

## Sidon and Tyre

Hans-Peter Mathys<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Basel, Switzerland

\*hans-peter.mathys@unibas.ch

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Spectabilis, ladies and gentlemen, and first of all, dear Angelika,

Strabo, the famous Greek geographer, wrote around the turn of the millennium in Book 16,22 of his *Geographica*:

After Sidon one comes to Tyre, the largest and oldest city of the Phoenicians, which rivals Sidon, not only in size, but also in its fame and antiquity, as handed down to us in numerous myths. Now although the poets have referred more repeatedly to Sidon than to Tyre (Homer does not even mention Tyre), ... At any rate, both cities have been famous and illustrious, both in early times and at the present time; and no matter which of the two one might call the metropolis (μητρόπολις) of the Phoenicians, there is a dispute in both cities.

The following half hour will be devoted to the course of this dispute. I will draw heavily on Old Testament sources but will not limit myself to them.

I begin with a highly controversial text, the table of nations in Genesis 10. This genealogy lists the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. The basic structure of this chapter comprises the following elements, according to a strong consensus:

“These are the descendants of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; children were born to them after the flood. The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, ... The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. These are the descendants of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram... These are the descendants of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. These are the families of Noah’s sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.”

This basic framework belongs to the *Priestly Code*, which dates to the Persian period. Many additions have been made to this basic framework, including the following:

“Canaan became the father of Sidon his firstborn. And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of ...”

This also means that Sidon was the most important city in Phoenicia, represented here by the name *Canaan*. The authoritative commentary on Genesis during my studies, by Claus Westermann, regarded these additions as insertions from the *Yahwist source*, which at that time was still dated to the 10th century BCE. According to him, they reflect the time when Sidon, not Tyre, was the dominant power among the Phoenician city-states. Tyre only rose to this position during the time of David and Solomon. In other words, Genesis 10 provides us with a valuable source for the primacy that Sidon enjoyed in the Late Bronze Age. I argue the opposite: Genesis 10:15, 19 also belongs to the period of Persian, Achaemenid supremacy in the Ancient Near East. These sentences are evidence of how Sidon surpassed Tyre and became the regional hegemonic power in Phoenicia.

There is much supporting evidence that Tyre held the dominant position in Phoenicia from the Iron Age until the Achaemenids came to power. I will briefly discuss two pieces of evidence. The first can be found in the story of Solomon in 1Kings 5:

“Hiram sent word to Solomon, ‘I have heard the message that you have sent to me; I will fulfill all your needs in the matter of cedar and cypress timber. Therefore, command that cedars from the Lebanon be

cut for me. My servants will join your servants, and I will give you whatever wages you set for your servants; for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians. My servants shall bring it down to the sea from the Lebanon.”

This passage also mentions the people of Sidon, who are unrivalled as woodcutters; here, this term refers to all Phoenicians, as it does in Homer. Hiram/Huram, on the other hand, is clearly a Tyrian.

The cooperation between Solomon and Hiram was ideal in that it was based on mutual interests, or to put it succinctly: Tyrian wood and technical knowledge in exchange for wheat and oil. Whether the Old Testament information about the Tyrian/Israelite alliance provides reliable information about the 10th century BCE is controversial. Occasionally, it is also suggested that it reflects the period of the Omride dynasty. One bold theory even suggests that Hiram does not refer to Hiram I, but to Hiram II, who reigned from approximately 738 to 731 BCE.

There is consensus, however, that northern Israel was under the influence of Tyre for a long time, if not actually part of its territory. The information that Solomon had to cede twenty cities to Hiram, with which he was not satisfied, contains more than a modicum of truth.

The supremacy of Tyre among the Phoenician city-states is also evident in the prophetic oracles against foreign nations, especially those written by Amos. He offers one against Tyre, but none against Sidon, as the name of the city does not appear at all in his book. No oracle against Tyre and Sidon has been preserved from the historical Isaiah, the prophet of the 8th century BCE. Chapter Isaiah 23, which deals with the two cities, belongs to a much later period. Jeremiah mentions the two cities of Tyre and Sidon occasionally, but not in an actual oracle against foreign nations.

Moving on to Ezekiel, the picture changes completely. The prophet is downright obsessed with Tyre, which he both admires and hates – and whose downfall he laments. He devotes three chapters (26–28) to the city, some parts of which, however, are likely to belong to later additions. This fixation on Tyre would be hard to imagine if it did not reflect historical reality, i.e., a powerful, self-confident, even arrogant city. A little exaggeration is, of course, not out of the question.

In two verses, Ezekiel addresses the balance of power within Phoenicia (Ezek 27:8–9):

“The inhabitants of Sidon and Arwad were your rowers; skilled men of Zemer were within you; they were your pilots. The elders of Gebal and its artisans were within you, caulking your seams; all the ships of the sea with their mariners were within you, to barter for your wares.”

In this passage, Ezekiel attributes primacy among the Phoenician cities to Tyre, mentioning all the most important ones. It presents a pictorial image. However, I do not know whether the details reflect historical reality, for example, whether the inhabitants of Sidon and Arwad were particularly skilled rowers. But that is not the point here.

To sum up: Ezekiel 26–28 documents the primacy of Tyre in Phoenicia. However, at the very end of Ezekiel 28 there is also a short passage that indirectly records its transition to Sidon (Ezek 28:20–23):

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Mortal, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it, and say, thus says the Lord God: I am against you, O Sidon, and I will gain glory in your midst. They shall know that I am the Lord when I execute judgments in it, and manifest my holiness in it; for I will send pestilence into it, and bloodshed into its streets; and the dead shall fall in its midst, by the sword that is against it on every side. And they shall know that I am the Lord.’”

This is certainly the most boring and insignificant passage in the Book of Ezekiel, perhaps even in the entire Old Testament. But this is precisely what makes the four verses such an appealing subject for study. They string together a series of typically Ezekielian phrases – I mention only *ben adam*, man, and the formula of recognition: “and they shall know that I am the Lord,” followed by the less familiar phrase “when I execute judgment upon them.” Indeed, there is not a single word in these verses that does not appear one or more times in the Book of Ezekiel. This is too much Ezekiel to be Ezekiel. In these four verses, a later writer is desperately trying to write like Ezekiel. He does not say a single word about what Sidon is guilty of. So, what is the point of this – I almost said “trash” – piece of writing? Its author lived at a time when the greatest danger to Jerusalem and Judah came from Sidon and no longer from Tyre. In his opinion, Ezekiel could have said this already. Sidon is no better than Tyre, but just as bad: that is the central message of Ezekiel 28:20–23. And that is why he prophesies: “Behold, I am coming against you, Sidon.” In Ezekiel 26:3 we read: “Behold, I am coming against you, Tyre”; it is here that the author of Ezekiel 28:20–23 takes his cue from.

We now turn to important sources that vividly illustrate the power of the Sidonians. The most important of these is undoubtedly the sarcophagus inscription of King Eshmunazor of Sidon, which dates from the beginning of the 5th century BCE. Eshmunazor states on it:

“Furthermore, the lord of kings gave us Dor and Joppa, the rich lands of Dagon which are in the plain of Sharon, as a reward for the striking deeds which I performed; and we added them to the borders of the land, that they might belong to the Sidonians forever.”

Since the Achaemenids were not seafarers, they hired the Phoenicians for coastal shipping. The mighty deeds that Eshmunazor claims to have accomplished certainly refer to nautical services, especially the use of Sidonian ships in the so-called Persian Wars of the 5th century BCE, which the Achaemenids waged against the Greeks. However, these mighty deeds were not always successful: the Persian fleet with its Phoenician ships often left the battlefield as losers. But that is not the point here. What is important is that among the Phoenicians whose services the Persians used, the Sidonians took the leading position. The Greek historian Herodotus makes this clear in several passages of his work. I will read them aloud quickly and without comment. Even taken out of context, they speak for themselves:

During his reconnaissance of the Greek coast (and Italy), Darius I relied on Sidonian sailors (3.13.6). When Xerxes arrived in Abydos in 480 BCE, he had his fleet stage a naval battle, from which the Sidonians emerged victorious (7.44). He watched his second naval review from a Sidonian ship (7.100.2–3), as he used Sidonian ships for his personal transport (7.128.2). – The following passages refer to the outstanding quality of Sidonian sailors: “Persians, Medes and Scythians formed the crews of all the ships. The Phoenicians brought the best sailors, and among them the Sidonians” (7.96.1). Xerxes climbs from his chariot onto a Sidonian ship (7.99.3). “The most famous people in the crew, next to the generals, were: Tetramnestos, son of Anysos from Sidon, Matten, son of Siromos from Tyre, Merbalos, son of Agbalos ...” (7.96). “When he (Xerxes) had arrived there and taken his seat, the appointed princes of the various peoples and the admirals of the ships soon appeared and sat down in the order in which the king had assigned them the seats of honour. First sat the king of Sidon, then the king of Tyre, and then the rest. When Mardonius began with the king of the Sidonians ...” (8:67–68).

Some remarks on the archaeological sources. Inland from Sidon there is an extra-urban sanctuary known as the *Tribune d'Eshmoun*. As you can see from the illustrations, it is a huge complex whose construction history spanned a long period of time. Two deities are closely associated with this sanctuary: the healing god Eshmun, whose Greco-Roman counterpart is Asclepius, and Astarte, a goddess whom many Old Testament scholars wrongly pay less attention to than Asherah.

One of the most interesting inscriptions in the history of religion in the Levant comes from Sidon. Based on the context in which it was found, it can be dated to before 350 BCE, i.e., before the Tennes rebellion. It contains the names of deities on five lines and five columns, which can be read in different directions. The name of Ashtarte forms the frame, next to it is the sun god Shamash. At the very bottom (left side), we can read the first two letters of the name of the god Eshmun. I cannot interpret the inscription here, not even to a small extent. It contains the beginning of a philosophical approach to religion. It says: “The deity is one and many at the same time.”

Here are some photographs of the *piscine du trône d'Ashtart*, which was located in a water basin. As its sheer size demonstrates, the sanctuary of Bostan ech-Sheiq did not serve merely local purposes but was also a pilgrimage site with international appeal. Word of it, and thus certainly also of Ashtarte, reached Jerusalem. This is evidenced, among other things, by the following three passages:

1Kings 11:5, 33

“For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.”

“This is because he has forsaken me, worshiped Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and has not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, as his father David did.”

2Kings 23:13 “The king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of Destruction, which King Solomon of Israel had built for Astarte the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.”

Two brief comments on these passages: Astarte is associated only with Solomon and no other king; she is mentioned first in all three passages. The selection of the three deities is not random: the Moabites

and Ammonites are among Israel's arch enemies. Even after ten generations, they are not accepted in the congregation of Yahweh. The reason for this is their behavior toward the Israelites when they were in the desert: "they did not meet you with bread and water on the way when you came out of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 23:4).

This also means that the Sidonians must have been as hated in Judah as the Edomites and Ammonites when the passages quoted were written. However, it must also be said that Astarte remains strangely pale in the Old Testament; we know nothing concrete about her – unlike, for example, with the Queen of Heaven, about whom we know, among other things, that the Judean women offered her smoke and drink offerings. Was Astarte considered so dangerous and attractive that even her dangerousness and attractiveness had to be kept secret?

As Elizabeth Bloch-Smith has demonstrated based on a comprehensive analysis of all the epigraphic and archaeological material from Phoenicia and its colonies, the cult of Astarte reached its peak in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE and then declined.

The late books of Chronicles and Ezra also contain evidence that a change of power took place during the Persian period. Although they mention the Tyrians and Sidonians together, they name the Sidonians first and not the Tyrians:

1Chronicles 22:3–4

"David also provided great stores of iron for nails for the doors of the gates and for clamps, as well as bronze in quantities beyond weighing, and cedar logs without number – for the Sidonians and Tyrians brought great quantities of cedar to David."

Ezra 3:7

"So, they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from King Cyrus of Persia."

In the 5th/4th century BCE, a shift in power took place in the Mediterranean region. The Greeks replaced the Phoenicians, who lost much of their influence. This loss is also reflected in the Old Testament. In some later passages, they are mentioned together – they are no longer distinguished from one another; they form a hendiadys that refers to Phoenicia as a whole. This is particularly true of the following two passages, which belong to the late Achaemenid and early Hellenistic periods respectively:

Joel 3:4

"What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily."

Zechariah 9:2

"Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise."

The joint mention of Tyre and Sidon is attested in the New Testament too:

Matthew 11:21–22 (cf. Luke 10:13–14)

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you."

Matthew 15:21

"Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon."

Luke 6:17

"He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon."

And finally Acts 12:20

"Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So, they came to him in a body; and after winning over Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for a reconciliation, because their country depended on the king's country for food."

The passages clearly show that the Phoenicians did not enjoy the best reputation. The reasons for this will not be discussed here.

I began my lecture with the rivalry that existed between Tyre and Sidon. I will now return to this briefly. It is also evident in original Phoenician sources, namely on coin inscriptions. On these, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre claim to be the mother in Canaan, respectively the mother of the Sidonians – and of a whole series of cities and colonies. I will quote three of them, without commenting on their historical context:

*ll'dk' 'mbkn 'n* of Laodicea, (the) mother in Canaan

*lšr 'm šdnm*: from Tyre, mother of the Sidonians (the Phoenicians?)

*lšdnm 'm km' 'p' kt šr* the Sidonians, mother(town) of Cambe, Hippo, Kition, Tyre

The noun *'em*, mother, is associated not only with a claim to priority in terms of time, but also with a claim to primacy. The Phoenician *'em* corresponds to the Greek μητροπολις, “mother city,” a noun that was often used in the past and is still used today to refer to large, important cities in general. The expression appears frequently in the works of Pindar and Herodotus, i.e., in the 5th century BCE. However, I wonder whether the Phoenician *'em* is not older than its Greek counterpart in this usage – after all, the Tyrians (and Sidonians) preceded the Greeks as colonizers.

In the Septuagint, the term *metropolis* refers to large cities, i.e., Gibeon and Hebron. Special attention should be paid to 2Samuel 20:19. Joab besieges the city of Abel Beth-Macha and wants to destroy it; he has already built a ramp. At that moment, the *wise woman* of Abel Beth-Macha approaches him and addresses him the following reproach – the exact context need not be discussed here:

“I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel; you seek to destroy a city and mother (עיר ואם) (*ir w<sup>e</sup>' em/ πόλις και μητρόπολις*) in Israel; why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord?”

It is interesting that *em* is translated here as *metropolis*, which is the same meaning as the lemma in Phoenician.

I had already chosen the title for today’s lecture and had already written half of it when I suddenly realized that there is a counterpart to Tyre and Sidon in Saxony: Leipzig and Dresden.

The two cities have been teasing each other not only since the revival of the Free State of Saxony in the post-reunification period. I do not know whether Leipzig has already come to terms with the fact that it lost the battle for the status of capital – albeit by a narrow margin. However, people from Leipzig have often pointed out to me that their city has made industry boom and thus contributes significantly more to Saxony’s tax revenue than Dresden. Solid/boisterous, *Frauenkirche* versus *Thomaskirche* and Bach. Pompous celebrations/ sober work, and on and on. These are just a few of the striking contrasts that circulate about Leipzig and Dresden. When the local city promoted tourism with the slogan “Leipzig is coming (Leipzig kommt),” its competitor responded with the following sentence: “Dresden is already here (Dresden ist schon hier).”

I try to be a flattering mediator and expect to be successful in this role. You remember Zechariah 9:2: “Tyre and Sidon, yes, they are very wise.” Let us reformulate this sentence: Leipzig and Dresden, they are very wise. In any case, this praise applies to today’s honoree, whom I thank for all her *chokmah* (wisdom), from which we have long benefited and which we will hopefully continue to enjoy for a long time to come. Thank you.