

Geoscience rediscovers Phoenicia's buried harbors

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The exact locations of Tyre and Sidon's ancient harbors, Phoenicia's two most important city-states, have attracted scholarly interest and debate for many centuries. New research reveals that the ancient basins lie buried beneath the medieval and modern city centers.

A network of sediment cores have been sunk into the cities' coastal deposits and studied using high-resolution geoscience techniques to elucidate how, where, and when Tyre and Sidon's harbors evolved since their Bronze Age foundations. In effect, ancient port basins are rich geological archives replete with information on human impacts, occupation histories, Holocene coastal evolution, and natural catastrophes.

Dateable archeological and organic remains provide a chronology for this 8000-year-old story. Analyses identify various stages of harbor evolution from natural sheltered coves during the Bronze Age to human modified environments from the Phoenician period through Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine times.

After the sixth and tenth centuries A.D., tectonic collapse, tsunamogenic impacts, and relative commercial decline meant that the harbors were no longer properly maintained, gradually buried beneath thick tracts of coastal sediment and lost until now. These findings have far-reaching implications for our understanding of Phoenician maritime archaeology and call for the protection of these unique cultural heritages.

Source: Geological Society of America

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