

Descriptions of the Phoenicians



ABOUT THE READING The Phoenicians lived along the coast of the Mediterranean from present day northern Israel to Lebanon. The time of their greatest influence extended from about 1100 BC to about 750 BC. The Phoenicians were well known throughout the ancient Western world for their skill as sailors. They used this skill to dominate trade in the Mediterranean and to explore other regions. Two Greek historians—Herodotus and Xenophon—describe this dominance in very different ways.

VOCABULARY

sow to plant

tackling system of ropes and pulleys used for lifting

contrivances devices

messes places where a group of people, such as a ship's crew, share meals

wanting missing; not available



As you read think about the different types of information the two historians give. Then think about how these two accounts share a common theme.

Herodotus Describes a Phoenician Voyage

Herodotus describes a voyage undertaken by the Phoenicians. Although Herodotus did not realize it at the time, the Phoenicians would have had to sail entirely around Africa to complete this voyage.

When [King Necos of Egypt] had stopped digging the channel from the Nile into the Arabian Gulf, he sent off Phoenicians in merchantmen, bidding them, on their return journey, sail through the Pillars of Heracles till they came to the northern sea and so come back to Egypt. The Phoenicians set out from the Red Sea and sailed the southern sea. When it came to be autumn, they would put in and **sow** the land wherever they happened to be in Libya in the course of their sailing and wait the harvest there. Having gathered in their crop, they sailed on again.

"The Pillars of Heracles" (or Hercules) is the eastern entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. It is now called the Straits of Gibraltar.

The southern sea refers to what we now call the Indian Ocean.

Libya is Herodotus's name for the continent of Africa. He was unaware of how large the continent was and whether other civilizations on the continent gave it any other names.

Source: from *The History*, Herodotus (trans. David Grene), Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1987 (paperback ed. 1988).

After two years of sailing, in the third year they rounded the Pillars of Heracles and came back to Egypt. And they declared (what some may believe, though I myself do not) that as they sailed round Libya they had the sun on their right.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Describe the sailing route of the Phoenicians.

2. Why do you think the Phoenicians interrupted their voyage to plant crops?

Xenophon Describes a Phoenician Ship

*Xenophon wrote historical stories, using characters to describe historical events and scenes in detail. This description from Xenophon's *Aeconomicus* is stated by a Greek character named Ischomachus.*

I think that the best and most perfect arrangement of things I ever saw was when I went to look at the great Phoenician sailing-vessel; for I saw the largest amount of naval **tackling** separately disposed in the smallest stowage possible. For a ship, as you well know, is brought to anchor, and again got under way, by a vast number of wooden implements and of ropes and sails the sea by means of a quantity of rigging, and is armed with a number of **contrivances** against hostile vessels, and carries about with it a large number of weapons for the crew, and, besides, has all the utensils that a man keeps in his dwelling-house, for each of the messes. In addition, it is laden with a quantity of merchandise which the owner carries with him for his own profit. Now all the things which I have

A ship requires a great many ropes (rigging) in order to move and set the sails.

Each group of sailors needs its own cooking pots, and each person has his own clothes and other personal items.

Source: from *Aeconomicus*, Xenophon (ed. Schneider), from *Encyclopedia Phoenicia* at phoenicia.org/trade.html

mentioned lay in a space not much bigger than a room which would conveniently hold ten beds. And I remarked that they severally lay in a way that they did not obstruct one another, and did not require anyone to search for them; and yet they were neither placed at random, nor entangled one with another, so as to consume time when they were suddenly wanted for use. Also, I found the captain's assistant, who is called "the look-out man," so well acquainted with the position of all the articles, and with the number of them, that even when at a distance he could tell where everything lay, and how many there were of each sort, just as anyone who has learnt to read can tell the number of letters in the name of Socrates and the proper place for them. Moreover, I saw this man, in his leisure moments, examining and testing everything that a vessel needs when at sea; so, as I was surprised, I asked him what he was about, whereupon he replied—"Stranger, I am looking to see, in case anything should happen, how everything is arranged in the ship, and whether anything is **wanting**, or is inconveniently situated; for when a storm arises at sea, it is not possible either to look for what is wanting, or to put right what is arranged awkwardly."

The equipment was well organized, making it easy to reach.

During a storm, sailors need to be able to find all the necessary equipment and supplies quickly.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. From this description, what can you conclude about "the look-out man"? Why?

2. Why do you think the organization of the ship described here was so impressive to Xenophon?

MAKE A COMPARISON

1. How are these two selections different? How are they alike?

2. What do these two selections tell you about Phoenician sailors and ships?

Primary Source Descriptions of the Phoenicians

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Herodotus Describes a Phoenician Voyage

1. They set out from the Red Sea and sailed into the Indian Ocean and eventually rounded Africa to come through the Straits of Gibraltar before returning to Egypt.
2. If they went on a long voyage, they would have to stop to resupply their ship. Planting crops would be one way of getting food for their voyage.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Xenophon Describes a Phoenician Ship

1. "The look-out man" was very conscientious and hard-working. He checked on the ship's equipment during his leisure time and planned for storms or other problems that the ship might encounter.
2. Answers will vary. Examples: Xenophon had not thought before about how important being organized is to successfully sailing a ship. Xenophon had been on other ships that were less well organized.

MAKE A COMPARISON

1. The first selection tells the story of a major voyage, while the second describes the inside of a ship. They are alike because they both show how impressive Phoenician sailors and ships were.
2. Phoenicians were very capable sailors who could sail long distances for long periods. Their ships were well organized.

History and Geography

MAP ACTIVITY

1. Colors will vary.
2. Persian Gulf
3. Tigris and Euphrates
4. Mediterranean Sea

ANALYZING MAPS

1. approximately 1,500 miles
2. Asia Minor
3. Euphrates
4. By increasing the amount of food they could grow, the development of farming supported larger populations, which led to population growth. Villages formed and eventually these developed into the world's first civilization.
5. Conquerors wanted to gain control over this fertile land and wanted to obtain the wealth in terms of food production and the earlier achievements of the Sumerians.

Economics and History

ACTIVITY:

Value in dollars of U.S. coin denominations:

Penny:	\$131,232,600
Nickel:	\$42,086,000
Dime:	\$178,581,000
Quarter:	\$271,170,000

WHAT DID YOU LEARN:

1. The Lydians, a people from the area of modern day Turkey, invented the first coins. They were round because of the process used to stamp an image onto the coin.
2. Coins made trade easier because they were of standardized value. Opportunities for cheating were reduced. Transactions could take place much faster.
3. Two thousand dimes would be needed to pay a salary of \$200. Given the prices of items available for purchase today, this would be an extremely inconvenient means of receiving that sum.
4. Coins are still necessary, as they make it possible to purchase items that are fractions of a dollar in value.