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COASTAL OBJECTS FROM PERSIAN PERIOD TELL EN-NAŞBEH IN JUDAH: PHOENICIAN INTERCONNECTIVITY WITH THE ACHAEMENID PROVINCE OF YEHUD

AARON JED BRODY*

Abstract: An unusual ceramic fragment and two glass conoid stamp seals from Tell en-Naşbeh were published in 1947 with few details. No narrative or identification was given for the pottery fragment, the seals are described in a list of artifacts in a figure but not illustrated nor discussed in the volume's chapter on seals. I identify these objects as Phoenician imports: a clay fragment of a satyr mask; and two stamp seals likely originating along the coast between Sidon and Tel Dor. Recognizing these pieces as Phoenician exports allows for further elucidation of contacts between the province of Yehud and the Mediterranean coast in the Persian period, long suggested by the Greek fine wares from the site. Conceptualizing interregional exchange between the southern Levantine coast and the Judean hills helps bridge the gap between international and local commerce in the Achaemenid period southern Levant, and suggests differences in routes of exchange from those of the late Iron Age. These new findings reverse the relative silence afforded the pieces in their original publication.

Key-words: Persian Period; Southern Levant; Interregional Exchange; Yehud Province.

1. INTRODUCTION

The identification of three artifacts from Tell en-Naşbeh as coastal allows us to reconsider interregional connections and exchanges from the eastern Mediterranean litoral to the northern region of the province of Yehud in the early Persian period (ca. 538–420 BCE; Fig. 8). These overland trade networks connecting the coast of the southern Levant to inland regions have been suggested by the finds of a limited number of Greek fine ware ceramics uncovered at Tell en-Naşbeh and a few other sites in the Judean hill country.¹ Evidence for interregional networks, commerce, and connections evinced by these three Phoenician² imports helps us to bridge a gap between international trade to, and through, the southern Levant and regional studies of local economies and the administration of the province of Yehud in the Persian period (ca. 538–332 BCE).³ Considering interregional trade along with the international and local levels of exchanges and economies allows us better conceptualize the interconnections between the Phoenician coastal southern Levant and the

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1 von Bothmer 1947; Wenning 2004a; Nunn 2014; Rönnberg *et al.* 2023.

2 For the appellation of the central and northern coast of modern Israel, Lebanon, north to coastal Syria as Phoenician see Sader 2019, pp. 4–23. The author will use the out-group term Phoenician to refer to peoples and products from this Levantine coastal region and other parts of the Mediterranean litoral primarily as designations of interconnectivity with the southern Levantine hill country, in the Achaemenid period (ca. 539–332 BCE) the province of Yehud.

3 For interregional exchange primarily in the late Persian period, see Ariel 2016; and Noonan 2011. For international, see van Alfen 2002; 2015; 2016; Wenning 2004a; 2004b; Stewart – Martin 2005; Chirpanlieva 2013; Nunn 2014; Gilboa *et al.* 2017; Lehmann *et al.* 2019; Shalev – Gilboa – Lehmann 2022; Rönnberg *et al.* 2023; Shalev 2024. For local, see Lipschits 2015. For an overview see Altmann 2016.

Judean Highlands in this early period of Persian rule over the western portions of its empire in the sixth-fifth centuries BCE.

The objects that I categorize as coastal Phoenician are a fragment of a Persian period mold made ceramic mask or protome⁴ and two glass conoid stamp seals. None of these artifacts were recognized as imports from the Mediterranean coast in the 1947 final reports for the excavations at Tell en-Naṣbeh.⁵ The mask fragment was only published in a photographic plate with other decorated ceramics that provided «examples of ribbing, rouletting, and miscellaneous impressions».⁶ The object itself is not discussed in the text of Wampler's 1947 volume, which focused solely on the ceramics from the site. The two glass conoid stamp seals are mentioned in the first final report for the excavations only in the descriptive portion for a plate of photographs of engraved seals.⁷ While the provenience of each seal, their glass material, colors, measurements, and the fact that each has an «indistinct» stamping face is detailed, no photographs or drawings of these artifacts is provided in the 1947 volume. Nor is either seal discussed in chapter XIII of the final report, which details and interprets the site's seals and seal impressions.⁸ Thus it is almost impossible to determine that these three objects are not local to Tell en-Naṣbeh, or the region of Judah, from the incomplete ways they are presented in the two 1947 final reports. Yet masks and glass conoid stamp seals are well known artifact types from sites along the coast of the Phoenician Levant in the Persian period.⁹

2. THE PHOENICIAN MASK FRAGMENT

The ceramic fragment that I have identified as portion of a Phoenician mask,¹⁰ was not recognized as such by Joseph Wampler, the project's ceramicist (Fig. 1). In his unpublished object notes, Wampler describes the piece as follows: «1 fragment of [sic] curious object of clay; medium hard; surfaces medium red orange over core of blue grey containing occasional fine white grits. Finish: wet-smoothed; incised decorations on two sides and a peculiar spout-like depression on one surface.»¹¹ The sketch he provided in these notes is upside down, which likely explains his identification of a kind of spout on the piece, as this feature is pointing downwards in his draft drawing. The proper stance, however, is represented in the photo in the final report.¹²

What Wampler describes as a spout-like depression in his unpublished records, is actually a left ear; the «incised decorations» on the piece are arched and represent the hairs of an eyebrow (Fig. 2). This eyebrow is especially clear when the mask is reconstructed by sorting out its proper stance and flipping the image

⁴ Technically, masks have eye holes and often mouth and nostril holes, and were worn by an individual to disguise, but also transform, the wearer. Protomes are clay plaques that represent a divinity or divine being but lack any eye/mouth/nostril holes and are presumed to have been displayed rather than worn. The fragment from Tell en-Naṣbeh is not big enough to preserve any remaining indications of an eye, mouth, or nostril hole, so it might have been either a mask or a protome. Given the more common use of the term «mask» to refer to both masks and protomes, I will use mask in the article, but admit that one cannot determine whether the full object was a wearable mask or a protome for display, given its highly fragmentary nature.

⁵ McCown 1947, p. 296, pl. 55 nn. 71–72; Wampler 1947, pl. 89 n. 2.

⁶ Wampler 1947, pl. 89 n. 2.

⁷ McCown 1947, p. 296, pl. 55 nn. 71–72.

⁸ McCown 1947, pp. 148–150.

⁹ Keel 1995, pp. 102–104; Uehlinger 1999; Martin 2007; 2014; Orsingher 2018.

¹⁰ Brody 2020, p. 70.

¹¹ These object notes, or millimeter cards, are housed in the collection of the Badè Museum of Biblical Archaeology at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. The information is quoted from the card for Room 478, Square X/18, Level I, April 16–18, 1935. The object was registered with the field number: Rm 478 I x15; which identifies the piece's context as coming from Room 478, Level I, and it was the fifteenth object recorded for the locus (= x15).

¹² Wampler 1947, pl. 89 n. 2.



Fig. 1. Mask fragment, Rm. 478 x15. Photo by Natalie Gleason and Brooke Norton (With permission of the Bade Museum at Pacific School of Religion).

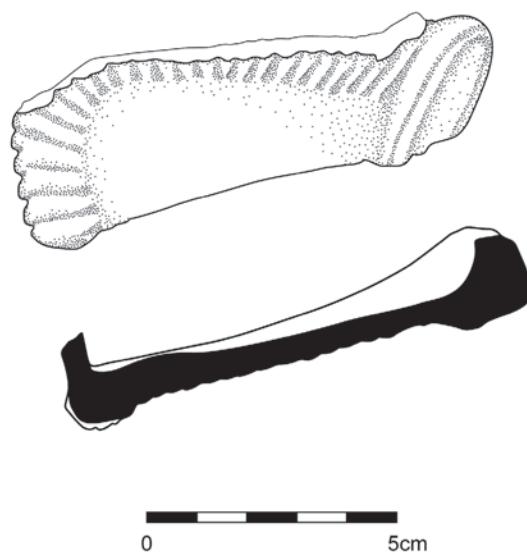


Fig. 2. Mask fragment. Drawing by Natalie Gleason (With permission of the Bade Museum at Pacific School of Religion).

to reconstruct the mirrored right side of the piece. The reconstruction suggests a representation of a face with two thick eyebrows. This feature has nice comparisons in representations of eyebrows on Bes images from Egypt (Fig. 3).¹³ The thick eyebrow and animal ear are both paralleled on a Phoenician scarab from the western Mediterranean that depicts a satyr in profile, represented on a janiform helmet (Fig. 4).¹⁴ When positioned correctly, one can also make out the curve of the eyelid between the eyebrow and ear. Given the distinguishable features of the ear, eyebrow, and eyelid, I have identified this as a clear fragment of a mask, a common artifact type found at Phoenician sites along the Levantine coast and throughout the Mediterranean in the late Iron Age and Persian period. This is the first Phoenician mask identified in Persian period Judah.

The mask fragment can be dated to the Persian period by its ware, context, and type. The piece's ware is salmon pink in color¹⁵ and is well-fired (Fig. 1), two qualities known from ceramics and pottery masks from the coast of the southern Levant in the Persian period. Context is always tricky when dealing with the legacy excavations at Tell en-Nasbeh, because of excavation and recording methods typical of the 1920–1930s and the state of preservation of these primarily surface remains. That said, Wampler dates the architectural context in which the mask was found, Room 478 in Squares X/17 and X/18, to between 600 and 450 BCE, based on its ceramics (Fig. 5).¹⁶ He does note, however, that the finds in Room 478 were mixed and his dating is not certain. All other associated rooms in the vicinity of Room 478 are dated by their ceramics to 600–450 BCE, with a similar level of mixing and uncertainty noted.¹⁷ Having checked the

13 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bes> accessed 3-2-25

14 <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/Gems/Scarabs/Images/Robs%20Images%202008/37.05m.jpg> accessed 3-2-25.

15 Here I disagree with Wampler's view on the color of the surface of the mask fragment, which he described in his unpublished notes as «red orange». Having handled numerous similar wares from the Persian period levels in the field at the Ashkelon and Tel Akko excavations, I would describe the surface of this similar ware as salmon pink in color.

16 Wampler 1947, p. 122.

17 Wampler 1947, p. 122.

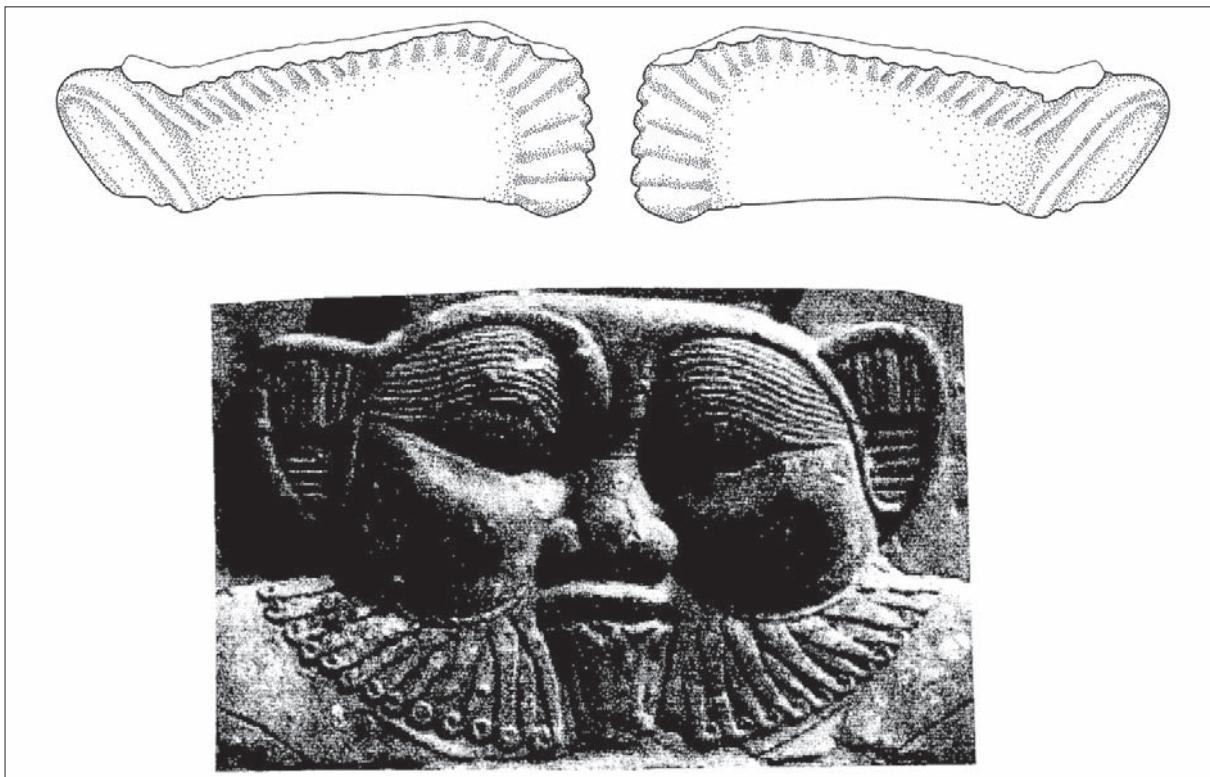


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the right side of the mask by flipping the existing left drawing of the fragment, in comparison with a Bes image to highlight similarities in eyebrows (Photo by Aaron Brody).

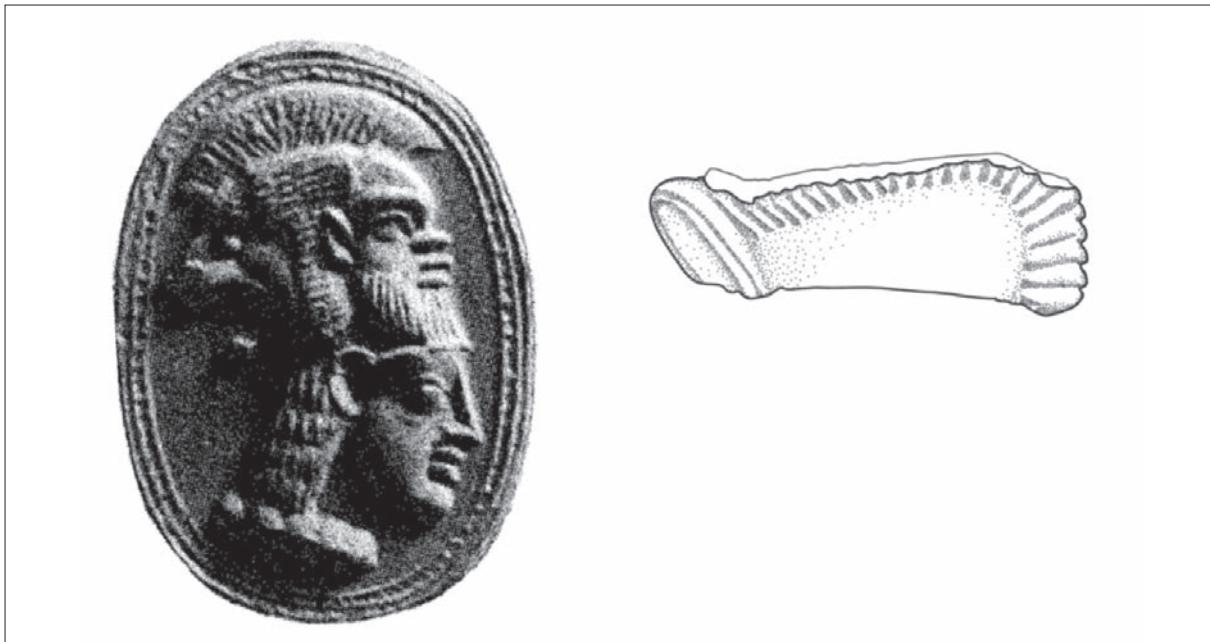


Fig. 4. Comparison of mask fragment with satyr's eyebrow and ear on a janiform helmet on a Phoenician stamp seal (After <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/Gems/Scarabs/Images/Robs%20Images%202008/37.05m.jpg> (photo by Aaron Brody and Natalie Gleason)).

SHEET 125

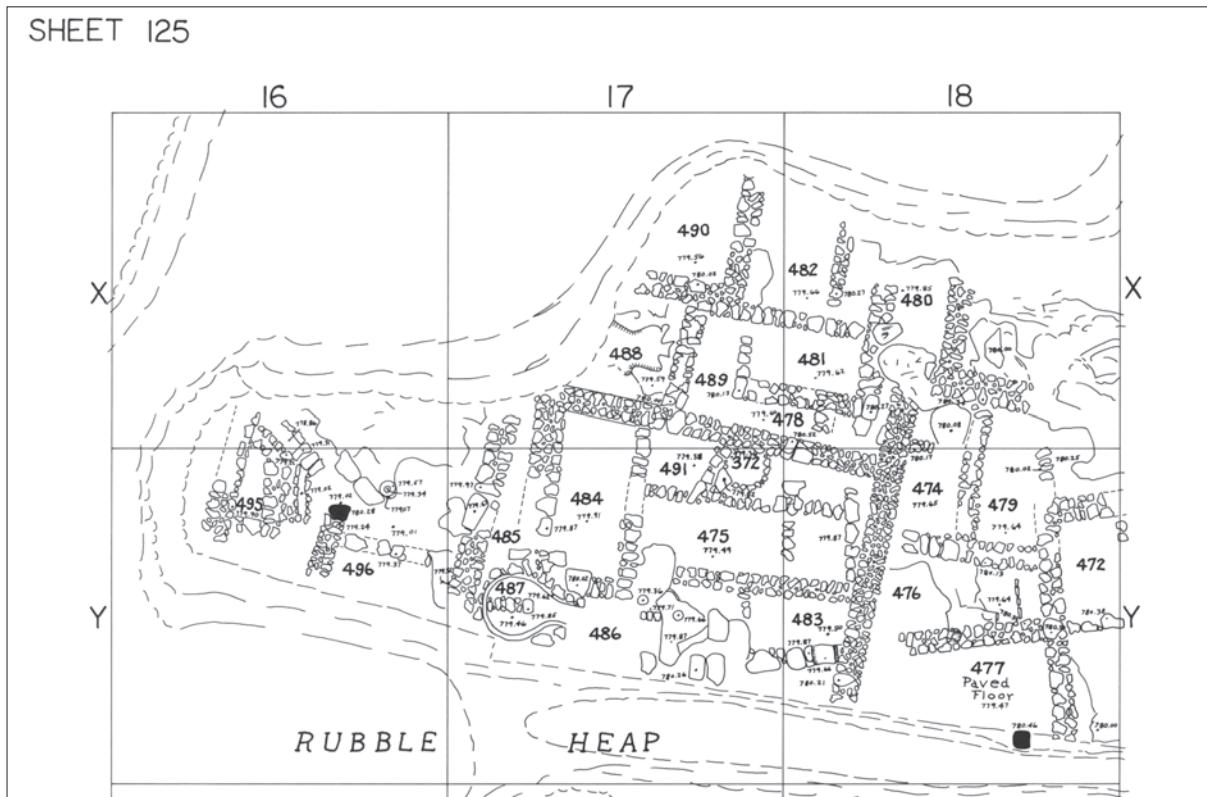


Fig. 5. Architectural context of mask fragment at Tell en- Nasbeh, Room 478 and surrounding features. Excavation squares are 10x10 meters. Detail from unpublished 1:100 architectural (drawing by Labib Sorial; photo by Aaron Brody. With permission of the Bade Museum at Pacific School of Religion).

unpublished object records, or millimeter cards, for all of these contexts, I can say that there are no ceramics that date later than the Persian period, and many are either from the Iron IIC or are seventh-century types that carry forward the late Iron Age potting traditions into the sixth–fifth centuries BCE. These ceramics reflect the overwhelming continuities in the pottery transitions from the Iron IIC (ca. 720–586 BCE) to the Babylonian/early Persian periods in Judah (ca. 586–420 BCE), yet certain lamp and cooking pot forms from these rooms are firmly in the Persian period tradition.

Masks, specifically Phoenician types, are known primarily from sites along the coast of the Levant, as far south as Tel Dor (Fig. 8), which is considered the southern limit of Phoenicia in the Persian period.¹⁸ Further to the south of Tel Dor and inland, Phoenician masks are also found at Tell es-Safi in the Persian period.¹⁹ Masks are prevalent at contemporary Phoenician sites along the central and northern Levantine littoral, in modern Lebanon and Syria, and are found in various locations throughout Phoenician diaspora sites across the Mediterranean and Atlantic.²⁰

18 Dayagi-Mendels 2002, pp. 156–160; Martin 2007; 2014; Orsingher 2018.

19 Martin 2007.

²⁰ Ciasca 1999; Dayagi-Mendels 2002, pp. 159–160; Morstadt 2010; Averett 2015; Orsingher 2018; 2019.



Fig. 6. Composite image of glass conoid stamp seal, M597 (Photo by Nadia Ben-Marzouk; drawing by Ulrike Zurkinden. With permission from the Stamp Seals of the Southern Levant database project).



Fig. 7. Composite image of glass conoid stamp seal, no object number (photo by Nadia Ben-Marzouk; drawing by Ulrike Zurkinden. With permission from the Stamp Seals of the Southern Levant database project).

3. GLASS CONOID STAMP SEALS

The first conoid stamp seal, Badè Museum number M597, is made from iridescent, or as it is described in the first final report, «opalescent» glass (Fig. 6).²¹ The seal is 14 mm in height, with an oval base that is 10 x 12 mm, and is perforated towards the top of the cone. Its base, unfortunately, does not preserve a distinguishable etched design. As detailed above, the seal is not further described in the written section on seals, nor is a drawing or photograph provided in the final report.²² The seal was uncovered in surface layers at Tell en-Naṣbeh in Square AH 22 located in the southern portion of the site. This particular excavation square does not have any features or architecture that were uncovered below its surface levels.

The second conoid stamp seal lacks a Museum number or a field number as it was found in «debris», or what we would call a dump pile, on June 30, 1932 (Fig. 7).²³ Finds were collected from the tips at the site by workers carting matrix from the excavation areas;²⁴ however, the specific dig area where the seal originated must have been uncertain. Perhaps this was due to the rapidity of excavation, the sheer amount of dirt moved, or it was simply a chance find on the project's dump pile and could not be associated with matrix removed from a particular excavation area. This must be left to conjecture as no records were left pertaining to the provenance of the glass seal, except we know that it came from debris at the site. This seal is yellowish brown translucent glass. Its height is 15 mm, with a rounded base with a 12 mm diameter, and a

21 McCown 1947, p. 296, pl. 55 n. 71.

22 McCown 1947, pp. 148–50, pl. 55.

23 McCown 1947, p. 296, pl. 55 n. 72.

24 Badè 1934, pp. 23–24.

perforation towards the top of the cone. Like the first seal, if there was originally an etched design it is now indistinguishable.²⁵ Similar to the opalescent stamp seal, this brown glass stamp seal is not further detailed in the chapter on seals, nor is it illustrated in a drawing or photograph.²⁶

Since neither of the two glass conoid stamp seals came from a provenienced context at Tell en-Naşbeh, they have to be dated typologically. Comparisons in the southern Levant are not numerous, but come from Persian period contexts listed here alphabetically and with the number of glass conoid seals discovered: Ashkelon 1; Dor 1; Gezer 7; Jemmeh 1; Kedesh 2; Khirbat Kabar (near Bethlehem) 1; Lachish 1; Samaria 4; Tall Qafqafa 1; Tell es-Sa‘idiyah 1 (Fig. 8).²⁷ Like the glass seals from Tell en-Naşbeh, several of these provenienced seals were from unstratified layers or were surface finds.²⁸ Uehlinger has proposed that the workshop that produced glass conoid stamp seals may have been in Sidon, unfortunately, as he notes, no provenienced glass conoid seals come from excavations in Sidon or elsewhere in the central or northern Levant.²⁹ It is challenging to pinpoint a workshop for Levantine glass, as is true for glass in the earlier Iron Age,³⁰ but following Uehlinger I would place the manufacturing origins of this mould-made glass along the coast between Sidon and Dor where the basic components of glass occur naturally and can easily be brought in by ship. The products used in the primary stage of manufacturing glass are not found in the Judean hill country, nor, to my knowledge have any glass ingots that would have been used in a secondary stage of manufacture been found in Persian period Judah. This connection of glass stamp seals to the coast has to do with the manufacturing

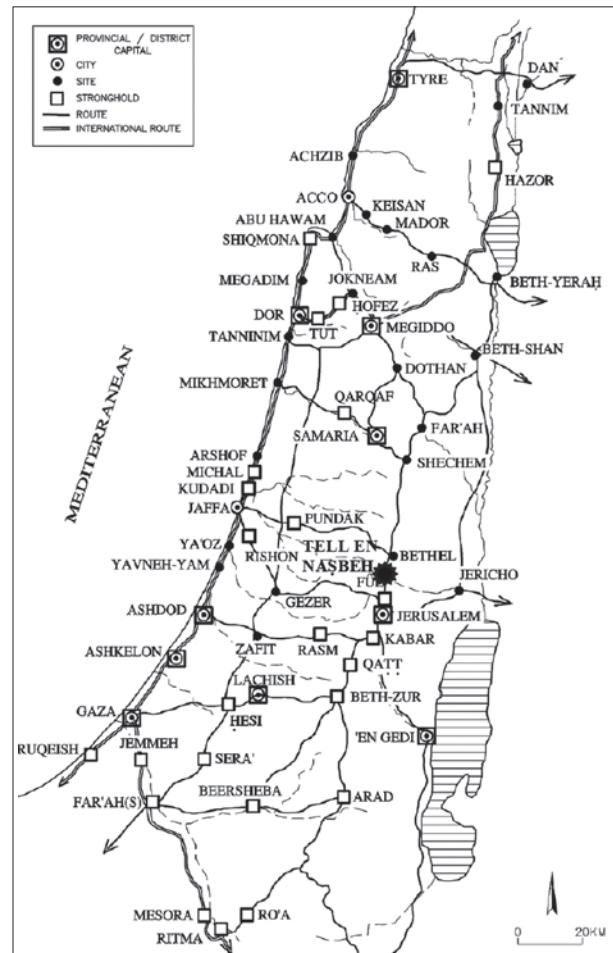


Fig. 8. Map of the southern Levant in the Persian period, with location of Tell en-Naşbeh in relation to most other sites mentioned. After Tal 2005, Fig. 1. Image by Aaron Brody.

25 McCown 1947, p. 296, pl. 55 n. 72.

26 McCown 1947, pp. 148–50, pl. 55.

27 Baruch 2006; Berlin – Herbert 2012, pp. 27–28; 2013, p. 375; Brandl *et al.* 2019, p. 223; Crowfoot – Crowfoot – Kenyon 1957; Keel 1995, pp. 102–104; Reisner – Fisher – Lyon 1924; Uehlinger 1999. I would like to thank Nadia Ben-Marzouk for her invaluable help with comparative information on glass conoid stamp seals from the southern Levant from the Corpus of Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant database project based at the University of Zurich, including detailed information and bibliography on glass seals not yet in the database that have been published from Samaria and Kedesh. She also photographed the Tell en-Naşbeh seal materials for the Corpus of Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant project, and kindly shared the relevant images with me.

28 Uehlinger 1999.

29 Uehlinger 1999, pp. 149, 156.

30 Schmidt 2019, pp. 153–157; Uehlinger 1999, pp. 148, 150, 169.

chaîne opératoire and is not a notoriously tricky stylistic argument based on iconography,³¹ which in the case of the two conoid seals from Tell en-Naṣbeh is worn away regardless.

4. COASTAL CONNECTIONS

The mask fragment and two glass conoid stamp seals uncovered at Tell en-Naṣbeh likely had their origins somewhere along the Mediterranean coast between Sidon, in the north, and Tel Dor, in the south. During the Persian period, this extended coastal region was under the political hegemony of Phoenicians based in Sidon and Tyre under the purview of the Achaemenid empire.³² These three items would have been transported up to the hill country of northern Judah, perhaps together with a variety of other items of exchange. Other coastal goods that were transshipped in small but significant numbers east into Judah include a group of Attic Greek fine wares, uncovered at Tell en-Naṣbeh in small numbers and elsewhere in the region in even smaller amounts.³³ Recently identified imported «Greek style», or East Greek, transport amphorae, table amphorae, and an askos, are among other finds from Tell en-Naṣbeh that arrived from the Mediterranean coast. These East Greek ceramics are in the collection in the Badè Museum at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, along with a fragment of a Kelenderis band-painted bowl from Cilicia,³⁴ however, they were not identified as imports from the Greek world in either final report.³⁵ Another ceramic imported from the coast was the ring based mortarium, which has been demonstrated by material science testing to have its origins in coastal northern Syria or eastern Cyprus.³⁶

The Phoenician mask from Tell en-Naṣbeh detailed above likely represents a satyr, as is indicated by its faun-like ear.³⁷ Phoenician satyr masks are not great parallels stylistically with what remains of the fragment from Tell en-Naṣbeh.³⁸ Images of satyrs on Phoenician stamp seals; however, suggest the representative type depicted in the mask fragment (Fig. 4).³⁹ Given the established presence of Greek fine ware drinking sets along the southern Levantine coast⁴⁰ and at Tell en-Naṣbeh,⁴¹ and the possible presence at the site of «Greek style», or East Greek, table amphorae, an askos for serving liquids, larger transport amphorae for importing wine, and a Kelenderis band-painted bowl we may have a grouping of imported ceramics related to celebratory drinking. Since satyrs are known to have been affiliated with symposia, which may have had a

31 Porzia forthcoming.

32 Tal 2005, pp. 83, 88–89.

33 von Bothmer 1947; Wenning 2004a; Nunn 2014; Rönnberg *et al.* 2023.

34 <https://www.levantineceramics.org/vessels/34857-nasbeh-y18x-i-x8>, accessed 2-3-25

35 McCown 1947; Wampler 1947; for parallels from the southern Levant see Lehmann *et al.* 2019; Shalev – Gilboa – Lehmann 2022; and Shalev 2024. I have identified sherds from imported transport amphorae, table amphorae, an askos, and a Kelenderis bowl in the Tell en-Naṣbeh collection in storage in the Badè Museum at Pacific School of Religion. These identifications require further research and confirmation by an expert in Greek/East Greek utilitarian imports to the region and proper publication.

36 For an imported mortarium from Persian period Tell en-Nasbeh see Wampler 1947, pp. 37–38, p. 171 n. 1361, pl. 59 n. 1361. Wampler already recognized the vessel's fabric as foreign to the Tell en-Naṣbeh region. For comparative Iron IIC and Persian period mortaria identified as imports to the southern Levant through material science testing see Zukerman – Ben-Shlomo 2011.

37 I would like to thank S. Rebecca Martin for pointing out the details of the satyr-style ear to me, while I was fixated on the Bes-like eyebrow.

38 Ciasca 1999, p. 415; Morstadt 2010; Orsingher 2018.

39 For comparative representations of satyrs on Phoenician stamp seals see <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/carc/gems/Styles-and-Periods/Classical-Phoenician-Scarabs/Satyrs>, accessed 3-2-25, and <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/Gems/Scarabs/Images/Robs%20Images%2008/37.05m.jpg>, accessed 3-2-25, where a satyr image is depicted on a janiform helmet that is worn perhaps as an aspect of ritual transformation (FIG. 4; Averett 2015).

40 Stewart – Martin 2005.

41 von Bothmer 1947; Wenning 2004a; Nunn 2014; Rönnberg *et al.* 2023.

Northwest Semitic counterpart in the *marzēah*,⁴² it is not too far of an interpretive stretch to posit a connection between the Phoenician mask and wine-drinking festivities. These celebrations garnered further prestige because the drinking cups, serving vessels, and some of the wines were valued foreign luxury goods brought in across the Mediterranean from mainland Greece and Ionia and transshipped inland over land routes from harbors on the southern Levantine coast.

One possible exchange route could have brought the mask, glass stamp seals and other goods from the coast up to Gezer in the northern Shephelah. Persian period finds from Gezer include Greek finewares and Phoenician glass conoid stamp seals.⁴³ From Gezer, merchants would have then followed the route east up into the northern region of the Judean hill country (Fig. 8). It is possible that this proposed route from Gezer to Tell en-Naşbeh then continued east to Jericho and then on to several sites east of the Jordan river in Ammon, all of which have low numbers of Greek fineware ceramics.⁴⁴ Studies have already demonstrated the interconnectivity of the coastal region and Judah through the interregional circulation and distribution of Persian period coins minted at a variety of local mints and Greek finewares.⁴⁵ I would suggest that imported Phoenician masks and glass conoid stamp seals, along with Greek and Cilician fine wares, East Greek transport amphorae and tablewares, and mortaria were exchanged within similar spheres of interregional interaction.

This Persian period west to east movement of goods, which originated in and was transshipped from the Mediterranean coast to the northern Judean hill country, marks a shift in connectivity from the earlier Iron II period. Prior research has suggested that while there was Iron II contact with the coast, marked by Phoenician imported pottery and eye beads, this commerce was directed from the Akko Plain through the Jezreel Valley and then up into northern Judah.⁴⁶ This Iron II trade may have gone along the trunk road to Tell en-Naşbeh and then on to Jerusalem,⁴⁷ although it is possible that Phoenician goods went to Jerusalem first and then back to Naşbeh. These late Iron Age coastal connections were quite limited in absolute numbers, while larger quantities of imported ceramics were being brought in to Tell en-Naşbeh from the region of Ammon, indicating a favored east-to-west interregional movement of goods from Transjordan to northern Judah.⁴⁸ The same goods from Ammon were exchanged with Tell en-Naşbeh in the Persian period, just in much smaller quantities than in the previous Iron II phase.⁴⁹ So the focus of interregional commerce to Tell en-Naşbeh shifts toward the coastal region in the Persian period, which should come as no surprise given the robust nature of eastern Mediterranean exchange in this era.⁵⁰ The transshipment of goods from the coast to the highlands is represented proportionally by the absolute numbers of imported Greek fine wares uncovered at sites along the southern Levantine coast and at Shephelah sites, numbers of which drop off exponentially at sites further east in Judah and Transjordan.⁵¹

42 Dvorjetski 2016; for a view against this link see Martin 2018.

43 Wenning 2004a; Nunn 2014; Keel 1995; Uehlinger 1999.

44 Wenning 2004a, p. 37 map; 2004b; Ray 2016.

45 Ariel 2016; Wenning 2004a; 2004b; Nunn 2014.

46 Brody 2014b.

47 Freud 2016.

48 Brody 2014a.

49 Brody 2014a.

50 van Alfen 2002; Chirpanlieva 2013; Nunn 2014; Gilboa *et al.* 2017; Lehmann *et al.* 2019; Shalev – Gilboa – Lehmann 2022; Rönnberg *et al.* 2023; Shalev 2024.

51 Wenning 2004a; 2004b; Faust *et al.* 2014; Nunn 2014; Ray 2016.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The attribution of three objects from Tell en-Naṣbeh, an unusually decorated ceramic mask fragment and two glass conoid seals, to a possible Phoenician manufacture has allowed for further elucidation of contacts of the site to the Mediterranean coast in the early Persian period, long suggested by the presence of Greek fine wares.⁵² The interregional interconnections supported by the identification of these Phoenician objects have links to our historiographical sources, which specify Tyrian trade of fish and other goods to nearby Jerusalem in the late Persian period.⁵³ A slightly earlier historiographical text details the interregional and international trade to Tyre in the early sixth century BCE, and suggests the return exchange of Judean agricultural products to the Phoenician coast.⁵⁴ Perhaps it was Phoenician merchants⁵⁵ that carried the mask, conoid stamp seals, Greek, East Greek, Cilician, and Cypriot/north Syrian ceramics to Tell en-Naṣbeh along with other goods, just as later in the same period they brought fish and other products to a revitalized Jerusalem. Likely these merchants returned to the coast with Judean agricultural goods and slaves.⁵⁶

Conceptualizing interregional exchange between the coastal region and the hill country of Judah helps to bridge the gap between international and local commerce in the Persian period southern Levant. This study also suggests differences in routes of contact with the Phoenician coast from those of the late Iron Age. Given the imperial geopolitical, regional political, and local social changes between the late Iron II, Babylonian, and early Persian periods in the southern Levant, it is not surprising to find dynamic variations in exchanges from the southern Phoenician coast to Tell en-Naṣbeh in the northern hill country of Judah over the seventh–fifth centuries BCE.

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52 Tell en-Naṣbeh was most likely the settlement of Mizpah in the region Benjamin, which was the provincial capital of the Babylonian province of Judah, a status that likely continued into the early Persian period. The revitalization of Jerusalem in the late sixth–fifth centuries BCE and the reconstitution of the city as the capital of late Persian period Yehud likely caused the eclipse of Tell en-Naṣbeh, whose Persian period settlement phase ends between 450–420 BCE.

53 Nehemiah 13:16; Noonan 2011. Egon H. Lass's remarkable discovery of the otoliths, or ear bones, from Atlantic species of fish in Persian period remains at Ashkelon are direct evidence of wide-ranging Phoenician piscine trade, likely exchanged as a dried commodity, Lass 2016. These fish otolith data demonstrate that goods were traded from the Atlantic literally across the entire length of the Mediterranean to a harbor site on the Sea's southeastern coast.

54 Ezekiel 27:12–24.

55 See Wenning 2004a, p. 56.

56 Economou 2021, pp. 71–72.

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