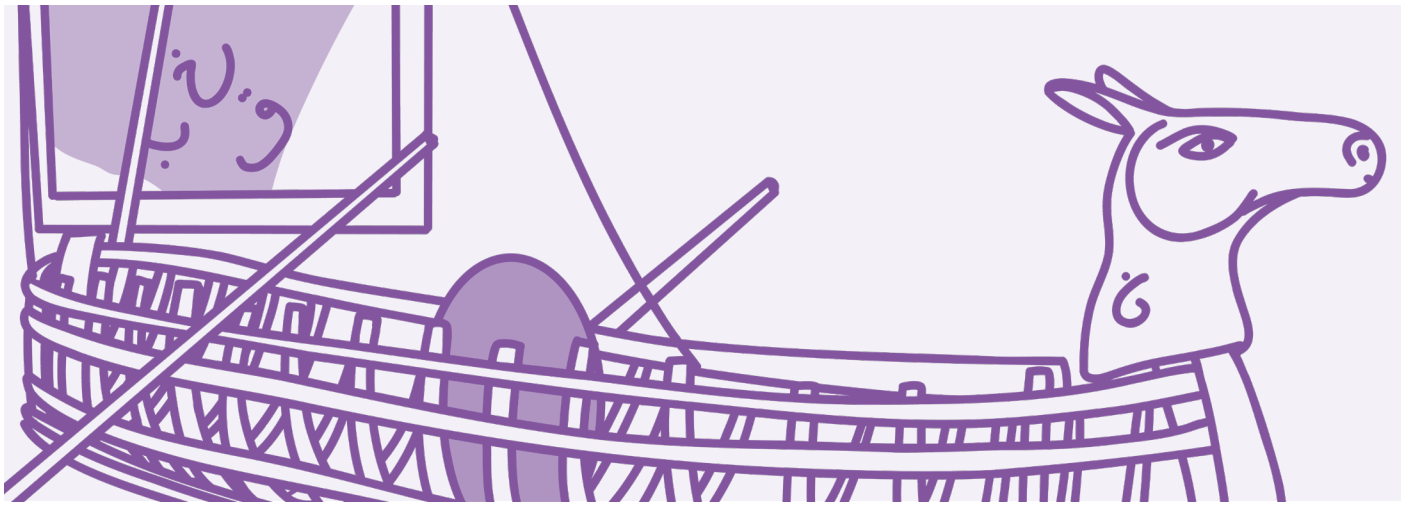


# COLLECTING STORIES ...

## PHOENICIAN MYTHS



### THE PHOENICIANS

The Phoenicians occupied the region that is now Lebanon. As a civilisation they were incredibly influential, living between 5000 and 2500 years ago (the same time as the Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt).

Phoenicia's most important cities were the coastal ports of Byblos, Saida and Tyre. They were known as great sailors, trading with Assyria and Egypt, amongst others. They became wealthy from ship building and traded in natural materials such as Murex shells and Cedar wood (also used for boat building).

The boat in *A Dance with her Myth* (2024) was made in Tyre by a family who still builds boats using traditional Phoenician techniques. It is made from fruit trees rather than Cedar, which is now an endangered species. Today most fishermen's boats in Lebanon are made of this more sustainable material.

During their reign the Phoenicians dominated trade in the Mediterranean region, with trade routes that stretched from the British Isles to Asia. The Phoenician civilisation began to decline following a year of siege at the port of Tyre by Alexander the Great (the ancient Greek King of Macedon). After their lands were conquered the Phoenician culture and language slowly began to disappear, and Phoenician stories, gods and beliefs were later adapted by the Romans.

## EUROPA'S MYTH

Princess Europa was the daughter of the Phoenician King Phoenix. Known for her beauty she caught the eye of Zeus, King of the Greek gods. Finding Europa alone one day, picking flowers, Zeus decided to trick Europa into becoming his wife. Transforming himself into a white bull to hide his identity, Zeus succeeds in abducting the Princess carrying her far away upon his back across the Mediterranean Sea.

Landing on the Island of Crete Zeus revealed his true self, forcing Europa to sleep with him under a tree. After succeeding in his deception – and fathering three sons, Minos, Sarpedon and Rhadamanthus – Zeus gave the Princess to the King of Crete, Asterion. Europa's story is often portrayed in Western art for example in *The Rape of Europa* (c.1570) by Paolo Veronese and *The Rape of Europa* (1559-1562) by Titian.

## ELISSA'S MYTH

The Phoenician Princess Elissa – known as Dido in Roman mythology – is often remembered as a brave seafarer and founder of new lands. Her story begins with the death of her husband, a notorious and wealthy priest who was killed by her brother, the king of Tyre, forcing Elissa to flee across the Mediterranean.

During her journey Elissa stopped on the island of Cyprus, taking 80 Cypriot women with her on her voyage and marrying them off to 80 young men from Tyre. Upon landing on the coast of North Africa (in what is now Tunisia), Elissa was gifted a small piece of land and a cowskin by the ruling King. She was promised a land as big as the area she could outline with the hide. Elissa cut the skin into narrow strips, laying them one after the other to encircle a large piece of land, now known as Carthage. The King fell in love with Elissa, threatening to destroy both Carthage and its people if she refused to marry him. Elissa accepted his proposal, but the day before the wedding she committed suicide. Carthage, however, remained in the hands of The Phoenicians.