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New Phoenician Elements in the Architecture of Tel Dor, Israel

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The excavations at Tel Dor can be used as a case study for Phoenician building styles and techniques because of their unusual state of preservation, and indeed this has been the subject of previous discussions (Stern 1994, and bibliography there). In particular, these excavations are important for the study of the transition from the traditional Phoenician-Israelite building style into the Greek-Hellenistic one (Stern 1988; Sharon 1991).

During the recent excavation seasons at Dor, some new Phoenician-Israelite architectural elements were uncovered which are significant in their contribution to the understanding of Phoenician architecture.

The peculiar Phoenician building techniques, especially that which is characterized by the erection of ashlar piers with fieldstone fills in between, have become the subject of detailed discussions and summaries (Stern 1977; Stern 1992; Elayi 1980; Van Beek and Van Beek 1981; Sharon 1987). Indeed, the construction of walls with ashlar piers and fieldstone fills is a feature of monumental architecture from the beginning of Iron Age II, as for example, at Megiddo (Strata VA-IVB) and at Hazor (Stratum VIII). Y. Shiloh, in his comprehensive treatment of this type of construction, correctly pointed out that its appearance as early as the tenth century B.C.E. proves that it was not a degeneration of ashlar

\[1\] The excavations at Tel Dor are conducted on behalf of the Berman Center for Biblical Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, the Hebrew University and the Israel Exploration Society, under the direction of the present writer.
Photo 1. Door, walls of public building in area D1. Persian Period
building, but was one of several techniques used alongside the more splendid examples of ashlar construction (Shiloh 1979).

An examination of the finds from the coast of Phoenicia and Palestine makes it clear that this element, which began in Phoenicia in a period roughly parallel with its appearance in Palestine, continued without interruption until the Hellenistic period. Walls of this type have been discovered at a large number of sites. At Tell Sukas, structures assigned to Period E of the Hellenistic period were found scattered over the surface of the mound; at Tell Kazel, a city wall and opening were dated to the Persian period; at Tabaat el-Hamman a Hellenistic wall was uncovered; at Tyre a wall in this style was assigned to Stratum IX (850–800 B.C.E.); at Sarepta a residential building was uncovered which should be assigned to the upper Iron Age stratum (D) (Riis 1962: 120, figs. 9–10; Riis 1970: 107–8; Riis 1979: n. 390, figs. 38–39; Dunand, Bouin, and Saliby 1964: pl. 4; Braidwood 1940; Bikai 1978: 10–11, pl. 89:5–6; Pritchard 1978: 93–94, fig. 91). In Palestine these walls have been uncovered at ‘Accho, in the north and south of the mound in Strata IV–III, dating to the Late Persian and Hellenistic periods. Construction of this type found at Akhziv has not yet been published, but M. Prausnitz assigned it to strata from the end of the Iron Age to the Hellenistic period. At Tell Abu Hawam (Stern 1968: 213–14), this type of construction was typical only in the upper phase, Stratum II, of the fourth century B.C.E. At Tel Megiddo a casemate wall of this type encircled a large structure from the Late Persian period, and many other such walls were uncovered recently at Tel Dor, dating from the Iron Age to the Hellenistic period (Dothan 1976; Dothan 1993; Stern 1968; Hamilton 1935; Stern 1977; Sharon 1987).

South of this area, at Tell esh-Shuni (Tell el-Kudadi), a section of a Persian period wall was discovered; and at Jaffa the most beautiful example of this technique was uncovered in Level 2, dating from the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. to the Macedonian conquest. Mention should also be made of the remains found at Tel Michal (Makhmish) and Mimho (Sukenik 1938; Ritter-Kaplan 1982; Avigad 1960: pl. 9; Porath, Dar, and Applebaum 1985: 131, fig. 23). A summary of the chronological data emerging from this survey shows almost unbroken continuity. The controversy over the architectural significance of this method of construction—that is, whether it was used for aesthetic reasons, as J. B. Pritchard suggested, or for structural reinforcement, as others surmise—will not be discussed here (Pritchard 1978: 19–20; Elayi 1980; Van Beek and Van Beek 1981). It is of interest that these scholars all conclude a definite similarity between this and the style of ninth-century structures. All the excavators agree on the Phoenician origin of this method of construction. M. Dothan designates the find at ‘Accho as “Phoenician,”
Figure 1. Tel Dor, general plan
while Kaplan calls it “Sidonian construction” (Dothan 1976; Ritter-Kaplan 1982; see Stern 1977 and Sharon 1987).

In recent years, this exact kind of Phoenician technique has also appeared in the western Mediterranean. Among the Phoenician settlements, the most prominent example was uncovered at Toscanos (Blazquez 1975: pl. 60). This is ample reason to view its appearance in the West as a continuation of a construction technique that had been developed on the Phoenician-Palestinian coast in the tenth-ninth centuries B.C.E.

At Dor, the walls of this type were present in all of the large excavation areas at the site, not only in the city center and the residential quarter in the east, but also in the south and west where the harbor magazines were erected. In the city center, it is clear that the technique used to construct the walls as early as the tenth century B.C.E. continued in use up to the Hellenistic Age; while the Iron Age walls were made of limestone, those from the Persian and Hellenistic periods were built with local sandstone or “kurkar.” Some of these walls are preserved to a height of more than 3 meters and are some of the finest examples of this architectural style (Stern 1994: 162, fig. 96). Further examples of this construction style are the impressive fortifications of the fourth century B.C.E. (Stern 1988; Stern 1994: 153, fig. 90).

Some additional features and innovations were recently found at Dor. In Area G, at the center of the site (see fig. 1), a section of a monumental wall of the Persian Age was uncovered, the width of which is more than a meter; it was certainly once part of a large public structure. The wall is built entirely in the technique described above, but all its stone elements are worked. They were placed two by two along the entire width of the wall, playing the role of the ashlars piers while the area in between, which is usually filled with fieldstones, was also filled with smaller ashlars stones which were laid in the usual technique of headers and stretchers (headers on one side of the wall and stretchers on the other side (Stern 1994: 163, fig. 97). This wall in no way represents a new technique in the Phoenician building repertoire.

While this building technique, with all its variations, was apparently common in the Near East along the Phoenician-Palestinian coast, few examples of it are known from the West. In the West, a different technique or style was common. It resembles the Coastal style but differs in that large monolithic stones were laid, as opposed to the ashlars piers erected in the header-stretcher style. This style, which is called “A-Telaia” (in frames), is known to us from various sites in the Punic world such as Carthage, Motya, Nora and elsewhere (Pritchard 1978; Harden 1971: pl. 13; Eley 1980; Van Beek and Van Beek 1981; Sharon 1987: 35-38 and bibliography there). It is accepted that the first building style is peculiar
Figure 2. Door, plan and reconstruction of the Public Building in Area D1.
to the eastern Mediterranean, i.e., to Phoenicia proper, while the second belongs to the western Phoenician colonies.

We have already seen that the eastern style is also found in the West (Toscany), and therefore we have suggested that it was transferred by the Phoenicians from their homeland to the western colonies. Now it is clear that in the East the “western” style existed as well. At Dor, a structure was recently uncovered built in three stages (two from the Persian Age and one from the Hellenistic), which was built entirely in the “western” style. It was uncovered in Area D1 in the southwest corner of the site, between the city’s acropolis and its southern main harbor, and is part of a large public building which has not yet been fully excavated (fig. 2, photo 1). The part that has already been cleared consists of one long room and three perpendicular rooms (a regular “four-chambered” plan). The entire structure and all its stages were built in the “western” style using sandstone monoliths with a fieldstone fill in between.

The difference between this building and the rest of the structures found at Dor during this period is that its piers are composed of monoliths instead of built masonry piers, the unavoidable conclusion being that the source of the so-called “western” style should also be traced to the East and the Phoenician coast. It seems certain to us that in the future more examples of the “eastern” style will be found in the West and vice versa, but with earlier dates.

Another unique architectural element which was uncovered in one (and perhaps both) of the Persian phases of this same building in Area D1 at Tel Dor was a rectangular pier, erected in the western room, which apparently supported a wooden spiral staircase giving access to a second floor (fig. 2). The pier is built of stone masonry arranged in the typical Phoenician style of headers and stretchers.

The shape of the pier strongly resembles that of a larger one which was discovered long ago in Area A at Dor, on the eastern side (see plan in fig. 1), in the center of a strong tower, part of the mighty defense system at Dor dating to the Hellenistic Age. This system was erected at the beginning of the third century B.C.E. by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (Stern 1988). Here, too, a central pillar, apparently supporting a wooden spiral staircase giving access to the top, was preserved. These stairs enabled the defenders to quickly reach their positions on the tower’s roof, and perhaps to access the ballista as well (Sharon 1991; Shatzman 1995; Stern 1994: 204-11, fig. 137).

In the past, it was believed that these staircase pillars in Dor’s city fortifications were the earliest of their kind in Palestine, for no analogies were found from this period. Also, the earliest written evidence was from the same general period: a structure referred to as a nesiʿbah in Jewish texts. A similar tower with a pillar and staircase is described in
Figure 3. Iron Age column-capital (?) found in secondary use as stone basin in a Roman period stratum, Area D3.

Figure 4. Tel Dan Column – Base
the Temple Scroll, and is discussed in its publication by Yadin (Magen 1984; Patriach 1986; Yadin 1977). However, the scroll is roughly dated to the second century B.C.E. Upon visiting the excavations at Dor, Yadin was delighted to see a tower of this type which predated the Temple Scroll, thus supporting his dating.

In the recent excavations at Maresha, however, it has become clear that almost all the residential buildings at the site, which date to the Hellenistic Age, were already equipped with similar pillars supporting stairs which gave access to second floors (Kloner 1997: 29). In the past, we had assumed that this element was of Greek origin. Now, with the discovery of the pillar in the Persian period house at Dor, it seems, due to the working system of the stones and the technique of laying them (in headers and stretchers), both of which are typically Phoenician, that this important new architectural element may have also originated in Phoenicia and predated the arrival of the Hellenistic armies.

Another architectural element, a decorated column base or capital with a band of incised leaves (no. 141288; locus 14162; fig. 3), was found recently at Dor (in Area D3 in the center and south side of the mound, see plan in fig. 1). This stone was found unstratified in a Roman period level, and was perhaps in secondary use as a stone basin; its inner part was hollowed.

Four similar column bases were found at Tel Dan, where they probably supported a "canopy" in the Iron Age city gate (Biran 1994: 239-42, figs. 197-99). Biran describes it as follows:

Two decorated pumpkin-shaped stones divided vertically through the middle so that the flat part abuts the wall were found — one, in situ, at the southwest corner of the structure, and another in the debris nearby. When placed on the stone base on the northwestern back end of the structure, the latter fitted so well that there could be no doubt of its original location. The straight, back sides of these two decorated, rounded stones each have a vertical recess carved into them corresponding with a square hole in the flat surface of the ashlar on which they were placed. At the front end of the structure — the southeastern corner — is a large stone set deep in the ground, with only its carved rounded part protruding above the level of the flagstone pavement. The flattened top of this rounded stone has a shallow, circular recess carved into it. We conjectured that there probably was a similar carved stone at the opposite — northeastern — side of the structure where there is now an empty spot of plain earth (Fig. 4).

These carved, decorated bases may have served to hold four columns or poles — two square ones in the rear and two round ones in the front — which probably supported a canopy. (Biran 1994: 240-41)
Figure 5. Umm al-Rassas Column Base
There can be no doubt that the origin of these bases is Syria during the Iron Age (whether Aramaic or Neo-Hittite). Other examples are the well-known bases and capitals at Tel Tayanat or Tel Barsip (Frankfort 1954: pl. 154B) and at Dan itself, although in secondary use (Biran 1994: pl. 5 190-91, fig. 150). The find from Tel Dan is probably a local Palestinian imitation of these bases. Biran himself noted that in the gate system the usual Phoenician-Israelite Proto-Aeolic capitals (some of which were later found not in situ; Biran 1994: 242, fig. 201) were also found. A recent find uncovered in eastern Jordan at Umum al-Rassas (also not in situ) is similar to those from Dan (fig. 5), as was noted by the site excavator (Piccirillo 1991: 352, fig. 20).

This find strengthens the assumption that these bases belong stylistically to a Palestinian “branch” of the Syrian types. The find at Tel Dor, however, may show that the various types were actually made by the Phoenicians and distributed around the country during the Iron Age.

It should also be noted that two capitals (or bases) of the pure Syrian style were recovered in Palestine; one at Tel Dan and the other at Bethshean (Arav 1995: 11, fig. 4; Biran 1994: 190, fig. 150).

The last “Phoenician” architectural element found at Dor is a crenellated stone of three steps which was found during the 1996 season on the western side of the mound in Area F (see plan). It was also in secondary use as a side stone along the paved Roman period street running along the western side of the city. Crenellation (no. 4, fig. 6) is another architectural decoration appearing on the upper part of important structures, typical of Phoenician, Israelite, and Judean monumental architecture in the period of the Monarchy. Crenellated upper walls from this period discovered to date have three “steps”: the governor’s palace at Megiddo, the palace of the kings of Israel at Samaria, the palace of the kings of Judah at Ramat Rahel, and, most recently, at Tel Mevorakh in a tenth-century building (Lamon and Shipton 1939: 28-29, fig. 36; Crowfoot 1942: 65, pl. 60.1; Aharoni 1964: 55-56; Stern 1977; Stern 1978: 71-75; Stern 1992).

There is now evidence that this type of three-stepped crenellation continued in the coastal region into the Persian period. In a temple from that period excavated in the area of the southern port of Tell Sukas, two crenellated limestone fragments were discovered. It would seem that in this late period, the type no longer remained uniform, as the two late examples have four steps, in imitation of a design common in Mesopotamia (Riis 1979: 47-48, figs. 149-53; Contenau 1934: 120; Stern 1978: fig 7:5-6).

Our crenellated fragment from Dor is unstratified, yet the fact that it is made of sandstone and not limestone points to a late Persian or even
Figure 6. Table of Iron Age crenellation stones from various sites: (1) Tel Mevorakh; (2) Ramat Rahel; (3) Samaria; (4) Tel Dor; (5) Megiddo
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Hellenistic date, when it undoubtedly adorned an important city building: either an administrative center or a palace.

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