

CONICAL CUPS AND PUMICE, AEGEAN CULT AT TEL NAMI, ISRAEL

Tel Nami is situated on a peninsula, ca. 15 kms south of the modern city of Haifa, Israel (Pl. LII, a). The peninsula is now known to be only a part of a larger settlement pattern which extends east and north of the peninsula, under the coastal dunes, as well as south-east in an agricultural area, about a kilometre away. The periods of settlement on the tell and the surrounding sites can be dated to the second millennium B.C.E., mainly the Middle Bronze IIa, possibly Late Bronze IIa, and definitely Late Bronze IIb. During these periods the site served the international maritime trade as an anchorage and a harbour town.

The geographical setting of Tel Nami was favourable for an anchorage at a time when the knowledge of artificial harbour construction was not yet known. As the Israeli coast lacks natural harbours needed for the vessels plying the Eastern Mediterranean coast in a period of international trade, there must have been a solution to the problem using the available geographical resources. The ancients made use of the small river mouths as inner anchorages. The proximity of the Nami peninsula to an outlet of a river and the swamps caused by it enhanced the possibility of an inner harbour in the area.

Although the exact position of the anchorage site may have shifted, as did the river, between the periods of habitation because of tectonic changes or changes in sea levels, the equation of river-coast remained viable for the ancient coastal dwellers and mariners. The occupation of the site mentioned here is limited to the second millennium B.C.E. It is already known that there is a prehistoric site a short distance north of the peninsula, but it is located under present sea level and has only undergone a survey (Artzy 1990: 74; Artzy and Marcus 1991).

In this study, we will not deal with the earlier period of habitation of Nami area, the Middle Bronze IIa, which is, no doubt, of interest to those dealing with the Minoan world. There are some signs of contact during this early period (Kislev, Artzy and Marcus 1992), but only a small part of the estimated habitational areas from that period have hitherto been excavated. We will deal with the last period of occupation on the site, namely the Late Bronze IIb which for the sake of brevity is tentatively dated, in this study, in the later part the 13th century B.C.E. This is the period from which many objects, on the tell and in the cemetery associated with it, were excavated. Objects found included local and imported ceramics, silver, gold jewellery, ivory and exquisite bronzes, the likes of which have rarely been found in the area (Artzy 1990b: 48-51). The ceramics include imports from Cyprus, as well as Mycenaean and Egyptian types. The finished metal products which include bronze, silver and gold are of excellent workmanship. It is hard at this juncture to point to any obvious location of manufacture; it could be of either local or imported workmanship. Obviously the presence of these luxury items of mixed typology, Egyptian, Cypriote, Anatolian, Syrian and Aegean, points to the active international nature of the site.

During the 1989 season at Tel Nami, a possible sanctuary was located on the summit of the tell. There were several finds in the rectangular structure of ca. 10.5 x 6 meters. The cultic nature of the architectural element is evidenced by the presence of several objects usually involved with cultic practices. Among them is a kernos, several parts of terracotta incense burners, miniature bowls and lamps as well as chalices. The area contained several pieces of bronze, signs of metal production and luxuries such as gold, silver and glass. The provenance of the finds seem to point to the breadth of the eastern Mediterranean. It is with one aspect of the finds which we would like to deal in this paper.

Among the ceramics there were a few items which appeared to us at first as miniature bowls and lamps (Pl. LII, b-c). Of the bowls several turned out upon reconstruction to be the bases of roundly pointed storage jars, broken a bit above the base and smoothed to be reused as small bowls. Another bowl (Pl. LIII, a), turned out to be a conical bowl, very similar to the conical bowls found in the Minoan world, where they are referred to as conical cups (Wiener 1984: 19-22). These cups, the original form and the imitation or the *ersatz* imitation in a sanctuary on the northern coast of Israel is surprising. The fact that they appear in the 13th century B.C.E., our LBIIb which could be compared to LM IIIb, should be interesting to those working with the contacts between the East and West as well as those working with the Minoan and Mycenaean worlds of the period.

The manifestation of the conical cups seems to coincide with yet another curious phenomenon, that of pumice, in the sanctuary and its environs (Pl. LIII, b). Pieces of pumice have been previously noticed in the Late Bronze II strata at Tel Nami. Since the sanctuary is founded on a rampart which can be dated to the LBII, most likely the Late Bronze IIb, it is now safe to assume that the pumice found thus far has been in some kind of relation to the sanctuary. It is hard to know how large the actual confines of the sanctuary and possibly workshops associated with it are; suffice to point out at this juncture that the area which seems to be within the rampart of the LBIIb is not much larger than 2 dunams.

The appearance of conical cups and pumice in juxtaposition is not singular to Tel Nami, although the practice is certainly foreign to this area. Pumice in cups was located in the Palace of Kato Zakro by N. Platon (Platon 1971: 196). It should be mentioned that at the same time cups bearing olives were found as well. Both were placed to be offered to the divinity. Platon reports yet another case in which pumice was found in conical cups, this time in the Minoan villa at Nirou Chani (Platon 1954: 449-450). These were placed under the threshold of a room serving as shrine. Obviously the cases mentioned above are to be dated to an earlier period than the one we are dealing with at Tel Nami. According to Wiener the appearance of the conical cups becomes less frequent after LM IIIA1, becomes rare in LM IIb and extinct by LM IIc (Wiener 1984: 19-20). This sits well with the dating of Tel Nami Late Bronze last stratum in which these objects were found.

13th century tribute offering of pumice is attested in Khania. A vessel of the 13th century was found filled with pumice by Tzedakis (Tzedakis 1968: 313-314). Of course the occurrence of the cult so late may be explained as the continuation of an earlier one. There is an attempt to explain the appearance of the cult so far in the western part of the island which suffered least from the volcanic eruption, by supposing that the practitioners were the descendants of those who had left the eastern parts after the volcanic disruptions. Hiller (Hiller 1971: 675-679) attributes the cult to the goddess Qe-Ra-Si-Ja, a Cretan goddess who is mentioned in Linear B texts from Knossos. According to Hiller the goddess was potent enough to be taken over by the Mycenaeans upon the conquest of Crete. There is a good chance that the origin of the goddess was Thera, hence her name which denotes a Theran origin (Hiller 1971: 676).

There is a question as to the origin of the pumice found in Crete; is it indeed Theran, since pumice was available in Crete itself? The same question can be applied to the pumice found at the latest stratum at Tel Nami. The pumice has not been analyzed yet, but the chances that it is

local to the area are rather slim. It does not look at all like any volcanic material which might originate in the Carmel mountain ridge. As a matter of fact one has to consider the position of Tel Nami, a coastal site, a peninsula, flanked by sand and by swamps. It is certainly more likely that the pumice arrived via the sea rather than via land. It should further be emphasized that the pieces of pumice do not show signs of having spent any length of time in water, thus one cannot imagine them arriving with the currents of the sea.

Who were thus the people who were engaged in the pumice cult of Qe-Ra-Si-Ja ? Could the site, the peninsula of Tel Nami, which seems to rise from the sea, especially when viewed from the west, remind the mariners of peak sanctuaries from their area of origin ? Was the site used as a peak sanctuary because of the lack of a better spot ? Peak sanctuaries and their cult have been discussed in a lengthy manner by Dietrich (Dietrich 1969: 257-275; 1971: 523) and Rutkowski (Rutkowski 1986: 1-19) thus we will not attempt to repeat the arguments. The question is whether the tribute bearers were Minoan mariners in transit or whether the cult was carried out by one or even more priests of Minoan origin. Is it possible that Syrian mariners who had seen or experienced the cult in the western world adopted it as their own for one reason or another. These are hard questions to answer at this juncture, although the appearance of the cult in the two spots at a similar time, namely in Crete and in the Syro-Palestinian coast in the 13th century, should not be attributed to chance.

Before abandoning the arguments for the appearance of the Minoan cult in the coast of Israel, we would like to return to a point raised at the beginning of the paper and which should not be neglected at its end. We have dealt with the appearance of the conical cup and the pumice which may go hand in hand as part of a cult. But there is yet another element appearing with them and which should be considered by the archaeologists. Those are the metal, namely bronze scraps and parts of crucibles which were found in the same area as the cups and the pumice. The appearance of metal objects in sanctuaries has been dealt with in previous studies (Catling 1971: 15-32). Could the scrap metal and the pumice have both been tribute which was later used by the priests for their economic advantage ? Could the pumice have been thus used in the production, possibly for smoothing recycled metal objects, such as those found in the Tel Nami project ? After all, metal industry and sanctuaries seemed to have existed side by side in other sites in quite a few places. Instances from the island of Cyprus are numerous. An important one is in the sanctuaries at Kition in Cyprus (Karageorghis and Demas 1985: 253-254). Since this report does not deal with the metal aspect in sanctuaries, we will only point out that in those mentioned, there is no mention of pumice. Evidence for a possible answer to our query could come from further scrutinization of data from sanctuaries in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean.

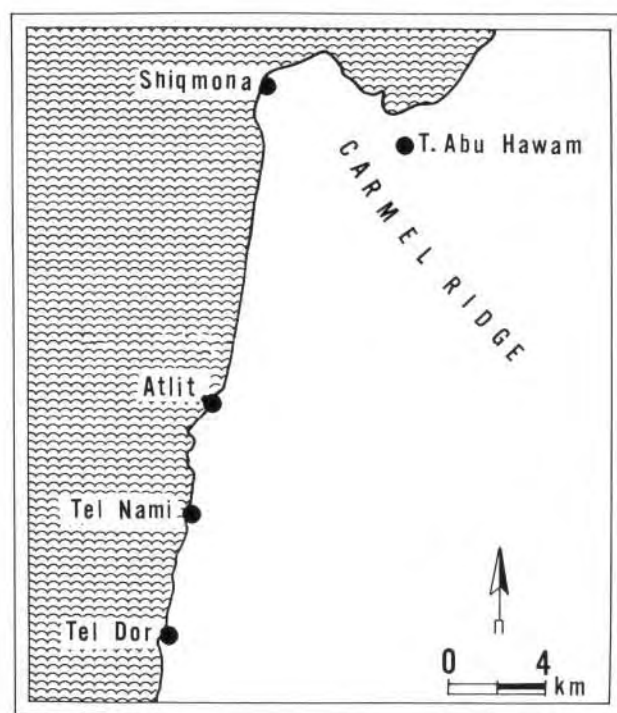
Michal ARTZY

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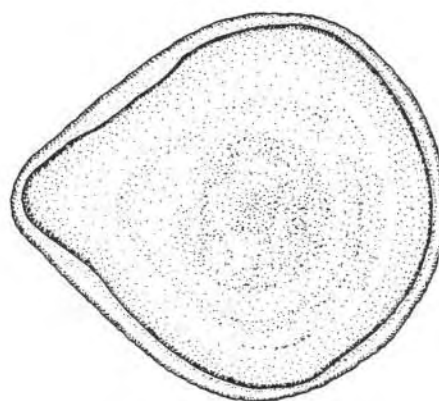
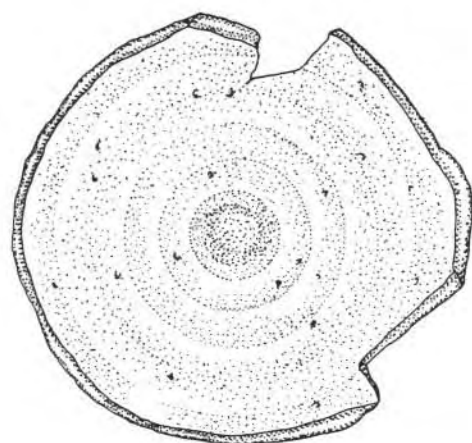
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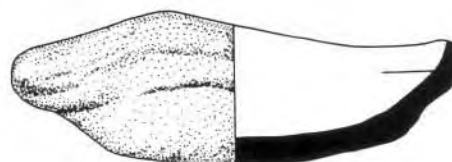


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