**Phoenician Networks in the Mediterranean: From Greece to Iberia, CA. 700-500 BCE**

**Overview**

Between the eighth and early sixth centuries BCE, Greek culture bears the clear imprint of its older neighbors in the Near East, the result of a process of contact and adaptation conventionally called the “orientalizing” phase or even “orientalizing revolution.” Monumental temples and sculpture, vase decoration, alphabetic writing, and mythological motifs all reflect fertile contact with the cultures of Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. The Phoenicians in particular, in their mercantile and colonial expansion throughout the Mediterranean, were crucial agents in this story of encounters. They are in fact held to be responsible for contemporaneous orientalizing phases in Italy (Etruria, Sardinia), ancient Iberia (Tartessos in modern Spain and Portugal), and in North Africa. In a novel monograph, I will offer the first systematic, comparative treatment of this transformative period across the Mediterranean, from Greece to Iberia, focusing on the contexts and outcomes of cultural contact. My study is multi-disciplinary at heart. It considers the adoption and marketing of tangible as well as intangible (literary, ideological) cultural capital of “oriental” stock as part of the transformative process through which Iron Age societies along the Mediterranean entered for the first time a new transnational (“global”) cultural and economic network.

**Methodological Issues, Scope, and Contribution**

The term “orientalizing” has been criticized for its vagueness. It evokes an Orient that is itself a construct, occluding the variety of cultures in the Near East and, therefore, falling into the trap of orientalism. If we think about it in a different way, however, it is a surprisingly appropriate term to label what was a rather idiosyncratic trend that evoked and appropriated an eclectic set of features loosely associated at the time with the Near East, conforming with stereotypes of eastern wealth and prestige at work among the ancient Greeks and others. As I will argue, this phenomenon is easier to grasp if we think about it from the Phoenicians’ perspective. These Levantines thrived precisely because they provided what their market coveted, selectively exploiting perceptions of what was “international” and sophisticated, which at that time overlapped considerably with what we classify as “oriental.” Modern efforts to locate the origins of the different oriental models (Assyrian, Egyptian, etc.) are not useless, but they distract us from the fact that the Phoenicians (whose culture was itself heavily dependent on Syrian and Egyptian models) targeted their products at increasingly urban and competitive elites, eager for the import and imitation of “foreign” artifacts, whose diverse origins or artistic roots they probably did not distinguish. In turn, this market triggered the manufacture of new forms of art that were both local and orientalizing. In other words, we struggle with the concept because we forget that branding and stereotypes are not the exclusive byproducts of modernity. What we see as the orientalizing phenomenon is but a manifestation of an increasing (and desired) interconnectedness of cultures across the Iron Age Mediterranean as they strove to “catch up” to the sophisticated urban, literate, eastern civilizations. The Phoenicians, indeed, rode this wave like no others. This phenomenon, moreover, reaches beyond aesthetics into all realms of culture (writing, mythology and religion, philosophy and political institutions). This is especially evident in the case of Greece, where literary production exploded in the Archaic period and, most importantly, where we have a textual tradition that preserved this legacy. In turn, the oversimplified “exceptionalism” of Greek culture and its study in isolation from other cultures that shared in the “orientalizing frenzy” has led to incoherence. While Etruscan civilization, for instance, is on the radar of classicists, the proto-historical cultures of Sardinia (and other islands) and the Iberian Peninsula are far less familiar outside the archaeological establishment of those regions, especially in the English-speaking world. These areas, nonetheless, present fascinating cases of indigenous civilizations transformed by early Phoenician presence since the eighth century BCE. Tartessos, for instance, was known in classical sources (e.g., Herodotus) as a wealthy civilization and was in fact the first urban and literate society of the
“far west,” as archaeologists have shown (e.g., Naville 2007, Dietler and López-Ruiz 2009). These and other cases showcase a variety of scenarios and modes of contact and hybridization, ranging from direct colonization to more indirect reactions in the hinterland.

As I will discuss, the lack of communication among academic camps has consequences inside and outside the strictly academic field. In Greece, the orientalizing phenomenon is seen as an archaic (preclassical) artistic “phase” and, generally, little effort is made to discuss the mechanics of cultural interaction and integration or to engage with the difficult question of the human interaction or the cultural change behind the materials (who was doing what and why). In the western Mediterranean, by contrast, where evidence is mostly archaeological and Phoenician colonies are abundantly attested, anthropologically-oriented narratives dominate, and the phenomenon is analyzed from a post-colonial stance, focusing on the negotiation between indigenous peoples and newcomers in a variety of scenarios, from colonies proper to less structured situations (e.g., Celestino et al. 2005, 2008, Dietler and López-Ruiz 2009, Dietler 2010). The Greek evidence, moreover, is itself rarely analyzed in its totality (using both archaeology and literature) and even more rarely in comparison to other cultures of the Mediterranean. An exception is the volume by Riva and Vella (2006), which juxtaposes excellent cases-studies, though not integrated in an overarching analysis. In other words, studies of ancient colonization and cultural contact are reaching new levels in terms of both accumulation of archaeological information and analytical sophisticated (Gosden 2004, Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002), while classicists are urgently calling for new models (Ulf 2009, Malkin 2011, whose application of “network theory” is, however, limited to the Greeks). Two recent volumes on the Punic Mediterranean (Quinn and Vella, 2014) and on Phoenician religion in the Hellenistic eastern Mediterranean (Bonnet 2015) also invite a timely dialogue between Hellenists and Semitists, but focus on two separate ends of the Mediterranean and on the Hellenistic period. The 2014 Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibit From Assyria to Iberia recently highlighted this emerging view of an earlier “orientalizing” continuum. But an overarching comparative study is still missing, despite our better understanding of specific aspects and areas of this contact. This is, in part, because very few scholars have their eye on the multiple disciplines and geographical areas involved (see “competences and skills” below). My work, thus, will help articulate the dynamics and consequences of these contacts with Levantine cultures, which paved the way for the emergence of a “new Mediterranean” populated by urban, literate polities, at the dawn of the European historical periods, with a treatment of the Phoenician agency that is attentive to the diversity of local reactions and mechanisms of adaptation deployed in different encounters, including the Greek world.

An evaluation of this phenomenon that ranges from the Aegean to the Atlantic will have deeper repercussions than a mere overview of artistic and technological changes. My study will to a degree shake our view of the “Classics” in an era that needs such reevaluation. Rethinking the orientalizing phenomenon from this western end requires us to reconsider historiographical inertias incrusteed in our field and beyond: I contend that classicists are knowingly or unknowingly carried away by teleological views of Greek history (Classical Greece as the cradle of western civilization) and by the ingrained image of Greek culture as an impermeable and autonomous entity. This view ultimately springs from the artificial dichotomy between Classical (Indo-European) and Near Eastern (Semitic) languages and cultures, perpetuated ideologically and institutionally during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and encouraged by the historically conflictive relationship between the West and the Near East. When it comes to Greece, the weight of the classical heritage and the absence of Phoenician colonization proper have led scholars to downplay the direct contact with Near Eastern individuals, reducing it to superficial exchanges at “neutral” meeting points (Crete, Cyprus, Sicily). In stark contrast, in the central and western Mediterranean, the Phoenicians and other Easterners are viewed as cultural agents. This imbalance, in part due to a lack of engagement with Spanish and Portuguese scholarship, calls for a comparative study that is sensitive to these historical narratives. By looking east and west and considering colonial and non-colonial interaction, we can acquire a more nuanced and humbling view of proto-historic Greece and its relation to contemporaneous peoples undergoing similar transformations. Moreover, this study will add to the growing interest in Mediterranean Studies in the US and abroad (cf. Horden and Purcell 2000, Harris...
2005, Abulafia 2011), while it will help balance the predominantly Medieval and early modern focus of this revival of Braudel’s *longue durée*.

**AUDIENCE, WORKING PLAN**

Among classicists, this book will stand alone in its discussion of the orientalizing phenomenon, never treated in a monograph with a comparative scope. After the works by Walter Burkert (1992, 2004), Sarah Morris (1992), and Martin West (1997), among others, set the pace for the study of Greek and Near Eastern connections, recent monographs on Greek and Near Eastern myth and literature (Bremmer 2008, Lane Fox 2008, López-Ruiz 2010, Louden 2011) and on material culture (Gunter 2009, Brissart 2011) speak to a growing interest in the question. My monograph will bridge the eastern and western ends of the Mediterranean and will integrate material and literary evidence, both aspects that I have worked on in the past. Thus the monograph will appeal to archaeologists, historians, and philologists, and those interested in colonization, ethnicity, and cultural contact. Avoiding a mere synthesis of the evidence, which would result in a catalogue of sites, texts, and scholarship, I will present a problem-oriented narrative revolving around important questions and current debates. The book is organized around topics (chapters) that cross geographical and disciplinary boundaries:

1. The problem: How to conceptualize the “orientalizing” phenomenon (types of evidence; methodological issues; discursive “traps” imbedded in disciplinary and cultural inertias).
2. Phoenician and Greek networks (colonial and non-colonial modes of contact; the challenges of defining local and “oriental”/“foreign” identities).
3. The loci of contact (geographical areas; modes of exchange, literary and material evidence).
4. Modern scholarship and national discourses (how they shape our interpretations of the orientalizing evidence, e.g. in Greece vs. Spain, Italy).
5. A Proposal: to foster a more integrated view of the “orientalizing” phenomenon from Greece to Iberia, articulating with similar nuance the outcomes of the Phoenician legacy in this first cultural continuum of the “pre-classical” Mediterranean.

**COMPETENCES, SKILLS, ACCESS**

I am in an exceptionally good position to write this book, as a classicist also trained in Northwest Semitic languages. I have already published widely on the orientalizing Greek world and on the Phoenicians in the west, and I am co-author of the first English monograph on *Tartessos and the Phoenicians in Ancient Iberia* (in press). I have also drafted a proposal under review for an *Oxford Handbook of the Phoenicians*. My easy access to European scholarship and resources (e.g., Italy, Spain, Portugal), where the bulk of research on Phoenician colonization comes from, is also an advantage. To sum up, I have been working on different aspects of this topic for more than a decade and it is time to put it all together. I have received institutional support for research related to this project (Virginia Hull Award, 2008), and I have obtained a grant from the College of Arts and Humanities to conduct research travel in the Central Mediterranean during the Summer 2015. I will focus on areas where Greek, Phoenician, and indigenous cultures overlapped, especially in southern Italy and Sardinia, having already spent time in Greece, the Levant, and Spain. Receiving NEH support will allow me to concentrate in the writing of this monograph for an entire academic year. I will work at my Ohio residence, but will also spend at least two weeks each semester in the archives of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, to ensure my research and bibliography are the most updated.

**FINAL PRODUCT AND DISSEMINATION**

This research time will be dedicated to produce a monograph, to be published by an academic press. Calling attention to this cultural horizon, where our concepts of the “Classical” and the “oriental” are questioned, may contribute to the goals of “THE COMMON GOOD: THE HUMANITIES IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE” initiative. My discussion should stimulate self-reflection in a time when issues of ethnicity and migration are under special scrutiny, and, on the other hand, when political conflict inflected with religious-ethnic overtones make the rift between the “West” and the “Levant” especially poignant.