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FAUNAL REMAINS OF IRON AGE TEL DOR: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FISHING

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Tel Dor is a major harbour town located on the Carmel coast of Israel, 21 km south of Haifa. Excavations headed by Prof. Ephraim Stern of the Hebrew University are ongoing since 1980. We analyzed the faunal assemblage retrieved in the 1997 season at area G, an Iron Age residential district with much evidence of various household industries.

Horizons analyzed include local phases 11-6. Phases 11 to 9 date to the Iron Age Ia period (probably end of the 13th and 12th centuries BCE). Phase 9 ends in a fiery destruction, at the very end of the 12th century, or shortly afterwards. Phases 8-7 are Iron Age Ib (11th century BCE). Due to evidence of mass destruction at phase 9, this phase has been named the "destruction phase" with phases 10 and 11 as "pre-destruction" and 6-8 as "post-destruction". The significance of the destruction layer is in debate. One view holds that the phases 11-9 inhabitants were the SKL "Sea Peoples", presumably of Aegean origin; that the destruction should be attributed to the expansion of the Phoenicians and their "reclaiming" Dor; that phases 8-7 represent the settlement of these Phoenicians in the "Sea Peoples" stead, and that phase 6 is the Israelite town of David and Solomon's time. Material culture, however, may indicate a cohabitation of several cultures rather than a total cultural upheaval.

Preliminary analysis of faunal remains for pre-destruction assemblages (n=333) indicate a high precentage of fish (51%). Caprines follow in abundance (32%), as do cattle (15%), and small percentages of pig, fallow deer, gazelle, canids, and microfauna. The destruction assemblage (n=323) indicates an increase in the precentage of fish (58%), with the economically significant mammal species similar to pre-destruction finds: caprines comprise 31%, cattle drop to 3%, and pig appear at 4%. Again small numbers of fallow deer and gazelle (2% each), birds, rodents and small reptiles were also present. Post-destruction assemblages (n=220) show a predominance of fish (63%) followed by caprines (27%) and cattle (9%). Small percentages (1-2% each) of pig, fallow deer, gazelle, rodents and birds were also present.

We found a very high proportion of fish remains at all three stages (percentages based on NISP, with only fish vertebrae and skull fragments counted to reduce sample bias), with an apparent trend of increase of the significance of fish to the diet. Chi square 2*2 test results indicate that the ratio of fish to other edible fauna was significantly greater in post-destruction than in pre-destruction faunal assemblages ($p=.0046$), confirming this trend. However, finer taphonomic analysis is still required in order to address the archeological significance of this phenomenon.

While the mammal remains found at Tel Dor are typical of the period, the overwhelming proportion of fish remains sets Dor apart from other IA sites. This may result partly from the paucity of fish research in this country and partly from a sieving bias. A large fraction of our sample was dry sieved using mesh size 5 mm, which retrieves at least part of the fish remains, while at other sites of the period sediments are rarely sieved. The inhabitants of coastal settlements along the Levantine coast during this period were of seafaring cultures, so economies based on fishing should be expected. Thus, this research provides an opportunity to illuminate different cultural uses of marine and freshwater resources in the Iron Age.

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