

## AN AEGEAN FIRE-STAND FROM TEL NAGILA

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*In this short paper we present a detailed study of a unique ceramic vessel fragment that was found in the excavations at Tel Nagila. The interpretation of this fragment as an Aegean fire-stand has implications for our understanding of the origin and development of Philistine material culture in Iron Age Philistia.*

Tel Nagila is located along the bend of the Shiqma River (=Wadi el Hesi), approximately 28 km east of modern-day Gaza and 6 km south of Tell el-Hesi (see Fig. 1). The site was excavated in the summers of 1962 and 1963 by Ruth Amiran and Avraham Eitan, with logistical support from the Israel Department of Antiquities and the Israel Exploration Society. Recently, J. Uziel, A. Maeir and D. Ilan received permission to publish this excavation.<sup>1</sup> The fragment discussed here is among the Iron Age finds discovered during this excavation.

The object was discovered in Area F (see map, Fig. 2), which is located on the north-eastern edge of the tel. This area was designated for excavation due to the topography, which suggested the possible location of a city gate. The excavators also hoped to explore further the fortification system, partially unearthed in Area C. Although the Middle Bronze Age gate was not found here, the ramparts and city wall were. At the very top of the section, near the surface, patchy architectural features were discovered, associated with Iron Age IIA pottery of the type found in the other areas of the tel.

A stone wall (W.6001, see Fig. 3) cut the remains of the massive Middle Bronze Age (MBA) mudbrick fortification wall. A flagstone pavement (L.6000a) was built up to this wall, sealing the MBA fortifications. In view of the finds that were discovered on this pavement (including a Cypriot Bichrome bull krater, Amiran and Eitan 1964; Artzy, Asaro and Perlman 1975), Amiran and Eitan (1964, 220–21) dated it to the Late Bronze Age I. Iron Age IIA pottery was discovered in the debris above the pavement.

The Iron Age IIA occupation at Tel Nagila is characterized by pits and it is likely that the Iron Age IIA material recovered in this area originates in a similar context.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the Iron Age pits were dug into the weathered debris of the MB mudbrick ramparts suggests that these fortifications were not in use during the Iron Age. The magnitude of weathered mudbrick debris from the fortifications testifies to a long period of neglect, perhaps spanning hundreds of years from the end of the Middle Bronze Age or the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. There is no evidence for fortification in this area during the Iron Age.

South of Locus 6000 another square was dug. Two loci were recognized: L6007 and L6008. The latter was identified as a floor (level 193.95, which is about 3 m higher than stone pavement L6000a). The scattered pottery on this floor includes types and treatment that are well dated to the Iron Age IIA,<sup>3</sup> such as a hand-burnished bowl (Fig. 4: 1) and a Pre-*LMLK* jar (Fig. 4: 5; for the definition of this pottery type see Shai and Maeir 2003).

A large fragment of a handmade vessel with the beginning of a small hole at the edge was discovered on floor L6008 (Fig. 5). The asymmetrical form of the sherd suggests that it is not a storage vessel fragment. Nor is it part of a tripod base, since the perforation is located just where the foot would be attached to the base. Traces of black soot are present only on one side of the ‘horn’.

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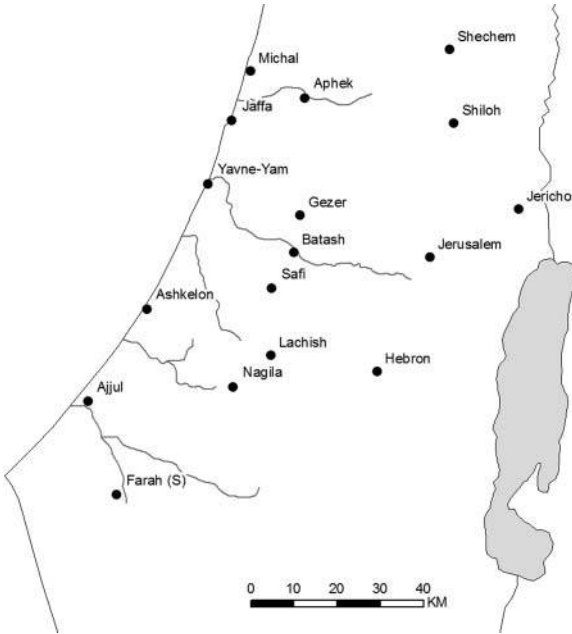


Fig. 1. Location of Tel Nagila and neighbouring sites.

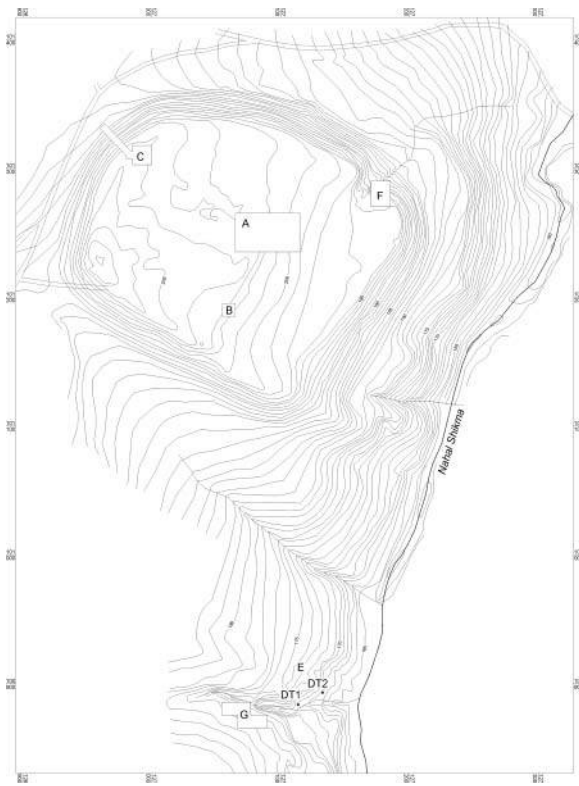


Fig. 2. Map of Tel Nagila showing excavated areas.

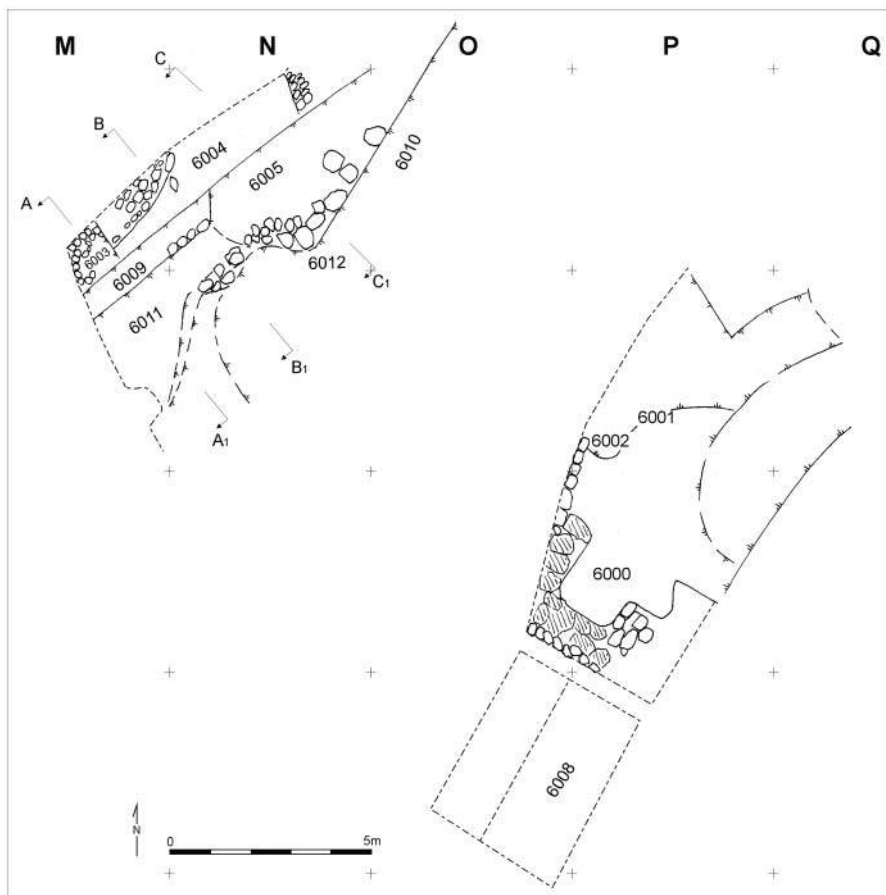


Fig. 3. Plan of Area F.

It is noteworthy that at least three similar fragments have been discovered at Tel Hamid, located c. 6 km north-west of Gezer (S. Wolff, personal communication). The other examples also have remains of a perforation, precluding their identification as tripod feet of the well-known local type. It is possible that similar objects have been misinterpreted as tripod base fragments, especially if the perforation is not found. In any event, the fragments in question cannot be attributed to any type of vessel known in the Southern Levant, making it necessary to search for parallels elsewhere.

We have identified this fragment as part of an Aegean-style fire-stand (see reconstruction in Fig. 6). Fire-stands are known from the Bronze Age Aegean. They are rectangular, hand-fashioned vessels with sides that narrow towards the top; they sometimes have horizontal handles. Fire-stands from Ayia Irini were made of local clay, not decorated; some have traces of burning (Georgiou 1986, 23, pl. 5). Twenty more fire-stands were found in Miletus dating to the Late Bronze Age (Niemeier and Niemeier 1999, 545; Kaiser 2005, 195). In Miletus, this type appears sometimes with horizontal or vertical handles or, in a few cases, without handles. The vessel is hollow, has thick walls and two or three holes in these walls, and two massive 'horns'. The fire-stands from Miletus were usually uncovered

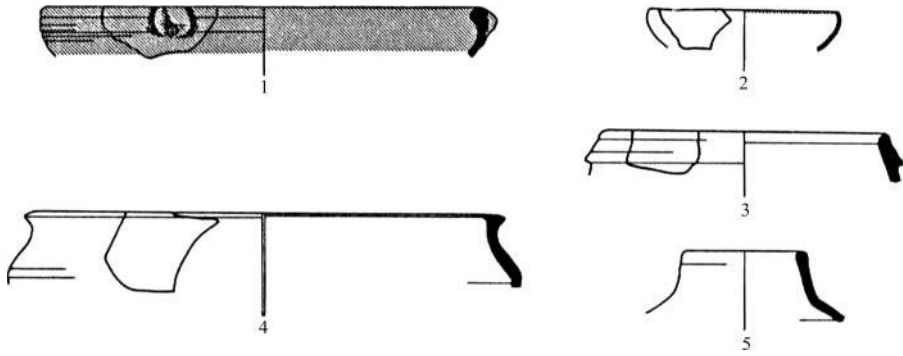


Fig. 4. Pottery from Locus 6008.

TABLE I. Pottery from Locus 6008.

No.	Type	Field #	Locus	Level	Stratum
1	Bowl	F <sub>51</sub> /1	6008	193.80	IV
2	Bowl	F <sub>41</sub> /2	6008	194.25	IV
3	Cooking Pot	F <sub>41</sub> /1	6008	194.25	IV
4	Krater/Cooking Pot	F <sub>42</sub> /3	6008	194.15	IV
5	Store Jar	F <sub>42</sub> /1	6008	194.15	IV

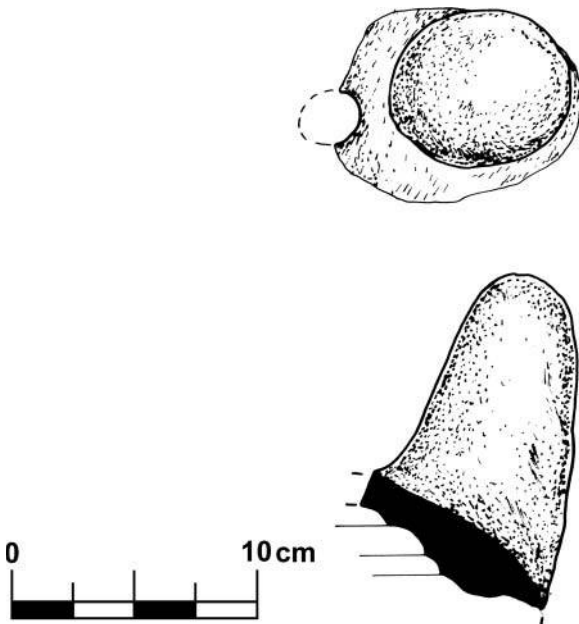


Fig. 5. The fragment of the fire-stand from Tel Nagila.

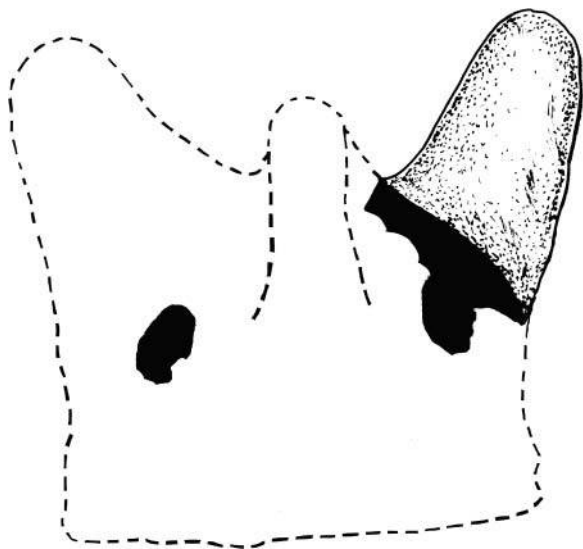


Fig. 6. Suggested reconstruction of the fire-stand.

together with other kitchenware but ‘do not show any traces of fire’ (Kaiser 2005, 195). The term ‘fire-stand’ is modern and the function of these objects remains to be proven. Kaiser suggested that the vessel was used for holding hot cooking pots in domestic, cultic or industrial contexts (Kaiser 2005, 195, pl. XLVII: d). The presence of fire-stands in Miletus, alongside other pottery finds and other material culture features, has been used to argue for a Minoan presence at Miletus in the Late Bronze Age (e.g. Niemeier and Niemeier 1999, 545; Kaiser 2005). Unfortunately, the rarity of such objects and the nature of their archaeological contexts preclude us from determining whether fire-stands are related to cultic or domestic practices.

Petrographic analysis of the fragment from Tel Nagila testifies that it was made of brown soil typical of the coastal plain and southern Shephelah region.<sup>4</sup> This negates the hypothesis that it arrived as an import from the Aegean during the Late Bronze Age.

It is surprising that fire-stands have not been identified (so far) at the five major Philistine sites (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron) in levels dating to the Iron Age I or Iron Age IIA. In this context we would point out that a fragment from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, fig. 3.95:4) identified as the base of a stand (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, 211) is, in fact, the horn of a fire-stand.<sup>5</sup> The perforation before the firing indicates as much. This fragment is also dated to the Iron Age IIA as it was discovered in Strata IX–VIII. Perhaps more such fragments exist among the many as yet unpublished finds from these cities. Fire-stand fragments are crude and, if they lack perforations, are likely to be identified as parts of local tripods or basins.

If our interpretation is correct, it is significant that this type of vessel — of Aegean origin — was still used in the southern coastal plain hundreds of years after the arrival of the Philistines. In the Aegean, fire-stands are a feature of the Late Bronze Age; so far, they are unknown in the Iron Age. The fire-stands from Tel Nagila, Tel Hamid and Ashdod are another indication of Philistine migration from the Aegean region. It seems to us that the Philistines brought the concept of Aegean fire-stands to the Levant at the end of the Late Bronze Age and they continued to manufacture them in Philistia in the Iron Age IIA. Perhaps they were embraced by their neighbours, as were Aegean-type cooking jugs

(Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008). By that time, however, fire-stands were no longer used in the Aegean.

The Iron Age assemblage of Tel Nagila bears similarities to both Judahite, Shephelah assemblages such as Lachish IV–V (Zimhoni 2004) and coastal assemblages such as Tell es-Safi/Gath and Ashdod, associated ethnically with later Philistines (e.g. Shai 2006). The ethnic affiliation of the Tel Nagila inhabitants is not certain, but given the close parallels to Tell es-Safi/Gath we feel that a Philistine element is at least present, if not dominant. This topic will be dealt with in more detail in the forthcoming final report (Uziel, Maier and Ilan forthcoming).

A similar picture seems to appear from the cultic repository pit at Yavneh. This ritual assemblage illustrates the eclectic nature of Philistine cult during the Iron Age II (Kletter, Ziffer and Zwickel 2006, 2007). Although some features of the Yavneh repository repertoire are generic to ancient Near Eastern cultic assemblages, other features of the repository's artefacts are unique to Philistia (Kletter, Ziffer and Zwickel 2006, 157–158; 2007, 94–95). Several motifs and techniques have origins in the west (Kletter, Ziffer and Zwickel 2007, 157). Maier and Shai (2006) have shown that Philistine decorated chalices of the Iron Age II maintained (or at least tried to maintain) the Philistine Bichrome decorative tradition. Similarly, incised scapulae (Zukerman et al. 2007) and Late Philistine Decorated Ware (Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maier 2004) can also be cited as examples of Philistine traditions surviving and developing independently in Iron Age II Philistia, even in late Iron Age Philistia. For example, the temple of Ekron, dating to the 7th century BCE, appears to have been dedicated to Ptgyh, a goddess of Aegean origin (Gitin, Dothan and Naveh 1997; though see Demsky 1997 for an alternative interpretation).

As research progresses, early Iron Age II Philistine material culture, ritual behaviour and political organization are becoming better known. The fire-stand from Tel Nagila is a newly fitted piece in this puzzle.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The preparation of the finds is funded by the Shelby White–Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publication.

<sup>2</sup> The Iron Age remains at Tel Nagila suffer from a paucity of architecture in good stratigraphic context. What there is consists of pits, truncated walls, a few definable floors and some undistinguished living surfaces. These features and their accompanying small finds cluster in small diameters here and there; they are not spread evenly across the excavated areas.

<sup>3</sup> In our view, this period should be dated to the 10th–9th centuries BCE, as defined by Mazar (e.g. 2001, 82–85). For discussion and suggestions to subdivide this period into two phases — early (the 10th century BCE) and late (the 9th century BCE) — see Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maier 2004; Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004.

<sup>4</sup> We would like to thank Dr D. Ben-Shlomo who analysed the sherd. A detailed petrographic report will appear in the final publication.

<sup>5</sup> We would like to thank Sam Wolff who referred us to this parallel.

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