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Phoenicians on Displays: a Comparative Analysis of Perceptions of Phoenicians in Museums

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ABSTRACT

Phoenician archaeology has a long history of being defined and redefined. Up until today, academics and institutions often have variable approaches to and perceptions of Phoenician material culture. This history has impacted the treatment of this material culture in museums, resulting in very different approaches from one museum to the other. This paper presents a comparative approach to Phoenician collections on display in museums of different scales and in different countries, taking into considerations cues such as frequency and importance played by the Phoenicians within the larger context of the museum, the variable definitions of the word in each museum, and curatorial choices with the aim of understanding whether the scale of the museum is a key factor in its presentation of Phoenician collections.

Keywords: Museum; Phoenician; Perceptions; Displays; Interpretation

Introduction

Today, the Phoenicians are generally defined in academia as the population who occupied the central Levantine coast, stretching north from Arwad and south to the region around Dor during the Iron Age of that region (c. 1200-333 BCE). This definition often includes the colonies these people established along the coasts of the Mediterranean, referred to as the Punic world, beginning with the rise of Carthage in the 6th century BCE (Sommer 2007). However, this definition has not always been as

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clear cut as it appears, to the point that it is still being rethought today (see Vella 1996, Quinn 2018, Martin 2017).
In order to fully grasp the complexity of the matter, it is important to understand the history of defining the Phoenicians, noting that, first and foremost, the Phoenicians never referred to themselves as such (Aubet 2001). In fact, out of over 10,000 deciphered Phoenician inscriptions, the majority of which mention personal names and genealogies, none includes a self-referral as "Phoenician" (Quinn 2018). Rather, the term Phoenician was devised by the Greeks upon encountering Levantine traders in the Aegean (Sherratt 2010), and the overwhelming majority of ancient mentions of the term Phoenician comes from Greek and Latin texts (Niemeyer 2000). Despite this being a well established fact today, it has proven difficult to reconsider the term Phoenician, notably because of the complex network of identities in the Iron Age Mediterranean, and because of the long history of use of this term. Phoenician archaeology begins to take off in the 19th century, with European scholars encountering rather unfamiliar looking material in the Mediterranean, and often associating these artefacts with the term 'Oriental' or 'Phoenician,' based on their knowledge of the classical authors. Some of these objects were inscribed in Phoenician, a language already deciphered since the 1600s, and it therefore seemed legitimate to ascribe them to that culture. However, the vast majority of these artefacts were simply called Phoenician for lack of a better term, and because they displayed a hybridity of characteristics which would not allow them to fit into more traditional categories such as Egyptian or Greek (Gubel 1955, Moscati 1968). Thus, Phoenician style was created in the 19th century following an art historical study of artefacts often found outside any archaeological context.
This situation (admittedly very roughly sketched) provided the backdrop for what was to become Phoenician archaeology. Starting then, it became almost impossible to disentangle this body of material from its label. I am not arguing that every study on the Phoenicians is Orientalist, but that every study on the Phoenicians, this one included, was in some way influenced by Orientalism and 19th-century art history. Having said that, the Phoenicians were not a main focus for archaeologists, considered artistically inferior to the great civilisations of antiquity for a large part of the 20th century. This point of view is clear in Perrot and Chipiez's 1885 volume. In fact, it was not until the 1960s, with the work of scholars such as Niemeyer and Moscati, that Phoenician archaeology experienced a sort of renaissance. Moscati was the first to curate an exhibition focused solely on the Phoenicians, and established the definition we know today (Salle 1995). This renaissance was the catalyst for much rethinking of the Phoenicians, with new monographs and handbooks published regularly up until today.
Throughout the course of the past couple of centuries, Phoenician material has wound up in several museum collections around the world. Museum interpretation is, of course, not a floating entity detached from archaeological methods, trends, and ideas. Despite the fact that they are slow moving institutions, museums are nonetheless influenced by major tendencies arising from archaeology and academia (Knell, MacLeod and Watson 2007). Throughout time, they are both witnesses of and vectors for these tendencies, shifting and updating their displays to the rhythm of new discoveries, refuted theories, and reinterpreted themes. However, they are not only influenced by the academic world. In fact, the importance of museums lies exactly

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within the fact that they are at the intersection between academia and audiences within ever changing socio-political climates (Falk and Dierking 2016). These combined factors are the main stakeholders shaping the displays of museums. Those will inevitably have affected the way in which Phoenician collections have been displayed in various museums, leading up to how they are presented today. This paper therefore seeks to delve deeper into the current displays of Phoenician collections by examining case studies of museums of different scales. Taking into consideration the contextuality of each museum and its collection, I will consider whether the definition of the term Phoenician, the complexity of which is now clear, varies according to the scale of the museum.
This paper stems from field research conducted within the framework of my PhD thesis at the University of Sheffield, which takes a deeper look at perceptions of the Phoenicians both in museums and within literature. I visited a number of museums playing hosts to Phoenician collections and conducted informal interviews with curators in order to further understand the rationale behind the displays. In this paper, I have selected six diverse case studies arranged by museum scale in order to assess whether this is a factor affecting the definition of Phoenician in museums. I will therefore begin with international museums, such as the Louvre and the British Museum, then move on to the national museums of Lebanon and Malta, before looking at site/regional museums in Cyprus and Spain.

1. International Museums

As a result of acquisitions, archaeological missions, and colonialism, much Phoenician material is at home in some of the world's large international museums including the Louvre, British Museum, or Metropolitan Museum of Art. These museums, also referred to in scholarship as 'universal museums,' exhibit vast and varied collections, often not limited to archaeology. Initially conceived as exclusive places for an educated elite, they have now evolved to perceive themselves as universal hubs of learning (O'Neill 2004). With their collections amounting to thousands of objects ranging from Renaissance sculpture to indigenous ethnographic collections, how do these museums integrate Phoenician material into their ecosystems?
Both the Louvre and the British Museum are subdivided into nine departments, yet their spatial organisation is rather different. Because the British Museum's collection is mainly composed of archaeological materials, its primary division is regional, with each area occupying its own aisle of the museum. The Louvre on the other hand, possesses a large art collection which inevitably leads to a first distinction between art and archaeology. On a second level, the collection is divided by region, and as in the British Museum, the final level of display is either by material or by theme.
In both these museums, the Phoenician material belongs to the Near Eastern department (Oriental Antiquities for the Louvre and Middle East for the British Museum). At the British Museum, however, the material from Cyprus, often related to Phoenician collections, belongs to the department of Greece and Rome, whereas it is part of Oriental Antiquities at the Louvre. The British Museum still shows a clear effort

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to relate relevant parts of the Cypriot display to the Phoenician material, despite the fact that it is part of a different department, linking it back to the Phoenician display in its labeling. Despite these discrepancies, the Phoenician and Cypriot collections are roughly located within the same area in both museums. However, the navigation differs greatly between the two museums. In order to take in the entirety of the Phoenician collection at the Louvre, one has to traverse a total of six galleries, in a discontinuous trail interrupted by displays on Palmyra and ancient Arabia. At the British Museum on the other hand, all the Phoenician material currently on display (apart from a sarcophagus and an inscribed stele) is concentrated in a single showcase located within one of the three ancient Levantine galleries. This leads to two entirely different visitor experiences: while at the British Museum one would be able to take in the display almost in one look, it would be a much lengthier process at the Louvre. In that sense, the experience of the Phoenician displays at the British Museum is quite condensed: the singular showcase features a range of materials and techniques the Phoenicians were famous for, and the labeling offers a short but efficient summary. The Louvre, on the other hand, presents a much larger variety of material organised across the galleries according to geographical location rather than the thematic approach within the British Museum showcase. Moreover, because the Louvre houses many larger objects such as stelai, sarcophagi, and architectural elements, they tend to hold visitors' attention, whereas the showcase at the British Museum calls for a focus on smaller artefacts.
These divergent approaches are the result of a number of factors, the most straightforward of which is the sheer difference between the size of the Phoenician collections in each of these museums. As a consequence of the French occupation of Lebanon and Tunisia as well as the French enthusiasm for Phoenician archaeology resulting in several archaeological missions, the Phoenician collection of the Louvre has become quite large. The majority of the Phoenician material at the British Museum however, comes from Tharros and therefore it cannot compete with that of the Louvre in terms of size. This difference in the size of the collections is not only expressed in its repartition within the museum, but also in the way the word Phoenician itself is defined. At the Louvre, it is used to refer to objects dating from 1200 BCE to 200 CE, whereas at the British Museum it is limited to the conventional definition of 1200 to 300 BCE (although the museum does not actually have any material from the 4th century BCE on display). Aside from being a product of the difference in collection size, another factor influencing the definition of the term Phoenician in both of these museums can be traced back to archaeological thought. As argued above, the term Phoenician prior to the mid 20th century was quite vague and could stand for anything that looked unconventional. Given the long time span covered by this term at the Louvre, it seems as if this museum has not necessarily updated its definition to match the one currently used. More precisely, the Louvre uses Phoenicia as a provenance on its labeling for objects up to the 2nd century CE. As such, it is using this term more as a geographical designation than a cultural one, the way the British Museum does for example. In a museum where the Phoenician material is not displayed in a continuum, this can help visitors situate themselves, at least spatially, compared to the (very large) amount of material from other locations and time periods exhibited nearby.

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And, because the British Museum has a much smaller amount of Phoenician material on display, it is easier to situate it within the broader context of the museum. The labeling of the material sends the visitor to other showcases in the same gallery, making the continuity of some aspects of jewelry making (in this particular case) apparent. In fact, the British Museum manages to tie its collection together across galleries and departments. The famous ivories from Nimrud, for instance, are on display both in the Phoenician showcase and in the Assyrian galleries, connecting material culture and technology. A certain group of these objects used as furniture fittings and ornaments in the royal palaces of Assyria has been defined as Phoenician based on this style (for a critique, see Feldman 2014), and although they have not been found in Phoenician territory, the British Museum is able to express this link by including them in both displays. In comparison, some parts of the Louvre can look like a random accumulation of objects. One must, however, keep in mind the fundamental difference between the two buildings: while the British Museum was designed to be a museum and therefore can utilise its spaces in their primary functions as galleries and build strong links between them, the Louvre was initially a palace and therefore has to adapt its displays to the preexisting layout of the building, often divided in many separate rooms.
One main, common characteristic of these two international museums is that the Phoenician material does not take central stage in either of them, despite the fact that they both host some of the most iconic objects associated with the Phoenicians, from the Nimrud ivories to the cippus of Malta and the sarcophagus of Eshmunazar. In fact, it can be safe to assume that visitors who go to the Louvre or the British Museum with the intention or even expectation to see the Phoenician material are rare. However, because of its location in both museums, they will very likely come across it if they visit the Near Eastern galleries. This is where the similarities between these two museums end. The different sizes of the Phoenician collections in the Louvre and the British Museum lead to completely different approaches, both in definitions and displays: the Louvre with a much larger timespan and the British Museum with a better ability to link the Phoenician material to the remainder of the collection.

2. National Museums

The above observations call for an examination of museums of a smaller scale. From international 'superpower' museums, I will now move on to national museums whose collections are limited to material from their home country. These museums are still relatively large in scale and usually host the largest archaeological collections of their respective countries. The two museums I have chosen to focus on in the following segment are this time located in modern countries that the Phoenicians were established in during Antiquity: the National Museum of Beirut (Lebanon) and the National Archaeology Museum of Valletta (Malta). Focusing on Lebanon was an obvious choice since it corresponds roughly to the homeland of the Phoenicians, who play an important part in modern Lebanese identities (Kaufman 2001). Malta, on the other hand, has a unique prehistoric heritage and a rich Christian history, which can

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sometimes take prevalence over the Phoenician occupational phase of the island. It is acknowledged and taught, especially since the Phoenician phase marks the start of literacy and therefore history on the island (Sagona 2002) but, unlike in Lebanon, it is not necessarily perceived as a source of national pride. It would therefore be interesting to investigate perceptions of the Phoenicians in the national museums of these two countries in order to contrast them with the international museums but also to compare them to each other.

As expected, both national museums have a more grounded definition of the Phoenicians than the international museums. In Malta, they correspond to the period ranging from 800 to 200 BCE, while in Lebanon the Phoenician period matches the Iron Age, from 1200 to 333 BCE. These are definite temporal definitions, with all the material referred to as Phoenician in these museums dated back to these periods; it comes in contrast to the sometimes vague utilisation of the word Phoenician encountered in international museums. This is normal considering that the national museums only exhibit material from their own countries which have archaeologically defined occupation phases that match the aforementioned dates. This is particularly clear in Malta: since it was a colony, there is a stark change in material culture starting in the 8th century BCE, which makes the Phoenician presence on the island easy to detect (Sagona 2008), and therefore the dating and definition of the period in the national museum quite straightforward. In Lebanon, the date of the conquest of Alexander the Great (333 BCE) marks the official end of the Phoenician period (although Hellenism is a phenomenon that begins much earlier than this, see Martin 2017), but the beginning of the Phoenician period is a blurrier line. It is now clear that the Phoenicians were not a new population group that emerged at the beginning of the Iron Age, as much of their material culture is quite continuous from that of the Late Bronze Age (Aruz et al. 2014, Tubb 2014, Fontan and LeMeaux 2007). This strong argument for continuity means that they cannot be treated as an entirely separate entity in the Levant, and the Beirut national museum is quite aware of this. There, the word Phoenician is almost exclusively reserved to designate inscribed objects, and the overall labeling of the museum follows a system of absolute dates based on the traditional Three Ages rather than divisions relying on cultural terms such as Phoenician or Roman. Within this division, the Phoenicians are mentioned as coinciding with the Iron Age, but they are not treated as the defining element of that period. In Malta by contrast, the museum includes a Phoenician gallery (in a purple colour scheme) and there are plans for a future adjacent Punic gallery (S. Sulatana personal communication, May 2018). Interestingly enough, the culturally-based divisions at the Valletta museum start with the Phoenician gallery, going on to Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic, and preceded by the Bronze Age, Temple period, and the early Neolithic. This division is understandable if we go back to the fact that the Phoenicians were the first known non-natives to settle on Malta, marking the start of a series of foreign establishments on the island (Sagona 2002) as expressed by the museum’s timeline. Therefore, the definition of the Phoenicians in national museums, although variable from one to another, comes in contrast with that of international museums that have to consider a much larger geographical span, and consequently a much broader definition.

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Another relatively evident distinction between national and international museums is the proportion of Phoenician material in relation to the rest of the collection. As noted above, in international museums, it consists only of a fraction of the total collection. In national museums however, it accounts for a larger part of it given that the Phoenician period occupies some centuries of both Lebanese and Maltese history. This might seem obvious, but the fact that the Phoenician collection is proportionally larger in national museums has an impact on the way it is displayed and interpreted. Now, taking up a more significant area in the spatial distribution of the museum, the collection is more visible to visitors and forms an integral part of the experience offered by the museum, whereas in international museum, it can be overshadowed by 'highlight' objects. This means that the way Phoenician material is displayed in relation to the rest of the collection must differ greatly between international and national museums. The British Museum illustrates this well, with its Phoenician showcase integrated within a larger display of Levantine material going back to the origins of farming. National museums, having a more restrained collection, tend to rely more on the chronological aspect to link the Phoenician material to the remainder of the collection.

Having said that, the Lebanese and Maltese examples show that there is no rule of thumb for integrating Phoenician materials into national collections. Each of these museums takes a particular approach to exhibiting the material while still following a chronological path at a certain level. In Valletta, the chronological division is the primary one used at the level of the museum to distinguish between the separate aforementioned periods. On the second level, the artefacts in the Phoenician gallery are organised in showcases by themes including crafts and technology, seafaring, and the funerary world. In Beirut however, the chronological aspect only comes as a secondary level. The two main floors of the museum are organised by object type, with monumental pieces on the ground floor and small finds on the first floor. The basement is reserved for funerary material, and all three floors are organised chronologically as a second level, and by material when they are in showcases. Simply put, this means that if one were to only look for the Phoenician material in Valletta, they would find it all in one gallery, whereas in Beirut, it is spread across all three floors of the museum. As with the international museums, this difference in repartition of the material leads to two completely different ways of experiencing the collection and relating it to the earlier and later material. In Beirut, it is easier to compare similar object types and objects from a similar context because they are located closer to each other, whereas in Valletta it is easier to get a global feel of the general assemblage formed by the Phoenician material. Once again, this difference in exhibition method can be linked back to the architecture of the museums themselves: the Beirut National Museum was designed specifically for that purpose, and its current setup was planned for in the conceptualisation of the building (Wilmotte 1997). The location of the material has essentially stayed the same throughout its history. The Valletta museum on the other hand, as the Louvre but on a much smaller scale, is a former palace. There too, the preexisting division of the building has guided the curatorial approach towards the current display in connected but distinct galleries.

This difference in spatial organisation also comes with two different directions when it comes to the interpretation of the collections. I have previously mentioned that the national museum of Beirut almost exclusively labels artefacts as Phoenician when they

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feature inscriptions. Generally, this museum tends to follow a rather minimalistic tendency in the interpretation of the Phoenician collections. While every artefact is individually labeled, dated, and provenanced, there are fewer panels referring to the Phoenicians more broadly. There are however a number of contextual labels covering one or several showcases, enabling visitors to piece fragments of the Phoenician narrative back together. This approach to interpretation, focusing on single objects and their contexts instead of more general themes, is quite intuitive, leaving room for visitors to project their own experiences onto the displays, and is a phenomenon that can be witnessed in several museums which choose to limit the information they provide to their audiences (Dudley 2010). This trend tends to be more frequent in art museums, but some archaeological museums have been adopting it as well as attested by several cases in this study.

The Maltese national museum presents us with the opposite approach. There, the displays are accompanied by a staggering number of large explanatory panels detailing many aspects of Phoenician history. The Phoenician gallery is by no means the largest one in the museum, yet one could easily spend a significant portion of their visit reading about this culture. What is really striking in this gallery is the proportion of objects to text: an average showcase displays around a dozen artefacts, and it is inevitably accompanied by a label list for each individual artefact and one or two explanatory panels discussing the focus theme of the showcase. This curatorial approach also has its merits, as it introduces some of the debates linked to the Phoenicians and familiarises the visitors with the main themes linked to this civilisation. Such an interpretation centric way of displaying collections has recently been popular with smaller scale museums as it can often help contextualise small or scattered collections (Ravelli 2007). Malta was rather unique in the Phoenician network, with relatively few Phoenician settlements, the majority of which were located inland rather than on the coast (Sagona 2002), and the fact that its national museum concentrates heavily on the narrative aspect is a judicious way to integrate the Phoenician presence in Malta into a broader context while still expressing its particular local aspect.

These two case studies have shown that national museums differ from international ones by the size of their Phoenician collection, which tend to be larger in relation to the rest of the collection and take more importance within the museum. This leads to a different way of integrating the Phoenician material within the museum, with the national museums focusing more on the chronological aspect which might not necessarily be prevalent in international museums. Another notable difference between national and international museums is that the former usually have a more grounded definition of the term Phoenician, especially in Malta where the beginning and end of this era are quite clearly determined. However, this definition still differs from that of the national museum of Lebanon, which as the homeland of the Phoenicians, naturally abides by an earlier chronology. Finally, these two museums also differ from each other in the way they display their respective Phoenician collections, with the Valletta museum centering it in one gallery heavily focused on interpretation, while the national museum of Beirut adopts a more minimalistic display in terms of labeling its Phoenician collection which is spread across all three floors of the museum. Therefore, while national museums can offer a more focused dimension in terms of

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their Phoenician displays as compared to international museums, they still exhibit significant differences from one country to another.

3. Regional and Site Museums

Reducing the scale further, this next part will be dedicated to regional and site museums, whose collections are limited to a site, a city, or its surroundings. In order to present a varied overview covering as much Phoenician territory as possible, I have chosen to focus on museums located in Cyprus and Spain. Both these countries have a rather decentralised cultural policy which favours the flourishing of regional museums. At the time of writing, I have visited two in Cyprus (the Limassol district archaeological museum and the Idalion museum) and two in Spain (the Malaga museum and the Cadiz museum). I will however limit this segment to two museums: Idalion and Malaga, because their current displays are relatively recent. The Idalion museum was founded in 2007 (A. Satraki personal communication, January 2019) and the Malaga museum reopened in 2016 after a significant refurbishment (J. A. Palomares Samper communication, May 2019), whereas both the Limassol and Cadiz museum have not witnessed any significant changes since the 1980s. Because of the number of advances in Phoenician archaeology both in Cyprus and in Spain in recent decades, it was natural to focus on the museum with the more recent displays.

As with national museums, the main difference between regional and international museums lies within the precision of the definition of the Phoenician period. As with the case of Malta, because these are colonies, they have quite a definite marker of the beginning and end of the Phoenician presence, which is marked by the arrival of the Romans in Malaga and by the abandonment of the site in Idalion. Coincidentally, in both these museums the Phoenician period stretches from the 9th to the 3rd century BCE. This is in line with dates of early Phoenician settlements in the Mediterranean (Aubet 2001), but it can vary depending on the different sites.

Another feature which links site and regional museums to national museums and away from international ones is the amount of Phoenician material in relation to the remainder of the collection. In these smaller museums, it takes an even larger proportion of the collection than in national ones and counts for a great part of the entire displays. It is to be noted that in Malaga, the museum presents both an artistic and archaeological collection (as the Louvre does), and I am referring here to the place of the Phoenician material within the archaeological collection, the artistic one being in a distinct part of the museum with a distinct curatorial approach. These small regional and site museums can therefore provide a more manageable overview of the Phoenician collection in specific areas thanks to the proportion of Phoenician material in relation to their total collection. However, the local nature of these museums is also what limits them. Unlike international museums, their collections all originate in the same place, and usually from known contexts. While contextualised material is always an advantage, international museums have more leeway to manipulate collections from different contexts in order to construct narratives. And unlike national museums, the collections of local museums usually do not go beyond regional boundaries,

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meaning the picture they present is also different on that scale. In this case, the provenance of the collection and its context are the most important factors that dictate the narrative adopted by the museum and the manner of displaying Phoenician collections in these regional and site museums.
Once again however, the actual place taken by these collections in the displays differs from one museum to another. The Malaga museum for instance is divided into several galleries marking the most important phases of the city (prehistory, Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic) organised chronologically and tied together by a curatorial pattern which features a historiographical display at the beginning of each gallery and a spectacular piece at the end (J. A. Palomares Samper personal communication, May 2019). Within the Phoenician gallery, the showcases are arranged by theme and provenance (from the different areas around the city). The Idalion museum on the other hand offers another approach. The museum is much smaller and composed of only two rooms, the first of which is dedicated to the history of the site and which I will come back to later. The second room is the main gallery of the museum where almost all of the material is exhibited. In this gallery, the showcases are arranged in chronological order by material rather than provenance. What is of interest here is that there is no formal Phoenician gallery, or even showcase, as there is in the Malaga museum. Rather, the Phoenician material in Idalion is integrated within various showcases of the main gallery. This stark difference can simply be explained by the fact that Idalion had a much shorter occupation phase than Malaga, a city that has been continuously inhabited since Antiquity. Because the settlement of Idalion spans less than a millenium, it does not necessarily call for such sharp distinction between the phases the way the Malaga museum does.
Yet, the difference in the importance that the Phoenicians take in each museum is quite significant, as reflected in Malaga where the Phoenician gallery is the most central and one of the largest ones in the archaeological section of the museum. If one digs deeper, there might be another explanation as to why the Phoenicians get their own gallery in Malaga but not even an individual showcase in Idalion. In fact, this could be linked to the perceptions of and identification with the Phoenicians in local populations. Every tour of Malaga begins with the history of the foundation of the city by the Phoenicians (J. A. Palomares Samper personal communication, May 2019), and it is a popular theme in the minds of many Andalusians, often reflected in carnival celebrations (M. D. Lopez Orden personal communication, May 2019). The Phoenician aspect is therefore quite strong in Andalucia, whereas it is not necessarily a main focus point nationally. This is especially clear if we compare the displays of the Malaga museum to those of the national museum of Spain, which feature the Phoenicians as part of many other Iron Age communities rather than as a central theme. In Cyprus on the other hand, Phoenician identity is not the most popular one. Most Cypriots identify with the Greeks, and this is reflected in the displays of museums from the smallest to the largest scale. In the case of Idalion, which was unambiguously occupied by the Phoenicians as attested by one of the largest known archives from the Phoenician world, the Phoenicians are acknowledged throughout the museum, especially in the showcase dedicated to said archive, but they are not given any particular importance. In this case, it is quite telling to compare the manner Greek imports are displayed in both museums. In Idalion, a few small vessels take up the central part of the Archaic

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period pottery showcase. In Malaga however, the Greek vessels are said to have come through the Phoenicians and are displayed among Phoenician material. This is interesting considering the history of Phoenician archaeology, particularly in Malaga where the earliest discoveries were done by archaeologists seeking the Greek city of Manaik but encountering Phoenician material instead. In fact, the museum credits this discovery for triggering the now established school of Phoenician archaeology in Andalusia.

Unfortunately, very little of the actual archaeological remains are visible in Malaga today. A small part of the Phoenician site has been preserved under the floor of the Picasso museum, but most of the features from this period have been excavated, documented, and then lost to modern construction. Aside from having to compete on a territorial stage, the Phoenicians also have to compete on the cultural scene in Malaga. Birthplace of Picasso and home to over twenty museums, it can be safe to say that the Phoenician material is not the primary attraction of the city (J. A. Palomares Samper personal communication, May 2019). On the other side of the Mediterranean, Idalion is in an entirely different situation. The site is located in a suburban area between Nicosia and Larnaca, and the museum serves as an interpretation centre for the site. As there is not much else to see in the immediate vicinity, the museum and site form a complex that can be experienced independently from the entangled layers of history of bigger cities. At the time of writing, the site is only partially open to the public, but there are plans to make it fully accessible in the near future (A. Satraki personal communication, January 2019).

Despite the fact that both these museums present local collections, their situation and relation to the archaeological remains is another factor that translates into a significant difference in display. As a result of the decentralisation of archaeology in Spain, the museum of Malaga houses the vast majority of the local collection. However, because the physicality of where this material came from is now invisible, it is necessary for the museum to fill these gaps through contextual displays. Examples of these include a map with the main excavation areas and audiovisual about specific aspects, such as the one about the famous *tomba del guerrero*. With the actual ruins in Idalion being very visible and forming part of the overall experience of the complex, the museum has different interpretative concerns. The first gallery presents large panels about the history of excavations and the topography of the city to help situate the site in a broader context and to help situate the material in the different phases of the site. More unusually however, the museum also features a large panel focusing on objects from Idalion in other museums around the world. This is of particular importance to this site, which was excavated several times by a series of different missions (or collectors in its early history), resulting in a scattering of its collection around the world, from Sweden to New York. The collection currently on display at the Idalion museum is therefore for the most part composed of artefacts excavated starting in the second half of the 20th century. This is an important particularity of the site, which explains this form of contextualisation in the displays.

The local museums of Malaga and Idalion therefore provide an interesting contrast to both international and national museums with their more precise definitions of the Phoenician period and the large space it occupies within the museum. However, as with international and national museums, the peculiarities of each of the two displays

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still vary significantly. This is due to a number of factors independent of size, notably the place of the Phoenician in popular minds (much greater in Andalusia than in Cyprus) which affect their place in the museum, as well as the visibility of the archaeological remains. Idalion with its visible site but invisible materials (those in other museum collections), and Malaga with its visible materials but invisible site present two perfectly valid but distinct ways of presenting Phoenician collections.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, I have given a broad overview of how different scales of museums affect the treatment and display of Phoenician material culture based on six case studies. From the comparative analysis of the displays in two international (Louvre and British Museum), two national (Lebanon and Malta) and two regional (Idalion and Malaga) museums, the main trend that emerges concerns the definition and delineation of the term Phoenician. The pattern observed shows that the smaller the museum, the more grounded its definition of the Phoenician phase can be. The Louvre's definition for instance, covers the longest period whereas the regional museums of Malaga and Idalion are among the ones with the shortest Phoenician time span. This is due to the fact that the more contextual collections are, the more straightforward it is to assign a specific date.

Another general tendency arising from this research is that of the place taken by the Phoenician material relative to the entire museum. As a general rule, the space allocated to these collections tends to increase as the overall size of the museum decreases. As such, the Phoenician collection is concentrated in a singular showcase at the British Museum, in a relatively small gallery in the National Museum of Archaeology of Valletta, and in one of the largest galleries of the Malaga museum. Once more, this can be linked to the total size of the collections in each museum and how varied these collections are, which brings us back to the smallest museums having the most contextual displays. This may seem straightforward, but it is in fact the fundamental difference that distinguishes the narratives of different scales of museums.

On another level however, the presentation and interpretation of Phoenician collections still varies immensely between museums of the same scale. Independent of how small or large it is, each museum is faced with its own challenges, resulting in numerous factors affecting the displays of Phoenician collection. The Louvre for example, has some restrictions linked to the physical size of some materials such as the Amathus vase or the Assyrian reliefs. Because these are physically unmovable, the Phoenician material is not displayed in a continuum and the museum has to adapt to this in its signalisation. This creates an entirely different experience than the one at the British Museum, where the Phoenician collections are linked to other material in the labeling, providing visitors with points of comparison within a singular gallery. Another factor affecting the narrative is the spatial organisation of the museum, as witnessed by the difference between the national museums of Beirut and Malta, where the former displays Phoenician material across all its floors and the latter concentrates it in

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one gallery. Finally, regional and site museums such as Idalion and Malaga have shown that the visibility of archaeological remains and the presence or absence of certain key artefacts within the museum also create two distinct ways of contextualising the material.

In addition to all the aforementioned factors, one must keep in mind that every museum, regardless of scale, comes with its own socio-political context, its own history, its own economic power, and its own curatorial policies. I may not have expanded on these sufficiently in this paper as I was focusing on tracking trends linked to scale, but the peculiarities of each museum are what makes every narrative about the Phoenicians (but this is also applicable to other collections) unique, despite the two main patterns noted above.

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