

THE CONSTITUTION OF PHILISTINE IDENTITY: ETHNIC DYNAMICS IN TWELFTH TO TENTH CENTURY PHILISTIA

Summary. The process and date of the Philistine settlement in Canaan have received a great deal of scholarly attention. As well, scholars have also devoted much attention to the expansion of Philistine interaction with Levantine societies prior to the Philistines' assimilation in the late Iron Age. While most studies view Philistine integration and acculturation as a gradual process, a close examination of the detailed faunal and ceramic evidence suggests otherwise. It appears that due to various processes of boundary maintenance, the Philistines maintained high ethnic boundaries with their neighbours for at least 150–200 years, before (quite suddenly) losing most of their unique traits in the tenth century BC.

Most scholars agree that Philistine settlement in Canaan involved a group of immigrants who arrived at its southern shores in the twelfth century BC, but many details surrounding that event are still debated. Archaeologists disagree about the exact timing of the Philistine entry into Canaan, the nature of their settlement process, the size and composition of this group (or groups), and the ways in which it encompassed the local Canaanite population, as well as its origins (e.g. Dothan 1982; Dothan and Dothan 1992; Bunimovitz 1990; A. Mazar 1986; Barako 2003; Finkelstein 1995; 2000; Singer 1988; 1994; Stager 1995; 1998; Yasur-Landau 2003; Sweeney and Yasur-Landau 1999; see also Sherratt 1998; Bauer 1998; Barako 2000).

Although the first phase of the Philistine settlement is still shrouded in mystery, the subsequent processes seem more straightforward, and it is agreed today that already by the eleventh century we can identify various local influences on the Philistine material culture (see below). From the tenth century BC onward, those influences seem completely to have transformed the Philistine (material) culture. In the past, those drastic changes were viewed as indicating the assimilation of the Philistines within the Levantine societies that surrounded them (e.g. Oded 1979, 237–8; B. Mazar 1986, 75–82; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 86), but it is clear today that the Philistines maintained their unique identity until the end of the Iron Age (Stone 1995; Gitin 1998; 2004). The changes in material culture are therefore interpreted as evidence of acculturation, i.e. the adoption of cultural traits without the concomitant adoption of another identity (Stone 1995; Gitin 1998; others prefer to define this process as fusion (Uziel 2007) or Creolization (Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maeir 2004, 20)).

In this article we will not discuss the process of the initial Philistine settlement in the southern coastal plain, and their fate in the Iron Age II will also be only briefly addressed. Rather, on the basis of several lines of evidence, this paper will attempt to re-examine the process that the immigrant population went through during their first 150–200 years of settlement, namely from the twelfth century BC until the early tenth century BC (i.e. until the emergence of complex societies and the formation of the state(s) in the highlands).¹ After briefly presenting the Philistine phenomenon and their influence on the formation of Israelite identity, we will present and discuss changes in key traits of Philistine material culture during this period, as well as their significance for understanding changes in Philistine identity.

Before beginning the discussion we should note the likelihood that there were differences between the various cities in Philistia, and perhaps even between neighbourhoods within the cities themselves.² Still, at the present state of knowledge, it seems that the processes discussed below are general and cover most sites.³

BACKGROUND

The Philistine settlement in Canaan

Although the exact timing (e.g. Dothan 1982; Mazar 1992; Finkelstein 1995; 2000; Bunimovitz and Faust 2001) and process (cf. Stager 1995; 1998; Sweeney and Yasur-Landau 1999; Yasur-Landau 2003; Barako 2003) of their settlement, as well as their social and ethnic composition and place(s) of origin(s) (e.g. Dothan 1982; Singer 1988; Sweeney and Yasur-Landau 1999; cf. Sherratt 1998; Bauer 1998; Barako 2000; see also Bunimovitz 1990; A. Mazar 1986) are debated, most scholars agree that the Philistines were one group of the so-called 'Sea Peoples' that settled in Israel's southern coastal plain during the twelfth century BC. Whatever the number of settlers was (and the process in which they assimilated the local Canaanite population), they were clearly the dominant group in the region, and their impact was felt even beyond the lowlands (more below).

The Philistines' foreign origin is visible in various material traits, which include, among other things, the following (see also Stone 1995; Uziel 2007):

Philistine pottery: The large quantities of the locally manufactured Mycenaean IIIC:1 pottery (also known as the Philistine monochrome pottery) that were unearthed in the major Philistine sites have been extensively studied, and are usually considered as good evidence for

- 1 Traditional, conventional chronology dates the initial Philistine settlement to the first half of the twelfth century, and the drastic changes in Philistine material culture to the first half of the tenth century (e.g. Mazar 1992). The low chronology, which is accepted by some scholars, challenged the dating, and places the settlement of the Philistines to the second half of the twelfth century, while the above-mentioned changes are dated to the late tenth century or even later (e.g. Finkelstein 1995; 2000). The dates in this article follow the traditional, or more precisely the modified traditional chronology (Mazar 2005), but we must stress that the debate over the chronology and its outcomes are irrelevant for the present discussion.
- 2 The differences can perhaps also be seen in the animal bones reported from Ashdod by Maher (2005). However, the assemblage is far too small to reach definitive conclusions, and the only preserved sample – little more than a single small box-full from a large, multi-season archaeological excavation, is suspect.
- 3 The data we currently possess regarding the faunal remains at Gath (Tel Zafit/Tell es-Safi) might suggest that the site was somewhat of an exception during the Iron Age II (Lev-Tov in press a). If this is indeed the case, and the data are very partial, then the site deserves more attention (see more below).

the foreign origins of the Philistines (e.g. Dothan 1982; Mazar 1992, 265–6; Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau 1996; Stager 1998, 154–5; Dothan and Zukerman 2004, and many references). This pottery was apparently manufactured only during the initial phase of settlement, and then gave way to the Philistine bichrome pottery, which continued many of the foreign traditions of its predecessor, but also incorporated elements which are usually regarded as local (e.g. Dothan 1982; Mazar 1992, 267–71; Stager 1998, 155–6; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 89–92, 258; and more below).

Dietary practices: Regular consumption of pork is also regarded as a foreign practice, presumably brought by the Philistines from their place(s) of origin. Where such data are available, it is evident that the quantity of pig bones in most Iron Age I Philistine cities is far larger than that in Late Bronze Age Canaanite settlements, and especially so when compared to Iron Age I Israelite sites (for Iron Age I dietary practices, see, e.g., Hesse 1986; Hesse and Wapnish 1997; Stager 1998, 165, and more below).

Cooking techniques: Unique cooking techniques are expressed by the use of hearths and the ubiquity of cooking jugs. Both of these reflect the different way of life and use of space practised by the Philistines in comparison to the local population (see, e.g., Dothan 1998; Yasur-Landau 2002; Ben-Shlomo, Shai, Zukerman and Maier 2008; Killebrew 1999).

Linear script: Although the available data are scant, the information we currently possess suggests that upon their arrival the Philistines used a unique writing system, different from those used in Canaan, and one which was probably based on the Aegean linear script, or at least incorporated some of its components (e.g. Singer 1994, 335–7; 2009; Cross and Stager 2006, 131).

The Philistines inhabited large urban settlements (e.g. Mazar 1992, 271–3; Stager 1995; 1998; Finkelstein 1996b), and seem to have carried out a policy of forced settlement resulting in the abandonment of the countryside (Bunimovitz 1998; see also Finkelstein 1996b; Shavit 2008).

The first phase of the Philistine settlement, characterized by the use of locally manufactured Mycenaean IIC:1 (or monochrome) pottery (above), was probably somewhat limited geographically, and covered only the regions near the Philistine pentapolis (i.e. Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron/Tel Migne and Gath/Tel Zafit/Tell es-Safi; see Fig. 1). Later, however, the Philistines expanded their area of control to encompass the entire southern coastal plain and lowlands, from Gaza to the Yarkon basin and from the sea to the Shephelah (i.e. the low hills between the coastal plain and the highlands). This phase is characterized by the use of the bichrome Philistine pottery – pottery which seems to have developed from the earlier monochrome (for the Philistine ‘expansion’, see, e.g., Mazar 1992, 273–4; Stager 1995, 334–5; 1998, 152–71).

Politically, the Philistines were the dominant group, especially in the south, during the Iron Age I, and there is a consensus that they were the most complex society in the region during this period (e.g. Hauer 1986, 9; Finkelstein 1996b, 236; Stager 1998, 168; Singer 1994, 299). They occupied very large cities which seem to exhibit a high level of urbanism, social complexity and socioeconomic hierarchy (e.g. Bunimovitz 1990; Stager 1995; 1998, 166–8; Singer 1994, 299). The importance of the Philistines can also be seen demographically. Stager estimated the Philistine population in the Iron Age I as some 25,000 (Stager 1998, 163) and Finkelstein reached an even higher figure of about 30,000 people (Finkelstein 1996b, 135–6). For the sake of comparison we should note that, using the same method, Finkelstein estimated the number of settlers in the Judean hills at the time as only 2,200 people (1996b, 236). Although the numbers

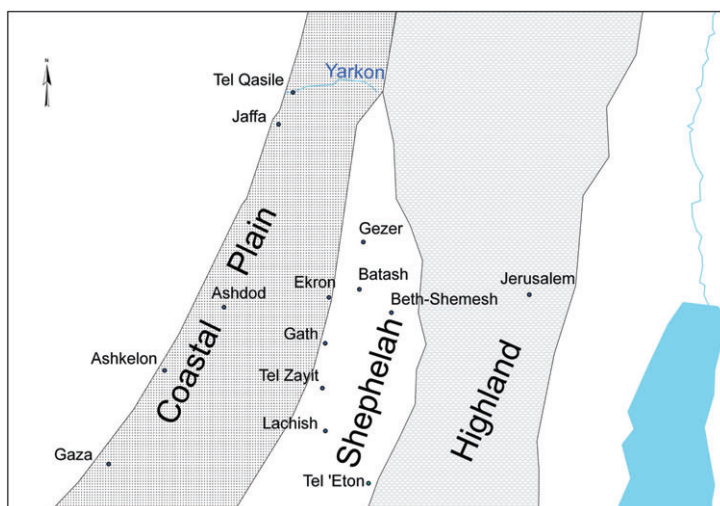


Figure 1
Schematic map showing the main sites discussed in the article.

are questionable on many grounds, and it is even possible that the parity was somewhat smaller, the decisive population differences between the regions do reflect ancient reality, and should be taken more seriously than the figures themselves (see also Faust 2006, 139–46).

Ethnicity in archaeology

Identifying ethnic groups in the archaeological record has long been an important theme of archaeological research, but as it is clear today, such identifications are notoriously difficult (cf. Renfrew 1993, 20; for good summaries, see Jones 1997; Emberling 1997; see also Faust 2006).

In the past, scholars tended to equate archaeological cultures with ethnic groups, or peoples, and this is epitomized in the following oft-quoted paragraph written by Childe (1929, V–VI): ‘We find certain types of remains – pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms – constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall term “cultural group” or just a “culture”. We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today would be called a “people”.’

Various advances in archaeology, however, changed the approach to the study of ethnicity. The development of the New Archaeology (later Processual Archaeology) and its critique of the culture history school and its normative approach to culture, along with the new paradigm’s search for ‘laws of human behaviour’ relegated the study of ‘unique’ phenomena like ethnic or tribal identity to the fringes of archaeological inquiry (e.g. Jones 1997; Trigger 2006). It is further likely that the disinterest in the study of ethnicity also resulted from the horrifying outcome of the racial archaeology so prevalent in Europe until the Second World War (e.g. Hall 1997, 1–2).

At the same time as the New Archaeology was emerging, changes in the perception of ethnicity were taking place in the anthropological literature. Following the work of Barth (1969),

it became apparent that ethnic groups are not 'culture-bearing units' (*ibid.*, 10–13), i.e. groups sharing core values that find representation in cultural forms (*ibid.*, 10–11). Barth defines ethnic groups as, in essence, a form of social organization; its critical criterion is an ability to be identified and distinguished among others, or in his words, allowing 'self-ascription and ascription by others' (*ibid.*, 11, 13). Ethnic identity here is not determined by biological or genetic factors but is subject to perception and is adaptable (for an assessment of Barth's influence on archaeological thinking, see also Emberling 1997).

In this light, it is clear today that ethnicity is too complex to be merely identified with a material or an archaeological culture (see, e.g., Hodder 1982); it is fluid, it is merely one of several attributes of an individual's complete identity, and it is subjective (e.g. Shennan 1989; 1991; Emberling 1997; Schortman, Urban and Aulsebrook 2001; Jones 1997; Faust 2006). This has led some scholars to question the ability of archaeologists to identify ethnic groups in the material record of extinct societies (see Jones 1997, 109–10, 124; with regard to the Levant, see Herzog 1997). Yet in most cases, clear relationships between material culture and ethnicity can be identified, however complicated they may be (McGuire 1982; Kamp and Yoffee 1980; Emberling 1997; Faust 2006, and others; see also Howard 1996, 239–40).

It is accepted today that groups define themselves in relation to, and in contrast with, other groups (Barth 1969; see also Cohen 1978, 389; Cohen 1985, 558). The ethnic boundaries of a group are not defined by the sum of cultural traits but by the idiosyncratic use of specific material and behavioural symbols as compared with other groups (McGuire 1982, 160; see also Kamp and Yoffee 1980, 96; Emberling 1997, 299; Barth 1969, 14, 15; Hall 1997, 135). As a consequence, emphasis shifted from the shared elements or characteristics of a group to the features that distinguish it from others. It was the contact between groups that was seen as essential for the formation of the self-identity of a group (see also Cohen 1985), which is thus clearly manifested in its material culture. Ethnic identity can be identified in certain artefacts that came to carry a symbolic meaning (McGuire 1982, 163; Hodder 1991, 3), or by identifying 'ethnically specific behaviour', or more accurately, the material correlates of such behaviour (McGuire 1982, 163; Faust 2006; cf. Deetz 1996, 187–211).⁴

PHILISTIA AND ISRAEL

Since groups define themselves in relation to another group (or other groups), and often utilize material items to transmit messages of difference, it is not surprising that the interaction between the dominant Philistines and the highland settlers left behind clear archaeological footprints. Indeed, the influence of the Philistines on the development and formation of Israelite ethnic identity has often been written about. The most notable example of this influence is the Israelites' avoidance of pork (e.g. Hesse 1990; Finkelstein 1996a, 206; Faust 2006, 35–40, and references). Many scholars believe that the mere fact that the Philistines consumed pork as a dietary staple led the Israelite population to avoid consuming this type of meat, as part of their

4 We should also note that boundary maintenance varies greatly in time and space. An object symbolizing ethnicity of a certain group in one context might be of less importance in another contemporaneous one, and something of importance at one time may become unimportant later (see Hodder 1982). Some boundaries might, therefore, be represented with sharp fall-offs in distribution patterns of certain traits, while others may be more blurred (see De Boer 1990, 102). Moreover, in some cases, differences can exist between different areas of interaction of the same groups (Hodder 1982, 27–31).

self-definition *vis-à-vis* the Philistines (e.g. Stager 1995, 344; Faust 2006, 35–40, and additional discussion). It is most likely, of course, that the same population (i.e. the highland settlers) did not consume large quantities of this meat even earlier, and that perhaps there was even a taboo on its consumption – a taboo that was prevalent among many societies in the ancient Near East (Hesse and Wapnish 1997). However, the Israelites' interaction with the Philistines – their arch enemies who consumed this meat as a regular practice – made this avoidance important.⁵

Philistine influence on Israelite identity seems to have had additional forms, e.g. the latter's tradition of not decorating pottery and the avoidance of imported pottery (Faust 2006, and references). In fact, both might have partially resulted from the avoidance of the Philistine decorated pottery of the Iron Age I – pottery that was ethnically significant at the time (e.g. Stager 1995, 334–5, 344; Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Faust 2006, 46–7, 145, 205–20, and references). The significance of circumcision also seems to have resulted from the Israelites' interaction with the un-circumcised Philistines (Faust 2006, 85–91, and references).

A topic that received much less attention, if any at all, is the influence of the Israelites on the Philistines' self-definition. By this we are not referring to the acculturation that the Philistines went through during the Iron Age II – the time in which they stopped producing their typical Iron Age I decorated pottery, significantly reduced the importance of pork in their diet, adopted the local script, etc. Instead we refer mainly to the impact that interaction with the Israelites had on the Philistines' ethnic self-definition during the Iron Age I.

Pork consumption and Philistine identity

It appears that when we attempt to decipher the material aspect of Philistine identity, food habits are the most obvious, and perhaps the most sensitive, index. We begin the discussion, therefore, with an examination of the development and changes in the consumption of pork in Iron Age Philistia.

It is clear from archaeozoological studies that the Philistines herded pigs in addition to other livestock, and thus were regular consumers of pork, as well as other meats, during the Iron Age I. For example, during some parts of the Iron Age I, the relative abundance of pig bones within the faunal assemblages from Ekron and Ashkelon reaches highs greater than 20 per cent of identifiable bones (Hesse 1990; Lev-Tov 2006; more below). This clearly was a dramatic contrast to the food habits of the Israelite population in the highlands (e.g. Hesse 1990; Stager 1995, 344; Faust 2006, 35–40, and references). The largest faunal assemblage examined from an Iron Age I highlands site, from Tel Shiloh (Hellwing, Sade and Kishon 1993) contains only a single pig bone from the Iron Age I sample of 1,350 identifiable bones. These *de facto* pork consumption taboos may have gone even further than the highlands of Canaan, as recent work at Beth Shemesh, a site on the borderlands between the Israelite and Philistine regions, shows that the population there avoided pork as well (cf. Bunimovitz and Lederman 2006; 2008). This cannot be attributed to ecology of course, as in other periods (some of) the highland population consumed pork (e.g. at Emek Rephaim during the Intermediate Bronze Age, and even in the Middle Bronze Age; Horwitz 1989, 46), while the population in the coastal plain sometimes

5 The Israelites' food habits are not our main theme here, and we must also keep in mind that the Israelites' dietary laws were complex and went far beyond the pork taboo. While the lion's share of archaeologists' attention has been focused upon pork consumption, some anthropologists have attempted to understand the entire food purity system laid out in Deuteronomy and Leviticus (cf. Douglas 1966; 1972; Soler 1997).

consumed much smaller quantities of pork (e.g. at Ekron during the Late Bronze Age, see below). The differences are so conspicuous that even Finkelstein, who believes that there is (almost?) no way to identify the Israelites in the Iron Age I, wrote that ‘... pig taboos, are emerging as the main, if not only avenue that can shed light on ethnic boundaries in the Iron Age I. Specifically, this may be the most valuable tool for the study of ethnicity of a given, single Iron I site’ (Finkelstein 1996a, 206).

The recent publication of the pig bone frequencies in several strata at Tel Migne (Ekron) allows us to identify changes in meat consumption during the periods under discussion, and to understand the changes in pork consumption experienced by the Philistines at Ekron during the Iron Age I and afterwards.

Examination of the animal bones unearthed at Ekron clearly shows that pigs appear quite suddenly in stratum VII, dated to the early Iron Age I (Lev-Tov 2006, 212). Lev-Tov wrote that the temporal correlation between the appearance of pork in Ekron and the settlement of Philistines tempts one to connect the two, but adds that pork consumption never served as an ethnic behaviour in the Aegean, commonly thought to be the Philistine homeland. Pigs were simply one component in the Aegean economy and diet and he therefore argues that it is problematic to make pork-eating the *sine qua non* of Philistine identity. We shall address this issue below, but the mere analysis of pork consumption at the site during the Iron Age I is very illuminating (Fig. 2). The percentage of pork in stratum VII, when it first appears, was about 14 per cent, and it rose to 17 per cent in stratum VI, and to 26 per cent in stratum V – the last Iron Age I stratum (Lev-Tov 2006, 211). In addition, we can point to new data emerging from another Philistine site, Tel es-Safi/Gath, which demonstrate a similar importance of pork to that city’s population during the same time period (Lev-Tov in press a).

Before beginning the discussion of these data, we must note that not only does the increase cease with the transition to the Iron Age II, but during this time there is even a drastic decrease in the importance of pork in the Philistine diet – a drop to some 7 per cent in stratum IV at Ekron, and even less in subsequent strata (Lev-Tov 1999). We shall briefly touch upon this decrease later; here we would like to address the gradual increase in pork consumption during the Iron Age I.

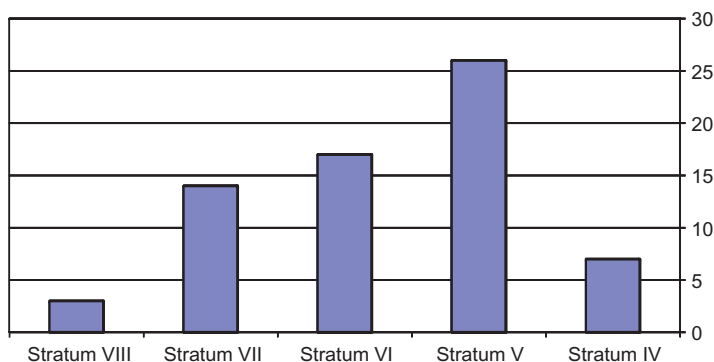


Figure 2
The percentage of pork in the faunal assemblage at Ekron.

Pork consumption and ethnic negotiation in the Iron Age I

It is quite clear that the Philistines consumed significant quantities of pork, starting from the time of their settlement in the region. This can clearly be seen in the finds at Ekron stratum VII, as well as at Ashkelon and at other sites, and many scholars have addressed this issue (e.g. Hesse 1990). It appears that if the Philistines originated in the Aegean world then they must have brought this habit with them, as Stager (1995, 344) has pointed out. It was in the Aegean world, admittedly among other regions to the west of the Levant, where consumption of large quantities of pork was the norm, even if it did not serve as an ethnic marker (Lev-Tov 2006, 212, with a brief discussion and additional literature).

But why did the Philistines increase their pork consumption over time during the two centuries of the Iron Age I? None of the other groups that inhabited the greater expanse of the entire Near East at the time consumed such large quantities of pork. Indeed, the trend in Egypt over time appears to have been one militating more and more against the consumption of pork (Hecker 1982), at least among upper classes (cf. Lobban 1998, 141; Redding 1991). If cultural influences from another group were the deciding factor in this dietary shift, then we should see a decrease in the significance of pork in the Philistine diet after their settlement, and not an increase. After all, the adoption of Canaanite traditions and cultural eclecticism have been argued to have been responsible for the development of Philistine bichrome pottery at the very same time (e.g. Dothan 1982; Mazar 1990, 313–14, 327–8; 1992, 266–7; Bunimovitz and Yasur Landau 1996, 95–6; Stager 1998, 155; see also Dothan and Dothan 1992, 91–2, 258, and more below).

Ethnic self-identity, however, is a very complex process, and interaction between different groups does not necessarily lead to similarities in their material culture, or at least not in all material traits. Interaction may lead to similarities in many traits, but not in those traits that a group uses for demarcating itself in relation to the other (McGuire 1982; Hodder 1982; Faust 2006, 13–19, and references).

It seems that pork avoidance was a key trait for demarcating identity for the Israelites, and they defined themselves as *not* eating pork in order to differentiate themselves from the Philistines, a population who, as previously demonstrated, did regularly consume that meat. We argue, however, that the Philistines, too, did not consume pork only as what one might call a 'passive' habit – brought with them from the Aegean world. Even if this was the case during the first phase of their settlement in Canaan, they subsequently used this habit actively in their ethnic negotiations with their neighbours. As the interaction between Philistines and Israelites intensified – reaching a peak toward the end of the Iron Age I (eleventh century or early tenth century) – each became the ultimate 'other' for the rival group, the different, the stranger, and the enemy. Each group chose elements from its own culture – elements that were the diametric opposite of those of the other group – and used them to mark and symbolize the differences between the groups. The Philistine habit of consuming pork and the simultaneous (textual) prohibition and (archaeological) near absence of this meat (as is evidenced by the lack of pig bones) from the Israelite diet, even if it was simply a result of regional food habits that initially had nothing to do with ethnicity – and it appears that this was the case, as has been pointed out by many scholars⁶ – made pork an ideal component (along with other elements of course) in this

6 That pork consumption was not ethnically meaningful in the Aegean, see the above reference to Lev-Tov 2006. For

process of ethnic negotiation and boundary creation. As the interaction between the groups intensified, they needed to stress and demarcate the differences between them, and as the process of boundary maintenance intensified, each group stressed the habits that were different from those of the other group (cf. the processes described by Jones 1997). In such fashion each group invested new meanings in their traditions. As time and often hostile interactions went on, those habits became at first *de facto* and then perhaps conscious markers for the populations' differences.

It appears, therefore, that as the Iron Age I advanced, the importance of the Israelites as the Philistines' 'other' increased, and this led to the growing importance of pork in the Philistine diet. It is clear, therefore, that the changes in the consumption of pork in Philistia during the Iron Age I are indicative not only of their foreign origins, but also shed light on the process by which the highland population became the Philistines' ultimate 'other'. Thus, pork consumption at that time demarcated how the Philistines defined themselves in relation to this highland people. The Canaanite population that survived in the Shephelah and in the highlands also participated in this process, trying to forge a place for itself in relation to both groups, until finally assimilating and becoming Israelites (cf. Bunimovitz and Lederman 2006; 2008; the issue deserves a separate discussion).

Philistine pottery

But are faunal remains the only means by which we can analyse the process that the Philistine society went through? A closer examination of the archaeological record shows that other ethnically sensitive elements in the Philistine material culture went through similar processes during the Iron Age I, hence supporting the above reconstruction.

Various studies show that Philistine pottery – both monochrome and bichrome – was ethnically sensitive, and was used in the process of self-definition and the strategy of boundary maintenance (e.g. Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Faust 2006, and many references). This can be seen, for example, in the absence of Philistine monochrome pottery in Lachish (Bunimovitz and Faust 2001), and while this could theoretically have been attributed to other factors (Finkelstein 1995; 2000), such explanations fall short of explaining the complete absence of this pottery in Tel Batash (Mazar 1994, 251), Tel Beth-Shemesh (*ibid.*; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2008, 24) and Gezer (Dever 1998, 47–9; Na'aman 2000, 2–3). In all three sites, the monochrome Philistine pottery is absent, despite their close proximity to Ekron (all sites are much closer to Ekron than is Lachish), where this pottery is abundant (see also Bunimovitz and Faust 2001, 2). The almost complete absence of the Philistine bichrome pottery in one area at Tel Qasile (area A; Maisler 1950–1) and its abundance in another one (area C; Mazar 1980; 1985) also show that this pottery was culturally sensitive and was used in the process of boundary maintenance (see Mazar 1985, 123, 126–7; and also Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Faust 2006, 205–20). If this is so, then one can expect that given enough information on the percentage of Philistine pottery in the various Iron Age I levels, we will be able to identify the processes that the Philistine society went through during the Iron Age I, and not only the drastic changes it experienced with the transition to the Iron Age II, when this pottery disappeared (Dothan 1982; Mazar 1990, 328; Stone 1995; Ben Shlomo 2005, 185, and others; see also below).

groups that did not consume pork in ancient Israel, see Hesse and Wapnish 1997; see also Faust 2006, 35–40.

We will begin the discussion with the detailed information published from areas H and K at Ashdod. Ben-Shlomo (2005) recently published a quantitative analysis of the rim sherds unearthed in the various levels of these areas (Fig. 3). In stratum XIII, which is dated to the early twelfth century, some 73 per cent of the vessels were in Canaanite tradition, and only 24 per cent were of Philistine style – monochrome and bichrome alike (Ben Shlomo 2005, 70, 78). In stratum XII, which is dated to the twelfth century BC, 52 per cent of the pottery was in the local tradition, while 47 per cent was Philistine (Ben Shlomo 2005, 120). In stratum XI, dated to the eleventh century BC, the percentage of local pottery in the assemblage decreased to 41 per cent, while Philistine pottery increased significantly, reaching 58 per cent (Ben Shlomo 2005, 132, 161). Despite the fact that the percentage of Philistine pottery in Ashdod's assemblages increased steadily during the Iron Age I, this tradition disappeared almost completely in stratum X, dated to the tenth century BC. In Ben Shlomo's (2005, 185) words: 'Philistine Bichrome pottery is almost non-existent in Stratum X.'

This picture is supported by the available evidence from Ekron, which, although only partial, presents a similar pattern. Dothan, Gitin and Zukerman (2006, 92–3) note that the ceramic assemblage of stratum VIIB included mainly Canaanite forms, and only small amounts of Philistine pottery. In stratum VIIA, on the other hand, more than 50 per cent of the assemblage was Philistine pottery. Although they do not provide exact numbers or percentages, they note that most of the pottery in stratum VIA was Philistine (Dothan, Gitin and Zukerman 2006, 94), and that levels VC and VB are also characterized by a 'significant amount' of Philistine pottery (Dothan, Gitin and Zukerman 2006, 94). The lack of exact figures makes final conclusions difficult, but it seems that the evidence from Ekron is very similar to that of Ashdod, and that both show an increase in the percentage and thus importance of Philistine pottery during the Iron Age I.

Notably, although the information from Ashkelon is not yet published, the situation there is also apparently comparable, that is, the percentage of Philistine pottery in Ashkelon increases during the Iron Age I, until disappearing in the tenth century BC (Daniel Master, pers. comm.).

While it is important to await the publication of more data – both from additional sites and from other areas within the sites discussed above – it seems that we can already discuss the general patterns which, in our view, are quite clear. Similar to the evidence regarding the

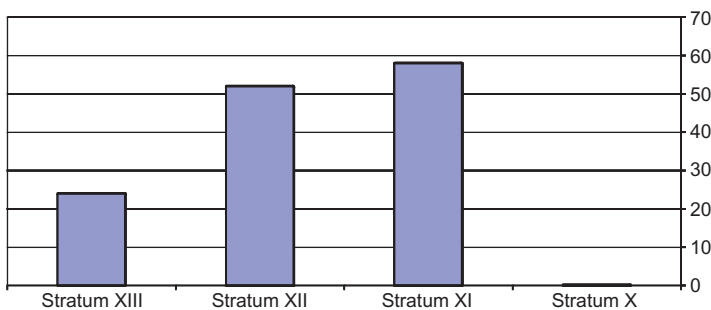


Figure 3

The percentage of Philistine pottery in the ceramic assemblage of Ashdod.

percentage of pork in Philistia, decorated Philistine pottery became more significant as the Iron Age I progressed, reaching a peak at the final stage of this era, before practically disappearing during the beginning of the Iron Age II.

It is interesting to note, therefore, that while the mere development of the bichrome pottery seems to show Canaanite (and other) influences (e.g. Dothan 1982; Mazar 1990, 313–14, 327–8; 1992, 266–7; Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau 1996, 95–6; Stager 1998, 155; see also Dothan and Dothan 1992, 89–92), this decorated pottery seems to have served as another marker of Philistine identity. It is therefore interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that its frequency increased during the Iron Age I.⁷

Discussion

The fact that the phenomena observed repeated themselves not only in different sites, but also in different media, strengthens the interpretation suggested here. That trend was first identified in pig-raising and pork consumption, and explained as the result of the Philistines' boundary demarcation. Yet it is also identified in the production (and consumption) of pottery, which on the basis of other lines of evidence appears to be ethnically sensitive, and it therefore supports the explanation set forward in this article. After all, if a similar pattern is identified in several aspects of material culture, then this tends to strengthen the archaeological context that verifies the interpretation (see also Hodder 1991). As Trigger (1995, 276) wrote (though in a different context): '(T)he convergence of the findings of several different and independent approaches provides a further, though not necessarily an infallible, warrant for the objectivity of the results.'

THE TRANSITION FROM THE IRON AGE I TO THE IRON AGE II AND THE PROCESS OF PHILISTINE ACCULTURATION

During the tenth century there were, as we have already seen above, drastic changes in the material culture in Philistine sites. Although this process deserves a more detailed treatment in its own right, a brief discussion is in order as it relates to the issues considered above.

The best known example is the Philistine pottery, which disappeared during the beginning of the Iron Age II (e.g. Dothan 1982; Mazar 1990, 328; see also Ben Shlomo, above), and the same is true, as we have seen, with regard to the habit of pork consumption. The Philistine script also vanished at some point, and the Canaanite–Phoenician–Hebrew script was adopted (e.g. Uziel 2007, 167), and, generally speaking, after using Aegean-style figurines in the Iron Age I, the Philistines 'reverted' to the use of Canaanite-style figurines in the Iron Age II (Ben-Shlomo 2009; see also Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009). It also seems that circumcision as a cultural-ethnic trait lost its significance, and the Philistines started to circumcise (Faust 2006, 88–91; cf. Herodotus, *Histories*, II:104). It appears, therefore, as if the boundaries which the Philistine society maintained for some 200 years were suddenly lowered. It is likely that this was a result of the different needs of Philistine society, and the changes in the form of interaction it had with its neighbours. After a number of generations in which the Philistines fought for the

7 We must stress that there is no contradiction, and traits that did not signal group identity 'crossed' ethnic boundaries, while more ethnically sensitive traits did not (cf. Faust's (2006) treatment of 'Israelite pottery').

hegemony of large parts of the country – at least with partial success – the Philistines seem to have lost the battle, at least culturally (and most likely also politically and economically, see below), and this had a significant impact on their society. The Philistines did not lose their identity, and were not assimilated (e.g. Gitin 1998; 2004), but many of the cultural traits which had been so significant to them for so long disappeared (Stone 1995; Uziel 2007).

It is clear, therefore, that the Philistine process of boundary maintenance drastically changed after the Iron Age I. From a foreign and different group – immigrants – that fought for hegemony over the southern Levant, the Philistines became one group among many, with no hope of hegemony over the entire region. Their relations to the other groups were reshaped, and their ethnic negotiation took a different form (below).

Following Stone (1995), we believe that the above changes were part of a process of acculturation – i.e. the Philistines adopted cultural traits from other groups, but without losing their separate identity (others favour the term Creolization (Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maeir 2004, 20) or fusion (Uziel 2007)). Whichever term is used, the process involved a change in the symbols of Philistine identity which were used during the first phases of their settlement. Many of these lost their meaning and importance, and were abandoned. The present study allows us to add a new layer to Stone's ground-breaking study. While a detailed discussion of the Philistine ethnic negotiation in the Iron Age II is well beyond the scope of this paper, and will be conducted elsewhere, the above shows not only that many of what were important traits during the Iron Age I were lost, but that acculturation was not a gradual process in which the Philistines gradually merged into (the) Levantine society(ies). The acculturation process was relatively abrupt, occurring after a long period during which ethnic and cultural boundaries were consistently *raised*. Should the process have been gradual, one might have expected the immigrants to have kept their boundaries for a generation or two, and then gradually allowed their cultural differences to lessen as they faded into the surrounding society. Since this was clearly not the case,⁸ the present study sheds light not only on the processes that the Philistines went through during the Iron Age I, but also draws new attention to their fate during the transition to the Iron Age II.

The causes of change

What was the cause of the Philistines' relatively sudden 'merging' into the local society? It seems that the internal processes which the Philistine society went through came about, at least to some extent, from external changes. The weakening of the military and political power of the Philistines, reflected quite clearly in the archaeological record,⁹ and indirectly in the biblical

8 We note that it is likely that many of the changes were gradual, and it is clear that they did not happen throughout Philistia at the same time and pace. Still, our study draws attention to the fact that something abrupt happened during the beginning of the Iron Age II, causing drastic changes over a relatively short period of time, and leading to additional changes, some of which were, in turn, gradual.

9 Archaeologically, this can be seen not only in the various destruction layers (no matter who was responsible for them; see, e.g., Dothan 1982; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 172–3, 181–3, 229, 252), but also by the diminishing size of many Philistine sites, as well as by a significant decrease in their numbers (see also, for example, Ehrlich 1996, 53–5; Gitin 2004, 60). This is even strengthened by the parallel process of Judahite/Israelite expansion, and the re-establishment of various sites (after settlement hiatus in the Iron Age I), e.g. at Lachish and Tel Zayit (Tappy 2008, 26–30, and references). The issue will be discussed at length elsewhere.

narratives as well,¹⁰ might be the background for those changes. The Philistines were weakened, and the separate city-states renegotiated their status. Their status changed not only in relation to the new state in the highlands which was probably (if we accept the biblical story in its general outlines) responsible for their decline, but also *vis-à-vis* the emergent economic hegemony of Phoenicia, with whom the Philistines were to have long relationships (and to a large extent cooperation) throughout the Iron Age II (Master 2003; 2009; see also Faust and Weiss 2005).

In this new environment, the high cultural boundaries which separated the Philistines from the Israelites and from other groups (and marked their foreignness) were unnecessary, and perhaps even meaningless, since the foreignness of the Philistines (i.e. being totally different) was no longer an advantage. Although we consider the political changes to be the major factor leading to the changes in the Philistine 'symbolic' world and for the sharp decrease in the use of traits which were until this period ethnic markers that were used to keep high boundaries with other groups, a good case can be made for the importance of economic factors. Thus, for example, in addition to political changes, foreignness in the Iron Age II may have even become economically disadvantageous, in that by raising animals not consumed by neighbouring peoples, the Philistines left themselves isolated from regional trade (see Lev-Tov in press b). Given the growing importance of the economic contacts with the Phoenicians, it is clear why cultural boundaries including a heavy investment in swine pastoralism become a problem. There is some evidence to suggest that the Phoenicians were interested in trading their renowned craft goods for agricultural staples (Revere 1957, 55–6). As Dothan (1995, 53) and Gitin (1998, 162, 167) have observed, Phoenician goods formed some of the principal imports during the Iron Age II, at least at Ekron (for Ashkelon, see Master 2003; 2009). Possibly, these goods were obtained by the Philistine city-states in exchange for agricultural produce raised on the coastal plain of the southern Levant. However, in order to make the trade attractive to the Phoenicians, the Philistines would have had to supply them with the produce they desired to eat. As Vila and Dalix (2004) show, although wild boars were hunted in Ugarit and in Lebanon, bones from domesticated pigs are quite rare in that region. Thus, the Philistines may have sought to supply those with whom they traded with the agricultural produce desired, and so diverted their economy from a mixed swine–cattle–sheep/goat regime to one in which sheep, especially, predominated, followed by cattle and supplemented with a comparatively small number of pigs.

Although the issue exceeds the scope of this article, we would like to note that, in addition to the changes in animal husbandry (see also Lev-Tov in press b), the new pottery that was adopted in Philistia in the tenth century might also be interpreted in the same light. The adoption of the Ashdod Ware style (see Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maeir 2004), which was clearly influenced by Phoenician decoration, suggests that the Philistines were now looking in this direction. Although less decisive a piece of evidence, the probable adoption of the 'local' script in the Iron Age II might also be viewed as aimed at facilitating integration into the regional economy.

Still, we must note that some of the above-mentioned changes, e.g. in religious practices (as expressed in the figurines) and the adoption of circumcision, as well as some other traits,

10 The military defeat of the Philistines is mentioned only in a few cases, e.g. II Kings 5: 17–25, but their overall weakening is also reflected (in addition to the archaeological evidence) in their peripheral position in the biblical narratives relating to the Iron Age II, and the expansive boundaries of the Kingdom of Israel/Judah at the time (e.g. I Kings 4: 7–19; see also Singer 1994, 325–6; Stager 1998, 170–1; Ehrlich 1996, 23–56, and additional references).

cannot directly be attributed to the economic relations with Phoenicia, such that the changes were also cultural and symbolic. Moreover, most of the changes were very abrupt, and it is unlikely that only economic changes would have led to such a rapid abandonment of traits that were common for so many years, and whose importance even grew over the generations. It is therefore likely that a number of factors contributed to the quick process in which many Philistine traits were lost in the early Iron Age II. The first, and probably most significant factor, was the weakening of the military and political status of the Philistines, and the fact that from a leading Iron Age I power they were relegated to a minor role in the political arena of the Iron Age II. This was accompanied by economic changes, and mainly the rise in the economic importance of Phoenicia. It appears that many of the new material symbols were inspired by that culture area.

Whichever exact reconstruction was the case, it is clear that the Philistines ceased using former symbols such as Aegean-influenced decorative motifs on pottery and abandoned habits like pork consumption. They instead adopted new symbols derived from the local syntax. The exact process in which those changes took place, however, is beyond the scope of the current article.¹¹

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The process through which the Philistines became 'part' of the Levantine societies has received a great deal of scholarly attention since Stone's (1995) ground-breaking study. The present article suggests, on the basis of various lines of evidence, that the progression was not gradual and that the process of Philistine 'integration' or acculturation did not start soon after their settlement. We suggest that, due to various processes of boundary maintenance, the Philistines maintained clear boundaries with their neighbours for at least 150–200 years, before (quite suddenly) losing most of their unique traits.

Indeed, various lines of evidence indicate that the Philistines – a foreign immigrant people that were very different from the local groups which existed in the region during the twelfth century BC – gradually saw the Israelites, or what became Israel at this time, as their main 'other'. As the interaction between those groups intensified, and the struggle between them deepened, both groups raised the boundaries between them, and the cultural traits which had previously distinguished them became more pronounced. It seems that the process peaked in the late eleventh or early tenth century BC, by which point the Philistines used their ethnic traits more extensively (or intensively) than in the past. This can be seen in the increase in their consumption of pork, as well as in the usage of bichrome-style pottery.

This is not the place for an extensive discussion concerning the possible implications of the present argument for our understanding of the first phase of Philistine settlement, as it is not within the main focus of the present article. Nonetheless, the possibility should be mentioned

11 If the suggested scenario is correct at least in its general outlines, then the unique position of Gath (e.g. with regard to faunal remains, as no decline in pig bones in the early Iron Age II was identified there; see Lev-Tov in press a) needs an explanation, which seems to lie with the city's location at the border between Philistia and Israel/Judah. Gath was the largest Philistine city on the eastern periphery of Philistia (especially in the tenth century BC). It is possible that due to the regular contact with the Israelites, ethnic boundaries were more visible here also during the beginning of the Iron Age II. Still, due to the partial nature of the data from Gath, any conclusion is premature, and we need to await more data before we can develop any detailed historical scenario to explain the finds there.

that the Philistines did not arrive as a homogeneous group with a single identity, and regardless of their origins and composition, the confrontation with their neighbours was a decisive factor in the creation of a Philistine identity.¹² It is most likely that the Egyptians were their principal enemy during the first generation of their settlement (e.g. Stager 1998; Bunimovitz and Faust 2001), but it is clear that their main enemy, which significantly influenced their material symbols during most of the Iron Age I, was the Israelite population of the highlands.

In the early Iron Age II, however, ethnic boundaries were rapidly de-emphasized, although the Philistines maintained a separate identity. It should be noted that while the above-described changes in Philistine boundary maintenance probably lasted many generations, the relatively rapid collapse of the traditional boundaries is remarkable, as it was not a result of a gradual process (even if some other changes that occurred after the initial collapse were gradual). We suggest that the most likely explanation for this drastic change was that the Philistines lost the 'battle' for military and political hegemony over the region, and from that point on their boundary maintenance was not that of a group seeking dominance, but rather of a group, consciously different from others, wishing to deal with the surrounding polities or ethnic groups on various terms acceptable to all. The foreignness of the Philistines was no longer an advantage, and the Philistines relatively rapidly abandoned their 'foreign' symbols.

Finally, we would like to reiterate that there were probably differences in the way the various ethnic traits were employed between different Philistine settlements, and even within them. The publication of more data will allow scholars to identify many subtleties in the processes of Philistine boundary maintenance, learn about the differences among the Philistines, and the relations of the various communities with the Israelites and other groups. We believe, however, that the general outlines proposed here will serve as the basis for this future analysis.

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12 It is likely that at least some portion of the Canaanite population was assimilated into this group (cf. A. Mazar 1986; Bunimovitz 1990; Stager 1998). If this was indeed the case, and the groups that arrived at the southern coastal plain of Israel did not have a common identity before their arrival, then the situation in which they found themselves, confronting other groups, is precisely the context in which new identities are expected to be created (see also Stein 2005, 27–8).

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