

# A GORGON'S HEAD AND THE EARLIEST GREEK TEMPLES AT DOR AND ON THE COASTS OF PHOENICIA AND PALESTINE

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In the summer of 2000, the 20th season of excavations was conducted at Tel Dor, the last at the site under the direction of this author. As the season drew to a close, an important discovery was made that provided evidence of the existence of a Greek temple (or several temples) in this harbor town at the end of the sixth century (or earlier) and during the fifth century BCE. The questions of the beginnings of Greek settlement at Dor and at other sites on the Palestinian coast and of the significance of the arrival of the Greeks had been uppermost in the minds of the members of the expedition throughout the excavations (Riis 1969; Stern 1982).

In 1989, shortly after the end of the third season of excavation, the author first proposed in an article on the beginnings of Greek settlement at Tel Dor that an early Greek temple had existed at the site, probably in Area C on the eastern side of the mound (Fig. 1). This article discussed finds from the *favissa* (Locus 4321) of a temple that differed in terms of its contents from all the other *favissae* known until then at settlements on the coasts of Phoenicia and Palestine (Stern 1989). It contained clay figurines in a distinct Greek style and rich ceramic finds that were mainly Greek, some Attic Greek and some East Greek. The author therefore assumed that this was one of several pits dug in the area to serve as *favissae* for a nearby Greek temple.

Since the clay figurines found in the *favissa* were mostly in Archaic Greek style (e.g., Fig. 2a–b), it was dated—on the basis of the figurine types alone—to the middle of the fifth century BCE at the latest. Robert Wenning, the expedition's authority on early Greek objects, concurred with this opinion: "The heads of the Greek figurines are of very good qual-

ity and I would date them to approximately 450/440 BCE; they are apparently the earliest objects in the assemblage" (see Stern 1989: 121, n. 3). The rich ceramic finds from the *favissa* and adjacent loci, on the other hand, consisted of three types: Attic Greek ware, East Greek painted ware, and local pottery, with the first two groups constituting the majority of the finds. The Attic pottery was examined by Wenning and dated to the second half of the fifth century BCE, slightly later than the figurines. Thus, it could be concluded that the *favissa* was in use from the middle to the end of the fifth century BCE, that is, for some 50 years. In the discussion of the finds from the *favissa*, the author noted: "Already in the fifth century BCE, some of the city's inhabitants, whether merchants, settlers or mercenaries, were of Greek origin" (Stern 1989: 121).

Many years have passed since the above observations were made, during which the excavated area of the site was greatly expanded, but no new finds were uncovered that could throw light on this subject. Only in the thirteenth season (1993) was new evidence discovered, this time in the southern part of the mound, in Area D2 (Fig. 3), above the remains of the city's main harbor.

The new evidence also came from a *favissa* that was undoubtedly associated with a nearby temple (Fig. 3). This time the evidence was unequivocal. The *favissa* (Locus 15066) yielded rich finds (published in Stern 1994), including a unique object—a bovine scapula (shoulder blade) incised with an elaborate Phoenician maritime scene. On the other side of the scapula was a Greek inscription in Archaic Cypro-syllabic script—a dedicatory inscription to the goddess Aphrodite (Fig. 4). The inscription was

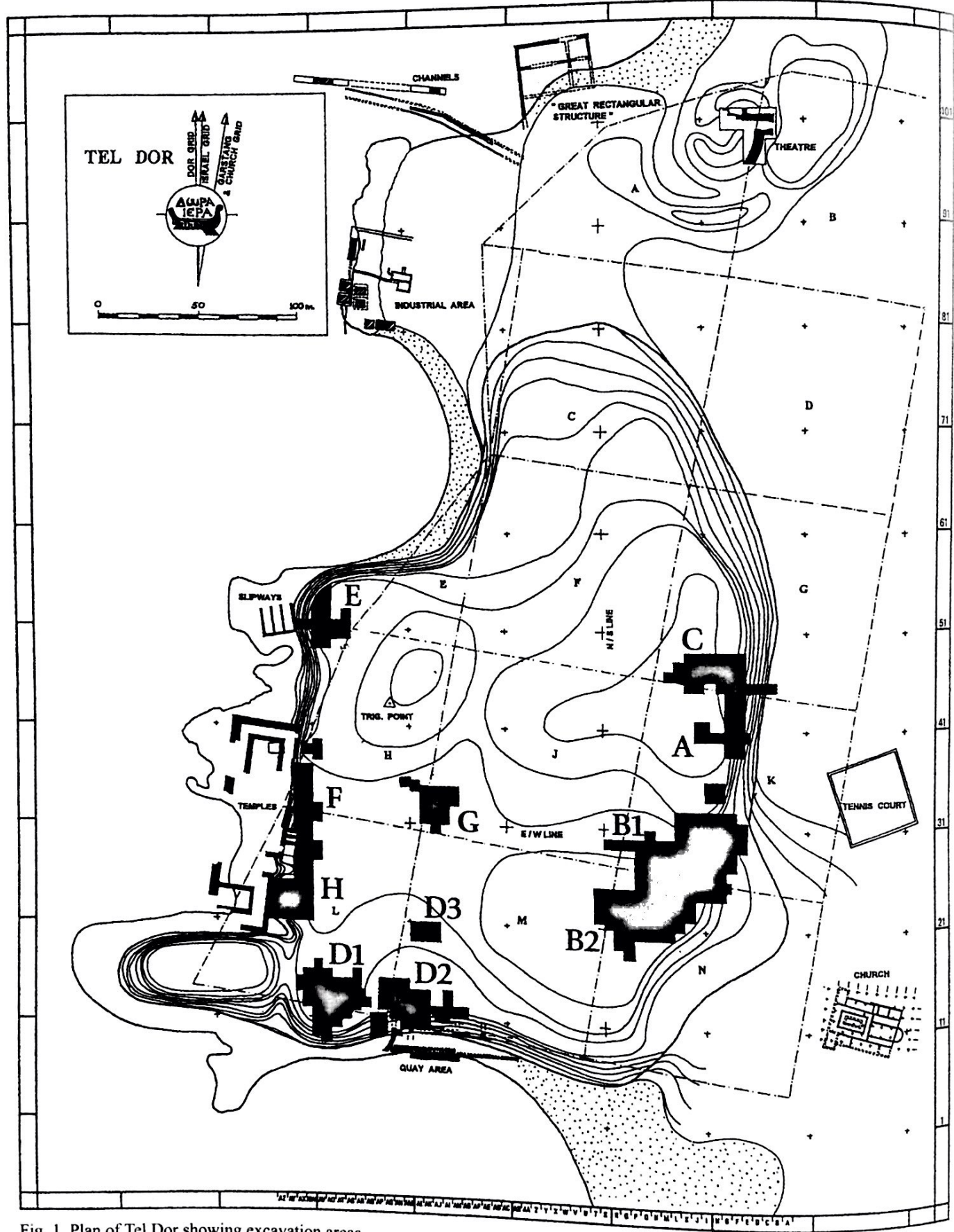


Fig. 1. Plan of Tel Dor showing excavation areas.





Fig. 2a-b. Two heads of Greek-style figurines from Tel Dor Area C.

read by Olivier Masson of the University of Paris, who concluded that it came from the western part of Cyprus, from the area around Paphos (1994). In his opinion, the Phoenician maritime scene dates to the end of the seventh or beginning of the sixth century BCE and the Cypro-Greek inscription was added on the back somewhat later in the sixth century. The *favissa* also yielded a Phoenician ostrakon that Joseph Naveh dated to the end of the sixth–beginning of the fourth century BCE (see Stern 1994: 3). Among the other finds in the pit were an Egypto-Phoenician-style amulet depicting the Egyptian

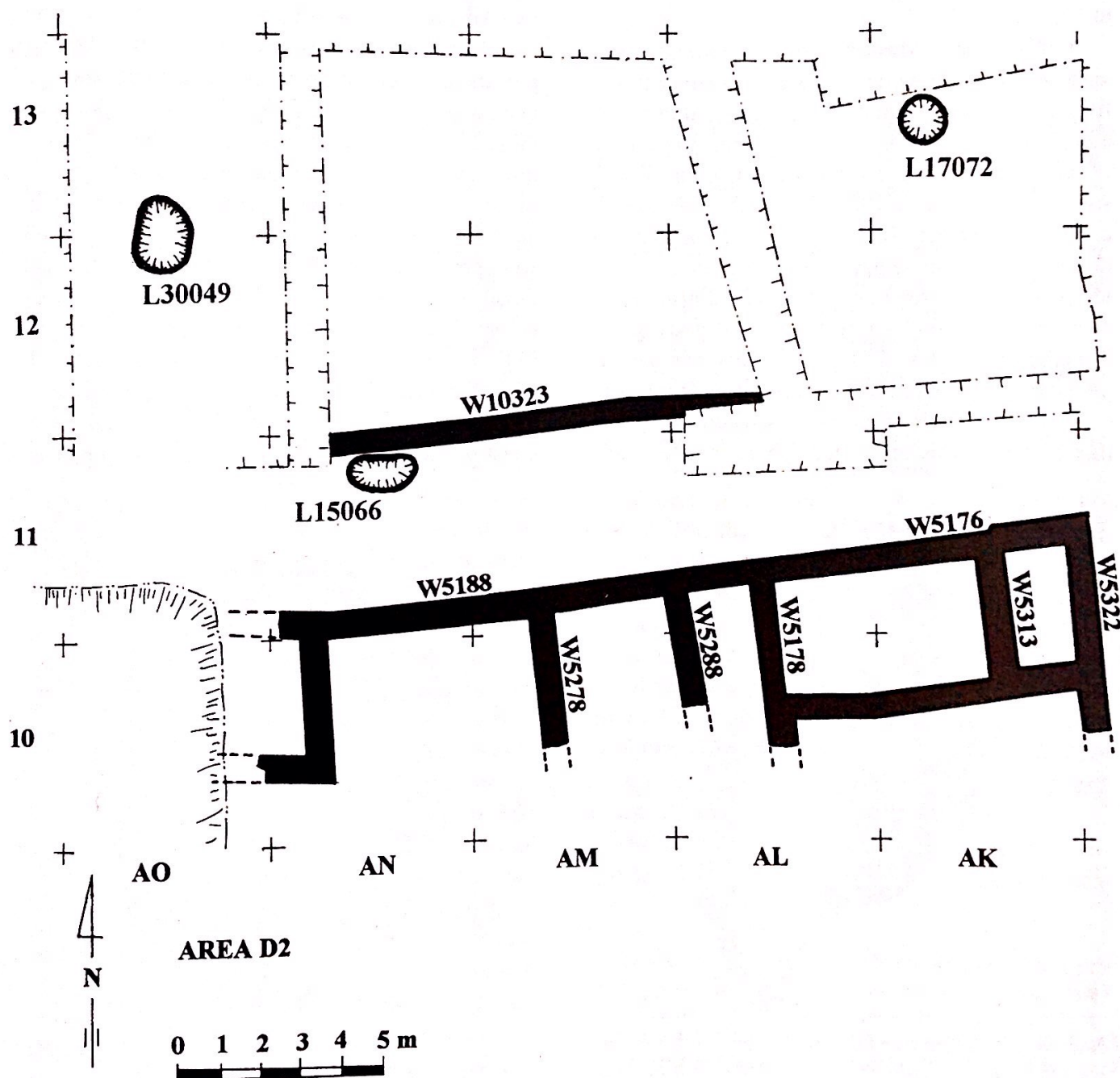


Fig. 3. Plan of Tel Dor Area D showing three *favissae*.



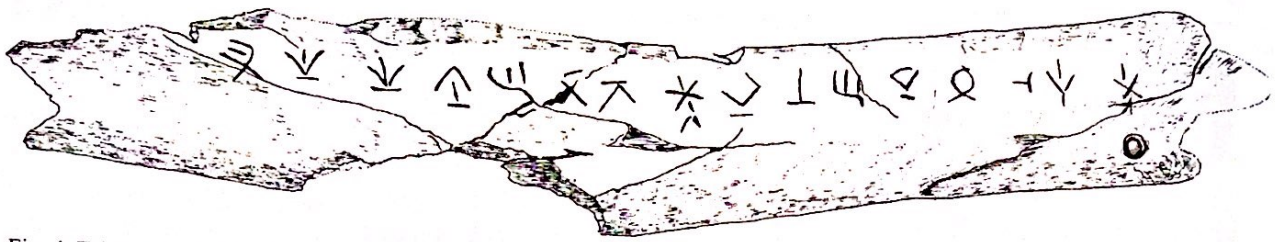


Fig. 4. Tel Dor, inscription in Archaic Cypro-syllabic script on bovine scapula from *Favissa* 15006 in Area D2.

goddess Taweret, of a type common among the Persian period finds at Dor, and several pottery vessels, some of East Greek origin and some local ware, similar to the vessels found in *Favissa* 4321 in Area C.

In this context, Masson also noted two additional Greek inscriptions in Archaic-Cypro script: one from Sarepta that mentions the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius, and the other found near the temple of Eshmun in Sidon that mentions Eshmun's consort, Astarte (Masson 1982). While the Greek dedicatory inscriptions from Dor, Sidon, and Sarepta could constitute evidence of the existence of Greek temples at these three sites, they could also represent appeals made by Greeks to local gods in the Phoenician temples. And, indeed, this was the explanation first offered for the inscription from Dor.

Again, several more years passed before any further evidence was unearthed. Then, in 1995, dur-

ing the 15th season of excavation, another *favissa* (Locus 17072) was found, also in Area D2 in the southern part of the mound, ca. 15 m northeast of *Favissa* 15066. This *favissa* (as yet unpublished) yielded a few sherds of local and Greek vessels that closely resemble the pottery found in the other two pits and another amulet in Egypto-Phoenician style depicting the Egyptian goddess Taweret. Alongside these finds, however, was a unique object, the significance of which was not understood at the time of its discovery: a fragment of a pottery mask of which an eye, an eyebrow, and part of a furrowed brow were preserved (Fig. 5). The enormous eye is much larger than a normal eye and was painted in strong colors. The brow was painted red and the eyebrow blue. It was thought at the time to be a fragment of a Phoenician mask, one of the many from the Persian period found at Dor (Fig. 6) and along the coast of Palestine, which were believed to be used



Fig. 5. Tel Dor, fragment of clay tile or relief with a Gorgon's eye, eyebrow, and forehead from *Favissa* 17072 in Area D2.



Fig. 6. Tel Dor, Phoenician-style mask.





Fig. 7a–b. Tel Dor, drawing and photos of clay tile (reconstructed) in the form of a Gorgon head found in *Favissa* 30049 in Area D2.

in Phoenician cult rituals, and it was described as such in the author's popular account of the Tel Dor excavations (Stern 2000: 306–7, Fig. 268; see also Stern 2001: 507–10). True, the eye was of unusually large dimensions and the mask it belonged to would have been several times larger than the head of a normal person—and no mask of this size had ever been uncovered at Phoenician sites in Palestine or at any other Phoenician settlement along the Mediterranean coast. At the time, however, there was no reason to doubt this interpretation.

As usually happens in such cases, the key to understanding the above finds was discovered only in the last—the 20th—season of excavations, in 2000. During the expansion of Area D2 to the west, a third Persian period *favissa* (Locus 30049) was found in this area, the fourth at the site. Like the others, only its base survived, the upper part having been destroyed by later Persian–Hellenistic period construction. Since no traces of the walls were preserved, its borders could not be defined, and several sherds had apparently fallen into the pit from the Iron Age strata, making it difficult to assign an exact date to the pottery in the pit. However, like the other *favissae*, it, too, was probably in use from the end of the sixth—the end of the fifth century BCE.

The unique find in this *favissa* consisted of fragments of a large clay roof tile in the form of the head of a Gorgon (Fig. 7). The first piece unearthed was a huge eye that was thought to be the second eye of the fragment previously found in *Favissa* 30049,

but it transpired that both are left eyes and of different sizes, the latter being larger. When this and the other fragments from the pit were pieced together, they formed the well-known figure from Greek mythology, the Gorgon, the fragments of the monster including the teeth of a wild boar and a protruding tongue. There was no doubt as to the identification, which was confirmed by Andrew Stewart, a member of the expedition and an authority on Classical art (see Stern 2002). Although much of the head was missing, one side was almost complete and the other could easily be reconstructed.<sup>1</sup>

Of the two fragments of Gorgon heads uncovered at Dor, the one with only a single huge eye preserved at 6 cm wide must have been enormous, estimated as measuring 35–40 cm wide. The other was somewhat smaller and lacked the ears and the snake hair, but it could be reconstructed on the basis of photos and drawings of clay Gorgon heads from other sites, like the terracotta examples from Tarentum (Richter 1949: Figs. 207–208). The reconstructed tile is 30 cm high and 20 cm wide, and may originally have been larger (Fig. 7).

The Gorgon is first mentioned in Greek mythology by Homer, described as a monster with ser-

<sup>1</sup> The excavations of *Favissa* 30049 in Area D2 were supervised by Heidi Koenig. The reconstruction of the Gorgon's head is by Rivi Oni; petrographic analysis by Anat Cohen-Weinberger; photos by Zeev Radovan; plans of Area D2 by Svetlana Matskevich; and drawings by Vered Rosen and Sara Halbreich.



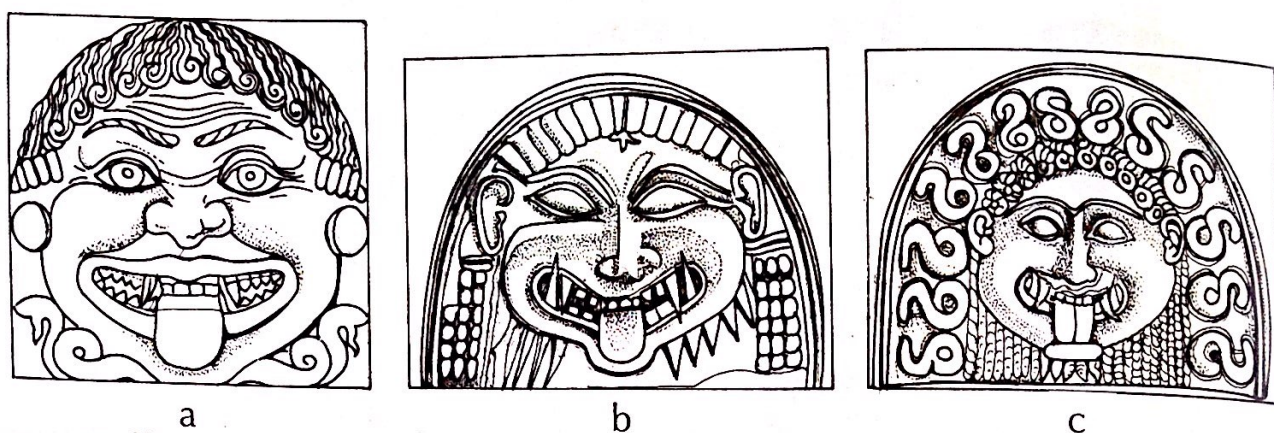


Fig. 8. Tiles decorated with Gorgon heads from Greek temples: a: from the Athens Parthenon; b–c: from Tarentum in southern Italy (Richter 1949: Figs. 207–208).

pents for hair and wild boar's fangs for teeth. Its terrifying eyes and fearful stare turned the beholder to stone. The Gorgon had two sister-monsters, Stheno and Euryale, who, unlike herself, were immortal. Gorgons were winged creatures that could fly from one end of the ocean (their home) to the other. Perseus, with the help of the gods, cut off the Gorgon's head and presented it to Athena, who set it in her breastplate. The Greeks carved heads of Gorgons to adorn temple roofs and pediments (Fig. 8) and shields and armor. They also depicted the Gorgon on amulets, believing that she possessed apotropaic qualities to provide protection against enemies, epidemics, and misfortune. In the Archaic period, she is portrayed as a hideous figure, either alone or being slain by Perseus, but in later repre-

sentations, she is rendered with a beautiful face, but with snakes for hair (Stern 2002: 56) (Fig. 9).

Roof tiles decorated with carved heads of Gorgons, known as *Gorgoneia* (Fig. 10), were very common throughout Greece, the East Greek islands, the coast of western Anatolia, and the Greek settlements in Italy. The roofs of the temples were lined with rows of plain clay tiles (*tegulae*), the seams between them were covered with curved tiles (*imbrices*), and decorative tiles (*antifixes*) were placed perpendicular to the outer edges to seal the openings. These decorative tiles, of which the *Gorgoneia* are only one type, were common in Greece from the end of the seventh century BCE, and especially in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.

In a comprehensive study of the various types of Greek decorative tiles, Winter (1993) distinguished nine styles according to the different regions of Greece and the Greek settlements abroad. These are: Corinthian; Laconian; Northwestern; Arkadian; Argive; Central Greece; Athenian; East Greek Islands and the Anatolian Coast; and West Greek (Sicily and southern Italy). Of course, Winter's 1993 study does not refer to decorative tiles from the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, that is, from the Phoenician and Palestinian coasts.

It can be assumed that the *Gorgoneia* at Dor would be similar in style to those from areas geographically closest to this region, that is, from the East Greek islands and the Anatolian coast—and, as noted above, East Greek pottery formed the bulk of the ceramic finds in all the *favissae* at Dor. The ceramic finds, however, do not provide conclusive



Fig. 9. Tel Dor, Roman period tile fragment with representation of a Gorgon head.



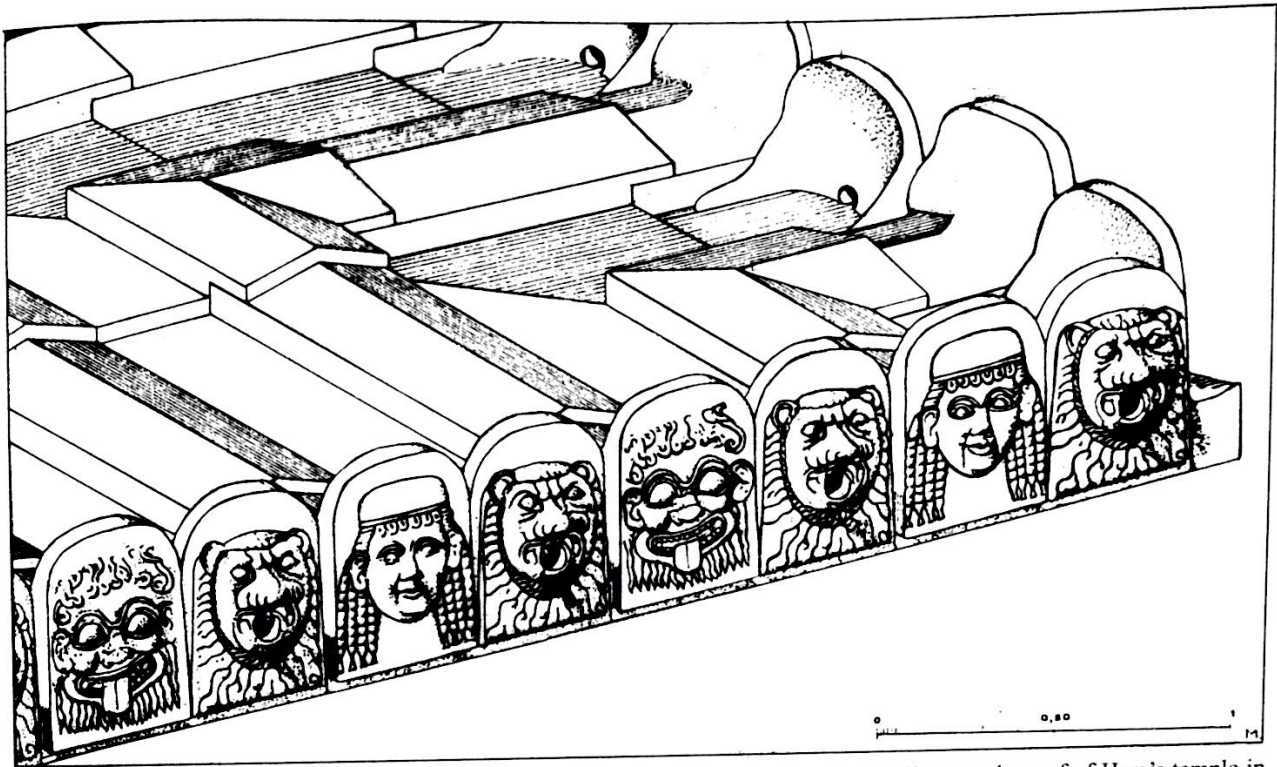


Fig. 10. Reconstruction of roof with clay tiles decorated with heads of Hera, the Gorgon, and lions on the roof of Hera's temple in Corfu built in 610 BCE (after Winter 1993: Fig. 13 [courtesy of N.A. Winter]).

evidence. Perhaps a tenth style, representing the Phoenician and Palestinian coasts, should be added to Winter's list, especially since the petrographic analysis of one of the Gorgons from Dor shows that the clay originated in Phoenicia.<sup>2</sup>

Given that the two Gorgon fragments were of different sizes, they may have adorned different parts of the temple. The smaller may have been part of a decorative tile placed at the edge of the roof, and the larger, with the enormous eye, may have belonged to a pediment with a scene of Perseus slaying the Gorgon, like that found in the Selinus

temple in Sicily (Fig. 11) and the Artemis temple in Corfu (Richter 1949: 15, Fig. 20).



Fig. 11. Perseus, with Athena at his side, slaying the Gorgon, depicted on a stone metope at Selinus, Sicily (Richter 1949: 126, Fig. 203).

<sup>2</sup> In her report on the petrographic analysis, "Petrographic Results of Clay from an Architectural Tile from Tel Dor," Anat Cohen-Weinberger writes: "The clay is highly calcareous, containing foraminifers that characterize the Taqiya marl formation of the Paleocene Age. This formation consists of outcrops over broad areas in Israel. The marl is accompanied by fragments of coralline alga, most probably *Amphiroa* sp. This alga is a 'fossil directeur' of the Quaternary coast, forming a dominant component of the sand along the northern Levantine coastline from Acco northwards. The object analyzed is therefore attributed to the Lebanese coast, or more specifically, to the region between Tyre and Sidon or north of Tripoli."



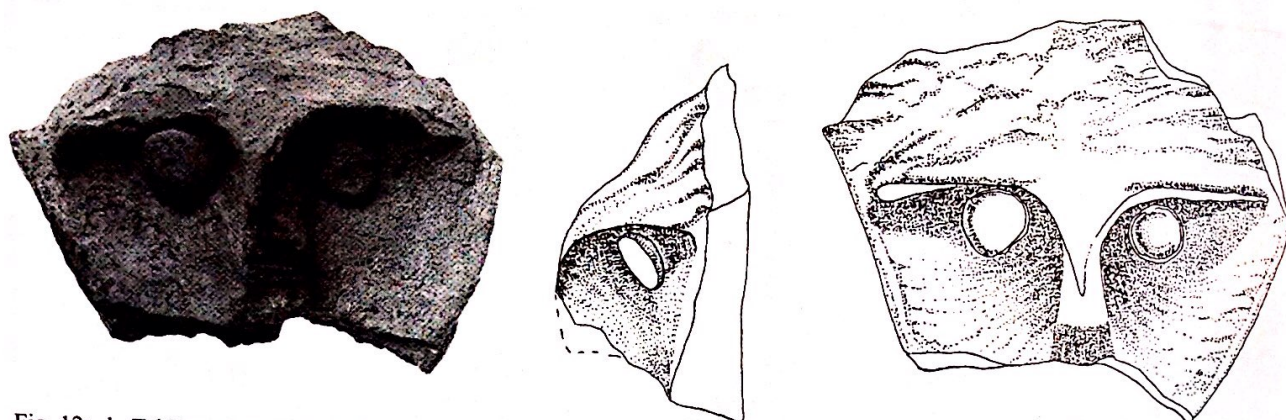


Fig. 12a–b. Tel Dor, clay tile depicting human head or bird of prey.

A large clay fragment with a flat back (possibly of another tile) found at the site consists of two eyes and a nose rendered in the Archaic Greek style (Fig. 12a–b). It may represent a human head or some kind of bird of prey. Judging from its size, it, too, probably belongs to a roof tile decoration.<sup>3</sup>

These unique finds indicate that a Greek temple was probably erected in Area D2 in the southern part of Tel Dor (together with the temple in Area

C on the eastern side of the site) at the end of the sixth century, which continued in use during the fifth century BCE. Tel Dor, therefore, provides the first conclusive evidence of the presence of a Greek temple (or temples) in the eastern Mediterranean at this early date (see Waldbaum 1993; 1997), and sheds new light on the early Greek settlement on the coasts of Phoenicia and Palestine at the end of the Iron Age and beginning of the Persian period.

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<sup>3</sup> The clay fragment (Object No. 97647) from Area G Strata 4/5 (Persian period) was identified by Bracha Zilberstein.



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