

PHOINIKES: THE HISTORY OF AN ETHNONYM

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*Una identità non è fatta di “cose”,
è fatta di assunzioni di “cose” a “valori”,
anche di “cose” assolutamente inesistenti,
perché l'identità è una costruzione*
(A.M. Cirese)

Abstract: The etymology of Greek *Phoinikes* points towards an Indo-European root, despite other proposed origins cannot be ruled out with absolute certainty. The original meaning of the noun does not seem to have connection either with the Phoenician purple dye or with the colour purple. As regards *Phoinikes* in Homeric epic poetry, the term seems to indicate Levantines in a broader sense, with no specific connection with those known as “Phoenicians” from the 6th century onwards. Apparently the Sidonians were the only “Phoenician” ethnic group known to Greek ancient epics.

Keywords: *Phoinikes*; etymology; Phoenicians; Homer.

1. INTRODUCTION**

While this contribution does not present substantially new data, I do critically examine the various proposed hypotheses in order to clarify the meaning of the term Φοίνικες in its earliest occurrences in Greek, particularly within the cultural horizon of the Homeric epics. My efforts aim to

- i. clarify the origin of the term Φοίνικες;
- ii. hypothesise which ethnic group or groups are indicated by the term;
- iii. understand whether those whom we now call “Phoenicians” are present in the Homeric poems (and under what ethnonym).

My analysis is deliberately limited to 2nd millennium Greek (i.e. Mycenaean) and to the Homeric poems, in an attempt to maintain a relatively homogeneous data set. Conceding the impossibility of establishing an absolute chronology for the Homeric, I take the 7th century BCE as the low chronological threshold for their composition.

* Istituto di Studi sul Mediterraneo (ISMed) – CNR, Roma; andrea.ercolani@ismed.cnr.it. <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1106-248X>. Abbreviations used in the text: Akk. = Akkadian; Canaan. = Canaanite; Egyp. = Egyptian; Gr. = Greek; Hebr. = Hebrew; IE = Indo-European; It. = Italian; Myc. = Mycenaean; Sem. = Semitic; Ugar. = Ugaritic.

** I am grateful to Marco Bonechi, Maurizio Del Freato, Emanuele Dettori, and Ida Oggiano for both their comments and the guidance they provided, enabling me to overcome, at least in part, my ignorance. The responsibility for statements and errors is and remains entirely mine. The epigraph is taken from Cirese 2010, p. 77.

2. DATA

An attempt at understanding the ethnonym Φοίνικες cannot be separated from an overview of what I operationally refer to as the “φοῖνιξ-semantic”, which has a rather wide range of meaning. In the Mycenaean tablets of Knossos (KN), the form *po-ni-ki-ja* = φοινικία appears repeatedly (KN Sd 0401, 0402, 0405, 0408,¹ 0409, 0413, 0450; Se 880,² 882, 965), as an adjectival formation expressing colour in reference to chariots (*i-qi-ja* = ἵππία, “chariot”; cfr. also KN Sd 0404 and Sf 0428; in reference to textiles KN L 1568e).³ On the basis of these occurrences, any ethnic and/or geographical reference should be ruled out, since in the tablets of the Sd and Se series the descriptive elements of chariots are material, more specifically chromatic. In the case of *po-ni-ki-jo* (KN Ga 418 and 424), it serves as a phytonym,⁴ which should probably be understood as “red grass” or the like, without any ethnic reference.⁵

In the Homeric poems, the term and the compounds in which it recurs to indicate:⁶

- i. the colour red (*Il.* IV 141; φοίνικι φαεινόν || VI 219 = VII 305 = *Od.* XXIII 201 etc.; χλαῖναν ... φοινικόεσσαν || *Il.* X 133 = *Od.* XIV 500 = XXI 118; etc.; νέας φοινικοπαρήους || *Od.* XI 124 = XXIII 271 etc.; note that the only Homeric occurrence of the adjective φοῖνιξ signifies “brown, chestnut”,⁷ i.e. a dark, brownish red, *Il.* XXIII 454);
- ii. the (date) palm tree (*Od.* VI 163; cfr. *hHomAp.* 117)
- iii. an anthroponym: 1. Phoenix king of the Dolopis, son of Amintor (*Il.* IX 168, 223, 427, 432, 607, 621, 659 etc.); 2. Phoenix father of Europe (*Il.* XIV 321);⁹
- iv. an ethnonym (*Il.* XXIII 744; *Od.* XIV 272, 288; XV 415, 417, 419, 473);
- v. a region (*Od.* IV 83; XIV 291).

1 Here *po-ni-ja-ja* “par lapsus du scribe”: Lejeune 1971, p. 29 n. 75.

2 *po-ni-ke-a*: for the different suffixation see Lejeune 1971, p. 29 n. 78.

3 Lejeune 1971, p. 29; Lejeune 1972, p. 304 (*sub d*).

4 Prob. a plant from which a coloring agent was obtained: Murray – Warren 1976, Foster 1977 and Melena 1976, p. 186 - which rejects the earlier interpretation of Melena 1973, where *po-ni-ki-jo* = “palm-date”.

5 Despite the caution of Ruijgh 1993, col. 455, and *pace* Stella 1965, p. 27 (see *infra* n. 65) and others (e.g. Tsirkin 2001, p. 276) the *po-ni-ke(-qe)* from Pylos (PY Ta 722) is a singular instrumental (cfr. the plur. in Ta 714. 2 *po-ni-ki-pi*) that “almost certainly means ‘palm tree’ and refers to an ornamental motif (of gold, ivory, blue glass paste [*ku-wa-no*]) applied to pieces of fine furniture (a throne and a footstool respectively)” (M. Del Frio, *per litteras* 29.4.2013; cfr. most recently Meier-Brügger 2008). It no longer seems tenable to assume that this refers “to the murex shell itself” (Muhly 1970, p. 32). For the *status quaestionis* on the alleged presence of the Phoenicians in Mycenaean texts, see Godart 1991 (where the assumption holds that the Myc. texts do mention Phoenician ethnicity), but Wachter 2009, p. 233, deems this unreliable.

6 For a complete list of occurrences, see the concordances of Prendergast 1962 and Dunbar 1962 (and the still useful Ebeling 1885). For semantic and etymological analysis, the obligatory references are *DELG*, *s.v.* and Frisk 1960-1972, *s.v.* (essentially aporetic Beekes 2010, *s.v.* Φοίνικες and *s.v.* φοῖνιξ, as well as *Lfgre*, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ, *s.v.* Φοῖνιξ, Φοίνικες, *s.v.* φοινός [H.W. Nordheider]). For an analysis of the term in relation to the Phoenician world, overview in *DCPP s.v.* (C. Bonnet, E. Lipiński). I discuss only here, and briefly, φοῖνιξ = “phoenix”, a mythical bird, Hes. fr. 304. 3 M.-W. etc. (hence Frisk, *s.v.* 4; again, in any case, the name would seem to derive from the red color of the plumage; differently, however, Beekes, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ, 3, so it would be related to Egyp. *bjn*). For the wide range of objective referents (especially as a phytonym) see the summary in *LSJ*, *s.v.* Very useful is Ruijgh 1993 (despite some points of disagreement).

7 See e.g. Richardson 1993, *ad loc.*

8 The explanation of the name of this character from the *Iliad* is controversial: “the Red” certainly applies, but reference to wine or the red color of grapes seems to be excluded. An allusion to the (bloody) affair of Altea and Meleager remains speculative, as those who have proposed the hypothesis concede: “unbestätigte Vermutung” (Mühlestein 1969, pp. 81-86, here: 86).

9 And thus brother of Cadmus: it is plausible that a mythical character with this name may have already appeared in Homeric poetry (even implicitly) as progenitor of the Phoenicians, *pace* Bonnet – Lipiński in *DCPP*. See also von Kamptz 1982, §81, p. 334. On the mythical figure of Phoinix, see Bonnet 1983a and 1983b (see also Pape – Benseler 1884, *s.v.* Φοῖνιξ, pp. 1641 f.).

According to lexicons, also:

- vi. purple dye/the colour purple.¹⁰

3. INTERPRETATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS (ANCIENT AND MODERN)

3.1 Ancient interpretations of the ethnonym

Let us begin with the ethnonym and the explanations given to it by ancient scholars. While the ethnonym Φοῖνιξ and the common term φοῖνιξ (correctly, according to modern linguistics) trace back to the colour red,¹¹ the ethnonym Φοίνικες could refer to a supposed origin of that people from the Red Sea. This “chromatic” explanation is unexpressed but implied, precisely due to the conjectural relationship between φοῖνιξ (“red”) and the Erythraean (“Red”) Sea.¹² Modern critics, however, reject this etymology.¹³

The *Etymologicum Magnum* records another ancient etymology (*s.v.* <Φοῖνιξ>) where the Φοίνικες would be so called because they are murderers (παρὰ τὸ φόνοσ- φόνιοι γὰρ οἱ Φοίνικες, καὶ ληστρικοὶ τὸν τρόπον, p. 797. 25 Kallierges). This paremiology obviously derives from the assonance between φόνοσ (“murder”) and φοινός (“red”) with possible interference and/or semantic slippage between these terms, assuming a progression *murder* → *blood* → *red colour*.¹⁴

3.2. Modern Interpretations

3.2.1. Non-Greek origin

- i. Egyptian origin. Sethe 1916¹⁵ proposed an Egyptian origin for the ethnonym Φοίνικες, a proposal recently reiterated by Tsirkin 2001 (pp. 275-276 and 279),¹⁶ which would derive the term from Egyptian

10 See *LSJ*, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ; *DELG*, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ, 1 B; Frisk, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ, 5; Beekes, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ, 4; *Lfgre*, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ.

11 See *infra*. For the ancient explanations, in addition to Eustath. *in Il.*, vol. I, p. 721, ll. 2-4 ἀρχὴ δὲ παραγωγικὴ αὐτῆς ὁ φόνοσ ἦτοι τὸ αἷμα, οὗ πρὸσ ὁμοιότητα ὁ τοῦ φοίνικος καρπὸσ ἐρεῖθεται. ὅθεν καὶ Φοῖνιξ κύριον διὰ τὸν κατ' αὐτόν, ὡσ εἰκόσ, φοινίκεον χροῦν, *cfr. e.g.* the numerous glosses of Hesychius pertaining to φοῖνιξ and corradicals referring to the colour red: φ 686 <φοίνικι>- ἐρυθρῶ βάρματι; 695 <φοινικήϊον>- πύρρον; 699 <φοίνικι φασεινόν>- φοινικίνω χρώματι λελαμπρυσμένον; 702 <φοινικήϊ>- ὄπλον ἐρυθρόν; 704 <φοινικόεσσα>- πύρρα τῶ χρώματι, ἐρυθρά; 706 <φοινικοῦν>- πύρρον, κόκκινον, αἱματώδεσ; 710 <φοῖνιξ>- τὸ δένδρον “φοίνικος νέον ἔρνοσ” καὶ ὁ καρπὸσ. καὶ ὁ πύρροσ τῶ χρώματι. Others quotations could be added (*e.g.* the Homeric *scholia*, conveniently collected in *Lfgre*, *s.v.* φοῖνιξ, *sub Σχ*). That it indicates a dark red color seems evident from *Etym. M.* <Φοινικοῦν>: Ἐρυθρόν, πυρρόν- ἢ τὸ μέλαν (p. 797. 30 Kallierges). Grand-Clément 2011, pp. 350-351, tries to establish which color lies behind φοῖνιξ.

12 The connection between the Phoenicians and the Red Sea goes back at least to Herodotus (Hdt. I 1 and VII 89.2). *Cfr.* subsequently Eustath. *in Il.*, vol. III, pp. 825.29-826. 1: τὸ δὲ φοινὸν πρωτότυπὸν ἐστί τοῦ δαφοινόν, καὶ δηλοῖ τὸ πεφοινιγμένον ὁμοίωσ τῶ “αἱματιφοινικόεισ”, ὃ ἐστί ἐρυθρόσ, ὅθεν καὶ χλαῖνα φοινικόεσσα καὶ Φοίνικες, ἔθνοσ οἰκῆσαν περὶ ποταμὸν Ἐρυθρὰν ἢ περὶ Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν, καὶ τὸ φυτὸν δὲ φοῖνιξ, ὅτι τοιοῦτον καρπὸν τελεσφορεῖ; and *Etym. M.* *s.v.* <Φοίνικες>: Πρότερον οἱ Φοίνικες ὤκουσ πρὸσ τῆ ἐρυθρᾶ θάλασση, καὶ ἐντεῦθεν αὐτοῖσ τοῦνομα- φοινικοί γὰρ τὴν χροῖαν, ἀπὸ τῶν παρακειμένων αὐτοῖσ πετρῶν [ἐρυθρόχρωων] οὐσῶν- διὸ καὶ ἐρυθρὰ λέγεται. Ἐντεῦθεν μεταστάτες, τῆσ Συρίας τὰ παραθαλάσσια κατασχόντες, ὁμοίωσ ἐκαλοῦντο Φοίνικες, οὐκέτι ἐπωνύμωσ, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὸ φοινὸν, ἦγουσ τὸ ἐρυθρόν καὶ πυρρόν. Ὅμηροσ, πᾶσι δὲ παρήϊον αἱματι φοινόν-γίνεται καὶ παρώνυμον, ἐκ τοῦ φοινός Φοῖνιξ τὸ ἔθνικόν- ἔνθεν καί, τὸ μὲν ἄλλο τόσων φοῖνιξ ἦν-σημαίνει δὲ καὶ μουσικὸν ὄργανον, διὰ τὸ ὑπὸ Φοίνικος εὔρεθῆναι (p. 797. 10 ff. Kallierges).

13 Speiser 1936, p. 126; *cfr. also e.g.* Moscati 1993, p. 165; for supporters of the hypothesis, see Muhly 1970, pp. 24-25 and n. 33.

14 Only as a *curiosum* I point out the continuation of the *Etymologicum*: Δύναται δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ φυτοῦ λαμβάνεσθαι, διὰ τὴν τῶν στελέχων ὀξύτητα- αἰμάσσοισι γὰρ καὶ φοινίσσοισι τοὺσ ἀπτομένουσ αὐτῶν.

15 The hypothesis is accepted by Peiser 1919, Belardi 1950, p. 222 (admittedly not very clear: Gr. Φοινικ- should be regarded as an “adaptation of an alloglot form *Pnk-” referring to Egyptian *fnh*-), and seems to be echoed in Faulkner 1962, p. 98, who elucidates *Fnhw* as “a Syrian people”.

16 The explanation is accepted by Bondi 2009, p. X.

fnhw (“carpenter, woodcutter”), a designation that would befit a people building ships and supplying timber for construction (like the Canaanites of the Old Testament). The Egyptian term, however, could simply mean “distant lands”,¹⁷ without having any specific relationship to the Phoenicians or to the Syro-Palestinian coastline, a relationship that should remain hypothetical.¹⁸ Moreover, as Speiser 1936, p. 122, has already pointed out, phonetic difficulties prevent the acceptance of φοῖνιξ < *fnhw*.¹⁹

ii. Semitic origin: see 3.2.2 in small print.

iii. Illyrian origin. According to Bonfante 1941 Φοίνικες would originally have been the name of an Illyrian tribe settled in Epirus, named after their progenitor, Φοῖνιξ, king of the Dolopi (*Il.* IX 484 etc.). With this explanation, all related toponyms would be compatible from both a geographical and a cultural point of view.²⁰ Bonfante takes as decisive the suffix -ικ- as found in Pre-Greek ethnonyms, specifically in names of Illyrian tribes settled in northern Greece and the Troad (Γραῖκες, Αἴθικες, Τέμμικες). She also rejects a Greek origin based upon two considerations (pp. 4-5) – the first semantic, since “people are not named from colours”; the second linguistic, because the suffix -ικ- is of Illyrian origin and non-productive in Greek. But the totality of the data (for which see *infra*) leads one to believe that a chromatic notion lies at the origin of the ethnonym (especially if allogenic) and to believe that the suffix -ικ-, regardless of its origin,²¹ has some productivity in Greek, albeit reduced (cfr. Schwyzer 1939, p. 497, *sub.* 5).

3.2.2. Greek origin

From a linguistic point of view, we cannot yet discard an IE origin for φοῖνιξ (and thus Φοίνικες), specifically a Greek origin, relating to the colour red (most likely the colour of blood,²² without any connection to the colour purple). The examination of the oldest linguistic material, in fact, suggests that φοῖνιξ as “purple” or “purplish-red” develops later and secondarily. The term derives from the adjective φοινός expressing in itself the chromatic notion of “red” (IE **b^hen-*, “to strike to death”, with apophonous vowel |o| **b^hon-* > **φον-ιος* > φοινός).²³ The progression “to strike (to death) → blood → colour of blood → red” is intuitive on

17 Goedicke 1965, p. 40 f. See the discussion (with bibliography) in Bonfante 1941, p. 2 n. 2.

18 See Muhly 1970, pp. 30-31, with further bibliography.

19 Particularly problematic (as Sethe himself admitted) appears the correspondence between Gr. φ [ph] aspirated occlusive, and Egyp. *f*, supposedly a labiodental fricative. In this case, it would be more plausible to admit an intermediate passage through the Western sem. since “Egyp. *F*- postulates Canaan. *P*”: Belardi 1950, p. 222. One would conclude that the Greeks recovered an ethnonym of Egyptian origin, phonetically adapted into the Semitic, from the very people to whom it referred. More economical solutions remain preferable.

20 Of the toponyms connected with φοῖνιξ, which would testify to filiations and direct relations with the Illyria, such names may well have been induced by chromatic characteristics of places, without any reciprocal relationship. A trivial parallel drawn from Italian toponymy may illustrate the objection, since the place names Punta Rossa or Rossano, encountered in various Italian areas, can be explained as possible chromatic characteristics of places, without the need to reconstruct direct or indirect links between them. Bonfante’s reconstruction may nevertheless have diagnostic value. His concluding point is expressed on p. 16: “The connection between the Syrian and the Aegean Φοίνικες must be admitted; only the direction of the migration must be inverted”, from Illyria to the Near East via Greece. Morris 1992, reviewing the data set, reconstructs an opposite direction of flow, from Syria to Greece.

21 A possible Illyrian origin would not detract from the semantics of φοιν-. For a non-Illyric but Pre-Greek origin of -ικ-, see Ruijgh 1993, col. 454, and Beekes 2004.

22 Cfr. *infra* (see also *supra* n. 11 and Eustath. *in Il.*, vol. I, p. 131. 19-20, for the association between blood and the color indicated by φοῖνιξ). For historical-religious, historical-cultural and linguistic reasons, the explanation of Beloch (1913, p. 70) is untenable, according to which Φοῖνιξ derived from a Greek sun god, namely from his place of residence in the region called Φοινίκη, which conceals a reference to “der blutrote Morgenhimmel”. This explanation seems to be recovered by De Sanctis 1939, p. 74, for the Phoenicians settled in Thebes: “These Phoenicians, ‘the reds,’ are but the demons, natural companions of the sun god Cadmus”.

23 For the outcome -iv-, from -vj-, see e.g. **komjos* > **κον-ιος* > *κοινός*. The disappearance of consonantic i (j) in this position is not linguistically problematic (but it may prove problematic that in Myc. the phoneme seems to be preserved behind liquid -rj-:

the semantic level (cfr. *DELG*, s.v. φοινός, p. 1220),²⁴ so that assuming purple dye (or a similar vegetable dye) becomes unnecessary.²⁵ As for the Phoenician “purple”, then, the case of the *po-ni-ki-ja* chariots in the Mycenaean tablets and the Homeric epithet φοινικόπαρος said of ships (e.g. *Od.* XI 124) lead us to exclude a connection with dye “car la pourpre, matière précieuse, ne convient pas à la peinture de nombreuses caisses de chars, moins encore à la peinture de coques de bateaux” (*DELG*, s.v. φοῖνιξ, 1, p. 1218).²⁶ Thus the meaning “purple” is not fundamental but secondary and derivative. Regarding Φοίνικες, furthermore, again with *DELG* note that in Greek no ethnonym originates from an artisanal product or its production,²⁷ and this fact, in my opinion, is decisive.²⁸ Outside of the Levant and Near East, Gr. φοῖνιξ produces toponyms that clearly have nothing to do with purple or its production, so that even in the case of Φοίνικες such a connection is unnecessary.²⁹ Furthermore, the entire range of high chronological meanings of corradicals (see Tab.) can be explained through reference to “red”, including the phytonym of the palm-tree, since “von der Farbe der Frucht φοῖνιξ auch ihren Baum bezeichnet” (Hissig 1853, p. 600).

For the Mycenaean chronological horizon and the relatively high horizon of the Homeric poems, “purple” does not serve as a generative factor for the name Φοίνικες.³⁰ Later interference occurs between Φοίνικες (ethnonym), Φοῖνιξ (eponym of the Phoenicians) and φοῖνιξ (the colour),³¹ but this is another matter.

**a-ro2-a*, *arjo(h)a*, **arjos-*? cfr. ἀρείων: Bartoněk 2003, pp. 269 and 304; cfr. however *DMic*, p. 107, s.v.). The real problem, at least according to *IEW* (s.v. *bhen-*, p. 126), is that no comparable outcomes exist in the IE languages.

24 Any connection with IE **g^hen-* (> gr. θείνω, φόνος etc.) should be excluded, since Myc. has signs for labiovelars (cfr. e.g. Lejeune 1979). Thus for *po-ni-ki-jo* etc., the hypothesis of initial *g^h*- must be discarded and an etymon with an occlusive must be admitted (*DELG*, s.v. φοινός, p. 1220; cfr. also Astour 1965, p. 348 [with reference to Ventris – Chadwick 1956, p. 405] and Murray – Warren 1976, p. 57). Aporetic Beekes, whereby Φοίνικες / φοῖνιξ < φοινός, the latter declared “without convincing etymology”. Against an IE etymology stands Ruijgh 1993, col. 454: φοινός “n’a pas d’étymologie indo-européenne plausible et pourrait donc être un emprunt préhellénique, c’est-à-dire un mot ‘égéen.’”

25 Chantraine 1972, after pointing out that the adj. φοῖνιξ conveys the chromatic notion of “red”, states that “la traduction traditionnelle par pourpre se recommande de façon particulièrement nette” (p. 9) in some cases (*Il.* IV 141, VI 219, VII 305, XV 538, *Od.* XXIII 201 and others). But he also points out that V. Bérard for *Od.* XXIII 201 translated “des courroies d’un cuir rouge éclatant. The use of the adjective in reference to horses and other animals, where the color purple does not pertain, leads one to discount the meaning “purple” for the Homeric poems. This follows Chantraine’s own reasoning, who, at the very end of his examination of the Homeric *loci*, concludes that “Il en est résulté que le mot [*scil.* φοῖνιξ] et ses dérivés ont pu signifier de manière assez vague et générale ‘rouge’” (p. 10). Rightly cautious Hoekstra 1984, in *Od.* XIV 500, pp. 233-234: points out that the original value of the adj. is “reddish brown”, admitting only a doubtful form with the value of “purplish”.

26 See also Chantraine 1972, pp. 10 ff. Purple obtained from mollusks was the most expensive dye in antiquity: e.g. Jensen 1963.

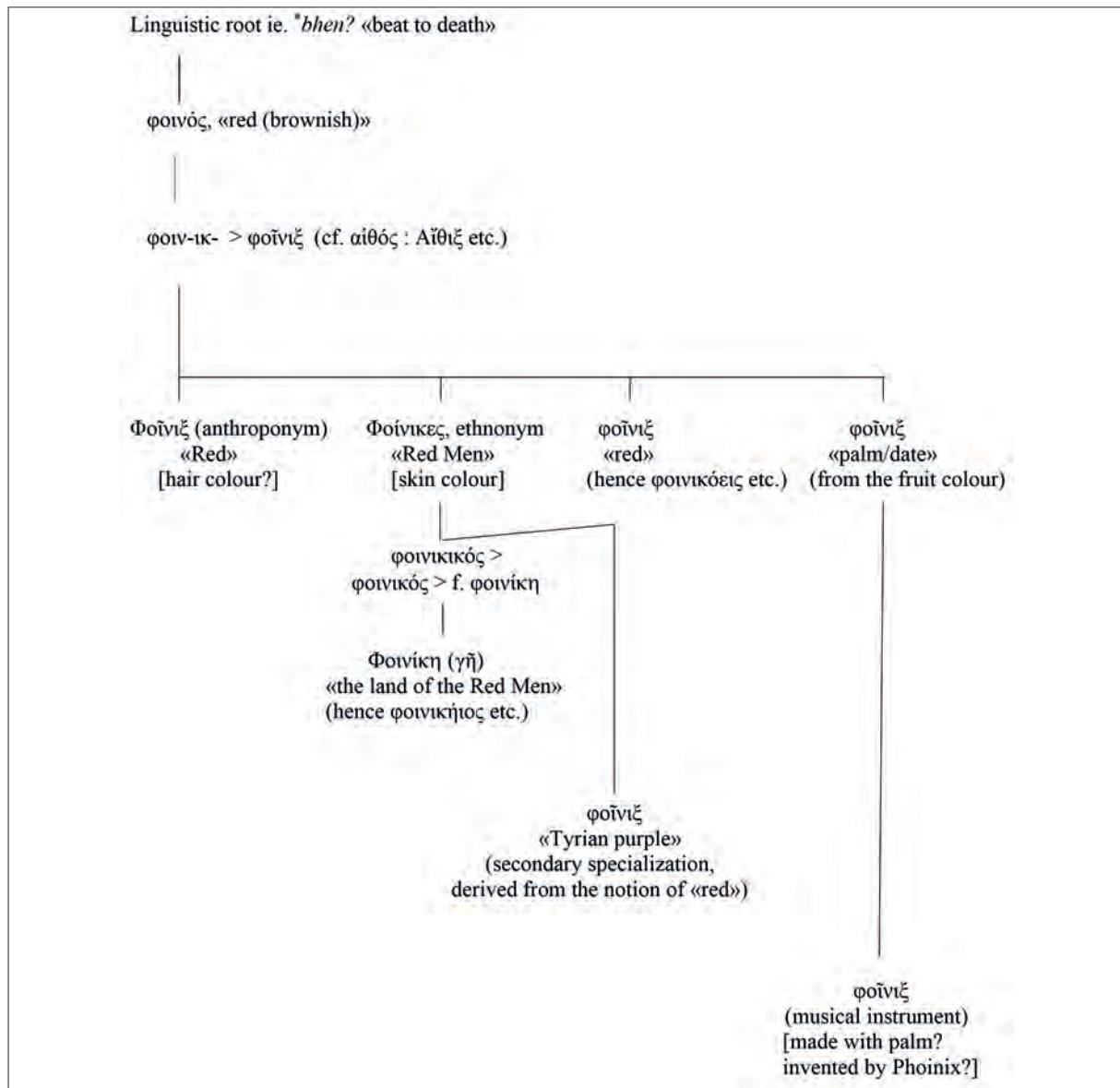
27 Artisanal production activities and/or the objects produced scarcely appear as onomastic elements even in anthroponymy (on the meagreness of material, see Bechtel 1917, pp. 606 ff).

28 Speiser 1936, p. 124, attempted to circumvent this reasoning on *realia*, but not persuasively.

29 Cfr. e.g. rivers called Φοῖνιξ, one in Achaia and the other in the vicinity of Thermopylae (cfr. respectively Paus. VII 23, 5 and Hdt. VII 200), with more extensive lists in Olshausen 1853, p. 335, and Speiser 1936, p. 121.

30 Note that Apollonius Sophist in his *Lexicon homericum* (s.v. <φοῖνιξ>) recognized the polyvalence of the term’s meaning: 1. a plant (the palm); 2. the proper name; 3. the red colour; 4. a *phoinikòn anthos*, 5. the ethnonym: τῶν πολλὰ δηλουσῶν ἡ λέξις. τὸ μὲν γὰρ δένδρον “φοῖνικος ἔην ἔρνος”. δηλοῖ καὶ τὸ κύριον ὄνομα, τὸν τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως τροφέας- “Φοῖνιξ ἄττα γεραίε”. σημαίνει καὶ τὸν πυρρὸν τῷ χρώματι, “τὸ μὲν ἄλλο δέμας φοῖνιξ ἦν, ἐν δὲ μετώπῳ λευκὸν σῆμ’ ἐτέυκτο” καὶ τὸ φοινικὸν ἄνθος, “ὡς δ’ ὅτε τίς τ’ ἐλέφαντα γυνὴ φοῖνικὶ μίηνει” καὶ τὸ ἔθνικόν, “δὴ τότε Φοῖνιξ ἦλθεν ἀνήρ ἀπατήλια εἰδῶς”. Of these, the only one that relates to purple in the proper sense is the *phoinikòn anthos*, which could be reference to the brilliance of a “Phoenician dye”, But the verse that Apollonius cites is *Il.* IV 141, where it refers to an artefact made by a *meonian* or *charyan* woman, as explicitly stated in the following: Ὡς δ’ ὅτε τίς τ’ ἐλέφαντα γυνὴ φοῖνικὶ μίηνει / Μηονίς ἢ Κείρα παρήϊον ἔμμενα ἵππων. Once again: purple, at least Phoenician purple, may be excluded.

31 See Bonnet 1983a and 1983b (briefly Pedrazzi 2011, pp. 116-118). Concise discussion of the ethnonym in Grand-Clément 2011, pp. 247-248.



The most widely accepted explanation, however, assumes φοῖνιξ in the sense of “purple” as the basis of the ethnonym.³² Thus, e.g. in *Dizionario della civiltà fenicia*: the name Phoenicia is assumed to be of Greek origin, related to purple production in the region. The link between the ethnonym (and/or the name of the region) and the production of purple can be traced back as an *en passant* hypothesis at least to Movers 1849, p. 2 (but in his footnote 8 he refers to an earlier bibliography). Speiser 1936, pp. 124-126, formulated a fuller hypothesis, and he was later followed by Moscati 1963 (reprinted in Moscati

32 Another explanation that has met with some favor connects the ethnonym and the name of the palm tree. The first to propose this explanation seems to have been Movers (cfr. 1849, p. 3), and was sampled among various hypotheses by Ebeling 1885, p. 440, s.v. Φοίνικες (cfr. also Melena 1973). But the botanical and palaeobotanical data do not support such an hypothesis (see objections in the following footnote).

1988, pp. 23-24), Moscati 1966, p. 21 (reprinted in Moscati 1974, p. 22), and then Fantar 1971, p. 115,³³ Garbini 1975, p. 15, Bonnet 1983a, p. 235, von Kamptz 1982, p. 334, *et alii plurimi*, up to Peyronel 2006, p. 51, Dietrich 2009, p. 53, Sherratt 2010, p. 122 (with due caution).³⁴ Wathélet (1983, p. 235) contemplated the hypothesis, only to rightly rule it out (p. 241 f). Also excluding the genesis of the ethnonym from the (production of) purple was Musti 1991, p. 161 n. 3, on the basis of P. Chantraine in *DELG*, discussed above. The repeated exclusion of this hypothesis from several quarters, however, does not seem to have dislodged the current consensus opinion.

The hypothetical connection with Phoenician purple dye posits Φοίνικες as a translation into Greek from the Semitic designation “Canaanites”³⁵ derived from Akk. *kinahhu*, “purple, reddish-purple”).³⁶ The hypothesis, proposed by Speiser 1936, pp. 124-126, presupposes a sequence Akk. *kinahhu*, “purple” > *Kinahhi* (or *Kinahna* or *Kinah(n)i*), “country of/whence the purple” > Ugar. *kn’ny*, Hebr. *kēnā’an*, “Canaanites”,³⁷ to denote its inhabitants, and a similar sequence in Greek, whereby φοῖνιξ, “purple, redish purple” > Φοινίκη, “country of/whence the purple” > Φοίνικες, to denote its inhabitants. But this hypothetical sort of “calque” is neither necessary nor plausible (see Appendix): first, given the exceptionality of ethnonyms formed by calque; second, because the morphologically correct sequence in Greek is φοινός > φοῖνιξ (pl. Φοίνικες) > *φοινικικός > φοινικός (haplology) > fem. Φοινίκη (*scil.* γῆ), i.e. progressing from the ethnonym to the geographical designation and not vice versa,³⁸ so that a correspondence with the “Semitic” sequence encounters difficulties.³⁹ The “purple” dye (or rather a similar dye) could, if anything, be called upon to explain the sense of φοῖνιξ as “red”, e.g. a cheaper red vegetable dye⁴⁰ called φοῖνιξ (which would justify Myc. *po-ni-ki-ja* etc., cfr. *supra* p. 1 and n. 4). The terms in the reconstruction would thus be reversed, with the sense of “red” for φοῖνιξ secondarily derived from “red dye”. But even in this case, the question of the etymon would remain open (with strong doubts hanging over the Semitic origin of the term⁴¹). In reconstructing the link between

33 Fantar, indeed, develops a more articulated reasoning, with Φοίνικες as a term < gr. φοῖνιξ, conveying the notion of both a color (dark red) and a plant (the palm). He then rules out a connection with the latter, considering that the date palm is extremely rare in the area and could hardly have triggered the genesis of an ethnonym on this basis. Precisely this exclusion leads him to consider more likely the hypothesis of a connection with purple, following Moscati’s line, similar to Bonnet 1983a.

34 The datum forms of a sort of meme that has taken root even in disciplines outside of Phoenician studies: see e.g. *LSJ s.v.*, where the translation “purple” is justified “because the discovery and earliest use of this colour was ascribed to the Phoenicians”.

35 Certainly not unknown in the Greek world: cfr. Hec. 1 F 21 *FGrHist* καὶ ἀπεξενομένον (= roughly ‘with a foreign word’) τὸ Χνᾶ- οὕτω γὰρ πρότερον ἢ Φοινίκη ἐκαλεῖτο; Steph. Byz. s.v. <Χνᾶ> οὕτως ἢ Φοινίκη ἐκαλεῖτο, ὡς περ Λᾶ Λακωνικῆ πόλις. τὸ ἔθνικὸν ταύτης Χνᾶος, ὡς τῆς Λᾶ Λᾶος. For the presence of lexicon of Semitic origin in Greek, the theoretical development of Szemerényi 1974 is still very useful.

36 von Soden 1959-1981, s.v.; Black – Black – Postgate 2000, s.v. (who, correctly, though cautiously, hypothesise a derivation of the term indicating the product from the toponym *Kinah(n)i*, and not vice versa: cfr. already de Vaux 1968, p. 25: “si vraiment les Hurrites de Nuzi appelaient *kinahhu* la teinture pourpre, c’est parce qu’elle était un produit importé de *Kinahhi*”). The general tendency to indicate a product by the name of the region of origin was recognized by Speiser 1936 (see *supra* n. 28 and *infra*, Appendix), but only in the case of Φοίνικες admitted the contrary (see p. 125: “The use of geographic terms to describe local products is quite normal. In the case of φοῖνιξ, however, the reverse process has to be assumed”).

37 For a list of attestations of the term “Canaan/Canaanites” in Semitic languages, see de Vaux 1968, p. 23.

38 Kretschmer 1939, p. 250; Frisk, s.v. φοινός. Cfr. the sequence Σιδών > Σιδώνιος > Σιδωνίη (*scil.* γῆ), etc. Speiser 1936, p. 125, admits the erroneous sequence Φοινική > Φοίνικες.

39 If one admits “Canaanite” as an autochthonous definition, the hypothesis that a people name itself after one of its products becomes all the more incredible: Tsirkin 2001, pp. 271-272.

40 On vegetable dyes in antiquity, see Murray – Warren 1976, pp. 47-54, and Peyronel 2006, pp. 50 ss. with n. 9.

41 A Semitic origin, specifically from Hebrew, was hypothesised by Benfey 1822, p. 109, s.v. φοῖνιξ (*sic*); see also Vanicek 1887, p. 59. The hypothesis is recorded by Ebeling 1885, p. 440, s.v. Φοίνικες. Another proposal for Sem. etymology in Astour 1965, pp. 348-349: Gr. φοῖνιξ would be explained as an imprest from the West-Sem. (continued from Hebr. *puuwā*, Ar. *fuwwā*) of the name of a plant (*Rubia tinctorum* L.) widely spread in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, from which a cheap red dye was obtained. Even if the material datum were acceptable, the phonetic correspondence strikes me as hardly admissible. Moreover the ethnonym, referring to a

φοῖνιξ and Φοίνικες, one should still conclude that Φοίνικες would mean “Red Men” (with sequence φοῖνιξ = “red vegetable dye” > “red” → Φοίνικες = “Red Men”), given the difficulty of deriving an ethnonym from a product (i.e. excluding Φοίνικες as “men who produce the tincture φοῖνιξ”).⁴²

4. THE (MOST PALUSIBLE) SENSE OF Φοίνικες

While the question of the etymon φοινός remains open, from the preceding it follows that Φοίνικες most plausibly stands for “Red Men”. This explanation finds support from other names formed on the basis of colour, those numerous “chromatic” ethnyonyms found in the archaic Greek epic: the Αἰθίοπες, the “Dark Red/Furred(?) Men” *Il.* I 423, XXIII 206, *Od.* I 22 etc.;⁴³ the κύανες ἄνδρες, the “Dark Men” Hes. *Op.* 527;⁴⁴ the Μέλανες (*scil.* ἄνδρες?), the “Black Men” Hes. fr. 150. 10, 17 M.-W. Note in particular those names formed with the -ικ- suffix, such as the Αἴθικες (< αἰθός, “Dark Red” or “scorched earth”) of Thessaly *Il.* II 744 and the Φαίακες (< φαῖός, “Gray” [approximately]) *Od.* V 35, 280, 288 etc.⁴⁵

Further confirmation lies in the Homeric terms related to purple and purple dyeing, with πορφύρα at the base of both the adjective πορφύρεος (*Il.* I 482, III 126, V 83 etc.; *Od.* II 428, IV 115 etc.), and the apparently more valuable ἀλιπόρφυρα (*Od.* VI 53 = 306 || ἠλάκατα στρωφῶσ’ ἀλιπόρφυρα, XIII 108 φάρε’ ὑφαίνουσιν ἀλιπόρφυρα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι). Moreover, already in the Myc. the term *po-pu-re-ia* refers to textiles.⁴⁶ If the element perceived to characterize the people in question had been the purple, why would the denoting ethnonym not originate from the Gr. term πορφύρα (albeit of controversial etymon – possibly Semitic⁴⁷ but certainly not Indo-European: *DELG*, s.v. πορφύρα, Frisk, s.v. πορφύρα, Beekes 2010, s.v. πορφύρα, with preceding bibliography) – but from φοῖνιξ, whose original connection with Phoenician purple is not only to be proved, but presently to be ruled out?⁴⁸

people famous for a purple dye obtained from mollusks, would have been derived from another type of dye, of lesser value and more widespread. In addition to the regions mentioned above, it seems to have been produced also in Crete and Cyprus (for the diffusion of dyes in the Aegean area see briefly Murray – Warren 1976, pp. 55-56cf, de Vaux 1968, p. 24 n. 18).

42 A chromatic notion may be generated from regional names (cfr. e.g. It. “turchese”, “turchino”, “indaco” etc.; collection of comparable examples in Bonfante 1941, pp. 3-4), but this only shows that an already-established ethnonym or toponym can have such a color derived from that area. Applying the same reasoning to Φοίνικες, one would have to conclude that from the ethnonym (or from the toponym) the Greeks derived the notion of “(reddish) purple”, not the inverse.

43 And here too, at least in the Homeric poems, the ethnonym seems to be generic: Ruijgh 1993, col. 455.

44 See Ercolani 2010, *ad loc.*

45 On these last two points, cfr. Bechtel 1914, pp. 328-329, s.v. φοινός (although questionable in some interpretative aspects, correct in the basic approach that moves away from the ethnonym: “nach den Phönicern heisst die Dattelpalme ..., die sie importiert, und die Purpurfarbe ..., die sie im Gewerbe angewendet haben”), cfr. Frisk, s.v. φοινός. Physical attributes (especially skin color, but also hair and beard color) generate ethnyonyms, often of a very generic type: cfr. e.g. It. “Pellerossa”, “Negri/Neri”, “Musi Gialli” to give some modern examples. Unique is the case of It. “Mori”, which seems to have given rise to a chromatic designation through the ethnonym, which also derives from a color indication: Μαῦροι (the first poetic occurrence I know from Opp. *Cyn.* I 171) < μαυρός = ὄμαυρός, “dark”. On the Latin side one can perhaps invoke the (doubtful) case of the *Rutuli* (cfr. Leumann 1977, p. 86; *sed contra* de Simone 2006, esp. pp. 131 ss.). Skin color is an intuitive connotator and, in the abstract, the same intuition held for antiquity, however difficult to demonstrate objectively. A distinction in the colouring of the skin (red vs. white), used as an indicator of sex in Aegean, especially in Minoan painting (see Evans 1900-1901, p. 16; for a substantial validation of Evans’ reconstruction, see Chapin 2012), suggests that skin color held both denotative and connotative functions, a factor which may have played a part in the formation of ethnyonyms.

46 Cfr. also KN X 976 *wa-na-ka-te-ro po-pu-re-*[], “royal purple”(?), on which Stieglitz 1994, p. 52. See also Dietrich 2009, p. 52.

47 For a Semitic origin, see Astour 1965, pp. 349-350 (with bibliography).

48 The disarming intuitiveness of this fact has only been noted, to my knowledge, by Chantraine 1972, pp. 11 ss. (who fails to close the argument) and by Tsirkin 2001, p. 275.

The first point of my argument, therefore, argues that Φοίνικες has no relation either to purple dye or its production. Instead Φοίνικες is a Greek term⁴⁹ and means “Red Men”, or “of a dark red colour”, because (as I conjecture) in their eyes such was the colour of their skin.⁵⁰ The ethnonym appears to have originated sometime between 1200-700 BCE (i.e., after the collapse of Mycenaean culture)⁵¹ and the lower chronology for the composition of the Homeric poems.⁵²

5. A REGION AND A PEOPLE WITH INDEFINABLE BORDERS

Let us now attempt to understand which human group the term indicates by reviewing the relevant Homeric passages:⁵³

Il. XXIII 744

Πηλεΐδης δ' αἴψ' ἄλλα τίθει ταχυτήτος ἄεθλα 740
 ἀργύρεον κρητήρα τετυγμένον· ἔξ δ' ἄρα μέτρα
 χάνδανεν, αὐτὰρ κάλλει ἐνίκα πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν
 πολλόν, ἐπεὶ Σιδόνες πολυδαίδαλοι εὖ ἤσκησαν,
 Φοίνικες δ' ἄγον ἄνδρες ἐπ' ἠεροειδέα πόντον,
 στήσαν δ' ἐν λιμένεσσι, Θόαντι δὲ δῶρον ἔδωκαν· 745
 υἱὸς δὲ Πριάμοιο Λυκάονος ὄνων ἔδωκε
 Πατρόκλῳ ἠρωϊ Ἰησονίδης Εὐνήος.⁵⁴

Od. XIV 272

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ τὸν γε κατέκτανον ὀξεῖ χαλκῶ,
 αὐτίκ' ἐγὼν ἐπὶ νῆα κιῶν Φοίνικας ἀγανοῦς
 ἔλλισάμην καὶ σφιν μενοεικέα ληΐδα δῶκα·
 τοὺς μ' ἐκέλευσα Πύλονδε καταστήσαι καὶ ἐφέσσαι
 ἢ εἰς Ἥλιδα δῖαν, ὅθι κρατέουσιν Ἐπειοί. 275

Od. XIV 288

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ὄγδοόν μοι ἐπιπλόμενον ἔτος ἦλθε,
 δὴ τότε Φοῖνιξ ἦλθεν ἀνὴρ ἀπατήλια εἰδώς,
 τρώκτης, ὃς δὴ πολλὰ κάκ' ἀνθρώπους ἐέοργει·
 ὅς μ' ἄγε παρπεπιθῶν ἦσι φρεσίν, ὄφρ' ἰκόμεσθα 290
 Φοινίκην, ὅθι τοῦ γε δόμοι καὶ κτήματ' ἔκειτο.

49 See Chantraine 1972, p. 2; Baurain 1986, p. 25 (“il s’agit d’un concept exclusivement grec”), Tsirkin 2001, p. 271. Ethnonyms are often expression of an outsider’s point of view – see the examples in Fabietti 2013, pp. 45-46 (*habiru* > Hebrews), 65 (Nuba), 83 (Kafiris), 83-84 (Nuristans) etc.

50 Thus Pietschmann 1889, p. 107: Φοίνικες is a noun “der nicht auf die Herkunft des Einzelnen eingeht, sondern den ganzen Volkstamm nach einem Merkmale seiner äußeren Erscheinung als einen Menschenschlag von dunkelröthlicher Hautfarbe kennzeichnen soll”. Presumably these are men with red robes or robes where red was a dominant color (which could refer to purple, but secondarily and by inference). Both of these options were proposed by Movers 1849, pp. 2-3. On the Greek side, one could point to Eustath. *in Il.*, vol. III, p. 232, ll. 23 ff., regarding Spartan usage: Λυκούργος ἐνομοθέτησε Λακεδαιμονίους ἐσθῆτα φοινικῆν ἐν πολέμῳ φορεῖν, ὡς ἂν εἰ τρωθείη τις, λανθάνῃ διὰ τὸ τῆς τοιαύτης χλαμύδος ὁμόχρουν πρὸς αἵματος ἐρυθρότητα.

51 Again, in Myc, the term had no ethnic value, see also *DMic*, s.v. *po-ni-ki-ja* etc.

52 Cfr. Sherratt 2010, p. 122. A narrower chronological range, between 900 and 700 BCE, must be applied to the toponym “Sidon” (Woodhouse 2004, p. 238, contradicting West 1981, *ad Od.* IV 618, p. 368, who assumes that the name Sidon was already known in Myc. times).

53 See also Muhly 1970, pp. 49-52, Latacz 1990, Richardson 1993, pp. 250-251, and, although not always persuasive, Winter 1995, pp. 247-249.

54 On this passage and its implications, see Sommer 2007, pp. 100-101 *e infra* Par. 6.

Indeed, the fact that Φοῖνιξ needs the determinative ἀνὴρ seems to manifest a lack of precision for the ethnonym here (at least in the singular, cfr. also the γυνὴ Φοίνισσα of *Od.* XV 417). There is a region called Φοινίκη (for which see *Lfgre*, s.v.) and it appears to have a more or less direct association with “Egyptian men” (*Od.* XIV 286), Libya (XIV 295), Crete (XIV 300), as if to define a sector of the Mediterranean that fits well within the Greek image of a “Near East.”

Od. XV 415-419

ἐνθα δὲ Φοίνικες ναυσικλυτοὶ ἤλυθον ἄνδρες, 415
 τρῶκται, μυρί' ἄγοντες ἀθύρματα νηὶ μελαίνῃ.
 ἔσκε δὲ πατρὸς ἑμοῖο γυνὴ Φοίνισσ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,
 καλή τε μεγάλη τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ ἔργα ἰδυῖα·
 τὴν δ' ἄρα Φοίνικες πολυταίπαλοι ἠπερόπτεον.

Note that ἀθύρματα (416) seems to indicate products of low value, thus the merchants transported not only quality, artisanal products but also cheap, serial products. This fact, if taken at face value, may present some difficulty to those who categorize Phoenician production as “elite” (cfr. Winter 1995, p. 253; Sommer 2007, p. 100, on *Od.* XV 388-483).

Od. XV 473

δύσετό τ' ἠέλιος σκιῶντό τε πᾶσαι ἀγναιί·
 ἡμεῖς δ' ἐς λιμένα κλυτὸν ἤλθομεν ὄκα κίοντες,
 ἐνθ' ἄρα Φοινίκων ἀνδρῶν ἦν ὠκύαλος νηῦς.

The Phoenicians and Phoenicia do exist, but no precise spatial or cultural coordinates situate them. No specific, “identifying” marker emerges from these passages: the “Red Men” are dedicated to “exclusively maritime-based” activities (Sherratt 2010, p. 122) – navigation for the transport of goods and passengers, trading, piracy – a series of activities which almost all the peoples who frequented the sea undertook, from the Mycenaeans to the Cretans to the Cypriots (whoever they were) to the peoples of coastal Syria who would later give rise to the Aramaic culture. This generic ethnic marker broadly refers to those operating in the eastern Mediterranean:⁵⁵ “the name ‘Phoenician’ was probably first applied on the basis of the maritime activities of easterners in the Aegean waters” (Sherratt 2010, p. 124).⁵⁶

A broad meaning for Φοίνικες might find support in a passage from Athenaeus (Athen. IV 76 [174f] Kaibel):

γίγγρανοισι γὰρ οἱ Φοίνικες, ὡς φησιν ὁ Ξενοφῶν, ἐχρῶντο αὐλοῖς σπιθαμιαίοις τὸ μέγεθος, ὄξυ καὶ γοερὸν φθεγγομένοις. τούτοις δὲ καὶ οἱ Κᾶρες χρῶνται ἐν τοῖς θρήνοις, εἰ μὴ ἄρα καὶ ἡ Καρία Φοινίκη ἐκαλεῖτο, ὡς παρὰ Κορίννην (fr. 27 B. = 33 PMG) καὶ Βακχυλίδην (fr. 53 B. = 40 Sn.) ἔστιν εὐρεῖν.

Corinna and Bacchylides allegedly called Caria “Phoenicia”, so they seem to have included Caria under the regional designation of “Phoenicia”, thus incorporating at least part of the Anatolian coast.⁵⁷

55 On the absence of the Phoenician West from the Homeric poems, one can only speculate (cfr. e.g. Winter 1995, p. 254).

56 Same idea already appears in Sherratt 2005, p. 35. Baurain 1986 (esp. pp. 25-28) provides the first and most comprehensive analysis leading to the conclusion that the term Φοίνικες is a generic Greek definition applied to the Levant. Further doxography *infra* nn. 65-66. For a general outline of the characterisation of the Phoenicians in the Homeric poems, see Winter 1995, p. 255 (which I do not subscribe to in full; I do not go into the merits of her narratological analysis [pp. 255-264] and on her evaluation of the Phoenicians as a litmus test for Greek identity).

57 Which would support Herodot. I 170 (Thales as “Phoenician” in reference to his homeland, to be located in the vicinity of Miletus and thus plausibly in Caria) and Thuc. I 7 (the inhabitants of the Aegean islands were once Κᾶρες and Φοίνικες), without

6. ABOUT *Il.* XXIII 744 AND *Od.* IV 83

Significantly, in the Homeric epic Sidon and the Sidonians have a certain prominence. And here we need to go into more details we analyze the relevant passages.

Il. XXIII 743-744

Πηλεΐδης δ' αἴψ' ἄλλα τίθει ταχυτήτος ἄεθλα 740
 ἀργύρεον κρητῆρα τετυγμένον· ἔξ δ' ἄρα μέτρα
 χάνδανεν, αὐτὰρ κάλλει ἐνίκα πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν
 πολλόν, ἐπεὶ Σιδόνες πολυδαίδαλοι εὖ ἤσκησαν.
Φοίνικες δ' ἄγον ἄνδρες ἐπ' ἠεροειδέα πόντον,
 στήσαν δ' ἐν λιμένεσσι, Θόαντι δὲ δῶρον ἔδωκαν· 745
 υἱὸς δὲ Πριάμοιο Λυκάονος ὦνον ἔδωκε
 Πατρόκλῳ ἠρωϊ Ἰησονίδης Εὐνήος.

A distinction clearly emerges from the passage between those who produce material goods (= Σιδόνες) and those who transport them (= Φοίνικες): for the Greeks at least, the Phoenicians are those Aegean/Near Eastern peoples engaged in sea-related activities (see below), while the Sidonians are those characterised by the quality of their metallurgy. The passage has linguistic traits of later origin: the *-v ephelkystikon* in χάνδανεν (v. 742), the form ἔδωκαν (v. 745), and especially the use of the adjective πολυδαίδαλοι (v. 743) in the active voice (otherwise occurring only in the passive).⁵⁸

Od. IV 83

ἦ γὰρ πολλὰ παθῶν καὶ πόλλ' ἐπαληθεῖς
 ἠγαγόμην ἐν νηυσὶ καὶ ὀγδοάτῳ ἔτει ἦλθον,
Κύπρον Φοινίκην τε καὶ Αἴγυπτίους ἐπαληθεῖς,
Αἰθιοπίας θ' ἰκόμην καὶ Σιδονίους καὶ Ἑρεμβοῦς
 καὶ Λιβύην, ἵνα τ' ἄρνες ἄφαρ κεραοὶ τελέθουσι. 85

Phoenicia again remains distinct from Sidon, in accordance with the Homeric pattern, where Sidon lives a life of its own:

Il. VI 288-291

αὐτὴ δ' ἐς θάλαμον κατεβήσεται κηῶντα,
 ἐνθ' ἔσαν οἱ πέπλοι παμποίκιλα ἔργα γυναικῶν
 Σιδονίων, τὰς αὐτὸς Ἄλέξανδρος θεοειδῆς 290
 ἠγάγε Σιδονίηθεν ἐπιπλῶς εὐρέα πόντον

Od. IV 615-619 = XIV 115-119

δώσω τοι κρητῆρα τετυγμένον· ἀργύρεος δὲ
 ἔστιν ἅπας, χρυσῷ δ' ἐπὶ χεῖλεα κεκράανται,
 ἔργον δ' Ἡφαίστοιο· πόρεν δέ ἐ Φαίδιμος ἠρως·
Σιδονίων βασιλεύς, ὅθ' ἐὸς δόμος ἀμφεκάλυψε
 κεισέ με νοστήσαντα· τεῖν δ' ἐθέλω τόδ' ὀπάσσαι.

having to invoke Aegean pre-Greek layers. The issue is decidedly more complex but does not directly concern my reasoning here (on this point, however, see Bonfante 1941, p. 15 and n. 32, Bonnet 1983b, p. 5 and n. 21). An association between this area and the colour red, in an extended geographical context that includes both Φοίνικες and Anatolian peoples, may be found at *Il.* IV 141-142, concerning an ivory artefact mottled in red made by a Maeonian or Carian woman: Ὡς δ' ὅτε τίς τ' ἐλέφαντα γυνὴ φοίνικι μίηνη / Μηονίς ἠὲ Κάειρα παρήϊον ἔμμεναι ἵππων.

⁵⁸ Wathelet 1983, p. 240.

Agamemnon wants to give Telemachus a krater, which is said to be an artefact made by Hephaestus for Phaidimos, king of the Sidonians.⁵⁹

Od. XIII 285

οἱ δ' ἐς Σιδονίην εὖ ναιομένην ἀναβάντες⁶⁰

Od. XV 425

εἰρώτα δὴ ἔπειτα, τίς εἶη καὶ πόθεν ἔλθοι·
 ἢ δὲ μάλ' αὐτίκα πατρὸς ἐπέφραδεν ὑπερεφές δῶ·
 ἐκ μὲν Σιδῶνος πολυχάλκου εὐχομαι εἶναι, 425
 κούρη δ' εἶμ' Ἀρύβαντος ἐγὼ ρυδὸν ἀφνειοῖο·
 ἀλλὰ μ' ἀνήρπαξαν Τάφιοι ληϊστορες ἄνδρες
 ἀγρόθεν ἐρχομένην, πέρασαν δέ με δεῦρ' ἀγαγόντες
 τοῦδ' ἀνδρὸς πρὸς δώμαθ'· ὁ δ' ἄξιον ὄνον ἔδωκε.

The *observatio* leads to the conclusion that Sidon stands out, first for metal working and second for textiles.⁶¹ Certainly Sidon as a port city was integrated into the trade routes circulating goods (Paris, returning to Troy, passes through Sidon: *Il.* VI 290-291; Menelaus transits there following a reverse route: *Od.* XV 118-119). The city's king is included “into the elite gifting network of his time” might indicate “a highly developed urban polity with complex sociopolitical organization”: Winter 1995, p. 252.

In order to avoid over-interpretating the texts, I would stick to the bare minimum: “Phoenicians” designates peoples of near-eastern origins who frequented the sea, while “Sidonian” is a more specific ethnonym, indicating the people of Sidon, characterized (at least in the cultural horizon of the Homeric epics) by their metallurgical and textile production.

At least for the Homeric attestations, it does not seem possible to affirm that “Sidonians” designate “Phoenicians” by synecdoche (with the part representing the whole, as Moscati 1974, p. 25, and others thereafter, most recently Bondi 2009, p. X), and by assuming Sidon's dominance over the rest of the region.⁶² If they had predominance, the Homeric poems do not support this hypothesis. Nor, conversely, does the term Φοίνικες indicate just the inhabitants of Tyre, of whom there would otherwise be no trace in epic, despite the prominence of this city in the first half of the 1st millennium BCE (as argued by Sherratt 2005, pp. 35-36; 2010, p. 125). Both positions start from a prominent role of Sidon (present *in homericis*) and Tyre (absent *ab homericis*), and implicitly or explicitly assume the predominance of one city over the other and the existence of a kind of geo-political unity, which remains conjectural,⁶³

59 One may find here an *interpretatio graeca* of the god Kothar, known from Ugaritic texts (cf. Morris 1992, p. 95, with bibliography n. 66). But as Wathelet 1981-1982, p. 241, rightly points out, the king is called βασιλεύς, which would be a more recent title, certainly post-Mycenaean (where the king is called *wanax*).

60 For the compatibility of *Od.* XIII 256 ff. with the role of Crete, as reconstructed on the basis of archaeological data, see Winter 1995, p. 250 (with further bibliography).

61 Of purple in reference to Sidon, nothing is said. This is an *argumentum ex silentio*, yet the silence of the epic seems to match the silence of the archaeological data. The first archaeological evidence of significant purple production in Sidon is the shellmidden partially investigated in the 1920s and dated, on the basis of the ceramic finds, to the Persian-Hellenistic period (cf. Peyronel 2006, p. 58). To the best of my knowledge, the only previous evidence of purple working in the area, with a high chronology, comes from Ugarit, specifically at Minet-el-Beidha, where snails dating between 1500 and 1300 BCE have been found (cf. Peyronel 2006, p. 54). In Tyre, the shell deposits date to the Late Bronze Age (Peyronel 2006, pp. 60-61). But the case of Sidon, it remains an *argumentum ex silentio*.

62 Nor do I find any justification for the statement of West 1981, *ad Od.* IV 500, p. 368, that “the supremacy of Sidon [*scil.* over Tyre] dated back to the Mycenaean age, and it is likely that it became part of the epic tradition at that time”.

63 The “myth” of a single kingdom of Tyre and Sidon (i.e. their political unity) derives from the title “king of the Sidonians” used by some kings of Tyre (see Boyes 2012, with critical discussion of the preceding bibliography). Richardson 1993, p. 250 rightly reports the issue (in the terms of that time) without taking a definite position.

Also conjectural is the unproven assumption that “generic Phoenicians ... and the specific Sidonians ... are synonymous in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, with the city standing for the people as a whole”: Winter 1995, p. 247.

7. CONCLUSIONS

1. Φοίνικες traces back to φοινός (although the etymology of the latter is currently left *sub iudice*); neither etymologically nor from a cultural-historical point of view (at least within the Homeric epic) does have any plausible connection with the production of purple. Instead the term conveys the notion of “red” (or “brownish-red”);
2. Φοίνικες is a Gr. ethnonym meaning “Red Men” used to designate populations located in the Near East.⁶⁴ The most plausible, reasonable and economical hypothesis remains that of Musti 1991, p. 165, who states that the name was “originariamente destinato a indicare *più in generale* genti del Vicino Oriente siropalestinese, mesopotamico, cipriota, forse anche anatolico, designandole con un colore (il rosso), che potrà anche riferirsi ad aspetti somatici, al colore della pelle”;⁶⁵
3. within the broad chronological horizon of Homeric society, the only indication of Phoenician historical reality relates to usage of the term Sidon/Sidonian.⁶⁶ This, in my opinion, is the only case of historical Phoenicians presence in the Homeric poems.

If this reasoning is correct, then the Greeks conceived of a broad area – let us call this, for convenience, the Near East – inhabited by “Red Men”, but they employed more precise terms to identify micro-regions. Within the Homeric poems, to use a Linnaean taxonomy, Φοίνικες seems to indicate the genus, Σιδόνες the species.

APPENDIX

The hypothesis of the linguistic “calque” relies upon Speisers interpretation of *kinahhu*, which has several drawbacks. First, when he states (p. 125) “the land name ‘Canaan’ ... had become in Mesopotamia an adjective meaning ‘purple dye’ etc.” the objection arises “dass ‘von Kanaan’ ja *kinahhu*, *-aju*, ... lauten müsse” (Landsberger 1967, p. 166), furthermore, still on the linguistic level, the supposed Hurrian influence is

64 Already Chantraine 1972, p. 2, came to a similar conclusion: “il est possible que Φοίνικες ait pu s’appliquer à d’autres populations qu’aux Phéniciens proprement dits”. See also Baurain 1986 and Ruijgh 1993, col. 455.

65 It is unlikely that, behind the Φοίνικες, some Greek traditions conceal “a mixture of Mycenaean and Phoenicians at the dawn of Phoenician civilisation, when Mycenaean sailors from the peripheral cities of the East and Phoenician sailors from the coast were in close contact and sailed together along the African routes to Spain and the Cassiteride islands”, as argued by Di Vita 1971, pp. 79 ss., esp. 83 (in a similar vein, see already A.H. Krappé in a paper dated 1940 and quoted *apud* Bonfante 1941, p. 16, n. 32). I am by no means persuaded by Wathelet 1981-1982, p. 237, “les aedes [of the Homeric epic] ont connu ceus que nous appelons ‘Phéniciens’ et les nomment ainsi”. Thus Φοίνικες seems a generic definition rather than our current, specific meaning of “Phoenicians”. Moreover, Wathelet, too, understood this problem: “Dans l’*Iliade* et dans la plupart des passages de l’*Odyssee*, le nom des Phéniciens est flanqué de celui de Sidon, comme si Φοίνικες demandait encore à être précisé”. Even less plausible, from what we have seen so far, is the hypothesis of Stella 1965, p. 27, where the *po-ni-ki-jo* (-*ja*) of the Knossos tablets would conceal ethnonymic references to the Canaanites of Ugarit (2nd mill. BCE). The broad meaning of “Phoenicia/Phoenicians” covers an area of the eastern Mediterranean that coincides with that covered by “Canaan/Canaanites” in extra-Biblical sources, where Canaan corresponds to the Middle East, i.e. an area between the Arabian Sea and the Mediterranean, sometimes including Egypt, Libya, Turkey: “It is within this area, that ‘Canaan’ lies”: Binger 1997, p. 23. On the significance of “Canaan”, see Lemche 1991.

66 Tsirkin 2001 reconstructs Phoenicians differently, as a designation for the inhabitants of the northern Syro-Palestinian coast and reconstructs Sidonians as a designation for the inhabitants of the southern part of the same region, moving from erroneous premises, in my opinion (cfr. n. 4 above). The reconstruction of Richardson 1993, p. 250, differs: “As a rule in Homer it seems that the name Sidonians is applied to the Phoenicians when at home, whereas abroad they are called Phoenicians”.

questionable for the terminal suffix *-na / -ni* (de Vaux 1968, p. 24, with the Hurritic derivation of the suff. *-h_h* out of the question: cfr. Landsberger 1967, p. 166). As a second objection, the interpretation as “purple, purple-coloured fabric” rests solely on Speiser’s understanding of the occurrences in just two Nuzi tablets (cfr. also Pfeifer – Speiser 1936, pp. 121-122) and Landsberger (1967, p. 157) provides later attestations (*HSS* 15, 221, *HSS* 15, 220 and *HSS* 15, 223), together providing a sample size too meagre to go beyond the level of hypothesis. Closer scrutiny led Landsberger (1967, p. 167) to the conclusion that “wenn der kostbare Rotpurpur unbedingt in Nuzi erwartet werden muss, so kommt dafür *qinah_hhu* [this is Landsberger’s transcription for *kinah_hhu*] nicht in Betracht”. As a third objection, outside of Nuzi, the Semitic languages use other terms to indicate purple: “*kinah_hhu*, désignant une couleur ou une matière colorante rouge, avec ou sans relation avec la pourpre, ne se rencontre nulle part en dehors de Nuzi, et l’hébreu, l’ugaritique, l’akkadien de Râs Shamra appellent la pourpre par d’autres noms” (de Vaux 1968, p. 25; for terminology, see Landsberger 1967, *sub* f and g, pp. 155-162 and 162-173; more concisely, Detrich 2009, pp. 44-54). Speiser’s hypothesis has often been accepted uncritically (cfr. e.g. Goetze 1956, p. 35; Moscati 1963 [and Moscati 1959]; more recently Jacobson 1999, p. 67 with mediated bibliographical references on pp. 70-71, nn. 18-19). Jacobson (p. 67) asserted that the “Greeks also translated names of peoples and places according to their accepted meanings” citing only two cases, that of “Phoinikes”, which is *sub iudice*, and that of the toponym Sela’ / Petra. The latter does not seem a congruous comparison, given that toponyms, often derived from real logical categories, such as physical characteristics of space etc., can more easily be converted from one language to another. For a list of Semitic toponyms translated into Greek, albeit with reservations, see Astour 1964, p. 196. Note also the case made by Albright (1961), based on Speiser’s reconstruction postulating an undocumented **kn*’ with the meaning “murex”, the mollusk from which purple is obtained. While admitting a series of connections, or rather unlikely equivalences, discussed and dismantled by Landsberger (1967, p. 166, i.e. sum. *g_{in}* = akk. *uqni-* = ugar. *iqni*’ = gr. *κυαν-* [cfr. *κύανος* etc.] = Nuzi *qinah_hhu* = syr. *q_nna’*), one would conclude – quite paradoxically – that the Greeks took directly a term indicating a blue colour and then translated it through a radical indicating a red colour (dark red, purple, violet, or whatever) from which *φοῖνιξ* would result. Critical discussion of the hypothesis by Astour (1965, pp. 346-348) for whom Akk. *kinah_hhu* would originally designate a geographical area and mean “Occident”, the “Land of Sunset”, or “Westland” and would serve as “the West Semitic translation or counterpart of Amurru” (p. 348; cfr. de Vaux 1968, pp. 23-25). For more balanced discussions, see Muhly (1970, pp. 26 f. with further bibliography), Dombrowski (1984), Morris (1992, p. 98) and the scepticism of Lemche (1991, pp. 26 f).

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