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THE PALM TREE MOTIF IN THE LATE BRONZE AND EARLY IRON AGE: EVIDENCE FROM SIDON AND TELL RACHIDIEH

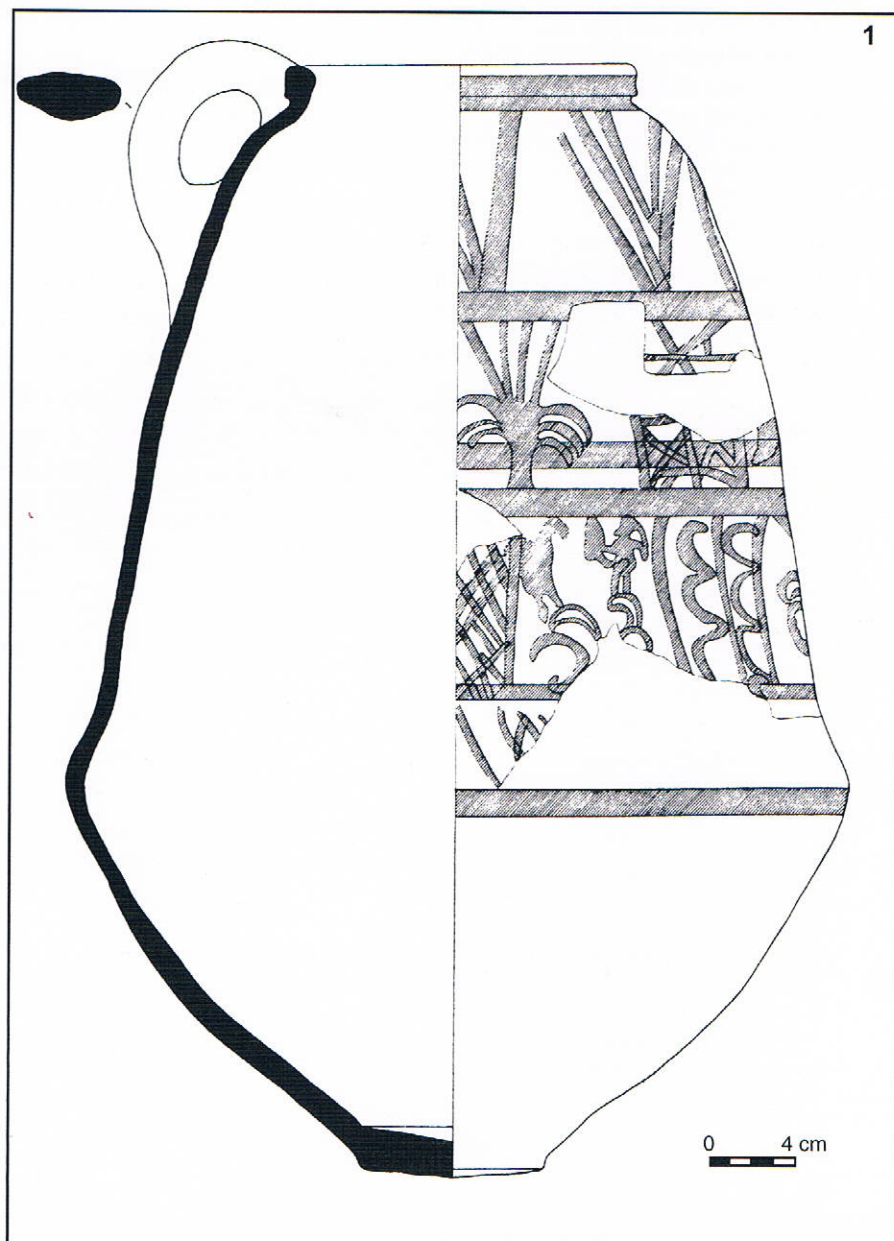
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The Palm tree was very important to the economy of the sometimes arid nations of the Middle East, providing food, fuel and shelter. Trees in general have always been associated with fertility, since the 3rd Millennium BC. It may be for this reason that it is sometimes known as the “tree of life” which was well established in the Levant in the Late Bronze Age. The Palm was identified as such because of the dates hanging from the tree. The tree was often flanked by two ibexes. This motif, which is also seen on Philistine pottery together with a wavy line, is commonly found on pottery (fig. 3-4) of the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age in Lebanon (fig. 9-12), Palestine (fig. 7, 8, 13-17) and Cyprus¹ (fig. 18-19). The motif does however degenerate during the beginning of the Iron Age and is reduced to either a tree trunk or to V-shaped lines as a poor substitute for the palm fronds or even to a simple linear tree².

A LATE BRONZE AGE JAR FROM SIDON (FIG. 1-2).

A biconical jar³ with slanting rounded shoulders, low thickened

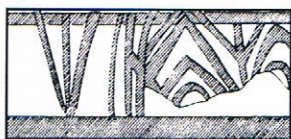
everted rim, bag-shaped body with a low carination, flat small base and a handle drawn from the rim to the shoulder was found in Sidon in a mixed Iron and Bronze Age context⁴. Although the Sidon jar is larger, its shape is similar to jugs from Megiddo in central Palestine and Hala Sultan



1 Jar S/4066 from Sidon. Conservation, Isabelle Skaf. Drawing, Norma Sfeir-Khoury; Scanning and plate arrangement Ramy Yassine.

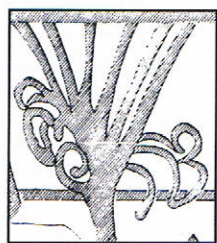
Tekké⁵ in Cyprus. It measures 50 cm high and is 36.4 cm wide at its widest point on the carination. The diameter of the opening is 15.5 cm and the jar is 0.9 cm thick. The decoration (fig. 1-2), carried out in red, is placed in the upper zone from the rim to the point

where the carination is sharpest, the lower part of the vessel remaining undecorated. The decorated zone is divided into four uneven horizontal bands by thick lines of red paint. The second and third bands are divided into panels or metopes of irregular size by triglyphs of straight, wavy or latticed panels⁶. The second band is further sub-divided by bands of thick red paint. Band four is smaller and measures 4.3 cm high. Metopes enclose images all rendered in silhouette or profile except for the palm trees. Images included: a quadruped, a quadruped and a human being and an ibex⁷ and an identified figure. In the top and bottom band a continuous frieze is depicted either with stylized palm frond or with zigzag lines (bottom band).



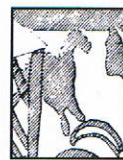
PALM TREES.

The style of the palm is simplified with the palm fronds rendered as curled strokes. The palm tree appears by itself⁸ within the panels. In the first band where a continuous frieze is depicted the



palm is indicated by just three to five strokes without the trunk.

QUADRUPEDS (IBEX).



The depiction of these animals is very schematic.

Two have a thin body⁹ with a tall neck of North Syrian type¹⁰. Another quadruped is shown standing on a palm tree facing a human figure.

A HUMAN FIGURE.



A human figure stands in profile on a motif which recalls the curls of the palm tree. Facial characteristics are very crudely rendered, only a large nose is shown. The figure is depicted with a conical cap from the top of which a streamer is hanging down his back similar to those depicted on "demons", at Alalakh¹¹ or on the gods from Ras Shamra, Amrit and Beth-shan¹². The figure is holding¹³ in his bent right hand a bag-shaped object. The left arm is bent backwards and joins up with the streamer. His two legs are straight. He is facing a quadruped.

1 P. M. Bikai, 1983, p. 399-400.

2 R. Amiran, 1969, p. 161-165; P. Maynor Bikai, 1983, p. 397-398; P. Bikai, 1994, p. 32.

3 R. Amiran, 1969, p. 147, calls this group the biconical-amphorae-kraters; The closest parallel to the Sidon example is a jug from Megiddo, P. L. O. Guy & R. M. Engberg, 1938, pl. 134, LBII. We note however the difference of composition in decoration between the Sidon example and the *horror vacui* at Megiddo.

4 The jar was found in trench Ic excavated by Sarah Collins.

5 *Supra* & P. Åström, 1983, pl. XXVII, 5-6.

6 J. L. Benson, 1960-61, pl. III, fig. 6, from Kourion.

7 Motifs that spread from the Syro-Palestinian coast into Cyprus in the 11th century; M. Yon, 1970, p. 315-316.

8 R. Amiran, 1969, p. 162, in LBII, the palm-tree appears alone.

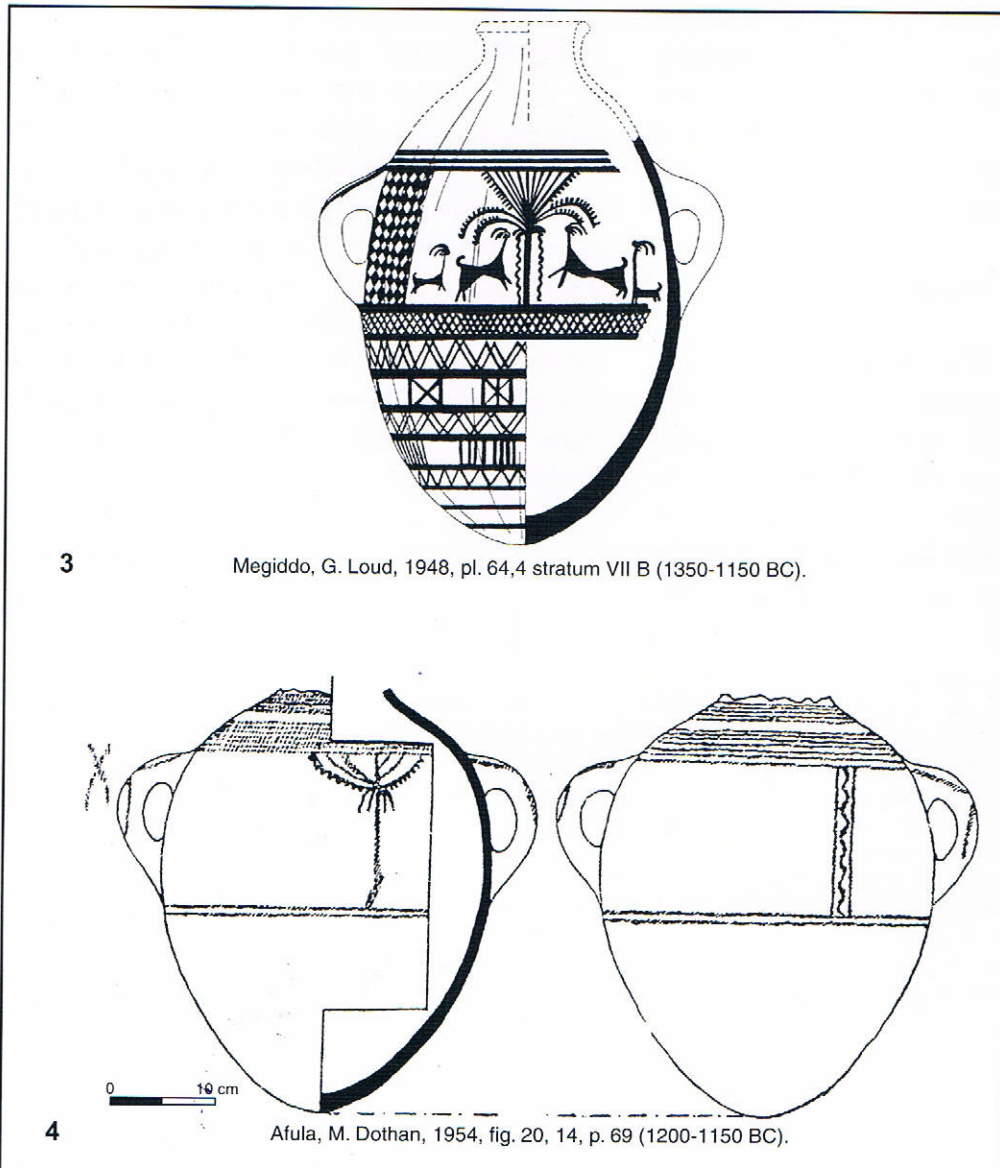
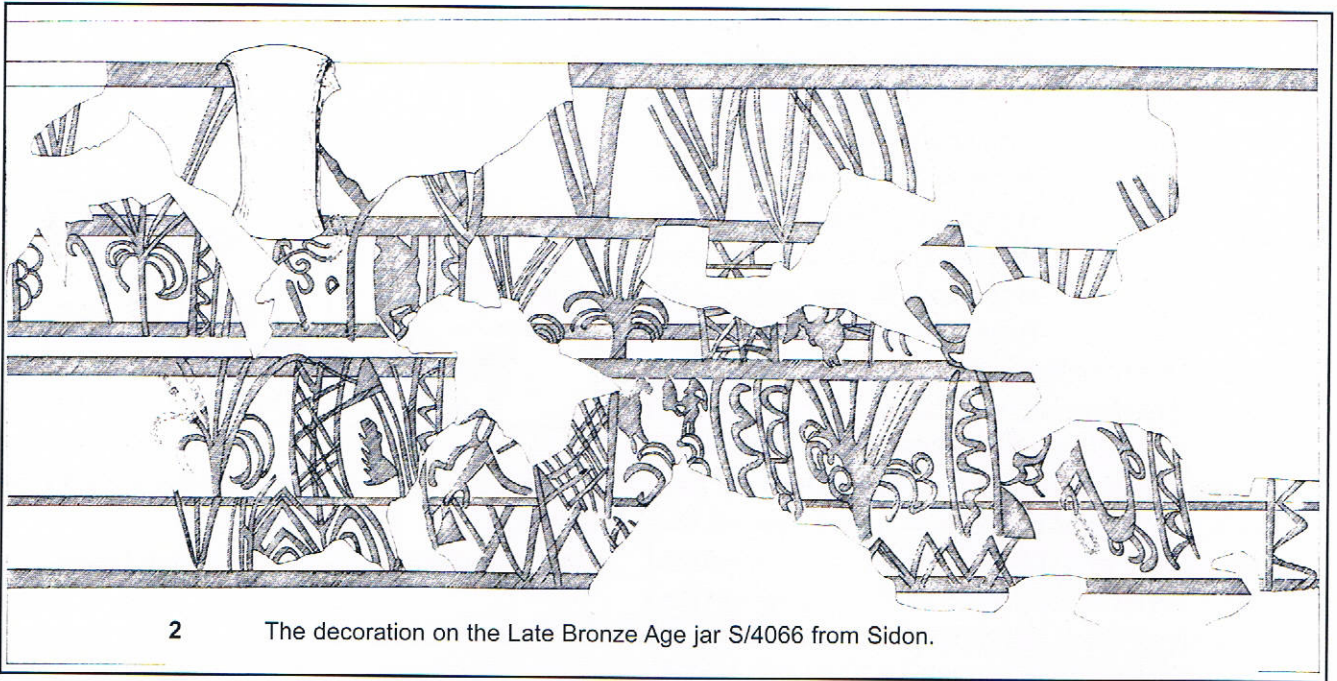
9 See C. F. A. Schaeffer, 1949, fig. 50, 10, p. 136, Ugarit Récent 2 (1450-1365).

10 M. Yon, 1970, p. 315-316 & 1973, p. 15, 17; V. Karageorghis, 1997, p. 73.

11 C. L. Woolley, 1955, pl. XCV, level V, pl. XCVI, e, level IV, demon dance; P. Åström, 1997, p. 11, such figures are absent in the Nuzi Ware.

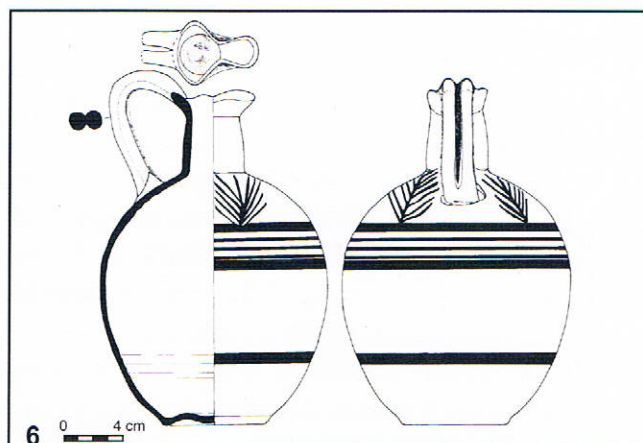
12 J. B. Pritchard, 1954, p. 306, 485, 486, 487; M. Welker, 1948, p. 222, pl. IV, 69.

13 M. Iacovou, 1998, fig. 68, p. 72, the human figure with goat. ...p. 71, none of the human figures are drawn in a passive relaxed attitude & 1997, p. 66...unlike the animals which are perfectly static, none of the human silhouettes is passive....





5-6 Tell Rachidieh, burial 1, Rach/26333.



The trefoiled rim jug from Tell Rachidieh.

The squat form of this Rach/26333 jug (fig. 5-6) with a trefoil mouth, two-stranded handle and ovoid body is reminiscent of a jug (?1050–850 BC) found at Palaepaphos–Skales ¹⁴, as well as of the round-bottomed Red Ware jugs ¹⁵. The jug, which is of local Black on Red ware, is decorated with a tree motif ¹⁶. The tree is reminiscent of the late Bronze Age palm motif but is depicted differently and is more stylized. It has a vertical trunk with three or four branches on either side, represented by straight lines angled upwards. Other examples evocative of this tree have been discovered in a context dated from the middle of the tenth to the middle of the ninth century BC (fig. 7) at Hurbat Rosh Zayit ¹⁷(fig. 13-15) and in one dated to the eighth century BC at Ashdod ¹⁸ (fig. 8).

Significantly, the Rachidieh jug is decorated with wide horizontal bands bordered on both sides by painted lines, a technique found on Cypriote

14 P. M. Bikai, 1987, pl. II, p. 11, 12, 14 and pl. XXV, p. 123.

15 P. M. Bikai, 1987a, p. 1.

16 P. M. Bikai, 1983, p. 396–398, on the evolution of the tree of life.

17 Z. Gal, 1992, figs. 8, 1, 2, 3, p. 181.

18 M. Dothan and D. N. Freedman, 1967, level 3a (Middle of the eighth century to 712 BC).

Black on Red jugs.

The technique of covering a vessel with red slip and then painting decoration on it in black was introduced more or less simultaneously around the eleventh century or the beginning of the tenth century BC in many places on the

Mediterranean littoral; it then evolved independently in each region. In Palestine¹⁹ a type of pottery with red slip with black concentric circles has been found at Tell Qasile²⁰, Ashdod²¹ and Tell er Reqeish²².

The origins of the technique of Black on Red appeared in Cyprus around 950 BC (Cypro-geometric II)²³. Bikai always maintained that at Tyre Black on Red Ware was a Cypriote import, because of the small amount found²⁴; this theory has now been confirmed by the analyses undertaken by N. J. Brodie and L. Steel, published in 1996²⁵. At Rachidieh one miniature Black on Red flask, a Cypriote import, was found in graves I to IV.

In Lebanon and in Cyprus the local variants of this type of pottery are known variously as Local Black on Red²⁶, Proto Black-on-Red or even Red Ware, the term used by Bikai at Palaepaphos-Skales²⁷.

The term Local Black on Red is used²⁸ to describe that red slip pottery with black decoration

which is comparable in the shapes of the vessels, in its texture and in the style of its decoration with bichrome Phoenician pottery. This last ware, characteristic of the north of Palestine, appeared, as early as the beginning of the Iron Age and represents a tradition parallel to that of the Black on Red²⁹ of Cyprus. Examples of Local Black on Red are, however, few: not enough to establish a true series, and its shapes are inspired by those of bichrome ware³⁰, has been aptly demonstrated. A date of around 800 BC seems feasible as a *terminus post quem* for the appearance of this technique of decoration on the bichrome style jugs.

The Palm tree motif that developed during the Late Bronze Age continued to be represented in the Early Iron showing that Canaanite cultural traits were not entirely wiped out but appeared along with a new technique of pottery decoration namely red slip with black decoration popular in Philistia during the 10th century³¹ and which was also found in Phoenicia³².

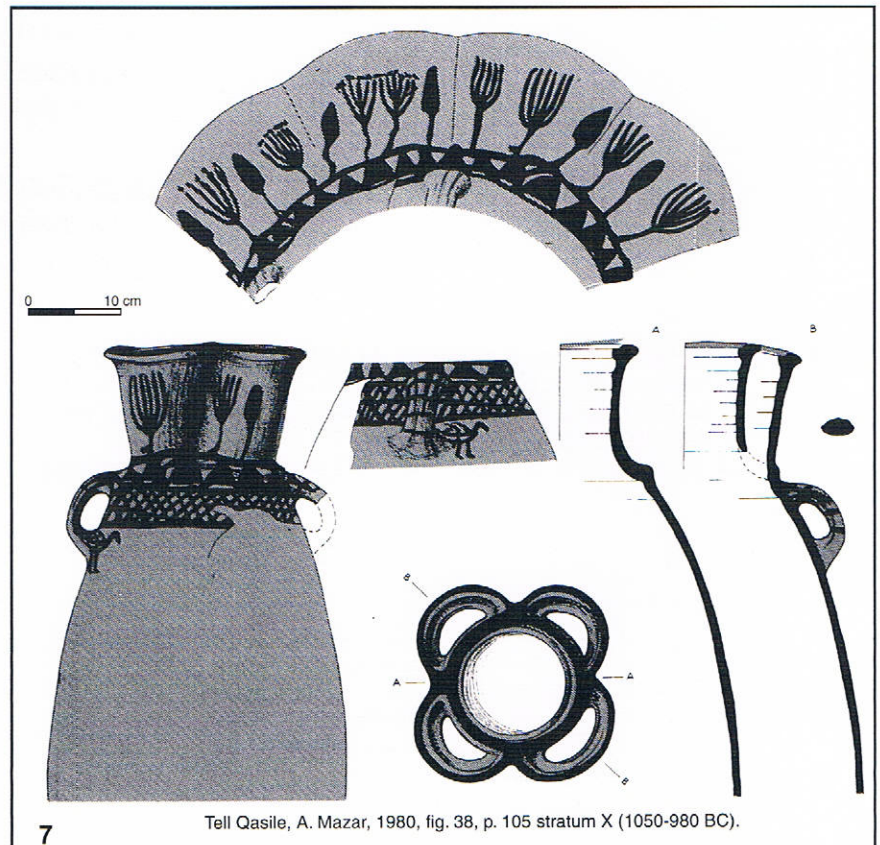
19 A. Mazar, 1994, p. 44.

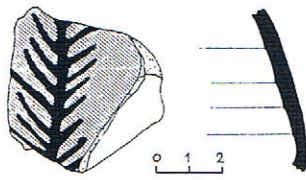
20 A. Mazar, 1980, p. 105; *idem*. 1985, p. 33 '...the technique of Black on Red disappears in level X (1050-980 BC), and p. 83.

21 M. Dothan and D.N. Freedman, 1967, p. 110; on the presence of Ashdod Ware until the end of Iron II, p. 113. See also V. Fritz and A. Kempinski, 1983, p. 77.

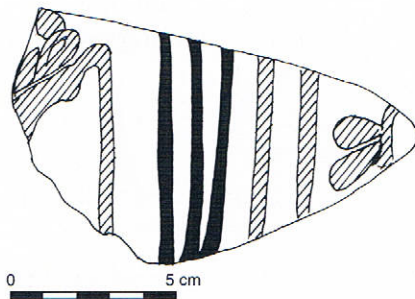
22 W. Culican, 1973, p. 102, n.23.

23 According to Nicola Schreiber. See also, F. Vandenaabeele, 1968, p. 107-8; E. Gjerstad, 1960, p.109.

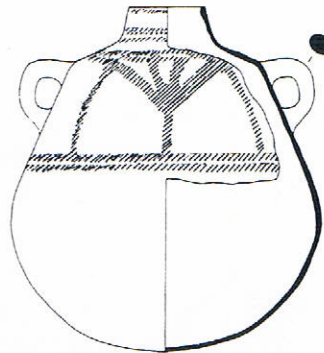




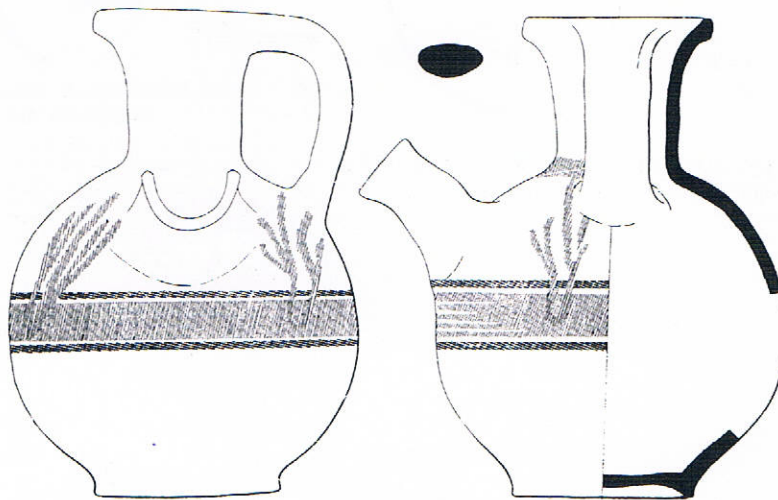
8 Ashdod, M. Dothan and D. N. Freedman, 1967, fig. 33, stratum 3 a, (mid 8th - to 712 BC).



9 Sarepta, W. P. Anderson, 1988, fig. A, 11, p. 648 substratum D 1 (Early First Millennium).

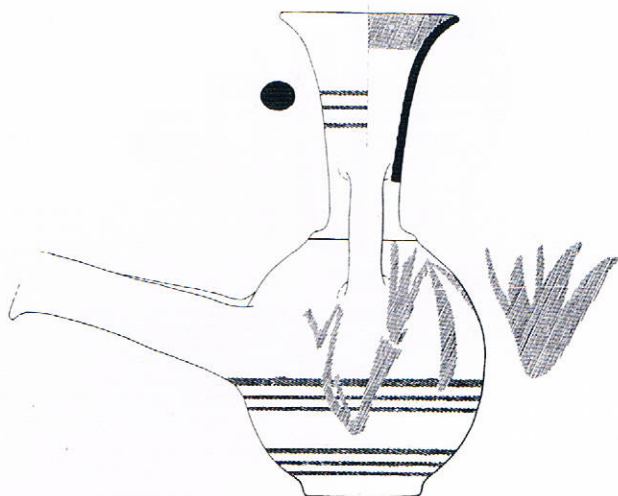


10 Sarepta, J. B. Pritchard, 1975, fig. 24 (Early Iron Age).

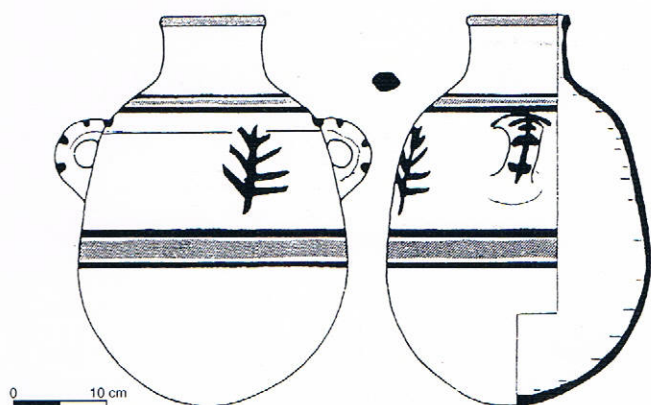


11 Khirbet Slim, S. V. Chapman, 1971, fig. 1, 1, p. 62, (Iron Age)

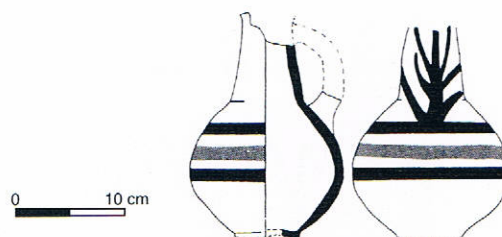
- 24 P. M. Bikai, 1978, p. 67.
- 25 N. J. Brodie and L. Steel, 1996, p. 263–78.
- 26 M. W. Prausnitz, 1969, p. 156.
- 27 P. M. Bikai, 1983, p. 400, n. 32.
- 28 S. V. Chapman, 1972, p. 140–41.
- 29 W. Culican, 1982, p. 55–58.
- 30 C. Briesse, 1985, p. 40.
- 31 S. Gitin, 1998, p. 165, "Ashdod Ware" with its decorative pattern of red slip and black and white bands which continues to develop throughout most of the Iron II period.
- 32 A. Mazar, 1998, p. 377, ... "changes were slow due to the strength of tradition. Such features as red slip and burnished red slip appeared gradually..."



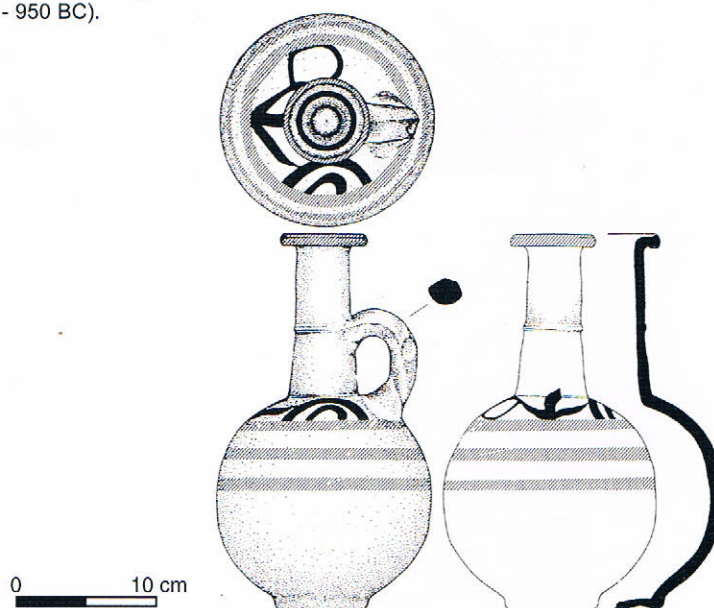
12 Khirbet Slim, S. V. Chapman, 1971, fig. 2, 4, p. 64, (Iron Age).



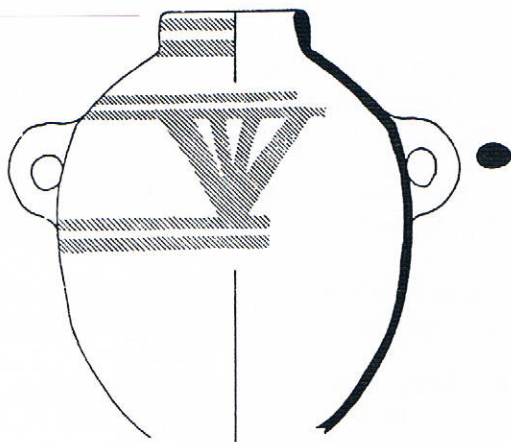
13 Horbat Rosh Zayit, Z. Gal and Y. Alexandre, 2000, fig. III.74, stratum IIb, locus 47 (960 - 950 BC).



14 Horbat Rosh Zayit, Z. Gal and Y. Alexandre, 2000, fig. III.84, stratum IIa, locus 18 (960 - 950 BC).

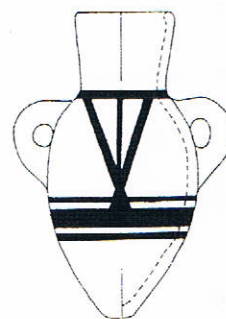


15 Horbat Rosh Zayit, Z. Gal and Y. Alexandre, 2000, fig. III.91, stratum IIa, locus 44 (960 - 950 BC).

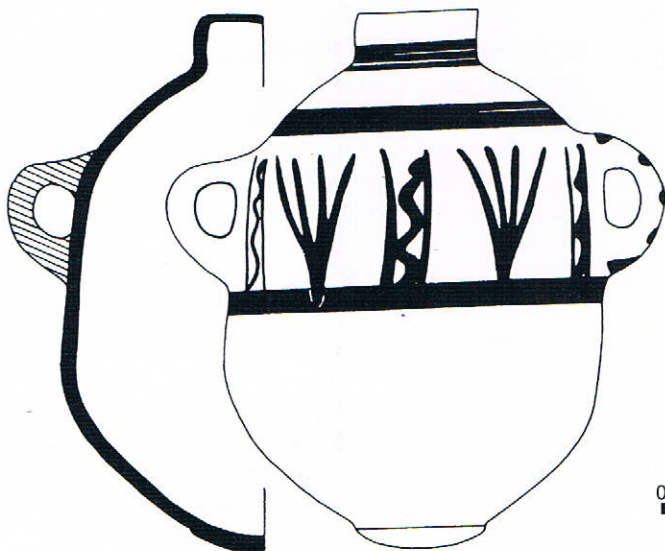


0 10 cm

16 Hazor, Y. Yadin *et al.*, 1960, pl. LIX, 7.



17 Megiddo, S. Lamon and M. Shipton, 1939, pl. 19, 114, stratum V (1050 - 1000 BC).



0 10 cm

18 Kouklia - Skales: Tomb 49/80, P. Maynor Bikai, 1987, pl. XXI, 565 (1050 - 850 BC).



19 Larnaca, Ayios Georgios Kontos, P. Maynor Bikai, 1987, pl. XXI, 567, (750 - 700 BC).

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