

Mediterranean Trade in the Late Bronze Age

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WILLOW CREEK MIDDLE SCHOOL

ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA

Subject: Ancient History (to A.D. 600)

Level: Grade 7

Length of Unit: Two to three weeks

Connections with the Textbook: This unit could serve as a bridge between the Neolithic farming unit and a concentrated study of ancient civilizations or be dropped in after an introduction to Sumer and the nature of ancient river civilizations. In either case, the idea is to present the ancient world as groups of peoples in constant communication and influencing each other, rather than as separate entities isolated by distance and time (except for war).

Readings for the Teacher:

Bass, George F. "Oldest Known Shipwreck" (see General Bibliography).

"The Report of Wenamun," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (see General Bibliography). Vol. 1, pp. 224–229.

"The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 1, 211–215.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Rochester, Minnesota, is a city of 75,000 about 100 miles south of the Twin Cities. The major employers are IBM and the Mayo Clinic. Most students in the Rochester schools go on to college or post-high-school technical training. Willow Creek is one of four middle schools in the country's largest school district. Our school's population of 1200 students is overwhelmingly of European descent with a rapidly growing population of Southeast Asian, African-American, Latin-American, Native American, and African students. Our school is more diverse than our community. Ancient history is taught in seventh grade. Students are placed on teams of approximately 150 students and six teachers.

Classes have traditionally been 42 minutes long, but this year our team experimented with selected doubled classes every other day.

The theme of my course has been "contributions." I want my students to carry away with them an appreciation for the accomplishments of the people who have lived before us.

Like many people, I taught history sequentially. First have come early humans, then the development of agriculture in different areas of the world, then the river valley civilizations—again in different areas—and so forth. Except for war, I never stopped to look at the connections between and among peoples, involving such phenomena as migrations, the movement of goods, the flow of ideas, and official government contacts.

This year, after the Institute, I decided to change that pattern, and look at ancient people as connected with one another. The Late Bronze Age presents an opportunity to look at a group of civilizations that regularly had trading relationships and therefore other kinds of contact. It is also the first period for which we have both written records and the archaeological information from shipwrecks which show the size and composition of that trade.

In the past, I have taught ancient civilizations by first introducing the idea of a civilization, then concentrating on one as an example (often Egypt), and finally, asking the students to each select one civilization on which to concentrate for a research project. One type of assignment has been to complete a five-page brochure, in which are featured five topics that reflect aspects of the characteristics of a civilization (monumental structures, cities, writing systems, uneven social classes, formal government/religion, etc.). This year, I made trade items a required topic. The assignment was to choose to do a cube with illustrations, or a big book, or a five-part poster. Once the research projects on individual civilizations were completed and shared with the class, we began work on long-distance trade between the various civilizations. This year, we studied Egypt, Sumer/Babylon, Canaanite and Phoenician civilizations, Minoan Crete, Nubia, Hebrew civilization, India, China, and southeast Asia (the last one, to reflect the ethnic background of some of my students).

PART TWO: CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

PINPOINTING INFORMATION ABOUT TRADE

As the students were doing their research, it was necessary to help them pinpoint the information on trade. We used ordinary classroom and library resources: textbooks (*Human Heritage and Message of Ancient Days*), *World Book Encyclo-*

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pedia, books from the library on various civilizations, issues of *National Geographic*, and other resources. The questions about a product of any kind was always: "Can you load this on a boat and trade it somewhere else?" We looked at agricultural products (wheat in Egypt), special manufactured products like purple dye in Canaanite/Phoenician culture, pottery from Crete, jewelry, metal/ minerals like gold from Nubia and copper from Cyprus, and processed products like linen, carved ivory boxes, and glass. This is painstaking detective work, for which the article by George Bass in *National Geographic* was invaluable (including the maps). We put a big blank map on the board and began to fill in where things came from (see Appendix 1). I read aloud "The Talk of the Shipwrecked Sailor," and asked the students to guess where he probably went. What would travel have been like? How long would it have take? How dangerous was it? What would people see in the ports they visited?

MEDITERRANEAN TRADING DAYS (2 DAYS)

Once the students knew where all the products came from, I placed them in groups according to the civilizations they studied. Most had done projects in pairs, so each pair was to choose a single item to sell on Mediterranean Trading Days. They developed a visual for the product (often, the meant digging into the same books they had used for their projects), and each pair came up with an advertisement for their product, one which covered the product's good points and its uses. Singing commercials were permitted (2 Days). Some of the students produced beautiful illustrations of their projects—the best were a drawing of a blue-and-white ware bowl from china and advertisements like a roll of papyrus with hieroglyphs on it. The ads were all presented on one day, and the next day we began the trading game.

MEDITERRANEAN TRADING GAME (3 DAYS)

(see Appendix 2, Bronze Age Trading on Land and Sea)

For this activity, students remained in pairs. In each case, one student was the Merchant who stayed "home" in port to sell (each pair of students had kept the visual aid they had created, which served as the object for sale), and the other was the Captain who sailed away to buy. The captain had to do something interesting in each of three different ports, as well as buy. For instance, he/she might visit a pyramid or investigate the new writing system the Phoenicians were using. (Note: The Merchant in port had to help the captains think of what to do or see in their civilizations.)

The next day, the students switched roles. One activity was negotiating prices. In each case, a person had to decide how much of what he/she had to sell would be needed to gain what he/she wanted. The quantity of goods exchanged had to be written in either hieroglyphic or cuneiform numbers on the trading sheet (see Appendix 2). I took the part of Cyprus and traded copper and tin ingots (for weapons and tools)—a monopoly. Some students came to the realization that no one

wanted what they produced, but on the other hand, people might want something they could buy somewhere else and then offer a trade.

On the second day, I handed out "Luck Cards" on an irregular basis. These were 5" x 8" cards on which I had written possible scenarios which would affect them like the following: "Seized by pirates, cargo seized and captain killed"; "Good winds bring you and your crew home safely ahead of schedule"; "The plague breaks out and half your crew dies"; "Shipwreck—cargo and crew lost"; "Merchant pays double to ship goods on your boat"; "Port officials off-duty=no tax"; "Phoenicians copy your goods and sell for less"; "Famine in Crete—Cretans will pay double for wheat"; and "Egypt invades Nubia and controls all exports."

On day #3, we debriefed, using questions like these:

What were the popular items?

How did necessities sell (wheat, cotton, copper, etc.)?

Who got the best deals, and why?

Were the trades realistic (would buyers actually have "paid" that much)?

What level of society used most of these goods?

Students failed to realize how important wheat was and concentrated on the luxury goods or the metals.

ULUBURUN SHIPWRECK—A TEST, OR A THINKING ASSIGNMENT

The article by George Bass in *National Geographic* shows a Late Bronze Age shipwreck that has been excavated by Dr. Bass and his team. A shipwreck is a time capsule and makes a perfect opportunity for students to use what they now know about trading and the Mediterranean to evaluate the cargo of this ship. They can ask the questions archaeologists ask: Where was it going? Where had it been? What are the goods used for and who would want to buy what was on this ship? Why did it sink? When did it sink? What ideas do you suppose came along with the people on this boat? What can this wreck tell us about life and trade in the Mediterranean? You may take slides of the pictures or use an opaque projector to show examples of the goods that have been excavated from this wreck. (*Editor's Note: You may also order slides of the Uluburun shipwreck and objects from the cargo.*)

Using Appendix 3, you can have the students work in pairs to analyze the contents to discuss possible answers to these questions. This can be a discussion or a preparatory writing exercise before a take-home essay test. Explain that each student is an expert who has been called in to help Dr. Bass evaluate this wreck.

The student is to describe the cargo: Are objects luxuries or necessities? Are all of them items for sale, or were some the personal possessions of people on board? Based on these conclusions, who made up the crew?

Then the student is to speculate on where the ship had

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been (look at the contents) and where it was going (map of prevailing winds, attached to appendix 3; the map was supplied by fellow Institute participant, Janet Cuenca). Which civilizations would want to buy what was on board? Which civilization probably sent this ship out? How did archaeologists figure out when the boat went down (how to date the ship)? What would these people from different cultures have shared with each other (clothing, writing/number systems, religious beliefs, music, food)?

HONORS OR ENRICHMENT ASSIGNMENT

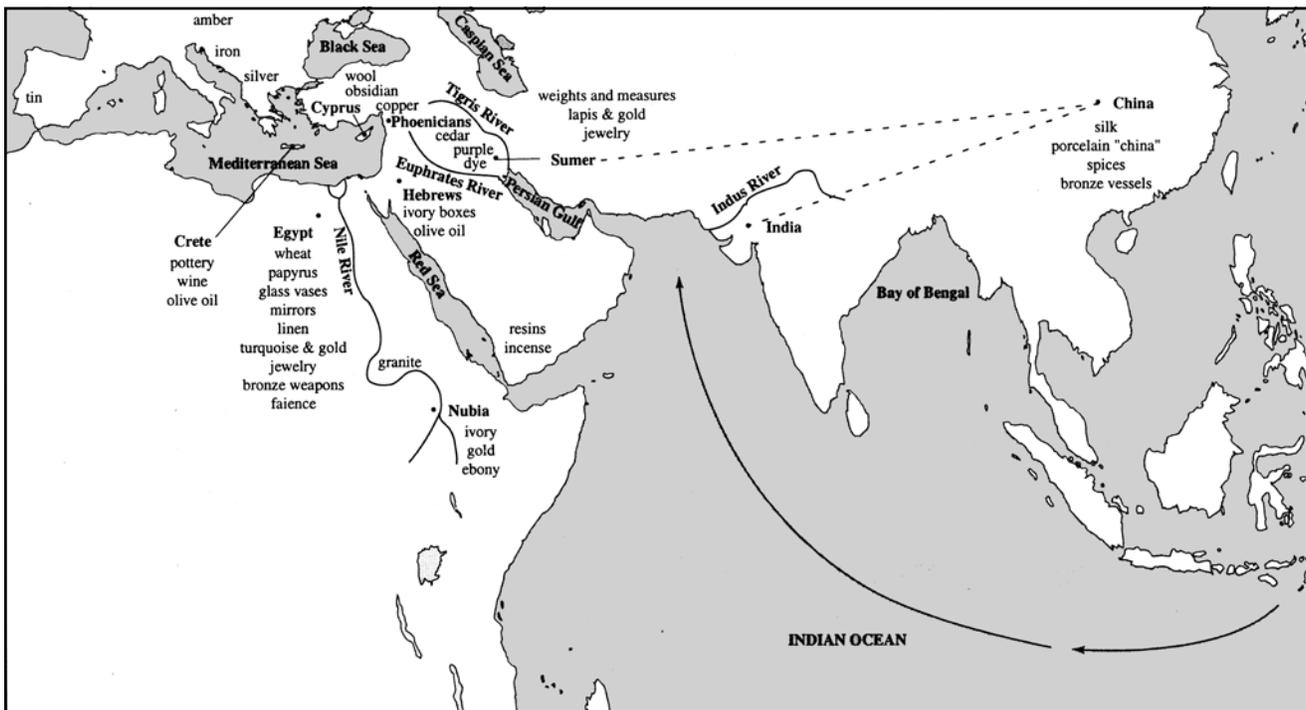
In most civilizations large-scale trade was under the control

of the king. The control operated in one of two ways: either the king taxed all foreign and domestic ships to raise money, or the king used trade as a means to further foreign policy goals by giving “most favorable nation status” to friendly kings, and to placate aggressive or hostile kings. “The Story of Wenamun” shows what happened to one trader caught one a power struggle. The students can analyze the story and relate it to situations in the world today.

HANDOUTS

For handouts for students, see Appendixes 1, 2, and 3, which follow.

APPENDIX I



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APPENDIX 2. BRONZE AGE TRADING ON LAND AND SEA

Directions: You are a merchant or a captain in your ancient civilization and have decided to run the enormous risks of trading with your neighbors. These risks include storms, shipwrecks, bandits and pirates, spoiled cargo, crooked traders, and no luck in finding buyers for your goods. Why are you willing to run these risks? **BECAUSE YOU WANT TO MAKE A FORTUNE IF YOU CAN!!** In your groups, decide who will stay behind and trade with visitors (Merchants) and who will travel by land and/or sea to trade your goods for the ones you want from others (Captains).

1. What have you got to trade?

2. What do you want to buy?

3. Consult the maps. Pick two or three destinations. Plan your cargo and your trip. What are you planning to buy and how much will you trade for it?

4. Make up markers for amounts in cuneiform or hieroglyphics to bargain with and prepare a note card to record your "purchases" and their prices.

5. On **TRADE FAIR DAY**, set up your "Five Fabulous Features" projects at your port so others can learn about your civilization. Merchants stay home.
 # BOUGHT # SOLD

Captains journey to your destinations and trade. Make the best deals you can and record it here.
 # SOLD # BOUGHT

6. What did you see at the port that interested you?
 Port #1:

 Port #2:

 Port #3:

7. All of you will draw a "luck card" sometime during the fair. Text for "luck cards" (examples):
 Shipwreck (total)
 Pirates take valuable cargo
 Disease kills your crew
 Storm blows you off course; you miss one port
 Merchant out of what you want
 Merchant overstocked and sells cheap
 Port tax takes one-third of your cargo
 You have to bribe merchant to sell your goods

8. Once the Captains come home, they will get together with the Merchants. Each pair will total how much they gained or lost.

9. Final question: Summarize what you learned about trading.

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APPENDIX 3. TRADE AMONG ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS**Introduction:**

As “The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor” shows, adventurous sailors and merchants traveled far from home to find valuable goods. They brought the goods home to sell in order to make pots of money but they also brought home ideas. Soon rulers wanted more and arranged trade themselves, or they marched their armies in to grab those goods without paying as “The Report of Wenamun” shows.

We know that people traded in these ways because the goods turn up in widely scattered civilizations, and we are finding more and more wrecks—like the Uluburun Wreck from about 1316 B.C., a Bronze Age ship that was found off the coast of Kas, Turkey (see article by George Bass in Readings).

You will see slides from this wreck that show what was on board. The fifteen-meter ship was built of cedar using mortise-and-tenon joints holding the planks together (like the ship *Odysseus* used).

In the same way as archaeologists do, you have to figure out who “owned” the ship, where it had been, where it was going, and when it sank.

Questions:

1. Look at the contents. Where had this ship been?
2. Look at the map. Sailing ships did best running before the wind. Where could this ship have been going next?
3. Look at the contents. Who might have owned this ship (planned this voyage), and where do you think that this ship ultimately might be going (look at the map)?
4. How do you suppose archaeologists figured out the date the ship sank?
5. What does a wreck like this tell us about trade in the Mediterranean?

List of Contents

From: George F. Bass, *Shipwrecks in the Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology* (museum publication).

Major Cargo:

- 10 tons of copper from Cyprus: 318 flat, four handled ingots weighing about 23 kilograms each, plus other in different shapes
- 1 ton of tin ingots (enough to turn the copper into bronze)
- 1 ton of terebinth resin (grown in the Near East/Cyprus) in 100 Canaanite amphoras (oldest known find) similar to *snt* which the Egyptians burned as incense in religious rituals.
- 150 disks of raw glass in cobalt blue, turquoise and lavender (earliest ingots of glass known)
- Cakes of glass the color of lapis lazuli and turquoise
- Logs of ebony (tropical African blackwood)
- Whole and partial elephant tusks
- One dozen hippopotamus teeth
- Tortoise carapaces (possibly for sound boxes of musical instruments)
- Ostrich egg shells

Manufactured goods:

- 9 large pithoi (storage jars) with Cypriot export pottery
- Oil lamps
- Faience drinking cups in the shape of rams’ heads
- Canaanite jewelry: silver bracelets and gold pendants including a goddess in relief holding gazelles and another with a falcon folding cobras, and gold scarabs (one with Queen Nefertiti)
- Gold goblet (uncertain origin), possibly Mycenaean (?)
- Beads of Baltic amber, agate, gold, faience, and glass
- Two duck-shaped ivory cosmetic boxes with hinged lids
- Copper caldrons and bowls
- Trumpet carved from a hippo tooth
- Ceremonial mace from Romania
- Weapons: arrowheads, spearheads, daggers, three Canaanite swords and one Mycenaean sword
- Bronze awls, drill bits, saw chisels, axed and adzes
- Weights: different weights shaped like a sphinx, cows and bulls, lions, ducks, frogs, a housefly, and a large ornate one with a cowherd and three calves
- Foodstuffs: almonds, figs, olives, grapes, wheat and barley, pomegranates; spices: cumin, coriander
- Net sinkers, netting needles, fishhooks and a bronze trident (shipboard fishing?)
- Assyrian, Syrian, and Kassite cylinder seals
- Gold-covered Canaanite goddess statue
- Ivory and boxwood “diptychs,” two-page “books” with wax surface for writing
- 24 ship’s anchors (Canaanite)