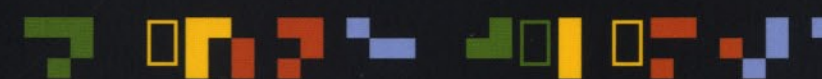




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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS — COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

PHOENICIAN TERRACOTTA FIGURE OF A MAN

At the end of the second millennium BC, an ethnic group emerged from among the Canaanites, whose country extended along the East coast of the Mediterranean, and who spoke a language that belonged to the Semitic family. The Greeks called these people Phoenicians, using their word meaning *purple*, probably naming them after one of their favourite products, the stuff dyed with the 'blood' of Phoenician whelk or murex. The Phoenicians did not form an integrated state. Their big settlements, Arad, Byblos, Sidon and Tyre in the first place, were independent city-states, but they all shared a common religion, language, alphabet and other cultural characteristics. They inhabited the narrow coastal strip bounded by the Lebanon mountains, the country jutting slightly into Syria on the north and Israel on the south, corresponding roughly to the territory of present-day Lebanon. Their geographical position automatically made them dependent on the products of their handicraft and their maritime trade, as the cornerstones of their economy. Homer mentions them as a seafaring people. From the very end of the second millennium on, they made voyages of exploration in the Mediterranean, in the course of which they soon reached the Iberian

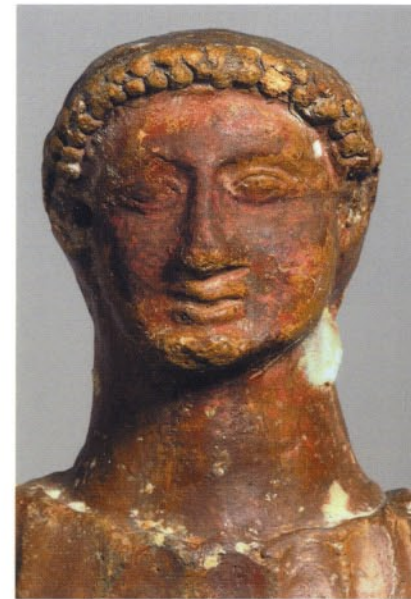
Peninsula, and even beyond that, the islands heralding Britain. The main purpose of these travels was to obtain raw materials (metals in the first place), and besides that, trade with their own products and those of the people they got to know during these voyages. In the second half of the sixth century the sudden rise of the powerful Persian Empire led to the occupation of their country, but the Phoenicians' independent existence was ended only by the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BC. Their most lasting achievement was — rather than the hieroglyphic and syllabic script — their consonantal alphabetic script based on Canaanite antecedents, the characters of which were adapted by the Greeks, and thus are still in use.

Their way of life made them eminently eligible for the role of introducing the achievements of the great Near Eastern civilisations of Egypt and Mesopotamia to the people inhabiting the coastline of the Mediterranean. In their days of glory, from the end of the eighth to the beginning of the sixth century, they were instrumental in the emergence of the so-called orientazing culture, which was homogeneous in many respects; the rise of this culture was stimulated considerably by Phoenician ivorywork, gilt-silver bowls ornamented with figured frieses, gold jewellery and sealstones, also imitations of Egyptian scarabs. They introduced glassmaking in the world of the Mediterranean.

Though the iconographic motifs of the characteristic genres of their art can be traced back mostly to Egyptian and Mesopotamian models, they did not allow the Canaanite traditions, rooted to a certain extent in the Bronze Age, to fall into oblivion, and the mark of Phoenician masters is clearly discernible even in the material of faraway cultures.

To facilitate their voyages and foster their commercial activities, they started to establish trading posts in the tenth century, and from the turn of the ninth and eighth centuries on, they established colonies, amongst which the 'new city', Carthage was the most prominent one. Initially, they competed peacefully with the Greeks, who embarked on voyages encompassing the whole coastline of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea soon after the Phoenician efforts. The Greeks did not found any settlements east of their homeland, still, South Italy, the better part of Sicily, the southern coast of France and the northeastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula essentially belonged to their sphere of interest. The Phoenicians established settlements in Cyprus, maybe in Rhodes and also on the southern coast of Crete. Their trading posts are found mostly on the coasts of Sardinia, the western part of Sicily and the island of Motya, in Malta, on the Mediterranean coast of present-day Tunis, Algeria and Morocco, furthermore, in the Balearic Islands and the greater southern part of the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, they even settled beyond the Strait of Gibraltar, to the Atlantic coast of Morocco. This division of the spheres of interest did not mean rigid separation: for instance, the works of Phoenician masters turned up in large numbers in the territory of Italy inhabited by the Etruscans. Likewise, Greek vases surfaced in Carthage and other Phoenician settlements. Having been occupied by the Persians, the western settlements seceded from Phoenicia, creating an independent empire under the command of Carthage. On the other hand, the influence of Greek art got stronger in the homeland, just as much as in all the other parts of the Persian Empire. The Parian marble sarcophagi, found mainly in Sidon, are the most beautiful relics of the Graeco-Phoenician art of the fifth and fourth centuries, which developed along these lines, but at the same time never abandoned the local traditions, either. Apart from a series of carved stones, we can find a rich crop of terracotta figurines belonging to the same artistic trend, an important representative of which is the unusually big (one third of lifesize) male figure, recently acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts.

The *design of the tresses* can be traced back to the Greek sculpture of the turn of the sixth and fifth centuries, though, the original snail curls got simplified into mere protrusions, which frame the forehead in two rows. However, a later period is indicated in the posture of the figure by the appearance of the great achievement of Early Classical Greek



sculpture: the *ponderation* of the standing figure. The weight of the body is not equally distributed, it is the right leg that bears the bulk of the weight, the slightly bent left leg simply props the body up. The simultaneous presence of these two features indicates that the statue must have been made around the third quarter of the fifth century BC. It is remarkable, however, that the gesture of the hands preserved the local tradition hailing from the Bronze Age: the left hand raised as if in greeting, prayer or benediction, while the missing right hand originally reached forward. It is another characteristically local feature that the figure ostensibly imitates the posture of ponderation, whereas neither the hips, nor the head move away from the frontal pose, as it is seen in Greek statues; also the folds of the long, sleeved robe (*chiton*) are less dynamic. By blending traits taken from the earlier periods of Greek art, the figure managed to preserve the spirit of its local antecedents, similarly to its close relation, the much disputed marble statue of a man of Motya.

Judging by the gesture of the hands, the statue could be the representation of a god and a mortal alike. The figure was produced by using a mould — a technique that had been used in Greece to make terracotta statues since the seventh century. The back part not modelled; traces of joining the two parts were roughly smoothed down, which is clearly visible at both sides of the statue. The two arms, moulded separately, were inserted afterwards into the sockets fashioned for them. Besides other well-known items of Graeco-Phoenician terracotta sculpture, three decades ago hundreds of figurines were discovered among the cargo of the wreck of a ship sunk close to the Lebanese coast. (Some of them are on show in Case 1, Room III of the permanent exhibition of the Department of Classical Antiquities.) Nevertheless, a male figure of this type ranks among the greatest rarities for the time being. It is probable that the workshop, which produced the statues, was in Tyre or in its surrounding. A seashell, stuck on the neck of the figure, under the left ear, indicates that the statue in possession of the Museum of Fine Arts must have come to light from under the sea, too, even though originally it was clearly intended to be set up in a shrine as a votive gift.

SZILÁGYI JÁNOS GYÖRGY

