



## Φοινίκη

BY DITTE MARIA D. HIORT & SIGNE KRAG

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In the spring of 2011, students and professors from Aarhus University (AU – classical archaeologists), Ruhr-University, Bochum (RUB – primarily classical archaeologists) and Central European University, Budapest (CEU – primarily late antique historians) went on an excursion to Lebanon. The length of the excursion was 14 days and it included a two day seminar followed by on-site presentations on different historical and archaeological sites by the students and professors. The excursion gave students and professors from different countries, environments, and interests the possibility to meet in a historical and archaeological forum. The main purposes were to explore and experience the sites, to participate in discussions, obtain new knowledge, and to create new contacts in a professional and friendly environment.

This issue of *Agora* will include abstracts prepared by the students on their chosen topics given either at the seminar or on-site. The abstracts cover the history from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. The purpose of this introduction is to give a general overview of Lebanon in a topographical and archaeological sense.

### General Historical Overview

The modern country of Lebanon, a narrow coastal strip, also called Phoenicia by the Greeks from the late Bronze Age onwards, originally stretched from the Lebanon Mountains to the Mediterranean Sea and from northern Palestine to southern Syria. Other than consisting of many larger and smaller dependent city states, never united in one nation, Phoenicia was also part of a greater area known as the Canaan. Lebanon has a very long and complex history, which includes great eras such as the Bronze Age settlements, the Phoenician trade and commerce people, the Hellenistic Period, and the annexation into the Roman Province of *Syria*.

Not a lot of archaeological evidence exist from the Early and Middle Bronze Age, but a few cultic structures have been found in Byblos, and settlement structures have been found all over Lebanon.



Fig. 1: Overview of the ruins of Byblos.

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From the Late Bronze Age we have the El-Armana Tablets, some of our earliest dated evidence of the contact and trade between Egypt and the big harbour cities of Phoenicia. The tablets are dated to 1417-1362 BC. These tablets confirm the importance of Beirut, Tyre, and Sidon as large, rich, and politically important centres, but Byblos and Arwad were also known to be important cities.

The Phoenician colonization of the whole Mediterranean began in the early Iron Age, mainly in Spain, northern Africa, Sardinia, Sicily, and Malta. The need for expansion could be explained as the growing domination by the Assyrian-Babylonian Empire or the fact that Lebanon was in need of access to resources such as metals because of the Phoenicians' abilities as great traders and artists. This period was characterized by the constant rivalry between Tyre and Sidon, and in the larger parts of the period Tyre was the dominant city.

The Assyrian-Babylonian domination increased during the sixth century and culminated in the siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar II's armies in 572 BC. The city states kept their independence during the whole period while paying tributes to the kings of the Empire.



Photo: Signe Krag

Fig. 2: The Obelisk temple at Byblos, erected in the 20th century BC

The arrival of Alexander the Great marked the beginning of the Hellenistic Empire and the increasing Hellenization of the eastern Mediterranean. A very visible piece of archaeological evidence of Alexander's

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time in Lebanon is the huge causeway built from mainland Tyre to the island fortress of the city. After Alexander's death in 323 BC, Phoenicia passed back and forth between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids before finally passing into the possession of the Seleucids in 198 BC. The next century was a more or less peaceful one, but the gradual weakness of the Seleucid Empire and the final annexation into the Roman Province of *Syria* in 64 BC marks the end of the Hellenistic Period. Very few archaeological remains derive from this period, and Beirut is one of the few cities presenting monuments from this time.

The Roman Period of Lebanon was characterized by the dominance of many different Emperors and Governors, politics, and monumentalization. The wealth was steadily increasing and the trade with metals, linen, glass, and purple dyed products made the Phoenicians prosperous. During the reign of Septimius Severus, Tyre became the chief city of *Syria Phoenice* and from the fourth century *Phoenice Paralia* or *Prima*. The archaeological remains show a variety of different local and roman styles, preferences, and individuality.

The Late Antique Period officially began in AD 395 and ended in AD 636 when Damascus fell to the Arabs. The Islamic Period marked the next large era of Lebanon and lasted roughly until the arrival of the Crusaders in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This period was marked by religious differences and stylistic changes as seen in the reign of the Umayyads. The archaeological remains from the time of the Crusaders in Lebanon are vast and extensive, and it is possible to see several different kinds of castles and churches. The period marked the last great era in ancient Lebanese history.

### Geography and Topography

Lebanon is characterized by various and often dramatic landscapes, from the deepest valleys to the highest mountains, from the Oceanside to the fertile hinterland, and from the dry, desert-like landscape to the stony impassable hills.

The archaeological remains of Lebanon are primarily Roman due to the continuation of a great portion of the cities and the monumentalization of the Roman architecture. Even though there is excavated and preserved material from other periods, the Roman Period is the one most visible and vast.

The geographical and topographical overview will follow the listing of the handed in abstracts into geographical areas divided into areas from the northern to the southern part of Lebanon.

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The most northern site reached on the trip was the tower of Hermel situated in the Bekaa Valley. This puzzling and much discussed monument is placed in a very distinct and desolate location.

Reaching the Kadisha Valley, one of the deepest valleys in Lebanon, many monasteries and hermit's caves are to be seen. The whole valley is still used today by various faiths as a place of worship, seclusion, and asceticism. The area is very fertile, and many waterfalls and springs can be seen passing through the valley.

The first large harbour city visited in the northern part was Byblos, the oldest continuously populated city in the world. It was founded around 5000 BC as it can be seen in the archaeological material. The so-called royal tombs of Byblos from the Bronze Age show a close connection with Egypt due to the extensive burial gifts imported from there. Several crusader remains can be seen here as well.



Fig. 3: Sarcophagus from the royal tombs of Byblos.

Baalbek is situated as the largest centre of the Bekaa Valley. It was a very important religious centre from early on, and large Roman temples can be seen here, some very well preserved.

Qalaat Faqra is placed on the hills of Mount Lebanon at a height of 1500 meters. The striking feature of the area is the creation of a huge labyrinth by the natural rock formations.

Beirut, the main capital, is another large harbour city in Lebanon. During the civil war, many archaeological remains were re-discovered in Beirut due to the extensive bombing of the city. Unfortunately, many of the sites have been built over, and the ones recently excavated are not easy to gain access to. Fortunately there is material covering the time from the Bronze Age to at least the Roman Period.

Niha and Hosn Niha are also sites located in the Bekaa Valley, northeast of Zahle. These two temple complexes are situated within two kilometres from each other. Quarries have also been found in this area. Hosn Niha is placed on a higher level than Niha and represents the different heights of the area well.

The Umayyad city of Anjar is located southeast of Zahle in a very marshy terrain. The city is extremely well preserved due to the early abandonment. The city is laid out in a square grid and is altogether very Roman, also including many spolia from Kamid el-Loz.



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Fig. 4: The crusader Sea Castle at Sidon.

The second largest harbour city of Lebanon was Sidon. The city is situated 33 kilometres north of Tyre in the southern part of Lebanon. Not a lot of material from the early periods is visible today. The famous Alexander Sarcophagus was discovered in one of the Sidonian necropoleis, today well hidden. Sidon was also a large centre during the Crusader Period and many remains are seen today. The Eshmun sanctuary is located three kilometres from Sidon. This place of cultic practice is situated in beautiful and hilly nature.



Fig. 5: The Eshmun sanctuary at Sidon.



Fig. 6: A throne at the Eshmun sanctuary

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Tyre is the southernmost harbour city of Lebanon and also the largest ancient city of Phoenicia. The city consisted of both a mainland - and an island city, where most of the ancient monuments are situated. It is the most complete city preserved, primarily showing Roman monuments. The city was a great centre in the time of the Crusaders and a large church has been located.

In the aftermath of the excursion, we find ourselves enriched with an enormous amount of new knowledge concerning the archaeology and history of Lebanon. Also, new cultures have been explored and new friendships have been established across borders. It is of absolute importance for people in our field to participate in arrangements like this because it offers a unique opportunity to become a part of foreign research environments.