

Britain in Bible prophecy

Nigel Bernard

The archaeological evidence for Phoenician contact with ancient Britain is controversial, with some experts saying there is none. This article argues that lack of evidence does not rule out a connection. The financial role of London is discussed to show how Britain is a daughter of Tyre. The Commonwealth in relation to the young lions is then considered. Finally, the maritime power of Britain is discussed.

IN EZEKIEL 38:13 “the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof” are mentioned as a power opposing the Gogian invasion of Israel. Tarshish is traditionally interpreted by Christadelphians as referring to Britain. In this article we consider some aspects of the subject of Britain in Bible prophecy.

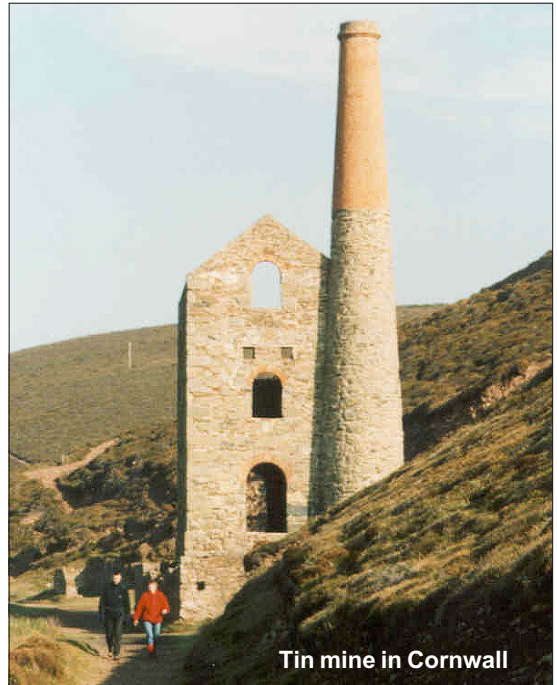
Phoenician connection?

EZEKIEL wrote concerning Tyre: “Tarshish was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all kind of riches; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded in thy fairs” (27:12). Some think an eastern Tarshish is indicated in places (for example, 2 Chronicles 9:21), but here the location would seem to be somewhere to the west of Israel. This verse shows that a criterion for identifying this western Tarshish is that it traded in metals with Phoenicia. Verse 25 shows that at least some of this trade involved the use of ships of Tarshish: “The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market: and thou wast replenished, and made very glorious in the midst of the seas”. If Britain is Tarshish then it must have conducted maritime trade with Phoenicia. Was this so?

Many think that the Phoenicians traded with Britain, in particular with Cornwall, the county on the southwest tip of England where tin reserves were located. The *Columbia Encyclopaedia* comments as follows:

“Phoenician seamen came to dominate the Mediterranean. They went to the edges of the known world, trading from the Iberian Peninsula to the Dardanelles. Some authorities believe they went as far as Cornwall, seeking tin”.¹

The connection between Cornwall and Phoenicia is accepted by many within Cornwall itself. In a website devoted to information relating to Cornwall, Robert Cook, a former Principal Librarian for Support Services in Cornwall County, states: “Cornwall has a long maritime history



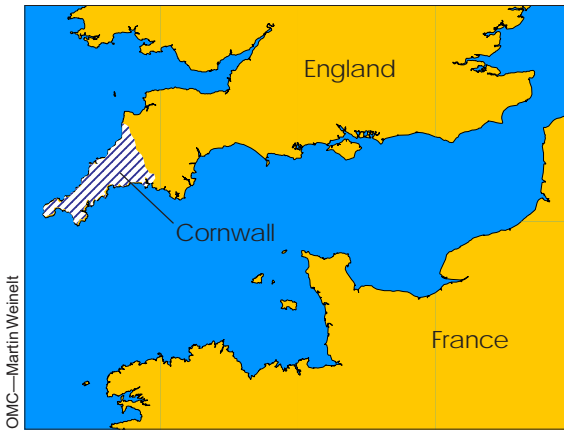
Tin mine in Cornwall

Jonathan Mellows

and was visited by the Phoenicians who traded for tin”.² In 2002, an article on Cornish fishing in the magazine *Geographical* commented that Phoenician amphorae are regularly found amongst the catch of fishermen.³

However, others dismiss the claim that Phoenicians ever came to Britain. In a book entitled *Tin in Antiquity*, Roger Penhallurick, then a curator at the County Museum in Truro, Cornwall, has a chapter called “The Phoenician Myth” in which he claims that “no Phoenician object has ever been found in Britain”.⁴

1. *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (sixth edition, 2001), <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ph/Phoenici.html>.
2. <http://www.infosearch-cornwall.co.uk/marhist.htm>.
3. “Trawl or nothing—fishing with the Cornish trawlermen”, *Geographical*, Mar. 2002.
4. Penhallurick, R. (1986), *Tin in Antiquity*, London, The Institute of Metals, p. 123.



O/MC—Martin Weinelt

Cornwall is the first part of England that sailors would reach

In fact there is great controversy about the Phoenician link with Britain. Perhaps Barbara Tuchman struck the right tone when she wrote: “Though not proved beyond all doubt, the Phoenician link is well within the realm of probability”.⁵ Taking into account all aspects of Bible teaching concerning Tarshish, there is little doubt that it relates to Britain. However, we must not allow this conviction to exaggerate the archaeological evidence for Phoenician contact, which, given the nature of the link, is understandably sparse. It may be that archaeologists will yet affirm that there was a link between Phoenicia and the islands of Britain, either through new finds or through reinterpreting existing evidence.

Timothy Champion, an archaeologist from Southampton University in England, has written about the way in which the Phoenicians were incorporated into the historical imagination of nineteenth-century Britain.⁶ He claims that “the direct archaeological evidence for the presence of Phoenician or Carthaginian traders as far north as Britain is nonexistent”. He shows how a famous tin ingot found at the mouth of the River Fal in Cornwall was wrongly ascribed to the Phoenicians when in fact it is probably from late-medieval times. He also asserts that ancient sources such as Strabo and Diodorus Siculus have been wrongly interpreted as showing that Phoenicians came into contact with Britain.

In previous centuries some British writers went as far as claiming that the British were descended from Phoenicians. But what Champion goes on to argue is that, as the evidence began to point away from this, “the Phoenicians were given a new role . . . as the prototypes of British imperial and commercial dominance”.

That British imperialism and commercialism should be seen to match so well with the Phoenicians actually supports an important aspect of interpretation held by Christadelphians in relation to Britain. This concerns the way Britain is seen as fulfilling the role of the daughter of Tyre. This aspect will now be considered.

Daughter of Tyre

IN Psalm 45 it is written: “And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour” (v. 12). Who is this “daughter of Tyre” who will bring a gift to Israel when the Kingdom is established? Tarshish was one of the key traders with Tyre in ancient times and will bring great wealth to Israel when Christ is King (Isa. 60:9). Tarshish fits the role spoken of the daughter of Tyre in Psalm 45. Ancient Tyre was a great maritime financial centre. How well does Britain fulfil the role of a modern-day Tyre?

The role of Britain, in particular London, as a centre for maritime services was highlighted by a report produced by International Financial Services, London (IFSL) in 2003.⁷ It showed how London is a main provider of services to international shipping. For example, in 1999 London had the largest share (nineteen per cent) of the world market in marine insurance. Ship-brokers based in London handle fifty per cent of the global chartering business in relation to tankers and thirty per cent with regard to the chartering of dry bulk. London is the main centre for providing legal services to the international maritime community. English law is invoked more than any other national law in relation to shipping disputes. Also, there are many foreign ship-owning companies based in London. In 2002 fifteen per cent of the world’s fleet was owned by foreign companies located in London.

These maritime services, together with the more general financial role of London, show how well she fits the role of the daughter of Tyre. The article by Champion mentioned above shows that the comparison with Tyre is not forced. The

5. Tuchman, B. (1982), *Bible and Sword*, London, Papermac, p. 6.
6. Champion, T. (2001), “The appropriation of the Phoenicians in British imperial ideology”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 7 (4), 451-65.
7. International Financial Services (2003), *Maritime Services*, London.

Early history of the Commonwealth

- 1884** Lord Rosebery calls the Empire a 'Commonwealth of Nations'
- 1887** First Colonial Conference for consultation between Britain and its colonies
- 1926** Imperial Conference: UK and its dominions declare they are the British Commonwealth of Nations
- 1930** Canada hosts first Commonwealth Games
- 1931** Statute of Westminster gives legal status to the independence of Australia, Canada, Irish Free State, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa
- 1949** London Declaration allows republics to retain membership, acknowledging the British monarch as Head of the Commonwealth

similarities have been recognised even by those with no interest in Bible prophecy.

Young lions

In Ezekiel 38 the young lions are "of" Tarshish. To identify the young lions we therefore need to identify countries which in some way have been 'reared' by Britain. The picture below is a First World War poster illustrating the way the countries of the British Empire came to the aid of Britain. The depiction of these countries as, to quote the poster, "young lions" provides clear



Recruiting poster from the First World War showing Britain as the old lion and the dominions as young lions.

evidence for relating the countries of the British Empire to the young lions in Ezekiel 38. Of course, for this link to be made, the young lions do not have to be part of an empire. The key thing is their origin, they are "of" Tarshish.

Today the British Empire no longer exists, but the "young lions" still have a familial connection with Britain. This is seen in the Commonwealth of Nations, usually referred to simply as the Commonwealth. As the box on the left shows, the Commonwealth had its beginnings prior to the end of the British Empire.⁸ It was to provide a means by which the relationship between Britain and its former colonies could be maintained, albeit with countries now having autonomy and independence. The organisation is intended to provide a forum for cooperation and consultation between nations. The Commonwealth currently has fifty-three member countries, covering 1.8 billion citizens and thirty per cent of the world's population. It continues to provide a tangible link between the young lions, which of course are growing older all the time.

Maritime power

In Revelation 16 the vials of God's wrath are poured out upon Roman Catholic Europe. The second vial is described as follows: "And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea" (v. 3). This verse was fulfilled by the great naval battles which Britain fought against France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One of the most famous of these battles was the Battle of Trafalgar. This year marks the two hundredth anniversary of this battle.

In the Battle of Trafalgar a combined French and Spanish fleet, consisting of thirty-three ships, was defeated by the twenty-seven ships of the British, led by Lord Nelson, in a battle off the southwest coast of Spain. It was a decisive battle as it wrecked the plans of Napoleon to invade Britain. This was significant for Bible prophecy as Britain has a role to play at the time of the end which is distinct from that of Europe.

The maritime power of Britain continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century, with its ships enabling it to fight land campaigns far

8. Information on Commonwealth from taken from <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/HomePage.asp?NodeID=20593>.

from home. One example was the Crimean War (1853-6). In this war Britain sought to counter the threat of Russian expansion, in particular the threat it posed to Constantinople and the Black Sea. This conflict ended with the Black Sea being declared a demilitarised and neutral zone. It was a victory of sorts for Britain, although many men were lost through disease.

The role which Britain played in halting the southward advance of Russia was significant from a Biblical standpoint, since it was not time for Russia to invade south as prophesied in, for example, Ezekiel 38 and Daniel 11. However, as a means to halting Russian expansion Britain was also seeking to preserve the Ottoman Empire. Yet the time would come when Britain, as the king of the south power in Egypt of Daniel 11:40, would “push at him” (the Ottoman power), and this happened during the First World War when British forces moved north through Palestine, taking Jerusalem in 1917. The occupation of Palestine, together with the Balfour Declaration, provided the opportunity for more Jews to return to the Land. However, British attitudes later became less favourable towards the Jews, and it took the birth pangs of another World War for the Jewish state to be born.

Today the sea power of Britain is still a potent force. The Falklands War was evidence of Britain’s continuing ability to propagate a war across the sea thousands of miles from home. At the time of Armageddon the ships of Tarshish will be broken “with an east wind” (Ps. 48:7), but the remaining ships will then have a role in bringing Jews, together with silver and gold, back to the Land of Israel (Isa. 60:9).



Tony Benson

Rising up over the rundown industrial landscape of Great Yarmouth is the town's monument to Nelson's victory over the French at Trafalgar which established Britain's dominion over the sea. The statue at the top is of Britannia, not Nelson, a reminder of the well-known song, "Rule Britannia, Britannia, rule the waves".



Nigel Bernard

Hobbs Point at Pembroke Dock, Wales. Soldiers and supplies heading for the Crimean War were ferried here to waiting ships in the haven.