

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that the invention of the phonetic alphabet was a pivotal event in the development of human culture, paralleled in importance by only a handful of events such as the beginning of tool-making and the invention of Gutenberg's printing press. The ability to record ideas through different combinations of twenty-two letters advanced mankind in all cultural domains. Earlier forms of writing (such as the ancient Egyptian, Chinese or Mesopotamian cuneiform scripts) required knowledge and memorization of thousands of symbols and were, therefore, the estate of a meager few. The powerful yet simple idea of the phonetic alphabet paved the way for lasting human communication of unlimited content and scope, and in doing so facilitated the cumulative progress of science, technology, culture and religion as we know them.

The development of the phonetic alphabet is commonly attributed to a mysterious ancient civilization, known as 'Phoenician'. The Phoenicians were a nation based in the Mediterranean coastal regions of modern day Lebanon, Syria and Israel. The Phoenicians are known for being a fierce clan of sailors and merchants who settled the shores of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, and whose famous later descendant Hannibal of Carthage almost conquered Rome. However, when studied carefully, it is clear that the coherence of this common description abounds with logical flaws. First, the earliest phonetic alphabet symbols were discovered in the area of Serabit El-Khadem in the Sinai Peninsula, and were dated to the 18th-19th centuries B.C., long before any documented mention of the Phoenicians. Their language is Semitic and is commonly considered 'proto-Phoenician', namely, a precursor to the later language known as Phoenician. Moreover, no mention of the term 'Phoenician' is found prior to Homer, several hundred years after their time (not even in the Phoenician writings themselves). From where and when then did this influential culture 'emerge'? Who were the Phoenicians?

Many researchers have addressed this mystery, and a multitude of ideas and conjectures have been made in hundreds and thousands of articles and books. As in many research fields, a genuine breakthrough was hard to achieve.

Preconceptions, inferences and dogmatic opinions are entrenched in the academic teaching of history, archeology and biblical science and are inevitably accepted by professionals through academic study without realizing it. Therefore, in history as in all fields of science, it is not uncommon to find

major breakthroughs and fresh unbiased views made by people who were not formally educated within the specific discipline. A good example of this is the German researcher Wellhausen, whose 19th century research on Arab tribes indirectly led him to a new understanding of the origins of the Bible – an understanding that is now key to all modern-day biblical research.

In my view, the same applies to the current study, originally published in Hebrew three decades ago. Dr. Ganor, a pediatrician and a self-taught history scholar, began his research on the Phoenician language and people by pure coincidence. Studying the field with outstanding intellectual curiosity, he saw what could only be seen through the eyes of a skeptic outsider unbound by preconceptions. Dr. Ganor's approach is novel and revolutionary, and his perspective is drawn from a completely different angle and outlook to that to which we are accustomed in historical research.

Over the course of more than thirty years, Dr. Ganor analyzed hundreds of books and articles, and studied every piece of information on the subject. It is evident that he has researched the subject comprehensively, as attested by the rich bibliography. Finding many fundamental contradictions and logical flaws in the conventional scholarly views, he embarked on extensive, step-by-step detective-like work, reshuffling the basic elements composed of uninterpreted hard evidence and gradually formulating his own unique interpretation. He then fitted many pieces of the puzzle into new places, arriving at surprising and far-reaching conclusions in unexpectedly diverse aspects in the history of the near east, from the dating of the Children of Israel's exodus from Egypt to the evolution of monotheism.

Dr. Ganor's conclusions, the significance of his challenges to common dogmas and his propositions regarding many fundamental yet unresolved problems cannot be overruled by any serious scholar of the history of the near-east, the Bible, and the land and people of Israel. For that alone, this work deserves a proper place in the library of anyone studying these subjects. One can also not remain indifferent when reading this book, which despite being an in-depth scholarly study is far from being a dull read. Rather, it reads like an exciting adventure in intellectual discovery.

I strongly recommend the publication of this new translation and hope it will reach the audience and gain the recognition it so deserves. I also hope that this study will inspire and induce other researchers to inquire further into the history and genealogy of the nations and peoples of the Mediterranean basin.

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