



# Israel Exploration Journal



VOLUME 27 ★ NUMBER 1  
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL ★ 1977



# A Temple at Dor?

MENACHEM HARAN

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

In a recent issue of *IEJ* Prof. N. Avigad published a Hebrew seal, which he dates to the middle of the eighth century B.C.<sup>1</sup> One side of this seal bears the inscription: *לזכריו בן מכא*, *Belonging to Šadoq son of Mikha'*, while the other side has: *כהן דאר*, *[Belonging to Ze]kharyau priest of Dor*. I accept Avigad's suggestion that it must have belonged to an Israelite priest, as is evident from the Israelite names appearing on both sides of the seal and particularly from the Yahwistic name [Ze]kharyau. However, certain historical inferences involved in Avigad's discussion need clarification. These are: (1) that there was an Israelite sanctuary in the coastal city of Dor which is not attested in the Bible; (2) that its founder was perhaps Jeroboam, who also set up the sanctuaries in Dan and Bethel. Does the evidence at our disposal, including that of the seal itself, permit these inferences?

The English term 'sanctuary' refers to a cultic site the nature of which is not exactly defined. Biblical Hebrew, however, has a cultic-institutional nomenclature of its own and clearly distinguishes between 'houses of God', in whose interiors the cultic activities took place, and places of worship of the 'open' type — altars, 'high-places' (*bāmôt*), stone pillars (*maššebôt*), sacred trees (*ashêrim*). To almost every 'house of God' a special altar was attached, but not every altar or stone pillar was necessarily attached to a house of God. Cult sites of the 'open' type were numerous and were to be found in almost every settlement in the Holy Land, while 'houses of God' were few, and those known to have existed do not exceed a dozen.<sup>2</sup> In the English versions of the Bible the term 'Temple' (spelt mostly with a capital T) is reserved for the 'house of God' built by Solomon in Jerusalem, while to the 'houses of God' which were situated outside Jerusalem the designation 'sanctuaries' is applied.<sup>3</sup> However,

<sup>1</sup> The Priest of Dor, *IEJ* 25 (1975), pp. 101–105.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed the fundamental, institutional distinction between the 'house of God' and the 'open' places of worship on various occasions; see, e.g., The Complex of Ritual Acts Performed inside the Tabernacle, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 8 (1961), pp. 289–290; *Enc. Miqr.*, IV, Jerusalem, 1962, cols. 17–18, s.v. *כהונה*; cols. 764–765, s.v. *מזבח*; V, Jerusalem, 1968, cols. 322–324, s.v. *מקדש בתי* (Hebrew); The Divine Presence in the Israelite Cult and the Cultic Institutions, *Biblica* 50 (1969), pp. 253–258. This will constitute one of the key points in my book *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford University Press, in press).

<sup>3</sup> The term 'temple' has actually become the English equivalent of the Hebrew substantive *היכל*, 'palace', and is consequently also applied to the 'house of God' at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3) in the English versions of the Bible.

the identity of the terms in biblical Hebrew clearly indicates that there was no basic, institutional distinction between the Temple in Jerusalem and its counterparts outside of Jerusalem.

At the solitary altars cultic acts could be performed by any Israelite wishing to offer a sacrifice. In the temples, however, cultic activity was the sole right of priestly families. The biblical idiom reserves a special epithet for the priests, משרתי ה', 'Yahweh's ministers' (Isa. 61:6; Jer. 33:21–22; Joel 1:9, 13; 2:17 *et al.*), i.e., those who serve him in his house. The problem before us is not, therefore, whether there was at Dor a place of worship, altar or high-place, but rather whether there was at Dor a temple, that is, what the Bible calls a 'house of God'.

Such a possibility should be ruled out for the following reasons:

(1) Historical-chronological considerations require us to assume, as Avigad himself correctly does, that if there was an Israelite temple at Dor it could not precede the time of David and Solomon and its builder could only have been Jeroboam I or one of the kings who succeeded him. However, significantly there is no hint of such building in the Bible, and this kind of activity would hardly have escaped attention. It is reported in the Bible that Jeroboam did indeed carry out several building projects, the most prominent of which was the setting up of the golden calves in the temples of Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:26–30). It is also reported that Jeroboam built Shechem and Peniel (*ibid.*, 25). However, nothing is mentioned about building a temple at Dor. It goes without saying that establishing a temple at Dor, no less than the setting up of the golden calves, could have been interpreted only as directed against the royal Temple in Jerusalem, and could not have been viewed sympathetically by the authors of the books of Kings.

(2) Avigad's assertion that Jeroboam set up the two sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel is not consistent with the evidence at hand. The text simply relates that Jeroboam 'made', ויעש, two golden calves and 'set (them)', 'put (them)', נתן, in Bethel and Dan (*ibid.*, 28–29). The temples certainly preceded him for, according to biblical tradition, that at Dan was built when the tribe bearing that name settled there (Judg. 18:30–31), and the beginnings of that at Bethel were also in the period of the Judges.<sup>4</sup> All the temples outside Jerusalem were actually anterior to the Temple built by Solomon.<sup>5</sup> According to the evidence embodied in our sources, the Jerusalem Temple was the *latest* and most important of the early Israelite temples, so much so that it overshadowed its predecessors. It is the only one about which we have an

<sup>4</sup> The great antiquity of the temple at Bethel is indirectly attested in, for example, 1 Sam. 10:3, where a pilgrimage to this house of God is implied. In Gen. 28:17, 22, however, the expression 'house of God' is used in an irregular way, as an appellation for Bethel's stone pillar.

<sup>5</sup> For the temples outside Jerusalem, see, for the present, the list in *Enc. Miqr.*, V, cols. 324–327 (which already requires some slight corrections). Among those mentioned there, in addition to the temples of Bethel and Dan, the following are particularly noteworthy: Shiloh, Gilgal in the hill-country of Ephraim, Mizpah in Benjamin, Hebron, Bethlehem, Nob, Giv'at Sha'ul (see also below).



account of its actual construction. The Israelite temples known to us were concentrated, for the most part, in Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim, that is, within the original area of Israelite settlement in Canaan. These facts may serve to indicate that after the Israelite population began to spread to other parts of the country, the original impetus of establishing temples actually fell away. In a sense, the building of the Jerusalem Temple was the last accomplishment of its kind (though it received a later extension in the form of the Second Temple, whose character was distinctly different from that of the First).<sup>6</sup> In view of these circumstances, it is even more difficult to suppose that Jeroboam, or one of the kings who succeeded him, saw fit to establish a temple at, of all places, the city of Dor.

(3) The above observations are based on the conviction that what was found at Arad cannot possibly be interpreted as a temple, Israelite or any other. This is not the place, however, to dwell upon this problem, which will perhaps be reserved for another occasion. Aharoni's theory of border temples is referred to by Avigad since Dor, situated on the sea-coast, might also have been considered a border-city. However, the theory itself remains unproven. Moreover, even if we assume that there was a temple in Arad, the theory of border temples still accords neither with the institutional character of the temple as a 'house of God' nor with the actual distribution of temples known to us from the biblical evidence, since they were located for the most part in the central region of the country.

What, then, is the significance of the seal's inscription? It is possible that Dor was the city of residence of Zekharyau the priest — as well as of Šadoq, mentioned on the reverse of the seal (according to Avigad's conjecture, Zekharyau's father) — rather than the city in which he, or they, served in a cultic capacity. In the biblical period and afterwards, the priests, regarded by ancient tradition as the descendants of the tribe of Levi, were dispersed throughout Israelite territory and the places of their cultic activity were generally not identical with their cities of residence. A list of forty-eight cities dispersed throughout the land of Israel, on both sides of the Jordan, and assumed to have been given to the members of the tribe of Levi, is found in Josh. 21:1–40; out of these, thirteen were given to the priests, 'the sons of Aaron', that is, to those members of the tribe who could put the prerogative of the priesthood into practice. The great majority of these cities were not temple-cities. Yet for all the schematic and utopian features perceptible in this list, it is anchored in the reality of a historical situation. The significance of this list is that families with priestly pedigree, i.e., potential or active priests, were living in these cities.<sup>7</sup> There are also some indications that priests, that is, members of the tribe who had the right to become priests,

<sup>6</sup> The Jewish temples at Elephantine and Leontopolis in Egypt and the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim are historical curiosities which do not relate to the context under discussion. In any case, they belong to a later historical setting, as does also the Second Temple in Jerusalem (cf. above, n. 2).

<sup>7</sup> See my discussion in *The Levitical Cities: Utopia and Historical Reality*, *Tarbiz* 27 (1958), pp. 421–439 (Hebrew); *Studies in the Account of the Levitical Cities*, *JBL* 80 (1961), pp. 45–54, 156–165.

stayed at times in other cities not mentioned in the list — for example, in Bethlehem (Judg. 17:7). It is, therefore, possible that a priest or two priests, father and son, resided in Dor, although that was not necessarily their place of cultic service.<sup>8</sup>

One must also take into account the possibility that the two words כהן דאר do not have the relationship of the construct state, but that each of them stands for itself: the first indicates Zekharyau's profession and status, and the second his place of residence. The case may be analogous with the combination appearing at the conclusion of one of the Punic inscriptions from Cagliari, Sardinia: עכבר הכנא אש צדן כהן, 'Akbar the builder, Sidonian, Priest',<sup>9</sup> where it is also a question whether the Sidonian builder served as a priest in his place of residence. The wording on the seal כהן דאר may also be compared to a Hasmonean seal stamped on a *bullā*, recently published by Avigad, which reads: ירושלם גדל כהן גדל, Jonathan, High Priest, Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Here, too, there is no construct state between Jonathan's description as high priest and the indication of his place of residence (and in this case of cultic service), Jerusalem.

In the opinion of this writer, therefore, the testimony of the very interesting seal does not provide enough evidence for deducing the existence of a temple in the city of Dor.

(cf. also above, n. 2); also B. Mazar: The Cities of the Priests and the Levites, *VT Supp.* 7 (1960), pp. 193–205.

<sup>8</sup> Avigad has correctly pointed out that in the Bible and the Phoenician inscriptions the substantive כהן is used in the construct state mainly with the name of the god which the priest serves. There are only three exceptions, where the *nomen rectum* is a place name: כהן און, 'priest of On' (Gen. 41:45, 50; 46:20), כהן מדין, 'priest of Midian' (Exod. 2:16; 3:1; 18:1), כהן בית-אל, 'priest of Bethel' (Amos 6:10). Thus, the wording of our seal inscription does not accord with the rule, but only with the divergent form. It is also worth noting the fact that the seal itself was apparently found at Sebaste rather than at Dor.

<sup>9</sup> See H. Donner and W. Röllig: *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*<sup>3</sup>, I, Wiesbaden, 1971, No. 65, line 11.

<sup>10</sup> A Bulla of Jonathan the High Priest, *IEJ* 25 (1975), pp. 8–12.