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ON THE CONSTITUTION AND TRANSFORMATION OF PHILISTINE IDENTITY

Summary. Recent discussion of the formation and alteration of Philistine identity in the Levantine Iron Age continues to reference primarily pottery styles and dietary practices. Such traditional narratives propose that the Philistines comprised one group of the ‘Sea Peoples’ and that the cultural boundary markers that distinguished their society in the Iron Age I (twelfth–eleventh century BC) diminished in importance and disappeared suddenly in the early Iron Age IIA (tenth century BC), with the ascendancy of the Judahite kingdom. Based on data from the Levant (especially Philistia), the Aegean and Cyprus, we argue for a more complex understanding of the Philistines who came to the region with an identity that drew on, and continued to engage with, a broad range of foreign artefact styles and cultural practices with non-Levantine connections. Concurrently they incorporated local cultural attributes, at least until the late ninth century BC, a feature that we argue was unrelated to the supposed tenth century expansion of the Judahite kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent study in this journal, Faust and Lev-Tov (2011) present a traditional narrative, arguing 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’ (p. 14), and that the strong foreign attributes, which served to separate them from other Levantine groups, are attested in Philistine culture only in the first 150–200 years after their arrival in the Levant. From the early tenth century BC onwards these foreign ‘boundary’ markers were no longer employed, ‘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’ (Faust and Lev-Tov 2011, 27).

As will be demonstrated below, these views are hard to accept and show little cognizance of much recent development in the study of the Philistines, despite the excavation and/or publication of four out of the five major cities of the Philistine ‘Pentapolis’, located in south-western Israel, on or abutting the Mediterranean coast (Fig. 1): Tel Miqne-Ekron (e.g.



Figure 1
Map of the eastern Mediterranean with sites mentioned in the text.

Meehl *et al.* 2006), Ashdod (e.g. Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005), Ashkelon (Stager *et al.* 2008a; 2011) and Tell es-Safi/Gath (e.g. Maeir 2012c). Likewise, smaller Philistine sites in this region have yielded important remains, such as Yavneh (Kletter *et al.* 2010), Nahal Patish (Nahshoni 2009; Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009) and Qubur al-Walaydah (Berlejung and Lehmann 2010; Lehmann 2011), while to the north of Philistia, other Levantine regions (e.g. Gilboa 2006–2007; Harrison 2009) have revealed finds relevant to our understanding of the ‘Sea Peoples’ phenomenon. With recourse to data from these Levantine assemblages (especially our excavations at Tell es-Safi/Gath in Philistia), as well as the Aegean and Cypriot archaeological record, we will focus on three central topics and demonstrate why, in our opinion, the traditional account presents an oversimplified schema of the emergence and transformation of Philistine culture, a process that requires a more subtle, multivalent and complex narrative.

PHILISTINE ETHNICITY

Traditional narratives assert that the Philistines were *one group* of the so-called Sea Peoples and privilege an Aegean component (Dothan 1982, 14; Yasur-Landau 2010; Faust and Lev-Tov 2011). Here, we follow Stockhammer (2012, 49) who recognizes that the terms ‘Philistine’, as well as ‘Mycenaean’ and ‘Canaanite’, are conventional, present-day analytical terms referring to archaeological cultures, and that their use falls back on ideas of essentialism and purity. Yet this is far from what the archaeological evidence suggests. As we will detail below, current research shows that early Philistine culture and identity drew on a plethora of social and cultural practices that were heterogeneous and multi-regional. Moreover, this culture may have undergone a complex ‘ethnogenesis’ (e.g. Emberling 1997; Hall 2000; Spickard and

Burroughs 2000; Voss 2008) or ‘transcultural’ processes (Hitchcock 2011a), perhaps similar to that claimed for ancient Israel (e.g. Killebrew 2005; Faust 2007), or a complex ‘hybridization’ process similar to that of early Iron Age Cyprus (e.g. Knapp 2008; Voskos and Knapp 2008; Russell 2009; but see Iacovou 2008) and Late Bronze Age Crete (Kanta and Kontopodi 2011; Hitchcock in press a). The result was encounters, entanglements, appropriations and merging of numerous constituent groups, due to shared economic and/or socio-political interests, each with its own characteristics. Sorting out these varying relations goes beyond the scope of this paper, whose purpose is to initiate debate and promote future research into a range of issues relating to Mediterranean identity. As discussed below, cultural interaction is demonstrated in Philistine culture by the presence of extensive links to many different worlds that served as conceptual and physical sources of material goods and religio-cultural practices: Cypriot (Cypro-Minoan script, hearths, bi-metallic knives, bronze stands, seal styles, pottery styles), Anatolian (hearths, personal names, pottery styles), Mycenaean (cooking jugs, preference for hearths, pottery styles, personal names, loom weights, figurine styles), Minoan (sacrificial practices and ritual activity, seal use, iconography, pottery motifs, plaster technology), south-central European (e.g. Edelstein and Schreiber 2000; Wachsmann 2000; Sherratt 2003) and possibly even Italian (handmade burnished ware (‘barbarian ware’), e.g. Karageorghis 2011; Pilides and Boileau 2011).

As in many deliberations on ethnicity, Faust and Lev-Tov’s recent argument regarding Iron Age Philistine and Israelite identities relies on Barth’s (1969) observation that ethnic groups define themselves in relation to, and in contrast with, other groups. While, they (Faust and Lev-Tov 2011; see as well Faust 2007) contend that the establishment of a counter-culture or a counter-religion¹ may have served as a means of defining Israelite identity, we will argue that Philistine identity was initially focused on maintaining cohesion and preserving continuity with its own past and not with the establishment of an identity *vis à vis* local Levantine populations. Once this identity was established, more dynamic changes followed, including the ongoing incorporation of local features, as they achieved a sense of social connectedness while still drawing on past symbolic behaviours.²

Ceramic evidence

Faust and Lev-Tov (2011, 22) acknowledge that identifying ethnic identity is a complex process that should take into account a range of evidence, but like so many previous studies on ethnicity in the archaeological record, at the end of the day, their study falls back on privileging the pottery evidence. However, as analyses of appropriation and use have shown, changes in the style of material culture do not always indicate a change in ethnic identity, and that objects and symbols from one culture can become entangled in the social processes and symbolic behaviour of another (e.g. Maran 2004; Casella and Fowler 2005; Hitchcock 2011a; Lehmann 2011; Stockhammer 2012; see also below). Thus, it is critical to look beyond superficial stylistic details of objects in order to examine how they are contextually incorporated into the social structure of

1 On counter-religions, see Assmann (1998). This issue is beyond the scope of the current paper.

2 On the phenomenology of static versus dynamic social structures in society, see Haggis (in press). See Knapp (2008) and Hitchcock (2011a) for a nuanced discussion of acculturation and hybridization processes, whereby identity is a result of an ongoing network of interacting cultures, and the mixture of groups results in something entirely new (Knapp) or transcultural (Hitchcock).

a culture, or, using the well-known terms of Bourdieu (1977), one must attempt to define the various manifestations of *habitus* and their concomitant *practice*.

Even more problematic is that Faust and Lev-Tov (2011, 22) primarily emphasize the ceramic evidence from just one site – Ashdod. Although they acknowledge ‘the likelihood that there were differences between the various cities in Philistia, and perhaps even between neighbourhoods within the cities themselves’ (p. 14), the implications of this ‘regionalism’ (as will be described below) are ignored in their account of ‘Philistine culture’, as is the fact that given so much regional variation it is clearly problematic to rely on finds from a single site or on one or even two classes of material culture. In our view, the study of Philistine identity requires a critical stance that resists essentialist conceptions of identity, while emphasizing its fluidity and taking into account that which is seemingly marginal (e.g. Knapp 2008; Hitchcock 2011a; Stockhammer 2012).³ For example, the appearance of locally made Mycenaean IIIC (Myc IIIC (= ‘Philistine I’)) pottery in the Levant is, in the majority of cases, justifiably regarded as one of the markers of the initial settlement of the Sea Peoples, the Philistines being among them (see, e.g., Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Dothan and Zukerman 2004; Maeir 2005). However, it should be stressed that Myc IIIC pottery was widely manufactured around the Mediterranean (Italy, Anatolia, north Syria) but it was marked by different regional traditions in design and use (e.g. Deger-Jalkotzy and Zavadil 2007; Lehmann 2009). It serves in the Levant as just *one marker* of Philistine identity, not the only one.

We believe that an additional note of caution is warranted regarding the use of the decorated Philistine pottery as a definitive indicator for the ‘Philistineness’ of a site. As noted previously (Maeir 2012a, 20), earlier attempts to assess the amount of Philistine pottery at a given site in a given context are often based on the relative percentages of decorated Philistine pottery (e.g. Bunimovitz and Lederman 2011a, 42–4; Faust and Lev-Tov 2011, 21–3). One should keep in mind that this decorated pottery visually stands out in comparison to other types of non-decorated pottery. Since it is clear that there are important non-decorated types of pottery which are unique to the Philistine pottery assemblage, and may have been of symbolic importance as well (such as the cooking jugs and other nondescript types; see, e.g. Zukerman 2012, 299–301), we wonder both what is the statistical validity of such ‘counts’, and whether the methodological approach of counting the decorated versus the undecorated pottery introduces a bias which gives preferential significance to the decorated pottery that might not have existed in the past.

Dietary practices

Faust and Lev-Tov (2011, 20–1) argue that a central component of Philistine–Israelite identity revolved around the consumption of pork, and support its having been imbued with cultural and symbolic significance, with the Israelite rejection of pork a contributing factor to the

3 Faust (e.g. 2007; 2010) has detailed a much more elaborate understanding of the material correlates relating to Israelite ethnicity, even if (as, e.g., Green (2009), Lehmann (2011, 297) and Master (2011, 264) have pointed out) he perhaps over-emphasizes the role of boundary maintenance in this definition, at the expense of noticing more subtle contexts in which these ‘boundaries’ were consciously crossed by those who according to a simplistic interpretation would be defined simply as ‘Israelite’ or ‘Philistine’. Even if we do not fully agree with his definitions of the Israelite ethnos – it is a multivalent interpretive framework; a similar recognition of the complex picture of the emergence and transformation of the Philistines’ cultural and ethnic definitions is called for.

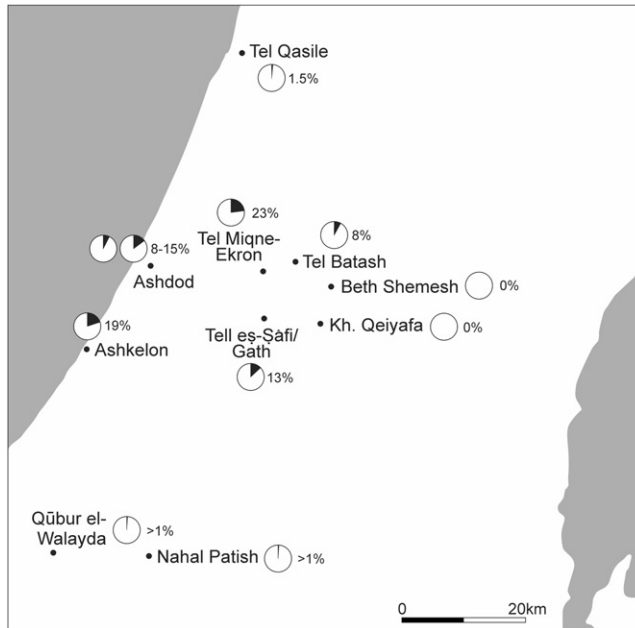


Figure 2

Map of Iron Age Philistia and Judah with frequency of pig bones at various Philistine sites and non-Philistine sites (see references in text for sources of data).

coalescence of the latter's identity. As evidence, they cite the high pig frequencies of over 20 per cent (based on individual bone counts (NISP)) at the Philistine sites of Ashkelon and Tel Miqne-Ekron (Hesse 1990; Lev-Tov 2006), relative to the insignificant number of pig remains, or their absence, in Late Bronze Age Canaanite settlements, Iron I sites in the highlands, or in sites located in the border zone between Philistia and the hill country (e.g. Hesse 1990; Hellwing and Adjeman 1986; Hellwing *et al.* 1993; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2009; 2011a; Kehati 2009; Tamar 2010). However, they neglect to acknowledge that (a) sheep, goat and cattle served as the dietary mainstay of Philistine and non-Philistine communities alike, and (b) other potential constraining or directing factors associated with pig-keeping need to be considered, as discussed at length by Hesse and Wapnish (1997; 1998) and Zeder (1996). For example, there were possible physiological–environmental constraints since pigs are obligate drinkers and require higher quality food than sheep/goat because they cannot consume raw cereals. In this regard, we refer to data on Iron I pig frequencies, which demonstrate that these are not constant but vary widely between coeval Philistine sites (Fig. 2). Although extremely high pig frequencies (*c.* 20 per cent or more) are found in sites on the Israeli coastal plain (Ashkelon, Tel Miqne-Ekron), even in this region a broad range is evident, with the coastal site of Ashdod yielding between 15–8 per cent pigs, in Strata 12 and 11 respectively (Maher 2005), but Philistine Tel Qasile having only 1.5 per cent pig remains (Davis 1985). At Tell es-Safi/Gath, located at the interface between the coastal plain and the hill country, pigs comprise 13 per cent of the Iron I fauna (Lev-Tov 2012, 596–7), while Tel Batash, located in a similar setting, has yielded only 8 per cent pigs; at southern Philistine sites, the Nahal Patish temple (Nahshoni 2009; pers. comm.) and the

small village of Qubur el-Walaydah in the northern Negev (Maher 2010), pigs represent less than 1 per cent of the faunal assemblage, a similar low frequency to that observed in coeval Israelite sites (e.g. Hellwing and Adjeman 1986; Hesse 1990; Hellwing *et al.* 1993; Kehati 2009; Tamar 2010).⁴ Thus, it is very feasible that ecological, economic or functional factors, or a mixture of them, rather than ethnicity, were responsible for the relatively high frequencies of pigs in some Philistine sites and their dearth in others – Philistine and Israelite settlements alike. However, by Faust and Lev-Tov's ethno-centric reasoning, the two northern Negev sites should be reclassified as Israelite despite the abundance of Philistine painted pottery and other typical objects at these sites (Nahshoni 2009; Berlejung and Lehmann 2010; Lehmann 2011). Although Faust and Lev-Tov (2011, 14, footnotes 2 and 3) attempt to dismiss the 'deviant' sites as resulting from small samples (e.g. Ashdod) or as representing as yet unexplained exceptions (e.g. Tell es-Safi/Gath in the Iron IIA which continues to have high quantities of pig bones), the number of 'non-typical' Philistine sites with low pig numbers is now almost equal to that of 'typical' Philistine sites with abundant pig remains. Clearly, factors other than a 'Philistine *ethnos*' are at work when it comes to pig-keeping and consumption.⁵ This is further emphasized in the search for precedents of pig-raising and consumption in Aegean/Cypriot sites (e.g. Lev-Tov 2006), since, just as in the Levant, pork was *not* uniformly consumed across the Myc IIIC-producing world. For example, pig frequencies vary between Late Bronze Age sites on Cyprus (e.g. none in Myrtou and Kouklia, few in Athienou and Kition, but abundant in Maa-Palaeokastro – see, e.g., Zeuner 1958; Croft 1988; Reese 2005; 2010; Yasur-Landau 2010, 295–9), while their remains are generally less common in Cypriot sites than on the Greek mainland, with the latter sites exhibiting pig frequencies of 15 per cent and higher. But even amongst the mainland sites, this relative abundance of pig exhibits significant inter-site variation, with some sites containing 15 per cent pigs and others nearly double that (e.g. von den Driesch 1987; Halstead 1996; Lipovitch 2006–2007; Reese 2010). Researchers such as Yasur-Landau (2010, 299) have observed that in several Greek mainland sites, such as Tiryns LHIIB2/LHIIIC Developed, similar high proportions of pig and cattle are found as in sites in Philistia. However, as he correctly notes, it still needs to be tested whether this resemblance derives from shared socio-economic, political or ecological conditions rather than assuming that this region was the source area for Philistine migrants.

It has been suggested that dog meat was consumed in Philistia, albeit in small quantities (e.g. Stager *et al.* 2008b, 257). For example, at Ashkelon the skeletons of two puppies buried in a pot, which had been used as a foundation deposit, exhibited butchery marks characteristic of skinning (Stager *et al.* 2008b, 266), while dog bones bearing cut marks were found at Tel Mique-Ekron (Dothan 2002, 17). There is some evidence for the consumption of dog flesh in Late Bronze–Iron Age sites in the Aegean (e.g. Klippel and Snyder 1991; Snyder and Klippel 2003; Lipovitch 2006–2007) and it is possible, although the current Levantine data are equivocal, that this practice was introduced into Philistia from the Aegean.

4 It is common knowledge that the manner in which faunal assemblages were collected may influence species frequencies. However, all Levantine assemblages discussed here were primarily hand-collected. In this regard, even for the small-sized samples it is predicted that pig and sheep/goat skeletal elements, being of similar size, would have been equally recognized and collected, while an over-representation of larger-sized cattle and equids may be expected.

5 To this one can add the abundant pig remains reported at Iron I Tel Kinrot (in the Jordan Valley, north of the Sea of Galilee), a site clearly not of Philistine orientation. See Münger *et al.* 2011, 86.



Figure 3

View of Philistine pebbled hearth from Tell es-Safi/Gath, Area A, Stratum A4, Locus 111222 (late Iron Age I/early Iron Age IIA).

Archaeobotanical evidence from Late Bronze Age and Iron Age sites such as Ashkelon (Weiss *et al.* 2011), Tel Miqne-Ekron, Tel Qasile and Tel Batash (Kislev and Mahler-Slasky 2010) indicates the presence of locally grown crops and fruits, but the grass pea lentil (*Lathyrus sativus*), a staple of Aegean communities, has been recovered only from Philistine sites. Its absence in Canaanite and other Iron Age sites in the southern Levant (Kislev and Mahler-Slasky 2010) demonstrates that it was probably intentionally imported into Philistia.

With regard to animal husbandry and diet, the picture from Philistia largely resembles that of other Levantine communities, with regional variations in pork frequencies feasibly dictated by factors other than socio-political ones. Alongside these local dietary components are traditions which may have originated in the Aegean – the consumption of dogs and the grass pea lentil.

Cooking techniques

Faust and Lev-Tov (2011) assess the cooking activities of the Philistines in terms of the use of cooking jugs and hearths. Yasur-Landau (2010, 329) has shown that the cooking jugs used were particularly associated with mainland Greece, while the tripod cooking pots associated with Crete remain unattested in Philistia. Similarly, the coeval use of foreign cooking jugs and local-type cooking pots is observed at several of the Philistine sites, while absent at others (see comments by, e.g., Ben-Shlomo 2011; Lehmann 2011; Master 2011; Yasur-Landau 2011).

The appearance of hearths in early Iron Age Philistia is often seen as an indication of the Aegean origin of the Philistines. Maeir and Hitchcock (2011) have shown that there is a great deal of regional variability with regard to Philistine hearth construction. The pebbled hearth that characterizes so many of the hearths in the interior of Philistia, particularly at Tel Miqne-Ekron and Tell es-Safi/Gath (Fig. 3), is thus far absent in the Aegean, but had a limited presence in Cyprus. Most Aegean hearths from the late Mycenaean and post-palatial era were made of burnt

clay, with a few examples of pebbles, sherds and clay. In contrast, most hearths in coastal Philistia are constructed of clay, clay and pebbles, or clay and sherds. They varied in shape, being round, square, ovoid, or keyhole-shaped (Maier and Hitchcock 2011).

In the interior of Philistia, there was a tendency for pebble hearths to be placed outdoors (e.g. at Tell es-Safi/Gath and at Tel Miqne-Ekron (Dothan 1998a, 157) most hearths occur in open areas). The outdoor setting of many others may be linked to function, perhaps to roasting, as has been suggested for MB Beth Shean (Mullins and Mazar 2006, 54–60).⁶ Another possibility is that locating hearths in open, outdoor areas in the interior of Philistia may have promoted larger, communal gatherings. Such gatherings could have occurred within the context of feasting that included drinking sets consisting of kraters and bell-shaped or deep bowls, which were broken and deposited in rubbish dumps (Hitchcock and Horwitz 2010). The location of hearths, undergoing regular renewal, in large, open areas associated with rubbish deposits containing animal bones, decorated drinking ware, and fragments of ritual objects suggests the following scenario: Philistines gathering for the consumption of meat and wine, with great emphasis on the display of Philistine drinking sets containing familiar Mycenaean motifs such as spirals. The meat consumed may have been flavoured with condiments, thereby heightening the experience, as indicated by the discovery of grape seeds in a tenth century hearth at Tell es-Safi/Gath with small basalt grinding implements. As the remains of these gatherings were placed in pits or dumps, a fragmentary symbolic object such as a figurine fragment might be deposited, and participants might keep tokens such as painted vessel fragments as a memento of the event. The practice of symbolic deposition and memorialization is known as *enchainment*, the establishment of lasting bonds between people and objects by depositing part of an object and retaining part as a means of memorializing a special event, a feature that characterizes pits in LM IIIC Crete (Driessen *et al.* 2008, esp. 7–8). The subsequent construction of superimposed hearths might represent acts by members of the community, who renewed these features as a means of promoting their status within the community. Such displays and performances of sociality heightened by alcohol consumption would have fostered nostalgia, strengthened community bonds, and/or promoted the status of particular individuals as has been argued for Mycenaean feasts (e.g. Hamilakis 1996a; 1996b; Bendall 2004; Hitchcock *et al.* 2008; Hitchcock 2012).

In contrast to Tell es-Safi/Gath, hearths in coastal sites, most noticeably Ashkelon, were less ritualized, in that there is greater variability in terms of their construction, and most of the hearths at Ashkelon were located indoors. At both Ashkelon and Ashdod, hearths tend to dominate rectangular halls, and doorways are always in the corner when evident, a characteristic that is more prominent in Minoan structures than in Mycenaean ones (McEnroe 2010, 143, 151, 153; Hayden 1981, 4). On the other hand, at Qubur el-Walaydeh, a small rural site with a clearly ‘Philistine’ material assemblage (e.g. pottery, cylindrical loom weights, etc.), hearths were not found at all (Lehmann 2011, 297); however, open spaces for gathering assumed importance early in its history.

6 Gaining a more precise understanding of how the hearths were used may help us in understanding the habits and customs of the Philistines, a key component of their identity. The Ph.D. dissertation research presently being conducted by Shira Gur-Arieh (Bar-Ilan University) may further elucidate the use and function of the Philistine hearths and related features. For initial results of this research, see Gur-Arieh *et al.* 2011; Gur-Arieh *et al.* 2012.



Figure 4

View of late Iron Age /early Iron Age IIA hydraulic plaster surfaces at Tell es-Safi/Gath, Area A, Stratum A4.
Upper surface – Locus 122034; lower surface – Locus 122036.

Technology

New technologies are evident in early Iron Age Philistia, and their foreign origin is quite clear. This is seen, *inter alia*, in pyrotechnology (see the hearths discussed above), the techniques of pottery production (Killebrew 1996), weaving (e.g. Yasur-Landau 2009) and, as will be discussed below, plaster technology.

Two superimposed layers of plaster discovered in the late Iron Age IA (late eleventh–early tenth century BC) levels at Tell es-Safi/Gath have been shown to constitute the earliest hydraulic plaster in the southern Levant (Regev *et al.* 2010, with references) (Fig. 4).⁷ The most convincing source for this technology is the Aegean region, where the earliest hydraulic plaster comes from Phaistos on Crete. Here it was used to create a platform covering the remains of the ‘First Palace’ prior to the construction of the ‘Second Palace’ in Middle Minoan III/Late Minoan IA (c.1700 BC; see Shaw 1971, 222–3, with references; Altavilla *et al.* 2006). In addition, a wide array of plastering technologies serving different purposes (roofing, wall painting, floors, courtyards, cisterns, mortar) was used in the Aegean (Shaw 2006, with references), and Chiotis *et al.* (2001) clearly demonstrate that some of these were hydraulic plasters. Furthermore, the use of mollusc shells as a source of aragonite, used as aggregate to fortify the Tell es-Safi/Gath plaster, is a technique that is well known in Aegean plaster technology (e.g. Brysbaert 2007).

Architecture

Like hearths, house construction shows regional variation within Philistia. Philistine house construction relied on local materials, while their form varied between the rectilinear shape of Mycenaean-influenced houses (the ‘Linear House’ of Aja 2009; Master and Aja 2011),

⁷ Save for a much earlier appearance in the Neolithic period (Goren and Goldberg 1991), there is a millennia-long lapse in the appearance of this technology in the Levant.

the *Korridorhaus* of Aegean origin (Yasur-Landau 2010, 270–81) and the pi-shaped or square-within-a-square plans found in Cyprus as at Pyla-Kokkinokremos and Maa-Palaeokastro (Hitchcock 2011b). House plans similar to Aegean and Cypriot examples from Iron I Philistia are found in Stratum 19, the twelfth century BC level at Ashkelon, in rooms 1023, 517 and 873 (Stager *et al.* 2008b).

These links to Cyprus are significant, as Pyla-Kokkinokremos and Maa-Palaeokastro are not regarded as typical sites of the Cypriot Late Bronze Age, but have been characterized as Sea Peoples' settlements or linked to a Mycenaean colonization of Cyprus at the end of the thirteenth century BC (e.g. Karageorghis 1998). In contrast, Knapp (2008, 137, 142) regards them as Cypriot outposts of larger urban centres, while admitting a variety of influences that he terms 'hybridized'. The house form at Pyla and in Building I at Maa has been shown to derive from one present on Cyprus since the Middle Bronze Age (Hitchcock 2011b). The dog-leg gate in the fortification at Maa, which has been compared to Mycenaean fortifications, has been shown to be based on a reconstruction as no evidence for dog-leg gates exists in Mycenaean architecture (Hitchcock 2008, 25, n. 43). However, megaroid-style (rectilinear with hearths) houses also occur at Maa-Palaeokastro along with exterior pebbled hearths, which may have some links to Philistine pebbled hearths (Maier and Hitchcock 2011). Arguing for these sites as purely local foundations or purely foreign intrusions belies the complexity of what was taking place there, and does not consider why there is a manipulation of Aegean and Canaanite artefacts and features alongside traditional Cypriot ones. Addressing these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, but they would benefit from a more intricate or transcultural approach, interrogating the significance of these features.

Textual evidence

The study of Philistine language and writing systems is immensely difficult. There is mounting evidence that the migrant Philistine population and their descendants probably spoke one, or more, foreign languages when they arrived in the Levant. Non-Semitic names and terms, appearing in Iron Age inscriptions and in the biblical narrative, as well as inscriptions in undeciphered scripts, point to languages belonging to the Indo-European family, with particular parallels to Mycenaean Greek and Luwian, but perhaps other languages as well – such as that represented by the undeciphered Cypro-Minoan script (on this see Maier *et al.* 2008, 33; Davis 2011). This evidence for varied language use among the Philistines fits well with that for mixed origins as seen in the material culture (above). The inscriptional material indicates that some of these non-local names and terms were still being used in the Iron Age IIA (Maier *et al.* 2008), and even until the very late Iron Age – whether the Aegean goddess name in the royal dedication inscription from Tel Mique-Ekron (Gitin *et al.* 1997),⁸ or the possible mention of the apparent non-Semitic term for a Philistine leader in the biblical text – 'seren' – in late Iron III Ashkelon (Cross 2008, 339; Zukerman 2011). At the very end of the Iron Age, at least in the known inscriptions, the Philistines used a language very similar to Iron Age Biblical Hebrew and Phoenician, but it is not clear at all that the foreign languages went out of use completely.

The writing systems which the Philistines used are even more problematic. Faust and Lev-Tov (2011, 23) suggest that the Philistine script vanishes. However, thus far, all we have is

8 For a different view on the problems with interpreting the name of the goddess PTGYH that appears in this inscription, see Berlant (2008) and Press (2012).

a very small assortment of inscriptions written in a variety of scripts, possibly representing several different writing systems, most probably in different languages, some of which are undeciphered. Those that do appear to be *bona fide* inscriptions, the 'Cypro-Minoan' inscription from Ashkelon (Cross and Stager 2006) and the Aphek tablet (Singer 2009), are undeciphered. Although the Aphek tablet is somewhat related to Minoan Linear A in the manner in which it renders the number combination for nine (5+4; see Singer 2009), it is not Linear A. Likewise, the connection between the Ashkelon inscription and Cypro-Minoan has been questioned (Hirschfeld 2009; Davis 2011). Two additional possible inscriptions from Ashdod (Stieglitz 1977) have been shown to be designs and not inscriptions (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, 166). As to the supposed Sea Peoples' inscriptions from Deir Alla in the Jordan Valley (Franken 1964), they are most probably Semitic texts (e.g. Weippert 1966; Knauf 1976).

This handful of inscriptions may very well point to the presence of a limited number of scribes of different ethnic origins, skill levels, and varieties of training, not to an ethnic group. In addition, the presence of a language does not automatically equate with ethnicity as indicated by the way Akkadian and Aramaic functioned in the ancient world. One inscription does not reveal the Philistine writing system and it is problematic to conflate the Aegean linear scripts (Linear A, Linear B and Cypro-Minoan) and other less-known scripts. The undeciphered Cypro-Minoan script is derived from Minoan Linear A. Linear A was probably a non-Indo-European language and the language it was used to represent is distinct from Linear B, an early form of Greek (e.g. Chadwick 1987, 47). Thus, deriving a linguistic conclusion about the ethnicity of the Philistines based on Cypro-Minoan is improbable (*contra* Cross and Stager 2006).

Writing in the Aegean was a limited and exclusive activity that was linked to palatial or high level administration.⁹ In Crete, the use of Linear A extended to ritual inscriptions, but it is believed that these were also connected to palatial authority (Karetsou 1981; Marinatos 1993, 116–17). Writing disappeared with the destruction of the Aegean palace systems because it did not play a role in the life of the average person, and once the palaces were destroyed, there was no need for, or reason to write or keep, records. It is quite possible that if Aegean scribes survived the destruction of the Mycenaean palace system, they turned to another livelihood and their scribal knowledge was not handed down to the next generation.

That a Cypro-Minoan scribal tradition survives into the Iron Age, despite the small size of the Cypro-Minoan corpus, is quite remarkable and suggests either less political disruption on Cyprus than we see in the Aegean, or the ability of Cypro-Minoan scribes to continue plying their trade.¹⁰ The attestation of Cypro-Minoan inscriptions in Ugarit suggests that Cypro-Minoan scribes may have been more mobile, and this may have been a contributing factor to the survival of the script.

The Philistine inscriptions we have thus far do not point to widespread literacy in early or later Iron Age Philistia, the ethnic identity of the Philistines as a group, or to a Philistine language. What they do indicate is isolated scribal activity by a handful of individuals from different scribal traditions that have created a limited corpus of inscriptions. As scribes frequently executed documents on behalf of a non-literate patron, it is quite possible that the writing system and/or languages used by Philistine scribes had nothing to do with the language spoken by the individual on whose behalf the inscription was executed. While one cannot deny

9 Approximately 1500 inscriptions and the rendering of 7000 signs are attested in Linear A (Younger 2005, 218), and 57,398 signs are attested in Linear B (Palaima 1989, 124).

10 Cypro-Minoan consists of fewer than 300 inscriptions and about 2500 signs (Younger 2005).

the possibility that the similarity between the inscription from Aphek, the Cypro-Minoan inscription from Ashkelon and Aegean/Cypriot writing systems hints at similarities between the original Philistine language(s) and those in use in the Aegean/Cypriot milieu, this cannot be taken for granted.

If we consider Philistine inscriptions as products of entanglement and interaction rather than assimilation at one extreme and colonization at the other, it becomes necessary to look at the script used, the language of the personal name, and the object, and to consider the function of the inscribed object. To take one example of how this might be understood, the earliest readable Cypro-syllabic inscription, a bronze spit dating to the eleventh–tenth century and inscribed ‘Opheltou’ or ‘belonging to Opheltas’,¹¹ might be seen as comparable to the Tell es-Safi/Gath ostrakon, in that it is rendering an Indo-European name in a foreign script, on a local bowl, according to both Cypriot and Levantine custom.¹² In the same manner, the ‘Cypro-Minoan’ inscription from Ashkelon becomes a record created by a Cypriot scribe on behalf of one or a small group of individuals.

Ritual, religion and iconography

Various religious and ritual facets representing a spectrum of non-local origins can be seen in the Philistine culture. This includes aspects relating to religious architecture, cultic paraphernalia such as figurines, and possible later inscriptional evidence of an Aegean-originating deity worshipped in late Iron Age Philistia (Gitin *et al.* 1997; Schäfer-Lichtenberger 1998; 2000; see though Press 2012). While most of these facets are seen in the Iron Age I, some of them clearly continue into the Iron IIA period and even beyond (see below).

Several Iron Age I sites in Philistia have yielded burials of complete or partial dogs, most in clearly ritual contexts: proximity to a cultic installation at Tel Mique-Ekron (Dothan 2002); interment in pots at Ashkelon (Stager *et al.* 2008b, 266); and in a separate room in Ashdod (Maher 2005). To date, no dog burials have been reported from contemporaneous Phoenician or Israelite sites in the Levant. Recently, Horwitz (2011) suggested that this ritual practice was introduced into the Levant from the Aegean (see Day 1984; Hamilakis 1996a), and was not an autochthonous development. It may also be related to the consumption of dog flesh, as discussed above.

The Philistine temples from Stratum X at Tel Qasile (Mazar 1980) and Tel Mique-Ekron (e.g. Dothan 2003) share certain features in common with Canaanite, Cypriot and Mycenaean temples. These include a rectangular hall supported by columns, a platform and/or benches to display the cult figures and offerings, rooms in the rear to store ritual paraphernalia, possibly a corner doorway, and a substantial quantity of ritual material. Though lacking some of these features, a recently uncovered structure in the eastern side of Area A at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Fig. 5) (Stratum A6-A4) is most likely a temple (or if not, an elite building) with Aegean features. The Tell es-Safi/Gath structure was provisionally in use from the twelfth century BC through to the Iron IIA period (Maeir 2012a, 27, figs. 1.15–16). The presence of two finely worked column bases (worked masonry being rare in early Philistine contexts) in a squarish hall, evidence for communal gatherings taking place nearby to the west (see above), and continuity of practice with

11 Opheltou represents a Greek name in the genitive (see Karageorghis 1983, 59–76, no. 16, pl. 63.16, fig. 88.16; Sherratt 2003, 225–7).

12 See the comparable discussion of the Cypriot obelos in Knapp (2008, 288–9).



Figure 5

View, looking north-east, of the temple at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Area A, Strata A6-A4; spanning the Iron Age I). 1) The temple with two finely worked stone column bases in the centre of the structure. 2) Location of metallurgical area (Stratum A4). 3) Location of ninth century BC (Stratum A3) cultic corner.

a cult corner rich in ritual finds found in the ninth century BC levels immediately above it confirm its importance. Furthermore, it seems to have been associated with a metallurgical installation where both copper and iron production were taking place (Eliyahu-Behar *et al.* 2012). The relationship between these two features mimics a relationship between cult and metallurgy on Cyprus, which was well established (see, e.g. Knapp 1986) and also attested to a lesser degree in the Aegean (Hitchcock 2006).

In addition to its similarities to Aegean cultic structures, squarish halls with two column bases form the core of important elite complexes at Late Minoan IIIA Quartier Nu at Mallia (Driessen and Fiasse 2011) and at nearby Late Minoan IIIB Sissi in Crete (Gaignerot-Driessen 2011; Gaignerot-Driessen and Letesson 2011; Letesson 2011), where a cache of 60 reel-style loom weights were recently discovered (Driessen in press).

Temple Complex 650, a monumental eighth or seventh century BC temple from Tel Miqne-Ekron, replicates several design features of a Minoan palace including the hypostyle hall, colonnaded central court, and spatial syntax of a court leading to the ante-chamber of a throne room.¹³

A unique, lime-plastered installation with earthen core was recently discovered at Ashkelon, in a small room (#572) located off the entrance of a larger structure (Master and Aja 2011). It may claim the honour of being the earliest Philistine horned altar. Contextually, it finds its closest parallels in earlier Tylissos, House C, on Crete where plaster horns of consecration

¹³ On the dating of the inscription from Temple 650, see Gitin *et al.* 1997 as opposed to James 2005. Regarding the transmission of architectural details from an earlier period, see Prent's (2003; 2004) work on ruin cults in Crete as creating a context for preserving the cultural knowledge about Minoan architecture. The threshold with door sockets for double doors in Temple 650 is an Assyrian feature as is the great hall: the long, narrow rectangular room reconstructed as connecting to the ante-room for the throne room (Gitin *et al.* 1997, 3–4). On the spatial syntax of court, ante-room and throne room, see Graham (1964). Kamlah (2003) draws less convincing comparisons between Temple Complex 650 and Temple 1 at Kition, where the hypostyle hall is a free-standing structure, and Assyrian palaces which lack the colonnaded courtyard found in Temple Complex 650. See now Gitin 2012 for an Extended discussion of Temple 650, its parallels and dating.

were found in a small screened-off room within the 'pillar crypt' of the house, located just off the entrance way (Gesell 1985, 136), and at later Tel Miqne-Ekron where smaller horned altars carved from stone were similarly situated in an olive-oil producing area. Knowledge of such installations may be situated in cultural traditions passed down generationally and transmitted through pottery motifs (Briault 2007).¹⁴ Statistical analysis by Briault (2007, fig. 6, 254–5) has shown that horns of consecration received their widest distribution as a symbol in the post-palatial period in the Aegean. By this time, it was mainly transmitted as a pottery motif or rendered as a plastic attachment and used in domestic cult. Cult corners in domestic contexts are a common feature in Philistia throughout the Iron Age. A very early Iron Age example has been recently reported from Ashkelon (Master and Aja 2011).

The occurrence of notched animal scapulae at Philistine sites in the Levant is an imported Cypriot feature attested at Myrtou-Pighades and at Enkomi in the Late Bronze and early Iron Age. At Myrtou-Pighades in Cyprus, notched scapulae were found in cult corners in association with lumps of slag and a shovel covered with lumps of copper and slag (Hitchcock 2008, 319, with references), similar to the industrial association at Tell es-Safi/Gath between the notched scapulae and installations for oil, wine and textile production (Zukerman *et al.* 2007, 64–5). The presence of the scapulae in such structures may be taken as an example of what Burdajewicz (1990, 67) has termed 'sacred economy'. The bench with scapula and chalice at Tell es-Safi/Gath may even represent an industrial 'cult corner', which need not be located in an actual corner, but may simply be understood as a small area in a larger building where cult objects were located (e.g. Gilmour 1995, 15, 214–17). As discussed below, rhyta in the Aegean were used in libations related to the textile industry, based on their frequent association with loom weights. In the case of Building 23033, the chalice may similarly have been associated with ritual activities connected with incense burning (Gadot *et al.* submitted) and here linked to textile production. This provides another example of sacred economy as discussed above. Given that cult corners can be identified in Canaanite, Cypriot and Aegean culture, they would not be out of character at Tell es-Safi/Gath, and they, as well as the practice of notching scapulae, show continuity with the past rather than indicate acculturation (Hitchcock 2011b). These inhabitants at Tell es-Safi/Gath may have originated in Cyprus, had close ties with Cyprus, or wished to establish their prestige through referencing the foreign and exotic. They kept, or manufactured, the notched scapulae as tokens of memory and as a demonstration of specialized knowledge of Cypriot ritual.¹⁵ This idea is adapted from Stockhammer (2009), who has made a similar suggestion for room 8/00 in post-palatial Tiryns, based on the presence and display of objects from Cyprus, which would have been unusual items at Tiryns at this time.

Generally, Philistine seals may be seen as entangled in an Aegean tradition of seal usage. Though stylistically distinct from the rendering of Aegean seals, the Philistine practice of stamping and using seals administratively more closely resembles the Aegean practice than Cypriot practice, where seals were used as amulets and evidence for their sphragistic use is minimal (e.g. Reyes 2002; Webb 2002; Younger 2005, 217). The local production of Philistine

14 The recent discovery of a stone altar with two horns from Iron Age IIA Tell es-Safi/Gath (see Maeir 2012b) appears to strengthen the connection between the motif of the Minoan horns of consecration and Philistine cultic iconography.

15 It should be stressed that, as opposed to the common assumption in the past, ongoing connections between Philistia and Cyprus, throughout the Iron Age I and II, can be clearly demonstrated. See, e.g., Zukerman *et al.* (2007, 73–4); Yasur-Landau (2010, 262).

seals that are stylistically different from the Aegean might be explained more by an absence of migrant seal carvers and the appropriation of a local object in a foreign practice (e.g. Stockhammer 2012) than as evidence of assimilation or acculturation. The seal carving tradition in the Aegean declined in LH/LM IIIA2–B, with the cessation of carving hard stones, and ceased after IIIB, with continued use of heirloom seals, which only functioned as votives in the post-palatial period (Rehak and Younger 1998, 156, 170). Imported and imitation scarabs and scaraboids were also well known in Minoan Crete (cf. Phillips 2008, 106–34), and it has been suggested that Minoan sealing practices were inspired by Egypt and the Near East, whereby a multiplicity of sealing practices were employed (Weingarten 1986). Ben-Shlomo (2008, 280) has observed that the conoid stamp seals were more suited to sealing a variety of objects than cylinder seals and that several Tel Miqne-Ekron and Ashdod sealings produced two identical impressions.

CONTINUITY IN PHILISTINE CULTURE

Based on the archaeological record, we contend that the ‘ethnic negotiations’ between the Philistines and the local Levantine groups were more complex than presented in previous research. As we will demonstrate below, not only is there evidence that the Philistines retained various foreign components into relatively late stages of the Iron Age, while at the same time taking in local Levantine cultural modes, one can see a flow of information in the opposite direction as well. While seemingly the Israelites did not take up the extensive use of Philistine decorated pottery, dog meat or *Lathyrus* consumption (see above), it has been demonstrated, for example, that they and other Levantine groups started using the closed cooking jug during the early Iron Age, most likely under the influence of the Philistines (Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2008).

While Faust and Lev-Tov (2011) contend that the cultural boundary markers that distinguished Iron Age I Philistine society diminished in importance and suddenly disappeared by the early Iron Age II, we will illustrate below that there is a plethora of archaeological evidence to the contrary.

Ceramic evidence

Following the Myc IIIC stage (Philistine 1), Philistine pottery developed into the so-called ‘Bichrome’ stage (Philistine 2) which combined Myc IIIC shapes and decorations, along with local Levantine, Egyptian and Cypriot motifs (see, e.g. Maeir 2005). This mixed input may relate to Philistine strategies of affiliation. During the initial phase of the Philistine culture, Myc IIIC display and use were perhaps aimed at evoking feelings of nostalgia, further heightened by alcohol consumption and feasting, that helped to bind the community together (Hitchcock 2012), but after a generation or so, such displays became less necessary and the manipulation of such symbolism became more integrated and complex. For example, although based on a Canaanite form, the chalices from the Iron IIA levels at Tell es-Safi/Gath are decidedly hybrid, incorporating motifs such as the hatched triangles, lozenges and chequerboard that seem to draw inspiration from designs of the Late Helladic Bronze Age and Cyprus (Maeir and Shai 2005, 363). The appearance of the ‘Late Philistine Decorated Ware’ (LDPW) in the tenth century BC (Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2004; Fig. 6), just as the better-known decorated pottery wares of the Philistines that date to the Iron I finally disappear (Myc IIIC, Bichrome, Monochrome (so-called Philistine 1, 2 and 3); see Maeir 2005), demonstrates that they continued



Figure 6

Assemblage of 'Late Philistine Decorated Ware' from Tell es-Safi/Gath, Stratum A3 (late ninth century BC).

to produce decorated pottery of a unique and regionally distinctive character well into the Iron Age IIA. It should be stressed that while some Phoenician influences can be seen in the LPDW pottery, it is first and foremost a phenomenon unique to Philistia, both as seen from various morphological and decorative facets that continue late Iron I pottery traditions in Philistia, but also as evidenced from its geographic dispersal. Similar pottery rarely reaches sites outside of Philistia (and if yes, in very small quantities) and likewise, they are markedly different from contemporaneous Phoenician types. The LPDW is clearly a pottery group of symbolic significance within Philistia, produced to meet Philistine cultural needs.

While previous research has noted (Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Faust and Lev-Tov 2011) that Myc IIIC pottery is not found in regions directly adjacent to Philistia, the slightly later Philistine Bichrome and Monochrome (Philistine 2–3) decorated pottery has been reported, though in limited quantities, at sites that are often identified as Israelite in later phases of the Iron Age I; see, for example, at Izbet Sartah (Gadot 2006) and Kh. Qeiyafa (Kang and Garfinkel 2009). To stress this point further one can note that while Kh. Qeiyafa is usually identified as an Israelite site with relatively small amounts of Philistine decorated pottery, a tomb with significant amounts of late Iron Age I/early Iron Age IIA decorated Philistine pottery was found at Kh. el-'Alya, located 3 km to the north-east of Kh. Qeiyafa (Dagan 2010, 195–201), supposedly in an area that should have been under Israelite control. In other words, the distribution of 'Philistine' pottery cannot be used reliably to define cultural and ethnic affiliation. As such, the data do not support the view of intentional 'avoidance of the Philistine decorated pottery of the Iron Age I – pottery that was ethnically significant at the time' (Faust and Lev-Tov 2011, 18).

Dietary practices

The current evidence from Tell es-Safi/Gath (Lev-Tov 2012, 601, 605), as well as additional finds (Kehati *et al.* in prep.), clearly indicates that pork continued to be consumed at this site well into the ninth century BC – and even during the eighth century BC, when it was taken over by the Judahite kingdom. These data are based on a substantial sample of over 5000 bones. Likewise, continuity may be found in the practice of consuming dog flesh, with cut-marked dog bones recovered from an Iron Age IIA context at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Lev-Tov 2012, 602). With regard to archaeobotanical remains, the Aegean grass pea lentil continued as a component of the diet in Philistia until the very end of the Iron Age II (Kislev and Mahler-Slasky 2010).

Cooking techniques and technology

Philistine hearths continued to be used in Philistia well into the tenth century BC (e.g. Maeir and Hitchcock 2011). For example, at Tell es-Safi/Gath there is evidence of the continued use of hearths well into the late tenth century, with their disappearance only in the ninth century BC. Thus, while there is no question that this foreign facet introduced by the early Philistine culture disappeared during the Iron Age IIA, one cannot connect it with the rise of the Israelite state and the concurrent changes in the Philistine corporate identity in the early tenth century BC, as Faust and Lev-Tov (2011) suggest.¹⁶

There are numerous instances of hearth areas being renewed in the same location at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Fig. 3), but, at present, this practice does not appear to have a clear functional motive. The activity of replacing the hearths might have been linked to the promotion of certain factions responsible for their construction and/or engaging competitive displays of sociality whereby the construction of new hearths might serve as the social locus of new gathering events. Whatever the precise purpose was of such gatherings, the display of shared symbolism would have served as an additional mechanism to foster and strengthen bonds of cultural, corporate identity.¹⁷ The preference for placing hearths in interior spaces in Ashkelon and Ashdod may be indicative of a more cohesive social structure and smaller, more exclusive gatherings and spatial segmentation characteristic of diacritical feasting activities (e.g. various papers in Hitchcock *et al.* 2008). As the Philistines at Tell es-Safi/Gath became more culturally established in the region and as, perhaps, certain families became paramount, the role of memory, nostalgia and the need for large-scale communal social activity may have decreased and social activity may have been channelled into interior spaces.

While some technologies, such as most aspects of the pottery production technologies seen in the early Iron Age (Killebrew 1996) and weaving (e.g. Yasur-Landau 2009), are not documented as continuing beyond the Iron Age I in Philistia, distinct continuity can be seen in some other facets. For example, Shai *et al.* (2009) have recently reported an Aegean-style fire stand from Iron Age IIA Tel Nagila, in southern Philistia, possible evidence of continuity of an additional Aegean-oriented practice related to pyrotechnology. Likewise, the continuity of plaster technologies into the tenth century BC has been noted above (Regev *et al.* 2010).

¹⁶ It should be noted that in the Israelite and Canaanite culture at this time, built clay ovens (the *tannur* and the *tabun*) were in use (e.g. van der Steen 1991; Master 2011).

¹⁷ LAH is grateful to Alfredo González-Ruibal for discussing these issues.

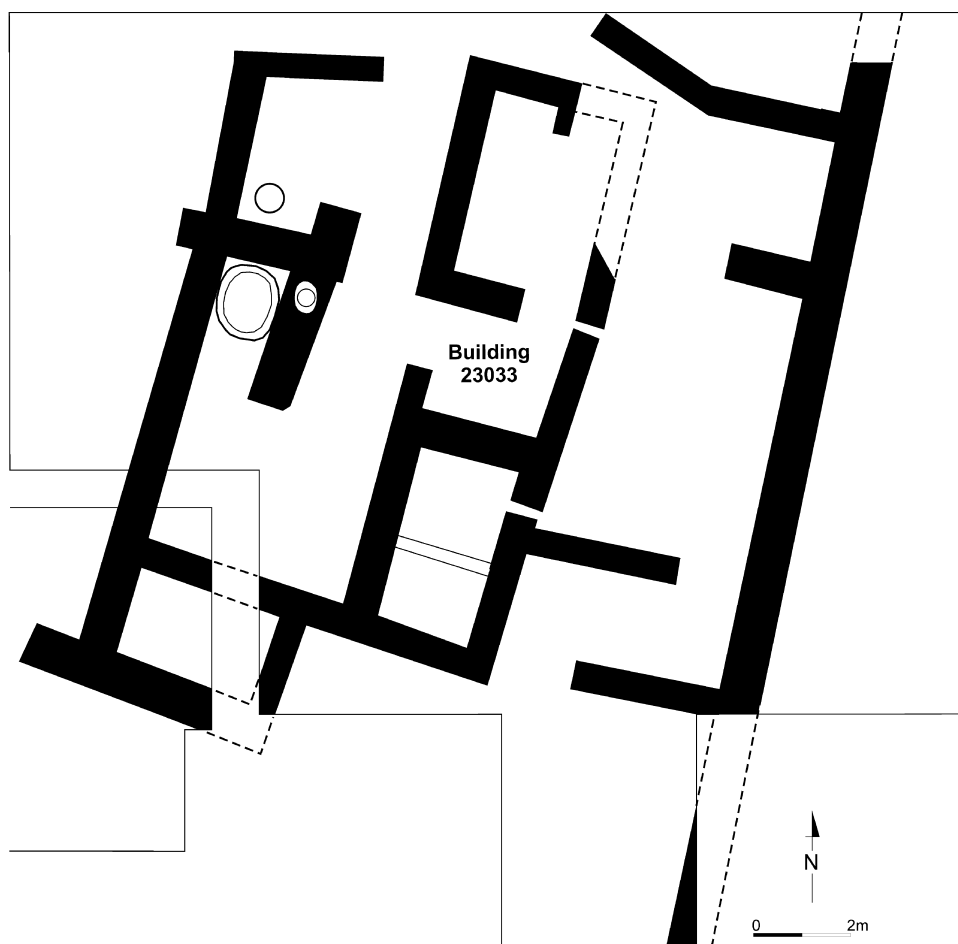


Figure 7

Schematic plan of Building 23033 from Stratum A3, Tell es-Safi/Gath (late ninth century BC).

Architecture

Architecture in Philistia also shows continuity beyond the Iron I. The plan of one of the ninth century BC structures at Tell es-Safi/Gath, Building 23033 (Zukerman *et al.* 2007, 66, fig. 8) (Fig. 7), preserves some clear Mycenaean characteristics (Hitchcock 2010). It is composed of a hall with porch employing approximately 1:2 proportions and four side chambers, but it is lacking the circulatory corridor separating the hall from side chambers as found in canonical *megara*.¹⁸

¹⁸ The canonical Mycenaean *megaron* (see Hitchcock 2010, with references) of the Late Bronze Age had a rectangular outline and consisted of a hall, fore-hall, and a porch with two columns in antis to support the roof. Both the fore-hall and the porch were approximately one-half the depth of the inner hall. The internal arrangement of the *megaron* was dominated by a circular hearth, and surrounded by four columns arranged in a square. The *megaron* frequently had rear chambers and side corridors giving access to smaller, square service rooms to the side. By the time of the post-palatial IIIC era in Greece, this plan became much simplified.

The plan of Building 23033 indicates that it was a special building, as does the context of some of the finds that may be regarded as ritual (see discussion above). In addition, an analysis of this structure (Maeir 2012a, 34) indicates that it is reminiscent of the 'Linear House' type with its Aegean connections (Aja 2009; Master and Aja 2011).

While new discoveries are continuously challenging our ideas of what we think we know about the Philistines, the earliest Iron Age architecture at Tell es-Safi/Gath seems to characterize a simple, village lifestyle with structures built on modest foundations of small stones in Area A. Elsewhere on the site, in Area F near the summit, large mudbricks are used for the foundation course, a practice also seen at Tel Mique-Ekron and at Ashkelon (e.g. Meehl *et al.* 2006; Aja 2009; Master and Aja 2011). Although Iron IIA rebuilding of the ninth century BC disturbs the ground plans of the latter structures, there is clear evidence of reuse with older walls being extended and floor levels being raised to cover some earlier walls, while continuing to make use of other associated walls. This apparent emphasis on the modification and reuse of existing structures suggests a continued, multi-generational use of architecture that has been termed 'curation' and is seen as a form of ritualization (Tomkins in press). Such emphasis on renewal and reuse in earlier periods of Greek prehistory has been characterized as a 'phenomenology of the static' (Haggis in press). In contrast, the Iron IIA structures of the ninth century BC at Tell es-Safi/Gath, while maintaining a similar orientation as their Iron I/IIA counterparts, represent a dynamic change and possibly a conscious distinction or reorientation in the nature of the community at Tell es-Safi/Gath. It is marked by the creation of new buildings constructed on massive stone foundations, disturbing the more modest constructions of the earlier period.

Ritual, religion and iconography

As recently summarized by Ben-Shlomo (2010), the unique, non-local aspects of the Philistine religious iconography continue into the Iron IIA and even later, *inter alia* in figurines, cultic stands and other items. While from the Iron IIA and onwards Philistine iconography is increasingly influenced by local Canaanite motifs, a unique and distinctive style, which has connections with various non-local iconographic roots, can still be seen in Iron II Philistia. This is best illustrated in the recently excavated and published rich cultic repository from Yavneh that is a prime example of new data on Philistine cult, which has provided novel insights on this topic. This context, dated to the tenth century BC, has provided a wealth of examples of the continuity of the 'western' (Aegean/Cypriot, etc.) facets in the Philistine cultic iconography well into the Iron IIA, side by side with the incoming influences from the neighbouring Levantine cultures. This has been shown, *inter alia*, in relationship to cultic praxis (e.g. Kletter and Ziffer 2010; Hitchcock in press b) and various aspects of iconography (e.g. Kletter and Ziffer 2010; Ziffer 2011). Ziffer's (2011) nuanced treatment of the Yavneh stands places them in an ongoing western tradition of rendering metal stands in less expensive clay, with motifs drawing on multiple traditions from the Levant and the Aegean – which in turn are influenced by Hittite and Canaanite artistic renderings.

Ben-Shlomo (2008, 278) has located the Philistine tradition of producing conical or anchor-shaped seals with abstract stick figures depicted on them as part of a larger, local Canaanite phenomenon of the linear style found on Cyprus at Maa-Palaeokastro and Kition, where conoid stamp seals were found from the end of LC IIC, about 1200 BC. The persistence of Aegean influence in this tradition is seen on a Philistine anchor seal from a ninth century BC



Figure 8

Stone altar with two horns, Tell es-Safi/Gath, Area D, Stratum D2 (late ninth century BC).

context in Samaria with a bull-leaping scene (e.g. Keel 1994), a well-known Aegean theme, which may have originated in northern Syria (Collon 1994). Such a hybridized object depicting an Aegean theme rendered in a Levantine style with noted Cypriot parallels can be seen as emblematic of Philistine identity.

While it has been proposed (Faust and Lev-Tov 2011, following Faust 2007, 88–91) that from the tenth century BC and onwards the Philistines started practising circumcision, adopting a cultic habit practised in the Levant, the evidence for this claim is lacking. In fact, as Shai (2011) has now convincingly argued, there seems to be evidence of just the opposite – that the Philistines continued the earlier practice of non-circumcision long beyond the Iron Age I.

Horwitz (2011) has suggested that dog burials, found in Levantine Iron Age II and Persian sites such as the *favissa* at Yavneh, Tel Dor, Shoham or Ashkelon (Edrey 2008), represent the continuation of this Philistine practice, although at this stage of the research the influence of other Anatolian traditions cannot be excluded.

Horned altars, drawing on Canaanite, Anatolian, Minoan and Cypriot traditions, increase in number in the Iron II period. The continuation of this tradition in Philistia into the ninth century BC (late Iron Age IIA) has now been demonstrated with the discovery of a two-horned altar in the lower city at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Maeir 2012b) (Fig. 8). It most closely draws on Cypriot traditions of rendering horned altars with two horns, with flat tops. Display

altars in this style are known from Myrtou-Pighades, Kouklia and Kition (see Webb 1999, with further references). It is significant that horns of consecration and horned altars are more commonly found in Cyprus than on the Greek mainland. Hitchcock (2002) has argued that they represent the conscious appropriation of Minoan horns of consecration by Cypriots, which were in turn influenced by bovine symbolism in Anatolian and Canaanite culture, and participate in a wider tradition of treating bulls as ritual symbols. Hitchcock (2008) has argued that the appropriation and deployment of Aegean (Minoan and Mycenaean) architectural symbols in Late Bronze Age Cyprus represents a conscious attempt to promote the status of Cypriot elites in international trade networks of the Late Bronze Age and should not be taken as evidence of Mycenaean colonization (also Knapp 2008, 255–79). Like Cypriot altars and representations in Minoan examples, Philistine horned altars exhibit a great deal of variability. Preserved horns of consecration in Crete take the form of architectural decoration, a function also attested on a set of horns from Kition.

Current evidence for Aegean horned altars is known only from two-dimensional representations. Thus, it is quite possible that four-horned altars existed in the Aegean but that they appeared as two-horned altars in their representations. It is quite possible that such representations influenced Cypriot interpretations of the motif, which were in turn more freely interpreted in Philistia by the Philistines. It is difficult to assign their appearance to a particular ethnic group; however, their context and style seem most closely linked to Cypriot culture. As the Tell es-Safi/Gath altar with its finely worked cornice was only fully finished in the front and on the anterior portions of the sides, it seems likely that it was intended to be viewed from its facade, making a rear pair of horns unnecessary.¹⁹ In addition, only the anterior part of the upper areas of the altar was fully finished (the two horns and surface between the two horns), while the rest of the superior surface was left in a roughed-out state (sculptures and ashlar blocks are typically only roughed out in a quarry, but finished *in situ* by a master sculptor or mason). The workmanship on the Tell es-Safi/Gath altar, with its finely finished facade and skillfully rendered moulding, and the partial finishing of the lateral and superior aspects, suggests that the rendering of two horns was intentional.

Remarks about the context of the Tell es-Safi/Gath altar are preliminary, pending further investigation of the area around it. However, the numerous loom weights found surrounding it may point to its use in a workshop shrine. In addition, there is no evidence of burning on the top of the altar, indicating that either it was used for libation (as Master and Aja 2011 suggest for the recently discovered altar from Ashkelon), or that incense offerings were burned in a receptacle placed on its surface. It should be noted that some of the late Iron Age horned altars from Tel Mique-Ekron were similarly located in industrial contexts, connected with olive-oil production (e.g. Gitin 1993). In the Aegean, rhyta were frequently associated with loom weights, indicating that libation (Koehl 2006, 335) and perhaps other ritual activities were connected to textile production. Metallurgical activities were being undertaken at both Kition and at Myrtou-Pighades on Cyprus, both sites with horned altars, further strengthening the connection between them and craft or industrial activity. This constellation of relationships between horned altars and

19 It should be noted that in later Philistine stone altars from Tel Mique-Ekron, there were 'engaged' altars whose posterior face was not as well finished, but in all those examples there were nevertheless four horns (see Gitin 1993). The case of the altar from Tell es-Safi/Gath might be likened to that of Roman sarcophagi, which were often placed against a wall and thus left unfinished on the back. These can be contrasted with Hellenistic sarcophagi, such as the Alexander sarcophagus, which were intended to be viewed from all sides (Allen 2010, 216).



Figure 9
Assemblage of cultic objects from cultic corner (Locus 62023), Tell es-Safi/Gath, Area A, Stratum A3
(late ninth century BC).

industrial activity shows continued continuity, with Philistine culture in the Iron Age II drawing on past traditions of their ancestors from multiple regions.

Repeated examples of corners/installations that were dedicated for cultic/ritual functions in seemingly domestic and/or industrial contexts were found in the late Iron Age IIA destruction level at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Zukerman and Maeir 2012). Various cultic objects were found in these corners, including chalices (Maeir and Shai 2005), phallic-shaped situlae (Maeir 2007), figurines (Maeir 2008) and notched scapulae (Zukerman *et al.* 2007; 2012), the latter one of the many introduced features found at Philistine sites that continued into the late Iron Age IIA. Hitchcock (2011b) has suggested that these spaces may represent a cult corner in a private house.

In the late ninth century BC destruction level (St. A3) in Area A at Tell es-Safi/Gath, a small rectangular space (Locus 62023) containing an unusual assemblage of ritual items was found, including a pomegranate-shaped object, some phallic-shaped situlas, and an annular rhyton/kernos for the manipulation of liquids and possibly other substances. This collection of objects indicates a cult corner (Fig. 9). While the publication of this area is much anticipated, some preliminary remarks are in order. Cultic corners are not specifically Canaanite and may represent continuity of Aegean practices (Hitchcock 2011b). Annular rhyta/kernoi are found all over Palestine beginning in the thirteenth century BC, occur in Cyprus in Base Ring I–II technique, and are also well known in later Cyprus (particularly at Kition and Enkomi; see Mazar 1980, 109–11; Bignasca 2000; Dever 2001). Although they occur with less frequency in the Mycenaean world, they were a part of Aegean tradition dating back to the fifteenth century BC as attested in Late Minoan II ring vase fragments from Kommos on Crete (Shaw *et al.* in press). Ring rhyta were not a purely Mycenaean phenomenon, but one that was at home in both Cyprus and the Levant (Mazar 1980, 109–11; Webb 1999, 200, 249, 296; Bignasca 2000). Although it

is difficult to pinpoint an origin for these objects, their continued presence in the Iron IIA shows strong cultural continuity with an earlier 'western' tradition.

The Iron IIA assemblage from the cult corners at Tell es-Safi/Gath shows continuity with a similar, but earlier, assemblage of objects from Tel Miqne/Ekron. At this site, a complete pomegranate vessel was recovered from the uppermost floor of the Iron 1 level of Stratum IVA, in the first side chamber of the monumental shrine (Building 350), together with bowls, juglets, flasks, a kernos with two goats, and miniature votive vessels (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007, 11). The bottles or rattles and pomegranate-shaped object from Tell es-Safi/Gath are pierced with suspension holes, and Maeir (2012a, 37–8) has suggested that these items were part of some kind of mobile or mobiliary arrangement. Smaller bronze objects dangle from Cypriot bronze stands (Catling 1964), and it is possible that the Safi objects represent an attempt at representing suspended bronze objects in terracotta, just as Nahshoni and Ziffer (2009) have argued that the clay stand from Nahal Patish imitates bronze *thymiateria* from Cyprus and a clay stand from Arkades on Crete replicates bronze stands from Cyprus. Philistine figurines show affinities with Late Helladic IIIC figurines of Mainland Greece, and Ben-Shlomo and Press (2009, esp. 42–3, 54) have shown that a few of these elements and concepts continue into the Iron IIB period.

THE DEMISE OF PHILISTINE CULTURE?

Faust and Lev-Tov (2011, 26–7) conclude their paper by proposing a historical outline that identifies the Egyptians as the initial enemy of the Philistines. Perhaps influenced by the historical narrative as seen in the biblical text, they claim that as of the early tenth century BC, Philistia is dominated, both politically and culturally, by the emerging Judahite/Israelite polity at the time of the reigns of David and Solomon, and that this is the underlying cause for the disappearance of most of the non-local facets of the Philistine culture. This was followed by a rapid collapse of the traditional markers of boundary maintenance, the outcome of the Philistines' loss of their military and political hegemony, i.e. they abandoned their foreignness and foreign symbols, since these features were no longer an advantage. They (Faust and Lev-Tov 2011) suggest that this outline should serve as the basis for future studies of the Philistines, as more data are discovered and published.

In this study we do not intend to broach the topic of the existence, or lack thereof, of the so-called 'United (Judahite) Monarchy' during the early Iron Age IIA, nor the date, process, character and/or extent of the influence of the early Israelite state (see, e.g., Faust 2003; 2007; Finkelstein 2005; 2010; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006; Garfinkel *et al.* 2010; Mazar 2010). However, the understanding of the rise of this monarchy and the contention, as presented by Faust and Lev-Tov (2011), that it totally dominated surrounding polities and cultures do not fit in with the currently available material evidence, settlement pattern and urban development from Philistia (or from other regions in the Levant as well).

This is clearly demonstrated by looking at the size of Tell es-Safi/Gath during the Iron Age IIA. As shown already from the survey of the site (Uziel and Maeir 2005; Maeir and Uziel 2007), and now from excavations as well (Maeir and Gur-Arieh 2011; Maeir 2012a, 43–47), during the Iron Age IIA (in the ninth century BC, but most likely in the tenth as well), Tell es-Safi/Gath reaches its greatest extent (during the Iron Age in particular, but in all periods in general). At this time, not only is the actual upper mound of this site settled, an extensive, and fortified, lower city appears, and the total size of the site is c.45–50 ha – perhaps the largest site in the southern Levant at the time. In comparison to other cities in Philistia at the time (Ashdod,

c.10 ha; Tel Mique-Ekron, c.4 ha; Ashkelon, c.10 ha; Gaza, unknown; see Shavit 2008), Tell es-Safi/Gath was clearly a 'primate' city. Likewise, if one compares Tell es-Safi/Gath's size to that of settlements in the regions to the east, in the Judean foothills and in the Central Hills region, a similar picture emerges. The closest relatively large site to the east, Kh. Qeiyafa, which dates approximately to the tenth century BC (see comments above), is c.2.3 ha (Garfinkel *et al.* 2010; Garfinkel and Kang 2011); Beth Shemesh, to the north-east, is approximately 25 ha during the tenth/ninth century BC (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2009; 2011b; pers. comm.); while Jerusalem, whether in both the tenth and ninth, or only in the ninth century BC, does not reach more than c.6 ha at most (see, e.g., Mazar 2006 contra Finkelstein 2011). Clearly, Iron Age IIA Tell es-Safi/Gath stands out, on a regional and supra-regional scale, when compared to all other contemporaneous sites. It would be rather hard to claim that the site, a primary city of the Philistine culture, was subservient to the emerging polity to its east – the 'United Monarchy' of the Israelites.

As expressed previously (Maeir 2004b), it would appear that during the Iron Age IIA, one can understand the geopolitical role of Tell es-Safi/Gath (Philistine Gath) in the context of its being an opposing polity to the emerging Judahite polity in the Central Hills. This latter polity had already commenced its rise during the tenth century BC, as the finds both from Jerusalem (Mazar 2006) and perhaps from Kh. Qeiyafa (e.g. Garfinkel *et al.* 2010) seem to indicate. During the ninth century BC this trend seems to continue, with evidence of foreign trade and bureaucracy apparent in the finds from Jerusalem (e.g. Reich *et al.* 2007). Nevertheless, it does not seem prudent to claim, based on the currently available archaeological evidence, that the Judahite kingdom reached a position that would enable it to overpower the Philistine culture during the tenth century BC, and certainly not during the ninth century BC, when Philistine Gath reached its zenith. This point can only be stressed by the fact that c.830 BC, Hazael, king of Aram Damascus, campaigned in the southern Levant and besieged and captured Tell es-Safi/Gath (Maeir and Gur-Arieh 2011; Maeir 2004a; 2012a, 43–7; contra Ussishkin 2009). Only then, with the fall of the until-then largest city in Philistia, do we see a major change in the geopolitical constellation in this region. It is most probably this occasion which enabled the Judahite kingdom to expand and develop further (see Maeir 2004b; 2012a, 49–56; Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006).

The dominant status of Philistine Gath on a regional scale is seen at other sites in the area. For example, the material culture from the mid/late ninth century BC destruction level at Tel Zayit (c.10 km to the south of Gath) is virtually identical to that of the mid/late ninth century BC destruction level at Tell es-Safi/Gath, most likely indicating that Tel Zayit 'was under the political sway of Philistine Gath' (Tappy 2011, 127). On the other hand, the material culture from Tel Zayit is quite different from the material culture at contemporaneous Judahite sites, such as Lachish (e.g. Ussishkin 2004) and Jerusalem (e.g. Cahill 2003; Reich *et al.* 2007). In a similar vein, preliminary analysis of the finds from the recent excavations at Tel Burna, 2 km to the west of Tel Zayit (in general, see Uziel and Shai 2010), has demonstrated that the ninth century BC assemblage has a significant degree of similarity with the contemporaneous coastal, Philistine material culture (Uziel and Shai, pers. comm.), and specifically with Tell es-Safi/Gath (on the character of the coastal/Philistine material culture during the ninth century BC, see Shai and Maeir 2008). This indicates that the dominant cultural, and most probably political, entity at the time in this region was Philistine Gath – and not the incipient Judahite monarchy.

Furthermore, while the relationship between the Egyptians and the Sea Peoples is well known from contemporary historical records and material culture (e.g. O'Connor 2000), the rest

of the schema proposed by Faust and Lev-Tov (2011) is lacking in coeval historical records and archaeological evidence. Faust (e.g. Faust 2003; but see, e.g., Finkelstein 2005) postulated that the rural abandonment during the latter part of the Iron Age I, around the middle of the eleventh century BC, may have been the result of conflict with outside groups such as the Philistines. The notion of ongoing confrontations between the Philistines and their surroundings during the early Iron Age is unclear from the archaeological record. During the initial Philistine settlement, there is little evidence of site-wide destructions of Late Bronze Age (LBA) Canaanite sites in Philistia, and, at most, one can identify limited destructions at some of the sites (Ashdod and Tell es-Safi/Gath), probably indicating that elite zones within the sites were taken over, but not entire sites (on this point see Maeir 2012a, 18). In addition, no Philistine weaponry has been found (Koller 2008), again emphasizing that evidence for military activity at the onset of the Philistine settlement is vague (e.g. Joffe 2002; Yasur-Landau 2010). While it is most often assumed that an ongoing confrontation existed between the Philistines and the Israelites (perhaps based on this being the dominant motif in the biblical narrative), in fact both in the biblical narratives (as in the story of Samson, e.g. Weitzman 2002), but more importantly (due to the ambiguity on the dating of these narratives) as seen in the archaeological evidence throughout the Iron Age, ongoing interactions of non-confrontational character existed between these cultures (e.g. Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2008).

CONCLUSION

Traditional narratives continue to view the Philistine culture as a relatively uniform foreign culture, which was violently ‘imposed’ on the southern coastal plain of the southern Levant (‘Philistia’) somewhere during the twelfth century BC. Yasur-Landau (2012) has clearly demonstrated that Canaanite elements were found in Philistine culture from the very beginning, and that the Philistines’ ‘common identity’ may have been formed after their arrival in Canaan. However, most studies continue to lack reference to the complex character of the processes and timing of the Philistine arrival, the diversity of cultural influences (and perhaps groups) affecting Philistine culture, the complexities of social interaction, and the evidence of ongoing external contacts and influences during the various stages of the Iron Age I. As detailed here, the diverse range of cultural influences seen in the early Philistine culture precludes any attempt to identify a single, unified origin of the Philistine culture.²⁰

The currently available data, and, as a result, the understanding of the patterns and development of the foreign connections of Philistia during the Iron Age I and IIA, have changed dramatically in recent years. While in the past it was assumed that after the initial arrival of the Philistines in the early twelfth century BC, Philistia and the Philistine culture were relatively isolated from overseas connections and influences, this picture has now changed. As mentioned above, throughout the Iron Age I, and in particular in the middle and later stages of this period, evidence of ongoing contact with the Cypriot realm is seen. For example, several of the aspects that are linked to Cyprus, such as the notched scapulae and some of the shapes and decorations of the Philistine Bichrome pottery, only appear in the second stage of the Iron Age I (e.g. Zukerman *et al.* 2007, 73–4; Bunimovitz and Lederman

20 We believe it would be futile to search for the original *ürheimat* (‘Alt-Philistia’) of the Philistines, since, as noted above, it appears that the foreign components within the early Philistines were of diverse origins (Aegean, Anatolian, Cypriot, south-central Europe, Italy, and beyond); see as well Russell 2009.

2010; Yasur-Landau 2010, 262), *bona fide* Cypriot imported pottery in tombs at Tell el-Farah (S.) (e.g. Taylor 1956, 35; Dothan 1982, 33; Laemmel 2003, 54–9), as well as developments in the cultic iconography (Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009). Likewise, the influx of Egyptian iconographical motifs in Philistine pottery (e.g. Dothan 1982) and sealing motifs (Münger 2003) in the Iron IB indicates additional foreign influences. But more important, for the topic at hand, is the pattern of connections with Phoenicia and, through that, the contacts between Philistia and the wider Mediterranean world. As already noted (e.g. Dothan 1998b), towards the end of the Iron Age I initial evidence of contacts between Philistia and Phoenicia emerges (but see Master 2009 who demonstrates that even in the Iron IB contacts with Phoenicia and Philistia resumed). Recently, this has been further demonstrated by the appearance of Phoenician-style pottery (Maeir and Shai 2007), the influence of Phoenician-style decorative syntax on Iron IIA pottery in Philistia (e.g. Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2004; Maeir and Shai 2005), and in the earliest known import from Iron Age Greece to the Levant, found at Tell es-Safi/Gath (Maeir *et al.* 2009). This and other evidence indicate that from the late Iron I and onwards, well into the Iron Age IIA, Philistia played a role in the newly emerging trade and cultural contact webs in the eastern Mediterranean. Mostly probably spearheaded by the Phoenicians, as time passed, these contacts spiralled and grew, and more and more ‘players’ were drawn into these networks. It is most logical to assume that many of the strong Levantine influences seen in Philistia during the Iron Age IIA can be explained by these intense contacts between Philistia and Phoenicia. The appearance of formalized alphabetic writing in ninth century BC Philistia (with several short inscriptions known from Tell es-Safi/Gath; see Maeir and Eshel *in press*) can be seen as reflecting these connections.

As noted above, the large size of Tell es-Safi/Gath during the ninth century BC (and most probably tenth century BC as well) must be seen in a regional and supra-regional context. While its exact role in international trade at the time is not currently known, the fact that Aegean pottery is found at the site (Maeir *et al.* 2009) is a strong indication of this role. Whether or not the site was a hub in the trade of metal coming from the Arabah Valley towards the Mediterranean, as Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006 have suggested, has yet to be determined (see now evidence of tenth century BC metallurgical activities at the site – Eliyahu-Behar *et al.* 2012), but in any case it is clear that this large site, perhaps the largest in the southern Levant at the time, played a role in the inter-regional contacts. It is hard to envision the scenario that Faust and Lev-Tov proposed of Philistia playing a subjugated and minor role at the time, seemingly under the domination, both political and cultural, of a strong Judahite polity.

While we applaud attempts to study the underlying processes behind the appearance, development, change and ultimate disappearance²¹ of the Philistine culture, this should be undertaken with reference to the most up-to-date finds and discussions. Current and future studies should avoid perpetuating a one-dimensional picture of the development of Philistine culture during the Iron Age I and the beginning of the Iron Age IIA by ignoring the mounting evidence for heterogeneity within Philistia, which is increasing with the ongoing publication of the finds from Ashkelon, Tel Mique-Ekron and Tell es-Safi/Gath, and from smaller regional sites such as those in the Negev. Recent claims that, by and large, the foreign facets of the Philistine culture that were so common in the Iron Age I disappeared in the tenth century BC, and that this

21 While not detailed in this study, the ultimate disappearance of the Philistine culture should be connected with the Babylonian destructions of the Philistine cities at the end of the Iron Age (e.g. Stager 1996), the subsequent forced exile, and eventual assimilation and disappearance of the Philistines in Mesopotamia (see, e.g., Eph'al 1997).

is to be connected with the ascendancy of the Israelite monarchy at that time, run contrary to much of the currently available evidence. As we have demonstrated, not only do many parts of the non-local 'western'-oriented cultural facets in the Philistine culture continue into the tenth century BC and beyond, but the evidence also points to the fact that the Philistine culture, and in particular as seen at the site of Tell es-Safi/Gath, continued to flourish as a vibrant cultural entity well into the ninth century BC, long after the supposed ascendancy of the Judahite kingdom over this region.

While we have no doubt that the Philistine culture went through a complex and dynamic process of change throughout the Iron Age, from its very beginning to its very end, there is simply no reason, and more importantly no archaeological evidence, to claim that there was a major break in this process at the beginning of the Iron Age IIA, or to tie this in with the supposed overpowering of the Philistines by a Judahite polity that had recently emerged.

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