

## THE ASHKELON DOG CEMETERY CONUNDRUM

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### ABSTRACT

Between 1989 and 1992 about 1 200 dog remains were excavated at Ashkelon as part of the Leon Levy expedition. This find generated much interest and debate at the time. The leader of the excavations, Prof. Lawrence E. Stager of Harvard University, attributed the dog cemetery to the presence of a cultic healing centre to which the dogs were supposed to have belonged. As no such centre has been found up to the present, this article reassesses the available facts from the excavations, the subsequent research and analysis of the remains by Dr Paula Wapnish and Prof. Brian Hesse, as well as other opinions. A completely novel explanation will be formulated for the presence of so many dogs in Ashkelon during the Persian era and why they were buried in that particular place.

### INTRODUCTION

When the philanthropist Leon Levy offered long-term funding in 1985 for a large-scale archaeological excavation in Israel, Professor Lawrence E. Stager of Harvard University selected the site of ancient Ashkelon. Whatever finds he had expected to encounter there most probably did not include a dog cemetery containing more than 1200 dog remains. At the time of the finds, Prof. Stager concluded that these dogs had belonged to a dog healing cult. He based his opinion on the find of a limestone plaque, inscribed in Phoenician and found in the port city of Kition on Cyprus in 1869. This plaque lists personnel as well as dogs associated with the worship of the goddess of fertility, Astarte, as well as a male deity, Mukol, whose healing cult flourished in Idalion on Cyprus in the Fourth century B.C.E. (Stager 1991a:40). However, no dog cemetery has been found at either Kition or Idalion.

Despite the ongoing excavations at Ashkelon, so far no cultic centre or temple,

which can be linked to the dog cemetery, has been found there either. Since Stager invited readers to submit other possibilities for the presence of the dog cemetery in Ashkelon (1991a:42), this article proposes a completely different opinion about the presence and purpose of the dogs in Ashkelon. Stager only looked at a religious reason for the presence of the dogs, but does not seem to have looked at other possibilities, such as an economic one. In this article Stager's opinion, as well as the extensive article by Dr Paula Wapnish and Prof. Brian Hesse (Wapnish & Hesse 1993) will be analysed anew in the light of the absence of a cultic centre and the fact that the dog cemetery was found in an area dedicated to economic activity. A few other suggestions which were submitted after the article by Stager was published will also be taken into account in this analysis. The available information will then be reorganised and combined with other factors to come to a different conclusion.

## **BACKGROUND ON ASHKELON**

The ancient city of Ashkelon, which had been established by the Canaanites, and subsequently inhabited by the Philistines, was destroyed by the neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B.C.E. (Stager 1991a:27). In 538 B.C.E. the city came under Persian control, after they had defeated the Babylonians. The Persian Empire, which was the largest then known, stretched from India to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. The Phoenicians, who had become allies of the Persians and as able seafarers provided them with naval power, were entrusted by the latter with the control of the southern part of the Levant, as far south as Ashkelon. The cities of Tyre and Sidon were to provide governors for alternating port cities and Ashkelon came under the control of the Tyrians, who rebuilt the city (Stager 1991a:28).

## **THE PHOENICIAN PRESENCE IN ASHKELON**

With their commercial skills, the Phoenicians brought much prosperity to the entire coast during this period. As a result of their activities, the Tyrians left behind a thick layer of occupational debris of about 6 to 10 feet, both at Ashkelon as well as at Dor

(Stager 1991a:29). It is in this layer of Persian Period occupational debris in Ashkelon that the dog cemetery was found, most notably in excavation Grids 50 and 57, as well as later in Grid 38. At the time when Stager wrote the article, about 700 dog remains had been excavated (1991a:30), and by the end of the 1992 excavation season more than 1 200 dog remains had been found (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:56). As rising sea levels have been encroaching on the excavation area, it is reckoned that there could have been even more dog remains, which have already been washed away (Stager 1991a:30).

## **DETAILS OF THE EXCAVATIONS**

The excavation Grids 50 and 57 are located side by side along the coast (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:55) and Grid 57 had been the site of a monumental structure built in about 500 B.C.E. This was followed by later phases of structures such as street-front workshops, which were destroyed in ca. 300 B.C.E. (Stager 1991a:29). The level (Phase 5) between the monumental structure and the street-front workshops is the one that contained about a dozen buried dogs (Stager 1991a:30). In Grid 50 remains of an impressive building were uncovered with about six almost identical rooms. These seem to have been the magazines of a large warehouse, 30 by 60 feet, each containing almost 250 square feet of interior storage space. In the floors of the magazines several articles of trade, such as Phoenician amphorae, Greek fine ware and pigments were found (Stager 1991a:30). Stager then wrote the following about this building:

In its original construction this large warehouse was stepped or terraced down towards the sea; the western half of the building's stone foundations therefore lay at a lower level than the eastern half. In the next phase (Phase 7 in Grid 50, which corresponds to Phase 5 in Grid 57), this western area was levelled up with a series of rubbish-laden fills. But before the levelled area was next used as a warehouse (sometime in the last half of the fifth century B.C.), the deeper fills above the western half of the warehouse were put to a different use: it was part of a huge dog

cemetery that extended all the way to the 12 dog burials we had found in Grid 57. Moreover, the western limits of the dog cemetery could not be ascertained because that part had eroded into the sea (Stager 1991a:30).

Stager furthermore added that the dog cemetery was of an extremely short duration, possibly lasting no more than 50 years. In some places as many as three burials were found superimposed over one another, suggesting that there were no burial markers over the graves. The dogs were buried individually and were each carefully placed in a shallow pit with the legs flexed and the tail tucked around the hind legs. They were covered with earth containing cultural debris, but no grave goods were buried with the dogs. Of the dogs about 60 to 70 percent were puppies, the rest were sub-adult and adult dogs. Subsequently the area was returned to its earlier mercantile use (Stager 1991a:31).

When the skeletons were analysed by Wapnish and Hesse, they determined that there were no butchering marks, which indicates that the dogs died of natural causes (Stager 1991a:32). This also means that the dogs were not eaten, of which the Phoenician Carthaginians were accused by the Persians [an accusation proven to be accurate, as dog bones were discovered during excavations in Carthage (Miles, 2011:76)]. The absence of butchering marks on the dog remains also means that these animals had not been offered as sacrifices (Stager 1991a:32).

As for which population group could have been responsible for burying the dogs, Stager gave the following reasoning: if the Persians were responsible for the dogs, they would not have buried them, as according to their Zoroastrian faith that would have polluted the soil. Stager reasoned that the Egyptians living in Ashkelon were not responsible either, as they would have mummified the dogs. Furthermore the very small segment of Greeks among the population of Ashkelon would not have buried the dogs in a prime piece of commercial land, because they did not have the authority to do so, and neither did the Egyptians. The sole population group with enough authority to bury the dogs in that particular area would appear to have been the Phoenicians by a process of deduction, as they were the population group in control of Ashkelon at the time (Stager 1991a:39).

However, the question of where the cultic centre or temple was located, to which the dogs were supposed to have belonged, remains. Such a centre would have attracted visitors, and no archaeological finds have been reported of traces or remains of such visitors either.

## **THE RESEARCH BY WAPNISH AND HESSE**

In 1993 Wapnish and Hesse published the results of their in-depth research into the dog remains. One of the first observations they made concerned the sheer abundance of bones found. These did not come from wild animals, but most certainly from dogs (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:55). Another unusual fact about especially the puppy bones that were found was that most were but a few weeks old, and that they had belonged to different litters (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:56). They concluded that even though more than 1 200 finds of dog remains were made, complete and partial, probably only about 600 to 700 dogs were actually represented. They also provided more information about the dog remains found in excavation grid 38, which appear to be of a slightly later date than those found in Grid 50 and 57. Most of the dogs in Grid 38 were buried in streets or in thoroughfares between buildings (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:57). They disagreed with the opinion expressed by Stager that the burials were a cemetery and stated this as follows:

While Stager (1991b) refers to the dog burials in Grids 50 and 57 as a cemetery, evidence that a sacred area was set aside for dog inhumation is not compelling. The matrix into which pits were dug accumulated throughout the period of interment. Dogs were buried where there was space, rather than a space being prepared to receive dogs. If we accept this view, then the burials in grid 38, while somewhat later in date, are part of the same phenomenon (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:58).

There was no discernible pattern in the orientation of the pits in which the dogs were buried nor in the placement of the corpse within each pit. As the top surfaces of the pits were of varying height, the interment of the dogs seems to have taken place

sporadically. What was interesting is that the animals had been buried carefully on their sides, as there were no skewed limbs, arched backs or any other skeletal distortions (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:58). Other facts that emerged were that there had been no trauma that could have killed the animal and that carcasses were not cut up or skinned before burial. The conclusion was drawn that no dogs had been killed before being buried. Moreover the burials had accumulated intermittently, which means that the dogs did not die as a result of an epidemic (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:61). The abundance of puppies was ascribed to the possibility that the residents of Ashkelon had been managing the dogs in some way, or had been very alert about dead dogs. The mortality levels were ascribed to the fact that in the pre-veterinary period the pups must have been afflicted by a host of diseases (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:61). They determined that the dogs must have been of medium size, ranging in weight from 11 to 20 kilograms, and varying in height at the shoulder from 48 to 61 centimetres (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:62). Some teeth showed extreme wear, but this may have been caused by the fact that what the dogs ate probably was contaminated with beach sand (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:60). In the remainder of their article, Wapnish and Hesse tried to determine what kind of dogs the Ashkelon dogs could have been, but did not come to any definite conclusion other than that these dogs were not the result of selective breeding, for instance to produce dogs that were adapted to running (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:65). Their final conclusion was that these dogs were the local unmanaged dog population and that there is no certainty that the Phoenicians were responsible for burying them (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:76). By expressing these conclusions they differed quite clearly from the opinions expressed by Stager. They did not, however, have an explanation for the enormous amount of dog remains. What is also contradictory in their report is that they stated that the dogs had been managed to some extent, but called the entire dog find the local unmanaged dog population.

## OTHER POSSIBILITIES

The article by Stager elicited a response from Professor Emeritus Morton Smith from Columbia University in New York, who berated Stager for immediately assuming that the dog burials were related to a cultic centre and a religious purpose. Apparently the academic A. D. Nock had laid down a basic rule for archaeology: “If you don’t understand something, say it is religious.” Smith was of the opinion that Stager had assumed a religious purpose for the presence of the dogs in the Persian era, and had erred in this respect.<sup>1</sup> He was of the opinion that the dogs had died as a result of an epidemic and were buried for sanitary reasons, as cremating them would have been expensive and might have spread the infection by spreading fumes and ashes (Smith 1991:12–14). Stager published an immediate response to Smith, stating that research had already determined that the mortality pattern of the dogs was attritional and not catastrophic and refuted the suggestion of death by epidemic (Stager 1991b:14).

Another reaction to the article was submitted by Dr T. Vago from Ashkelon, Israel, who suggested that the dogs had been killed for commercial purposes to make parchment of their skins. This was done in Hungary, where a person who was elevated to nobility would receive confirmation of this on a dog-skin parchment (Vago 1991:14). As there were no marks of cutting or butchering found on the dog remains, this does however not seem to have been the case (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:60).

So with the absence of a cultic centre, the presence of the remains in a mostly commercial area, the possibility of an epidemic excluded, as well as the use of the dog skins for parchment, what other explanation could there be for the presence of the buried dogs in Ashkelon?

## POSSIBLE TRADE IN DOGS

A possibility which does not seem to have been explored by anyone yet, is that there was a commercial reason (other than the production of parchment) for the presence of

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<sup>1</sup> The author of this article encountered a similar approach to items found in excavations of remains of the native Indians of the South West which could not be explained, during the exchange year she spent at the University of Arizona in 1972–1973.

the dogs. In the analysis of all the facts discovered so far, what also needs to be taken into account is that the Phoenicians were very motivated by commercial objectives. Trade was their main focus in life. Moreover, the Phoenicians and certainly the Tyrians were no strangers to the trade in live animals. They brought back apes and parrots (or monkeys and peacocks, depending on which translation is used)<sup>2</sup> from their expedition to Ophir, which they undertook together with the Israelites under King Solomon (I Kings 10:22). They also traded for work horses, war horses and mules in Beth Togarma (Ezekiel 27:14). So could they possibly have traded in dogs? That is the possibility which will be explored in the remainder of this article. As the buried dog remains were found in an area of Ashkelon, which was used for commercial purposes, this is certainly a possibility. Stager himself wrote, “The area occupied by the dog cemetery is significant. Throughout the preceding (*sic*) and the remainder of the Persian period, this ground was devoted to *profit making enterprises* (emphasis added) connected with the export-import business. But for a generation or so, this was interrupted by the dog cemetery, apparently devoted to ritual purposes” (Stager 1991a:39). It is worth investigating whether Stager is correct in assuming that the area for a while was devoted to ritual purposes. If the Tyrians did indeed trade in dogs, then the *commercial* nature of the area was maintained, and there would not have been a hiatus in its use at all.

## **POSSIBLE FACTORS IN FAVOUR OF THE TRADE IN DOGS**

What factors could have contributed to a potential trade in dogs? In the first place, the Tyrians were in charge of Ashkelon and under the overlordship of the Persians, they basically had free reign and control (Stager, 1991a:28). The home port of Tyre was an

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<sup>2</sup> Prof. Meir Bar Ilan, of Bar Ilan University in Israel is of the opinion that the word *Qophim* as used in the Hebrew text derives from the Sanskrit word *Kapi*, which means “monkey”, not “ape”, as the latter are too large and too dangerous to be kept as pets. The word *Tukim* is derived from the Tamil word *Tokei* and means “peacock” and not “parrot” as it usually is translated. The fact that the words used have their origin in present day India and Sri Lanka is a strong indication for the location of Ophir (paper presented at the ARAM conference, Oxford UK, July 2011).



overcrowded island state (Markoe 2000:197), and was probably not a very suitable place for the trade in dogs, due to the lack of space and possible problems with the noise of barking dogs. The mainland quarter of Tyre may have had space, but then the distance to take dogs to be loaded onto ships would have been greater. Over against that there was space in Ashkelon, close to the coast, making loading of dogs onto ships easy. The location in a commercial area was away from the inhabited part of the city, which would have avoided problems with noise, stench, and the like. Moreover it may have been a matter of the right kind of trade at the right time.

Ashkelon itself was located strategically on the main trade route, the *Via Maris*, which ran from Egypt in the south to the Fertile Crescent and beyond in the north and north-east, and vice versa (Gore 2001:71). So the port had Egypt and the entire Persian Empire as its hinterland. Moreover, sailing from Ashkelon the Tyrians had the entire Mediterranean basin as a potential market.

In Egypt dogs had been present for a long time. A specific breed, the Pharaoh hound which bears a close resemblance to the god Anubis, including its yellow eyes, was well appreciated. One such dog called *Abuwtiyuw*, was buried with great ritual ceremony by order of the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt according to an inscription found in the great cemetery west of the pyramid of Cheops at Giza in 1935 (Cunliffe 1999:150). Quite a few other dog varieties were also present as displayed on the murals in the Beni Hasan tombs dating to 2000-1800 B.C.E. (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:73). One of the dogs displayed there, with the curled tail, could possibly be the Basenji breed, which does not bark, but only yodels and originates in the Congo (Briggs 1998:154). Dogs were also brought back from Punt by the fleet dispatched by Queen Hatshepsut, as shown on the murals at the temple at Deir el Bahri (Wachsmann 1998:22). Dogs were also used for hunting in the time of King Tutankhamun, in ca. 1330 B.C.E. as shown on images found in his grave. One of the items found was a golden fan. This consisted of a pole with a semi-circular panel mounted on top. Around the semi-circular top edge ostrich feathers used to be mounted, now long disintegrated. Servants waving the fan forth and back would provide the king with some cool air in his day. This semi-circular top panel, covered in gold, shows an

image of King Tutankhamun on a horse-drawn chariot and equipped with bow and arrow, hunting the ostriches, whose feathers had been used for the fan. Alongside the horse on the image, there is a dog running after the ostriches, quite clearly enjoying the chase (Gros de Beler 2002:88–89). Also found among the grave goods was an alabaster ointment vase in a circular shape with a lion on top. On the side of the container is an image of a lion attacking a cow, with a dog attacking the cow between the legs as the main image. To the left of it there is a smaller image of a dog attacking another animal (Gros de Beler 2002:120). A third image of a hunting scene with a dog from King Tutankhamun's grave has recently been found in storage and is presently being investigated in Germany. It is a semi-oval gold foil piece, which may have been the lid of an archer's bow case, and it shows a dog and a mythical winged animal attacking an ibex. The interesting thing about this image is that it is not Egyptian in style at all and that it may have been made in Syria. This could indicate that hunting with dogs was not just practised in Egypt, but also in other parts of the ancient Near East (Williams 2014:18).

In various parts of the Persian Empire there were also indigenous dogs. The Mastiff was found in Assyria, where the dogs were especially bred in a few towns to be trained for use in battle (Cunliffe, 1999:71). In the far reaches to the east, there were Salukis in Afghanistan and there may have been other breeds elsewhere. Pliny the Elder mentions that the king of Albania sent a dog to Alexander the Great (*Nat.* 8.61.149). It should not have been a problem for the Tyrians to acquire dogs, as their trade network reached far and wide (Diakonoff 1992:168–193). What also needs to be taken into account is that the Persians had a very high esteem of dogs and moreover that the roads which existed in the Persian Empire at the time (for instance, the highway from Susa to Sardis, see Del Giudice 2008:46), made the transport of dogs possible from the far reaches of the empire.

It is the contention here that the Tyrians did use Ashkelon as a hub for the trade in dogs. This means that dogs would have arrived there from various origins, possibly by caravan trade. These dogs would have to be kept somewhere until such time as a ship would arrive to take on cargo, so as to transport them to which ever destination in the

Mediterranean. If several dogs were penned up in the above mentioned commercial area, the chance existed that dogs would mate, and that puppies would be born. There also may have been a deliberate attempt to breed with the dogs present there, as that would have increased the amount of dogs available for trade without having to pay for a dog. Without the veterinary care which is available these days, puppies would have been prone to get sick. What then to do with the dead puppy or with a mother dog that had died? As Smith already stated, burning an animal would have been expensive, (due to the necessity of wood), and would have caused a smell, with the possibility that ashes would have spread (Smith 1991:14). To throw the carcass into the sea was also not an option, as the prevailing winds and currents along this part of the coast are south-westerly (Marriner et al. 2005:1303) and would have washed it back onto the shore. The quickest way to get rid of it would have been to bury it in the debris which had been used to shore up the western foundation of the commercial building, which was just outside the entrance of the holding facility. No markers were placed where the dog had been buried and for subsequent burials another hole was dug at random, so in this way they became superimposed. The dogs had possibly curled up when they died (in fact dogs normally sleep curled up) and thus were buried with the legs together and the tail tucked in. In this rounded shape they were the easiest to bury in a round hole. As the area of what would become the excavation grids 50 and 57 became filled, at the later stage of the trade the dogs were buried in the area that would be labelled Grid 38 during the excavation. This would agree with what Wapnish and Hesse stated that all three areas of finds belong to the same phenomenon.

Assuming that the dogs were the unmanaged dog population of Ashkelon as the latter stated is rather farfetched, as then there would have been a very large amount of dogs present in the city, much larger than in the other cities where a few dog remains have been excavated, such as the seven dogs buried in Dor and the five in Ashdod (Wapnish & Hesse 1993:68-69). Also, if puppies had died in the streets, they would not have been buried in such good shape as was the case, unless there was someone searching the streets of Ashkelon to find and bury them on a daily basis. This would probably not have happened without an economic reason (getting paid for it), as it

would have been a waste of time and effort without remuneration. Not burying the puppies quickly would have resulted in rapid deterioration of the carcasses. Even Wapnish and Hesse (1993:61) concede that “Ashkelon’s residents either must have been managing the dogs in some way, or they were exceptionally alert for dead dogs”. This statement is not in line with their conclusion that the dogs were the locally unmanaged dog population

The questions that remain are: Would dogs have had a commercial value? For what purpose could they have been sold and would it be possible to find out whether any dogs were traded by the Phoenicians and landed up anywhere in the Mediterranean area?

## **DOG BREEDS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

When a search is made in various modern day dog encyclopaedias, there are a number of dogs that are said to have been brought to the place where they now occur by the Phoenicians. These include the Pharaoh hound originally found in Egypt, which now is found on Malta and the neighbouring island of Gozo (Cunliffe 1999:218). Then there is the Sicilian Hound in Sicily, also called the Cirneco dell’ Etna. This dog resembles the Pharaoh Hound, but is smaller and is used as a hunting dog for small game (Briggs 1998:150). Another example is the Ibizan Hound, which is also called the Podenco Ibicenco, found on Ibiza and the neighbouring Balearic islands, where it also serves as a hunting dog (Briggs 1998:152). Furthermore there is the Spanish Greyhound or Galgo Español, which is used for coursing (Briggs 1998:152). The Podenco breed also occurs in Andalucia ([www.elpodencoandaluz.com](http://www.elpodencoandaluz.com)) and on the Canary Islands (<http://www.podencocanario.net>).

Furthermore there is the Old English Mastiff. As stated before, Mastiffs originated in Assyria. This breed is said to have been brought to Britain by Phoenician traders, where it was crossed with local fighting dogs, and was subsequently used to hunt the wolf (Vicente 2011:121). Most of the dogs mentioned above are of a medium size, which would correspond to the size of the dog remains found in Ashkelon.

What is interesting is that most of these dog breeds have survived on islands, such as Malta, Sicily and Ibiza, which are known places where the Phoenicians traded. Most of the dogs mentioned are still used there for hunting purposes. The Phoenicians also traded in Andalusia (Aubert 1993:250) and whether they reached the Canary Islands is not proven, but it is mentioned as a possibility by Mazel (1971:209). From Mogador, which the Phoenicians did reach in connection with the production of purple (Mazel 1971:208), the distance is not that great to the Canary Islands. In fact Mazel quotes Pliny who mentions the *Purpurariae insulae* as the islands of Mauritania, which would be more than the single island of Mogador (Mazel 1971:209). The Podenco Canario there is also used for hunting small game. Trade with Britain by the Phoenicians, especially as a source of tin, has been a hotly debated topic, but the presence of the mastiff in Britain could be an indication that the Phoenicians did indeed travel that far.

That dogs were used for hunting purposes in antiquity is shown by a number of ancient sources. Pliny the Elder states that dogs have many qualities, but that they are most suitable for hunting. The dog given by the king of Albania to Alexander the Great was suited to kill large animals (*Nat.* 8.61.147–150). A frieze on the Alexander Sarcophagus depicts Alexander the Great and the client-king of Phoenicia engaging in a lion hunt, with a dog biting the hind leg of the lion that is being attacked (Stager 1991a:33). So hunting with dogs was a known practice in antiquity and the Phoenicians as the pre-eminent traders of that era may have very likely been the providers of dogs for this purpose. They had to obtain these dogs from a source area and transport them to where they could be sold. The likelihood that Ashkelon was the hub for this trade is considerable, due to its favourable location and the find of the buried dog remains would give strong support to this hypothesis. The question needs to be asked if there may have even been a different kind of link to the dog cult in Cyprus, as this was contemporaneous with the dog burials in Ashkelon (Stager 1991a:40). Dogs were needed for the dog cult there, and it may have been possible that the Phoenicians shipped dogs there from Ashkelon, to be part of it.

## CONCLUSION

If by now remains of a cultic centre had been found in Ashkelon to which the dog burials could be linked, credence could be given to the opinion expressed by Stager (1991) that the presence of the many buried dogs was related to a healing cult. This is however not the case and the commercial nature of the area where the dogs were buried, makes a temporary spiritual purpose for it rather unlikely, especially because all the surrounding buildings around the burial area were used for commercial purposes.

The opinion expressed by Wapnish and Hesse (1993) that the buried dogs represent the local unmanaged dog population in Ashkelon during the Persian era lacks credibility as well, due to the sheer number of dog remains which have been found in comparison to dog remains found in other cities in Israel during excavations dating to the same era. It is impossible for such a large number of dogs to have been roaming the streets of Ashkelon in search of food, as they would have either died of starvation or been exterminated by the population as a threat to them, as dogs might have started to hunt in packs. The cause of death of the dogs was neither an epidemic, as suggested by Smith (1991), nor the manufacturing of parchment from the dog skins as proposed by Vago (1991). These two possibilities have been disproven conclusively.

The Phoenicians, and especially the Tyrians, are known to have built an extensive trade empire. This not only encompassed the entire Mediterranean basin, but was also linked to the extensive hinterland of the entire Persian Empire at that time, through which overland traders brought a large variety of goods to the coast which they traded with the Phoenicians to be transported over sea. The Phoenicians are known to have traded in other kinds of animals and the likelihood that they traded in dogs, with the express purpose of being used in hunting is considerable.

Both the Persians as well as the Egyptians held dogs in high esteem, and there were dogs present in various corners of the empire, which made trade in dogs a strong possibility.

In the present day and age there are still dog breeds present on a number of islands

in the Mediterranean Sea, which were frequented by the Phoenicians, that are said to have been brought there by the Phoenicians, even though this has not been scientifically proven. Ashkelon would have been an excellent location as the transit point for this dog trade, which was of short duration and can probably be considered to have been a temporary fashion fad or the specific trade of one trader or trading enterprise.

In the final analysis, the dogs which were found buried in Ashkelon were those who died before they could be transported by ship to destinations across the Mediterranean. Those dogs that survived their captivity in the storage facility near the coast were possibly the ancestors of the present day dog breeds now still present in various places in the Mediterranean. It would be interesting to investigate this further by means of DNA testing.

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