**Phoenician problem – solution**

The first thing to consider is that the Phoenician words all have fewer letters than their transliterated equivalents, so each symbol must represent more than just one sound. But the system was described as phonetic, so a reasonable assumption is that the symbols represent consonants, with the vowels having to be assumed.

A scan for repeated patterns reveals that the pattern \( \text{BL} \) appears in two words. Are there any repeated sequences of consonants in the transliterated names? Yes, BL in RIBLAH and EBLA. So let’s assume the two symbols in \( \text{BL} \) are B and L.

This would mean however that \( \text{BL} \) is of the form LB?, but there are no names of that form. However, there is one other name with an L and B next to each other: HALAB. This leads to the realisation that Phoenician is written right-to-left, a fact hinted at in the introduction (if you know anything about Hebrew and Arabic). So \( \text{BL} \) are L and B (which they resemble somewhat, too).

So we now have three of the names, as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{EBLA} & \quad \text{HALEB} & \quad \text{RIBLAH}
\end{align*}
\]

Only one name begins with B, so we can add to the above list \( \text{BERITOS} \) (which nowadays is called Beirut, in answer to the extra question).

And only one other name contains an R, namely TSAREPATH: \( \text{TSRPR} \)

The other three cities are MEGIDIUW, QADESH and AYNUK, and the following three Phoenician names are still unassigned: \( \text{YQMV} \) \( \text{KZYT} \) \( \text{WPH} \)

None of the letters in those three names have appeared in any of the names we have so far deciphered. However one of the letters, \( \text{Q} \), appears in two of the names. The only consonant repeated in our three remaining names is D, in 2nd and 3rd place in QADESH and MEGIDIUW respectively. So that allows us to match \( \text{YQMV} \) with MEGIDIUW, and \( \text{WPH} \) with QADESH. The remaining name must be AYNUK.

Here is the full alphabet (excluding a couple of letters that we didn’t use) in its traditional alphabetical order.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{'BGDHWTHYK} & \quad \text{LMSNPQRSTS}\n\end{align*}
\]

You will see that two of the letters are given as ‘ and ‘ – they are used for words which begin with a vowel, and represent (roughly) two types of glottal stop. You will also see that there are two Hs. One is actually the CH sound also found in German, Welsh, Irish, Scots, etc. and is often written with a dot below it: \( \text{H} \).

Actually alphabets such as Phoenician, Hebrew and Arabic, which don’t show the vowels, are called ‘abugidas’, based on the traditional first four letters ABGD (which we also see in Greek and Cyrillic).