

MARINERS AND THEIR BOATS AT THE END OF THE LATE BRONZE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE IRON AGE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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Abstract

This paper discusses recently excavated ship representations that shed new light on the boats and mariners of the central and southern part of the eastern Mediterranean in the period that bridges the end of the Late Bronze Age with the Iron Age.

For quite some time, the iconography of boats in the Levant in the period between the end of the Late Bronze Age and the very first part of the Iron Age was limited to two Egyptian representations (both manned by non-Egyptians): the Kenamon boat (Daressy 1895; Davies and Faulkner 1940) and the Medinet Habu Sea Peoples boats (Nelson 1930). Since publication of the Medinet Habu Sea Peoples boats, rock carvings of other sea going vessels that could be attributed to the period have emerged and it is these that we will present in this study.

We have elsewhere discussed discoveries of ship representations found at Tel Acco and at Kition-Kathari in Cyprus (Artzy 1984; 1987, Basch and Artzy 1985). Now, additional rock carvings with examples of boats of this category have been located in several find spots in Israel and other types have been noted.

The Tel Acco rock carving was first recognized in the 1983 excavation at Tel Acco. It was engraved on an altar in a well-stratified context. The altar is small, *ca.* 24 x 26 x 30 cm., and, as its shape suggests, it was most likely used aboard a ship. The altar eventually found its way to the harbour site of Tel Acco, where it was later unearthed. Besides ashes, the altar contained three pebbles, one of which was quartz from a non-local source. The engraving, which might once have been painted for accentuation, depicts four 'fan type' boats (Fig. 1), so called since the prow bends inward and sports a lovely, well-defined fan. We know that the fan represents the boat's bow because a tiller and a steering oar signifying the aft appear on the largest of the boats. The altar dates to the very end of the Late Bronze Age, which in coastal areas, especially in the northern part of the Israeli coast, can be the end of the 13th or the first part of the 12th centuries BCE. The same type of boat appears in Kition-Kathari, Cyprus, both on the walls of Temple I (Fig. 2) and the altar in Temple IV (Fig. 3). There, in what seems likely to be *ex-voto*, numerous examples exist (Basch and Artzy 1985).

Renderings of these boats are not limited to these two sites. Thus far, in three different areas on the western side of the Carmel Ridge in northern Israel—in the

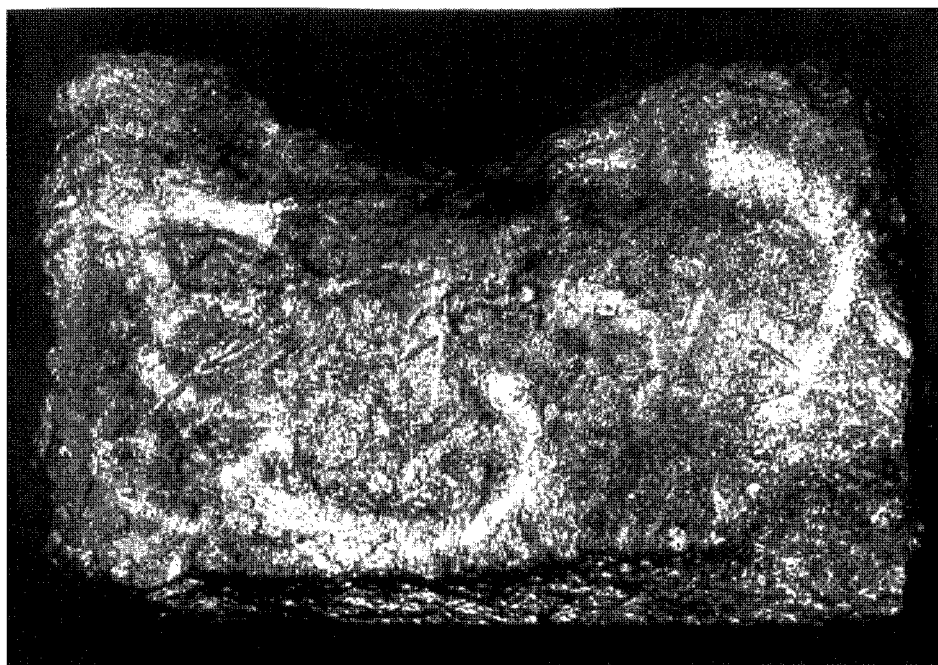
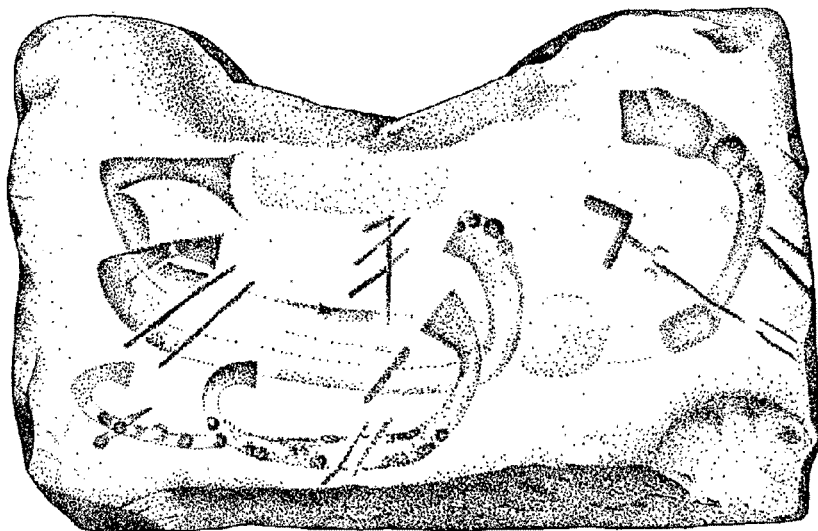


Fig. 1. Boats on altar at Tel Acco.

Nahal ha-Me'arot and Nahal Oren areas—rock carvings with similar boats have been noted and the majority are of the ‘fan type’. The most prolific site in which engraved boats were found is the area surrounding the entrance to Nahal ha-Me'arot, especially on the northern side facing west. Nahal ha-Me'arot is closely associated with the coastal site of Tel Nami, situated *ca.* 3.5 km. from the Carmel Ridge, which served as an international entrepôt during the end of the Late Bronze Age (Artzy 1995). When approaching the Carmel Ridge from the sea, the point at which Nahal ha-Me'arot cuts through the rocks is breathtaking and was no doubt used by ancient mariners as a landfall. The southern cliff drops sharply in an almost straight edge while in the northern area, there is a triangular form which can best be described as a pyramid-shaped rock. The complete composition, which from afar looks much like a crevice, might have lent the name *mgr* (Mugar), a Semitic word meaning ‘cave’, to Nami (Artzy 1995:33). We present here a rock carving of one of the boats (Fig. 4), which in this case has not only the accentuated fan, but also a mast and a crow's nest much like the ones previously observed in the Kition-*Kathari* samples. Another representation (Fig. 5), this one ‘drawn’ to emphasize a boat that sports oars but no mast, can be observed in another part of the rock crop. There are rock carvings of other boat types in the area, and we will return to them later on. The ‘fan’ type boats appear on rocks in the area of Khirbet Shalaleh (Otto 2000:40) and on the most western cliffs, just before the river flows down to the plain.

The most impressive representation of boats found thus far in the Carmel Ridge, in terms of size, depth of incision and position, is located on the outcrop of rocks in Nahal ha-Me'arot north of the ‘pyramid’ (Fig. 6). It was first published in the 1970s as part of a corpus of incisions attributed to the Neolithic period (Wreschner 1973). Wreschner's research focused on the Neolithic period, and since ancient boats were not of particular interest to him, he grouped this boat with other rock carvings he

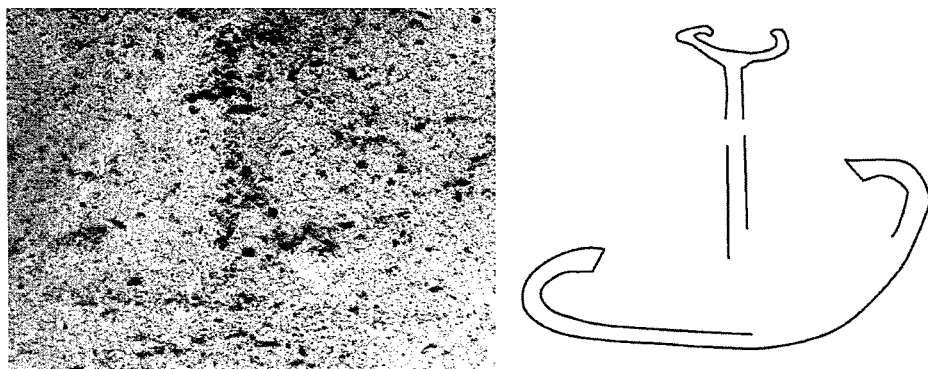


Fig. 2. ‘Fan type’ boat from the wall of Temple I at Kition.



Fig. 3. 'Fan type' boat from the wall of Temple I at Kition.

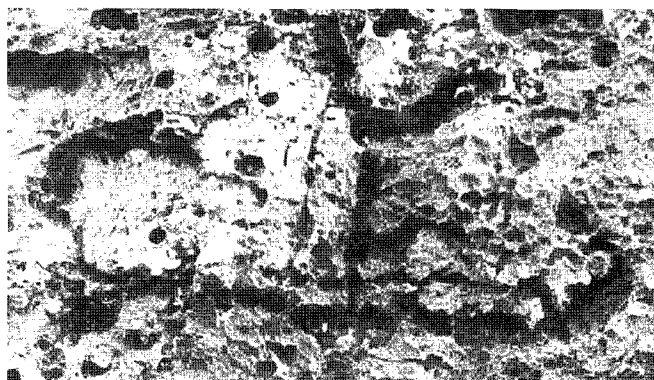


Fig. 4. 'Fan type' boat from Naḥal ha-Me'arot.

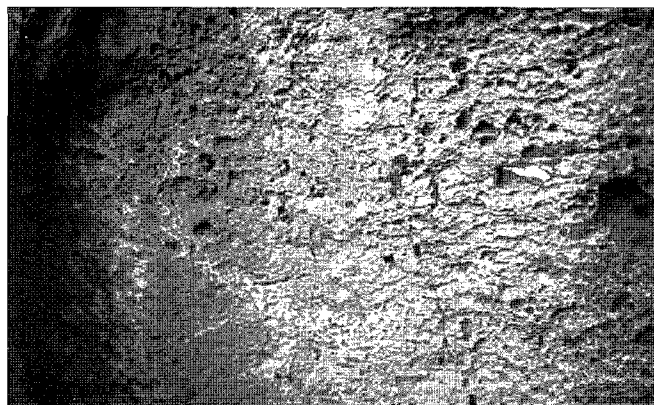


Fig. 5. 'Fan type' boat from Naḥal ha-Me'arot.



Fig. 6. 'Aegean type' boat from Nahal ha-Me'arot.

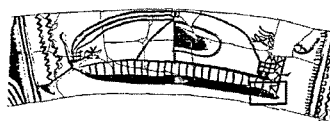
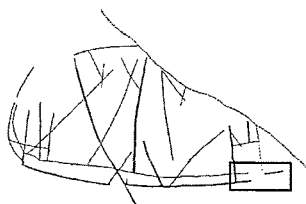
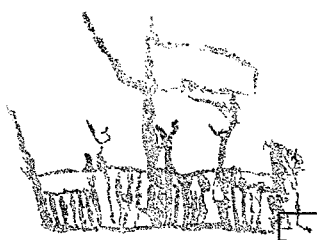


Fig. 7. 'Aegean type' boats.

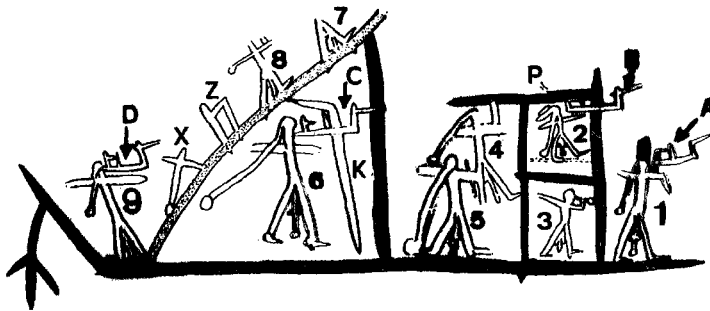
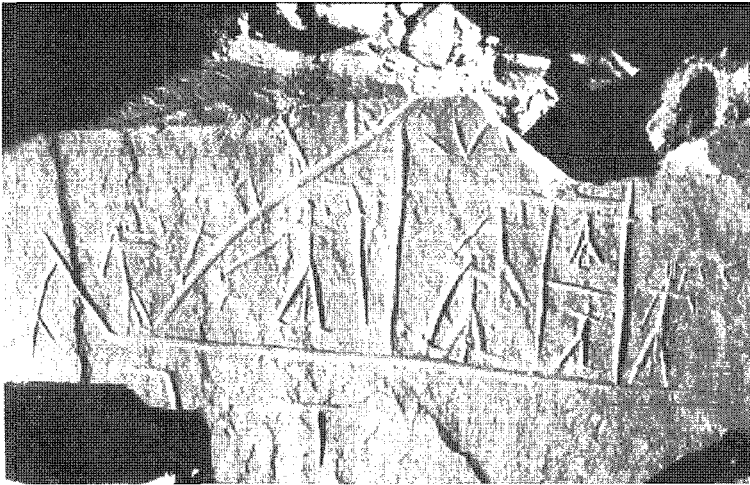


Fig. 8. The Teneida boat (drawing by L. Basch).

deemed to be Neolithic. His excellent photo of the boat was taken before chemicals were used on the rock carving in an attempt to accentuate or copy the incision. One section of the carving (Fig. 7), and an important one for our discussion, fortunately went unnoticed or was misunderstood and was, therefore, left untreated.

The boat is of the Aegean longship type with the cutwater accentuated, much like those found at Gazi, Tranaga and Dramesi in Beotia, dated to around 1200 BCE (Basch 1987:142–145). The cutwater was used for beaching the boat safely, or possibly for cutting waves, especially short waves such as those in lakes or bays, before they hit the prow. The cutwater would also have helped maintain stability during sailing. The extra length it added might also have enhanced the pace of the boat, i.e., its hull speed.

A rock carving of this type of boat was found in yet another setting, in Teneida, in the Dakhla Oasis in the Western Delta, Egypt (Basch 1997). The original photograph was taken as part of Hans Winkler's survey, carried out for the Egypt Exploration

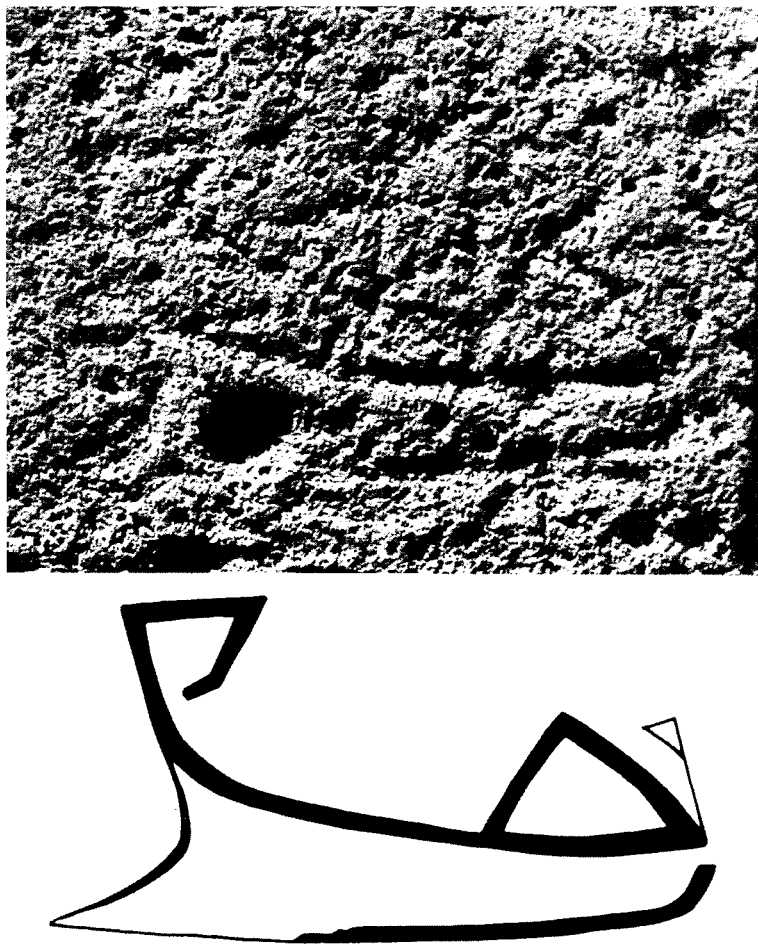


Fig. 9. Long boat from Temple I, Kition.

Society in the second half of the 1930s. Since only a part of the survey was published, Basch, in an attempt to find Byzantine iconographic representations of boats, asked and was granted permission to go over Winkler's work. He was surprised by the photo of the unusual boat, which was, no doubt, part of the documentation of the survey. This boat (Fig. 8) is similar to the type of Aegean vessels dated to the 14th–12th centuries BCE, and is very much like the one from Naḥal ha-Me'arot.

Unlike its counterpart in Naḥal ha-Me'arot, the Teneida boat has a very impressive group of human figures. The men are naked, and this is very much accentuated. One of them sports a feathered hat. He also has a long knotted braid. Similar braids appear on other figures on the boat. Some of the men hold small boats in their hands,

possibly clay models of boats. These will be discussed later, with other types of boats. Basch (1997:27) concluded that these men were Meshwesh, the group that allied itself with the Libyans against the Egyptians.

There are rock carvings of two types of boats of which only one occurrence has thus far been noted. The first type (Fig. 9) is from Kition Area II, on the wall of Temple I in Cyprus (Basch and Artzy 1986:332). Although several specimens seem to have been incised, only one is clear enough for our study. The boat might be assumed to be of the long boat type and has an accentuated element on its front that is likely a cutwater. Even so, its similarity to the Proto White Painted family rhyta, which are quite reminiscent of the ship rams depicted in the Attic Geometric period, should not be overlooked (Basch 1987:149–150; Basch and Artzy 1986:334). The second type of boat appears on the quartz pebble found on the Tel Acco altar. The boat is very small, less than two cm. in width, and the details are not easy to discern (Fig. 10). It seems, however, to have had an everted stempost that might represent an animal head. The stern is not clearly defined.

The last of the boat types we wish to introduce is reminiscent of the Sea Peoples boat known from the scene in Medinet Habu, although there is at least one clear

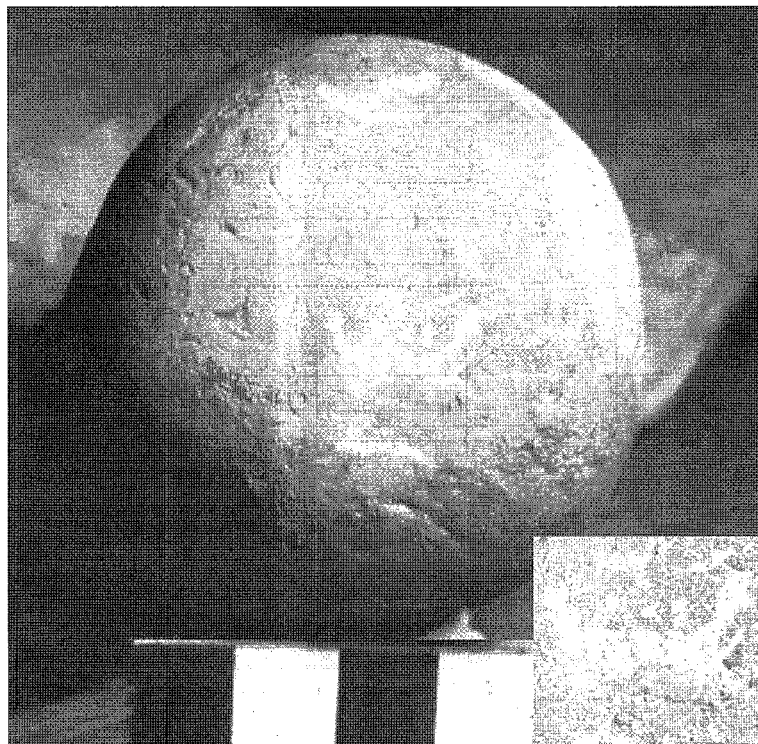


Fig. 10. Boat on a pebble found on the altar at Tel Acco.

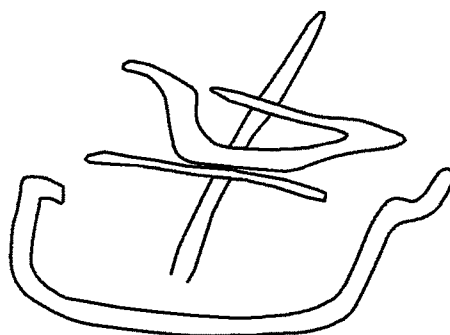


Fig. 11. Miniature 'animal head' boat at Naḥal ha-Me'arot.



Fig. 12. 'Prows' at Naḥal ha-Me'arot.

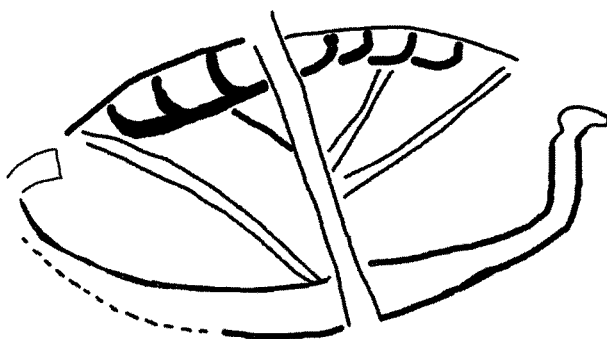
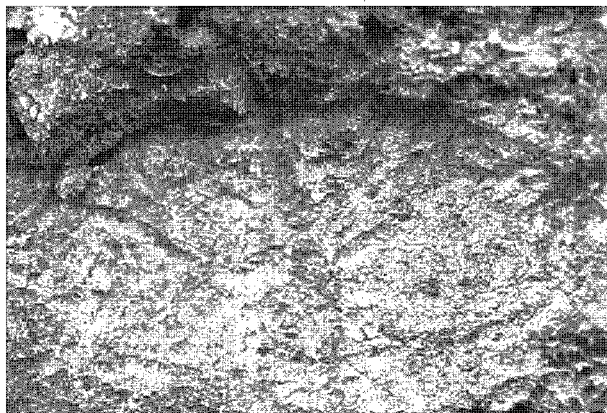


Fig. 13. 'Small boat' at Naḥal ha-Me'arot.

difference. It has been found in two distinct places, namely Naḥal ha-Me'arot and in the lower part of Naḥal Oren. The rock carvings of these boats look much like those from Medinet Habu, yet they have one clear difference, as discussed below. A minute representation of this boat can be seen on the pyramid-shaped rock on the northern bank of the Naḥal ha-Me'arot crevis. It is barely 6 cm. in length and boasts a mast, a yard and a rolled sail (Fig. 11). It is oriented in an east-west position and what we assume to be the prow, which has a bird or animal head, is facing west in the direction of the sea. This boat type might not have aroused attention had it not been that rock carvings with this prow show up again and again on this rock, and they are always facing the sea (Fig. 12). Another boat type found here, this time not only with a mast and yard, but with a furled sail as well (Fig. 13), is reminiscent of the Medinet Habu Sea Peoples boats, as well as one found in Byblos (Basch 1987:67, Fig.122). A carving of a boat of this type was also found on the lowest slopes of the Carmel Ridge on the northern bank of Naḥal Oren. On a solitary rock, two boats appear, one similar to the 'fan' type previously discussed but the other has an impressive duck

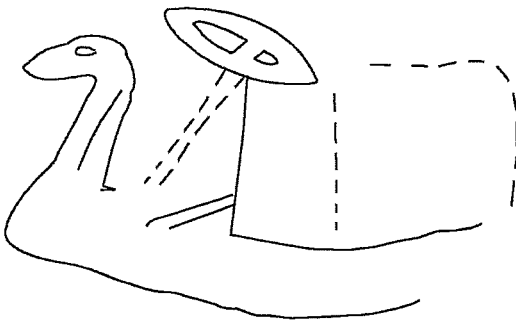
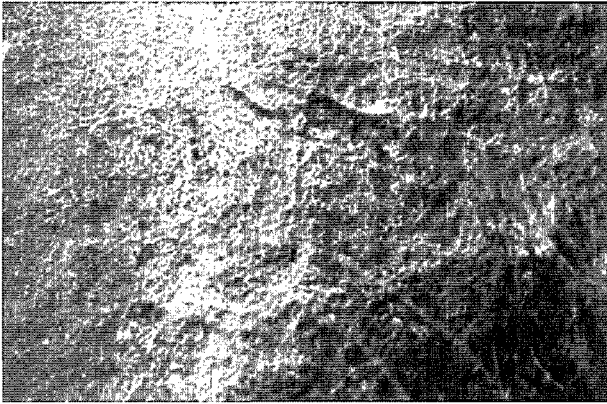


Fig. 14. Boat at Naḥal Oren.

head and beak for what we think is the prow. Again, it faces west in the direction of the sea. This boat, too, has a mast and folded sail (Fig. 14).

In addition to these boats, we must also note the ‘models’ of the boats held by the mariners of the Taneida boat (Basch 1997:22). Again, only one animal/bird-head is represented, probably on the prow, since the mariners hold them in their direction as well as that of their own vessel’s prow.

DISCUSSION

The depiction of the naval battle between Ramesses III and the Sea Peoples is dated to the first part of the 12th century BCE. This seems to be the earliest depiction, if not account, of a maritime battle scene. Nautical archaeologists and boat specialists have diagnosed the minutest details of the vessels, as if the engravers had rendered even the minor details of this historic event in a realistic manner (Wachsmann 1981; 1982; 1997). While in a previous study we questioned the authenticity of the scene

vis-à-vis the Papyrus Harris (Artzy 1987), we now question the shape of the vessel as it is depicted in that scene (Artzy 2000). Close inspection of the written account of the event, which transpired at the end of Ramesses III's reign or shortly thereafter, reveals that the written account does not correspond with the scene depicted at Medinet Habu. While the artistic rendition shows several Egyptian boats of one type participating in the battle, the written account mentions that three categories of boats surprised the enemy. The three were *br*, *mns* and *aha*. The boat depicted in the scene is probably the *aha*, the war boat, a term already used by Ramesses II in his description of the naval attack by the Shardan, which he so valiantly repelled (Artzy 1988:184).

Interestingly, while the artist rendered only one type of boat, he portrayed diverse groups of surprised adversaries and accentuated their diverse attributes. Their fantastic features border on the impossible. See, for instance, the hats or headdress/hairdos of the group thought of as Philistine. The discomfort these mariners must have borne is self-evident. In addition, the clear danger in battle of any basic movement around the confined ship, as well as the brails or other ropes, would no doubt have caused havoc. The artist further tampered with the sizes of the boats and the men manning them. This might have resulted from both political decisions and artistic expediency. We should consider the political importance of the scene to the ancient beholder and the effort expended by the artist to present it even in a fanciful, exaggerated manner. But we should also consider another angle—one that has to do with the mariners themselves. Rauh (1997), in an article dealing with pirates, points out the importance pirates placed on appearance—both their own and that of their vessels. With this analogy in mind, one might imagine that the invaders appeared outrageous to the Egyptian artist, who contributed his own far-fetched elements to the scene.

There is no question that a discrepancy exists between the representation of the boats at Medinet Habu and the ones found by us in the Carmel Ridge. Add to that the period and the propaganda propagated by the pharaohs and other rulers of antiquity for that matter, especially the besieged Ramesses III. As the topic has already been discussed (Artzy 1999), there is no need to do so here. But we should be asking ourselves whether we can put our confidence in the scene depicted in the Medinet Habu rendition.

The appearance of the boats in the rock carvings on the Carmel Ridge, which by association could be dated to roughly the same period as the Medinet Habu boats, calls into question some elements of the vessels as they appear in the scene. The most notable one is obviously the bird's head on both the fore and aft of the boats. The appearance of the two duck-headed boats has been the topic of numerous studies (Wachsmann 1981; 1982; 1997). Scholars who have dealt with these attributes and

the possible associations have reached far afield. The most logical answers might be the simple ones, namely that the boats boasted only one animal head, namely the one in the bow as shown in the various samples mentioned above. It should be kept in mind that the mariners who created the carvings of the boats, whether on altars, walls or rocks, might not have been great artists, but were fully cognizant of the shapes of their own vessels and presented them and their most important elements as they intimately knew them. They, the mariners, accentuated the elements in their vessels to which they associated themselves, a form of a group standard, the animal head, ducks or others and the 'fan'. These are the elements that repeat themselves in the various find spots. Never do the animal heads appear on both stem and stern. These are the products of individuals who are not part of the system and thus do not produce what might be best termed 'state art'.

The cultic association of at least some of the rock carvings, those on the altar in Tel Acco and at the Temple IV altar at Kition-*Kathari*, is obvious. We feel that the boats from the rocks on the ridge of Naḥal ha-Me'arot and those on the walls of Temple I at Kition-*Kathari* were engraved as *ex-voto*, some sort of a cultic offering by mariners who either offered thanks for safe arrival or hope for future safe sailing and landing. Such practice would be very much in keeping with later occurrences of 'ship graffiti', which appear in later temples, churches and mosques.

We would obviously be interested in the identification of the rock carvers. The dating of the carvings at Tel Acco and at Kition-*Kathari* to the end of the Late Bronze Age coincides well with the occurrence of the boats on the Carmel Ridge in the vicinity of the anchorage site of Tel Nami. The site was occupied during two periods, namely, the Middle Bronze IIA period and the last part of the Late Bronze IIB period. It is to the latter period that we would link the rock carvings, in keeping with the other sites mentioned. Tel Nami would not have been very successful as a purely agricultural site since it has little arable land and suffers from high ground water level and swamping. The site must have been dependent on trade, especially sea trade, and very likely on the traffic of foreign commodities of a luxurious nature, mostly of an east-west, sea to desert nature. Its added role as an outlet for an overland route would explain the remarkable prominence of the site in the LB IIB period (Artzy 1994).

The polymorphic society at Tel Nami is well represented by the different rituals that seemed to have taken place there. There are remains of Canaanite, Syrian, Cypriot and Aegean cults (Artzy 1991). When approaching Tel Nami from the sea, the mariners must have used navigational landmarks to find safe anchorage for their vessels. Such a landmark was probably the cavity in the Carmel Mountain, carved out by Naḥal ha-Me'arot less than four km. east of Tel Nami. It is there that most of the engravings were found.

We cannot assign a particular ethnic identity to those who used and introduced these ships, but there were plenty of groups on the move. They are usually collectively called Sea Peoples, and, in accordance with ancient Egyptian propaganda, thought of as aggressors. In our case, however, they are probably coastal Canaanite and Syrian merchants, Cypriot, Aegean and coastal Anatolian mariners, representatives of the system economies and fringe mariners—‘Nomads of the Sea’ of various origins (Artzy 1997). They were economic intermediaries, entrepreneurs, possibly mercenaries, and the difference between them and pirates was slight, as was the difference between desert intermediaries, nomads or semi-nomads functioning as caravan leaders, mercenaries and bandits.

Acknowledgments

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