The small states of Syria and the two Israelite kingdoms laid aside their rivalries to mount a joint resistance to the Neo-Assyrian Empire, but to no avail. In 721 B.C.E. the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and deported much of its population to the east. New settlers were brought in from Syria, Babylon, and Iran, changing the area’s ethnic, cultural, and religious character and removing it from the mainstream of Jewish history. The kingdom of Judah survived for more than a century longer, sometimes rebelling, sometimes paying tribute to the Assyrians or the Neo-Babylonian kingdom (626–539 B.C.E.) that succeeded them. When the Neo-Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar² captured Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., he destroyed the Temple and deported to Babylon the royal family, the aristocracy, and many skilled workers such as blacksmiths and scribes.

The deportees prospered so well in their new home “by the waters of Babylon” that half a century later most of their descendants refused the offer of the Persian monarch Cyrus (see Chapter 4) to return to their homeland. This was the origin of the Diaspora—a Greek word meaning “dispersion” or “scattering.” This dispersion outside the homeland of many Jews—as we may now call these people, since an independent Israel no longer existed—continues to this day. To maintain their religion and culture outside the homeland, the Diaspora communities developed institutions like the synagogue (Greek for “bringing together”), a communal meeting place that served religious, educational, and social functions.

Several groups of Babylonian Jews did make the long trek back to Judah, where they met with a cold reception from the local population. Persevering, they rebuilt the Temple in modest form and drafted the Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomist is Greek for “second set of laws”) of law and conduct. The fifth century B.C.E. also saw the compilation of much of the Hebrew Bible in roughly its present form.

The loss of political autonomy and the experience of exile had sharpened Jewish identity, with an unyielding monotheism as the core belief. Jews lived by a rigid set of rules. Dietary restrictions forbade the eating of pork and shellfish and mandated that meat and dairy products not be consumed together. Ritual baths were used to achieve spiritual purity, and women were required to take ritual baths after menstruation. The Jews venerated the Sabbath (Saturday, the seventh day of the week) by refraining from work and from fighting, following the example of Yahweh, who, according to the Bible, rested on the seventh day after creating the world (this is the origin of the concept of the weekend). These strictures and others, including a ban on marrying non-Jews, tended to isolate the Jews from other peoples, but they also fostered a powerful sense of community and the belief that they were protected by a watchful and beneficent deity.

**PHOENICIA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN, 1200–500 B.C.E.**

While the Israelite tribes were being forged into a united kingdom, the people who occupied the coast of the Mediterranean to the north were developing their own distinctive civilization. Historians refer to a major element of the ancient population of Syria-Palestine as Phoenicians, though they referred to themselves as “Canaanites.” Canaanites. Despite the sparse written record and the disturbance of the archaeological record by frequent migrations and invasions, enough of their history survives to reveal major transformations.

The Phoenician City-States

When the eastern Mediterranean entered a period of violent upheaval and mass migrations around 1200 B.C.E. (discussed earlier), many Canaanite settlements were destroyed. Aramaens—nomadic pastoralists similar to the early Israelites—migrated into the interior portions of Syria.

By 1100 B.C.E. Canaanite territory had shrunk to a narrow strip of present-day Lebanon between the mountains and the sea (see Map 3.4). The inhabitants of this densely populated area adopted new political forms and turned to seaborne commerce and new kinds of manufacture for their survival. Sometime after 1000 B.C.E. the Canaanites encountered the Greeks, who referred to them as Phoinikes, or Phoenicians. The term may mean “red men” and refer to the color of their skin, or it may refer to the highly valued purple dye they extracted from the murex snail (see Environment and Technology: Ancient Textiles and Dyes).

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Nebuchadnezzar (NAB-oo-khahd-nee-uhm)
Diaspora (die-ASS-pehr-uh)
Deuteronomic (duh-tuhr-uh-NAHM-ik)

Phoenician (fi-NEE-shun) Aramaean (ah-ruh-MAY-uhm)
Ancient Textiles and Dyes

Throughout human history the production of textiles—cloth for clothing, blankets, carpets, and coverings of various sorts—may have required an expenditure of human labor second only to the amount of work necessary to provide food. Nevertheless, textile production in antiquity has left few traces in the archaeological record. The plant fibers and animal hair used for cloth are organic and quickly decompose except in rare and special circumstances. Some textile remains have been found in the hot, dry conditions of Egypt, the cool, and Andes of South America, and the peat bogs of northern Europe. But most of our knowledge of ancient textiles depends on the discovery of equipment used in textile production—such as spindles, loom weights, and dyeing vats—and on pictorial representations and descriptions in texts.

The production of cloth usually has been the work of women for a simple but important reason. Responsibility for child-rearing limits women's ability to participate in other activities but does not consume all their time and energy. In many societies textile production has been complementary to child-rearing activities, for it can be done in the home, is relatively safe, does not require great concentration, and can be interrupted without consequence. For many thousands of years cloth production has been one of the great common experiences of women around the globe. The growing and harvesting of plants such as cotton or flax (from which linen is made) and the shearing of wool from sheep and, in the Andes, llamas are outdoor activities, but the subsequent stages of production can be carried out inside the home. The basic methods of textile production did not change much from early antiquity until the late eighteenth century C.E., when the fabrication of textiles was transferred to mills and mass production began.

When textile production has been considered "women's work," most of the output has been for household consumption.

One exception was in the early civilizations of Peru, where women weavers developed new raw materials, new techniques, and new decorative motifs around three thousand years ago. They began to use the wool of llamas and alpacas in addition to cotton. Three women worked side by side and passed the weaving from hand to hand in order to overcome limitations to the width of woven fabric imposed by the back-strap loom. Women weavers also introduced embroidery, and they decorated garments with new religious motifs, such as the jaguar-god of Chavin. Their high-quality textiles were given as tribute to the elite and were used in trade to acquire luxury goods as well as dyes and metals.

More typically, men dominated commercial production. In ancient Phoenicia, fine textiles with bright, permanent colors became a major export product. These striking colors were produced by dyes derived from several species of snail. Most prized was the red-purple known as Tyrian purple because Tyre was the major source. Persian and Hellenistic kings wore robes dyed this color, and a white toga with a purple border was the sign of a Roman senator.

The production of Tyrian purple was an exceedingly laborious process. The spiny dye-murex snail lives on the sandy Mediterranean bottom at depths ranging from 30 to 500 feet (10 to 150 meters). Nine thousand snails were needed to produce 1 gram (0.035 ounce) of dye. The dye was made from a colorless liquid in the snail's hypobranchial gland. The gland sacs were removed, crushed, soaked with salt, and exposed to sunlight and air for some days; then they were subject to controlled boiling and heating.

Huge mounds of broken shells on the Phoenician coast are testimony to the ancient industry. It is likely that this snail was rendered nearly extinct at many locations, and some scholars have speculated that Phoenician colonization in the Mediterranean may have been motivated in part by the search for new sources of snails.
Rivers and rocky spurs of Mount Lebanon sliced the coastal plain into a series of small city-states, chief among them Byblos, Berytus, Sidon, and Tyre. A thriving trade in raw materials (cedar and pine, metals, incense, papyrus), foodstuffs (wine, spices, salted fish), and crafted luxury goods (textiles, carved ivory, glass) brought considerable wealth to the Phoenician city-states and gave them an important role in international politics.

The Phoenicians developed earlier Canaanite models into an “alphabetic” system of writing with about two dozen symbols, in which each symbol represented a sound. (The Phoenicians represented only consonants, leaving the vowel sounds to be inferred by the reader. The Greeks added symbols for vowel sounds, thereby creating the first truly alphabetic system of writing—see Chapter 4.) Little Phoenician writing survives, however, probably because scribes used perishable papyrus. Some information in Greek and Roman documents may be based on Phoenician sources.

Before 1000 B.C.E. Byblos had been the most important Phoenician city-state. It was a distribution center for cedar timber from the slopes of Mount Lebanon and for papyrus from Egypt. The English word bible comes from the Greek biblion, meaning “book written on papyrus from Byblos.” After 1000 B.C.E. Tyre, in southern Lebanon, surpassed Byblos. King Hiram, who came to power in 969 B.C.E., was responsible for Tyre’s rise to prominence. According to the Bible, he formed a close alliance with the Israelite king Solomon and provided skilled Phoenician craftsmen and cedar wood for building the Temple in Jerusalem. In return, Tyre gained access to silver, food, and trade routes to the east and south. In the 800s B.C.E. Tyre took control of nearby Sidon and monopolized the Mediterranean coastal trade.

Located on an offshore island, Tyre was practically impregnable. It had two harbors, one facing north, the other south, connected by a canal. The city boasted a large marketplace, a magnificent palace complex with treasury and archives, and temples to the gods. Some of its thirty thousand or more inhabitants lived in suburbs on the mainland. Its one weakness was its dependence on the mainland for food and fresh water.

Little is known about the internal affairs of Tyre and other Phoenician cities. The names of a series of kings are preserved, and the scant evidence suggests that the political arena was dominated by leading merchant families. Between the ninth and seventh centuries B.C.E. the Phoenician city-states contended with Assyrian aggression, followed in the sixth century B.C.E. by the expansion

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**Phoenician Ivory Panel, Ninth to Eighth Century B.C.E.** This panel, originally covered with gold leaf and inlaid with red carnelian and blue lapis lazuli, depicts a lioness devouring a boy. Produced in Phoenicia, perhaps as tribute for the Assyrian king, it was probably part of a wooden throne. It was found in a well in the palace area of the Assyrian capital Nineveh, where it was discarded when the city was destroyed in the late seventh century B.C.E. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom and later the Persian Empire (see Chapter 4).

**Expansion into the Mediterranean** After 900 B.C.E. Tyre began to turn its attention westward, establishing colonies on Cyprus, a copper-rich island 100 miles (161 kilometers) from the Syrian coast (see Map 3.4) that was strategically located on a major trade route. Phoenician merchants sailing into the Aegean Sea are mentioned in Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey around 700 B.C.E. By that time a string of settlements in the western Mediterranean formed a “Phoenician triangle” composed of the North African coast from western Libya to Morocco; the south and southeast coast of Spain; including Gades (modern Cadiz) on the Strait of Gibraltar, controlling passage between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean; and the islands of Sardinia,

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Byblos (BIB-los)  Berytus (buh-RIE-tus)  Sidon (SIE-duhn)  Gades (GAH-days)  Cadiz (kuh-DEEZ)
Sicily, and Malta off the coast of Italy (see Map 3.5). Many of these new settlements were situated on promontories or offshore islands in imitation of Tyre. The Phoenician trading network spanned the entire Mediterranean.

Overseas settlement provided an outlet for excess population, new sources of trade goods, and new trading partners. Tyre maintained its autonomy until 701 B.C.E. by paying tribute to the Assyrian kings. In that year it finally fell to an Assyrian army that stripped it of much of its territory and population, allowing Sidon to become the leading city in Phoenicia.

The Phoenicians' activities in the western Mediterranean often brought them into conflict with the Greeks, who were also expanding trade and establishing colonies. The focal point of this rivalry was Sicily. Phoenicians occupied the western end of the island, Greeks its eastern and central parts. For centuries Greeks and Phoenicians fought for control of Sicily in some of the most savage wars in the history of the ancient Mediterranean. The Phoenicians controlled all of Sicily by the mid-third century B.C.E.

Carthage's Commercial Empire

Historians know far more about Carthage and the other Phoenician colonies than they do about the Phoenician homeland. Much of this knowledge comes from Greek and Roman reports of their wars with the western Phoenician communities. For example, the account of the origins of Carthage that begins this chapter comes from Roman sources (most famously Virgil's epic poem The Aeneid) but probably is based on a Carthaginian original. Archaeological excavation has roughly confirmed the city's traditional foundation date of 814 B.C.E. Just outside the present-day city of Tunis in Tunisia, Carthage controlled the middle portion of the Mediterranean where Europe comes closest to Africa. The new settlement grew rapidly and soon dominated other Phoenician colonies in the west.

Located on a narrow promontory jutting into the Mediterranean, Carthage stretched between Byrsa, the

Byrsa (BUHR-suh)
original hilltop citadel of the community, and a double harbor. The inner harbor could accommodate up to 220 warships. A watchtower allowed surveillance of the surrounding area, and high walls made it impossible to see in from the outside. The outer commercial harbor was filled with docks for merchant ships and shipyards. In case of attack, the harbor could be closed off by a huge iron chain.

Government offices ringed a large central square where magistrates heard legal cases outdoors. The inner city was a maze of narrow, winding streets, multistory apartment buildings, and sacred enclosures. Further out was a sprawling suburban district where the wealthy built spacious villas amid fields and vegetable gardens. This entire urban complex was enclosed by a wall 22 miles (35 kilometers) in length.

With a population of roughly 400,000, Carthage was one of the largest cities in the world by 500 B.C.E. The population was ethnically diverse, including people of Phoenician stock, indigenous peoples likely to have been the ancestors of modern-day Berbers, and immigrants from other Mediterranean lands and sub-Saharan Africa. Contrary to the story of Dido's reluctance to remarry, Phoenicians intermarried quite readily with other peoples.

Each year two "judges" were elected from upper-class families to serve as heads of state and carry out administrative and judicial functions. The real seat of power was the Senate, where members of the leading merchant families, who sat for life, formulated policy and directed the affairs of the state. An inner circle of thirty or so senators made the crucial decisions. From time to time the leadership convened an Assembly of the citizens to elect public officials or vote on important issues, particularly when the leaders were divided or wanted to stir up popular enthusiasm for some venture.

Carthaginian power rested on its navy, which dominated the western Mediterranean for centuries. Phoenician towns provided a chain of friendly ports. The Carthaginian fleet consisted of fast, maneuverable galleys—armed warships. A galley had a sturdy, pointed ram in front that could pierce the hull of an enemy vessel below the water line, while marines (soldiers aboard a ship) fired weapons. Innovations in the placement of benches and oars made room for 30, 50, and eventually as many as 170 rowers.

Carthaginian foreign policy reflected its economic interests. Protecting the sea-lanes, gaining access to raw materials, and fostering trade mattered most to the dominant merchant class. Indeed, Carthage claimed the waters of the western Mediterranean as its own. Foreign merchants were free to sail to Carthage to market their goods, but if they tried to operate on their own, they risked having their ships sunk by the Carthaginian navy. Treaties between Carthage and other states included formal recognition of this maritime commercial monopoly.

The archaeological record provides few clues about the commodities traded by the Carthaginians. Commerce may have included perishable goods—foodstuffs, textiles, animal skins, slaves—and raw metals such as silver, lead, iron, and tin, whose Carthaginian origin would not be evident. We know that Carthaginian ships carried goods manufactured elsewhere and that products brought to Carthage by foreign traders were reexported.

There is also evidence for trade with sub-Saharan Africa. Hannón, a Carthaginian captain of the fifth century B.C.E., claimed to have sailed through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Atlantic Ocean and to have explored the West African coast (see Map 3.5). Other Carthaginians explored the Atlantic coast of Spain and France and secured control of an important source of tin in the "Tin Islands," probably Cornwall in southwestern England.

**War and Religion**

Unlike Assyria, Carthage did not directly rule a large amount of territory. A belt of fertile land in northeastern Tunisia, worked by native peasants and imported slaves, provided a secure food supply. Beyond this core area the Carthaginians ruled most of their "empire" indirectly and allowed other Phoenician communities in the western Mediterranean to remain independent. These Phoenician communities looked to Carthage for military protection and followed its lead in foreign policy. Only Sardinia and southern Spain were put under the direct control of a Carthaginian governor and garrison, presumably to safeguard their agricultural, metal, and manpower resources.

Carthage's focus on trade may explain the unusual fact that citizens were not required to serve in the army; they were of more value in other capacities, such as trading activities and the navy. Since the indigenous North African population was not politically or militarily well organized, Carthage had little to fear from potential enemies close to home. When Carthage was drawn into a series of wars with the Greeks and Romans from the sixth through fourth centuries B.C.E., it relied on mercenaries from the most warlike peoples in its domain or from neighboring areas—Numidians from North Africa, Iberians from Spain, Gauls from France, and various Italian peoples. These well-paid mercenaries were under the command of Carthaginian officers.

Carthaginian religion fascinated Greek and Roman writers. Like the deities of Mesopotamia (see Chapter 1), the gods of the Carthaginians—chief among them Baal Hammon, a male storm-god, and Tanit, a female fertility

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Hanno (HAN-no)  Baal Hammon (BAH-ha-MOHN)
Tanit (TAH-nee)
The Tophet of Carthage  Here, from the seventh to second centuries B.C.E., the cremated bodies of sacrificed children were buried. Archaeological excavation has confirmed the claim in ancient sources that the Carthaginians sacrificed children to their gods at times of crisis. Stone markers, decorated with magical signs and symbols of divinities as well as family names, were placed over ceramic urns containing the ashes and charred bones of one or more infants or, occasionally, older children. (Martha Cooper/Peter Arnold, Inc.)

figure—were powerful and capricious entities who had to be appeased by anxious worshipers. Roman sources report that members of the Carthaginian elite would sacrifice their own male children in times of crisis. Excavations at Carthage and other western Phoenician towns have turned up tophets—walled enclosures where thousands of small, sealed urns containing the burned bones of children lay buried. Although some scholars argue that these were infants born prematurely or taken by childhood illnesses, most maintain that the western Phoenicians practiced child sacrifice on a more or less regular basis. Originally practiced by the upper classes, child sacrifice seems to have become more common and to have involved broader elements of the population after 400 B.C.E.

Failure and Transformation, 750–550 B.C.E.

The extension of Assyrian power over the entire Middle East had enormous consequences for all the peoples of this region and caused the stories of Mesopotamia, Israel, and Phoenicia to converge.

By 650 B.C.E. Assyria stood unchallenged in western Asia. But the arms race with Urartu, the frequent expensive campaigns, and the protection of lengthy borders had sapped Assyrian resources. Assyrian brutality and exploitation aroused the hatred of conquered peoples. At the same time, changes in the ethnic composition of the army and the population of the homeland had reduced popular support for the Assyrian state.

Two new political entities spearheaded resistance to Assyria. First, Babylonia had been revived by the Neo-Babylonian, or Chaldaean, dynasty (the Chaldaeans had infiltrated southern Mesopotamia around 1000 B.C.E.). Second, the Medes, an Iranian people, were extending their kingdom eastward across the Iranian Plateau in the seventh century B.C.E. The two powers launched a series of attacks on the Assyrian homeland that destroyed the chief cities by 612 B.C.E.

The rapidity of the Assyrian fall was stunning. The destruction systematically carried out by the victorious attackers led to the depopulation of northern Mesopotamia. Two centuries later, when a corps of Greek mercenaries passed by mounds that concealed the ruins of the Assyrian capitals, the Athenian chronicler Xenophon had no inkling that their empire had ever existed.

The Medes took over the Assyrian homeland and the northern steppe as far as eastern Anatolia, but most of the territory of the old empire fell to the Neo-Babylonian kingdom (626–539 B.C.E.), thanks to the energetic campaigns of kings Nabopolassar (r. 625–605 B.C.E.) and Nebuchadnezzar (r. 604–562 B.C.E.), Babylonia underwent a cultural renaissance. The city of Babylon was enlarged and adorned, becoming the greatest metropolis of the

Tophet (TOH-fet)