

and powerfully developed during the period of the new cosmical views that succeeded the Macedonian conquest. The opening of the Egyptian ports under Psammitich is an event of very great importance, as the country up to that period, at least at its northern extremity, had for a long time been completely closed to strangers, as Japan is at the present day.*

In our enumeration of the non-Hellenic civilized nations who dwelt around the basin of the Mediterranean—the most ancient seat and the starting point of our mental cultivation—we must rank the Phœnicians next to the Egyptians. This race is to be regarded as the most active in maintaining intercourse between the nations from the Indian Ocean to the west and north of the Old Continent. Although circumscribed in many spheres of mental cultivation, and less familiar with the fine arts than with mechanics, and not endowed with the grand form of creative genius common to the more highly-gifted inhabitants of the Valley of the Nile, the Phœnicians, as an adventurous and commercial race, and especially by the establishment of colonies (one of which far surpassed the parent city in political power), exerted an influence on the course of ideas, and on the diversity and number of cosmical views, earlier than all the other nations inhabiting the coasts of the Mediterranean. The Phœnicians made use of Babylonian weights and measures,† and, at least since the Persian dominion, employed stamped metallic coinage as a monetary currency, which, strangely enough, was not known in the artificially-arranged political institutions of the highly-cultivated Egyptians. But that by which the Phœnicians contributed most powerfully to the civilization of the nations with which they came in contact was the general spread of alphabetical writing, which they had themselves employed for a long period. Although the whole mythical relation of the colony of Cadmus in Bœotia remains buried in obscurity, it is not the less certain that the Hellenes obtained the alphabetical characters long known as Phœnician symbols by means of the commercial in-

* Diod., lib. i., cap. 67, 10; Herod., ii., 154, 178, and 182. On the probability of the existence of intercourse between Egypt and Greece, before the time of Psammetichus, see the ingenious observations of Ludwig Ross, in *Hellenika*, where he expresses himself as follows, bd. i., 1846, s. v. and x. "In the times immediately preceding Psammetichus, there was in both countries a period of internal disturbance, which must necessarily have brought about a diminution and partial interruption of intercourse."

† Böckli, *Meteorologische Untersuchungen über Gewichte, Münzfüsse und Masse des Alterthums in ihrem Zusammenhang*, 1838, s. 12 und 273