



Material, Method, and Meaning

Papers in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology
in Honor of Ilan Sharon

Edited by Uri Davidovich,
Naama Yahalom-Mack,
and Sveta Matskevich

Zaphon

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Illustration on the cover: Tel Dor and the southern lagoon, looking northwest.
Photograph by Howard Karesh, courtesy of the Tel Dor Project.

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in Honor of Ilan Sharon

Edited by Uri Davidovich, Naama Yahalom-Mack, and Sveta Matskevich

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Ilan Sharon

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An Iron Age IIA Phoenician Bichrome Jar from Tel Abel Beth Maacah

NAVA PANITZ-COHEN

ABSTRACT

An elaborately decorated Phoenician Bichrome jar was found at Tel Abel Beth Maacah, a large site located at the northern end of the Hula Valley. The jar came from a room belonging to an imposing building, possibly a citadel, that occupies the summit of the tell and is dated to the Iron Age IIA. This article will present the jar and its context, and discuss its cultural and economic significance in light of Abel Beth Maacah's location proximate to the Phoenician coastal cities. It is suggested that this jar comprised a prestige product, either as a high-level gift or as a container of a significant commodity. As such, it expresses close economic relations between Phoenician traders and local merchants at Abel Beth Maacah, a key urban center and potential commerce hub for the Jordan Valley in the late tenth and ninth centuries BCE.

KEYWORDS: Tel Abel Beth Maacah, Phoenician Bichrome, Iron Age IIA, Phoenicians

LOCATION, BACKGROUND AND EXCAVATIONS

Tell Abil el-Qameh, an imposing mound covering an area of 100 dunams (10 hectares), is located in the northern Hula Valley, 5 kilometers south of the modern border of Israel and Lebanon, 6.5 kilometers slightly northwest of Tel Dan and 35 kilometers north of Hazor (Fig. 1).¹ The site commands a north-south road that ran along the western flank of the Hula Valley, which is the northern trunk of the Way of the Sea, as well as the northern continuation of the Jordan Rift Valley road, branching to the east towards Damascus (70 kilometers as the crow flies) and to the west towards Tyre and northwest to Sidon on the Lebanese/Phoenician coast, each 35 kilometers away.

The site is identified with Abel Beth Maacah, which is mentioned three times in the Bible, once

in a story of a Benjaminite who rebelled against King David and fled north to take refuge in the city, which was saved by a Wise Woman (2 Samuel 20:14–22; Panitz-Cohen and Yahalom-Mack 2019), and twice in the context of foreign conquests: in the ninth century BCE by the Aramean king Ben Hadad (1 Kings 15:20) and in the eighth century BCE by the Neo-Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III

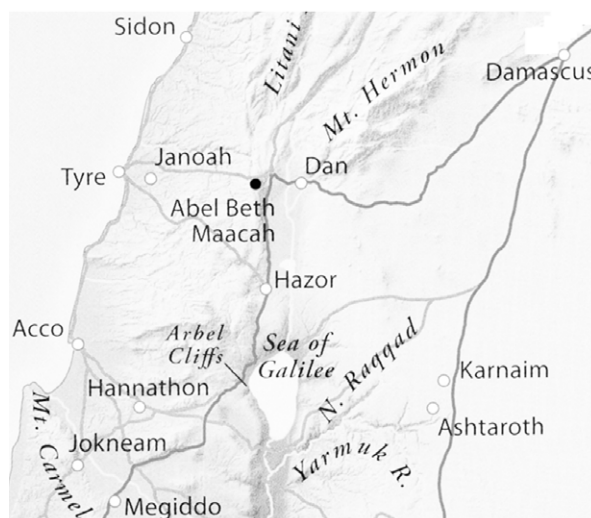


Figure 1. Map showing location of Abel Beth Maacah. Drawing by Ruhama Bonfil.

¹ I am most happy to contribute this article to the festschrift in honor of Ilan Sharon, as a tribute to his broad scholarship on the Phoenicians and to his investment in training students in the intricacies of stratigraphy, myself included, since I participated in my study dig at Tel Dor under his directorship. I was privileged to edit the second volume of the Tel Dor excavations publication of which he is co-author and to see, first-hand, the extent of his thoroughness, scholarly integrity and prowess in all things stratigraphic and architectural.



Figure 2. View of the tell, looking west; Areas K, A and B (the latter where the Phoenician Bichrome jar was found) contain rich Iron IIA remains. Photograph courtesy of Mikraot Gedolot Haketer Project, www.mgketer.org.

(2 Kings 15:29). Notably, the name of the site in second millennium BCE Egyptian sources, such as the Execration Texts and the list of cities conquered by Thutmose III, is Abel. It seems that the suffix “Beth Maacah”, was added at a later stage and could represent the settlement of a tribal entity by that name at the site, possibly in the Iron Age I (Mazar 1961: 27; Younger 2016: 215).

Surveys and excavations at the site² have exposed remains of a continuous occupation sequence from the Middle Bronze IIB until the end of Iron IIA. Two major destruction events were noted in the Iron I strata, the latest bringing that cultural sequence to an end sometime in the tenth century BCE. Intense Iron IIA remains were revealed mainly in the north and center of the tell, in excavation areas A, B and K (Figs. 2–3). Aside from some sundry ceramic forms, no traces of an occupation stratum that can be clearly attributed to the eighth century BCE, nor traces of an Assyrian destruction towards the end of that century, as known at nearby Dan and Hazor, were exposed to date. In addition to the substantial Middle Bronze II to Iron IIA strata, more sporadic remains were uncovered from Iron IIC, and the

Persian, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods, concentrated mainly in the north of the site (Area B), as well as pottery, burials and some architecture from the Early Islamic and Medieval periods. A small Arab village, Abil el-Qameh, occupied the tell until 1948 (see Fig. 3).³

THE FIND CONTEXT OF THE JAR

The northernmost part of the tell is considerably higher than the middle and southern parts. Aerial photos show the contours of a large rectangular structure being the possible reason behind this elevation (Fig. 4). Direct excavation into the center of this contour is impossible due to the presence of a modern military bunker. Thus, excavation was undertaken on the southeastern side of the summit, deemed Area B, prompted by the identification of a massive stone wall that had been reused as an agricultural terrace wall in modern times. It was hypothesized that this wall might comprise part of the structure that was the cause of the lofty summit. Excavation showed that it belonged to a large building of the Persian/Early Hellenistic period, much of which was eroded due to the nearby eastern slope, or cut on the west

² A survey was conducted by W.G. Dever in 1973 (Dever 1986). The current project conducted nine seasons of excavation (2013–2021), co-directed by Naama Yahalom-Mack and Nava Panitz-Cohen of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Robert Mullins of Azusa Pacific University of Los Angeles. Research is supported by an Israel Science Foundation grant (859/17) and by generous private donors.

³ For preliminary reports and articles on selected finds, see Panitz-Cohen, Mullins and Bonfil 2013; 2015; Panitz-Cohen and Mullins 2016a; 2016b; Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen and Mullins 2018; Panitz-Cohen et al. 2018; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2018; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2019; Yahalom-Mack and Panitz-Cohen 2019.



Figure 3. Aerial photograph of the tell taken by the Royal British Airforce in 1945, with the excavation areas marked. The houses of the village Abil el-Qameh can be seen. Courtesy of the Department of Geography Photograph Archive, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

and north when the military bunker had been built. The southern part of this building was constructed directly on top of a large casemate structure that is dated to the Iron IIA.⁴

The casemate building (Fig. 5) is comprised of parallel walls, each 1.0–1.1 m wide and ca. 2 m apart, running northwest to southeast, and is divided into three rooms by north–south cross walls: a long (7.2 m) room on the east, a small (ca. 2.5 m) room in

the center, and a long (5.2 m) room on the west. On the east, the building ends just short of a massive wall running northeast to southwest, with an entranceway in it. At this stage of excavation, the reason for the gap between the eastern end of the casemate building and this wall is not clear, although the two elements are most likely contemporary. It is possible that this massive feature, only partly exposed to date, comprised the main entrance into the complex and possibly, part of a fortification that encompassed this part of the city.

The construction of most parts of the casemate building directly on top of the sloping Middle Bronze rampart (see note 4), necessitating the foundation of the walls on different levels, such that the northern wall is based higher than the southern wall. A similar phenomenon can be seen in the foundation of the northern wall from west to east; its base in the eastern casemate room is lower than that of the middle room. An interesting phenomenon is the westernmost part of this northern wall, which was constructed in a somewhat different manner and was built above the western closing wall of the western room in its latest phase. It is thus tentatively understood as having been a later addition, or repair, although its date and the reason for its construction remain ambiguous at this point. Assuming that it post-dates the earlier stages of use of the western room, the original northern wall should be sought somewhere to the as-of-yet unexcavated north, making this western space larger than the other rooms in the casemate structure.

To the north of the eastern and central casemate rooms is a courtyard containing two stone-lined silos, as well as other installations. The gravelly layers of the Middle Bronze II rampart were leveled to comprise the foundation of the courtyard floor, which appears to have been terraced. To the south of the casemate rooms is an open area in the east and architectural remains with several phases in the center and west. Red-slipped and hand-burnished local pottery of typical northern Iron IIA shapes, as well as Phoenician Bichrome pottery, fine Samaria and Achziv wares, a sherd of a Greek skyphos,⁵ Cypriot Black-on-Red and White-Painted wares, a painted female-drummer figurine fragment (Panitz-Cohen and Tsoran 2021), a mold-made figurine head, a pendant stamped with a Phoenician-ship motif (Yahalom-Mack and Brandl, this volume) and a spoon-shaped stone nozzle, were among the finds in the casemate complex. A special find in the eastern casemate room was a beautifully crafted, faience

⁴ The Iron IIA casemate structure and associated buildings and courtyards were built, for the most part, directly on top of a Middle Bronze II rampart composed of gravel layers sloping from northwest to southeast (Panitz-Cohen et al. 2018). It is possible that this rampart had supported a large structure of that period built on the summit of the tell that would be the reason for its elevation. However, this cannot be examined due to the modern disturbance.

⁵ The sherd was identified as possibly Euboean, dating to the ninth century BCE (personal communication, Nota Kouru). An additional small sherd was recovered in the 2020 excavation season.



Figure 4. View of the upper mound, looking south; contours of a large building on the summit are visible. Excavation Area B is marked on the left. Photograph courtesy of Mikraot Gedolot Haketer Project, www.mgketer.org.



Figure 5. Aerial photo of Area B showing the Iron IIA casemate structure and associated buildings; findspot of the Phoenician Bichrome jar is marked with a star. Photograph by Alexander Wiegmann and Yakov Shmidov at the end of the 2019 season.

head of a bearded elite figure (Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen and Mullins 2018: 154; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2018: 30).

The fragments of the Phoenician Bichrome jar that is the subject of this article were found scattered in the uppermost layer of debris inside the western casemate room, most of them at level

401.40 m and close to its western wall (marked with a star in Fig. 5); no clear floor level was identified. The context with the jar is ascribed to Stratum B4a, the latest phase of the casemate building. Based on stratigraphic considerations and radiocarbon dating, the latest date assigned to the casemate complex is in the last quarter of the ninth century BCE, which



Figure 6. Conservator Miriam Lavi during the process of restoring the jar. Photograph by Nava Panitz-Cohen.

is the *terminus ante quem* for the jar's deposit in its find spot. The earlier phase in this room, Stratum B4b, comprised a layer with three flat-topped stones laid in an east–west row; here, too, no clear floor makeup could be discerned. As noted above, due to the situation in which the northern wall of this room post-dates the phase with the jar, the northern border of this part of the room during this phase (as well as the earlier one) remains an open question, requiring further excavation. The northwestern part of the room was covered by a pebble floor and wall segments that belonged to Iron Age IIC or the Persian period (Strata B3c–B3a).

DESCRIPTION OF THE JAR

The jar stands 45.5 cm high and has wide sloping shoulders and a bag-shaped⁶ body (31.5 cm at its widest point); recovered fragments of the jar comprise ca. 70% of it (Figs. 6–7a–b).⁷ The slightly

flaring, cylindrical neck is long (9.25 cm) and the rim is plain, with a rounded top and a slightly thickened interior (10 cm rim diameter). Although the very bottom of the base is missing, the extant part shows that it had been broad and rounded. Two loop handles extend from the bottom of the shoulder to above mid-body. The capacity of the jar is 20.7 liters, up to the rim (and thus, the realistic capacity is somewhat less).⁸

The outstanding feature of this jar is its elaborate, well-preserved decoration in vivid red and black, with few touches of white, which covers the neck, shoulder and body down to its lower third, where the body is the widest. The base color of the jar is dark reddish-yellow (Munsell 5YR7/6,8) that appears to have been created by the application of a slip of that color, close to the color of the fabric itself (“self-slip”). The jar is burnished to a sheen, with vertical and some irregular burnish lines visible, mainly where the painted pattern does not appear.

A notable feature of the decoration is discernible upon close examination, showing that the artist painted an underlying pattern in a drab reddish-brown color, on top of which the black and red paint

⁶ This form is sometimes termed “sack-shaped” (e.g., Mazar 2020b).

⁷ Restoration was performed by Ora Mazar and Miriam Lavi, who also cleaned the painted sherds before restoration in the Conservation Laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (see Fig. 6).

⁸ Measured by Ortal Harush in the Computational Archaeology Laboratory at the Institute of Archaeology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



Figure 7a. The Phoenician Bichrome jar. Photograph by Tal Rogovski. (Color Plate 13.1, p. 416)

of the final design was applied. Since the latter faded at some points, it resulted in lines that appeared to be both red and black (when the upper layer of paint was black) or two shades of red (when the upper layer of paint was red).⁹

⁹ This feature made it difficult for the artist, Yulia Rudman, to correctly capture the red-and-black arrangement in some parts of the decoration; see Fig. 7b.

Neck: A broad red band covers almost half of the neck, extending from the rim down. Below it are two clear narrow black lines and a third such line at the bottom that is somewhat eroded or was not originally painted around the entire circumference. Between the black lines are white lines, partially eroded. Below this is a wide black band, although not as wide as the upper red one. Below the black band is another set of thin black and white lines, also partially eroded.

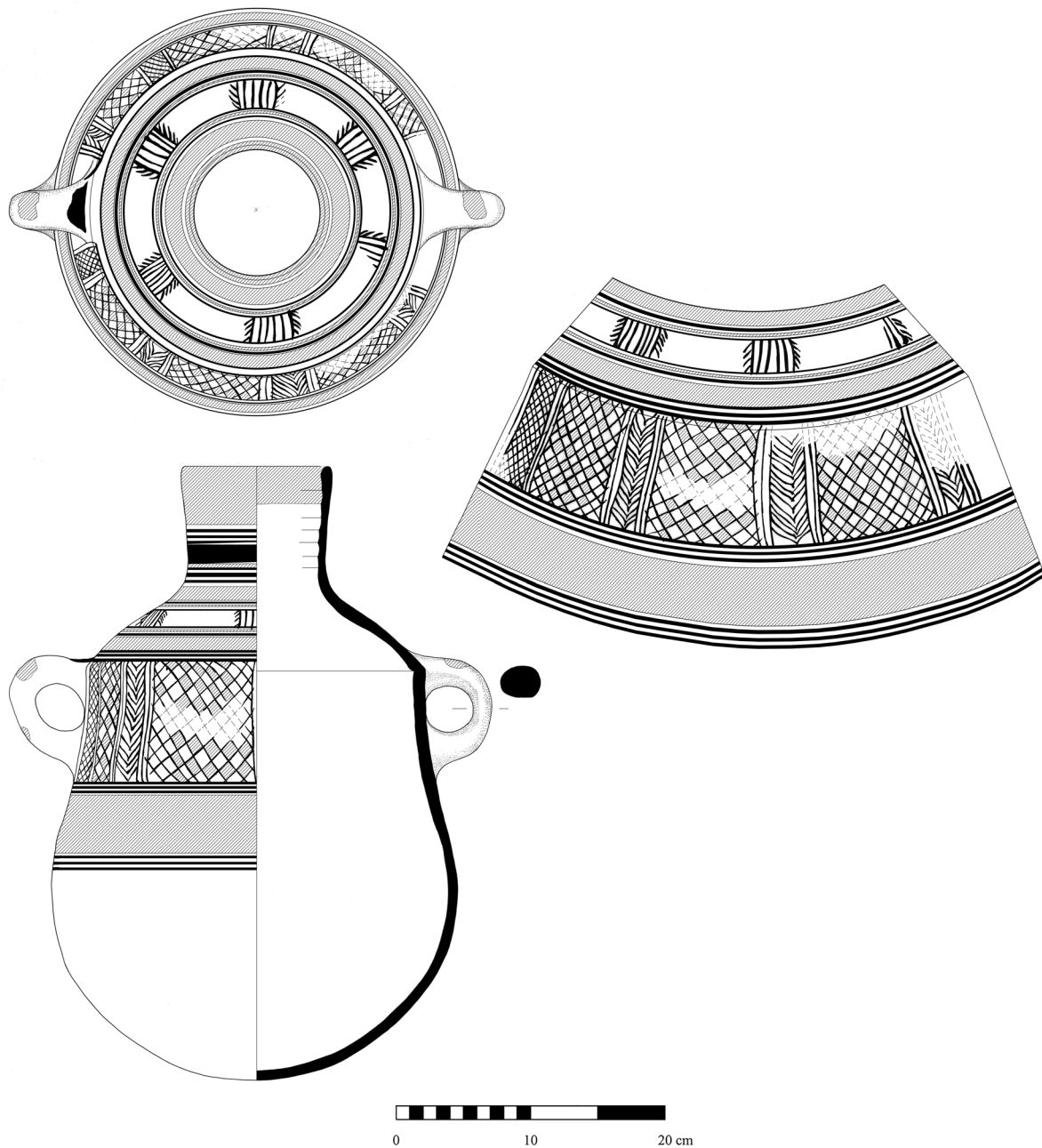


Figure 7b. The Phoenician Bichrome jar. Drawing by Yulia Rudman.

Shoulder: The shoulder pattern is relatively symmetrical, with a central panel flanked on the top and bottom by wide red bands surrounded by thin black and white bands, just like the ones on the neck; the black paint here is partially eroded. The top band covers the join of the neck to the shoulder, while the bottom one reaches the join of the shoulder to the body. The central panel contains six more-or-less equidistant groups of black vertical lines flanked on each side with down-turning diagonal hatches; notably, each group has a different number of vertical lines: five, six or seven. The number of diagonal hatches in each group is either four or five.

Body: The body decoration is comprised of a panel with a rich design in black and red in a frieze that encompasses the whole body and extends from the bottom of the shoulder down to below the handles, a total of 16 cm high. The panel is bordered on the bottom by a pattern similar to the one at its top (and to the one on the neck), composed of three thin black lines flanking a very wide red band on its top and bottom; faint traces of white lines can be seen between the black lines. The painted design ends at the widest part of the vessel's body and below it, the slipped surface shows vertical burnish lines down towards the base.



Figure 8. Woven tapestry rug from Morocco. Courtesy of Ora and Amihai Mazar. Photograph by Moshe Cohen. (Color Plate 13.2, p. 416)

The panel design is divided into metopes separated by narrow triglyphs; the two faces of the jar (between the handles on each side) are not symmetrically painted. The better-preserved face has three metopes separated by four triglyphs. The latter are painted in black, each composed of a line of chevrons flanked by two narrow vertical lines which are not entirely straight or equidistant. Each metope (most of them 7 cm wide, one 6 cm and one 4 cm [near one handle]) contains a lozenge pattern painted in black, while the fill of the lozenges created by these lines are painted in both red and black. The colors of this fill are not symmetrical or orderly, so that in some places the red and black alternate, while in others they are proximate, and some of the lozenges remain unpainted altogether.

The central pattern of the other face maintains the same basic composition of four triglyphs, each surrounded by two narrow black vertical lines, bordering three metopes. However, in this case, three of the former are filled with a dense alternating red and black net pattern, while the fourth (near a handle) is filled with the same up-turning black herringbone pattern as the triglyphs on the opposite face. The metopes on this side are designed in the same manner as those described above.

Handles: The design on each handle comprises two widely spaced, wide red horizontal bands with somewhat tapering ends. The bands are quite carelessly painted, not covering the span of the handle, of different widths and not entirely straight. One handle has a splotch of black paint at the top of the handle that interferes with the fine black and white lines at the bottom of the shoulder pattern.

Summary and Significance of the Decoration

Taken together, the look of the jar is very impressive and demonstrates a significant investment in the

surface treatment. It is notable that despite this attention, some of the individual elements are not particularly well or carefully executed, such as the inconsistencies in the central panel design or the rather sloppy stripes on the handles. This possibly reflects the manner in which the decoration was applied, with the linear pattern painted while the vessel was rotated with regularity, while the central panel and handles were executed freehand. It could also possibly represent the involvement of an apprentice or more-amateur artist. The method of painting an underlying pattern might point to this as well, with a skilled artist carrying out this stage and leaving the final application of paint to someone less proficient, possibly as a way of training, or as a way to increase productivity.¹⁰

Narrow black (and sometimes white) lines flanking wide red bands are a cornerstone of Phoenician Bichrome ware decorative syntax (Anderson 1990: 36–37; Gilboa 1999: 5; 2018: 124). The earliest appearance of such a pattern is on the globular jugs/flasks that first appear in late Iron IB, mostly found in a concentric configuration (e.g., a jug from Tel Rehov Stratum VII; Mazar 2020b: Fig. 28.6:1). This pattern is found on both closed and open vessels in Iron IIA, when it was most common, either as vertical concentric circles or horizontal bands, and continued to a lesser extent into Iron IIB and IIC, when red-slipped and burnished, and red-and-black wares became more popular (Bikai 1987: 48; Stern 2015: 436). More complex geometric patterns, such as lozenges and the net, as well as the division into metopes and triglyphs, also appear in the late Iron IB and Iron IIA stages of Phoenician Bichrome, mainly on strainer jugs (e.g., Megiddo Stratum VI; Loud 1948: Pl. 75:22; see also Ben-Ami and Ben-Tor 2012: 431), while some of these appear as secondary motifs on shoulders or below handles (e.g., a globular jug from Tell Qasile Stratum X: Mazar 1985: Fig. 41:13). A commonality of these patterns with some Philistine Bichrome motifs can be traced (cf. a jug from Azor with chevron, net and lozenge patterns divided into metopes and triglyphs that recall the patterns on our jar; for a color photo, see Ben-Dor-Evian 2017: 33; see also a strainer jug from Tell Qasile Stratum X: Mazar 1985: Fig. 35:1).

The ultimate source for a large part of these designs (but less so for the bichrome color) should apparently be sought in Cypriot pottery, as evidenced by Late Helladic IIIC wares (Anderson 1990: 38–38; Gilboa 1999: 2–9). The division into metopes

¹⁰ Such a pre-arrangement was not used in the rich corpus of Late Bronze Age painted pottery, to the best of my knowledge, though the possibility of such a technological style in that ceramic tradition warrants re-examination.

separated by triglyphs, as well as the employment of a red-and-black bichrome color scheme and some of the motifs, can be sourced to Late Bronze Age Canaanite pottery, although the Phoenician expression of this tradition takes on an identity of its own, amalgamating local and foreign conventions. This cultural dialogue is particularly characteristic of the early phases of Phoenician pottery in the late Iron I and Iron IIA, and the Bichrome tradition is its best representative. As A. Gilboa put it for the Phoenician Bichrome vessels: ...“decoration (and surely shape as well) now constituted a genuine trademark, recognizable by consumers” (Gilboa 1999: 12). The Phoenician Bichrome decoration can be understood in terms of “active style” (Wobst 1977), serving as a dynamic medium of communication by which individuals and social groups define relationships and associations. “Elements of style, as in objects used in ceremonial display, are chosen purposely to signal social relationships and group membership. Thus, style acts as a critical prop in social drama as it functions to form, maintain and configure social relations” (Earle 2007: 163); see further discussion below.

It is possible that the inspiration for the rich, intricate design on the jar from Abel Beth Maacah, as well as the others of its ilk (see below), stemmed from woven tapestries or rugs (Mazar 2020b) (Fig. 8). It is also probable that other archaeologically invisible, cultural-specific customs, such as body tattoos or wall murals, bore these patterns as well, as individual motifs and/or as complex compositions (cf. David, Sterner and Gavua 1988: 370; see also Hodder 1991: 72). The more pervasive a cultural element, such as decorative motifs, the more entrenched it is and the more resistant to change, becoming a hallmark of the particular culture, both internally and externally (David, Sterner and Gavua 1988: 366; DeBoer 1991). Along these lines, and despite the sharing of some of the motifs with other ceramic traditions, its rich decoration renders the jar from Abel Beth Maacah (henceforth, ABM) a quintessentially Phoenician product, and a special one at that, as discussed below.

PROVENANCE

Petrographic analysis of the ABM jar by A. Cohen-Weinberger showed that its origin should be sought on the Phoenician coast, north of Akko and probably between Tyre and Sidon. This result is compatible with her analysis of a similar jar from Tel Rehov (described below) (Cohen-Weinberger 2020).¹¹ It is

thus concluded that the jar was a product of a coastal workshop located in the heartland of Phoenicia, and was imported to Abel Beth Maacah.

REGIONAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL COMPARISONS

When seeking comparisons, two aspects of the jar should be addressed: the shape and the decoration. Both Lehmann (2015: 117) and Stern (2015: 440) considered the bag-shaped jar in general to be a component of the Phoenician ceramic repertoire, mostly typical of the Early Iron IIA (and no later than early Iron IIB), and differentiated between the general shape and the sub-group of decorated (generally smaller) jars, like the ABM example (see further below). The same understanding was reached by Gal and Alexandre (2000) in their study of high-necked jars with bag-shaped bodies at Horbat Rosh Zayit, determining that this type “is the end of an earlier tradition which fades out after the ninth century BCE” (ibid.: 53) and “represents the gradual penetration of Phoenician influences into the repertoire of Israelite pottery” (ibid.: 51).

Comparisons—Body Shape

The examples of the bag-shaped jar demonstrate a rather wide degree of variability, as they are much less standardized than the cylindrical transport jars typical of the Phoenician repertoire (Bikai 1987: 49). This range includes a somewhat less-swollen lower body and a short(er) neck, as well as size variations. Comparisons to the bag-shaped body with a long neck and a wide round base can be found in Iron IIA pottery assemblages at various sites in northern Israel and in Lebanon.¹² The former includes coastal sites, for example, Tel Mevorakh Stratum VII (Lehmann 2015: Pl. 2.2.2:7) and Dor Stratum 6a (Area G) (Gilboa 2018: 148; type SJ12, Fig. 20.66:5), as well as inland sites, such as Dan (Biran 1994: Fig. 131, Stratum IVA), Hazor (Ben-Ami and Ben-Tor 2012: 426, Fig.

from ABM by A. Cohen-Weinberger, head petrographer of the Israel Antiquities Authority, within the framework of Israel Science Fund Grant 859/17 to N. Yahalom-Mack.

¹² Bag-shaped jars do exist in the south, although their proportions differ somewhat from the northern examples, as do the shoulders and neck (e.g., from Tel Batash Strata III and II; Panitz-Cohen 2001: 97–101). Note also bag-shaped jars at Kuntillat ‘Ajrud (Ayalon 2012: 220–222; Fig. 7:11:3–4), dated to the late ninth and early eighth century BCE. Singer-Avitz (2006), contesting this latter date by claiming that the assemblage belongs to the eighth century, cited comparisons to bag-shaped jars at Beersheba Stratum II and Lachish Stratum III (Singer-Avitz 2006: Fig. 5: 1b, 1c). It is notable that these comparisons from southern sites all date to Iron IIB and are, in effect, lacking there in early Iron IIA (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021).

¹¹ The petrographic analysis was conducted as part of a comprehensive provenance study on the Iron Age pottery

5.6:1, Stratum X; Ben-Tor and Ben-Ami 1998: Fig. 14.6, Stratum VIIb), Megiddo (Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 20:20–121; Stratum V) and Taanach (Rast 1978: Fig. 34:4–5, Stratum IIB). A few jars included in types SJIII (large) and SJV (small) at Horbat Rosh Zayit answer to the bag-shaped body and wide-base description (although others do not), e.g., Gal and Alexandre 2000: Figs. III.87:5–6; III.92:11; Stratum IIa. Notably, such a body shape is known in the Iron IIA strata at Abel Beth Maacah itself, with a few bearing red-and-black linear Phoenician Bichrome decoration (Fig. 9, and see below) and some others, red slip and irregular hand burnish. One large jar with a pronounced bag-shaped body, covered with red slip and hand burnish, bore a Hebrew inscription (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2021).

Selected comparisons to the undecorated bag-shaped jar at sites in Lebanon include two examples from the cemetery at Joya, several kilometers inland from Tyre (Chapman 1972: Nos. 215–216, Fig. 21; dated to Iron Age II), as well as a somewhat similar jar, but with a short neck, in Tyre Stratum IX, dated to the second half of the ninth century BCE (Bikai 1978: 66–68, Pl. XXI:13). Similar jars were found at Tell el-Gassil in the Lebanese Baq'a (Joukowsky 1972: Plates IV:1 [fragmentary]; XX:5; Baramki 1964: 94, Fig. 35:1 [neck missing]; all from Iron Age II Level 2); however, a more precise chronological attribution is not noted (Joukowsky 1972: 220–221).

Comparisons—Decoration

The other comparative parameter is the decoration (mostly taken together with variations of the bag-shaped body); as noted above, this feature often appears on the smaller jars of this type. While the application of Phoenician Bichrome linear and other simple geometric or schematic floral patterns to



Figure 9. Iron Age IIA storage jar from ABMArea B with linear Bichrome decoration. Drawing by the Computerized Archaeology Lab, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, photograph by Tal Rogovski. (Color Plate 13.3, p. 416)

such jars is known in Iron IIA, including Abel Beth Maacah itself (as noted above and detailed below; see Table 1), the elaborate design on the ABM jar can be compared to only a few select examples. It is notable that no two jars are similarly adorned; the choice of motifs was the act of an individual potter/artist and reflects a degree of freedom and creativity which made each jar unique, although the basic syntax of horizontal bands surrounding a central panel is common to all.

Elaborate Decoration

The closest comparison is a jar from Tel Rehov, which was found in the courtyard of an open-air sanctuary of Stratum IV, dated to the second half of the ninth century BCE, no later than 830 BCE when the city was completely destroyed (Mazar 2020b: Fig. 28.9, with detailed discussion; see also Mazar, this volume; for the find context, see Mazar 2020a: 279–288). It is of very similar shape and size, and bears a complex, elaborate bichrome design, including a unique guilloche motif featured in a separate panel, as well as lozenges filled with smaller lozenges and net patterns, hanging triangles and schematic flowers composed of dots. The Rehov jar is symmetric in that both faces are almost identically decorated (which differs from the composition on the ABM jar). The black paint on the Rehov jar is mainly eroded away and there do not seem to be any traces of white color. Like our jar, the handles are painted somewhat carelessly with red bands which contrast with the meticulous design on the jar itself.

A second relatively close comparison to the ABM jar (and even more so to the Rehov jar, as far as the design composition) comes from the so-called “Lefkaritis Tomb” at Kition (Larnaca Tomb MLA 1742), although dated to a later period (Cypro-Archaic I, 750–650 BCE); it is “clearly a Phoenician product” (Hadjisavvas 2007: 189; Fig. 2). The design on this jar has a central panel, like the Rehov jar, although it is filled with a net pattern rather than a guilloche; a similar red and black net pattern fills large lozenges that flank this panel. The neck, shoulder and lower-body design are quite similar to the ABM jar, although the width of the bands differ somewhat. Based on the similarity of its design to the Rehov (and now, the ABM) jar, Mazar (2020b) suggested that it was a venerated heirloom dating to the ninth century BCE when it was placed in this elite family tomb.

A third comparison to the elaborately decorated jars, though removed in time and place, is a similarly sized bag-shaped jar with a tall narrow neck from the earliest phase of the Tophet at Carthage (the “Tanit I” phase), dated to the second half of the

Table 1. Chronological and spatial distribution of jars according to decoration type

Decoration Type/ Region and Site	Iron IIA			Iron IIB			
	Northern Israel	Lebanon	Cyprus	Northern Israel	Lebanon	Cyprus	West
Elaborate Bichrome	-ABM B4 -Rehov IV -Beth-Shean S1b* -Hazor Xb* -Dor G-6B*				-Al Mina Level 8***	-Larnaca (Lefkaratis Tomb) -Larnaca (Kition Area II)	-Carthage Tophet Tanit I
Monochrome “palm-tree”	-Tell Abu Hawam III -Hazor X-IX, VIII -Ḥorbat Rosh Zayit IIb	-Sarepta -Tell Kazel -Tell Arqa 10C-D**				-Kouklia, Larnaca tombs and Kition bothros	
Linear Bichrome	-ABM B4, A1 -Hazor VIII			-Hazor VII	-Tyre -Tell Arqa 10	-Larnaca (Kition) -Kouklia	

*Fragment

**late ninth-early eighth century BCE

***uncertain context and date

eighth century BCE, bearing an hourglass motif and a bird in black in the central panel, surrounded by wide Bichrome bands. It was considered to be “the outcome of early cultural contacts” with Phoenicia and is the “only certain specimen of this form” found in the west (Orsingher 2012: 565, 574, note 51; Fig. 4). It is possible that this jar, like the one in the Larnaca tomb mentioned above, was an earlier object traded as a prestigious commodity to serve in the Tophet burial ritual.

Though with a differently shaped neck (wider and, though broken on top, apparently shorter) and longer body, an additional jar that can be cited as a comparison to an elaborate Bichrome decoration in the central zone is from Al Mina Level 8 (750–640 BCE), although its context and exact date remain unknown due to poor excavation documentation (Docter 2013). Another possible example comes from Cyprus (Larnaca-Kition Area II) in the form of a fragment of the neck and upper part of a jar, with a short wide neck and (apparently) a bag-shaped body; the design on the upper part of the jar comprises red and black triglyphs and a lattice pattern, somewhat recalling the ABM jar’s pattern. The jar was dated to Bikai’s “Kition Horizon” (750–700 BCE) (Bikai 1987: Pl. XXI: No. 575).

A few additional possible comparisons to jars with an elaborate Phoenician Bichrome design can be cited from Israel, yet they include only fragments, such as a jar shoulder found in an elaborate public building at Hazor in Stratum Xb (Ben-Ami 2012: Fig. 2.3:12), a jar shoulder from a special-function

building at Dor in Stratum 6b (Area G) (Gilboa 2018: Fig. 60:12), and a body sherd from a public building(?) in Stratum S-1b at Beth-Shean (Mazar 2006: Pl. 8:14). All of these contexts are in northern Israel and date to Iron IIA; it is unknown whether they were bag-shaped jars, although this is likely.

Monochrome “Palm-Tree Jars”

A number of jars bear linear monochrome decoration with simple, schematic tree motifs in the central panel; these were dubbed “palm-tree jars” by Bikai (1983: 396–400). While they are decorated, they are a far cry from the elaborate jars discussed above. Such jars were found in small amounts at Iron IIA sites in northern Israel, usually painted in red and, seldom, in black. These include a jar body from Tell Abu Hawam Stratum III (Hamilton 1935: 24; No. 97) and a complete jar from Ḥorbat Rosh Zayit Stratum IIb (Gal and Alexandre 2000: Fig. III.74:21; SJ type V). Note also several fragmentary and complete examples from Hazor (Yadin et al. 1960: Pl. LI:21, Stratum IX-X; Pl. LIX:7, Stratum VIII; Yadin et al. 1961: Pl. CLXII: 7, Stratum Xa).

“Palm-tree jars” were found in Lebanon as well, including a jar from Sarepta (Pritchard 1975: Fig. 24:2, Area II, Sounding X; Room 3, level 8; type SJ-7), one from Tell Kazel (Temple Phase II, 850–738 BCE) (Gubel 2009: Fig. 3), and several from Tell Arqa, in contexts associated with a sanctuary in Levels 10C–10D, with a terminus ante quem of 740–730 BCE (Chaaya 2020: 57; Fig. 4, upper left).

A few “palm-tree jars” were also found in Cyprus, in tombs at Kouklia (Palaepaphos-Skales) and in a bothros from Kition (Bikai 1987: 43; Pl. XXI: Nos. 565–567; in No. 565, the trees appear inside metopes in the central panel), and are dated to Bikai’s “Kition Horizon” (750–700 BCE).

Linear Bichrome Decoration

To these schematic-floral designs we may add a number of jars with simple linear Bichrome design that were found in Iron IIA contexts in northern Israel, such as Hazor Strata Xb and Xa (Ben-Ami 2012: 112, Figs. 2.1:23; 2.11:21) and Stratum VIII (Yadin et al. 1960: Pl. LIX:4, 6). An almost-complete jar with such decoration, as well as fragments of others, were found in Iron IIA contexts at Abel Beth Maacah as well (e.g., Fig. 9).

Jars bearing linear Bichrome designs from Lebanon are of more diverse shapes, e.g., a small squat jar from Tell Arqa with linear Bichrome decoration from a late ninth/early eighth century BCE level in the sanctuary (Chaaya 2000: Fig. 2). Some jars are of a later, Iron IIB date, such as a straight-bodied jar with a short wide neck from Tyre (Bikai 1978: 53, Fig. 4.3).

Linear Bichrome decoration on jars found in Cyprus come mainly from tombs, for example, a group in Tomb 56 in the Tourabi Necropolis near Larnaca, dated to early Iron IIB (Bikai 1987: 44, Pl. XXI:579; see also Stern 2015: Pls. 4.1.10:1, 3; 4.1.11:4).

FIND CONTEXTS AND DIACHRONIC DISTRIBUTION

The elaborately decorated jars were all found in non-mundane contexts, including cultic settings (Tel Rehov), elite tombs or burial contexts (Larnaca, Tanit [Tophet]), or substantial public buildings (Abel Beth Maacah and the fragments from Hazor, Dor, and Beth-Shean). The “palm-tree jars”, too, tend to be found in similar venues (e.g., cultic: Tell Kazel, Tell Arqa, Kition; burials: Kouklia, Larnaca; public buildings: Horbat Rosh Zayit, Hazor). See Table 2 for a summary of the main find-context types.

The elaborate jars belong to the earlier, Iron IIA horizon and were found in northern Israel and Cyprus,¹³ yet are missing from Lebanon (the Phoenician heartland). The “palm-tree” and linear Bichrome jars were distributed more evenly between Iron IIA and Iron IIB, and between the three regions (northern Israel, Lebanon and Cyprus),

although the later examples are found in Cyprus alone and almost exclusively in tombs. Of course, secure conclusions cannot be drawn from this pattern (summarized in Tables 1 and 2), as it reflects the vagaries of excavation as much as it does the reality of distribution. Yet, based on the extant evidence, it may be very cautiously suggested that the elaborately decorated jars, and perhaps somewhat less so, the simpler-decorated jars, were manufactured as items to be target-traded from the outset, or as items with added value within an exchange context, possibly due to their content. That is to say, these were not common jars that were routinely manufactured and subsequently traded for their contents alone, but rather, were manufactured with a message in mind. The application of such careful and highly invested decoration, with a clear Phoenician quality, was an act of signaling; the question is, what was the signal, to whom was it directed, and to what purpose?

A MESSAGE IN A JAR: CULTURAL, ECONOMIC AND GEO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Having established that this type of jar, and especially its decoration, are emblematically Phoenician, and that the jar arrived at Abel Beth Maacah from the coast, it remains to examine what was its function and significance at both the giving and the receiving ends. Two interpretations are offered to understand the role of the jar in its find context: a high-level prestige gift meant to promote and nurture commercial relations, or a vessel imported for its special contents which the decoration possibly heralded.

A High-Level Prestige Gift

This explanation suggests that the jar was sent as a high-level prestige gift, with the purpose of encouraging and cementing the cultural and, mostly, the economic relationship between ABM and the Phoenician coastal city-states of Tyre and/or Sidon. Given the chronological framework of the jar in the late ninth century BCE, the former city is the more likely candidate (see further below). Woolmer (2019: 90) discussed the role of gift giving as practiced by the Phoenicians, noting that it “...is an expression of an existing social relationship or the establishment of a new one which contrasts with the impersonal nature of market exchange....The profit in gift giving may be assessed in terms of social prestige rather than in material advantage and the gift exchange cycle creates obligations to give, to receive and to return, thus tying the participants into a long-term relationship”. In addition to the political and personal aspect, gifting of valuables was aimed at gaining access to particular markets by granting

¹³ The Iron IIA date for the jar from Cyprus is based on the assumption that it could have been an heirloom from the ninth century BCE, as described above.

Table 2. Phoenician Bichrome jars according to find-context types

Period/ Context	Burial	Cultic	Public building	Other/Unknown
Iron IIA	Larnaca-Lefkratis*	Tel Rehov Tell Arqa**	ABM Hazor Horbat Rosh Zayit Dor*** Beth-Shean***	
Iron IIB	Tyre Larnaca-Kition Kouklia Tanit I-Carthage	Tell Kazel Kouklia (bothros)	Hazor	Al Mina

*possibly a ninth century BCE heirloom deposited in an eighth century tomb

**late ninth-early eighth century BCE

***fragments

the special items to the authorities/elites in charge which contributed to the consolidation of their prestige and power in the eyes of the locals. This, in turn, enhanced their ability to cultivate a relationship of obligation with farmers and entrepreneurs in the region in order to control the staple economy and the movement of goods through the region (Earle 2002: 218, 246–247).

On the level of production, such a labor-intensive and relatively rare item (certainly the decoration) as the ABM jar would most likely have been manufactured in an institutionalized setting of attached specialization, and thus would have reflected the interests of the elite patrons of that production.¹⁴ The elites tend to control the distribution of such items by regulating their production, for whatever reasons they deem expedient for their economic and political interests (Costin 1991: 11–12). This seems to have been the case with the careful selectivity of the distribution of the elaborately decorated Bichrome jars, which appear to have been targeted products with a political and economic purpose in mind, as described above.

In the discussion of the possibility that the ABM jar was a prestigious gift, it must be acknowledged that pottery was generally not an elite object per se, even a finely decorated one as this. Sherratt (2012: 153) defined such an item as “a curiosity, not a treasure”. Thus, the added value of the jar should be understood not because of its precious material, but rather against the background of the historical context of the ninth century BCE, when Phoenician culture, particularly art and craftsmanship, was well-

entrenched and highly appreciated in northern Israel (see further below).

If indeed our jar was gifted by Phoenician agents to become the prized possession of a local, high-ranking individual or official(s), possibly those who administered the casemate complex or regulated commercial activities associated with it, it joined several status-enhancing items found in this compound. These include the pendant with a Phoenician-ship motif, Greek pottery, fine Samaria ware, and the extraordinary faience head of a bearded elite figure, all mentioned above.

An Import Valued for Its Contents

This explanation contends that the jar arrived at ABM because of its contents, with the decoration serving as their “advertisement”, announcing that this was no ordinary jar and that it contained a special commodity. Such a “message in a jar” (paraphrased by Yasur-Landau [2008] as a “message in a jug” when describing the portent of the rich decoration on the well-known “Orpheus jug” from late Iron I Megiddo) is a known phenomenon in both archaeological and ethno-archaeological contexts (e.g., Hodder 1991). The medium of decoration could have been a “cost-effective means of sending a message” (David, Sterner and Gavua 1988: 365).

Lehmann (2015: 117) called the smaller decorated bag-shaped jars “transport jars”, assuming that this was their main function. The capacity of the ABM jar (20.7 liters up to the rim) indicates that the commodity was most likely not a precious substance that was distributed in small amounts, such as opium or exotic spices. It may be noted that most of the more-elaborately decorated vessels in the Phoenician Bichrome repertoire in northern Israel are small containers (flasks, strainer jugs) that are understood to have had a commercial and culturally specific function in the early stage of Phoenician

¹⁴ Remains of industrial-scale pottery production in the Iron Age were found at Sarepta on the Phoenician coast (Pritchard 1975: 71–84), though no specific evidence that would have been part of such an attached production mode was identified.

commercial activity in the region (Gilboa 1998; 1999). It is possible that applying the intricate Bichrome motifs typical of small closed vessels to a large closed vessel was aimed at including the latter in this category, while supplying a larger amount of the commodity that comprised its contents. It is not known what that commodity might be, whether liquid or solid, yet it may be surmised that it was an extraordinary product.

ABEL BETH MAACAH AT THE PHOENICIAN-ISRAELITE INTERFACE

In Iron IIA, Tyre became increasingly dominant among the coastal entities as a maritime power, while cultivating relationships with inland polities. Notable among the former was the Northern Kingdom of Israel, as evidenced in the ninth century BCE diplomatic marriage of Jezebel, Tyrian king Ithobaal's daughter, and Ahab of the Omride dynasty, aimed at "securing trade concessions with the flourishing Israelite kingdom and its newly established capital at Samaria" (Markoe 2000: 38). "Although there has been considerable debate over the precise nature of the political and commercial relationship between Tyre and Israel ... with some arguing that Israel was the dominant party, the evidence points towards a more equitable alliance that was founded on the concept of reciprocity to ensure that both parties benefitted" (Woolmer 2019: 36).

The prime location of ABM in the Hula Valley, at the northern end of the Jordan Valley route, with easily navigable roads from the city to both the west (Phoenician coast) and the northeast (Damascus), made it a potential commercial hub for goods that travelled through the valley and were destined for the coast, and from there, to points further west. An example of such trade items could be Arabah copper (e.g., Valske and Bode 2018–2019)¹⁵ or a special commodity, such as beeswax or honey from the apiary at Rehov in the Beth-Shean Valley (Mazar 2020c: 103).¹⁶ In the opposite direction, goods from

Lebanon, such as cedar timbers or items that arrived from the west via the Phoenician ports, would have been easily transported to ABM and, from there to points further south and east. For instance, the import of Greek pottery in Iron IIA was possibly mediated by the Phoenicians who served as distributing agents throughout northern Israel (Mazar and Kourou 2019: 385).

In addition to Tyrian interests in the northern Hula Valley involving long-distance trade services, this region, only 35 km away and rich in agricultural lands and produce, was a crucial "bread basket" for the densely populated island-city of Tyre that was dependent on a broad hinterland for its food supplies (Woolmer 2019: 36).

The excavations at ABM have shown that the site was an urban entity, replete with large public structures, and continuously occupied throughout Iron IIA, based on the stratigraphic sequence, pottery, and radiocarbon dates; the city was apparently abandoned at the end of the ninth–beginning of the eighth century BCE. The material culture is similar to that found at other northern Israelite sites, such as Hazor Strata X–VIII, and it is possible that indeed, ABM was part of the Israelite kingdom at that time. Notably, during the entire Iron IIA sequence at the site, there is a strong Phoenician element in the material culture, ranging from a large amount of typical pottery (e.g., Bichrome ware, Achziv Ware), glyptics, figurines and high art, exemplified by the faience head of a bearded elite male that is at home in the Phoenician iconographic world. Whether part of the Israelite kingdom or as a politically unaffiliated city on the periphery of the Phoenician (and Aramean) cultural range, Phoenician art and craftsmanship would have been well known and highly appreciated by the ABM inhabitants. The close and mutually beneficial commercial ties between the northern Hula Valley and the nearby coast that we surmise existed in Iron IIA, along with the preeminence of Phoenician culture in northern Israel at that time, serve as the backdrop to appreciate the presence of such a special jar, as the one discussed in this article, at Abel Beth Maacah.

¹⁵ The Phoenician need for copper was most likely multi-fold, yet one demand might be that raw copper and copper vessels were among the gifts given to Ashurnasirpal II by the Phoenicians when he visited the Mediterranean in 870 BCE, extended with the goal of securing budding trade relations with the Assyrians (Markoe 2000: 39).

¹⁶ A route extending from the Beth-Shean Valley to the west, towards the Akko Valley on the Southern Phoeni-

cian coast, would be a viable alternative to the northern Jordan Valley route suggested here for such trade (Darb el-Hawarna; Mazar 2020c: 104 and also, Mazar, this volume). Yet, for merchandise directed to the northern Phoenician coast, the route via ABM is eminently suitable and would avoid the more circuitous path mentioned above.

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Plate 13.1. Panitz-Cohen: Figure 7a.



Plate 13.2. Panitz-Cohen: Figure 8.



Plate 13.3. Panitz-Cohen: Figure 9.