

Finding Canaan: Ancient Roots of the Lost Phoenician Civilization

Jim Willis

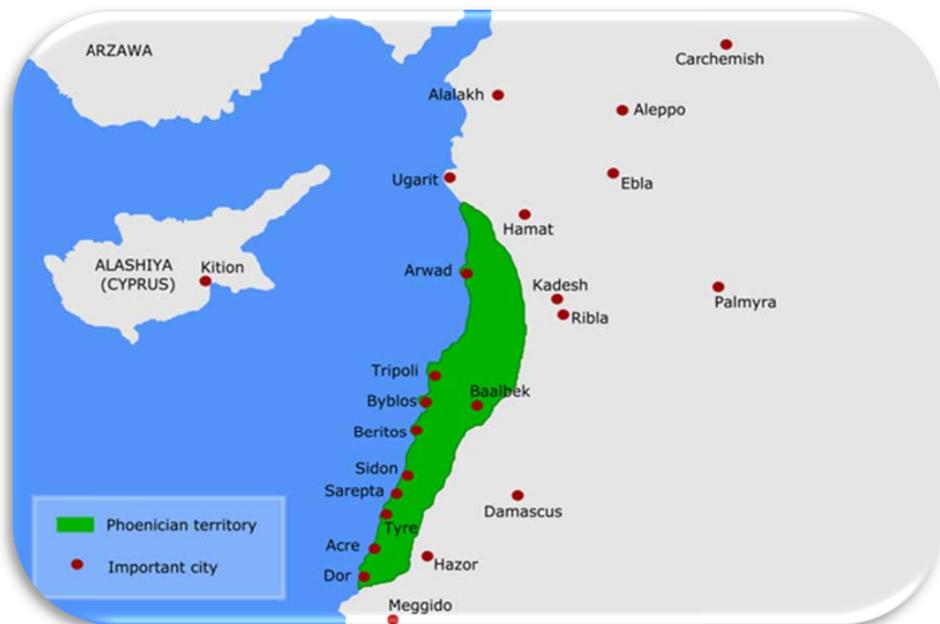


Of all the seafaring civilizations which, to our knowledge, first explored the vast oceans, none are more mysterious than the ancient Phoenicians. How far did their voyages take them? What lands did they discover and explore? How did they navigate? What forgotten

influence did they have upon the history of the world? And most importantly, where did they come from?

Map of Phoenicia- late Bronze Age (CC BY-SA 3.0)

In the early texts of the *Bible* they are called Canaanites, although there is a subtle difference between the two terms. Phoenicia generally refers to what is now called Lebanon. Canaan is a broader term that included present day Israel, Syria and Jordan. But they were collectively a Semitic people and it was their written language that was the basis for first the Greek and then the Roman alphabet from which the English language is derived.

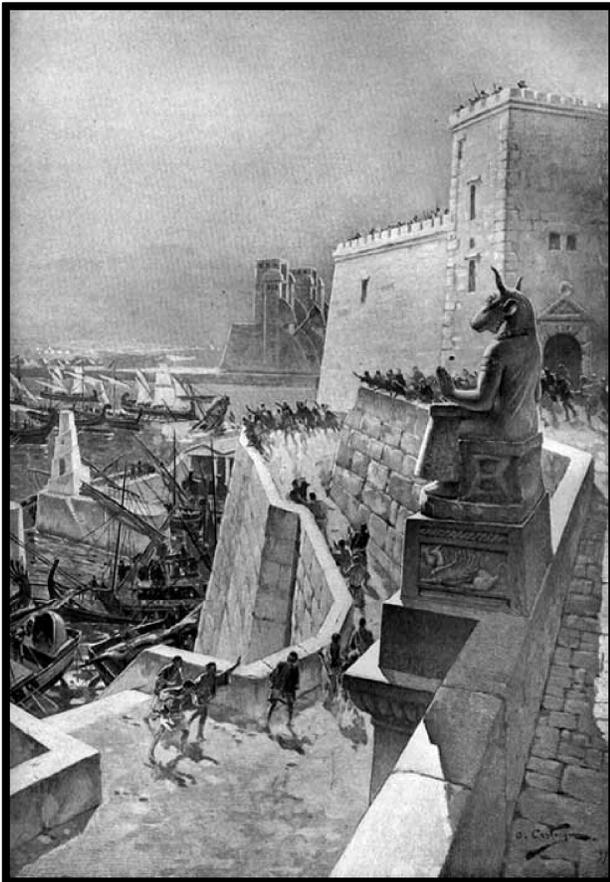




Phoenician ship carved on the face of a sarcophagus. 2nd century AD (Elie Plus/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

It must have been quite a sight to see the Phoenician great ships, decked out with carved images of horse's heads in honor of *Yamm*, their god of the sea, when they hove into view, bringing the promise of trade from exotic lands. Especially prized were purple robes from Tyre, coveted initially by Mesopotamian royalty

and later by Roman aristocrats. Tyre, and its sister city, Sidon, were famous for their exports and trade systems. Byblos, which was to gain fame in the Egyptian myth of Osiris, and Baalbek, named after the god Baal, who was later so despised by the Hebrew prophets, were the most important religious centers of the Canaanite civilization.



A naval action during the siege of Tyre in 332 BC by André Castaigne, (1888- 1889) (Public Domain)

Canaan, Descendant of Noah

Canaan, the man who is the presumed founder of the Canaanites, was reportedly the son of Ham and the grandson of the patriarch Noah. His story is told in *Genesis* 9:20-27. After the flood waters had retreated: "Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked. When Noah

awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."

What had Ham, the father of Canaan, done to his naked father? The act remains a mystery. But why was his son Canaan cursed, and not Ham? According to Robert Johnson Bowie, Jr., in his book *Genesis Characters and Events in Ancient Greek Art*, this story gets even more interesting. When Noah was told to board the ark prior to the flood, his family joined the cruise as well. His son Ham was married to a Canaanite woman, named Naamah. If the ages given to the biblical patriarchs were to be taken seriously, and the story read historically rather than metaphorically, people lived a lot longer before the flood. Thus, Naamah was thought to have brought with her both a genetic disposition for long life and anger toward the god who had destroyed the people of her birth family. Was she the one who influenced her husband's attitude towards his god-fearing father? Did the daughter-in-law inspire whatever the act was that brought about Noah's anger?



Noah Sacrificing after the Deluge, by Benjamin West, San Antonio Museum of Art. (Public Domain)

It gets even more intriguing. Through the study of linguistics, some scholars believe that Naamah went on to fame and glory, remembered by her descendants under names such as Astarte, Ishtar, Artemis, Asherah, and perhaps Isis, eventually emerging as the goddess Athena. The Greeks later built an altar to her, lauding the way she brought back the pre-flood religion of Cain who, according to their religious beliefs, was enlightened by the serpent from Eden. Is it any wonder, then, that this was one of the reasons biblical theologians give for Jehovah, the God of the Israelites, to later order the destruction of the Canaanites when the Israelites were about to enter Canaan following their exile in Egypt?

Canaanite Masons and Shipbuilders

For those who consider the *Bible* to be historically accurate, it is probably a lucky thing that the Jews never completely followed instructions. They let some Canaanites live, which proved handy when Solomon wanted to build the great temple at Jerusalem. His chief architect and head builder was none other than Hiram of Tyre, a Canaanite city famous for its 'Cedars of Lebanon'. According to legend, Hiram went on to fame as a principle founder of Freemasonry, who provided not only the building secrets that enabled the construction of monumental feats of architecture, but the very blueprint for Masonic lodge rooms around the world even today, including the twin pillars of Jachin and Boaz, the royal arch, and many other secrets of the higher degrees of Masonry.



Phoenician Merchants and Traders. Publisher: New York Ward, Lock (1881) (Public Domain)

Even before the time of Solomon, however, the Canaanites had established their reputation as seafarers. During the time of the pharaohs they dominated the Levant, an area that includes modern day Lebanon, Jordan, and much of Syria. Given the fact that geography hemmed them into a narrow strip along the coast of the Mediterranean, they were forced to turn to the sea and eventually controlled most of the Mediterranean.



The Queen of Sheba before the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem by Salomon de Bray (1597–1664) (Public Domain)

Canaanite Gene Pool

According to modern DNA testing reported by the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, not only were their principal cities not destroyed during the Jewish ascension to power in Israel some 3,500 years ago, their gene pool was enhanced when even earlier settlers from Iran were peacefully assimilated into their culture 5,000 years ago. And 1,500 years before that, according to DNA recently extracted from an Israeli cave, an influx of immigrants from Turkey arrived on the scene, carrying a gene associated with light skin and blue eyes.



The remaining columns of the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbek (Public Domain)

City of Cain

To make matters even more complicated, there are those who want to place the origins of the ancient city in Lebanon called Baalbek, a city supposedly built by the Romans, back even further into remote history. In 1860, Scottish explorer David Urquhart wrote in his diary that while visiting the site he was told by the locals that the city of Baalbek was built by none other than Cain, son of Adam and Eve.

The book of *Genesis* offers yet another historical tidbit. *Genesis* 4, tells that after the notorious Cain killed his brother Abel, he went out and built a city. Was that city the precursor to Baalbek?

A literal reading of the *Bible*, of course, raises a huge problem at this point. If Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel, and Cain killed Abel, where did the inhabitants of Cain's city come from? The elders of Baalbek did not attempt to answer this riddle, but they had no doubt about the geography. In the words of Istifan al-Duwayhi, the 57th Patriarch of the Maronite Church:

"Tradition states that the fortress of Baalbek is the most ancient building in the world. Cain, the son of Adam, built it in the year 133 of the creation, during a fit of raving madness. He gave it the name of his son Enoch and peopled it with giants who were punished for their iniquities by the flood."



The largest stone at Baalbek, uncovered in 2014 (Ralph Ellis / CC BY-SA 4.0)

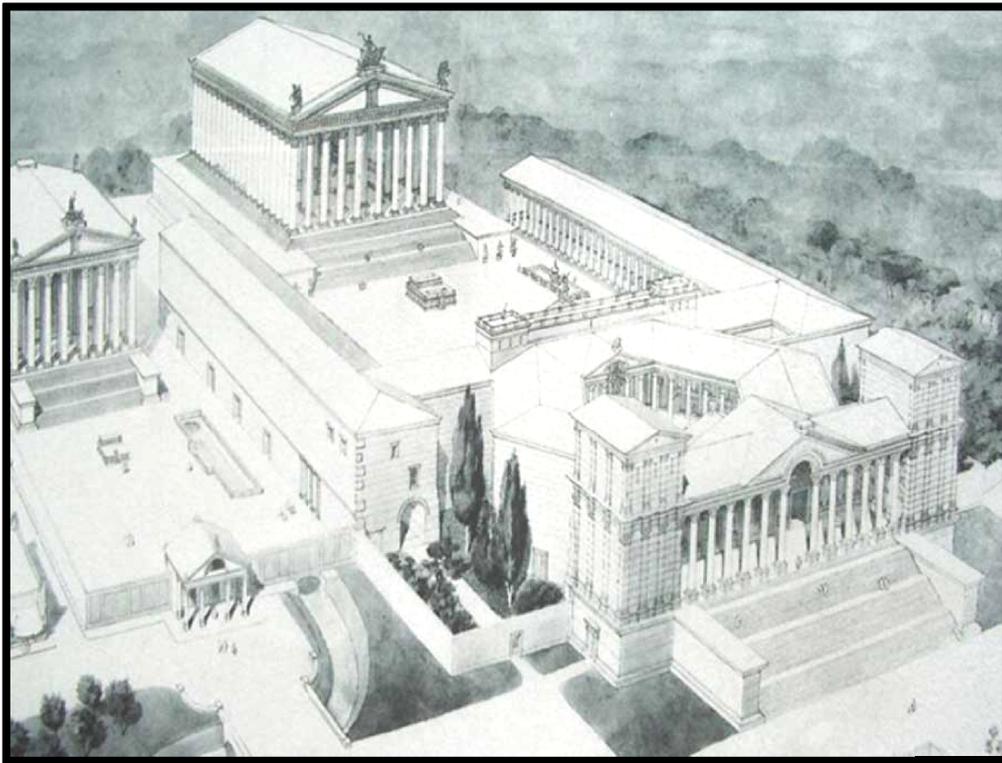
It probably would have helped Urquhart's reputation if he had simply reported what he heard and left it at that. But, as so many after him have done, he went on to speculate

about the sheer size of the stones. They are incredible, being the largest quarried blocks yet discovered on planet Earth. They came from a nearby limestone quarry, these days numbered Quarry #1 and Quarry #2, but back in early times it was just one big quarry. The largest block,

known as the 'Stone of the South', weighs 1,242 tons (1 126,723 kilograms). The next largest, called *Hajjar al-Hibla*, or 'Stone of the Pregnant Woman', is solid limestone and weighs 1,000 tons (907,185 kilograms). One would be hard-pressed to move monsters of this kind today. How the ancient builders expected to move them is anyone's guess. But they must have had a plan, because stones weighing 400 to 800 tons (362,874 to 725,748 kilograms) did make their way to the fortress, and were then raised 20 feet (six meters) in the air, and carefully placed with exact precision over the foundations.

City of Nimrod

How they did it, no one knows. Urquhart is said to have suggested that the builders had trained mammoths to do the task. For this he was soundly laughed out of the archaeologist's club. But, in his favor, a careful reading of his diary, readily available today, does not make any references to mammoths. Urquhart himself discounted the stories that took the original construction all the way back to Cain. He thought it was built right before Noah's Flood by the wicked people whom God was about to punish by drowning. Evidence of their civilization was, of course, swept away in the deluge. But he did recount various legends that giants had manhandled the huge limestone blocks, that Nimrod constructed it, that it became known as 'The Tower of Babel', and that Solomon built it with the help of local djinns as a summer palace for the Queen of Sheba.



A proposed reconstruction of the temple complex at Baalbek under the Romans (Public Domain)

City of Romans

Nowadays the official version of the Baalbek story is that it was built by the Romans, who continued to call it by its Greek name, Heliopolis. Rome did annex this ancient religious center of Phoenicia in 64 AD and built extensively there, including the great Temple of Jupiter, the ruins of which survive to this day and are a popular tourist destination. There is no doubt that most of today's visible construction can be traced back to Roman times, but the foundations upon which they built are undoubtedly much older. There are many scholars who make the claim that Phoenicians travelled to North America, perhaps even far up the St. Lawrence and Mississippi rivers to the Great Lakes, so as to transport ore from the copper mines of Lake Superior back to the burgeoning Bronze Age trade. If so, they preceded Columbus by centuries, if not millennia.

Dating Back to Younger Dryas

That they were secretive goes without saying. In those days, maps and routes were kept closely guarded so as to protect their trade monopoly. But enough evidence seems to have survived to warrant much more investigation. If even some of the evidence of their far-flung civilization proves credible, Baalbek, Lebanon, might be the oldest surviving, spiritually significant, principle city on earth. Was it indeed constructed shortly after the catastrophe that violently ended the Younger Dryas Ice Age? Was it thus contemporaneous with the construction of Göbekli Tepe? Do its early roots extend even further back in time? What was the spiritual presence that lingered so strongly there that Rome saw fit to build a great temple on the ruins of an old Canaanite religious site?



Phoenician trade routes (CC BY-SA 3.0)

We may never know all the secrets that the ancient Phoenician civilization could have taught mankind, but a few trends are visible even at a distance from this culture. Firstly, the mythology of the pre-Canaanite/Phoenician civilization runs deep. Oral history may not be

reliable in terms of archaeological evidence, but where there is this much smoke, there is very possibly a fire underneath it all.

Secondly, the Phoenician's desire to dominate trade and commerce led to a great deal of secrecy surrounding information about sea routes and foreign lands. Countries as close as the British Isles, Iceland, and Greenland were unknown to those who did not have the proper Phoenician credentials to leave the Mediterranean Sea through the Straits of Gibraltar. There is even some good evidence that Christopher Columbus might have had access to Phoenician maps.

Hellenistic Heliopolis

Eventually, Phoenician secrecy led to the downfall of its civilization. What Greece could not negotiate, it took by force. In 334 BC, when Alexander the Great conquered Baalbek and renamed it Heliopolis, he was able to easily subdue both Byblos and Sidon two years later. The remnants of the civilization succumbed to the inevitable, and the unique Phoenician culture dissolved into the Hellenistic Age.

The Phoenicians are frequently referred to as the 'carriers' of civilization. This is a reference to the fact that because of their seafaring skills and feats of exploration they carried their ideals, products, and culture to the whole known world. In this sense, they might be called the

'missionaries' of civilization. Perhaps that influence extended all the way to America.



Battle of Heliopolis during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1800 by Cogniet Leon (1837) (Public Domain)

Although tantalizing literary clues survive in biblical and a few secular accounts, the spiritual mysteries hidden away in Baalbek's ancient past were eventually lost, partly because of religious war and domination, both of which

figure prominently in today's spiritual climate. This kind of thinking brought down the spiritually rich and technologically proficient Phoenicians, a civilization strong enough to prosper for thousands of years. They undoubtedly thought they would last forever. There is no reason to think similar cultures today will not suffer a similar fate.

References

Fell, B. 1976. *America BC.: Ancient Settlers in the New World*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Ngo, R. 2018. *What Happened to the Canaanites?* Biblical Archeological Society.

Quinn, J. 2017. *In Search of the Phoenicians*. Princeton University Press.

Urquhart, D. 2015. *The Lebanon (Mount Souria): A History and a Diary*. BiblioBazaar, LLC

Willis, J. 2019. *Lost Civilizations: The Secret Histories and Suppressed Technologies of the Ancients*. Visible Ink Press.

Willis, J. 2016. *Ancient Gods: Lost Histories, Hidden Truths and the Conspiracy of Silence*. Visible Ink Press.