

# THE *RIVISTA DI STUDI FENICI* AT 50

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*Abstract:* The fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the first issue of the *Rivista di Studi Fenici* provides occasion to review the importance of this journal then and now. The Editor in Chief invited a member of the journal's scientific advisory board for his personal views on the matter.

*Keywords:* Phoenician and Punic Studies; Sabatino Moscati; Historiography; History of the Discipline; Scientific Journals.

This is the 50th year of the publication of the *Rivista di Studi Fenici*. For our journal this special occasion marks an important milestone, a moment when we rally to celebrate the achievements of past authors and editors. The journal's fortieth birthday was marked by a contribution written by a leading scholar of our discipline heralding these achievements.<sup>1</sup> Here, I break with tradition and rather than looking back at ten fruitful years of original insights and contributions to knowledge about the Phoenician and Punic world, seven of which under the editorship of the able Ida Oggiano, I wish to pause and reflect briefly on the role that a journal like ours plays in a world of scholarship and publication that has changed dramatically since the foundation of the *Rivista di Studi Fenici* in 1973. Mine is a personal viewpoint; foregrounded is the relationship between noble origins of the journal's past and the challenging times of the journal's present.

## 1. A CONTEXT FOR THE BEGINNINGS

Why have a journal dedicated to Phoenician studies? Time was when such a question would have seemed foolish, when it could simply be asserted that “the Phoenicians aren't like others”. In 1973 the need for a new journal had to be explicitly ascertained by its founder, Sabatino Moscati (1922-1997).<sup>2</sup> The Phoenicians did not enjoy decades of easy self-assurance as the Greeks or the Romans did, an effortless superiority entrenched in a discipline with its books and academic journals dedicated specifically to the Classical world, its texts, philology as well as its archaeology. In Germany, professionalised university researchers in the Classics appeared in the late eighteenth century, a system that was slowly emulated overseas.<sup>3</sup> Classical remains had their principal institutions for study and academic divulgation set up at the same time. The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies was established in London in 1880 and the first issue of its *Journal of Hellenic Studies* published that same year, following the old tradition that learned societies had to have their own journal for dissemination of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> The French had their journal for the Classics – *Revue des Études*

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1 Ribichini 2013.

2 Moscati 1973.

3 Morris 2000.

4 Fyfe *et al.* 2022.

*Grecques* – in 1888, replacing an annual that had already existed for more than 30 years, and flanking the *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* founded in 1877 by the École française d’Athènes. In America, the Archaeological Institute of America was founded in 1879 and its journal, dedicated to matters of Classical archaeology, began in 1885.

The *Rivista di Studi Fenici* was the brainchild of the doyen of modern Phoenician studies, Sabatino Moscati (1922-1997). Its foundation and publication were timely and are one expression of the breadth of vision of this extraordinary individual who wished, and succeeded, in bringing Phoenician studies, with its archaeology and its philology, to a scholar’s Mediterranean that was still pretty much stuck in a binary Graeco-Roman world.<sup>5</sup> In Italy, it can be argued that two forces were decisive in shaping Moscati’s vision for the study of the ancient Phoenicians by the time that the *Centro di Studio sulla Civiltà Fenicia e Punica* was set up in 1969 with Moscati at the helm. The first was the need to prevent the Phoenicians from being lost to Oriental scholarship that was gradually finding its feet after the horrors of World War II; the second, was the determination to ensure that Phoenician studies did not become an innocuous sub-discipline within Classics. An example for Moscati to emulate existed already for the other forgotten protagonists of ancient Mediterranean history – the Etruscans: a journal dedicated to them was established in 1927 and a study centre was founded in Florence in 1932.<sup>6</sup>

A bold attempt to nuance the general understanding of the discourse of Moscati and his school, as seminal and formative thinkers of our discipline not least through the very pages of this journal and its companion monograph series, still needs to be written. Such an intellectual history would have to move away from hagiography and, instead, combine an internalist view which concentrates on what goes on inside a discipline and an externalist view that considers the interaction between practitioners and outside forces – within Italy and beyond it, to encompass those areas where scholarly interests on the Phoenicians thrive. It is in this vein that we ought to see relevance in intellectual pursuits that seek to understand how the Phoenician past has been constructed. That the Phoenicians have been used (if not abused) in an effort to come up with totalising metanarratives which give meaning in history – ancient and modern – has been amply demonstrated in a bold and radical thesis presented by a relative newcomer to Phoenician studies, Josephine Quinn, in her book *In Search of the Phoenicians*.<sup>7</sup> Yet, it beggars belief how hundreds of scholars who gathered at the traditional quadrennial international congress, at Mérida in 2018 and in Ibiza in 2022, failed to debate Quinn’s bold stance. The collective silence was deafening. In print, on the other hand, reflection, appraisal and criticism have been singularly manifest even if some of the discipline’s heavyweights have been notable by their absence.<sup>8</sup>

Why is the dissection of the construction of knowledge needed? I would say that, first and foremost, it is central to the workings of a journal like ours to recognise and define the pluralities of discourses that have made the discipline what it is today. For if not here, where else? Welcoming reflections on those discourses in the making of our discipline is a sure sign of intellectual honesty, maturity and integrity. Moreover, in a contemporary postmodern world and a Europe that carries a heavy ideological baggage of colonial relations, where what we do as scholars generally and as archaeologists and historians in particular, requires adequate intellectual justification,<sup>9</sup> we ought to be bold and define the discourses we belong to in the present.<sup>10</sup> Here I take the cue from Michel Gras when he concluded, in proceedings of a gathering which saluted Moscati’s

5 Xella 2007; Vella 2019; Gomes – De Sousa – Arruda 2023.

6 Tarantini 2002.

7 Quinn 2018.

8 See, for instance, Arnaud 2018; Frendo 2018; Garbati 2021; Gzella 2018; Oggiano 2019.

9 Dietler 2005; Settis 2017; for a global scope, Berg 2013.

10 For an inspirational view into the world of Classical archaeology, see Shanks 1996.

memory: «Ricordare Moscati è anche occasione per prendere coscienza dei grandi cambiamenti nel nostro mondo mediterraneo e dunque della nostra ricerca».<sup>11</sup>

Rallying calls for a general clearing of the throat were made in archaeology in the 1970s and in the 1980s, as part of an effort for the practitioners in the discipline to be critically self-conscious of what they do – in line with what the oft-cited historians of disciplines, Michel Foucault and Thomas Kuhn, recommend. 1973, the year our journal was born, marks the publication of a seminal essay of discontent and discernment by the prehistorian David Clarke.<sup>12</sup> In it, Clarke argued that archaeologists should begin to question their methods and approaches, not be content with easy answers or accepted traditions of workings. The year Phoenician studies were being baptised, the rallying call was being made for archaeology to come of age and for its practitioners to lose their innocence. Phoenician studies were a latecomer but giant strides have been made in the last decades. If my “Elusive Phoenicians” of 1996 was an embrace of the belated winds of change stemming from Spanish researchers affiliated to university prehistory departments, it also reacted to the need for a more systematic application of modern techniques of research: more method and more theory alongside field survey, radiocarbon dating, geoarchaeology, provenance studies, floral and faunal analysis.<sup>13</sup> I leave to others to figure out why interdisciplinary approaches to Phoenician studies took their time to change the way we engage with material remains of the past. But I’ll wager that the role of journals, academic presses and funding agencies, and a strict adherence to the network of patrons who fathered or mothered the academic interests of many of us, was vital in filtering what got done and published, in Italy and elsewhere.

## 2. CHALLENGES AS THE INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE IS REFIGURED

The focus on the (de)construction of knowledge which helped me frame the first part of my thoughts was not meant to question the reality of a Phoenician (or Punic) past. It helped me bring into focus the fact that the intellectual landscape in which we practise our professions – as academics, researchers, heritage management professionals – is being refigured as the face of scholarly communication and scientific publishing changes profoundly and rapidly because of the growth of digital technologies. Thinking that our journal can escape this process unscathed is naïve at best and foolish at worst. In what follows, I wish to reflect briefly on a number of challenges that journals like the *Rivista di Studi Fenici* are facing but also of the resulting opportunities that are arising.

1. Scholarly journals are repositories of the collective research and knowledge of its authors and the research community. They should be the place where new ideas and novel approaches are presented, where syntheses and meta-analyses that identify trends are published, where disciplinary progress is discussed and new directions suggested. Over the years, our journal may have restricted itself too modestly to the presentation of new discoveries and an historical analysis of their significance at the local, regional and supra-regional level. It is time, perhaps, to complement this practice with a drive to commission position papers – viewpoints – on issues which strike at the heart of our discipline, followed by brief discussion pieces, and all wrapped up by the response or reaction of the author of the original position paper. This will foster an ethos of pluralism and unravel a process of healthy dialogue and exchange between scholars that is often relegated to the confidential peer-review system meant to validate research results before these are published. It will certainly help to attract and nurture new professionals in the discipline.

11 Gras 2009, p. 185.

12 Clarke 1973.

13 Vella 1996.

2. The present era of apparently effortless access to information via electronic sources has resulted in a democratisation of knowledge on a scale never witnessed since Gutenberg. The negative side to all of this is what has been aptly called “the death of expertise”,<sup>14</sup> a scenario which is seeing attacks on established knowledge proliferate and a pandemic of misinformation consisting of outlandish and conspiracy theories with their flawed reasoning growing. Worse still is the misappropriation of genetic data to further problematic and social agendas.<sup>15</sup> The Phoenicians are a victim too even if popular views continue to build on old stereotypes of cultural one-upmanship which might come across as rather benign but which may be ideologically tendentious.<sup>16</sup> The peer-review system, where anonymous referees are chosen to act as well-intentioned but rigorous devil’s advocates on work submitted for publication, lies at the heart of scholarly endeavour and ensures that the scientific community continues to validate research and uphold standards. In the Humanities, where the monograph is still a central part of scholarly communication despite all odds, there is the need of more and more book reviews and review articles, not less, to be accommodated in the pages of discipline-specific journals like ours. Reviews of books published in languages other than English will foster visibility of much valid scholarship that otherwise risks being side-lined;<sup>17</sup> this is in line with the timely editorial decision taken by the *Rivista di Studi Fenici* to have seminal contributions to the discipline translated into English.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the book review’s status as an uncounted publication in academia should be resisted, challenged even, and dedicated reviews editors should explore genres that move beyond the customary formula, fostering an ethos of dialogue and openness along the way.<sup>19</sup>
3. The revolution in digital technology may force us to rethink the publication model of our journal, and in so doing respond in part to the issues that have been raised above, not least to bring to public attention the results of research in the field of Phoenician studies quicker. If the scholarly world intends to keep marching to the drum of the journal article as open access becomes a condition for spending funds awarded by public agencies, we need to become a more attractive publication venue. This is the time to take full advantage of the range of features that digital publication offers, and we can exploit these more imaginatively. Changes in this sense will be noticeable to readers already in this issue, which is available as open access.<sup>20</sup> Authors can now present key information, including ORCID IDs, in more standard ways. This, together with having assigned a digital object identifier (DOI) to each contribution, will facilitate the capture and indexing of the journal and authors by global bibliographic search tools – thus giving authors that all-important credit for their work and visibility to their institution. There is also scope to use the “supplementary data” feature that online publication usually offers in order to set out the lengthy and often voluminous sources – whether catalogues of material culture or ancient historical sources and texts or other critical apparatus – which underpin an argument.
4. I said earlier that our discipline’s coming of age over the last decade or so has certainly been the renaissance in interdisciplinary research that young and established researchers have embraced. The Phoenicians now feature in high impact journals as part of the revolution that archaeological science is

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14 Nichols 2017.

15 Hakenbeck 2019.

16 See, for example, [www.phoenicia.org](http://www.phoenicia.org); cfr. Garnand 2019.

17 Kristiansen 2001.

18 Oggiano 2021.

19 See the suggestions by Sturm 2020.

20 See Ida Oggiano’s contribution to this issue.

bringing to Iron Age studies in the Mediterranean:<sup>21</sup> the intrepid Levantine seafarers are protagonists in European genetic investigations,<sup>22</sup> their silver sources defined as part of lead isotope studies,<sup>23</sup> their connections with south-east Asia defined on the basis of lipids extracted from Phoenician pottery.<sup>24</sup> The principal investigators and the corresponding authors are often scientists with access to generous funding, outsiders to our discipline; the experts from the discipline are those who often provide the precious raw data for study and who are there to ensure that the cultural reading emanating from the science is robust. Our journal needs to position itself strongly as a node within a network of information flow with other scientific journals. A possible way of achieving this, as has been suggested,<sup>25</sup> is to publish diverse contributions for a single over-arching theme, edited by subject specialists, welcoming papers in areas within the scope of the discipline but rarely submitted to our journal. The editorial decision to use English as the language of choice for the *Rivista di Studi Fenici*, should go a long way to ensure that this objective can be achieved.<sup>26</sup> Taking creative steps to improve sharing of knowledge between disciplines can also include comprehensive review articles on themes from, or inspired by, advances from related disciplines (e.g., Assyriology, Egyptology, Etruscology) of immediate relevance to Phoenician studies.<sup>27</sup>

To bring a change on the lines suggested here – embracing digital technology to the full, facilitate rapid publication, increase the communities who have access to research results, allowing basic and applied research to flourish together with introspective dialogue – may require us to rethink the very foundations of our discipline. On one hand, it is clear that we will have to position the *Rivista di Studi Fenici* for success in an era of rapidly evolving business models for not-for-profit scholarly publications. We will never be able to compete with the monopolistic private-sector publishers which are able to process dozens of submitted articles per hour, entirely automatically. On the other hand, there is the realisation that for a discipline-specific journal like ours to change and grow, its readers need to decide how to face up to the organizational challenges of their own discipline, recognising its rich legacy with Moscati as its defining figure, but moving on. The call for action to set up an umbrella structure for Phoenician and Punic studies was made at the quadrennial meeting held in Lisbon 18 years ago and reiterated more recently by its most vociferous promoter:<sup>28</sup> a professional society or association on the lines of many others that already exist but with a strong, and much needed, Euro-Mediterranean dimension, subscribing to democratic principles of organization and representation. As researchers hailing from all corners of the world, we are positioned at a key intersection among humanistic and scientific disciplines, cultural heritage policy, the study of ancient history and archaeological practice. It is time to act to ensure a legacy for tomorrow, all the while looking forward to another fifty years of *Rivista di Studi Fenici*.

21 Ben-Josef 2019.

22 Matisoo-Smith *et al.* 2018; Modi *et al.* 2022.

23 Eshel *et al.* 2019.

24 Namdar *et al.* 2013.

25 *Institute of Medicine 2005*: ch. 7.

26 Oggiano 2016.

27 See, in this vein, the insightful contribution by Porzia published in this journal (Porzia 2018), which compares issues of identity surrounding the study of ancient Israel and the Phoenicians.

28 Docter 2020.

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