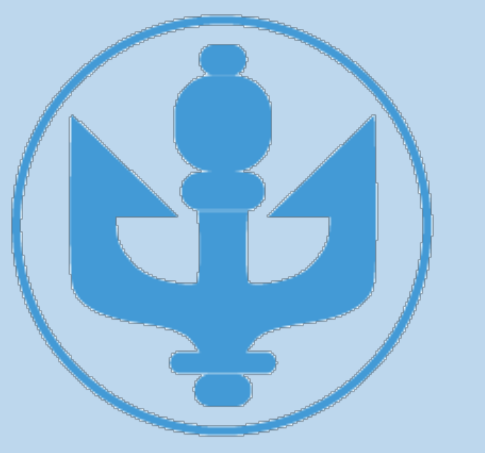




Aegean Mercenaries in Akko in the Persian Period



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ABSTRACT

In 2006, an Israel Antiquities Authority salvage excavation took place ca. 450 meters north of Tel Akko and ca. 2 kms. from the present coastline. 'Area R' revealed the remains of unique structures dating to the end of the Persian Period, ca. 4th century BCE. Four layers were revealed: Str. I, Crusader Period; Str. II, Byzantine-Umayyad Periods; Str. III, Hellenistic and Roman Periods; Str. IV, Late Persian period.



Str. IV, the Persian Period:

Remains of complex constructions of fieldstones, 'Persian'/Phoenician Store-Jars (SJ) and Amphorae. The shape of the constructions is rectangular and/or of ellipse shape and sections of floors approaching to the walls. Most of the ceramics originated in the Aegean and dated to the end of the 5th/ first half of 4th centuries BCE. The similar occurrence to this type of construction was found in graves with circles of amphorae in an Greek Necropolis in the western and northern shores of Black Sea.

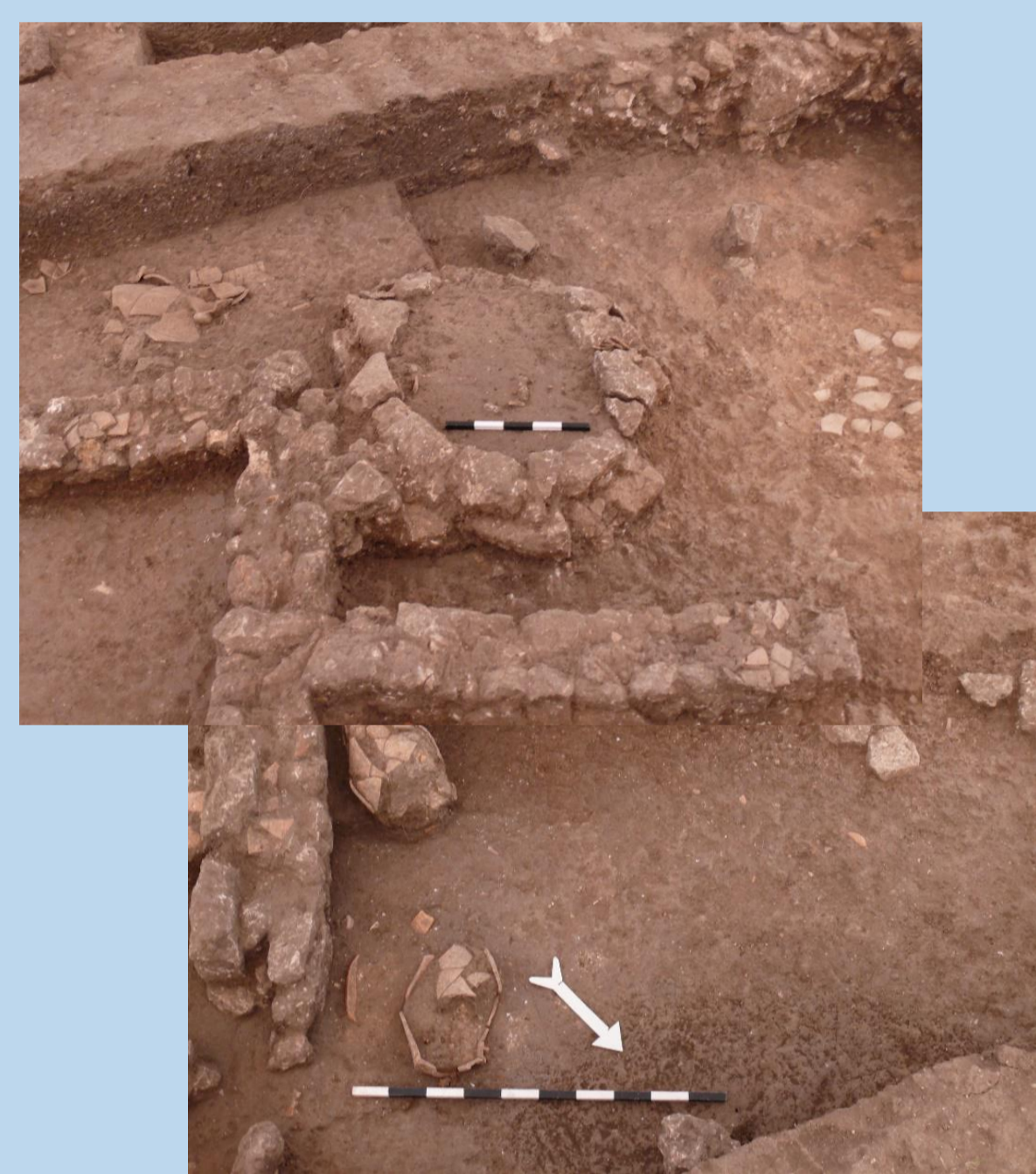
Four variants were noted:

Small and medium fieldstones

Complete vertical shoulder SJ

Large Amphorae sherds

Body sherds of SJs and Amphorae



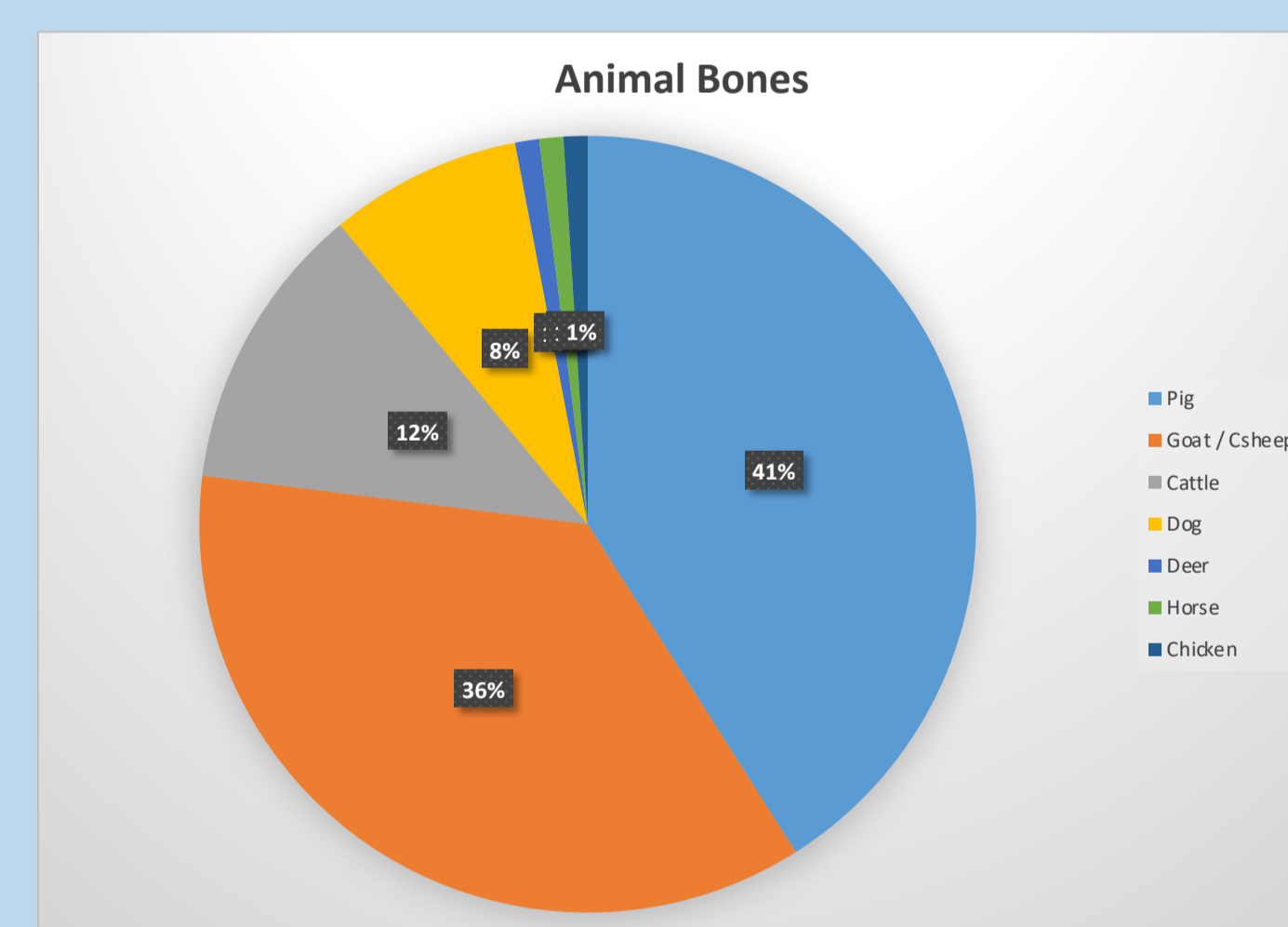
Remains inside the structures included: Ceramic bowls, Mortaria, Aegean table ware, SJs, Amphorae, some with stamped handles, Basket Handle SJ from Cyprus and the Levantine Coast, Coins, animal bones and shells:

Cook Ware: Mainly imported and locally imitated, small sized, cooking pots. Petrographic thin section analysis indicate that they were imported from Western Asia Minor, Cilicia and Cyprus.

Coins: Thirty-six Late Persian period coins were found, rare finds in Israel. Most were minted in Western Asia Minor. Some bear the figure of the "Great King" holding an arch.

Animal Bones: Pigs, goats, sheep and very few cattle bones indicating a non-agrarian population.

Aegean Amphorae: Thasos, Corinth, Chios, Samos, Mande and others.



Persian Period remains in the Akko region:

Past excavations in the Akko region, outside Tel Akko, revealed only a limited number areas dating to the Late Persian period, the earliest period of settlement beyond the limits of the tell. 'Area R' and others found recently are located on a strip with a maximum width of about half a km. encircling Tel Akko to the north, east and west. A 2010 salvage excavation in the South-western foothill of Tel Akko and series of geo-archaeological tests indicate that the bay extended below the tell.

Historical Sources:

Greek mercenaries served the Persian Empire in the conquest of Egypt and the suppression of rebellions there. Diodorus Siculus mentions Akko in 374/3 BCE: "When the Persian army had assembled at the city of Ace' it numbered two hundred thousand barbarians under the command of Pharnabazus and twenty thousand Greek mercenaries led by Iphicrated. The triremes numbered three hundred. And the thirty-oared vessels two hundred. The number of those conveying food and other supplies was great. At the beginning of the summer the King's generals broke camp with the entire army, and accompanied by the fleet sailing along the coast proceeded to Egypt..."

Conclusions :

The unique architectural and other archaeological remains, including the ceramics, coins, dietary habits as well as the historical evidence indicate foreign habitation. We suggest them to be possible Greeks, Phoenicians and Cypriotes. The textual evidence attests to the Greek mercenaries who served Persian military campaigns to reach Egypt during the end of the 5th and first half of the 4th BCE. They served in the Persian Empire terrestrial army in the conquest of Egypt and the suppression of its rebellions. Akko served as a naval base of the Persians and their maritime/coastal mercenaries, and the area surrounding Tel Akko may have been utilized by them.