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Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, No. 279. (Aug., 1990), pp. 27-34.

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New Evidence from Dor for the First Appearance of the Phoenicians Along the Northern Coast of Israel

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Recent excavations at Tel Dor, Israel (1987–1988), showed that the city of the Tjeker (a tribe of Sea Peoples), a large, well-fortified town (Stratum XII), had been destroyed violently ca. mid-11th century B.C. That destruction left a huge layer of ashes and debris. The first Israelite town was constructed, however, only at the end of that century or the beginning of the next. Two interim occupation strata (Strata XI–X and IX) yielded rare Cypriot White Painted I pottery vases and early Phoenician Bichrome vessels, all well dated to the second half of the 11th century B.C.

The city of the Sea Peoples seems to have been destroyed and resettled later by the Phoenicians in their move from Tyre and Sidon toward the south. Later they were blocked by the Israelites. The final border between the two peoples was settled during Solomon's time, when the Israelites agreed to return Cabul to the Tyrians.

Only small amounts of Phoenician remains have been uncovered in the excavations of the four principal Phoenician cities, Tyre, Sidon, Arvad, and Byblos (Muhly 1985). Our knowledge of the early history of the Phoenicians, and of their material culture in general in this area, at the end of the second millennium and throughout most of the first millennium B.C., is minimal. It is based so far on the results of a small-scale excavation at Tyre (Bikai 1978a; 1978b), a few excavations at small sites such as Tell Sukas (Riis 1970; Ploug 1973; Riis 1979; Lund 1986) and Sarepta (Pritchard 1975; 1988; Koehl 1985; Anderson 1988; Khalifeh 1988), and a number of cemeteries (Saidah 1966; Chapman 1972).

In recent years some southern Phoenician sites of great importance have been excavated in Israel. Those sites include Achzib (Prausnitz 1982), ^cAkko (Dothan 1976; 1985), Tell Keisan (Briend and Humbert 1980; Humbert 1982), Cabul (Gal 1984), Tell Abu Hawam (Hamilton 1933; 1935; Balensi 1980; 1985), Shikmona (Elgavish 1978: 1101–9), Tel Mevorakh (Stern 1978), and Tel Michal (Herzog 1978; 1980). Although important finds have

been uncovered at all those sites, it probably would not be an exaggeration to say that the remains unearthed at Dor were the best preserved and the most numerous, and that their sequence was the most complete.¹

A great deal of new and significant material was found during those excavations, including two main Iron Age I strata (1150–1000 B.C.) that represent the period of transition from the Canaanite Age to the conquest of the city by David.

At Dor that period is divided into three strata. In the earliest, Stratum XII, the city was ruled by the Sea Peoples of the Tjeker tribe; the two later strata (XI–X and IX) date from the destruction of the city of the Tjekers to its conquest by David. On the basis of the remains, Stratum XII should be dated to approximately 1150–1050 B.C. The other two lasted only about 50 years, approximately 1050–1000 B.C. After nine seasons of excavations, however, it is evident that more light can still be thrown on the history of the earliest phase by the historical sources than by the excavations.

Rameses III, who repulsed the invading Sea Peoples from Egyptian territory in about 1180 B.C., mentions the “annihilation” of three tribes of

Sea Peoples: the Danuna, the Tjeker, and the Philistines (Pritchard 1969: 262). A nearly contemporaneous Ugaritic text also refers to the Tjeker as sea marauders who lived on their ships (Dietrich 1978).

Most of the information on those tribes, however, comes from two slightly later Egyptian sources. The first source, the "Onomasticon of Amenope," dates from the end of the 12th or beginning of the 11th century B.C. That document contains a list of names: "Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gaza, Asher . . . , Sherden, Tjeker, and Philistia"—that is, the three coastal cities of the Philistines are mentioned. In the view of several scholars, it may also include the Israelite tribe of Asher, which ruled over an enclave adjoining its territory in the ^ʿAkko Plain, and three tribes of Sea Peoples. It can thus be assumed that the Tjeker and Sherden had also seized a number of areas on the coast of Israel (Gardiner 1947: 24).

The second and much more detailed source is the Wen-Amon document (Pritchard 1969: 25–29; Goedicke 1975; Hlessondra 1985). That document is a papyrus from el-Hibeh in Egypt, now in the Pushkin Museum. It dates to the 21st Dynasty (11th century B.C.), and has great importance as the only document containing a direct reference to the Tjeker's area of settlement at Dor. It also is an unparalleled source for the history of Israel in general in the 11th century B.C., an era considered a "dark age" from the standpoint of written documents.

The writer, Wen-Amon, an official in the Temple of Amon at Karnak in Egypt, was sent to the city of Byblos in Phoenicia, which had trade relations with Egypt, to buy cedar wood for the construction of the sacred barge. From this story, which was apparently based on an actual event, it is evident that Dor was inhabited by Tjeker who operated a large fleet of ships out of its harbor. Aside from the ruler of Dor, three other rulers are mentioned whose names are connected with the Sea Peoples. One, who had about 50 ships and a trade alliance with Sidon, may have been the ruler of Ashkelon—a principal Philistine city—and the other two may have been the rulers of Ashdod and Gaza.

The Wen-Amon document presents a unique description of independent harbor towns in the 11th century B.C., some of which were under the rule of the Sea Peoples and others, of the Phoeni-

cians. Those towns were linked by commercial ties and they controlled the coasts of Israel and Phoenicia with no fear of Egyptian intervention.

The Egyptian documents and the others mentioned thus indicate that the Philistines had settled in the southern part of the country. Indeed, the Philistine domination and occupation of their five large cities is also often mentioned in the Bible and is, moreover, confirmed by archaeological finds. Their northern border was at Tell Qasile, where a prosperous Philistine city containing houses and temples has been excavated (Dothan 1982; Mazar 1985a: 124–27). The settlement of the Tjeker in the northern Sharon and of the Sherden farther north in the ^ʿAkko Plain has similarly been confirmed by excavations. At Tel Zeror near Hadera, the excavator attributed finds associated with the Sea Peoples to the Tjeker (Kiyoshi 1970). Excavations at ^ʿAkko and neighboring Tell Keisan have yielded Mycenaean IIIC pottery, which is generally associated with the Sea Peoples (Dothan 1976; 1985: 12–14; Briand and Humbert 1980: 229–30). The excavators at the latter two sites maintain that both settlements were conquered by the *Sherden*. Aharoni and others have even linked Tell Abu Hawam, a port city in the southern ^ʿAkko plain near the mouth of the Kishon, with the Sea Peoples in this period (see also Harif 1974).

During the last (1988) season of excavations at Dor, we reached the stratum of the Tjeker only in Area B1, which was marked by a destruction layer and a conflagration so fierce that it had turned the mud bricks red and crumbled the limestone of the houses, leaving a heavy residue of ashes and charcoal (Stern, Berg, and Sharon 1989; Gilboa 1989). The depth of the stratum in that area so far is about 2 m and the floor has not yet been reached. The destruction layer was sealed by floors on which were found vessels dating to the second half of the 11th century B.C. (see below). Another section was dug in Area F on the western edge of the mound, adjacent to the seashore. There, too, we found the same massive burnt layer; flames had charred the bricks and limestone. No clearly defined floor could be distinguished there. Nevertheless, the great distance between the sections excavated on the eastern and western edges of the mound indicates that this huge city of the Sea Peoples covered the entire area of the mound.

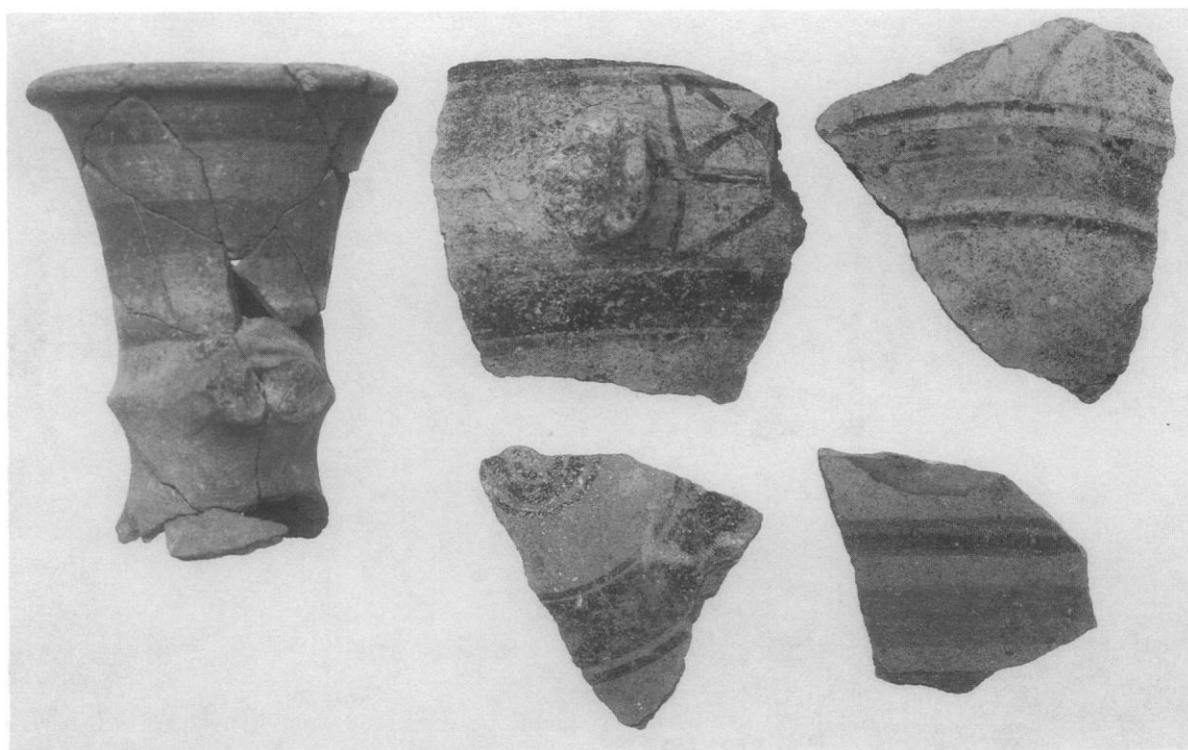


Fig. 1. Phoenician bichrome pottery from Stratum XI-X.



Fig. 2. Cypriot Bichrome Sherd.

Very little pottery was found in those sections and most of it was too small and undistinguished to be classifiable. In the 1988 season, however, when we extended the excavation in Area B1 and descended along the entire length of the stratum,

we found two unique vessels that could clearly fix its date. One was a giant pithos decorated on the outside with a wavy relief design. The second, which could also be completed, was an outside pilgrim flask with red-painted concentric circles. Though no pottery connected with the Sea Peoples has been discovered so far among the ruins of this stratum, on the surface of the mound—but not *in situ*—were a number of Philistine bichrome ware sherds, as well as other potsherds, including a handle with a red spiral decoration.

The widespread, violent destruction of the city some 50 years before the time of David (middle of the 11th century B.C.) prompts us to attempt to discover the identity of the perpetrators. A close examination of the coastal cities in the Sharon and the ^cAkko plain reveals that the destruction was not restricted to Dor. Excavations at Tel Mevorakh uncovered no signs of such destruction, since during the period of Tjeker rule at Dor, no settlement existed at that site. Other sites, however, such as Megiddo Stratum VIA, had a very thick destruction layer (Loud 1948: 33–45). At all the other coastal settlements, on the other

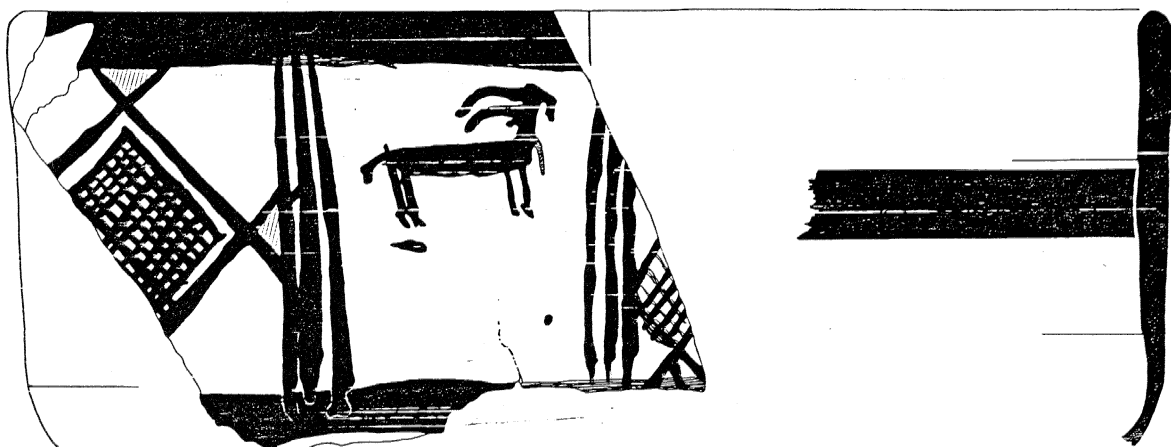


Fig. 3. Drawing of the bowl form of the Cyproit White Painted Sherd in Fig. 2.

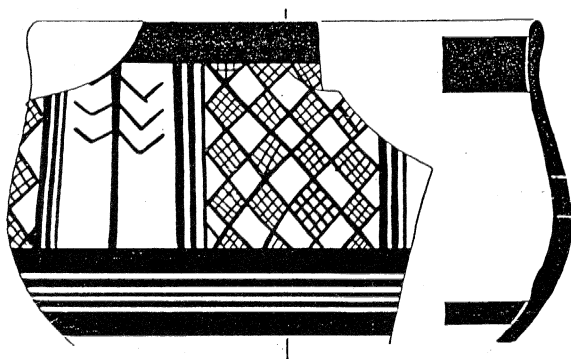


Fig. 4. Drawing of Cyproit White Painted I bowl from Stratum IX.

hand, such as Achzib, ^cAkko, Tell Keisan, Tell Abu Hawam, Dor, and Tel Michal, the material culture of the period is distinctly Phoenician (Mazar 1985a: nn. 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 22). The excavator maintained that by the middle of the 11th century B.C. even at Tell Qasile (on the banks of the Yarkon on the border of Philistia), the finds proved that Stratum X, (second half of the 11th century B.C.) already contained a mixed Philistine-Phoenician population (Mazar 1985a: n. 18).

Neither Phoenicia nor any of its main centers—Tyre, Sidon, Byblos, or Arvad—was ever con-

quered by the Sea Peoples. This area in fact was the only one to retain the Canaanite culture that flourished throughout the second millennium B.C.; it also contained a large refugee population. In the 11th century B.C., when those centers enjoyed a renewed wave of prosperity, they began spreading into the surrounding territory and utilized the natural resources (timber and seaports) of the areas under their control. In that brief period, the small Phoenician area formed a central island of culture, which it dispersed to its surroundings. Within a short time, its population increased and the center's influence began to be evident on the coast of Cyprus as well as along the coast of northern Israel, where a major struggle for control of the maritime trade routes seems to have developed. It was probably during that conflict that the Phoenicians conquered and razed Dor of the Tjeker, as was apparently also the case with ^cAkko and the other coastal cities held by the Sherden. The Sherden in that period formed only a minority—albeit a ruling minority—in their cities (Bonimovitz 1986; Mazar 1985b). Only in the coastal cities from the Yarkon south, which were occupied by a substantial Philistine population, did the Phoenicians penetrate by peaceful means and commerce. The destruction of Dor and the rapid renewal of settlement along the northern coast of Israel were therefore part of the process

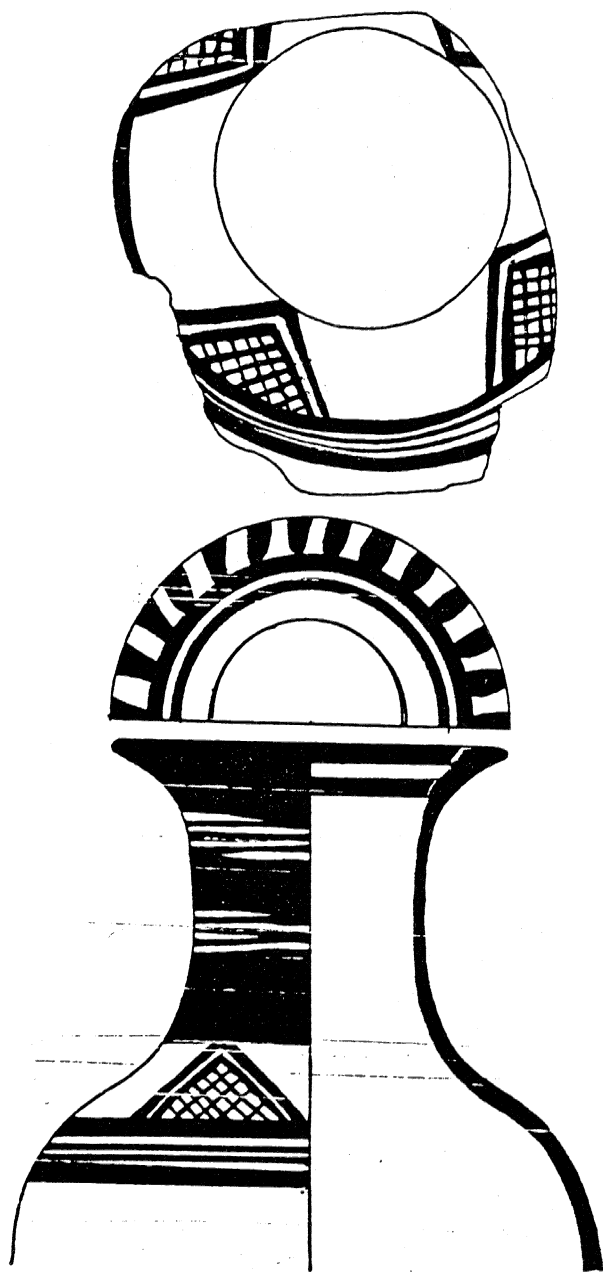


Fig. 5. Drawing of Cypriot White Painted I jar from Stratum IX.

of Phoenician expansion. It is possible that if, during their southward thrust, they had not encountered Philistine might in the initial stage, and the United Monarchy in a later stage—which ended their expansion in that direction—the era

of their maritime colonization overseas in the west might have been delayed by a good many years.

THE PHOENICIAN TOWN

The archaeological evidence for the second part of the period, under discussion, i.e., the second half of the 11th century B.C., is much more abundant. In historical terms it falls between the destruction of the city of the Sea Peoples and the conquest of Dor by David.

Since neither biblical nor external historical sources for the period are available, all our information comes from the excavations. We have so far only excavated a limited section in Area B1, about 20 m long and 10 m wide. Several long walls, mostly mudbrick and oriented north-south, were preserved (more than 15 m have already been exposed) as were several partition walls oriented to the west. Between the partitions and the outer walls was a succession of tightly-packed clay floors belonging to two phases. The size of the structures—though a complete unit has not yet been uncovered—indicates that they were public buildings. The floors of these two phases, 11 and 10, yielded a small quantity of Phoenician bichrome ware (fig. 1). Especially noteworthy is a group of extremely rare types of Cypriot potsherds uncovered on the floors. Very few appear among the ware imported to Palestine and only isolated examples have been found at other sites (and somewhat more on the Phoenician coast). The sherds belong to two main groups, White Painted and Bichrome I (figs. 2–5, Iacovou 1984; Gilboa 1989). Parallels to the Dor vessels, in Cyprus, are found mainly in Cypro-Geometric I contexts, the second half of the 11th century B.C. or slightly later. Thus, those vessels confirm the date assigned to that phase—ending ca. 1000 B.C.—a date deduced independently from the local pottery.

On the basis of that ware and the Phoenician pottery found on the site, we must consider the identity of the population that occupied the city in this early period, prior to the Israelite conquest. In his excavations at Tell Qasile, Mazar also discovered Phoenician and Cypriot vessels from the same period alongside late Philistine ware; he maintained that Tell Qasile at that time already contained a mixed Philistine-Phoenician population (Mazar 1985a: 126–27).

At Dor the picture seems even clearer. We have already noted that the Phoenicians probably carried out the destruction of the Tjekker city as part of their struggle to seize control of the coastal strip. They apparently also settled in the city in the second half of the 11th century B.C. and from then until the end of the first millennium B.C. they comprised the majority of the population.

The appearance of the Phoenician vases from the middle of the 11th century B.C. and the contemporaneous Cypriot White Painted I ware should probably be interpreted as the result of trade between Cyprus and Palestine; or even more likely, they may represent the internal movement of goods between the Phoenicians in Dor and those in Cyprus, where intensive Phoenician settlement should have begun. That has become increasingly obvious from the excavations, surveys, and chance written finds, and especially from the distribution of the Phoenician pottery on the island itself, in both the east and the south. Bikai's comprehensive study of this pottery, its date, and distribution, confirms the Phoenician settlement and trade. The beginnings of the Phoenician

pottery, which she calls the *early Kouklia horizon*, also dates to around 1050 B.C. (Bikai 1987: 68–69).

The parallel phenomenon of the pottery found at Dor (as well as at Tell Abu Hawam, Tell Keisan, Tyre, Sarepta, and Khaldeh on the Phoenician coast, and elsewhere) and in Cyprus seems in fact to represent two sides of the same coin: the beginning of Phoenician expansion and settlement on the northern coast of Palestine and in Cyprus.

When David, in 1000 B.C., united the Israelite Monarchy and routed the Philistines in the south, he seems to have acquired firm control over the northern coast of Palestine from the Phoenicians and to have held it for a brief time. But David, and Solomon without doubt after him, withdrew from substantial areas on the coast and relinquished them in exchange for economic and trade cooperation when they recognized the Phoenicians' superiority in all phases of their material culture, especially in shipping and trade. In their time, the border was fixed on the summit of the Carmel, where a temple held in common by the Phoenicians and the Israelites and dedicated to Baal, was established.

NOTES

¹Those remains were uncovered during nine years (1980–1988) of excavations undertaken by an expedition of the Hebrew University, with the participation of

California State University, Sacramento, the University of California, Berkeley, and many other institutions (Stern 1985; 1987).

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