

LOST IN TRANSLATION.
THE COMPROMISE OF TRANSLATING NON-ENGLISH WRITINGS

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This issue inaugurates a new section of the *Rivista di Studi Fenici* called “Lost in Translation”, where the English translation of some articles whose diffusion is considered important for the studies of the Mediterranean history of the first millennium BCE will be published. The title refers to the many important books and articles written in Italian, Spanish, French, German and other languages that almost seem lost when one scrolls through the bibliography of the many studies devoted to the Phoenicians and written in English today. However, these books and articles often constitute the basis of the Phoenician studies that were born and have grown continuously from the seventies to the present day.

Some time ago, I wrote that: «The “Phoenicians” are back in fashion and bringing them back into the spotlight, has undoubtedly contributed to a number of developments: the interest of British academia, particularly in Oxford, in the sector of research on the Mediterranean of the first millennium in which the Levantine people were protagonists; the involvement of classical scholars in topics related to the Near East of the Iron Age as well as that of the Hellenistic and Roman periods; and last but not least, the use of the English language, which has sent the *Phoinikes* (...) not only across Europe and the countries overlooking the Mediterranean, but as far afield as the USA and Australia. The use of English has formed the basis of the new direction taken by this field of study and has fortunately resulted in a much wider range of scholars becoming involved in the Mediterranean».¹

This is why, when I started directing the *Rivista di Studi Fenici* I decided, after lengthy discussions with scholars on the editorial board, to “promote” the use of English as the primary and almost exclusive language for contributions. We need a *lingua franca* in which to communicate our studies because other scholars must be able to access our research.

Some considerations must be made, however. The writings on history and archaeology, unlike those on the hard sciences, can have a very long life. They are not just used briefly and some of them constitute absolute reference points, even as the disciplines progress. Hence the necessity, at least up until recently, for those dealing with the Phoenicians to know many of the languages used in the writings from the seventies until today, mainly Italian, Spanish, French and German. Now things have changed. Today, Phoenician and Punic studies have “exploded” worldwide. New themes, new regions, new chronological scopes and, above all, new kinds of methodological approaches are bringing ever greater topicality and interest to the study of the history of the Mediterranean of the first millennium BCE from the Phoenician perspective.² This means that, in order to deal with Phoenicians and the Iron Age Mediterranean, from the Levant to the Iberian Peninsula, we need scholars from different backgrounds who speak and write the most diverse languages.

This fact makes it necessary to provide access to a wealth of research that cannot be ignored, something that can only be done by using today’s *lingua franca*: English. This will make many important studies

1 I. Oggiano, *Who Were the “Phoenicians”? A Set of Hypotheses Inviting Debate and Dissent*, in «JRA» 32, 2019, pp. 584-591 (quotation at p. 591).

2 I. Oggiano, *Editorial*, in «RStFen» 44, 2016, p. 9.

accessible (and therefore readable!) and they will hopefully become well-known, recognised and used. These choices, the use of English for *Rivista di Studi Fenici* starting in 2016 and the creation of the “Lost in Translation” section starting in this issue, aim to address what would otherwise appear to be a kind of cultural colonialism due to ignorance of what is not written in English. *Italianum est, non legitur* (but also Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, etc.). This is not an excuse to ignore thousands and thousands of important scientific contributions. That’s why I suggest that young “Phoenician and Punic” scholars read, at least, in German, French, Italian, Spanish to gain access not only to the thousands of articles that constitute the history of the discipline but also to the beauty that is the variety and local tradition of study.

Cultural globalization and localization are concepts that now come hand in hand with our research on ancient societies. The same concepts, therefore, must be kept in mind when we use a language that, as every *lingua franca*, artfully directs entire sectors of our research.