**Tel Shiqmona: A forgotten Phoenician site on the Carmel coast**

**Introduction**

Between 1963 and 1977, an area measuring some 800 sq m was excavated on Tel Shiqmona (Fig. 1) revealing strata that presented a sequence of settlements from the Late Bronze Age through the Iron Age and into the classical periods (Elgavish 1968; 1970; 1972; 1974; 1994). The excavation was conducted on behalf of the Haifa Museum and directed by Joseph Elgavish. Between 2011 and 2013, an archaeological expedition led by Shay Bar from the University of Haifa’s Zinman Institute of Archeology renewed excavations at the site. The aim of the new excavations was to study the stratigraphic sequence using modern-level excavations. Although Elgavish's excavations ended forty years ago, no academic report, of the ancient periods was ever published. For this reason, Tel Shiqmona has remained almost completely disregarded in academic research.

The Tel is located west of Haifa. Nearby are some of the most important Tels of the Bronze and Iron Age on Israel’s northern coastal area. For example, Tel Abu Hawam is about five kilometers as the crow flies to the east, Tel Akko about 15 kilometers to the north, and Tel Dor about 23 kilometers to the south. These three coastal Tels are situated at points that allow for ships' anchorage and are also close to rivers and main roads that access the mainland (Artzy 2006; Gilboa and Sharon 2008: 149). Tel Shiqmona, on the other hand, is located in the small area where Mount Carmel meets the sea. To its north lies small, shallow anchorage as well as a shallow rocky reef that makes it challenging for even small fishing boats to drop anchor. To the south lies the beginning of the Carmel coast, which has little room for agriculture. In addition, there is no significant main road near the Tel, and its size throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages never exceeded two acres (Elgavish 1994). These facts lead us to the main questions that we should focus on throughout this paper: Why was the site located there? Who were its inhabitants? And what did they do there?

**Strata and Chronology**

Elgavish’s Tel Shiqmona excavation led to his two major publications on the Bronze and Iron Age periods. The first is an entry in the Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations, while the second is a popular Hebrew book entitled *Shiqmona on the Carmel Coast* (Elgavish 1994). In the book, Elgavish presents ten strata of the Bronze and Iron Ages. He claims that the first two are Late Bronze Age, the following three are from Iron Age I, and the next five are from Iron Age II. The final stratum associated with our research has been dated to the sixth century (Table 1).

The most significant change in Elgavash’s proposed chronology of the Iron Age is already evident in a few of his publications. He claims that the Black-on-Red Cypriot vessels that appear in stratum 13 should be dated to the late 11th century. Nevertheless, black-on-red vessels first appeared in the Levant in Iron Age IIA late period, that is, in the ninth, not the 11th century. The rest of the assemblage too points to Iron Age IIA late period. This difference of over a hundred years creates a chronological gap that can be reconciled by the fact that Tel Shiqmona was apparently not settled in the 12th century. This gap likewise holds true for other coastal sites in Southern Phoenicia, as has already been noted by Gilboa, Waiman-Barak and Sharon (2015). Moreover, most likely each century is represented by more than one stratum. Table 1 shows, in a very general way, the changes we propose to Elgavish's chronology.

**Strata 11 and 12**

The most familiar strata in Tel Shiqmona are 12 and 11 (Fig. 2; Elgavish 1994: 49, Fig. 25). The few discussions of Shiqmona that we do have are based on these, and they are also the ones that have shaped most scholars’ perceptions of the site (for example Faust 2002; 2003: Mazar 1990; Stern 2001). Stratum 12 consists of buildings, streets, and a casemate wall. Elgavish named it "the City from the Days of David and Solomon" and assigned it to the 10th century. Stratum 11 consists of a four-room house, which Elgavish called "A Building from the Time of Ahab\Jehu" and assigned to the 9th century (Elgavish 1994). These names have been reconciled with the traditional belief that the casemate wall and four-room house are, inter alia, Israelite ethnic features that are associated with the architecture of the Israelite Monarchy (Lapp 1976; Shiloh 1987; Yadin 1958; Yeivin and Yeivin 1970). Archaeologists who have examined early Iron Age remains in the Carmel area in light of the Bible (a customary practice) have likewise reinforced the belief that the region was under Israelite control (Aharoni et al. 1993; Galil and Zakovitch 2002: 169, 180–181; see also the summary in Gilboa, Saron & Bloch-Smith 2015: 54–56). All of them have fixed the view – which many scholars seem to hold to this day – that in the Iron Age, Tel Shiqmona was a site under Israelite influence or rule. Today it is clear that casemate walls and four-room houses cannot be attributed to ethnos as they occur across a very broad geographical area (there are casemate walls in Iberia; for example, Martínez and Perez 2007; Serrano and Niño 2008) and can therefore not be regarded either as indicative of the construction of a specific king or as a chronological indicator of the 10th century.

**The Enigma of Tel Shiqmona**

Three unusual Iron Age phenomena have come to light at Shiqmona. We must specify, however, that these occur in pottery, meaning that at this stage we can only note their existence as it impossible to associate them with a specific stratum. The first phenomenon is related to material culture. At Tel Shiqmona, pottery associated with the "Israelites" and pottery associated with the "Phoenicians" (i.e. the pottery common in the Acre Valley and the coast of Lebanon in the Iron Age), seem to exist side by side in the same strata (Fig. 3). This differs from the situation at Tel Dor, where a clear chronological division distinguishes these cultural assemblages (Gilboa & Sharon 2008; Gilboa, Sharon, Bloch-Smith 2015). In addition, the site seems to have more Phoenician than Israelite pottery: Achzivian vessels, decorated and bullet-shaped jars, and decorated bowls. Evidence of fineware ("Samaria Ware") and decorated vessels is quite abundant at Shiqmona. What is more, the site has yielded types that do not appear at Tel Dor, as well as types of vessels that have thus far been unknown to exist on the northern coast of Israel.

The second notable phenomenon is intense evidence of trade. Tel Shiqmona possesses what appears to be the largest assemblage of BoR vessels outside of Cyprus (Fig. 4). Moreover, as Anna Georgiadou has shown, the vessels do not come from one but from a number of place, such as Paphos, Salamis, and Amathus (Georgiadou, personal communication).

Evidence of large-scale trade, specifically with Amathus, can also be deduced from the White Painted-Ware amphoras found in this city. This assemblage of White Painted vessels is one of the largest known in Israel, second only to the one at Tel Dor. Worth mentioning is that the White Painted vessels in Dor were produced in Salamis (that is to say, the amphorae arrived in Shiqmona from Amathus, and in Dor from Salamis). These amphoras serve as an example of the many diverse trade networks that could be discovered from a careful study of the imported pottery.

It is assumed that in most cases, pottery vessels were not a specific or principal reason for the development and justification of trade systems. Most served as storage vessels for a product (e.g. oil, wine, etc.) that was traded alongside something of significant value (e.g. metal, timber, people, etc.). If so, then foremost among the questions about trade systems that we must ask, is why a site as small as Shiqmona, which had no significant anchorage and lay far from a main road, was integrated into such an intensive trade system?

In recent years, scholars have suggested that textiles, especially purple-dyed textiles, were one of the key players within the trade system of the second millennium, possibly ones as important as metals (Kremer 2017; Soriga 2017).

This proposition leads us to the third phenomenon: the fact that within the context of the first millennium, Shiqmona has yielded the largest number of purple potsherds (Fig. 5). Some of these have already been analyzed by Naama Sukenik of the Israel Antiquities Authority and have been found to contain the genuine molluscan purple dye (Sukenik personal communication; see also Karmon and Spanier 1988; Sukenik et al. 2017). The chronological range of the phenomenon is unknown, but the evidence becomes very clear in stratum 12 and in many of the finds from the buildings on the Tel. Finally, dozens of loom weights and spindle whorls have been uncovered at the site, attesting to a thriving textile industry, which, par for the course, goes hand in hand with the production of dye.

**Discussion**

In sum, one can see that the features of Tel Shiqmona included: (1) a small fortified site; (2) no discernible anchorage or main road in its proximity; (3) some material culture characteristic of Israelite territories; (4) an abundant supply of Phoenician material culture; (5) rich evidence of trade; and (6) rich evidence of a purple-dye industry.

The questions arising from these features touch on several issues. First, function; since it seems that Tel Shiqmona was not a regular dwelling site, what function did it serve throughout these periods? This question is related to economic ones: how and from what did the residents of the Tel make their living? When did the purple-dye industry begin, and at what point did it stop? What other economic bases existed in the Tel? What was the Tel’s place in the regional economic system? From an ethnic and political standpoint, who were the residents of Shiqmona? Can they be characterized according to ethnicity? And more directly, was Shiqmona a Phoenician site? What, in addition, was Shiqmona’s place in the region’s system of settlement ? Was it an independent site? If not, under the auspices of which major city did it operate?

Today it is clear that the answer to some of the big questions regarding Shiqmona are related to purple dye. It seems that the shallow reef – the site’s major disadvantage when it came to anchorage – was a major advantage when it came to collecting marine snails from the sea. Moreover, if Tel Shiqmona, at least at a certain point of the Iron Age, functioned as a fortified facility for purple-dyed textile production, then this discovery is unparalleled. Although it is reasonable to assume that large cities along the Phoenician coast, such as Tyre and Sidon, housed large centers of purple-dye production, these have yet to be found.

At Tel Shiqmona we will attempt to find a solution to the questions presented here by conducting a thorough stratigraphic and typological analysis of the Tel as well as a comprehensive petrographic study and various other analyses that will help us map the trade network and relations between the residents of this Tel and those of others in its vicinity.