

## THE NOTION OF *PHOENICIA* IN THE ROMAN PERIOD\*

by

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this paper is to display the evolution of the term *Phoenicia* in the Roman times (64 BCE–636 CE) by focusing on the most important issues regarding this problem, i.e. the geographical extension of the notion of *Phoenicia*, the transition from its geographical meaning into its administrative one and the role of the establishment of the Roman province of Syria Phoenice (194 CE) played in this process. The paper shows that the concept of *Phoenicia* in Roman times was influenced by the Hellenistic term *Syria and Phoenicia*. The provincial identity of the Phoenicians also seems to have been a product of the extension of the notion of *Phoenicia* further inland and some Eastern communities, which were never before thought to be Phoenician, could now share this identity as a means of integration into the Graeco-Roman world. The problem of the notion of *Phoenicia* in the Roman period seems to be a neglected topic and the current paper is an attempt to fill the gap in that field.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In modern scholarship it is generally assumed that the term *Phoenicia* designates the narrow coastal strip of Syria where the Phoenician city-states were situated, a term specific mostly for the Iron Age (ca. 1200–332 BCE), when the Phoenician culture flourished. Although the geographical dimensions of this land as proposed by scholars vary to some extent<sup>1</sup>, the modern definitions usually set Phoenicia in the coast land somewhere between the city of Arados up to

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. ELAYI 1982: 83, n. 1.

Akko or Mount Carmel<sup>2</sup>. However, as was demonstrated by VAN DONGEN, defining Phoenicia on the basis of linguistic, archaeological and historical criteria is indeed not an easy task; although there are some indications allowing scholars to distinguish such a region, the evidence is too scanty to solve the problem decisively<sup>3</sup>. The term *Phoenicia* as a designation of a geographical and cultural region, a commonwealth and shared identity of the city-states like Tyre, Sidon or Byblos and their hinterland, despite the uncertain etymology and origins of this concept<sup>4</sup>, seems to be a purely Greek construct without a clear equivalent in known Phoenician sources – there is no indigenous evidence for a common self-identification of these cities and their inhabitants, whose identity seems to be civic rather than ethnic<sup>5</sup>. The view formulated by KRAHMALKOV that the Phoenicians called their language *Ponnīm* and their homeland *Pūt*<sup>6</sup> is generally rejected by other scholars<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, the alleged identification of Phoenicia with the notion of Canaan has recently also been brought into question<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary to state that the attempt to define Phoenicia demands an instrument which would allow us to do it and only Classical sources can provide that instrument, since only they state explicitly *what Phoenicia is*.

This assumption seems to be of some importance if we keep in mind that the modern notion of *Phoenicia* differs quite significantly from the ancient application of this term. Underestimation of this fact may sometimes lead to a misunderstanding of the problem – some scholars ignore information provided by the sources when it does not correspond to the modern concept regarding what Phoenicia is. SARTRE, for instance, at some point discusses various Classical accounts concerning the geographical extent of Phoenicia, which sometimes include cities situated beyond the modern notion of this land. He points out the divergences between them, but pays only very little attention to the diachronic aspect of this notion. In the case of Strabo, who mentions Rhinocolura near Egypt among the cities of Phoenicia (see map 1), SARTRE writes that “En réalité, la Phénicie se termine au sud avec le territoire d’Akko (Aké, Ptolémaïs), au nord avec celui d’Arados. Ni Rhinocolura, ni Myriandros ne sont, géographiquement,

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<sup>2</sup> For encyclopedic definitions of Phoenicia, see: EISSFELD 1941; LIPIŃSKI, RÖLLIG 1992; WARD 1997; RÖLLIG 2003–2005; EDER, NIEMEYER, RÖLLIG 2007; SALLES 2012; KOTSONAS 2013.

<sup>3</sup> VAN DONGEN 2010.

<sup>4</sup> For the discussion on the etymology and origins of the term *Phoenicia*, see: SPEISER 1936; BONFANTE 1941; ASTOUR 1965; BILLIGMEIER 1977; VANDERSLEYEN 1987; PARASKEVAIDOU 1991; BEEKES 2004: 181–183. For the term *Phoenicians* as used among the Greeks and Romans, see PRAG 2006 and 2014.

<sup>5</sup> QUINN 2018: 25–43.

<sup>6</sup> KRAHMALKOV 2000: 10–13; 2001: 1–5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. NAVEH 2001; MOSCA 2003; JONGELING, KERR 2002; VAN DONGEN 2010: 478, n. 53; QUINN 2018: 30, n. 25.

<sup>8</sup> QUINN *et al.* 2014; QUINN 2018: 30–37.

en Phénicie”<sup>9</sup>. This statement demands a constant and invariable definition of Phoenicia and somehow neglects the fact that, as this paper aims to display, the ancient notion of *Phoenicia* evolved through the ages.

The words Φοινίκη and Φοινίκες appear at the very beginning of Greek literature, since they are mentioned several times by Homer<sup>10</sup>. It is noticeable, however, that the term *Phoenicia* persists in Graeco-Roman texts long after the Phoenician language ceases to be attested in the Roman period – it seems that the last known Phoenician inscription carved in stone is either a bilingual dedication from Arados dated to 25/24 BCE or a dedication from Byblos, which is sometimes dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE. However, Phoenician letters and single words appear on coins issued by Tyre as late as the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE<sup>11</sup>, while the notion of *Phoenicia* is still present in the evidence long after that time. Furthermore, it is striking that despite the process of acculturation and integration into the Graeco-Roman world, which took place in Phoenicia and shaped the local culture, the concept of Phoenicia as a separate entity could hardly be considered an antiquarian one – the memory of Phoenicia and its heritage, of course in the prism of Graeco-Roman interpretation, lasted and was cultivated in Roman times as well. Old Phoenician cities like Tyre, Sidon or Berytos and their inhabitants, by accepting this Graeco-Roman perspective willingly, referred to their glorious mythological past, as is clearly visible on the iconography of the coins issued by them<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, in Roman times the notion of *Phoenicia* itself evolves vividly and does not lose its contemporary aspect. Not only do the boundaries of *Phoenicia* change significantly during this period, but the very nature of this concept evolves. The fact that in Roman times the word *Phoenicia*, next to its geographical and cultural sense, gains permanent status as an administrative term, introduces a difficulty in the interpretation of its meaning attested in the evidence.

These two problems, namely the evolution of the extent of the term *Phoenicia* and the transformation of the nature of this concept in Roman times, so far have not met with much attention. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the meaning, the semantic range and the historical evolution of the notion of *Phoenicia* in the Roman period (64 BCE–636 CE) and to discuss the most significant problems associated with this issue. Several questions should be asked: What is the application of the term *Phoenicia* in the evidence in the Roman period? What are the geographical boundaries of *Phoenicia* and how do they change over time? What is the nature of this notion – is it after the establishment of the Roman province of Syria Phoenice that it is understood as an

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<sup>9</sup> SARTRE 1988: 19.

<sup>10</sup> Hom. *Il.* XXIII 744; *Od.* IV 83; XIII 272; XIV 291; XV 415. 417. 419. 473.

<sup>11</sup> For the decline of the Phoenician language, see BRIQUEL-CHATONNET 1991. The last Phoenician inscriptions carved in stone: *I GLS VII 4001* (Arados); *KAI 12* (Byblos). For Phoenician words on coins, see ROBINSON 1997a, 1997b and 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. HIRT 2015.

administrative term only? What was the reason for naming this province in such a way? Who are the Phoenicians after Septimius Severus' reform? In order to avoid misunderstandings, the terms "Phoenicia" or "Phoenician cities" are understood here in an usual sense, while by *Phoenicia* I will refer to the term itself, i.e. to the construct proper attested by the sources of a particular period.

## 2. EVIDENCE

In order to examine the meaning and evolution of the term *Phoenicia*, it is necessary to take into consideration the evidence which enables it to be defined. This study is based on the most important descriptions of Phoenicia and attestations of this term occurring in the most informative sources, namely the literary and epigraphic texts dated from the establishment of the province of Syria by Pompey (64 BCE) until the end of Roman rule in the East at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (636 CE). Not all attestations of the term can be taken into consideration, since many appear in a context so obscure that it does not allow for analysis. There are several difficulties we should be aware of.

First of all, the number of available literary texts, our main source, is extremely limited and particular historical periods are not equally represented in the evidence, which is especially true for texts from the first decades of Roman rule over the East. On the other hand, there is so much more evidence for the Late Roman period, that the current investigation is, as a result, somewhat imbalanced. Secondly, because of the nature of Classical literature, the information derived from some texts is in principle anachronistic, since it may be dependent on the writers' own sources and, to some point, reproduce their views, ideas and notions, which do not have to correspond to the views contemporary to the text we are analysing. A very clear example of this is the *Ethnica* by Stephanus of Byzantium, a geographical lexicon based on information provided by a plethora of not always identifiable sources. There are more than fifty entries on Phoenicia and only a few of them actually refer to a primary source – e.g. Hecataeus of Miletus, Strabo, Dionysius Periegetes, Philo of Byblos, Alexander Polyhistor, Pausanias of Antioch, Istrus and Aelius Herodianus. Such a mosaic, composed on the basis of the information derived from different texts dated to different times, can hardly be thought to be a coherent picture.

We should also remember that a particular author may be wrong regarding even some major geographical issues, as in the case of Strabo, whose description of the Phoenician landscape sometimes gives erroneous data<sup>13</sup>, or may provide unique information which does not agree with other contemporary sources. This divergence concerns details, but the general tendency his description displays still corresponds to other descriptions dated to the same period and therefore

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<sup>13</sup> MACADAM 1999: 282–285.

provides an insight into the notion of *Phoenicia* in a certain period. For instance, despite the fact that the accounts of Pliny and Ptolemy differ with respect to the exact boundaries of *Phoenicia* (Pliny: Mt. Bargylus – Crocodilon; Ptolemy: Eleutherus – Chorseos; see map 2), they both in fact give very similar information (the environs of Arados – the environs of Mt. Carmel) and in consequence it is probable that both reflect more or less precisely the concept of *Phoenicia* at the time they were written (the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE). However, we should be aware that sometimes Classical authors may indeed be wrong – the most prominent example of this is perhaps a passage from Josephus, where he corrects Apion, who mistakenly associates Dora with Idumaea instead of *Phoenicia*<sup>14</sup>.

We also cannot forget the differences in the nature of the literary sources – apart from geographical narrative texts, historiography and prose fiction, we also have other sources such as itineraries and documents of different informative value. Therefore, it is necessary to remember the fact that our evidence comes from texts of different periods and genres and is characterised by different scopes of perception and interest. The inscriptions, on the other hand, are likely to present ideas on the notion of *Phoenicia* which are contemporary to them, but the information they provide is in fact only very limited.

### 3. THE MEANING OF *PHOENICIA*

Basically, the term *Phoenicia* as attested by our sources has two meanings. The first one is purely geographical, since it simply designates a certain part of Syria, namely the coast land where the Phoenician cities are situated. The persisting association with Syria as a greater geographical entity can sometimes lead to oversimplification by associating the Phoenician cities directly with Syria and omitting *Phoenicia* as its sub-region, e.g. Lucr. VI 585: *in Syria Sidone*; Porph. *Vit. Pyth.* 1: Τύρος τῆς Συρίας; Aphrodisias 228: Τρίπολις τῆς Συρίας. It is possible to distinguish two kinds of statements in the evidence which to some extent allow us to establish the view on the frames and content of the notion of *Phoenicia* according to a particular source:

(1) a general description which gives us the most important information concerning the range of the notion, e.g. according to Strabo: “the seaboard from Orthosia to Pelusium is called *Phoenicia*, which is a narrow country and lies flat along the sea”<sup>15</sup>. This kind of definition can be accompanied by the enumeration of the elements included, but it is not always the case. Despite its relatively high value for the present research, these kind of statements are rather rare and they do not always have to be representative for every period.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph. *Ap.* II 116.

<sup>15</sup> Strab. XVI 2, 21: τῆς δὲ λοιπῆς ἢ μὲν ἀπὸ Ὀρθωσίας μέχρι Πηλουσίου παραλία Φοινίκη καλεῖται; transl. by H.L. JONES.

(2) a selective statement pointing out only a single element of the semantic range of the notion, e.g. Joseph. *BJ* VII 39: Βηρυτός ἐν τῇ Φοινίκῃ; *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 4210: Τριπολίται τῆς Φοινείκης; Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* IX 5, 2: Δαμασκός τῆς Φοινίκης. The obvious flaw of this category of attestations is the fact that it refers only to a narrow aspect of *Phoenicia* and an analysis of a single text can only very rarely give a comprehensive and coherent description of Phoenicia within a particular account. Only a few sources provide enough information of this kind to create a reconstruction of the notion of *Phoenicia* as a whole.

Secondly, the term *Phoenicia* very often appears in an administrative sense, as a more or less formal name of an administrative district or a domain of competence of a certain official. The identification of this context is possible on the basis of the explicit connection between the office held by a particular individual and the designation of the district, for instance: *I.Tyr* II 23: *legatus provinciae Phoenices*; Amm. Marc. XXV 1, 2: *dux Phoenices*; Malalas XVIII 16 [435]: ὁ δούξ Φοινίκης. Placing the term in a formal context allows us to identify its administrative meaning.

### 3.1. THE GEOGRAPHICAL DIMENSION OF *PHOENICIA*

Since *Phoenicia* is primarily a geographical term, we should discuss its range and content. The differences occurring in the sources concerning the boundaries of *Phoenicia* attested through the ages indicate an evolution of its meaning. Although the evidence, limited as it is, gives only a very general picture of the course of this process, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish three stages of the geographical development of *Phoenicia* in Roman times:

#### (1) Phoenicia as the Levantine coast (map 1):

Early Roman evidence attests the geographical boundaries of Phoenicia which seems to strongly correspond to the earlier Classical and Hellenistic imagination concerning this region. Phoenicia is depicted as a narrow coastal strip spreading almost all along the Levant. Strabo, whose account was influenced by Hellenistic sources<sup>16</sup>, states that Phoenicia spreads from the Eleutherus river and the city of Orthosia as far as Pelusium<sup>17</sup> – one may conclude that this idea of the extent of Phoenicia is shared by Livy when he calls Raphia a city *in Phoenicia*<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, we see that, according to Strabo, Phoenicia extends almost as far as Egypt. This concept is also attested in Diodorus, who, while referring to Homer, states that the place called Nysa is situated between the Nile and Phoenicia<sup>19</sup>. We see a distant reminiscence of this in the novel by Xenophon of Ephesus, when he says that the border point between Phoenicia and

<sup>16</sup> SAFRAI 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Strab. XVI 2, 12–19. 21. 22–33.

<sup>18</sup> Liv. XXXV 13, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Hymn. Hom. Bacch.* 8 f.; Diod. III 66, 3; IV 2, 3.

the Nile Delta is a place called Paralion<sup>20</sup>, and in Procopius' remark when he states that in the times of Moses Phoenicia was a coastal land extending from Sidon to the boundaries of Egypt<sup>21</sup>.

(2) *Phoenicia* as a coastal land limited to the core of the Phoenician settlement (map 2):

In the second phase, which is attested by sources dated to the Early Roman period up until the reign of the Severan dynasty (app. 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE – the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE), *Phoenicia* appears in a significantly limited form, comprising only the coastal land where the most important Phoenician cities such as Tyre, Sidon, Berytos and Arados are situated. The term *Phoenicia* ceases to include a great deal of its former land – in the north, the cities of Gabala, Paltos and Balanaea<sup>22</sup>, and cities such as Caesarea Maritima, Joppa, Jamnia, Ascalon etc. in the south are no longer considered to be Phoenician, since later sources, when referring to these places, locate them in Palestine or Syria without any further details<sup>23</sup>. This is the case of Pomponius Mela, who pays great attention to Phoenician matters, but mentions nothing about the Phoenician heritage of cities like Gaza or Ascalon<sup>24</sup>. According to Pliny, Phoenicia spreads from Mount Bargylus in the north to Crocodilon, which is perceived as a southern marker point<sup>25</sup>. Although Josephus does not provide a comprehensive description of Phoenicia, we can conclude that this land extends at least from Botrys to Dora, but it is not a consistent and homogeneous area of Phoenician settlement – for example, the author includes Caesarea Maritima while excluding Ptolemais-Akko<sup>26</sup>. Ptolemy's description on the other hand contains the coastline from the Eleutherus river to the Chorseus or Cherseus river between the city of Dora and Caesarea Maritima, but also includes some cities inland like Caesarea Philippi<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Xen. *Ephes.* III 12, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Procop. *Bell.* IV 10, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Plin. *HN* V 79; Ptol. *Geogr.* V 15, 3.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Vit. VIII 3, 8; Plin. *HN* V 68 f.; Mela I 64; Paus. I 14, 7; Ptol. *Geogr.* V 16, 2. 8; Euseb. *Onom.* s.v. 'Ιαμνεία [106, 20 f.]; 'Ιόπιπη [110, 24 f.]; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* VI 11; VII 15, 11; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* VIII 10, 1; *IGUR* II 590: Σύρος Ἀσκαλωνείτης Παλαιστεινή.

<sup>24</sup> BAITY 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Plin. *HN* V 75–79.

<sup>26</sup> The places which are directly said to be situated in Phoenicia (πόλις ἐν τῇ Φοινίκῃ, πόλις τῆς Φοινίκης etc.) are Berytos (*BJ* VII 39), Botrys (*AJ* VIII 324), Caesarea Maritima/the Tower of Strato (*AJ* XV 333), Dora (*Vit.* 31), Sidon (*AJ* I 138) and Tyre (*AJ* XIV 290). Josephus states that Ptolemais-Akko is “a maritime city of Galilee” (*BJ* II 188) and a city “in Galilee” (*AJ* XII 350). Moreover, he mentions that Cleopatra sent her son Alexander “to Phoenicia” while she herself was besieging Ptolemais (*AJ* XIII 350).

<sup>27</sup> Ptol. *Geogr.* V 15, 4 f.: the coast land; V 15, 21: and the hinterland: Arca, Palae-Byblos, Gabala and Caesarea Panias; V 15, 27: the islands: Tyre and Arados.



(3) *Phoenicia* as a territory of the Roman province (map 3):

The third and last phase of the geographical development of the notion of *Phoenicia* is attested by sources dated up to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE, which coincides with the administrative reform of the province of Syria conducted by Septimius Severus, and continuing until at least the end of Roman rule in the East (app. 194–626 CE). In that period the boundaries of the term changes greatly – *Phoenicia* is no longer thought to be a narrow coastal strip and now it reaches far inland. The southern limitation becomes even more apparent as the sources very often point out the city of Ptolemais or Mount Carmel, considering them to be a border point separating *Phoenicia* and Palestine or Judea<sup>28</sup>. In this period *Phoenicia* includes places which were never before considered in any way to be Phoenician, e.g. Emesa, Heliopolis, Damascus or Palmyra<sup>29</sup> – it is noteworthy that in the previous phase these places were said to be situated in neighbouring regions<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, one may see that after the institution of the Roman province of *Syria Phoenice* the term *Phoenicia* corresponds to the territory of this administrative unit.

The analysis of the descriptions and attestations of the term *Phoenicia* shows that, in consequence, the close relation between the geographical and administrative aspect of the notion of *Phoenicia* in the Late Roman period (phase 3) makes the distinction between them almost impossible. To some extent it is so because of changes in the evidence itself, since for the Late Roman period we have a much wider range of sources than in earlier times. Moreover, the nature of the sources changes through the ages as well and, in consequence, they focus on provinces rather than lands.

The Greek and Roman intellectuals were actually aware of the changes in the geographical boundaries of the concept of *Phoenicia*. We see this in the remark of Eusebius, who states that in the past *Phoenicia* covered the land now called Palestine: “Now these Syrians would be Hebrews who inhabited the neighbouring country to *Phoenicia*, which was itself called *Phoenicia* in old times, but afterwards *Judaea*, and in our time, *Palestine*”<sup>31</sup>. Procopius also distinguishes the

<sup>28</sup> Euseb. *Onom.* s.v. Κάμμηλος ὄρος [118, 8 f.]; cf. Isid. *Etym.* XVI 16, 1; *Dig.* L 15, 1, 3.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Emesa: Hdn. V 3, 2; Euseb. *Praep. evang.* IV 16, 22; *Vit. Const.* III 58, 1; Damascus: Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* IX 5, 2; *Onom.* s.v. Δαμασκός [76, 6–8]; *SEG* XXXIII 491: Δαμα[σκηνός τῆς] Φοινίκης; Heliopolis: Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* I 18; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* VII 15, 11; Emesa and Damascus: Amm. Marc. XIV 8, 9; Emesa and Heliopolis: Malalas XI 22 [280]; XII 26 [296]; XII 50 [314].

<sup>30</sup> For instance, according to Pliny, Damascus was located in Decapolis and both Caesarea Panias and Heliopolis were not assigned to *Phoenicia* (Plin. *HN* V 74: Damascus, Caesarea Panias; V 80: Heliopolis); Ptolemy, on the other hand, locates Emesa in Apamene, Damascus and Heliopolis in Decapolis and Palmyra in Palmyrene (Ptol. *Geogr.* V 15, 19: Emesa; V 15, 22: Heliopolis and Damascus; V 15, 24: Palmyra).

<sup>31</sup> Euseb. *Praep. evang.* X 5, 2: Σύροι δ' ἂν εἶεν καὶ Ἑβραῖοι τὴν γείτονα Φοινίκης καὶ αὐτὴν τὸ μὲν παλαιὸν Φοινίκην, μετέπειτα δὲ Ἰουδαίαν, καθ' ἡμᾶς δὲ Παλαιστίνην ὀνομαζομένην οἰκήσαντες, ὧν καὶ μάλιστα οὐκ ἄλλοτρία φαίνεται ἢ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν γραμμάτων φωνή; transl. by E.H. GIFFORD (*EP*, p. 506).



extent of Phoenicia in the times of Moses and his own contemporary idea of that land<sup>32</sup>. The *Ethnica* of Stephanus of Byzantium emphasise the fluctuations in the geographical boundaries as well by pointing out the divergences in the accounts of his sources – this is the case for e.g. Gabala, Gaza and Joppa. Stephanus states that Gabala was on the one hand called “a Phoenician city” by Hecataeus, but on the other hand his other source, Strabo, associates it with Syria instead<sup>33</sup>. In the case of Gaza, Stephanus says that it used to be “a city of Phoenicia”, but now it is “a city of Palestine”<sup>34</sup>. For Joppa, Stephanus juxtaposes the accounts of Philo of Byblos and Dionysius Periegetes, where the former considers the city to be “a city of Phoenicia” and the latter describes it as “a city of Palestine”<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, as we can see, the Greeks and Romans seem to be conscious of the geographical evolution of the term *Phoenicia*.

### 3.2. *PHOENICIA* AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE TERM

The administrative meaning of *Phoenicia* under Roman rule becomes apparent in Early Roman times, when the sources mention it as an eparchy of the imperial cult, with the office of *Phoenicarch* as a head of this eparchy<sup>36</sup>. However, it was the administrative reform of the province of Syria and the establishment of the Roman province *Syria Phoenice* by Septimius Severus that seems to have been an event which shaped the meaning of *Phoenicia* in Roman times<sup>37</sup>. The motivation driving Severus to divide the province of Syria was most probably the desire to weaken the position of the governor of this wealthy and important province in order to avoid the risk of a civil war<sup>38</sup>. According to the *Historia Augusta*, the idea of restructuring Syria had also been considered earlier on by Hadrian, who allegedly felt an aversion to the people of Antioch<sup>39</sup>. Whether this story is true or not, Hadrian indeed seemed to display some interest in Phoenicia, its domestic affairs and its antiquities<sup>40</sup>. The establishment of a province bearing the name of Phoenicia is sometimes thought to have been an act of “re-invigoration of Phoenician identity”, presumably inspired and promoted by the Severan dynasty, an imperial house of Phoenician-Punic descent. The apparent revival of the ties between some cities in Phoenicia and Punic Africa, as is attested by

<sup>32</sup> Procop. *Bell.* IV 10, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *FGrH* I F 273; Strab. XVI 2, 12; Steph. Byz. s.v. Γάβαλα [γ 3; 191].

<sup>34</sup> Steph. Byz. s.v. Γάζα [γ 13; 193 f.].

<sup>35</sup> Phil. Bybl. *FGrH* 790 F 38; Dionys. Per. 910; Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἰόπη [1 72; 333 f.].

<sup>36</sup> *OGIS* 596; *Gerasa* 188; *Cod. Iust.* V 27, 1; *Nov.* 89, 15; cf. SARTRE 2005: 59, n. 50; 399.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. MILLAR 1993: 121–123.

<sup>38</sup> MILLAR 1993: 122; SARTRE 2005: 135.

<sup>39</sup> *HA Hadr.* 14, 1.

<sup>40</sup> MACADAM 2001.

the epigraphic evidence in the case of Tyre and Lepcis Magna and the iconography of the coins issued by the Phoenician cities (mythological Phoenician-Punic references like the representations of Europa or Dido)<sup>41</sup>, may indeed confirm this view. From now on, the sources refer to this province, both the state and later on the ecclesiastic administrative unit, simply as “Phoenicia”<sup>42</sup>, or “the people of the Phoenicians” (ἔθνος Φοινίκων, *genus Foenicum*)<sup>43</sup> – this last term is particularly puzzling due to the fact that there is no terminological difference between “a people” and “a province”<sup>44</sup>.

A more accurate way to name this province appears later, after its division into *Phoenicia Maritima* and *Phoenicia Libanensis*, presumably performed by Theodosius the Great<sup>45</sup>, when the name of the province is very often followed by its specification<sup>46</sup>. A very clear example of distinguishing these two provinces from each other is the *History of the Church* by Evagrius of Epiphanea (ca. 535–600 CE), who not only specifies the province he refers to, but also uses expressions like “each Phoenicia” or “two Phoenicias”<sup>47</sup>, which clearly indicates the administrative context of his application of this term. Therefore, we can see that *Phoenicia* in its administrative context is attested not only in technical documents, which were preserved in considerable abundance at that time, like lists of the provinces of the Roman Empire and law codes<sup>48</sup>, but also very often in prose writing, which is certainly less formal in nature. In consequence, if we keep in mind the geographical evolution of the term *Phoenicia* and the fact that in the Late Roman period it covers the territory of a Roman province, the only clearly traceable context of this term in the evidence is the administrative one. Therefore, the notion of Phoenicia as a geographical and cultural region seems to be somehow pushed out of the Graeco-Roman imagination by the administrative meaning – in the Late Roman period it is possible to identify only the administrative aspect of *Phoenicia*.

<sup>41</sup> HALL 2004: 93 f.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Dio Cass. LXXXVIII 35, 1; Amm. Marc. XIV 8, 9; XXV 1, 2; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* II 4, 7; VI 38, 1–3; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* V 10; *IGR* IV 374; *I.Tyr* II 21; *I.Tyr* II 23.

<sup>43</sup> Hdn. II 7, 4; Euseb. *Vit. Const.* III 55, 1; IV 43, 2; *De laud. Const.* 8, 5; *IGLS* XV 369 (Najran, Roman period, uncertain date, epigram): ἔθνος Φοινίκων; *IGLS* XVII/1 194 (Palmyra, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE, epigram): Φοινείων τάγος; *AE* 2000, 1500 and 1503 (Berytos or Byblos, the vicinity of Caesarea Pannias, 362/363 CE): *Foenicum genus*.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. ISAAC 2011: 495.

<sup>45</sup> Malalas XIII 37 [345].

<sup>46</sup> E.g. Malalas VIII 30 [211]; XI 22 [280]; XII 26 [296]; XII 50 [314]; XIII 37 [345]; XIV 29 [367]; XVIII 16 [435]; XVIII 26 [441]; Procop. *Aed.* II 11, 10; V 1, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Evagr. *Hist. eccl.* III 33 [131]; IV 34 [184]: Φοινίκη Πάραλος; III 34 [134]; VI 5 [225]: Φοινίκη Λιβανησία; III 36 [135]; VI 2 [223]: Φοινίκη ἐκατέρω; II 18 [92]: δύο Φοινίκαί.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. *Latercul. Veron.* 1; *Notit. dignit.* 1, 43; 1, 89; 2, 10; 2, 18; 22, 3; 22, 9; 22, 19; 22, 25; 32, 1–52; Hierocl. *Syneg.* 715, 5–716, 9; 717, 1–7; Georg. Cypr. 967–983; 984–996.

3.2.1. THE NAME OF THE ROMAN PROVINCE *SYRIA PHOENICE*

Since this newly established province included old Phoenician cities such as Tyre, Sidon, Berytus etc., it seems to be obvious that the district's name referred to this fact. However, as was demonstrated above, *Syria Phoenice* also comprised the lands beyond Phoenicia itself. MILLAR states that

the use of this term [*Phoenice*] can have been intended only as a historical reminiscence, emphasising the importance of the cities of Phoenicia. This newly devised province was not confined to areas which anyone would previously have thought of as “Phoenician”, for the “border” between it and Syria Coele ran all the way from the Mediterranean across to the Euphrates<sup>49</sup>.

The question one may ask is why such an extensive province received such a name – is it only “a historical reminiscence”? The creation of the province *Syria Phoenice* had a tremendous impact on the meaning of *Phoenicia* and its geographical shape by extending *Phoenicia* further to the East, but it is far from certain whether the naming of the district in this way by the Romans was a reason for or a result of this semantic extension. In other words, we should ask what prompted the Romans to re-introduce the name of Phoenicia as the name of a province which in fact goes beyond Phoenicia's original geographical and cultural boundaries.

The evidence is meagre, although there is an interesting remark which deserves consideration – Justin the Martyr (ca. 100–165 CE)<sup>50</sup>, whose life and activity precedes the administrative reform of Septimius Severus, states that “Damascus was, and is, in the region of Arabia, although now it belongs to what is called Syrophenicia”<sup>51</sup>. Not much later, a very similar statement appears twice in the writings of Tertullian, although it occurs in a slightly different form: “and Damascus, on the other hand, used formerly to be reckoned to Arabia before it was transferred into Syrophenicia on the division of the Syrias”<sup>52</sup> – which may indicate that the author is making a reference to the division of Syria by Septimius Severus. However, the similarity between these remarks in Justin and Tertullian seems to suggest that at this point Tertullian did not rely on contemporary ideas of the shape and extent of *Phoenicia* (as the province *Syria Phoenice*), but rather on the earlier concepts regarding this notion. Therefore, these passages,

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<sup>49</sup> MILLAR 1993: 122.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. FREND, EDWARDS 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Justin. Mart. *Dial.* 78, 10: ὅτι δὲ Δαμασκὸς τῆς Ἀραβικῆς γῆς ἦν καὶ ἔστιν, εἰ καὶ νῦν προσενέμηται τῇ Συροφαινικῇ λεγομένῃ, οὐδ' ἡμῶν τινεὶ ἀρνήσασθαι δύνανται; transl. by A. ROBERTS, J. DONALDSON (*ANF* I, p. 238).

<sup>52</sup> Tert. *Advers. Jud.* 9, 12; *Advers. Marc.* III 13, 8: “et Damascus Arabiae retro deputabatur, antequam transcripta esset in Syrophenicem ex distinctione Syriarum”; transl. by A. ROBERTS, J. DONALDSON (*ANF* III, p. 162).

despite some obscurities, indicate that the extension of the notion of *Phoenicia*, presumably a simplification of the term *Syrophoenicia*, is not related only to the institution of the Roman province and that it precedes Severus' reform. This issue deserves some further investigation.

### 3.2.2. SYROPHOENICIA

In order to fully discuss this semantic extension and the transformation of the term *Phoenicia*, we should perhaps turn our attention to the notion of *Syrophoenicia*. The word “a Syrophoenician” is attested in the evidence as late as the Early Roman period<sup>53</sup>. It is highly doubtful whether the word “Syrophoenician” should be considered simply as an analogy of the word “Libyphoenician” and a specification introducing the distinction between the Phoenicians in the East and those in the West. For instance, the Gospel of Mark, which introduces the first example of this word in the preserved corpus of texts, needs hardly any differentiation at this point, for it obviously does not deal with the Punic West. It is more probable, then, that the term “Syrophoenician” is rooted in the local Near Eastern context and one may suspect that the origins of *Syrophoenicia* reach back to Hellenistic times. Since the term is composed on the basis of the duality of *Syria* and *Phoenicia*, it is tempting to connect it with the earlier concept displaying the very same feature, namely the term *Syria and Phoenicia* (Συρία καὶ Φοινίκη, Κοίλη Συρία καὶ Φοινίκη), an official name of a Hellenistic province (governed by *strategos*; in later sources this province is called *eparcheia*) applied in the Ptolemaic and Seleucid administrative systems. The name of this province is widely attested in the contemporary epigraphic material<sup>54</sup>, official documents<sup>55</sup> and literary evidence<sup>56</sup>. It is noticeable that the same name was applied in the Septuagint in order to render the Oriental notion of *the Land Across the River* (Akkadian *Ebir-Nāri*, Aramaic *Abar Naharā*) – an official name of a unit in the administrative system of the Near Eastern empires comprising the Transeuphratene<sup>57</sup>. We see that while the First Book of Esdras keeps the exact translation of the Aramaic expression *Abar Naharā* by πέραν τοῦ ποταμοῦ, the Second Book of Esdras renders it by the terms Συρία καὶ

<sup>53</sup> For the *Syrophoenicians* in ancient literary texts, see Mark 7, 26; Plin. *HN* VII 201; Lucian *Deor. conc.* 4; Eunap. *VS* XVI 2, 2 [496]. The term is parodied by Athenaeus, when he calls Ulpian of Tyre a *Syroatticist*: Ath. 126 F; 368 C.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. *I. Tyr* II 18; *OGIS* 230; *SEG* XXIX 1613; LVII 1838.

<sup>55</sup> *C. Ord. Ptol.* 21 f.; cf. AUSTIN 2006: 456–458 [n° 260a–b].

<sup>56</sup> In the second book of Maccabees a governor of *Syria and Phoenicia* (ὁ Κοίλης Συρίας καὶ Φοινίκης στρατηγός) occurs for several times: *LXX 2 Macc.* 3, 5; 4, 2; 4, 4; 8, 8; 10, 11. We also learn about the inspection of the cities of Coele Syria and Phoenicia performed by the Seleucid governor: *LXX 2 Macc.* 3, 8.

<sup>57</sup> DANDAMAYEV 1996.

Φοινίκη or Κοίλη Συρία καὶ Φοινίκη. The same application can be found in Josephus, when he deals with the Persian and Hellenistic times<sup>58</sup>. In the ancient literature, this term used to be abbreviated in various ways as a *pars pro toto* simplification of a larger entity – Polybius, for instance, very often does not bother to apply its full name and refers simply to Coele-Syria<sup>59</sup>; Lucian, on the other hand, in his story on the calumny of Apelles, says that Theodotus was a governor of Phoenicia<sup>60</sup> (while Polybius calls him a governor of Coele-Syria<sup>61</sup>). It is possible, then, that the term *Syrophoenicia* could be just another simplification of the official name of the Hellenistic province.

It is also noteworthy that various authors dated to the Early Roman period (preceding the institution of the province *Syria Phoenice*) refer to this land by combining the names of both regions – in Diodorus we find a peculiar designation in the case of Akko, which is described as “Ake of Phoenician Syria” (Ἄκη τῆς Φοινίκης Συρίας)<sup>62</sup>; on the other hand, Appian, who, while dealing with the geographical division of Syria, refers to Phoenicia several times as *Syria Phoenicia* (Συρία ἢ Φοινίκη), where *Phoenicia* clearly modifies *Syria*<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, it is noticeable that these texts, most likely reproducing their Hellenistic sources, display the duality of the term *Syria-Phoenicia*, which is attested here in the geographical meaning. The appearance of this duality in the non-administrative context suggests that the term *Syrophoenicia* may be just another variant of the geographical notion combining these two entities. The term is certainly imprecise, but somehow explains the extension beyond the traditional boundaries of *Phoenicia* itself. In a honorific inscription commissioned in app. 102 CE, Tyre claims to be not only a metropolis of Phoenicia but also a metropolis of the cities of Coele-Syria (μητροπόλις Φοινείκης καὶ τῶν κατὰ Κοίλην Συρίαν καὶ ἄλλων πόλεων)<sup>64</sup>, which can perhaps be considered to be a reference to the concept of *Syrophoenicia*.

Due to the scarcity of the evidence, it is difficult to trace the course of the development of the term *Syrophoenicia*. However, the sources mentioned above provide some information, which perhaps allows us to create some sort of a general

<sup>58</sup> Joseph. *AJ* XI 89. 101. 127. 129. 138. 167; XII 175. XII 224.

<sup>59</sup> In Polybius' work the expression *Coele-Syria* is much more frequent than *Coele-Syria and Phoenicia* (*Coele-Syria and Phoenicia*: III 2, 8; V 66, 6; V 67, 11; V 87, 6; *Coele-Syria*: I 3, 1; II 71, 9; III 1, 1; III 2, 4; IV 2, 11; IV 37, 5; V 1, 5; V 29, 8; V 31, 1; V 34, 6; V 40, 1–3; V 42, 6; V 42, 9; V 48, 17; V 49, 5; V 58, 2–4; V 59, 2; V 61, 3; V 63, 4; V 67, 4–7; V 68, 2; V 87, 3; V 105, 3; XIV 12, 3; XXVII 19, 1; XXVIII 1, 1; XXVIII 17, 7; XXVIII 20, 7). Polybius refers to *Coele-Syria* even when he describes the course of the campaign waged in the direct vicinity of the Phoenician cities: V 68.

<sup>60</sup> Lucian. *Cal.* 2.

<sup>61</sup> Polyb. V 40, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Diod. XIX 93, 7.

<sup>63</sup> App. *Syr.* 251; 271; *Mith.* 499; 580.

<sup>64</sup> *I.Didyma* 151.

outline of this process. The creation and organisation of the Hellenistic kingdoms introduced the notion of *Syria and Phoenicia* as an administrative term designating a Ptolemaic and later on a Seleucid province. Although the Hellenistic kingdoms and their institutions declined, the notion itself could last as a geographical term and appear in variety of ways in an abbreviated or simplified form – *Syrophoenicia*, for instance. It is also necessary to state that the similarity of the terms and the names of these administrative units does not have to indicate that they covered exactly the same territory. Despite the lack of the organisational continuity between the Hellenistic province of *Syria and Phoenicia* and the Roman province of *Syria Phoenice*, the notion of *Syrophoenicia*, by including the duality of Syria and Phoenicia, would provide a pattern for the Romans for naming their own province, now comprising an entity that goes beyond the geographical boundaries of Phoenicia itself. The official name *Syria Phoenice* was also simplified and the final form it acquired, both in administrative and literary use, was *Phoenicia*. This hypothetical transition could be illustrated thus:

PERIOD	NAME AND ITS VARIANTS	MEANING
Hellenistic	Συρία καὶ Φοινίκη	Hellenistic province
	Κοίλη Συρία καὶ Φοινίκη	
	Κοίλη Συρία	v. s. (simplification)
	Φοινίκη	
Hellenistic – Early Roman	Συρία ἢ Φοινίκη	geographical region
	Συροφοινίκη	
Roman (after 194 CE)	Συρία Φοινίκη	Roman province
	Φοινίκη	v. s. (simplification)

In consequence, the evidence discussed above may indicate that naming a new administrative district *Syria Phoenice* was not an invention of the Romans, but rather an adoption of an existing notion and reference to a historical name of a greater geographical entity corresponding more or less to the territory of this new province. The name had been shaped earlier in the Hellenistic and Early Roman times and was still in use under Septimius Severus. The fact that the official Latin name of the Roman province is *Syria Phoenice* and not *Syria Phoenicia*<sup>65</sup> perhaps implies an even stronger influence of the Greek term and a reliance on the previous Hellenistic name of the region. In other words, the act of adoption of the name *Syria Phoenice* for the Roman province may be not

<sup>65</sup> MILLAR 1993: 122.

a “historical reminiscence” referring to Phoenician cities like Tyre or Sidon and their past, but perhaps a reference to a greater notion unifying both Syria (or at least some portions of Syria) and Phoenicia, a notion of Hellenistic origins.

Another important issue associated with the term *Syrophoenicia* is its relation with the notion of *Syrophoenicians*, which may be thought of as an ethnic identity. Indeed, next to the mythological figures who are described in such a way, like Cadmus, who is called “a Syrophoenician merchant” by Lucian<sup>66</sup>, there are historical individuals who share this designation. Sources dated to Roman times attests individuals who either are recognised as the *Syrophoenicians* by others or recognise themselves as such – the Gospel of Mark mentions a Greek woman, Syrophoenician by race<sup>67</sup>; there are also several epitaphs from Africa of people bearing ordinary Roman or Greek names (e.g. Aurelia Claudia Alexandra, Domitia, Salutus, Dionysodorus), who are said to be *Syrophoenicians*<sup>68</sup>. However, the scarcity of information these inscriptions provide prevents one from answering the question of who exactly these people were. Nevertheless, the problem of Syrophoenician identity deserves further investigation in relation to the extension of the boundaries of the notion of *Phoenicia*. This leads us to the general issue of Phoenician identity in Roman times.

#### 4. PHOENICIANS IN THE ROMAN WORLD

Since in Roman times the administrative aspect of the notion of *Phoenicia* seems to become dominant, we could ask the question: who is a *Phoenician* in the Roman period? Unfortunately, our sources do not provide much information concerning the ethnic and cultural identity of the people inhabiting Phoenicia in that time – the literary texts are scant and the people mentioned in the epigraphic evidence are usually described by their civic identity; references to their ethnicity only appear very rarely. In the case of the Phoenicians, the identification of such a person is also difficult because of the ambiguity of the words φοινίξ and *phoenix*, which, as a proper name, can occur not only as a designation of ethnicity, but also as a first name, a nickname and, during the Roman times, a Roman cognomen *Phoenix*. Therefore, only a very limited number of individuals in Antiquity could possibly be defined as *Phoenicians* because of their ethnicity. For instance, PRAG points out only six uncertain examples of such individuals mentioned in the epigraphic evidence dated to the Hellenistic period<sup>69</sup>. The establishment of the Roman province of *Syria Phoenice* and later on other administrative units of similar names makes that problem even more dif-

<sup>66</sup> Lucian. *Deor. conc.* 4.

<sup>67</sup> Mark 7, 26.

<sup>68</sup> *AE* 1987, 1123; *IAM* II 544. 582. 583.

<sup>69</sup> PRAG 2006: 21–24.



difficult to solve, since there is no certainty whether the designation *a Phoenician* refers to the individual or collective ethnic identity or only to the fact of an association with the province and its territory. This difficulty is clearly noticeable if we consider who is actually described in such a way in the evidence. Several examples of Phoenicians can be given: Porphyry of Tyre<sup>70</sup>; Proclus, a governor of the province. *Phoenice*<sup>71</sup>; Severianus of Emesa, a military commander<sup>72</sup>; Rhodon, a governor of Alexandria<sup>73</sup>; Eusebius of Emesa, a bishop<sup>74</sup>; Tyrannion the Grammarian<sup>75</sup>; Chrysogonus, a pupil of Libanius the Rhetor<sup>76</sup>; and Heliodorus of Emesa<sup>77</sup>. Even in the case of Porphyry, the best known man among these individuals, his indigenous Phoenician origins or identity are not certain. One may suspect that at least some of the people listed above can be called *Phoenicians* only because of their association with the province, as in the case of Eusebius of Emesa, whose birth place was Edessa<sup>78</sup>, Emesa being only a city he lived and worked in for some time, or in the case of Proculus, a governor of the province *Phoenice*, who is said to have come from Lycia in the very same epigraphic text that calls him “a Phoenician in the prime of youth” (πρωθήβης Φοῖνιξ).

The most important case is, however, a remark by Herodian, who states that Julia Maesa, the sister of the empress Julia Domna, was “Phoenician by origin” and she came from the city of Emesa “in Phoenicia”<sup>79</sup>. This information is of great significance if we take into account Herodian’s description of Elagabalus, whose cults and habits are explicitly called *Phoenician*<sup>80</sup>. Moreover, the alleged *Phoenician* element of Elagabalus and his family’s culture is attested solely by Herodian – other sources, like Cassius Dio or the *Historia Augusta*, while discussing his reign, rather emphasise his Syrian background instead<sup>81</sup>. Herodian’s portrait of Elagabalus is discussed by BOWERSOCK, who considers this description as independent and reliable regarding some details, although unfortunately

<sup>70</sup> Schol. in Lucian. *Peregr.* II [216, 13]; Troph. 12; Ioan. Philopon. *De aet.* 6, 8 [145]; Dav. *In Isag.* 4, 1 [91, 24]; 4, 2 [92, 4 f.].

<sup>71</sup> SEG VII 195; LIX 1671 (Berytos, 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE, epigram): [Proclus] Φοῖνιξ[ιξ]?, YON 2009: 306–309.

<sup>72</sup> Procop. *Bell.* IV 23, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Procop. *Anec.* 27.3.

<sup>74</sup> Theodoret. *Eran.* 3, 73 [249]; *Haeretic. fabul. comp.* prol. [340]; 1, 26 [381].

<sup>75</sup> Sud. s.v. Τυραννίων [τ 1185].

<sup>76</sup> Liban. *Epist.* 1208.

<sup>77</sup> Heliod. *Aeth.* X 41, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* II, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Hdn. V 3, 2: Μαῖσα ἦν τις ὄνομα, τὸ γένος Φοίνισσα, ἀπὸ Ἐμέσου καλουμένης οὕτω πόλεως ἐν Φοινίκῃ.

<sup>80</sup> Hdn. V 3, 4; V 5, 9 f.; V 6, 4; V 7, 9.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. *HA Opil.* 9, 1–2; *Heliogab.* 1, 6; 7, 3; 33, 2; Aur. Vict. 23, 1; Dio Cass. LXXIX 30, 2 f.

he does not pay attention to this particular problem<sup>82</sup>. The case of the Emesene Phoenicians – who were very numerous, as we can see – deserves special attention because, in the epigraphic sources, people from Emesa living abroad in this period tended to identify themselves as Syrians<sup>83</sup> – it is noteworthy that the designation *a Syrian* is simply far more frequent in the epigraphic evidence and is applied by individuals from various regions of the Roman Near East, even inhabitants of old Phoenician cities like Tripolis<sup>84</sup>.

It is also noticeable that in Roman times the designation *a Phoenician* sometimes applies to people who are associated neither with the province of Phoenicia nor the territory of Phoenicia as a geographical notion. Although such cases are very rare, it is possible to adduce the example of Apsines the Rhetor (ca. the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), who is said to come from Gadara; Philostratus, a friend of his, refers to him as *a Phoenician*<sup>85</sup>. He is not the only *Phoenician* from this city. There is also the case of Menippus the Cynic (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE), who is also called *Phoenician* by Diogenes Laertios<sup>86</sup>. Other sources, however, state that he came from Gadara<sup>87</sup>. It is important to stress that Gadara was never thought to be situated in Phoenicia, since the texts mention it as a city in Decapolis, Palestine or even Assyria (here an equivalent of Syria), as in a poem by Meleager of Gadara, who calls his own hometown “Attica in the land of the Assyrians”<sup>88</sup>. On the other hand, some scholars suspect that there were some Phoenician communities in that city in the Hellenistic period, and therefore there is perhaps a possibility that there were some reasons to ascribe Phoenician origins to both Menippus and Apsines<sup>89</sup>. It is noticeable then that some literary sources from Hellenistic and Roman times, although extremely rare and of questionable value, mention people who are called *Phoenicians* even though they are not directly associated with Phoenicia proper.

The examples discussed above show how difficult it is to interpret Phoenician identity in the Roman period – the designation *a Phoenician* can be applied not only to people who come from the old Phoenician cities or to people who are associated with the province of Phoenicia, but even to those who come from abroad. This last case invites some supplementation – there is some scarce evidence displaying the alleged influence of the Phoenicians and Phoenician culture deep into the mainland,

<sup>82</sup> BOWERSOCK 1975.

<sup>83</sup> *AE* 1965, 126; *SEG* XXII 353; Σύρος Ἐμεσηνός; *CIL* III 3301: “natione Surus domo Hemesa”.

<sup>84</sup> *IG* XII/7 257: Σύρος Τριπολίτης.

<sup>85</sup> Sud. s.v. Ἀψίνης [α 4735; 208]; Φρόντων [φ 735; 1106]; Tzetz. *Chiliad.* VIII 695; Philostr. *VS* II 33, 4 [628]; cf. O’ROURKE 2005: 37–41.

<sup>86</sup> Diog. Laert. VI 99 f.

<sup>87</sup> Strab. XVI 2, 29; Steph. Byz. s.v. Γάδαρα [γ 9; 193].

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Plin. *HN* V 74; Ptol. *Geogr.* V 15, 22; Steph. Byz. s.v. Γάδαρα [γ 9; 193]; Hierocl. *Syn.* 720, 3; *Palestina Secunda*; Meleagr. 2 GOW–PAGE = *AP* VII 417.

<sup>89</sup> For the presumed Phoenician influences in Gadara, cf. COHEN 2006: 282–286.

even beyond the frontiers of the Roman province of Phoenicia itself: according to Uranius (app. 300 CE)<sup>90</sup>, and perhaps Philo of Byblos, the name of the city of Nisibis in Mesopotamia was derived from the Phoenician language (the word for *stelae*)<sup>91</sup>. The fact is, however, that in the reference to the account of Philo, Stephanus gives only a translation of the name without a clear indication if Philo did consider the name Nisibis to be Phoenician – it is Uranius who actually provides this information. In fact, modern scholars assume that the etymology of the name of Nisibis, as the word for *pillars*, is Aramaic (*aramäische Volksetymologie*)<sup>92</sup>. It is impossible, therefore, to state why the forementioned sources ascribe it to the Phoenician. Moreover, the city of Eddana on the Euphrates is said to be “a Phoenician colony” (κατοικία Φοινίκων)<sup>93</sup>. Sometimes it is supposed that this remark may refer to the reign of Odenathus, the ruler of Palmyra, which in this period is after all a city in the Roman province of *Syria Phoenice* and “the Phoenicians” in this context should be understood as the Palmyrenes. But because of the fact that we know virtually nothing about the timeframes of the source of this remark, it is only a mere guess. Nevertheless, the extension of what is considered to be Phoenician, despite the fact that most probably it is not associated with Phoenicia in the modern understanding, is noticeable.

At this point we should come back to the notion of *Syrophoenicia* and *Syrophoenicians*. Keeping in mind the fact that a wide variety of people can be identified as Phoenicians in the Roman period, one may derive this phenomenon from the very same roots as in the case of the extension of the notion of *Phoenicia* – the transformation of the Hellenistic term *Syria and Phoenicia* into a geographical notion designating a greater entity going beyond the Phoenician coastland, and its later adoption as the name of a new Roman province. The case of Emesa is again of great interest. The city of Emesa and its dynasty certainly sought a way to integrate with the ruling class of the Graeco-Roman world. It is sometimes suspected that in this case we could possibly have an example of a social phenomenon when a certain newly-founded community formulates its collective identity on the basis of the self-attribution of ancient and noble descent. The adoption of the claim to these alleged Phoenician origins by the Semitic people of Emesa could be, perhaps, an attempt to produce some sort of a foundation myth which would allow this community to participate in the universal Graeco-Roman world “on equal terms” – the Phoenicians are in fact the only Semitic people so deeply connected with Greek culture from its very beginning. The perception of the Phoenicians and the general attitude toward them

<sup>90</sup> RETSÖ 2003: 491–493.

<sup>91</sup> Phil. Bybl. fr. 6 ATTRIDGE–ODEN; *FGrH* 675 F 30 ap. Steph. Byz. s.v. Νισίβις [v 65; 476 f.].

<sup>92</sup> For the Aramaic folk etymology of the name of Nisibis, see STRECK 1999: 186; KESSLER 2006: 777.

<sup>93</sup> Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἐδδανα [ε II; 260]; EDWELL 2007: 71, n. 34; 230.

in Classical culture is a complex problem. The fact is, however, that they could refer to their antiquity, their long-lasting ties with the Greek world and their kinship with this world. Due to the role the Phoenicians played in Greek mythology, they could also claim their ancient kinship with the Greeks, which is attested in the epigraphic evidence as early as the Hellenistic period. For instance, in a letter addressed to the citizens of Delphi, the Tyrians call them their kinsmen (συγγενεῖς)<sup>94</sup>. The Sidonians, on the other hand, could present their city as a metropolis of Thebes<sup>95</sup>. Furthermore, in Graeco-Roman perception, the Phoenicians were held in high regard because of their cultural achievements (the invention of the alphabet, etc.) and their mastery in craftsmanship or maritime exploration – the Phoenicians are very often praised by Classical authors<sup>96</sup>. The high position of the Phoenicians in the Graeco-Roman imagination could explain why the Phoenician or pseudo-Phoenician identity could have been possibly attractive for some Eastern communities<sup>97</sup>, and why the term “a Syrophenician”, a term presumably designating a member of an Eastern community comprised by the notion of *Syrophenicia*, could be displaced by the term “a Phoenician”.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Although the evidence is extremely limited, the analysis of descriptions and attestations of the term *Phoenicia* provided by Graeco-Roman testimonies shows that this notion is differently defined by various sources. This invites a diachronic approach to the problem – its application allows us to notice that the notion of *Phoenicia* changed greatly through the Roman period. The sources attest the evolution of its range and meaning and it is possible to distinguish two major stages of this process: (1) the geographical development; and (2) the transition from the geographical into the administrative meaning.

The first aspect of the evolution is the geographical, which can be discussed in three phases: (1) some early sources dated to the beginning of Roman rule over the East describe Phoenicia as narrow coastal strip in Syria spreading from Arados almost as far as Egypt. This way of understanding Phoenicia seems to correspond to the earlier perception of this land, which takes its origins from Persian and Hellenistic times. Sometimes it is also reproduced by later texts when they deal with the ancient past of Phoenicia; (2) the texts from the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE still consider Phoenicia to be a coastal land, but its range along the coast is displayed in quite a limited form. The northern limit remains pretty much the same, while the extreme

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<sup>94</sup> SEG II 330: Τύρου τῆς ἱερᾶς καὶ ἀσύλου ἢ β[ουλή καὶ ὁ δῆμος Δελφῶν τῆ] | βουλῆ καὶ τῶι δῆμῳ τοῖς συγγεν[έσιν χαίρειν.]; cf. ALIQUOT 2017.

<sup>95</sup> IAG 41.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. MAZZA 1988.

<sup>97</sup> LEWIN 2014: 113 f.

southern part, which in the previous phase were included in the notion of *Phoenicia*, ceased to be thought as such. The southern border of *Phoenicia* for now is in the vicinity of Mount Carmel, while the cities further to the south are associated with other regions, like Palestine; (3) after the establishment of the Roman province of *Syria Phoenice* (194 CE), the sources attest a significant change in the boundaries of the notion of *Phoenicia*, which now include not only the range along the coast land, but also the territories deeper into the mainland which had never before been considered to be Phoenician. It seems that this extension occurs due to the identification made in our sources of the geographical term *Phoenicia* with the administrative unit. In consequence, *Phoenicia* begins to include cities like Heliopolis, Emesa, Damascus and Palmyra. Therefore, one may conclude that the differences between the boundaries of *Phoenicia* occurring in various descriptions of that land do not necessarily show that the literary sources of the Roman period have a “vague idea of what, and where, *Phoenicia* actually was”, as it has sometimes been claimed<sup>98</sup>. These differences should be rather understood as evidence of an evolution of the concept of *Phoenicia*, an evolution taking place in Classical culture and the Graeco-Roman perception of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East.

Secondly, due to the terminological ambiguity, the establishment of the province of *Syria Phoenice* introduces a difficulty in distinguishing the geographical and administrative sense of *Phoenicia* in the ancient sources. The application of the administrative meaning of the term occurs not only in official texts like lists of the provinces or institutions of the Roman empire, but also in literary texts, which makes the confusion concerning the nature of the notion of *Phoenicia* even more noticeable. At this point, only the administrative aspect is clearly traceable, since it is possible to identify it through the connection with a dignitary of the district (statements like “a governor of *Phoenicia*” or “a province of *Phoenicia*”). Therefore, one may ask: what is the relation between this apparent transition in the notion of *Phoenicia* from the geographical to the administrative meaning and the extension of its geographical boundaries, and moreover, is the geographical extension of the term *Phoenicia* and the correspondence between *Phoenicia* and the province of *Phoenice* a result of the administrative reform by Septimius Severus?

To some extent, this paper argues something opposite. The remark from Justin the Martyr, which is dated to the time before the administrative reform of the province of *Syria*, stating that Damascus was associated with *Syrophoenicia*, indicates the existence of a geographical or cultural notion comprising in its nature both *Syria* and *Phoenicia* and covering the area deep into the mainland – a notion preceding the establishment of the Roman province of *Syria Phoenice* but sharing these two important features, namely the duality of name and a proper semantic content. This observation leads to the notion of *Syrophoenicia*, which perhaps should be considered to be a derivative of the name of the Hellenistic

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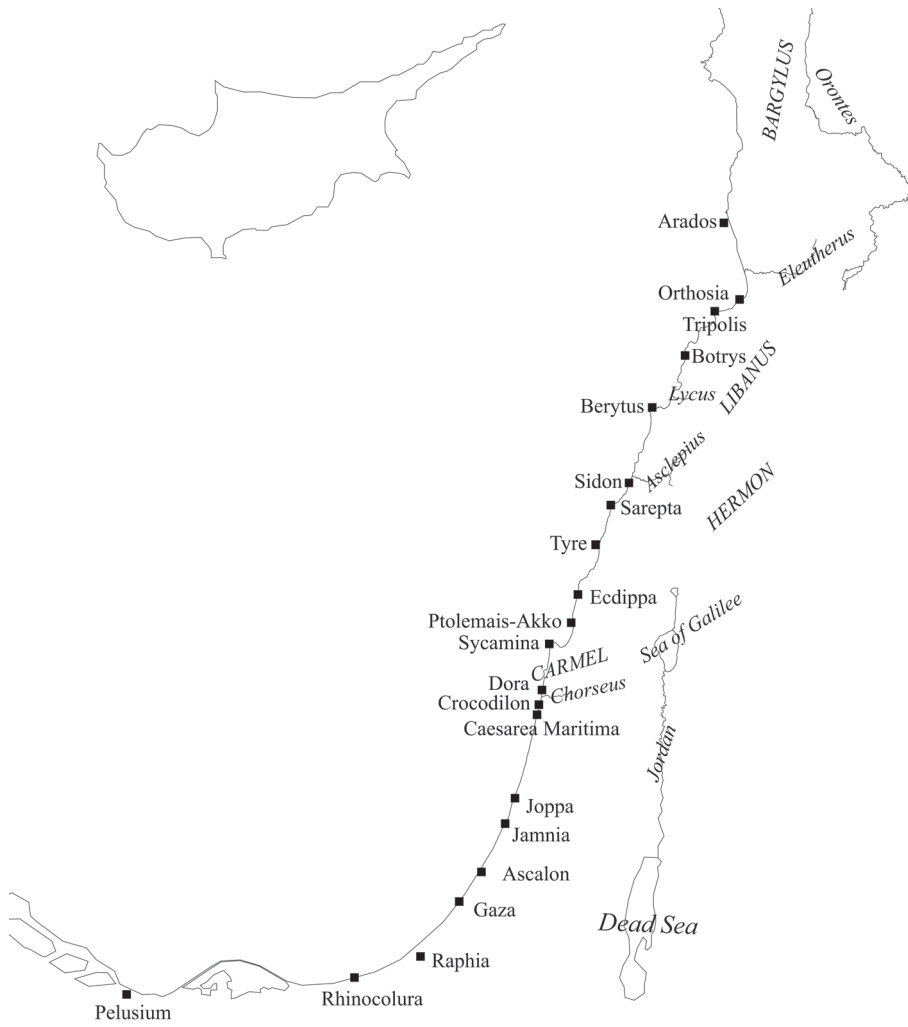
<sup>98</sup> QUINN 2018: 56.

province *Syria and Phoenicia*. The connection between these two terms is highly probable if we keep in mind two things: firstly, the official name of the Hellenistic province was frequently abbreviated in literary use and very often occurred in a simplified form; secondly, the sources dated to the period between the decline of the Hellenistic kingdoms and the institution of the Roman province of *Syria Phoenice* attest geographical notions which strongly resemble the Hellenistic term *Syria and Phoenicia* and its simplified forms because of the *Syria-Phoenicia* duality. This seems to suggest that the official name of a Hellenistic province, even though the province itself no longer existed, was transformed and preserved as a geographical term which would go beyond Phoenicia proper. A term like that was later re-used by the Romans in order to provide a name for their newly devised province. The evidence suggests that when naming the new province covering the land of Phoenicia and some other regions on the Syrian mainland, the Romans did not invent its name on their own, but rather exploited an earlier name of the geographical concept of *Syrophoenicia* – a concept of duality attested by various sources and most probably originating in Hellenistic times from the name of the Hellenistic province of *Syria and Phoenicia*. The geographical extension of Phoenicia into the mainland, which is so noticeable in Roman times, could perhaps have its origins in the complex entity of Syria-Phoenicia. It is also important to state that the similarity of particular administrative terms does not have to indicate that they have to cover strictly the same area.

The issue cannot be discussed in separation from the problem of Phoenician identity in Roman times. As it has been displayed above, the evidence attests a number of individuals described as “the Phoenicians” at that time. It is not certain, however, what their association with the indigenous Phoenician population and the old Phoenician cities like Tyre or Sidon was – some people were called that way only because of their association with the Roman province, while some people had no connection with Phoenicia at all. It is noteworthy, however, that in the sources there are a substantial number of Phoenicians from the city of Emesa, a city which began to be considered Phoenician only after the establishment of the Roman province. Keeping in mind the importance of the notion of *Syrophoenicia* and the extension of the concept of *Phoenicia*, one may conclude that it could have an impact on local identity. Indeed, the evidence mentions the people identified as the Syrophoenicians. The creation of the province of *Syria Phoenice* and the later simplification of its name in the form of *Phoenicia* may further shape the way the inhabitants of the province were addressed – some newly founded Near Eastern communities might have sought opportunities created by the process of integration into the Graeco-Roman world by adopting the convenient identity of the Phoenicians, an Eastern people of ancient and noble descent, closely related to the Graeco-Roman world.

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## MAPS\*



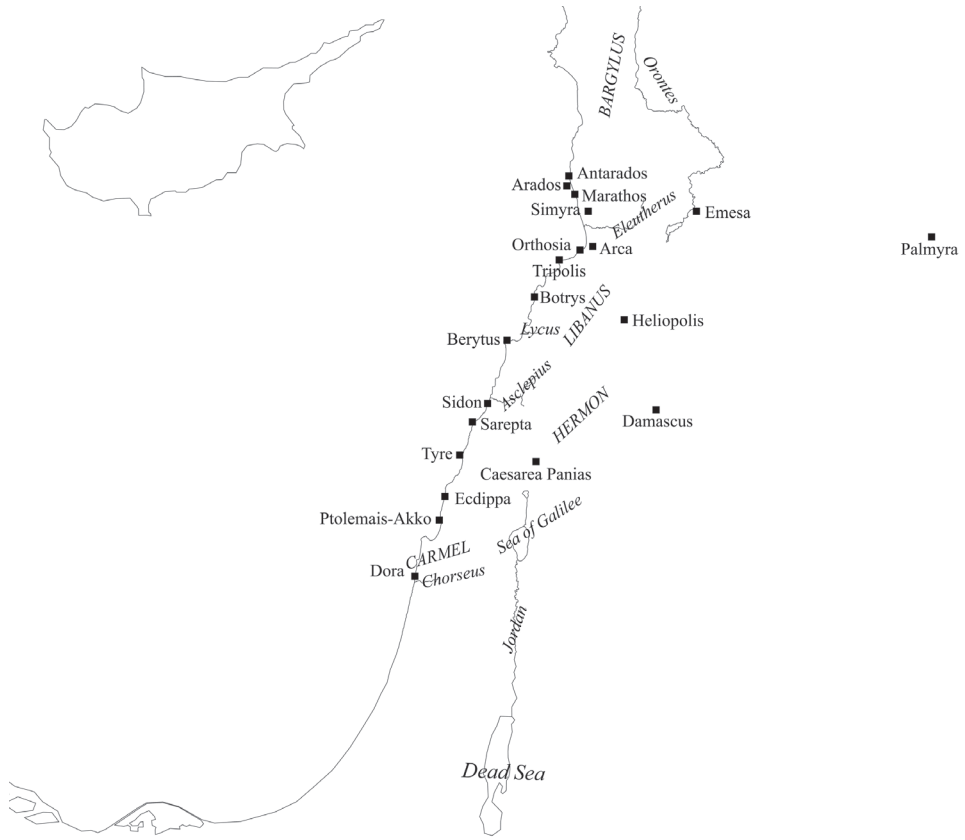
Map 1. Phoenicia in the Early Roman period (64 BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE) according to Strabo (phase 1).

\* The maps have been prepared on the basis of the *Barrington Atlas*.





Map 2. Phoenicia in the Roman period (1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE) according to Pliny and Ptolemy (phase 2).



Map 3. Phoenicia in the Late Roman period (app. 194–636 CE) according to various sources (phase 3).

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AE*: *L'Année Épigraphique*.  
*ANF*: *The Anti-Nicean Fathers*.  
*Barrington Atlas*: R.J.A. TALBERT (ed.), *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, Princeton 2000.  
*BNP*: Brill's *New Pauly*.  
*C. Ord. Ptol.*: M.-T. LENGER (ed.), *Corpus des ordonnances des Ptolémées*, Bruxelles 1964.  
*CIL*: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.  
*EAH*: R. BAGNALL *et al.* (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, Malden, MA 2013.  
*EncIr*: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.  
*EP*: E.H. GIFFORD (ed.), *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae Praeparationis I–IV*, Oxonii 1903.  
*FGrH*: F. JACOBY (ed.), *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, Berlin–Leiden 1923.  
*Gerasa*: C. B. WELLES, *The Inscriptions*, in: C.H. KRAELING (ed.), *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*, New Haven 1938.  
*I.Didyma*: A. REHM (ed.), *Didyma II: Die Inschriften*, Berlin 1958.  
*I.Tyr I*: J.-P. REY-COQUAIS (ed.), *Inscriptions grecques et latines découvertes dans les fouilles de Tyr (1963–1974)*, vol. I: *Inscriptions de la Nécropole*, Paris 1977.  
*I.Tyr II*: J.-P. REY-COQUAIS (ed.), *Inscriptions grecques et latines de Tyr*, Beyrouth 2006.  
*IAG*: L. MORETTI (ed.), *Iscrizioni agonistiche greche*, Roma 1953.  
*IAM 2*: M. EUZENNAT, J. MARION (eds.), *Inscriptions antiques du Maroc 2: Inscriptions Latines*, Paris 1982.  
*IG XII/7*: J. DELAMARRE, (ed.), *Inscriptiones Graecae*, fasc. 7: *Inscriptiones Amorgi et insularum vicinarum*, Berlin 1967.  
*IGLS VII*: J.-P. REY-COQUAIS (ed.), *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, vol. VII: *Arados et régions voisines*, Paris 1970.  
*IGLS XV*: A. SARTRE-FAURIAT, M. SARTRE (eds.), *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, tome XV: *Le Plateau du Trachôn et ses bordures*, Beyrouth 2014.  
*IGLS XVII/1*: J.-B. YON (ed.), *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, tome XVII/1: *Palmyre*, Beyrouth 2012.  
*IGR*: R. CAGNAT *et al.* (eds.), *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*, vols. I–III, Paris 1902–1906.  
*IGUR*: L. MORETTI (ed.), *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae*, Roma 1968–1990.  
*KAI*: H. DONNER, W. RÖLLING (eds.), *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, vols. I–III, Wiesbaden 2002.  
*OCD*<sup>4</sup>: S. HORNBLLOWER, A. SPAWFORTH (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford 2012.  
*OEANE*: E.M. MEYERS (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, New York–Oxford 1997.  
*OGIS*: W. DITTENBERGER (ed.), *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, vols. I–II, Lipsiae 1903–1905.  
*RLA*: *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*.

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