



Virtual reconstrucción of a hippos, Phoenician cargo ship. ARPA Patrimonio.

The Mediterranean has been, since antiquity, an important communication route, traversed since prehistoric times. Although archaeological data is still scarce and we lack shipwrecks to support this theory in the earliest periods, the abundant exchange of materials found at various sites since the Early Bronze Age confirms the existence of active trade. It is from the Phoenician period onward that we can clearly observe an unprecedented transfer of people, goods, and ideas.

The deep and extensive colonization would not have been possible without significant advancements in the art of navigation. The Phoenicians were a people intrinsically tied to the sea; their geographic location between the empires of the Fertile Crescent and the Egyptian Empire, as well as their broad access to the West, gave them a privileged position to establish contacts and control

trade exchanges. Initially, navigation was limited to coastal routes or short-distance sailing (cabotage), but thanks to a series of technical and nautical advances, they were able to undertake planned open-sea voyages, which significantly improved travel times and efficiency. Generally, they preferred to sail during months with less thermal variability, taking advantage of the anticyclones that formed in the Mediterranean between March and October.

To ensure successful navigation, Phoenician sailors oriented themselves by the sun during the day and, at night, relied on the star *Hwab*, known in antiquity as the “*stella Phoenica*.” Phoenician navigation was primarily sail-based, making knowledge of winds and marine currents essential. This meticulous understanding allowed them to trace round-trip routes, thus facilitating commerce and exploration throughout the Mediterranean and beyond.

Open-sea navigation and long-distance voyages were revolutionized thanks to a series of technological innovations in shipbuilding. The introduction of advanced sealing methods for different parts of the vessels, the use of nails to secure the wood, and the development of a defined keel that provided a solid structure and improved stability were essential elements. Additionally, improvements in rigging and the implementation of astronomical navigation systems based on mathematical and astronomical advances played a crucial role. These technological developments not only allowed for navigation as an efficient means of transport but also boosted commerce, facilitated communication, and strengthened the military capabilities of maritime civilizations.

Ibiza emerged as a crucial point along ancient maritime routes, and it was inevitable that the Phoenicians would consider its strategic location in their expansion plans. Choosing to settle at some point on the island was almost unavoidable. Control of a port such as *Sa Caleta* not only provided them with a place to restock before embarking on long-distance voyages but also offered shelter from inclement weather. However, beyond being a mere safe harbor, the strategic position of Ibiza and *Sa Caleta* gave them a fundamental role as a distribution hub for various products and goods. From there, they could direct shipments northward, through Catalonia and southern France; northeast through Sardinia and Etruria; or southward through Fonteta, Málaga, and Gadir, to reach the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa. They also had the possibility of heading

eastward through Sicily. This strategic position made Ibiza a vital hub for Phoenician trade in the western Mediterranean.

*“There is an island called Pityussa, named after the abundance of pine trees that grow on it. It lies in the open sea and is three days and three nights’ sailing from the Pillars of Heracles, one day and one night from Libya, and one day from Iberia; in size, it is similar to Corcyra. The island is not excessively fertile; there is little cultivated land, planted with vines and olive trees grafted onto wild olives. Of what it produces, they say that its wool stands out for its extreme softness. The island alternates between vast plains and hills, and it has a city called Eresos, a colony of the Carthaginians. It also has excellent harbors; large walled constructions and a significant number of well-built houses. It is inhabited by barbarians of different ethnic groups, but the Phoenicians predominate. The colony was founded one hundred and sixty years after the founding of Carthage.”*

– *Diodorus of Sicily, Book V, 16.*