



The *Phoenicia*
sailing on the
Atlantic during her
voyage in 2019

Sailing into History

By crossing the Atlantic in a replica Phoenician boat, explorer PHILIP BEALE wanted to prove that these great mariners of the ancient world landed in the New World long before Columbus

WORDS: Philip Beale

In September 2019, after years of planning and preparation, my dream to cross the Atlantic, from Carthage (in Tunisia) to the Americas came into being. I had numerous setbacks along the way whilst preparing my replica Phoenician ship, the *Phoenicia* (built a decade earlier). As fast as we raised funds, they were eaten up by an ever-increasing list of repairs. In the end I threw the credit cards at the problem. So here we were in the ancient port of Carthage, ready to recreate a voyage we believed these ancient seafarers had made over 2,500 years ago. In short, to illustrate the theory that the Phoenicians or their descendants, the Carthaginians, could have been the first people to reach the Americas by boat. This is my account of how that dream was realised.

Inspired by the example of previous maritime adventurers such as Thor Heyerdahl and Tim Severin, who had both constructed replicas of sailing vessels used in ancient times –



ABOVE: Philip Beale who wanted to sail like the Phoenicians did from the Mediterranean to the Americas

the balsa-wood raft *Kon Tiki* for Heyerdahl's 1947 journey across the Pacific from South America to the Polynesian islands, and the leather currach *Brendan* for Severin's 1976 expedition from Ireland to Newfoundland – I wanted to prove that the Phoenicians were capable of a sea voyage from the Mediterranean to the Americas.

As a 21-year-old student, I had been inspired by the stone reliefs of ships at the Borobudur stupa in central Java. In 2003, I reconstructed an 8th century double outrigger (a replica Borobudur ship), sailing it with my gallant crew from Jakarta in Indonesia, more than 4,000 miles across the Indian Ocean to Africa. Our objective was to demonstrate that the types of ship known to exist at that time were capable of reaching Africa, spreading Asian cultures (such as the xylophones, Asiatic rice and plantains) not only as far as Madagascar, but around the coast of Africa and the Cape of Good Hope to West Africa.

This successful expedition was followed by my first voyage aboard the *Phoenicia* in 2008. The ship was built in Arwad, Syria using materials and construction techniques developed by the ancient Phoenicians, master mariners and traders from the Eastern Mediterranean, their civilisation was at its height between 1200 and 200 BC. This region, traditionally known ▶



Photo: Philip Bealey/atlantic-centre

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as the Levant, was a geographical area centred around modern-day Lebanon.

The goal for this first expedition was to demonstrate that the account by the Greek historian, Herodotus, that the ancient Phoenicians had circumnavigated Africa in around 600 BC was in all likelihood true, despite the lack of concrete proof. It would be highly unlikely for a maritime voyage of discovery to leave behind any physical evidence, let alone for that to be discovered more than 2,500 years later.

The seeds of my most recent expedition, the second aboard the *Phoencia*, had been sown long before the crew and I arrived back in Arwad in October, 2010, having achieved our objective. I wanted to test a theory that the Phoenicians had also been the first to sail across the Atlantic, perhaps as much as 2,000 years before Columbus. After all, the Phoenicians, represented by their Carthaginian brothers, had been the first recorded sailors to explore the Atlantic, through the expeditions of adventurers

Hanno, to West Africa and Himilco, to Northern Europe.

Stories, legends, theories, call them what you will, that the Atlantic had been crossed many centuries before Columbus are not new. A 9th century Latin text, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis (The Voyage of St Brendan the Abbot)*, records the legend of St. Brendan’s 6th century voyage across the Atlantic. Indeed, the objective of Tim Severin’s epic *Brendan Voyage* aboard a handcrafted reconstruction of a traditional Irish currach, made of tanned ox hides, proved that the legend may well have been true. The success of his voyage has only served to demonstrate the folly of outright dismissal of some of these stories.

Vikings not only reached the North America continent in the 10th century but also built settlements. And there is hard physical evidence to corroborate this theory, not just the famous 13th century Icelandic sagas of the epic voyages of the explorer, Leif Erikson. These record that after his father, Erik the Red, discovered Greenland, Erikson himself sailed west to a place referred to in the sagas as ‘Vinland’. Archaeological evidence of Norse settlements in what is now the Canadian province of Newfoundland have shown that that these

MY TOP 5 DORSET ADVENTURES

Sailing the tall ship *Moonfleet* from Portland Marina along the Jurassic Coast. Two-hour to six-hour trips available on this 1930s Dutch-built gaff cutter. moonfleetsailing.com

Kayaking, paddleboarding, coasteering, snorkelling, fishing or foraging along the Dorset coast with Fore Adventure.

foreadventure.co.uk

Walk or cycle the seven peaceful miles of the Sika Trail running through Wareham Forest. forestryengland.uk/wareham-forest

Moors Valley Country Park & Forest offers family activities including cycling and walking trails, Hawk Walks, Go Ape tree-top adventures, fishing and golf. moors-valley.co.uk

Splashdown Waterpark in Poole family-friendly waterpark with chutes, flumes and splashdown zones (reopens Feb 23).

splashdownwaterparks.co.uk/poole



ABOVE: *Phoencia* in front of Table Mountain in South Africa in 2008

RIGHT: *Phoencia* was built in Syria using traditional boat building techniques such as mortise and tenon joints



Photo: Philip Beale/atlanticcrut

Raising the mast on the *Phoenicia* as we set sail from Syria on her maiden voyage



Photo: Philip Beale/atlanticcrut

were fact not fiction. Indeed, recent archaeological evidence has identified the exact date of inhabitation of a Viking settlement in Newfoundland to AD 1021.

While the archaeological and scientific evidence to prove my theory that the Phoenicians had landed in the Americas was lacking, as was the case for both Heyerdahl and Severin before me, I wanted to show that it was not only a practical possibility, but also extremely likely. Especially when the extent of the

known Phoenician colonies in both West Africa and the Canary Islands, and quite possibly the Azores, nearly 1,000 miles into the Atlantic off the coast of Portugal, is taken into account.

The fact that a second expedition aboard the *Phoenicia* became a mission I simply had to attempt was because of my conviction that ancient history, beyond the names and dates of kings, tyrants, and emperors, is rarely, if ever, written in stone. The aphorism attributed to Churchill – a designation which ▶



Photo: Philip Beale/atlanticbc.net

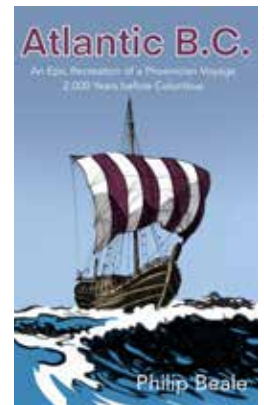


Photo: atlanticbc.net

ABOUT PHILIP BEALE FRGS

Author, adventurer, sailor, writer and motivational speaker, Philip Beale embarked on his first international expedition, Operation Drake from Fiji to Papua New Guinea, as an 18-year-old, and developed a strong interest in Asian, African and Middle Eastern cultures. Following a career in the Royal Navy as an officer, Philip led three international Kon-Tiki type expeditions. In 2019 he embarked on a 6,000-mile expedition on a 600BC replica Phoenician ship to prove that the Phoenicians could have sailed across the Atlantic Ocean 2,000 years before Christopher Columbus. A fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and a member of the Scientific Exploration Society, Philip is MD of adventure travel and wildlife company pioneerexpeditions.com based at Chaldon Herring. *Atlantic BC: An Epic Recreation of a Phoenician Voyage Before Columbus*, shortlisted for the Dorchester Literary Festival Writing Prize 2022, is available from AtlanticBC.net.

is itself factually incorrect – that ‘history is written by the victors’ is an expression of the truth that history is not a fixed entity, whoever writes it. New scientific discoveries undermine previous certainties, while re-interpretation of the past through the lens of the dominant ideology in any given era, inevitably results in a process which is forever in flux.

The history of the ‘discovery’ of America is one such example. For centuries, it never occurred to the historians of the Old World that the ancestors of the ‘Indians’ encountered by Columbus in the New World might have discovered it for themselves. But putting aside the very likely human crossing of the Beringia land bridge which connected Asia to America around 30,000 years ago, the belief that Christopher Columbus was the first to set foot in the American mainland in historical times is now open to serious ridicule.

Finally, after the repairs on the *Phoenicia* were completed, on September 28 2019 we set sail on a voyage that would last some five months and cover

6,000 nautical miles. Our mixed international crew set about the task with determination and not a little worry. Would a Phoenician replica ship, now over 10 years old and feeling its age, withstand the ravages of the Atlantic and all that it could throw at us?

After sailing from the Canary Islands in late November 2019 we reached the Caribbean and Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic on December 31 2019, tired but triumphant. We sailed onto Florida, arriving in Fort Lauderdale on February 4 2020, our voyage was a success. However, with a global pandemic brewing the crew departed in haste as the world started to close its borders. The subsequent two years have provided a valuable opportunity for me to write the account of the expedition back here in Dorset where I live, and review the evidence of what the ancients knew about the Atlantic in my book, *Atlantic BC: An Epic Recreation of a Phoenician Voyage Before Columbus*. It was an expedition that’s enriched my life immeasurably and it has left me with a lifetime of inspirational memories. ♦

ABOVE:
The *Phoenicia* on her Atlantic crossing in 2019

RIGHT:
Philip Beale’s book about his historic voyage across the ocean