CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

There Are No Camels in Lebanon

We start again, this time in 1946, and this time in Phoenicia itself. Three years after Lebanon gained its independence from France, the young Druze socialist politician Kamal Joumblatt gave a lecture in Arabic at the Cénacle libanais, a newly established forum for writers and politicians in Beirut, on "My Mission as a Member of Parliament." His speech ended in an appeal to "hope and confidence," as he reminded his listeners that their new state's glorious history dated back to the ancient Phoenicians:

> On this beautiful golden coast, which thousands of years ago witnessed the emergence of the first civic state, and the growth and diffusion of the first national idea, and the establishment of the first maritime empire, and the emergence of the first form of representative democratic government . . . in this rare spot in the world, where the sea and the mountain meet, embrace, and communicate . . . and in an internal national consciousness, as if Lebanon was self-conscious . . . in this country that has always been open to all the global intellectual currents of human civilization . . . in this ancient young country . . . which gave the world values, ideas, men, institutions, and glory, it is right for us to be optimistic."[1]

Joumblatt's approach to that crucial question for any young country—"Who are we?"—would have been very familiar to his listeners. "New Phoenicianism," or the idea that the modern Lebanese were the inheritors of an ancient Phoenician legacy, had been a significant political and cultural movement in Lebanon since the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, and it is one that has lasted in some quarters to the present day. Its fundamental claim is that the nation of Lebanon is a timeless entity, with a distinctive character and culture determined by its distinctive geography, and a history going back to the city-states of the ancient Phoenicians, long before the arrival of the Arabs in the seventh century CE.

The movement was originally championed by Christians, and in particular Maronite Catholics, but Joumblatt's words capture some of its most important aspects: on the one hand the glorification of the Phoenicians themselves, with an emphasis on their maritime achievements and their

contributions to world civilization, and on the other the connections and parallels between them and the modern Lebanese, with an emphasis on the unique geography they shared. But Joumblatt does not just connect the Phoenicians with his new nation through history and geography; he makes them responsible for the idea of the nation itself, reflecting the underlying premise of this modern Phoenician rhetoric that the ancient Phoenicians too formed a coherent "people" or national community.

This chapter argues that the modern notion of the Phoenicians as a people with a shared history, culture, and identity—found in modern textbooks and scholarship as well as in postcolonial political rhetoric about Phoenician forebears—is the product of relatively recent European nationalist ideologies. I then turn in the rest of part 1 to the difficulties of reconciling this modern picture with the fragmentary ancient evidence. Lebanese Phoenicianism is a good place to start, a striking case study in the way in which we moderns can bend the ancient world to our own experiences, and to our nationalist assumptions and ideologies, including the notions that ethnic identities are natural, timeless facts and that ancient "nations" can and even should map onto nation-states.

THE YOUNG PHOENICIANS

The idea that the modern Lebanese were the inheritors of a Phoenician legacy was originally suggested by Lebanese scholars in the nineteenth century.[2] The Maronite Catholic historian Tannus al-Shidyaq made the first explicit association between Phoenicia and Lebanon, and between the mountain and the sea, in his *History of the Notables of Mount Lebanon* (1859): his first chapter, on the borders and populations of Lebanon, discusses the location and population of Mount Lebanon and then those of the "Phoenician cities of Lebanon" (*mudun lubnan al-finiqiyya*).[3] The idea that the Lebanese were in some sense Phoenician quickly gained traction in the early twentieth century among emigrant Lebanese communities in Egypt and the United States, aided by US government documents published in 1911 defining new immigrants from the Syrian coast not as Arabs, but as Christian descendants of the Phoenicians.[4]

It only became popular in Lebanon itself, however, in the aftermath of the First World War. In the context of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which had held the region since the sixteenth century, and as the European powers carved up the Middle East, a loose collection of entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and political activists became fascinated by the idea of a link

with their celebrated ancient predecessors. It was a largely urban, bourgeois, francophone grouping—one that saw the Phoenicians as natural merchants and champions of protocapitalist free enterprise.[5] These "young Phoenicians" were not for the most part churchgoers, but they tended to have a Catholic education and perspective—most of them were themselves Maronites, and almost all, including Kamal Joumblatt, had attended the Jesuit Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut, where French missionaries had long encouraged the study of local pre-Islamic history and languages.[6] They also relied to a significant degree on the work of French and francophone scholars, including those at the Université Saint-Joseph itself.[7]

Central to the ideology of the young Phoenicians was the conviction that Lebanon and the Lebanese were not Arab. They emphasized instead their metaphorical, spiritual, and sometimes even literal descent from much earlier inhabitants of their distinctive geographical space, where Mount Lebanon cuts off the coastal strip from the rest of Syria, a region they always characterized as peculiarly western or Mediterranean by contrast with the Arabs farther east: "there are no camels in Lebanon," as the slogan goes.[8] They argued among other things that the language spoken in Lebanon was influenced as much by the local ancient languages of Phoenician, Aramaic, and Syriac as by colloquial Arabic, and the poet Said Akl, who died in November 2014 at the age of 103, even invented an alphabet based on Latin rather than Arabic letters in which to write this "Lebanese" language.[9] This rejection of Arab heritage was a long-lived phenomenon: as late as the 1950s, the widely respected Maronite historian Philip Hitti, who taught at Princeton and Harvard, noted that "according to anthropological researches, the prevailing type among the Lebanese—Maronites and Druzes—is the short-headed brachycephalic one . . . in striking contrast to the long-headed type prevailing among the Bedouins of the Syrian Desert and the North Arabians."[10]

New Phoenicianism was closely connected with the broader, and also largely Maronite, struggle for a Lebanese state separate from Syria and the wider Arab world.[11] The Phoenicians provided an attractive prototype and parallel for the new state as well as a convenient alternative to Arab origins, but they also played another very specific role in this Lebanist rhetoric. Within the Ottoman Empire, the area of Mount Lebanon itself had formed a majority Maronite *Mutasarrifate* or privileged administrative region since 1861, alongside a series of other Levantine provinces and sub-provinces that included the coastal cities (fig. 1.1). With the whole of that empire on the negotiating table at Versailles in 1919, most "Lebanists" were arguing for the extension of the old *Mutasarrifate* to form a new state of
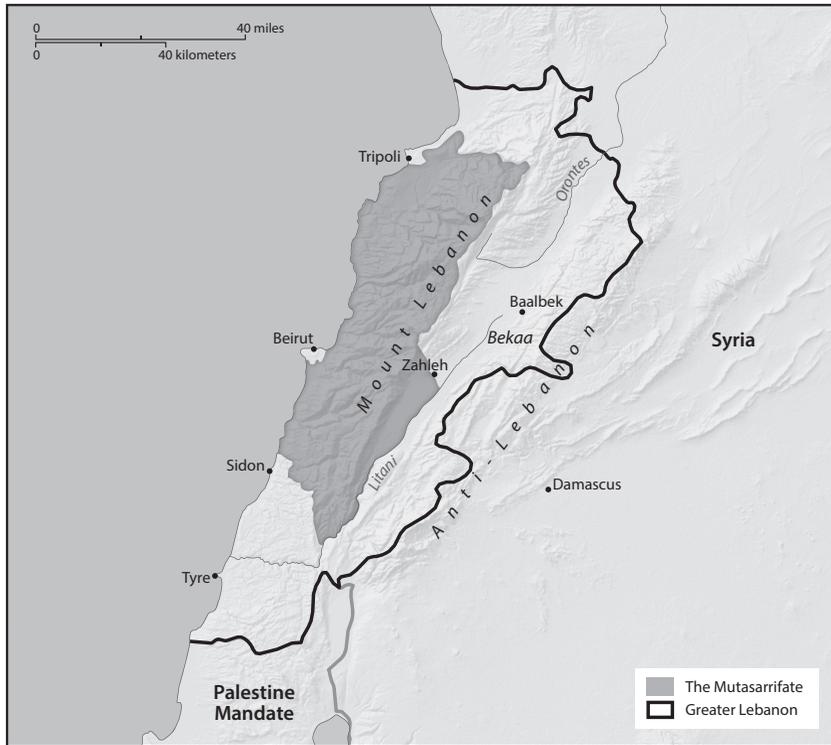
1.1 The Ottoman Mutasarrifate of Mount Lebanon (1861), and Greater Lebanon under French Mandate (1920).

"Greater Lebanon" under a French mandate, which would also include the traditionally Muslim areas of the Bekaa Valley to the east and the cities of Tripoli, Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut to the west. But to make the case for Greater Lebanon as the natural answer to the national question, the Lebanists had to tie together Mount Lebanon, the traditional home in modern times of both the Maronites and the Druze, and the Mediterranean coast, where the ancient Phoenicians built their cities. They did so by positing on the one hand a natural economic relationship between the mountain and the sea, and on the other a long-standing historical connection between the Phoenicians and Maronites that preceded and then by-passed the Arabs: the Maronites had assimilated with the Phoenician coastal population on Mount Lebanon in the sixth century CE, converting them to Christianity along the way.[12]

The neo-Phoenician movement coalesced around the short-lived journal *La revue phénicienne,* published for just four issues in 1919, and strongly

Lebanist in its politics. The first issue appeared in July, immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, and at a stage when the future of Lebanon itself and its future relationship to both Syria and France were still quite unclear. The contributors were for the most part Beiruti businessmen,[13] and much of the issue was devoted to the economy: the financial case for Greater or "natural" Lebanon, the country's resources, the hotel and tobacco industries, the problems of small businesses, and the re-provisioning of Beirut. Plenty of space was given to political issues as well: the advantages of a French mandate, the disadvantages of the American King-Crane Commission sent to investigate local attitudes to the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, and the proper basis of a state. There was also local history, literature, literary commentary, and a diatribe by a medical professor against the corset.

Naturally, the Phoenicians were also present. The issue begins with an introductory page attributed to "L'histoire," presumably written by the editor, Charles Corm, outlining the Phoenicians' history, character, and achievements. They were above all men of the sea, sailing as far as Great Britain; liberal, peaceful; bringing the world civilization, commerce, and industry. Although the author understands that the city-states of the "land" (*contrée*) of Phoenicia were politically autonomous, he presents them as united not only by a common culture but by a common proto-monotheism and unusual rituals: "they all worshipped a higher Divinity to whom they sacrificed human victims."[14] In another article, Jacques Tabet goes further, describing *la Phénicie* as a "country" (*pays*) and suggesting that in the tenth century the rest of "the Phoenician people" (*le peuple phénicien*) had recognized the supremacy of King Abibaal of Tyre—about whom we in fact know barely anything beyond his name—whereby he "brought about the political unification of Phoenicia."[15] The historical importance of this entirely speculative point becomes clear in the essay on the King-Crane Commission signed by "Caf Remime" (that is, the letters KRM, or "Corm" in Phoenician script): "we want this nation [of Lebanon] because it has always come first in all the pages of our history."[16]

A PHOENICIAN NATION

Phoenicianism was by no means the only nationalist movement in the early-twentieth-century Middle East to identify with the great civilizations of the past, and through them with the Mediterranean and the West. Other examples include Pharaonism in Egypt, Assyrianism and Arameanism

in Syria, and Canaanism in Palestine, whose adherents looked back to a "Phoenician-Hebrew" Mediterranean civilization dating to the time of King David and King Solomon that colonized the west, a model that was used both for and against Zionism.[17] Furthermore, in Lebanon itself supporters of a "Greater Syria" rather than an independent Lebanon could also appeal to the Canaanites as forebears, and even as the inventors of national sentiments,[18] and there were also Christian as well as Muslim supporters of an even larger Arab nationalism who argued, with the Greek historian Herodotus, that the Phoenicians were immigrants from the Arabian peninsula, and therefore that they actually provided Lebanon with an Arab heritage.[19]

Why was ancient history so important to these modern political movements? In all these cases, not only nation-states but national identities of any kind were a recent import from Europe in a region where polities had previously taken quite different forms and where "identity realms were more local and limited: the family, village, church and so forth."[20] Much recent scholarship has emphasized that nations are not a "natural" form of social organization, but a constructed one; in the words of Caspar Hirschi, they are "not formed by 'objective' criteria like common territory, language, habits, ancestry, fate, etc. but by the common belief in such criteria."[21] Even when geographical, linguistic, or biological links between people do persist over time, it is the communal choice to recognize and value them (or some of them) that creates a national identity. And to justify a new and unfamiliar collective identity, national movements had to create new, shared myths of origin and historical memories for all their citizens. As Eric Hobsbawm puts it, "Nations are historically novel entities pretending to have existed for a very long time."[22] As Asher Kaufman has noted, appeals to ancient ancestors served to distinguish aspiring nations from their neighbors (especially their Arab neighbors), "to highlight their own cultural uniqueness, and emphasize the historical kinship of their own community."[23] And as James C. Scott has remarked of another historical context, the result "is a historical fable that projects the nation and its dominant people backward, obscuring discontinuity, contingency, and fluid identities. Such accounts serve, as Walter Benjamin reminded us, to naturalize the progression and necessity of the state in general and the nation-state in particular."[24]

The reliance of successful nationalism in the present on the perception of a shared past was emphasized at the time by the French orientalist Ernest Renan, in one of the first descriptions of the "nation" as a construct rather than a natural fact. In a lecture in Paris in 1882, Renan asked, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" (What is a nation?) and found his answer not in blood

or descent, but in a collective will and collective memories: "A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which to tell the truth are but one, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is consent in the here and now, the desire to live together, the will to preserve the value of the heritage that has been collectively received."[25]

For Renan, these "memories" were not necessarily real, and he also emphasized the importance of forgetfulness in the creation of a national consciousness: "The essence of a nation is that all its members have a great amount in common, and also that they have all forgotten a great deal."[26] This nostalgic combination of present consent and creative memories is exactly what the neo-Phoenicians in Lebanon cultivated as they saw their new nation into being, and for some of them at least, this tactic was self-conscious and explicit: in 1935, the banker and politician Michel Chiha noted with approval "the conception of Renan . . . who sees the formation of a nation as nothing but the will of the inhabitants of that nation" and that "the principle of Lebanism rests in the exaltation of a glorious past [and] in that of an entirely abstract desire for cohesion."[27]

THE FRENCH MANDATE

In April 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres handed control of Syria, including Lebanon, to France, and from September 1920 "Greater Lebanon" was administered as a separate state within the French "Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon."[28] The French adoption of the Lebanist program is understandable: the desire to distinguish between Lebanon and Syria played into the hands of their colonial policy to encourage local identities such as Phoenician and Lebanese at the expense of the larger and potentially more troublesome contemporary regional identities of Syrian and Arab. Like the Ottomans, the French found it useful to divide the region under their mandate into a number of mini-states, which also included entities for the Alawites, the Druze, and for the areas around Alexandretta, Aleppo, and Damascus (fig. 1.2).[29]

The New Phoenicians flourished in politics, administration, business, and banking during the Mandate years, when it was thought that Lebanon could become the "Switzerland of the East," with its multiple languages, alpine tourism, and attractive financial services.[30] French nationalist scholarship continued to be central to their worldview: in 1934, for instance, Charles Corm dedicated his epic nationalist poem *La montagne inspirée*
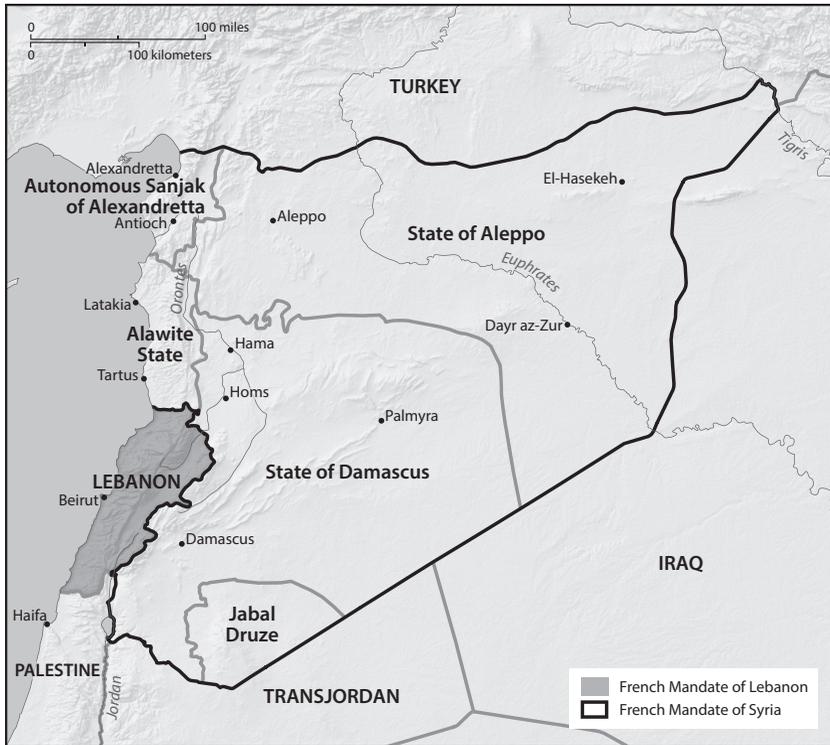
1.2 Lebanon and Syria under the new French Mandate in 1920.

to Maurice Barrès, who had popularized the notion that "soil, geography, and climate constituted the physical anchors of the nation," and to Victor Bérard, whose *Les phéniciens et l'Odyssée* (1902) portrayed the ancient Phoenicians as the source of Hellenic culture and presented the *Odyssey* as a work written from a Phoenician ship.[31] At the same time, the French authorities in Lebanon actively encouraged associations with the Phoenicians. They issued coinage with images of a Phoenician ship, as featured on the ancient civic coinage of the region, and a cedar of Mount Lebanon (fig. 1.3), and planned two very different national museums, a Lebanese one focused on the Phoenicians, and a Syrian one showcasing the Islamic and Arab past.[32] When the former was inaugurated in Beirut in 1937, the front cover of the first issue of its journal boasted another Phoenician ship.[33]

It is perhaps not surprising that at the beginning of the Mandate period there was an "effective boycott of the state by all but a handful of the Sunnite Muslims," but this faded over time,[34] and the New Phoenicians for their part gradually retreated from their strategy of privileging the French

1.3 Five-piastre coin minted in Lebanon under the French Mandate in 1940, depicting a ship and a cedar tree.

language, Catholic faith, and Phoenician past above all else. Michel Chiha in particular, himself a Chaldean Catholic with a Melkite mother from an Iraqi family, argued that Lebanon was a land of many minorities, with many languages, and that the Phoenicians were just one of its past glories—though at times he still emphasized the great differences between Lebanon and the Arab world.[35]

This downgrading of the importance of religion also helped explain away the obvious local problem with Lebanon's timeless "national" past, that Lebanon had not operated as a nation in more recent centuries: with the coming of the Arabs, it was explained, a national sentiment had been transformed—temporarily and regrettably—into a religious one. As Chiha explained, "the principle of individual identity that, under Byzantine domination, had been national (one was or was not a citizen of the Empire), became confessional."[36] Or as Charles Corm put it slightly more poetically in *La montagne inspirée*: "At the beginnings of our history, before becoming Muslims or Christians, we were simply a single people united in a single glory."[37]

When independence from France was finally achieved in 1943 with the support of almost all Lebanese scholars and politicians whatever their declared race or religion, Lebanon was defined in its new National Pact as a country with an "Arab face,"[38] and in 1944, it became one of the founding members of the Arab League. Nonetheless, neo-Phoenicianism remained a useful ideology for the new Lebanese state: the Phoenician origins of Lebanon were now what made it unique, and uniquely pluralistic, within the larger community of Arab nations.[39] Phoenician stories and symbols were adopted by urban elites of various confessional and political persuasions; coins issued by the Lebanese Republic once again featured a Phoenician ship and the famous cedar of Lebanon (fig. 1.4); and from 1956, the annual International Festival of Baalbek became a major showcase for the country's Phoenician past.[40]

Lebanon was not alone in this postcolonial turn to an ancient Phoenician past, and the appeal of the comparison in states with a claim to Phoenician

1.4 Ten-piastre coin minted by the Lebanese Republic in 1955, depicting a cedar tree and a ship.

heritage continues to the present day: in the spring of 2012, just before I delivered the Balmuth lectures, it emerged that two years earlier the aptly named Hannibal Qadhafi, fifth son of the Colonel and head of Libya's General National Maritime Transport Corporation, had commissioned a personal cruise liner named the *Phoenicia*, with design features including marble columns, gold-framed mirrors and a 120-ton tank containing six sharks, along with a team of biologists to look after them.[41] A more interesting comparison can, however, be made with Tunisia, where a form of Phoenicianism centered on the great western colony of Carthage also became popular after independence from France.

NEW CARTHAGINIANS

Under Ottoman hegemony from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Tunisia's history had been presented as purely Arabic, whereas from 1881, the French Protectorate emphasized instead the era of the Roman occupation of North Africa, presenting the Romans as their imperial predecessors in the region—a confrontational approach very different from the one the French adopted in Lebanon.[42] By contrast, Tunisia's two presidents in the era between independence in 1956 and revolution in 2011, Habib Bourguiba and Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali, who took office in a rather literal sense in 1987, made use of all of the region's past, including its indigenous, Phoenician, Roman, and Islamic history, to characterize their own preferred version of its present.[43]

The new state's coat of arms featured a Phoenician ship (identified by the sign associated with the Carthaginian goddess Tinnit on its sail) as well as a pair of scales and a lion holding a sword, with the legend "freedom—order—justice," represented by the ship, lion, and scales, respectively.[44] Bourguiba built his presidential palace at Carthage, now a seaside suburb of Tunis, and encouraged regular arts festivals there, as well as the UNESCO "Save Carthage" archaeological campaigns of the 1970s. State celebrations

for the ancient city's twenty-eighth centenary in 1986 happily coincided with thirty years of Tunisian independence.

Under Ben Ali, and encouraged by the World Bank, Carthage was further developed for tourism and commercial purposes, and a "Carthageland" theme park was constructed an hour's drive down the coast.[45] Ben Ali's government also provided sponsorship for foreign exhibitions about Carthage, and in 1994–95, the traveling exhibit *Les routes d'Hannibal* recreated Hannibal's march on Rome, using buses rather than elephants, and presenting fancy-dress episodes from Carthaginian history at stops in Tunis, Madrid, Cannes, and Rome.[46] Though largely promoted by government propaganda and economic elites—the first commercial television channel in the country was Hannibal TV, launched in 2005—the association with Carthage still has wider social resonance in Tunisia, where the national football team is nicknamed "the Eagles of Carthage."

Tunisian Phoenicianism started from an explicitly anticolonial standpoint. Bourguiba was particularly fond of Hannibal as a symbol of resistance to Roman, and therefore European, colonialism, and schoolbooks taught (not unreasonably) that Rome was the aggressor in the Punic Wars, forced Carthage to resist, and prevailed only with the help of another local hero, the Numidian king, Massinissa. As in Lebanon, this was part of a careful negotiation with European ideologies: French continued to be taught in schools, and Bourguiba was in cultural terms a liberal and cosmopolitan figure who promoted considerable social change, in particular in relation to women's rights—a development reflected in a new focus on the role of Queen Elissa, also known as Dido, as the founder of Carthage.

This interest in Elissa, as well as a more general identification with the Phoenician past, went well beyond state propaganda: the distance between Rome and Carthage is embraced in two novels by the francophone writer Fawzi Mellah, *Le conclave des pleureuses* (1987) and *Elissa, la reine vagabonde* (1988), which treat Elissa's story from a variety of local perspectives, including the suggestion that she has been misrepresented in the European tradition and in particular in the work of Virgil, who according to one of Mellah's characters "disfigures" the queen by calling her Dido and ascribing to her a love affair with a Greek sailor, "a vagabond unworthy of our Elissa."[47]

Under Ben Ali, the focus on Hannibal as a "national mascot" continued, but there was also a reconciliation with the Roman past, for pragmatic as well as ideological reasons.[48] The great Roman sites and monuments appealed to tourists, and as in Lebanon, the notion of Tunisia as a crossroads or bridge between Eastern and Western cultures was a useful one, making

the country a core participant in a Mediterranean culture. Associations with both the Phoenician and the Roman pre-Islamic past became part of a wider display of openness to the Mediterranean: in this model, the Phoenicians were just one of many roots of Tunisian society and ethnicity.

Furthermore, from at least the 1990s the Carthage connection operated alongside the country's Roman past as a single pole in a very different opposition, a weapon in the hands of the secular government against the increasing popularity of political Islam,[49] "in part as a means of countering efforts by Islamists to encourage Tunisians to identify exclusively with Islam and the Arab world."[50] This strategy downplayed (though it certainly did not deny) the importance of Islam in the history of Tunisia in favor of a more multicultural presentation of the national past "from Carthage to Kairouan." The approach has survived the popular revolution and subsequent negotiations over the new constitution largely intact. A new monument to Hannibal is planned for the Punic Port at Carthage,[51] and in the summer of 2014, postrevolutionary Tunisia celebrated the anniversary of Hannibal Barca's victory over Rome at the Battle of Cannae on August 2, 216 BCE as well as the 2,828th year since Dido's foundation of Carthage in 814 BCE, with a parade and carnival in the ancient Phoenician colony.[52]

LEBANON FIRST

Back in Lebanon, however, the religious associations of Phoenicianist ideology reasserted themselves in the civil war that tore the country apart from 1975 to 1990, and the cosmopolitan ideals of the Lebanese elite gave way to boundary-building.[53] Phoenicianism particularly suited the Lebanese Forces, a coalition of far-right Christian militia groups, including most notoriously the Phalange (*Kataeb*). These groups, strongly encouraged by Said Akl and his journal *Lebnaan*, adopted an inflammatory, anti-Arab rhetoric of Phoenician descent against both Lebanese Arabs and the country's large population of Palestinian refugees.[54] Neo-Phoenicianism was severely tainted by its associations during this period, and when the war ended in 1989, the Ta'if peace accord emphasized again that Lebanon was an Arab state. When the National Museum in Beirut was partially reopened in 1999 after suffering immense damage during the war, the image on the poster was not Phoenician but Greek: Hygieia, the goddess of healing.[55]

Ongoing political tensions between Syria and Lebanon in the generation after the end of the war, and in particular the assassination of the former prime minister of Lebanon Rafik Hariri in 2005, consolidated the political

demise of the New Phoenicians. Lebanese separatism became a widespread principle among Arabs as well as Maronites: "Lebanon First" is the slogan of Hariri's son Saad's Sunni-aligned Future Movement party, as well as of the unexpected "March 14" political alliance he made with the Lebanese Forces and the Phalange in 2005.[56] Phoenicianism has remained however a popular cultural ideology: in a series of interviews with Lebanese students in 2005–6, Craig Larkin found that especially among Maronites, "the myth of Phoenicianism . . . remains very much alive and rooted to an ancestral past . . . an intuitive reaction to and rejection of Arabism and Islamic identity . . . [and] very often during interviews this myth was raised as a justification of cultural uniqueness; an explanation of characteristic traits; or a defence of Lebanon's inimitable position in the Arab world."[57]

At the same time, however, the connection between the Phoenicians and the Lebanese can now be evoked once again as part of a shared national past, as in the remarkable research project on the genetic makeup of the Lebanese population led by Pierre Zalloua of the Lebanese American University. In addition to demonstrating particular links to Europe in the DNA of Lebanese Christians (thought to relate to the Crusades), and to the Arabian Peninsula among Lebanese Arabs (presumably a result of the Arab migrations in late antiquity), Zalloua's team showed that about 30 percent of Lebanese men carry what the study identifies as Phoenician genetic traces in their DNA, as opposed to 6 percent of men from all Mediterranean countries put together. The results mean, Zalloua told an interviewer, that "Phoenician is a heritage for all. . . . There is no distinct pattern that shows that one community carries significantly more Phoenician than another."[58]

Zalloua's investigation is part of the broader *National Geographic*–funded "Genographic Project" led by Spencer Wells, who himself went rather further in an interview with *National Geographic*, concluding from the study's apparent finding that "modern Lebanese people share a genetic identity going back thousands of years" that "[t]he Phoenicians were . . . the ancestors of today's Lebanese."[59] But there's a real problem with such a statement: Wells moves from the observation that a certain proportion of the ancient and modern populations of the region have similar DNA to the conclusion that both constitute specific named peoples, without noting the difference between these propositions. In fact, an assumption that "people" always belong to "peoples" potentially distorts the investigation as a whole: the initial decision to seek to identify ancient DNA markers at the level of "the Phoenicians" rests on the assumption that genetic connections at that particular level are, or rather were, more meaningful than those of larger or smaller population groups whose shared DNA markers

the team could have investigated instead. In other words, it *assumes* that people in the past who shared this particular set of genetic connections can and should be identified with each other, and *investigates* only which people in the present they should also be identified with.[60]

The difficulty here is that even if some genetic similarities can be demonstrated between an ancient sailor from Tyre and another from Byblos, that doesn't mean that either had any concept of himself as anything other than a Tyrian or a Byblian (if that), that anyone else saw them that way, or that they had or did anything in common beyond that particular genetic likeness. And that is the real problem with co-opting the ancient Phoenicians for any modern nationalist project, sectarian or pluralist: whether or not it relies on the idea of a literal connection through descent or genetic resemblance (both of which all humans at some level share), it assumes that the Phoenicians were a coherent ethnic group themselves, an ancient nation that could form the basis of a modern nation-state. This assumption, as we have seen, has bolstered varieties of nationalist politics and rhetoric in Lebanon for almost a century, but its origins are in nineteenth-century European scholarship, when ideas about the Phoenicians slowly became saturated with the ideas and assumptions of modern nationalism.

INVENTING THE PHOENICIANS

The Phoenicians were a shadowy presence in European scholarly literature from the Renaissance period onward, part of a broader early modern interest in the diverse peoples of the ancient world, prompted by the wider availability of the Greek and Latin texts that discussed them.[61] European interest in the Phoenicians only really began, however, in 1646, when the French Protestant minister and orientalist Samuel Bochart (1599–1667) published a popular book in Latin called *Geographia sacra, seu Phaleg et Canaan* (Sacred Geography, or Phaleg and Canaan), which went through a series of reprints into the eighteenth century.[62] In it, Bochart traced the dispersal of Noah's descendants across the globe after the confusion of the languages at the tower of Babel, with a particular focus on the migrations and settlements of the Phoenicians, describing the enormous influence they had on the world's languages and cultures. He was one of the first scholars to point out and investigate the close relationship between Phoenician and the much better-known Hebrew language, and using this insight, he "roamed the map of the classical world and detected names that might lend themselves to etymological reduction back into Phoenician and Hebrew."[63]

In this manner, he found evidence for Phoenician presence from Thule in the far north to India in the far south.[64]

Scholars in this period did not portray the Phoenicians as a full-fledged ethnocultural group: as Timothy Champion puts it, they were still "a somewhat mystical part of the Mediterranean world, available to be invoked as exotic outsiders and as the origin of cultural traditions."[65] Bochart, for instance, calls them a *gens* (people), but presents them throughout his work simply as merchants and colonists from the same region. This "thin" depiction of the Phoenicians also comes out very clearly in the hit didactic novel *Les aventures de Télémaque* by Archbishop Fénelon, which was published in 1699, translated into every European language, and became the most popular book in France in the eighteenth century.[66] The work was written as a guide to kingship for Fénelon's pupil, the Duc de Bourgogne, who was second in line to the throne, but who was outlived by his grandfather Louis XIV, with the throne passing eventually to his son. Supposedly a continuation of the fourth book of the *Odyssey*, the book imagines the travels of Odysseus's son Telemachus in the company of his tutor, Mentor, who is given many opportunities to share his opinions on politics and political morality. Naturally, the pair run into the newly fashionable Phoenicians on their travels, and in book 3 they are carried to Tyre by Narbal, the commander of the Tyrian fleet, who passes the time explaining Phoenician seamanship and commerce: "You see, Telemachus, the power of the Phoenicians: they are formidable to all the neighbouring nations by their numerous vessels; from the trade they carry on as far as the Pillars of Hercules they derive such wealth as surpasses that of the most flourishing peoples."[67] Although Phoenicia has "neighbouring nations" in this passage, elsewhere only Tyre is given the label "nation" itself, while the Phoenicians are simply "so famous in all the known nations."[68]

In 1758, interest in the Phoenicians spiked again when the distinguished numismatist Jean-Jacques Barthélémy deciphered the Phoenician alphabet from a pair of bilingual dedications found in Malta in the late seventeenth century, one of which had been sent to Louis XVI as a present. This era of European scholarship culminated in the German manuals of Wilhelm Gesenius, who published the first full-scale manual of the Phoenician language with a collection of all the Phoenician inscriptions then available in 1837, and Franz Carl Movers, who collected the classical and biblical sources for Phoenician history and religion (1841–56). As Mario Liverani notes, "No wonder we don't find any reference there to a complex image or characterization of the Phoenicians, nor any value judgment (beyond the implicit, artless admiration that many scholars have for the objects of their

studies). The search for 'origins' was already under way, that is to say for the provenance of the Phoenician people (on the basis of notices in classical sources), but attention did not yet focus on the delineation of 'character,' a largely ethnographic and colonial project, involving (and deriving from) reports of activities, specialisms, cultural idiosyncrasies and behaviors in contact with others and in daily life."[69] Things were changing though: Movers does present the Phoenician "people" (*Völkerschaft*) as an entity, one member of a larger group of Semites tied together by ancestry, language, and religion.[70]

The later decades of the nineteenth century saw a shift to a perception of the Phoenicians as a distinct and separate ethnocultural collective. This can in part be explained by the expansion of European colonialism and colonial archaeology in the Levant and North Africa,[71] but it also mapped onto the development in European ideologies of what Paul Gilroy has called "the nation as an ethnically homogenous object," and the "fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture."[72] It relied heavily on the newly perceived importance of both race and environment, and the distinctive cultures and mentalities they created:[73] around the year 1850, as Fernand Braudel put it, "*civilization* (and *culture*) moved from the singular to the plural."[74]

One early example is John Kenrick's *Phoenicia* (1855), which builds onto the work of Bochart and Movers a cultural element, with chapters devoted to the Phoenicians' alphabet and language, to commerce, to navigation, to mining and metallurgy, and to manufacturing and the arts—although the arts receive only four pages, about the same as a "Note on the Natural History of the Buccinum and Murex."[75] On the basis of the works at Jerusalem attributed to King Hiram of Tyre—little else was available at the time—Kenrick declares that the "aesthetic character of Phoenician art" was "national and local," these words apparently being used as synonyms, and neither as a compliment.[76] He also devotes a long chapter on the "Origin of the Nation" to an attempt to make coherent sense of the different origins and genealogies of the Canaanites and Phoenicians suggested in the biblical tradition, the classical sources, and modern linguistic scholarship.

Ernest Renan himself then played a major part in the consolidation of the modern image of the Phoenicians when he traveled to the Levant in 1860–61 at Napoleon III's command. Although he accompanied a French expeditionary force sent to support Mount Lebanon's community of Catholic Maronites in their conflict with the British-backed Druze, his own mission was to study what he called "the ancient Phoenician civilization" (*la vielle civilization phénicienne*), a smaller scale follow-up to Napoleon Bonaparte's

great Egyptian expedition of 1798–1801 that had brought the glories of ancient Egypt to the attention of the French public.[77] Renan pressed the French soldiers into service in a series of excavations at Byblos (Phoenician Gebel), Tyre (Sur), Sidon, and Arados (Arwad), explaining that he took care not to be distracted from the important historical questions by the allure of potential museum pieces "while remaining of course attentive to the interests of our collections."[78] Although the project did not in the end produce a great deal of Phoenician material, the results were published between 1864 and 1874 in beautiful drawings and trenchant prose as the *Mission de Phénicie,* a work that did much to promote the study of the Phoenicians in Europe.[79]

For Renan, the Phoenicians were a "people"[80] and a "nation,"[81] with a distinct art and architecture, if not a very impressive one: "In general, in their buildings, the Phoenicians seem to have had little force of character."[82] Nonetheless, he took a rather narrow view of the extent and nature of ancient Phoenicia: "Phoenicia was not a country; it was a series of ports, with a rather narrow hinterland. These towns, situated at intervals of ten or twelve kilometers, were at the center of an entirely civic life, as in the Greek towns. Phoenician civilization did not reach the mountain, and had little effect on the people of Syria."[83] However, and conveniently for those who would later see Lebanon as distinct from (or even within) the Arab world, Renan reflected at length on the atypicality of the Phoenician character within the larger category of "Semitic" peoples to which contemporary linguistics and racial science had assigned them: their famous practicality and business acumen, not to mention their political institutions and polytheistic religion, were quite at odds with the general image of the Semitic race at the time.[84]

Renan did not make a clear connection between the modern Maronites and the ancient Phoenicians, although he noted that "the inferiority of the Phoenicians as artists seems, furthermore, to have persisted to the present day in the country they inhabited,"[85] and that "the Lebanese race, whether Christian or Muslim, is, if I may say so, iconoclastic and ignorant of art. . . . The Maronite churches are very severe and forbid statues."[86] However, he did describe the Maronites themselves as a "nation,"[87] dismissing the Muslims by contrast as "half-savage or dull-witted . . . inferior races,"[88] and the map of the region explored by his expedition that accompanied Renan's publication, which covered a large area including Mount Lebanon, the cities of the coast, and the Beqaa valley (fig. 1.5), was revived by Lebanists in 1920 to support the case for Greater Lebanon.[89]

Back in the nineteenth century, Renan's expedition to Phoenicia increased the material available to scholars interested in the Phoenicians, and the launch in 1867 of his *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum,* still the definitive collection

1.5 Ernest Renan's map of the area explored by his mission to Phoenicia in 1860–61.

of Phoenician inscriptions, provided another enormous boost to the field. This may help to explain why the notion of a discreet national, ethnic, and cultural identity of the Phoenicians became more explicit in later studies.[90] At the same time, Phoenicia became an object of study in itself: compare the title of the hugely popular work published from 1730 to 1738 by Charles Rollin, *Histoire ancienne des égyptiens, des carthaginois, des assyriens, des babyloniens, des medes et des perses, des macédoniens, des grecs*, with George Rawlinson's 1869 *Manual of Ancient History, from the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Western Empire, Comprising the History of Chaldaea, Assyria, Media, Babylonia, Lydia, Phoenicia, Syria, Judaea, Egypt, Carthage, Persia, Greece, Macedonia, Rome, and Parthia*, or Ernest Babelon's 1888 *Manuel d'archéologie orientale: Chaldée, Assyrie, Perse, Syrie, Judée, Phénicie, Carthage*.

In 1885, Georges Perrot and Michel Chipiez dedicated a volume of the popular French *Histoire de l'art dans l'antiquité* to Phoenicia and Cyprus. At the beginning they define the Phoenicians with some circumspection as "the peoples [*tribus*] who settled on the coast at the foot of Mt. Lebanon," assigning them on the basis of the similarity of Phoenician and Hebrew, and after considerable discussion of the contemporary debate on this point, to the "grande race sémitique" (broader Semitic race).[91] By the end of the work, however, after noting that despite the poverty and unoriginality of their art, the Phoenicians were masters of industry and commerce, they are less hesitant about defining the Phoenicians as a racial group in themselves: "it has been very well said that the Phoenician had some characteristics of the medieval Jew, but he was powerful, and he belonged to a race whose strength and superiority in certain respects should be recognized."[92]

In 1889, George Rawlinson's *History of Phoenicia* calls the Phoenicians a "nation," and assigns them on similar linguistic grounds to a larger Semitic "group."[93] In the third edition, published in the 1890s, the language is stronger: Rawlinson begins the work with a declaration that the Levantine coast is "inhabited by three nations, politically and ethnographically distinct," Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine, and he devotes a chapter to "The People—Their Origin and Ethnic Character."[94] The book now concludes with a "General Estimate of the Nation" in which, after the traditional observation that the skills of the Phoenician "race" were in exploration and commerce rather than literature or art, Rawlinson awards them a "rank among the chief of the secondary powers of the earth."[95]

Also in 1889, Richard Pietschmann published a *History of the Phoenicians* (*Geschichte der Phönizier*) in which he too describes the Phoenicians as a "nation," though he notes that in their case this was a rather vague

concept, and he treats their own national self-consciousness as an open question.[96] Concern for internal or "emic" definitions of ethnicity or nationhood was, however, unusual by this period; peoples, nations, and races were usually discussed as if they were simply natural facts, even if the precise categorization of specific examples was open to debate. And these natural nations had equally natural cultures: as Nicholas Vella has noted, all the popular nineteenth-century works on the Phoenicians from Renan's *Mission* onward, "included an immense corpus of objects, integrating inscriptions, coins and seals," and "common language and script, religion and burial practices, dress and personal ornaments, and other attributes were taken as material markers for an ethnic group with undisputed roots." In describing and isolating so-called Phoenician culture, Vella suggests, such books and exhibitions in a sense invented it.[97]

The popularity of the Phoenicians in the nineteenth century should not however be overestimated: the celebration of Phoenician achievements in this period competed with a more popular European scholarly model that privileged the Greeks, then a newly independent nation, and denied them close links with their "oriental" neighbors. And in the strongly anti-Semitic academic atmosphere of the early twentieth century, the Phoenicians became considerably less fashionable, at least in Europe.[98]

MOSCATI'S PHOENICIANS

In 1963, Sabatino Moscati, professor of Semitic philology at the University of Rome, effectively refounded the field of Phoenician studies in a lecture that put the question of Phoenician identity center stage, asking his audience, "Who were the Phoenicians, really? What were the distinguishing features and characteristics of their civilization, what were the historical, political, religious and artistic events and qualities that defined and shaped it? Because so far it seems that the unity, the autonomy, the homogeneity of the people and culture have merely been assumed rather than investigated."[99] The answer, Moscati reassured his listeners, was to study all the documentation carefully so that "Phoenician civilization can emerge as a historical object. . . . At the end of the day, it seems clear that the divisions between the Phoenician cities and their dominant civic consciousness were compatible with a relative homogeneity intrinsic to the population of the region and distinct from that of their neighbors."[100]

Moscati's re-visioning of the Phoenicians stripped them, for the most part, of the negative stereotype and racial science of earlier scholarship and

was much less interested than those studies in their origins and national character.[101] Nonetheless, the Phoenicians were still a "people," "civilization," or "nation,"[102] with distinct limits in space (from Tell Suqas in the north to Akko in the south), and in time (from the end of the Bronze Age kingdoms to the conquest of their cities by Alexander the Great, c. 1200–332 BCE),[103] made up of individuals not necessarily of the same race (*razza*) or from the same place (*provenienza*) "but who take on a homogenous character though having in common a geographical area, a language and a historical-cultural process."[104] Whether or not they appreciated that themselves was of little interest or importance. In 1988, this approach was still at the heart of Moscati's Phoenician studies—"I was interested in the reality of a people"[105]—and although in 1992 he admitted that "national consciousness was rather ephemeral among the Phoenician cities, where citizenship was a more important reference point,"[106] in 1993 he continued to defend the "incontestable" notion of an "ethnic reality," and a "Phoenician civilization" defined by "a series of intrinsically valid characteristics." Any further debate on the subject he declared "otiose."[107]

It should come as no surprise then that the spectacular exhibition *I Fenici* (*The Phoenicians*) at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice in 1988, organized by Moscati and sponsored by Fiat, was curated in the same way as the antiquarian corpora of the nineteenth century, with artifacts of "Phoenician" culture displayed according to their genre and geographical provenance. The joke at the time went that that "Sabatino Moscati invented the Phoenicians, Gianni Agnelli manufactured them."[108] And this could still be said of the exhibition *La Méditerranée des Phéniciens* (*The Mediterranean of the Phoenicians*) held at the Institut du monde arabe in Paris in 2007, where the various skills, crafts, and characteristics of the Phoenicians were once again sumptuously presented in splendid isolation from each other and from similar artifacts from other places.[109] Furthermore, this notion of the Phoenicians as a collective with a shared chronology, geography, language, history, and culture is still alive and well in the specialist literature: in the most important recent textbooks in Spanish, Italian, and English they are referred to as a "people," a "civilization," and a "distinct ethnic group."[110]

This interpretation of the Phoenicians as a people has also informed recent literature on nationalism. One of most influential recent studies of communal identity in the ancient world is Anthony D. Smith's magisterial *Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986). Smith is no "primordialist," arguing for the timeless existence of natural nations, nor does he accept the "modernist" position that sees the construction of ethnic identity as inextricably bound up with the rise of the modern nation-states. Instead, he argues that since

antiquity people have been constructing themselves as what we would now call ethnic communities, "collective cultural units and sentiments" that "form the models and groundwork for the construction of nations."[111]

Smith explicitly sees the Phoenicians as one example of this phenomenon: "In ancient Sumer, Phoenicia and Greece, we find two kinds of sentiment side by side, a political loyalty to the individual city-state, and a cultural and emotional solidarity with one's cultural kinsmen, as this is interpreted by current myths of origin and descent."[112] While there were "deep-seated rivalries" between individual Phoenician states, these "co-existed with strong . . . pan-Phoenician . . . sentiments based on a common heritage of religion, language, art and literature, political institutions, dress and forms of recreation."[113] Furthermore, in Phoenicia "a common Canaanite fertility religion, common language and alphabet, seafaring activities and colonies, temple construction and geographical location on peninsulas, all provided the basis for common sentiments among different strata and city-states in defence of their life-style."[114]

We don't need to worry too much about the specific historical claims here: Smith did not claim to be a specialist on the Phoenicians. Instead, my argument in this book is that Smith's notion of the Phoenicians as an ethnocultural group isn't just wrong, but the wrong way round: in the case of the Phoenicians at least we are not dealing with the ancient ethnic origins of modern nations, but the modern nationalist origins of an ancient ethnicity.[115] My answer to the question Moscati posed in 1963 is that nothing did in fact unite the Phoenicians in their own eyes or those of their neighbors, and that his Phoenician people, or civilization, or nation, is not actually a real historical object, but rather a product of the scholarly and political ideologies I have discussed in this chapter. Such modern ideas about the ancient Phoenicians are thoroughly interwoven with ideas about the modern nation-state. That does not in itself, of course, mean that they cannot also be true. But the picture presented by our ancient sources is very different.

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