

## Trade in the Ancient Greek World

The Phoenicians were among the greatest traders of their time and owed much of their prosperity to trade. At first, they traded mainly with the Greeks, trading wood, slaves, glass and powdered Tyrian purple. Tyrian Purple was a violet-purple dye used by the Greek elite to colour garments. In fact, the word Phoenician derives from the Ancient Greek word *phoinios* meaning "purple". As trading and colonizing spread over the Mediterranean, Phoenicians and Greeks seemed to have unconsciously split that sea in two: the Phoenicians sailed along and eventually dominating the southern shore, while the Greeks were active along the northern shores. The two cultures clashed rarely, mainly in Sicily, which eventually settled into two spheres of influence, the Phoenician southwest and the Greek northeast.

In the centuries after 1200 BC, the Phoenicians were the major naval and trading power of the region. Phoenician trade was founded on the Tyrian Purple dye, a violet-purple dye derived from the shell of the Murex sea-snail, once profusely available in coastal waters of the eastern Mediterranean Sea but exploited to local extinction. The Phoenicians established a second production centre for the dye in Mogador, in present day Morocco. Brilliant textiles were a part of Phoenician wealth, and Phoenician glass was another export ware. They traded unrefined, prick-eared hunting dogs of Asian or African origin which locally they had developed into many breeds. To Egypt, where grapevines would not grow, the 8th-century Phoenicians sold wine, the wine trade with Egypt is vividly documented by the shipwrecks located in 1997 in the open sea 30 miles west of Ascalon. Pottery kilns at Tyre produced the big terracotta jars used for transporting wine and from Egypt they bought gold.

From elsewhere, they obtained other materials, perhaps the most important being silver from the Iberian peninsula and tin from Great Britain, the latter of which when smelted with copper (from Cyprus) created the durable metal alloy bronze. It is also apparent that there was a highly lucrative Phoenician trade with Britain for tin.

Goods which were traded within Greece between different city-states included cereals, wine, olives, figs, pulses, eels, cheese, honey, meat (especially from sheep and goats), tools (e.g. knives), perfumes, and fine pottery, especially Attic and Corinthian wares.

Fine Greek pottery was also in great demand abroad and examples have been found as far afield as the Atlantic coast of Africa. Other Greek exports included wine, especially from Aegean islands like Mende and Kos, bronze work, olives and olive oil (transported, like wine, in amphorae), emery from Delos, hides from Euboea, marble from Athens and Naxos, and ruddle (a type of waterproofing material for ships) from Keos.

The goods available at the market places (agorai) of major urban centres which were imported from outside Greece included wheat and slaves from Egypt, grain from the Black Sea (especially via Byzantium), salt fish from the Black Sea, wood (especially for shipbuilding) from Macedonia and Thrace, papyrus, textiles, luxury food such as spices (e.g. pepper), glass and metals such as iron, copper, tin, gold and silver.

<http://www.timemaps.com/civilization/Phoenicians#trade>

<http://www.ancient.eu/article/115/>