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PHOENICIANS, SIKILS, AND ISRAELITES IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT TEL DOR

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General

The excavations at Dor (fig. 1) were undertaken by an expedition of the Hebrew University and the Israel Exploration Society headed by the writer, with the participation of the Universities of Sacramento, Berkeley, McMaster and other institutions¹. By now we have concluded a series of ten seasons (1980-1989) in the course of which we have opened seven areas on the mound (fig. 2). The stratigraphical evidence with which we intend to deal in the following comes, however, mainly from one of these: Area BI, which is located on the eastern side of the mound. Some additional material has been uncovered also on its western side (Areas F & E), as well as south of the mound as the result of the underwater survey headed by A. Raban.

In the course of these excavations, a great deal of new and significant information was uncovered concerning the Iron Age I (1200-1000 B.C.), that represents the period of transition from the Canaanite Age to the conquest of the city by David. At Dor, this period is divided into three strata: Stratum VIII — the upper of the three — belongs to the period of the United Monarchy, *i.e.*, from *ca* 1000 to 925 B.C. when it was destroyed by the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak I. The earlier Strata IX and X-XI date from the destruction of the city of the Sikils to its conquest by King David. On the basis of its remains, this city should be dated to *ca* 1050 to 1000. The earliest Stratum XII dates to *ca* 1150-1050 and should be considered as the city of the Sikils, the Sea Peoples' tribe mentioned in the Wen-Amon story.

¹ E. STERN, *The Excavations at Tel Dor*, in E. LIPÍŃSKI (ed.), *The Land of Israel: Cross-Roads of Civilizations* (OLA 19), Leuven 1985, p. 169-192; ID., *Excavations at Tel Dor — A Canaanite-Phoenician Port-City on the Carmel Coast* (Hebrew), in *Qadmoniot* 20 (1987), p. 66-81; ID., *New Evidence from Dor for the First Appearance of the Phoenicians along the Northern Coast of Israel*, in *BASOR* 279 (1990), p. 27-34; ID.-J. BERG-I. SHARON, *Tel Dor, 1988-89*, in *IEJ* 41 (1991), forthcoming.

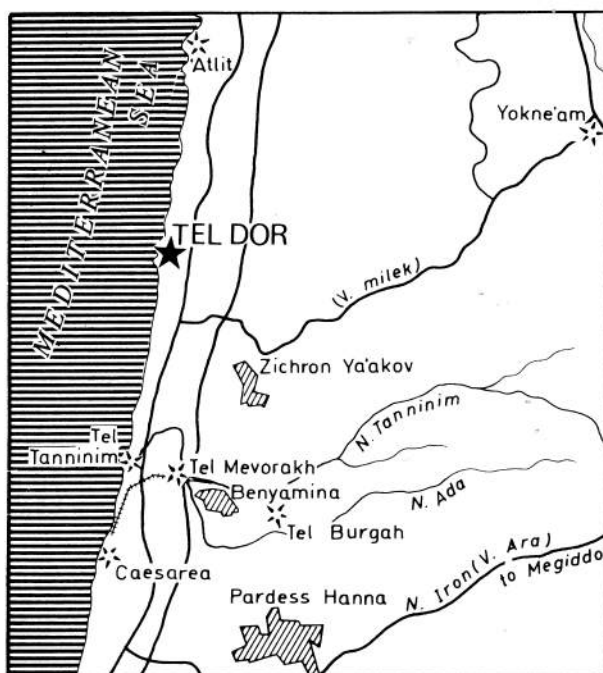


Fig. 1.

Stratum VIII

Dated to the 10th century B.C. it was found to be composed of several phases, of which we have by now uncovered a portion of a wide mudbrick fortification, but not yet a gate. Most of the remains of this structure were found in Area BI. Here we opened a wide area, in the eastern part of which a large house had been uncovered adjoining the wide mudbrick fortification system, on one side, and a narrow alley which bisects Area BI from south to north, on the other.

On the western side of the alley, the entire area was covered with a thick lime floor which completely sealed everything below it. Both above this floor and that of the house, we uncovered several vases *in situ*, which date to the 10th century B.C., including — besides the undecorated local ware — some Phoenician Bichrome and imported Cypriot White Painted ware, too, and for the first time, many Black-on-Red sherds. Other residential houses were uncovered elsewhere on the mound with the same pottery repertoire. We found that some walls

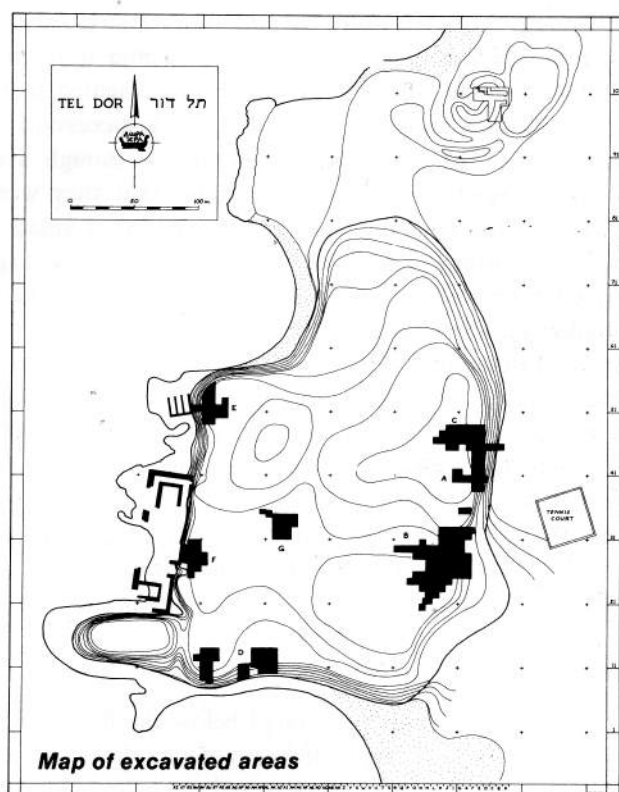


Fig. 2.

of this relatively early period were already constructed in the typical Phoenicio-Israeli method, *i.e.*, pillars made of masonry and a fill of field stones in between.

Strata IX and X-XI

The archaeological evidence for Strata IX and X-XI, *i.e.*, the second half of the 11th century B.C., is much more abundant. This period falls — in historical terms — between the destruction of the city of the Sea Peoples and the conquest of the city of Dor by David. Since no historical sources for this period are available — neither biblical nor external — all our information comes from the excavations.

For this period, as well, we have so far only excavated a limited section in Area B1, about 20 m long and 10 m wide, below the white

lime floor of the previous stratum. Several long walls, mostly mudbrick and oriented north-south, were preserved here and more than 15 m have been exposed with several partition walls oriented to the west. Between the partitions and the outer walls was a succession of tightly packed clay floors. 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 yielded a small quantity of Phoenician bichrome ware. Especially noteworthy is a group of Cypriote potsherds of extremely rare types uncovered on the floors of the large buildings. Very few of them appear among the ware imported to Palestine and isolated examples only have been found at other sites, and somewhat more, on the Phoenician coast. These sherds belong to two main groups — White Painted I and White Painted/Bichrome I². Parallels to the Dor vessels, in Cyprus, are found mainly in Cypro-Geometric I contexts, in the second half of the 11th century B.C. or slightly later. Thus, these vessels confirm the date assigned to this phase — ending *ca* 1000 B.C. —, a date deduced independently from the local pottery³.

Stratum XII

During the last seasons we penetrated below the floors of Strata IX and X-XI through a thick layer of heavy destruction and ashes. The strong fire had burnt the clay bricks to red, and the limestones of the houses had crumbled. As this accumulation of debris was sealed by the floors above in which were found the Cypriot and Phoenician vases of the second half of the 11th century B.C. (see above), it seems that this should be attributed to an earlier town of the Sikils⁴ or the Sea Peoples. The depth of this layer was more than two meters and up to now we have excavated only parts of two large rooms and a section of a broad partition wall in between. It is a narrow strip 10 m long and 2 m wide.

The whole structure was leaning on the eastern city fortification wall. It is a huge wall about 4 m wide, composed of a Cyclopiian stone base, towering to the height of 3 m! On its inner (western) face it stands erect, and on this side lean the two rooms mentioned above. The outer

² A. GILBOA, *New Finds at Tel Dor and the Beginnings of Cypro-Geometric Pottery Import to Palestine*, in *IEJ* 39 (1989), p. 204-218.

³ M. IACOVOU, *The Eleventh Century B.C. Pictorial Pottery of Cyprus*, Ann Arbor 1987; J. YELLIN, *The Origin of Some Cypro-Geometric Pottery from Tel Dor*, in *IEJ* 39 (1989), p. 219-227.

⁴ A. F. RAINEY, *Toponymic Problems*, in *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982), p. 133-134.

face is sloping — wider at the base and narrowing upward. Above this solid stone base a strong brick wall had been laid, composed of flat and square bricks of a type hardly known in the country; it had survived to the height of about half a meter. The outer eastern side was strengthened by a sand glacis built against it to protect its lower part. The top of this huge glacis was covered by a heavy layer of strong clay cover to protect it from rains or erosion.

Because of the immense size of these fortifications and, especially, because all of the sand glacis in which we identified, right from the beginning, Middle Bronze pottery sherds, we were convinced almost to the last week of the last season that it was the usual «Hyksos» system, which was repaired and rebuilt during the 12th century B.C. But then it became clear that within the sand there are also 12th century sherds which continued to show up down to the very base of the Cyclopiian stone wall inside, to its lowest course. There was no alternative but to conclude that this huge fortification system had been indeed erected at that time and that the Middle Bronze sherds were brought with the sand from somewhere else. If so, ours is yet the strongest fortification system of this age ever found in the country.

The same layer of destruction and ashes has been reached also in a deep pit excavated in Area F, *i.e.*, on the western side of the mound; but here we have not yet found its floor. During the last seasons, parts of two rooms were uncovered in Area E, also located on the western side of the mound. These two discoveries point to the fact that, in this period, the town covered the entire area of the mound. We should also remember that during the undersea survey done by A. Raban at the southern harbour of the town, some more remains of the period had come to light⁵.

The question now rises as to whom did this city belong? According to Egyptian sources, as the Onomasticon of Amenope and especially the account of Wen-Amon, it had been ruled by the Sikils⁶, a tribe of the Sea Peoples. But the vases found in the two rooms in Area Bl do not necessarily belong to them. Among them was a huge pithos decorated with wavy applied lines (fig. 3) of a type known mainly from

⁵ A. RABAN, *The Harbor of the Sea Peoples at Dor*, in *Biblical Archaeology* 50 (1987), p. 118-126.

⁶ A. H. GARDINER, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* I, Oxford 1947; J. A. WILSON, *The Journey of Wen-Amon to Phoenicia*, in *ANET*, Princeton 1969, p. 25-29; H. GOEDICKE, *The Report of Wenamun*, Baltimore 1975; M. DIETRIH-O. LORETZ, *Das "Seefarende Volk" von Šikila*, in *UF* 10 (1978), p. 53-56; A. NIBBI, *Wenamun and Alashia Reconsidered*, Oxford 1985.

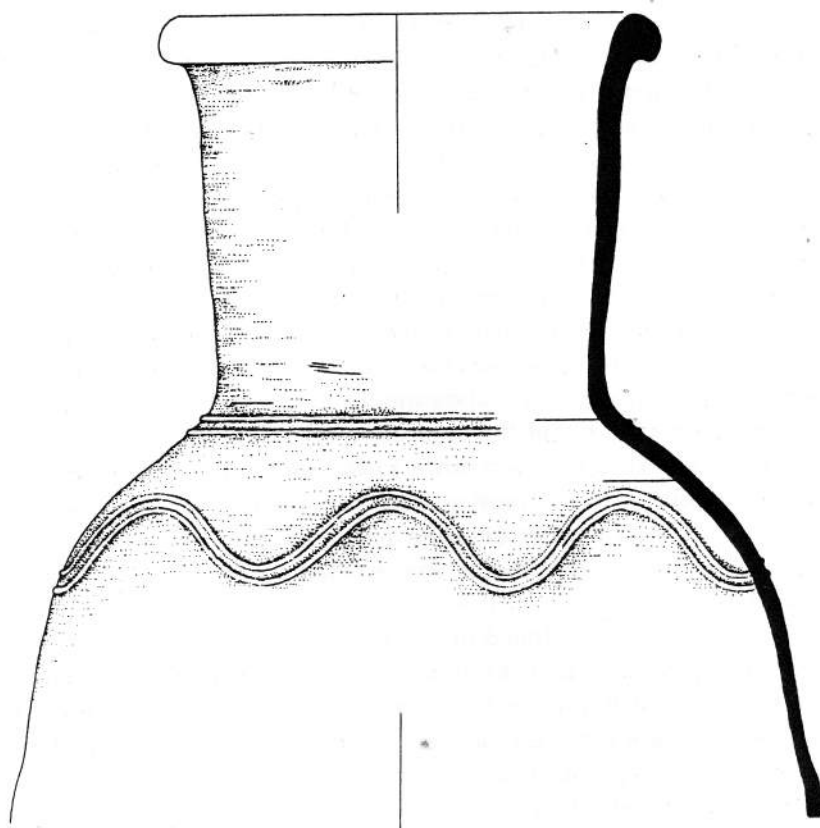


Fig. 3. — The upper part of the pithos from area B1, Stratum XII.

Upper Galilee⁷, the Syro-Palestinian coast⁸, and especially from Cyprus⁹. This may have originated in the west, but the rest, including a large flask decorated with red concentric lines and some jars, continue local traditions. Although they definitely testify to the date, viz. the

⁷ D. DAVIS-R. MADDIN-J. D. MUHLY-T. STECH, *A Steel Pick from Mt. Adir in Palestine*, in *JNES* 44 (1985), p. 41-52; D. BAHAT, *The Excavations of Sasa, 1975* (Hebrew), in M. YEDAYA (ed.), *The Western Galilee Antiquities*, Asher, Jerusalem 1986, p. 85-104; A. BIRAN, *The Collared-Rim Jars and the Settlement of the Tribe of Dan*, in S. GITIN-W. G. DEVER (ed.), *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology* (AASOR 49), Cambridge, Mass. 1989, p. 71-105.

⁸ C. F. A. SCHAEFFER, *Ugaritica* II, Paris 1949, fig. 86.

⁹ T. DOTHAN-A. BEN-TOR, *Excavations at Athienou, Cyprus, 1971-1972* (Qedem 16), Jerusalem 1983, p. 113-115.

second half of the 12th and the first half of the 11th century, there is no clear evidence for the identity of its inhabitants. It is true, however, that we have found a small number of unstratified sherds belonging to the typical Bichrome decorated pottery, usually attributed elsewhere to the Philistines, as well as a decorated lion's head rhyton of the type known from other Philistine sites¹⁰ like Ashdod, Tel Miqneh (Ekron), Tell es-Safi, Tell Qasileh¹¹, as well as from Megiddo¹² and Tel Zeror, near Hadera¹³. To this short list we should perhaps add a cow scapula, a shoulder blade incised with parallel lines along the upper edge of a type which had also been found in a Philistine connection, *viz.* in the Philistine sanctuary uncovered lately at Ekron, as well as in Cyprus. We should agree perhaps with the Ekron excavators' assumption that it was probably used by the Philistines — or the Sikils, in our case — to divine a message from a god. Although the purpose of the notches is uncertain, they may have been cut to produce a musical sound. According to the Ekron excavators, these instruments were brought by the Sea Peoples from Cyprus "after their journey across the Mediterranean to Palestine"¹⁴.

Be it one way or the other, our excavated area is still too small, and the material culture of the Sikils is waiting for more work in the future. But it seems safe already at this stage to assume that their culture will correspond to only a part of the finds of the period, as they must have been forming but a part of the population of the city at that time, unlike the Philistines in the southern part of the coast¹⁵.

Historical Conclusions

The results of the Tel Dor excavations brought up new data which make it possible — in our mind — to reconsider and reinterpret some of the major historical events of the period in this region.

¹⁰ T. DOTHAN, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture*, New Haven 1982, p. 229-234.

¹¹ A. MAZAR, *Excavations at Tell Qasile II* (Qedem 20), Jerusalem 1985.

¹² G. LOUD, *Megiddo II* (OIP 62), Chicago 1948.

¹³ O. KIYOSHI, *Tel Zeror III*, Tokyo 1970.

¹⁴ T. DOTHAN-S. GITIN, *Ekron and the Philistines*, in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16 (1990), p. 28.

¹⁵ A. MAZAR, *The Emergence of the Philistine Culture*, in *IEJ* 35 (1985), p. 95-107; S. BONIMOWITZ, *Is "The Philistine Material Culture" really Philistine? Methodological Problems in the Study of the Philistine Culture* (Hebrew), in *Archaeology: Bulletin of the Israel Association of Archaeologists* 1 (1986), p. 11-22; Z. HERZOG (ed.), *Excavations at Tel Michal, Israel*, Tel Aviv 1989, p. 64-87.

As to Stratum XII, the town attributed above to the Sikils, from mid-12th to mid-11th century B.C., we will have to wait for additional evidence concerning their material culture and, especially, their specific characteristics as compared with those of the Philistines. But it is already clear that theirs was a large harbour town founded with an extremely strong fortification system. This evidence already stands in perfect harmony with the picture emerging from Wen-Amon's story which describes it, too, as an important naval town with a strong fleet. Most interesting and intriguing, however, is the total destruction which this city suffered about the mid-11th century B.C.

We now come to the historical interpretation of Strata IX and XI-X, dating from mid-11th century B.C. to its end. They are characterized by the early Phoenician and Cypriot pottery found above the floors and by the problem of the identity of the population which occupied the city during this period, prior to the Israelite conquest.

We are now inclined to propose that the destruction of the Sikils' city was probably carried out by the Phoenicians 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 this time until the end of the first millennium B.C., they constituted the bulk of the population. In our opinion, the appearance of the Phoenician pottery from the middle of the 11th century B.C. and of the contemporaneous Cypriot White Painted I Ware should probably be interpreted as the result of trade relations between Cyprus and Palestine or, even more likely, as the reflex of internal movements of goods between the Phoenician inhabitants of Dor and the Phoenicians in Cyprus, where intensive settlement by the Phoenicians should have begun. This has become increasingly obvious from the excavations, surveys, occasional finds and especially from the distribution of the Phoenician pottery on the island itself, both in the east and in the south. This can be concluded with certainty from the comprehensive study of this pottery, its date and distribution, which has been made by Patricia Bikai. The beginnings of the Phoenician pottery, which she calls "Early Kouklia Horizon", also begins around 1050 B.C.¹⁶

We maintain that the parallel phenomenon at Dor, — as well as at

¹⁶ P. M. BIKAI, *The Phoenician Imports*, in V. KARAGEORGHIS (ed.), *Excavations at Kition IV. The Non-Cypriote Pottery*, Nicosia 1981, p. 23-25 and Pl. XIX-XXXVI; EAD., *The Phoenician Pottery of Cyprus*, Nicosia 1987, p. 68-69.

Tell Abu Hawam¹⁷, Tell Keisan¹⁸, Tyre¹⁹, Sarepta²⁰ and Khaldeh on the Phoenician coast, to mention only a few places, — and at Cyprus represents in fact the two sides of the same coin: the beginning of Phoenician expansion and settlement on the northern coast of Palestine and in Cyprus.

At the start of Stratum VIII (1000-925 B.C.), when David had united the Israelite monarchy and routed the Philistines in the south ca 1000 B.C., he seems to have acquired firm control also over the northern coast of Palestine from the Phoenicians, for a brief time. But David, and Solomon without doubt after him, chose to withdraw from substantial areas on the coast and to relinquish them in exchange for economic and trade cooperation when they recognized the Phoenician's superiority in all aspects 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 two peoples, and dedicated to Baal, was located.

It seems to us that this withdrawal was not only payment made to the Tyrians for their contributions to the constructions in Jerusalem, but also and mainly a recognition of the fact that this very region belonged to them just a few years before. Even so the withdrawal did not concern the entire area belonging earlier to the Phoenicians, but only its northern part, leaving the port of Dor as the major port for the common naval activity of both peoples.

South of the Carmel coast, however, the new excavations at sites like Shikmona²¹, Dor itself and Tel Mevorakh²² had brought up

¹⁷ R. W. HAMILTON, *Tell Abu Hawam*, in *QDAP* 3 (1933), p. 74-80; 4 (1935), p. 1-69; J. BALENSI, *Les fouilles de R. W. Hamilton à Tell Abu Hawam — Niveaux IV & V (1650-950 env. a. J.C.)*, Unpublished Doct. Dissert. Strasbourg 1980; EAD., *Revising Tell Abu Hawam*, in *BASOR* 257 (1985), p. 65-71.

¹⁸ J. BRIEND-J. B. HUMBERT, *Tell Keisan (1971-1976). Une cité phénicienne en Galilée*, Paris-Fribourg 1980; J. B. HUMBERT, *Récents travaux à Tell Keisan (1979-1980)*, in *RB* 88 (1981), p. 373-398; ID., *Tell Keisan 1979, 1980*, in *IEJ* 32 (1982), p. 61-64.

¹⁹ P. M. BIKAI, *The Pottery of Tyre*, Warminster 1978; EAD., *The Late Phoenician Pottery Complex and Chronology*, in *BASOR* 229 (1978), p. 47-56.

²⁰ J. B. PRITCHARD, *Sarepta: A Preliminary Report on the Iron Age*, Philadelphia 1975; R. B. KOEHL, *Sarepta III. The Imported Bronze and Iron Age Vases from Area II, X*, Beyrouth 1985; W. P. ANDERSON, *Sarepta I. The Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Strata of Area II, Y*, Beyrouth 1988; I. A. KHALIFFEH, *Sarepta II. The Late Bronze and Iron Age Periods of Area II, X*, Beyrouth 1988; J. B. PRITCHARD, *Sarepta IV. The Objects from Area II, X*, Beyrouth 1988.

²¹ J. ELGAVISH, *Tel Shikmona*, in *EAEHL* IV, Jerusalem 1978, p. 1101-1103.

²² E. STERN, *Excavations at Tel Mevorakh (1973-1976) I. From the Iron Age to the Roman Period* (Qedem 9), Jerusalem 1978, p. 46-70, 77-79.

new evidence for massive Israelite construction in the period. At the same time, the excavations at Akko²³, Tell Keisan and especially the homogeneous 10th century B.C. Phoenician administrative centre recently excavated at Hurvat Rosh Zayit, the biblical Cabul²⁴, point out to a Phoenician settlement in this part of the country.

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²³ M. DOTHAN, 'Akko — Interim Excavation Report, First Season, 1973-74, in *BASOR* 224 (1976), p. 1-50; ID., *Ten Seasons of Excavations at Ancient Acco* (Hebrew), in *Qadmoniot* 18 (1985), p. 2-14.

²⁴ Z. GAL, *Hurbat Rosh Zait — A Phoenician Fort in Upper Galilee* (Hebrew), in *Qadmoniot* 17 (1981), p. 56-59; ID., *Hurbat Rosh Zayit, Biblical Cabul* (The Hecht Museum, Catalogue 5), Haifa 1989; ID., *Khirbet Roš Zayit — Biblical Cabul. A Historical-Geographical Case*, in *Biblical Archaeologist* 53 (1990), p. 88-97. See also P. L. O. GUY, *An Early Iron Age Cemetery near Haifa Excavated September 1922*, in *Palestine Museum Bulletin* 1 (1924), p. 47-55; J. D. MUHLY, *Phoenicia and the Phoenicians*, in *Biblical Archaeology Today*, Jerusalem 1985, p. 177-191; E. STERN, *ibid.*, p. 226-227.