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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AASOR Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research  
*ADAJ* Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan  
*AJA* American Journal of Archaeology  
*AfO* Archiv für Orientforschung  
*ANET* Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament<sup>3</sup>, ed. J.B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1969  
*BA* The Biblical Archaeologist  
*BASOR* Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research  
*BT* Babylonian Talmud  
*CAD* Chicago Assyrian Dictionary  
*CIS* Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum  
*DJD* Discoveries in the Judaean Desert  
*DSD* Dead Sea Discoveries  
*EI* Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies  
*ESI* Excavations and Surveys in Israel  
*IAA Reports* Israel Antiquities Authority Reports  
*IEJ* Israel Exploration Journal  
*JAOS* Journal of the American Oriental Society  
*JBL* Journal of Biblical Literature  
*JCS* Journal of Cuneiform Studies  
*JEA* Journal of Egyptian Archaeology  
*JNES* Journal of Near Eastern Studies  
*KAI* W. Donner and W. Röllig: *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* 1–3, Wiesbaden, 1962–1964; 1<sup>s</sup>, 2002  
*NEAEHL* The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (English Edition), Jerusalem, 1993  
*PEQ* Palestine Exploration Quarterly  
*PT* Palestinian Talmud  
*QDAP* Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine  
*RA* Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale  
*RB* Revue Biblique  
*RE* Pauly-Wissowa's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft  
*RQ* Revue de Qumran  
*VT* Vetus Testamentum  
*ZA* Zeitschrift für Assyriologie  
*ZDPV* Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins

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# A Decorated Fragment of a Tyrian Lead Coffin from a Cemetery at Akhziv

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**ABSTRACT:** The finding of a lead coffin fragment in the Gesher Haziv library has led to a surprising discovery: Its decoration is identical to the decoration of a complete lead coffin from Tyre and they were both made of the same mould. This is further evidence of Tyrian influence on northwestern Galilee culture in the Roman period and especially on burial customs.

LEAD coffins were in use in the Levant during the second–fourth centuries CE (Rahmani 1999: 4–9). Tyre and Sidon were two of the most important centres of coffin production along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Rahmani’s comprehensive study of the distribution and production of lead coffins discovered

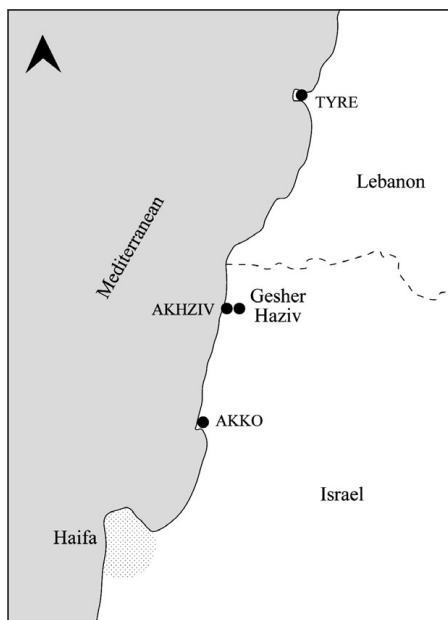


Fig. 1. Location map

in Israel comprises the largest collection of coffins from this area. He pointed out that most of the lead coffins in northern Israel originated in Tyre and Sidon, although he suggested a few smaller workshops at Akko, Caesaria, Ashqelon, Gaza and Jerusalem (Rahmani 1999: 72–80). Nevertheless, until now, none of the coffins from Israel could be proven to have been produced in one of the Tyrian or Sidonian workshops.

The fragment under discussion was probably found in the eastern cemetery of the Roman town of Akhziv,<sup>1</sup> in the province of Phoenicia (fig. 1). The fragment (41 cm wide, 25 cm high; fig. 2) is from the right side of one of the long sides of the sarcophagus; it includes its right edge as well as the rim.

1 The fragment was found some 40 years ago by members of Kibbutz Gesher Haziv and was stored in the kibbutz library. We were recently informed about it by Helen Frenkley, the librarian, who handed it over to the Israel Antiquities Authority.



Fig. 2. The coffin fragment from Gesher Haziv

The decoration consists of two panels with varied motifs. The upper panel is a frieze bordered by cord decoration, with four groups of laurel leaves between the cords. Each group contains three leaves joined at their right edge, the central leaf slightly overlapping the other two. Between the leaves there are two fruits at the end of long stalks. Although the lower panel is broken, two spiral pillars headed by Corinthian capitals are visible on it, with a krater (*kantharos*) between them. On either side of the krater there is a cluster of three laurel leaves directed toward the centre of the scene. Below the left cluster of leaves, the upper part of another krater is visible.

According to the documents in the IAA archives, part of a cemetery was excavated in 1923 at Akhziv; its precise location is unknown (Rahmani 1999: 87–88). Although Rahmani wrote that its location is unknown (Rahmani 1999: 87–88), Avi-Yonah mentions that it was found ‘during the repair of a road from Acre to Beirut, near the village of Ez-Zib’ (Avi-Yonah 1930: 300); thus, since the road passes east of the village, it strengthens the assumption that the 1923 excavation was conducted in the eastern cemetery. Among the finds are built socket tombs, stone sarcophagi and a few lead coffins. One of the lead coffins bears a decoration very similar to the Gesher Haziv coffin: a row of columns headed by Corinthian capitals, with medallions bearing human faces, sphinxes and floral motifs between them (fig. 3; Rahmani 1999: 87–88, no. 8, pl. 4:8).

Surprisingly, the fragment from Gesher Haziv was found to be identical to a complete decorated lead sarcophagus from the cemetery of Tyre (fig. 4; Chêhab





Fig. 3. The coffin from Akhziv (courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority)

1934: pl. 41:1). A detailed examination of the decoration revealed that the motifs on the two coffins were impressed by the same moulds. The design of the long side of the Tyrian sarcophagus is divided into three panels. The upper one consists of two groups of clusters of three laurel leaves with fruits meeting in the centre, bordered by two lines of cord designs. The middle panel is decorated with a row of seven spiral columns headed by Corinthian capitals. In the centre, on either side of the central pillar, a crouching sphinx faces away from the pillar. The sphinx is surrounded by leaves and kraters in a composition similar to that on the Gesher Haziv coffin. On either side of these scenes, there are depictions of a *Medusa* mask with dolphins above and below it and with medallions of vines on each of its sides sprouting from kraters. To the right and the left of these scenes, at both edges of the side of the sarcophagus, sphinx scenes are again depicted. The lower panel is bordered at its top with a cord design and includes vine scrolls.

The decoration on the Gesher Haziv coffin is identical to the decoration on the upper right part of the Tyrian coffin. We can therefore assume that the Gesher



Fig. 4. The coffin from Tyre (courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority)



Haziv coffin in its entirety was identical to the Tyrian one. To the best of our knowledge, even though over a hundred lead coffins have been found in Israel, this is the first time that two can be conclusively shown to have been produced with the same mould.

In 1990 a salvage excavation was conducted by E. Mazar at the Roman period cemetery adjacent to Kibbutz Gesher Haziv, to its north. A total of 18 burials was uncovered (Mazar 1994: 80–82), divided into three types: 16 socket tombs simply built of ashlar or field stones; one built tomb containing a clay sarcophagus; and one stone sarcophagus and its lid. Stone sarcophagi and socket tombs are also mentioned among the burials excavated in 1923; therefore, it is plausible that this excavation was conducted at the same large cemetery as the one excavated by Mazar. Thus, the Gesher Haziv fragment probably originates in this cemetery.

The identical decoration on the Tyrian and Gesher Haziv sarcophagi strongly supports Rahmani's suggestion that lead sarcophagi were imported from Tyre to the Land of Israel, especially to its northwest, the southern boundary of the province. The Hellenistic and Roman burial customs in the northwestern part of the Land of Israel included Phoenician burial traditions, such as cremation (in the Hellenistic period); family tombs; built and cut socket tombs; free-standing sarcophagi; and burial goods (multiple glass vessels and snake-shaped bracelets) (Aviam 2004: 257–231; Stern and Getzov 2006).

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