

MEDINA

MEDITERRANEAN NETWORK FOR THE VALORIZATION AND FRUITION OF INSCRIPTIONS PRESERVED IN MUSEUMS

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Photo: Gold Necklace composed of Granulated gold beads. Beirut, National Museum.

Training Courses in Lebanon

The second training programme of MEDINA took place from April 11 – 12 at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. Fourteen Lebanese students of archaeology, epigraphy, and museology attended the event and received training on the University of Pisa's DASI database and the information technology tools developed by the Scuola Normale in Pisa. Participants included students from the American University of Beirut, Lebanese University, and the University of Balamand, all leading schools for the study of archaeology in Lebanon. Ms Irene Rossi and Mr Daniele Marotta from the Scuola Normale travelled to Beirut to conduct the training. Students learned how to identify information for cataloging, organize this information into a consistent schema, and insert the information into a digital archive. On the second day, students practiced their data entry skills by digitalizing epigraphic and archaeological items of the National Museum of Beirut and entering them into DASI.

The Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions, DASI, is a project of the Department of Civilizations and Forms of Knowledge at the University of Pisa and is led by Professor Alessandra Avanzini. As part of the MEDINA project, students in Lebanon, Jordan, and Italy will use the software to insert Phoenician and Nabataean inscriptions and artefacts into the DASI database, creating a unique and valuable resource for experts, students and epigraphists around the world.



Training Courses in Lebanon.

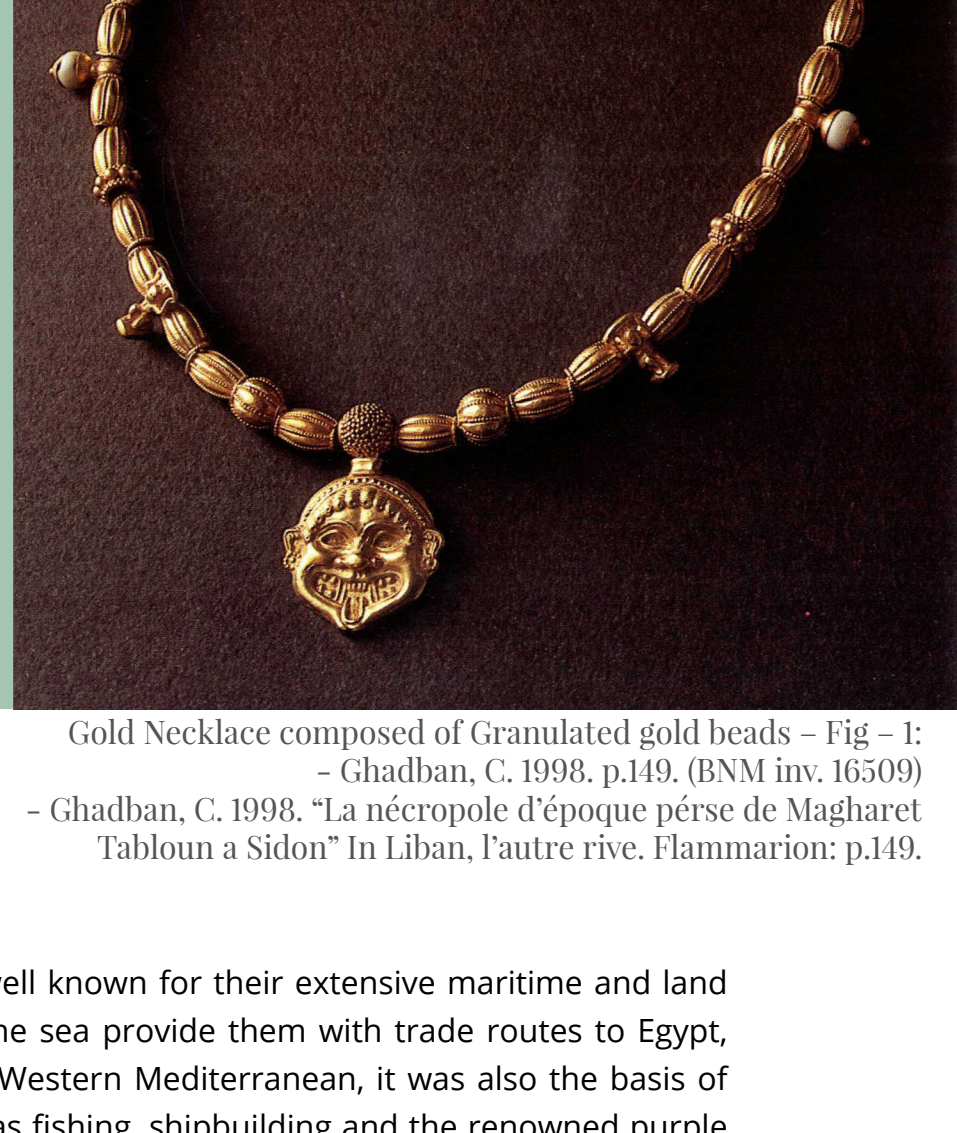
Upcoming Project Meeting in Lebanon

The second Project Steering Committee Meeting will take place in Beirut from May 30–31. Partners from Italy, Spain, and Jordan will travel to Beirut for the event to meet with Lebanon based partners and stakeholders. The meeting will mark approximately one year since the initiation of the MEDINA project.

PHOENICIAN TRADE AND GOODS

Dr. Helen Sader, Jack Nurpetlian, and Hassan El-Hajj

Dr. Helen Sader
is Chair of the History and Archaeology Department at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. As part of the MEDINA team in Lebanon, Dr. Sader and her research team are working to create a comprehensive catalogue of Phoenician objects and inscriptions housed in the National Museum of Beirut. Below, they examine the various types of goods traded under the Phoenician empire.



Gold Necklace composed of Granulated gold beads – Fig – 1:
– Ghadban, C. 1998. p.149. (BNM inv. 16509)
– Ghadban, C. 1998. “La nécropole d’époque perse de Magharet Tabloun a Sidon” In Liban, l’autre rive, Flammarion: p.149.

The Phoenicians are well known for their extensive maritime and land trade. Not only did the sea provide them with trade routes to Egypt, the Aegean, and the Western Mediterranean, it was also the basis of their main industries such as fishing, shipbuilding and the renowned purple dye industry. The limited amount of raw materials available on the narrow Phoenician coast, coupled with the relentless requests of raw materials by neighboring states, drove the Phoenician maritime expansion and enabled the establishment of their extensive trading networks in order to satisfy their local and foreign needs.

Cedar wood –abundant in the Phoenician hinterland–was the only raw material locally available and it was mainly traded with Egypt due to its strength, length and scent, as attested in Egyptian literary sources of the second millennium BC. The Journey of Wenamun, a text of the 10th c. BC, depicts the amount of goods traded to the Royal House in Byblos in exchange of a shipment of cedar wood. The exchange material, as expected, included large amounts of gold and silver, as well as other metals and goods, such as linen, papyrus rolls, and foodstuff to satisfy local demand.

The annals of the neo-Assyrian kings Ashurnasipal II (883 – 859 BC) and Shalmaneser III (858 – 824 BC) list the booty taken from the Phoenician cities. The booty and tribute listed is an indicator used by scholars to identify the commodities that were traded by the Phoenician cities and which were provided to the Assyrians. Next to metals –gold, silver, tin and bronze–they mention exotic animals, precious wood, such as ebony and boxwood, and finally, semiprecious stones, such as lapis-lazuli and carnelian. The Assyrians, of course, cut wood from the Lebanese mountains for the building of their temples and palaces.

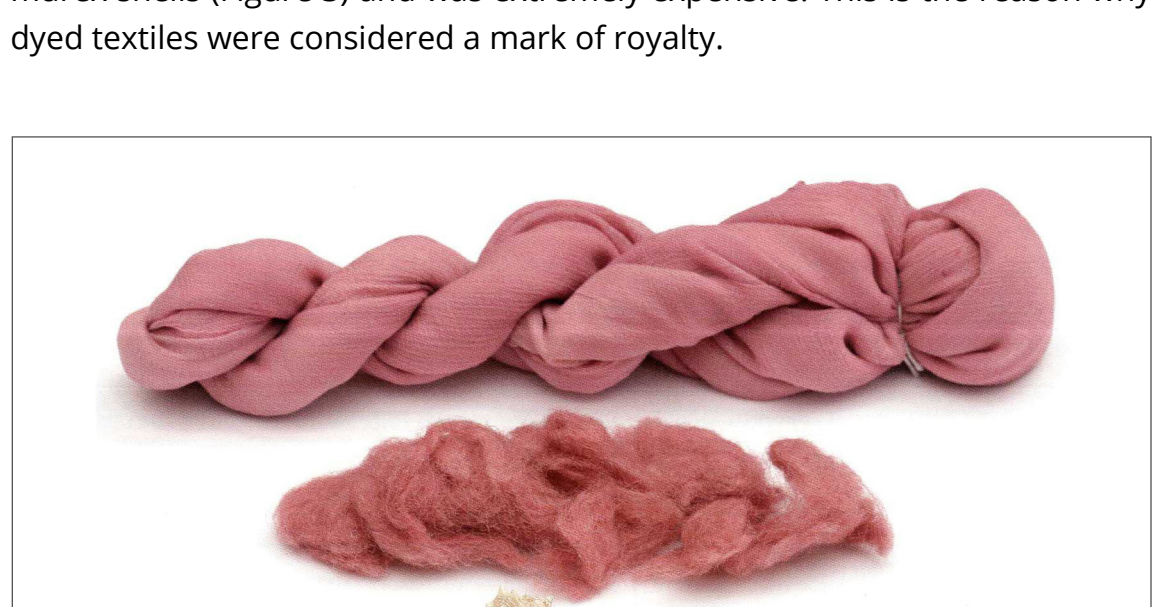
Later on, Phoenician traders started expanding in search of new sources of raw materials and developed a network that not only covered the Mediterranean basin, but extended to the African and European coast on the Atlantic. Due to their success, the Phoenician cities became extremely wealthy, prompting the prophet Ezekiel –writing in the 7th c. B.C.– to address the island city of Tyre as ‘the ships’ in reference to its important trading fleet and numerous trading outposts. Tyre was no doubt one of the most successful trading cities along the Phoenician coast with colonies set up in Cyprus, Rhodes, Anatolia, and Spain, as well as other trading posts inland in Syria, Palestine, Arabia, and Mesopotamia.



A pair of Phoenician period copper alloy vessels – Fig – 2:
– Stampolidis, N.C. (Ed). 2003. p. 448–449
– Stampolidis, N.C. (Ed). 2003. Sea Routes... From Sidon to Huelva Interconnections in the Mediterranean 16th–6th c. B.C. Athens: p. 448–449.

As it appears from all the available written sources, the most significant imports were precious metals acquired from the Phoenician colonies around the Mediterranean basin, such as Cyprus, Asia Minor, Sardinia, Italy and Spain. All these colonies were located in strategic positions in close proximity to metal resources, which were mined by the locals and exported back to the homeland. It is important to mention that the Phoenician search for metals, especially silver and iron, was spurred by constant Assyrian demands culminating in the 8th to 7th c. B.C. The Phoenicians used metals to produce beautiful jewelry (Figure 1) and vessels (Figure 2) that were offered as gifts or taken as booty.

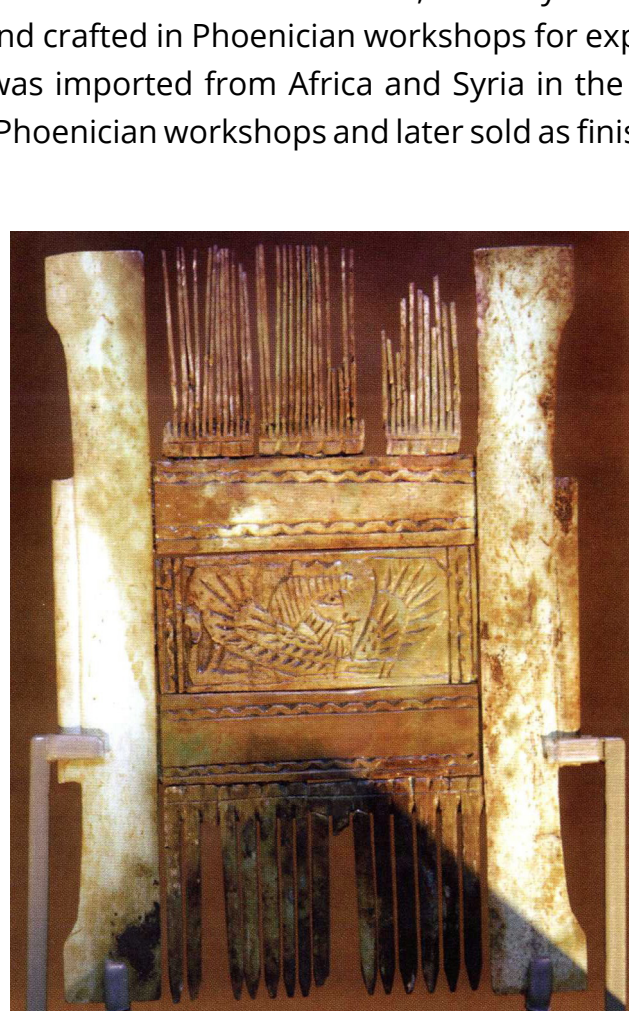
Textiles were another important commodity traded by the Phoenicians, especially purple dyed textiles, a highly valued local specialty. The textiles are believed to have been imported from Damascus and dyed in Phoenicia. The Phoenicians were experts in purple dyeing: the dye itself was extracted from murex shells (Figure 3) and was extremely expensive. This is the reason why dyed textiles were considered a mark of royalty.



An assortment of Murex shells – Fig – 3:
– Doumet, E.J. 2007. p. 89.
– Doumet, E.J. 2007. “La Pourpre” In. La Méditerranée des Phéniciens: de Tyr à Carthage. Institut du Monde Arabe: p. 89.

Vineyards and olive tree plantations were scattered along the slopes of the Lebanon Mountains and provided the basis for an active wine and olive oil industry along the Phoenician coast. These were often transported in large quantities in amphorae, as attested by several Phoenician shipwrecks.

In addition to the materials mentioned above, a variety of other raw materials were imported and crafted in Phoenician workshops for export. For example, ivory (Figure 4) was imported from Africa and Syria in the form of elephant tusks, worked in Phoenician workshops and later sold as finished luxury items.



Ivory Comb – Fig – 4:
– Jidéjian, N. 2006. p. 251.
– Jidéjian, N. 2006. Sidon through the Ages. Aleph, Lebanon: p.251.

By the 7th c. B.C. the Phoenician coast was considered a major trading hub. Raw materials were imported from all over the Mediterranean basin, as well as from other inland locations through their numerous trading outposts. These materials were then crafted into luxury goods, which were redistributed and sold for profit through an intricate trading network that spanned most of the known world at the time.