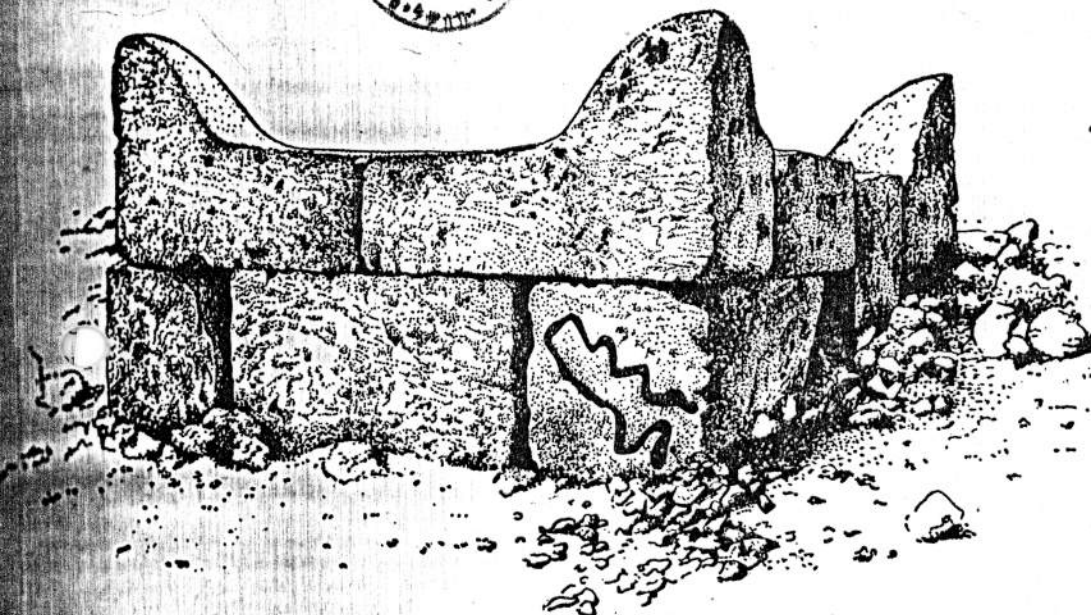# TEL AVIV

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נְפָה—A GEOGRAPHICAL TERM OF POSSIBLE "SEA PEOPLE" ORIGIN

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In this article the word נפה will be discussed in the meaning of "district, region," etc. and not "sieve" with its many uses. In modern Hebrew the word נפה means: region, district, administrative area. The source for this usage is in biblical Hebrew. Thus, Even-Shoshan's dictionary defines it: "נפה — perhaps from נוף, district zone, region close to the meaning in Josh. 11: 2" (Even-Shoshan 1968:865). Similar to this are the definitions by Steinberg (1960:563) and Ben-Yehuda (1948:3716). According to Gesenius it means "elevation, height", and this because the original root is נוף. Gesenius does not bring at all the meaning "region, district" (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1952:632).

The definition of the word as an administrative region can be supported by its use in the description of Solomon's officers and the areas of their charge.

"בן אבינדב כל נפת דאר טפת בת שלמה היתה לו לאשה"

"The son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor, which had Taphath the daughter of Solomon to wife" (1 Kgs. 4, 11). A further confirmation of this meaning could be the plural form נפות:

"...בית שאן ובנותיה ויבלעם ובנותיה ואת ישבי דאר ובנותיה. וישבי עין־דר
ובנותיה וישבי תענך ובנותיה וישבי מגדו ובנותיה שלשת הנפת"

".... Beth-shean and her towns, and Ibleam and her towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of En-dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of Taanach and her towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns, even *three countries*" (Josh. 17, 11).

It is worthwhile noticing that in the Solomonic list the stress is not on the territorial aspect but on the officers: "And Solomon had twelve officers..." (1 Kgs. 4, 7). On the other hand, the geographical-historical research of the Holy-Land needed a territorial term, because it was dealing with Solomon's administration from a geographical point of view. These scholars, therefore, coined the phrases: "Solomon's district", "Solomon's provinces" and also נפות שלמה.

The word נפה, connoting a region appears in the Bible four times, always indicating an area attached to the region of the city of Dor (Josh. 11, 2; 12, 23; 17, 11; Judg. 1, 27). The area is not clearly defined, but there is no doubt that it has to do with the meaning of the word נפה. The accepted explanation, that of any administrative district, was sufficient for the philologists, and therefore, they did not delve deeper into the origin of the word. Moreover, the root of the word seemed to be Semitic-Hebrew: נפי or נוף as accepted by most scholars of the Bible and Holy-Land studies. Dor itself only appears six times in the Bible, four of which are these passages containing the word נפה.

The tel of the port-city Dor is situated near Kibbutz Nahsholim (Tantura) between Caesarea and Atlit and archaeological excavations were conducted there

in the twenties of this century. These excavations helped in ascertaining the identity of the place (Garstang 1924:35; *Enc. Miqr. VIII*:579–581).

The city stood on the very shore line and east of it spread the flat coastal plain, only a few kilometers wide. What was, then, the additional territory of Dor which was defined by the word נפה? Some scholars, who thought of the word as meaning "high place, elevation" turned eastward to the ridges of the Carmel, and saw in the area defined by the word נפה a district extending over the Carmel mountain, all the way to Yokneam and Megiddo (Aharoni 1961:111; 1967:276; Wright 1967: 66*). Others, who according to their historical-geographical conception could not see in the mountainous ridge of the Carmel the additional district of Dor, looked for it in the coastal plain southward to the Yarkon river. But there remained a linguistic difficulty, since the word נפה was thought to mean a high place. Albright tried to solve it by suggesting that the word originated from another Semitic root, which also exists in modern Arabic (Nafnaf, نفنف) and means "a cliff". According to this opinion the Dor district was, therefore, the plain extending up to the cliffs of the Carmel ridge (Albright 1925:32). It seems to me that all interpretations looking for the meaning of the word in the Semitic vocabulary have not produced an acceptable solution.

A new direction in solving the problems connected with the word נפה might be provided by trying to look for its origin in one of the "Sea people" languages. It is based on the fact that the word נפה appears only in connection with the city of Dor, which rose to importance, as far as we know, only with its settlement by one of the "Sea people" — the *Tjeker* or *Sikel* (*ANET*:25; Dotan 1967:21, 47). An additional difficulty is raised by the words שלשת הנפת (Josh. 17, 11) which seemingly indicate other units entitled נפה: En-dor, Taanach and Megiddo, but not Dor. The acceptable interpretation is that En-dor is only a corruption of Dor, and that actually there were only three units named נפה, Dor among them. There is another interpretation, though, which seems appropriate to me: one has to read the words in the above verse השלשת הנפת that is: "the third city in the list is Dor of the נפה, in order to avoid confusion between Dor and En-dor, with a similar name. This suggestion, made by the excavators of Dor (Garstang 1924:35) is actually based on Jewish Bible commentators of the Middle Ages. Thus, the word נפה is associated only with the city of Dor on the coast.

There are only a few words which the Hebrew language absorbed from the "Sea people" languages: סרן (Tyranos), ארגז, כובע, אכיש (a personal name) (*Enc. Miqr. VI*:491). The languages of the Philistines and other "Sea people" dialects are not known to us, and in searching for a word whose origin might be one of these peoples' languages, scholars can only refer to earlier form of the Greek. Looking for the word נפה in Homeric Greek produced an interesting fact which may solve our problem: there, the word ναπη means a forest in the plain (Liddell and Scott 1968:1160). It appears that in the vicinity of Dor and on the coastal plain south of it, to the Yarkon river, spread out a wooded area called Sharon. In early Semitic, the word שרון indicated a forest in the plain (Waitz 1939:132; Brawer 1940:34), in contrast to חורש or חורשה which indicate forests on the mountains (Maisler [Mazar] 1945:41).

It would seem, therefore, that the plain between the Mediterranean and the Carmel and Samaria, as far south as the Yarkon, was named by the Semitic inhabitants שרון as being a wooded area, and for the same reason the "Sea people" called it נפה.

If this interpretation be true, and the word נפה means a forest in the plain, then from it one might draw an historical-geographical conclusion: the area of the fourth district of Solomon, that governed by Ben-Abinadab, included the coastal plain, between the sea and the mountains, to the Yarkon river. This was, in fact, the conclusion of Albright, who reached it through historical-geographical considerations without interpreting correctly the meaning of the word.[1] On the other hand, it seems preferable to assume that the zone to which Dor was assigned in the fourth district of Solomon's administration did not correspond to the whole of the wooded Sharon as far as the Yarkon but only to its northern portion.

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[1] A few years ago I brought this suggestion to Prof. H. Rabin, and asked him specially whether the word נפה could evolve from the Greek ναπη that is, whether the Greek π (p) could develop into a פ (f) and whether the antiquity of ναπη in Greek could hint that it had ....

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