstable for a long time, since the finds are not before the eighth century; a second step, fully verified by archaeological data, ranks in the late ninth century, with a more stable occupation of the Mediterranean coasts (Kition in Cyprus 820 BC, Carthage in 814 BC, the sites of Crete and Dodecanese). Taking advantage of the large number of islands in the eastern Mediterranean, that reduce the distances, starting from Phoenicia, the first stop of navigation was inevitably Cyprus. It continued to the coast of Asia Minor, Crete and the Aegean Islands. Moving to the west, the stages are longer and the navigation was forced toward the island of Malta, the starting

point to the western Sicily and the east coasts of Maghreb (gulf of Utica and Carthage). The crossing of the sea to the west of Sicily required a detour to Sardinia. The short-steps trail ended and a stretch of open sea began. The Phoenician ability to exploit the sea currents and prevailing winds (east-west) in the North Western Mediterranean, enabled them to go to the Balearic Islands and Spain. Along the North African coast, also accessible via coastal routes through Egypt and Libya, the Phoenician navigation went far to the west of Carthage, touching Algeria, the Atlantic coast of Andalusia (Huelva, Cádiz), Madeira, the Canaries, until the Moroccan coast of Mogador. For all of these settlements, the Phoenician occupation is attested at least since the seventh century BC and the archaeological investigations are far from considered concluded.



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5 - Phoenician settlement characteristics and contact with people

A key aspect in the long-distance trade routes is the interaction between different cultures and the consequent emergence of trade-oriented entities in the interface areas. This aspect was at the base of the Phoenician settlements in the Mediterranean, places of business contact with people along the coasts, characterized by common territorial morphologies. The choice of new docks was never random. The Phoenicians were very cautious. They tried to get as close as possible to local people, respecting the regional balances and keeping the safe distance afforded by small coastal islands (like those of Tyre and Arvad in the homeland), bays in the major islands, peninsulas ends, mouths of rivers and gulfs. Cadiz, Mozia (Sicily), Sulcis (Sardinia), Rachgoun (Algeria) and Mogador (Morocco), are famous examples of coastal islands. Settlements on coastal peninsulas were Tharros and Nora (Sardinia). The mouths of rivers had a strong attraction on the Phoenicians, because of the

easy mooring and contact with the inland territories. Many of the settlements in Andalusia have these characteristics, but also Utica (Libya), Bithiah (Sardinia) and Lixos (Morocco).

The first Phoenician settlements were temporary camps, where the exchange took place through barter and which could evolve into emporion, a more stable form of coastal trade settlement, very common in the Mediterranean. Centered around a shrine, the Phoenician emporion were the scene of continuous contact between ethnic groups, where the population was always mixed and unstable. Many Phoenician emporia has developed into real urban centers, with the continuity in the trading function. Carthage itself probably has been originated by a similar dynamic. The available data are insufficient to draw a picture of the general characteristics of the Phoenician settlements in the West.



The presence of warehouses in the port areas, evidences that they were not only simple trading ports, but also active centers of production and residence. Of course, around the Phoenicians settlements, was created a commercial space, a craft and technology space, a religious space, but there are no reports of farms for the systematic exploitation of the earth, unlike in the Greek colonial world, though some scholars suppose the

Phoenician import of olive cultivation in Andalusia. The Phoenicians never entered into conflict with the resident population but they tended to establish a peaceful coexistence and cultural integration. This attitude changed with the rise of Carthage, which showed an imperialist character, opposite to that of the Phoenician homeland.



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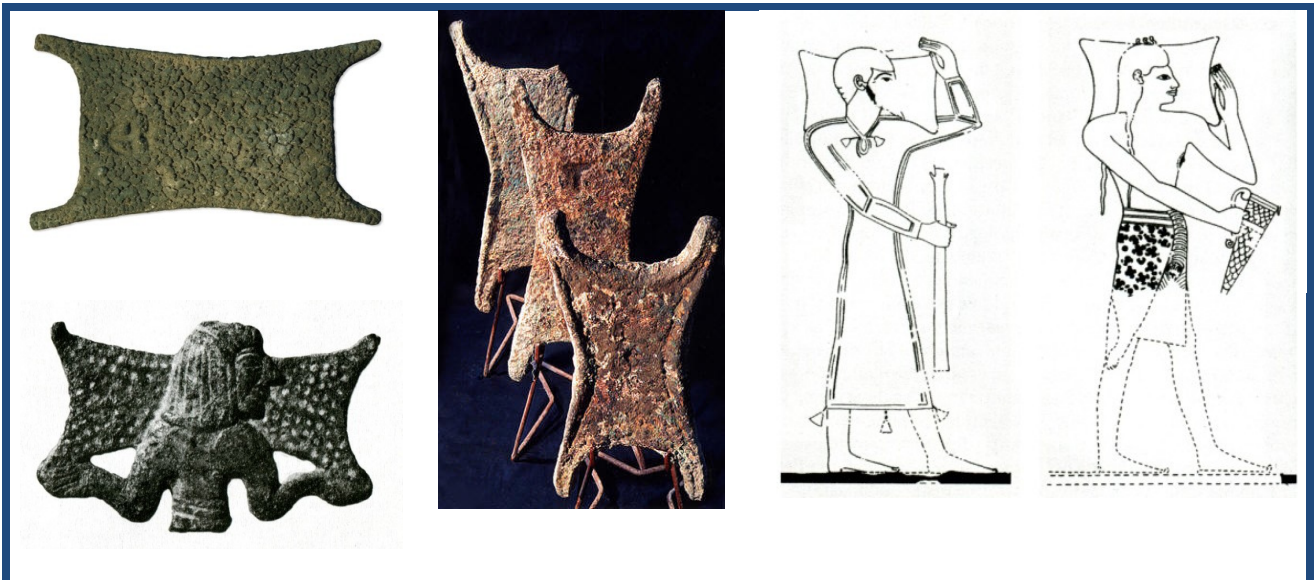
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6 - The traded objects and their tracks

The exchange of commonly used goods or valuable ones, took place along primary arteries, Oman were the main suppliers of copper until the second millennium BC, then Cyprus became the

often established over the centuries. Metals and minerals were the base of trade. Anatolia and main source of this metal in the Eastern Mediterranean ("ox-hide shaped" Cypriot ingots).



The tin came from the Iranian-Afghan area, but if the origin of tin from the Atlantic was proved, the Phoenicians would have played a crucial role as suppliers in Eastern world. The wood, essential in the economy of the Phoenicians, was a much traded object, especially the one coming from Lebanon mountains. There were many networks for the exchange of valuable materials.

The gold came from western Turkey, Arabia, Iran, Nubia and Egypt, which in the Late Bronze Age became the largest exporter in the entire Near East. For silver, this record was held by the Anatolia and Upper Euphrates. Lapis lazuli came

from central Asia and Afghanistan, mother of pearl and shells came from the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, some types of light-colored stones (alabaster, calcite) and dark (diorite, olivine) arrived in Mesopotamia from Asia and the Persian Gulf, and in Syria and Palestine from Egypt. The ivory came in Mesopotamia from India through the Persian Gulf, while Syria and Palestine used the native animals (Asian elephants and hippos) until their extinction (the first millennium BC), which made Egypt the main coordinator of the distribution of African ivory. Among the traded objects were also luxury goods and exotic animals.



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The Phoenicians got monkeys and crocodiles in Egypt, scented wood, precious stones and peacocks in the "land of Ophir". The Phoenician, such as Mesopotamia, was exporting its food (oil, wheat, barley and wine) in the Near East and Egypt, but there is still no evidence of exports in the western Mediterranean. The knowledge level about the Phoenician pottery is not advanced and the study of amphoras is at an early stage, but it is possible to distinguish products manufactured in the Near East coast, Cyprus, the central Mediterranean or in Spain. The plate is the most

found Phoenician pottery. It has become a useful tool for dating with relative chronologies for East and West, based on changes of parameters such as the width of the edge. The object of Phoenician trade changed over time but the organization remained the same until the rise of Carthage in the sixth century. The circulation of objects was always accompanied by movements of people and ideas. However, in the western emporia, workshops of Phoenician craftsmen began to develop, putting their items on the market, adding to those from the Near East.





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7 - The Phoenicians and the Orientalizing

An interesting deepening concerns the role of the Phoenicians in the "Orientalizing" phenomenon, which features, from the eighth century BC, the spread of oriental models in the luxury handcraft of the aristocracy in the Mediterranean and Near East. A clear reading of the origin areas is difficult because of the multipolarity of the production centers and mobility of the oriental craftsmen, resulting in a diversification of models and artistic techniques. It was a more complex phenomenon than just trade, and involved elements of tradition and fashion, according to cultural paths in which it is impossible to distinguish the role of the Phoenicians and the Greeks. Certainly northern Syria (Gulf of Iskenderun) had a key role as a

producer and collector of luxury handcraft, in the middle of a strong network between Euboea, Cyprus and Phoenicia, much frequented by the Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon. Cyprus, Rhodes and Crete were early involved in the reception and dissemination of this phenomenon, which also reached Italy and Andalusia. Scholars agree that the Phoenicians played a central role in this phenomenon, spreading products, models, crafts and techniques. This is quite evident for gold, ivory, shells, and specially in Egyptianising artifacts, for which a Phoenician production has been proved, inspired by Egyptian models or monuments, including reproduction (not always correct) of hieroglyphic inscriptions.

8 - The role of Carthage

The apex and the beginning of the epilogue of the Phoenician presence in the Mediterranean, culminated with the decline of Phoenician homeland under Persian control, the rise of Carthage and the clash with Rome. Let us not forget the possibility that other Western Phoenician cities such as Utica may have initiated policies of expansion. However, in the mid-seventh century, the Carthaginian society was already able to promote the foundation of Ibiza. From the second quarter of the seventh century, Carthage was completely seated in the trade with the western world, being able to coordinate and organize the Phoenician settlements of the West in a great empire. Around the sixth century, took place the rise of the Carthaginian control on the Phoenician settlements in Sicily and then in Sardinia, which culminated in two key battles with the Greek colonial world: the battle of Himera, in 480 BC against Syracuse and the battle of Alalia, in 540 BC, in alliance with the Etruscans, against the Greeks of Corsica and Marseille. The links with Etruria were very strong, leading to a series of treaties and confirmed by the widespread presence of Etruscan material imported in

Carthage. The influence of Carthage also arrived in Corsica and trade are also documented with southern France and Catalonia. After creating a sphere of influence in Andalusia, it seems that the Carthaginians took also control in Madeira, the Azores and the Canary Islands. In the mid-sixth century, a military expansion started in North Africa, covering Libya, Tunisia and directed to Algeria and Morocco, at first alongside of the settlements of Phoenicia, and later incorporating them. This control did not coincide with a domain on all of North Africa, but rather with the creation of coastal enclaves. The centralization of control of trade, following the military one, which is typical of the great empires, was reversed in Carthage, a mercantile settlement, heir of the Phoenician maritime trade network, which used these tools to plan his growth policy, going toward the clash with the cities of Magna Graecia and then, against Rome. The Punic Wars represent another break and changing point, from a peaceful, commercial and cultural interaction, till the rise of a central power in a radial structure, destined to affect trade in the Mediterranean.

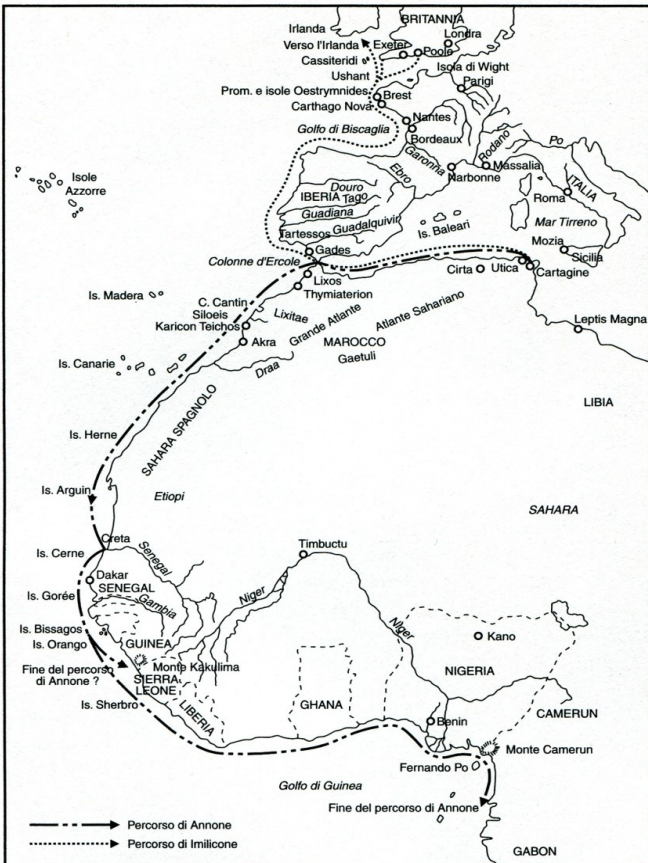


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9 - Across the Strait of Gibraltar



The sources say several expeditions made by the Phoenicians in the Atlantic. Among these, a famous episode recounted by Herodotus, is the task given by Pharaoh Neco to some Phoenician sailors, between seventh and sixth centuries BC, to complete the circumnavigation of Africa starting from the Red Sea, to return back in Egypt from Gibraltar. In the context of Carthaginian expansion there are two expeditions in the Atlantic, that went far beyond the limits reached by the Phoenicians of the homeland: the expedition of Hanno in Gabon and that of Imilcone in North West Europe.

The reasons appear to have been once again economic, related to the metals research (copper, tin, gold in Africa, tin and lead in northern Europe). In both cases it came to the creation of trade contacts, foundation of emporia and colonies, and penetration in the inner territories. The risk of attacks by pirates and rival powers, pushed Carthage to give military protection to shipments, always joined with war fleets, absolutely different from those of the Phoenicians of the homeland, a few centuries earlier.

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