

The Appearance, Formation and Transformation of Philistine Culture: New Perspectives and New Finds

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Abstract

In the early/mid-12th century BCE, the social and cultural milieu in the Southern Levant went through deep changes (e.g., WARD and JOUKOWSKY 1992; GITIN et al. 1998; KILLEBREW 2005; YASUR-LANDAU 2010; CLINE 2014). This is manifested in various ways, including: 1. the gradual waning of the Egyptian control of Canaan; 2. a drawn-out process of destruction and/or depopulation of many of the Canaanite city states; 3. the appearance of “new groups” in the region, in the inland (identified by most scholars as the precursors of the “Israelites”, Aramaeans, and others) and along some of the coastal regions; and 4., the primary focus of this article, the advent of so-called Sea Peoples, and the most notable among them, the Peleset, in the southern Coastal Plain of Canaan (e.g., HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2014; MAEIR et al. 2013).

During the Late Bronze Age, one can note already the presence of foreigners and traders in the Southern Levant (ARTZY 1998; EMANUEL 2014). These foreigners, which were of diverse origin (Aegean, Cypriot, Italian, Levantine, Anatolian, etc.), seem to have been mostly concentrated in or near various harbour sites - and played an active role in intercultural exchange up until the early 12th century BCE. The destruction of the Mycenaean palaces in Greece and of administrative centres in Cyprus, may have led to a temporary reinforcement of the activities of these foreigners (e.g. “Horizon Nami” in STOCKHAMMER forthcoming). Soon afterwards though, in the first decades of the 12th century BCE, in certain regions (Philistia and perhaps the Amuq) these networks collapsed, coinciding with the influx of foreign immigrants, of multiple origins. On the other hand, in some regions these networks seem, by and large, to have continued (e.g., the coastal areas of Northern Israel, the Jezreel Valley, North Syria and Lebanon, Cyprus, and coastal Anatolia), for approximately another century.

In Philistia, the new migrant groups developed and changed, and expanded upon these previously developed inclinations for appropriating foreign cultural styles and habits. This included the incorporation of a wide range of new cultural facets, such as architectural features (e.g. hearths, columned halls, “baths”), food preparation and consumption habits (hearths, cooking jugs, new foods), new technologies (iron metallurgy, hydraulic plaster) and various new cultic paraphernalia. Significantly, these non-local features cannot be traced to a single geographic or cultural origin, but rather seem to reflect a wide range of non-Levantine cultures (MAEIR 2008; MAEIR and HITCHCOCK 2011; MAEIR et al. 2013; HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2013). At the same time, evidence of varying degrees of entanglement with local Canaanite traditions can be seen (MOUNTJOY 2010; YASUR-LANDAU 2012; HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2013; MAEIR et al. 2013; STOCKHAMMER 2013).

As is well-known, this new and entangled culture, which is defined based on a relatively wide set of material attributes (e.g., DOTHAN 1982; KILLEBREW and LEHMANN 2013; MAEIR et al. 2013), is identified as the Philistines. This group is described in the biblical and other ancient near eastern texts, and associated with the Peleset, one of the so-called “Sea Peoples” groups known from the Egyptian texts.

Until the 1990s, the prevailing view on the questions of the appearance, transformation and demise of the Philistine culture assumed a rather straightforward sequence of events (e.g., DOTHAN 1982; SANDARS 1985; NOORT 1994; OREN 2000; YASUR-LANDAU 2010). This paradigm envisioned the arrival of a large foreign population, which violently conquered the southern coastal plain of the

Southern Levant – and introduced a non-local material culture with a strong Aegean-oriented (and a largely Mycenaean) character. Thereafter, accordingly, over a period of approximately two centuries, this culture became increasingly influenced by the local, Levantine cultures until somewhere in the IA IIA (sometime after 1000 BCE), the unique, foreign attributes of the Philistine culture disappeared. This was interpreted as a gradual process of assimilation, in which the Philistines lost their foreign identity (recently, FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011).

From the late 1990s, this understanding began to change. First of all, it became clear that the Philistines did not simply assimilate and lose their cultural identity during the early IA II (c. 10th century BCE and onwards), but in fact continued to exhibit various ‘foreign’ traits and practices until the late Iron Age. BRIAN STONE (1995), while adhering to the model of the largely foreign origin of the Philistines, suggested that throughout the Iron Age they went through a process of acculturation. During this process they shed many of their original foreign attributes, while at the same time, certain significant foreign facets continued to be used until the end of the Iron Age, and the Philistines retained their unique identity throughout the Iron Age.

Following this lead, various scholars attempted to elaborate on this in order to propose more sophisticated explanations of this process. MAEIR for example (in BEN-SHLOMO *et al.* 2004) and others (KILLEBREW 2005) suggested looking at the emergence of, and changes in Philistine culture, through a socio-linguistic perspective, seeing the emergence of the Philistines as a process of creolization. Some suggested understanding events characterizing the Bronze to Iron Age transition in the Mediterranean as a process of hybridization (KNAPP 2008) or entanglement (STOCKHAMMER 2013), while yet others suggested that Philistine culture was simply a process of on-going cultural change (UZIEL 2007). Creolization, which KILLEBREW (2005: 201, 253) defined as cultural mixing, was seen as a ‘middle ground’ between the hyper-diffusionist colonization model and the other extreme, which reinterpreted the appearance of the Philistines as not being related to the arrival of foreign populations, but rather an economic realignment of local, Levantine groups following the collapse of the Late Bronze Age palatial economies (SHERRATT 1998).

KILLEBREW (2005: 206, 225, 251), for example, saw the production of the Bichrome Philistine pottery (Philistine 2), as an example of creolization, as well as the increase in indigenous pottery in Philistine levels is seen as evidence of a creolization process that led to the loss of the Philistines’ unique character. Creolization and acculturation are treated as processes that typify Philistine ‘colonialist activity’ (KILLEBREW 2005: 249).

Creolization has come under criticism, including by the present authors, for functioning as a thinly-veiled substitution for the term colonialism, re-enforcing asymmetrical relationships and reifying a dualistic approach to Philistine identity over the multi-vocal approach argued for here (e.g., HITCHCOCK 2011: 271–72; HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2013). The term “acculturation” is also problematic – in that it implies that the Philistines passively adopted local Canaanite social practices and influences, rather than actively manipulating material culture to construct, re-construct and negotiate their identity.

Previously, we have suggested instead to use the terms “transculturalism” or “entanglement” – to describe the transformative processes triggered by the encounter of the foreign immigrants with the inhabitants of the Southern Levant, their material cultures, social practices and world views (HITCHCOCK 2011; HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2013). For example, STOCKHAMMER (2013) recently demonstrated (and see his paper in this volume) that the Aegean-type ceramic repertoire of the Philistines has to be understood as the attempt to conduct Southern Levantine feasting practices through the use of Aegean-type shapes. This resulted in the selection and use of just a few Aegean-type shapes in the so-called Philistine households. We recently suggested that Aegean-style ceramics served as symbols around which the identities of the Sea Peoples coalesced (HITCHCOCK and MAEIR

2014).

Similarly, while in the past it was often assumed that the Philistine language and writing should be connected to the Mycenaean culture, the small corpus, different varieties of inscriptions, different comparisons – and the very dissimilar socio-political environment in early Iron Age Philistia than that of the palatial political-geography of Mycenaean Greece, makes it difficult to simplistically establish a clear correlation between these scripts and languages (DAVIS *et al.* 2015).

Comment [T1]: Reference updated (see also bibliography)

In addition to these developing considerations of Philistine identity, attention was paid both to the early and later stages of the Philistine culture. Close scrutiny of the archaeological evidence from the Late Bronze/Iron Age transformation in Philistia and other parts of the Levantine coast demonstrated that: a) there is little evidence of widespread destruction of the immediately preceding settlement phases at the sites associated with the Philistines or with the Sea Peoples; b) at many of these sites, there is significant evidence for the continuity of local cultural elements alongside newly appearing foreign traits. The very basis for understanding the appearance and transformation of the Philistine culture – as a foreign culture becoming increasingly locally-oriented – was therefore questioned (e.g., GILBOA 2005; 2006–2007; SHAI 2009; YASUR-LANDAU 2010; 2012; MAEIR *et al.* 2013). Clearly then, a simplistic understanding of the origins, development, change and ultimate disappearance of the Philistine culture is no longer relevant.¹

Recent finds and new perspectives warrant a new understanding of the underlying mechanisms, and processes, in the development and transformation of the Philistine culture – from its appearance in the early/mid 12th century BCE (which is the most pertinent for the present paper), until its demise in the late 7th century BCE. While it is evident that many components of Philistine culture do have a foreign origin, and important components of the population of early Iron Age Philistia were of non-local origin, it is also clear that these foreign traits are: 1. of a mixed nature and include features from various parts of the Aegean, Cyprus, Anatolia, South-eastern Europe and beyond – indicating multiple origins for these foreigners (MAEIR *et al.* 2013; HITCHCOCK 2014); 2. As noted above, it is clear that the foreigners that arrived in Philistia in the early Iron Age did not capture and destroy the Late Bronze Age settlements of the Canaanites; at most they destroyed elite zones at some of the sites and became integrated among local Canaanite populations, and adopted some of their customs in these early Philistine sites.

On the other hand, the actual identification of archaeological remains of other Sea Peoples groups, aside from the Philistines, which supposedly should have settled along the Levantine coast north of Philistia, has been much more problematic (and see, e.g., GILBOA 2005; this volume; SHARON and GILBOA 2013; but see STERN 2013 for a different opinion).

Previously, we suggested that one perhaps could view some of the groups of the Sea Peoples as heterogeneous tribal groups, similar to pirates of the historical era. The members of these groups most probably were disenfranchised members of varying cultural traditions and origins, skilled seafarers and craftspeople, and may have been led by warlord-like military leaders (HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2014). These groups took on particular types of items of varying origin (i.e. Aegean-type pottery, hearths, depiction of birds, etc.) as emblematic symbols, but the mixed origins of the members of these tribal groups makes the identification of a particular point of origin (or origins) in the

¹ While we agree with MIDDLETON (2015) that one cannot simplistically trace the origins of many of the Philistine cultural attributes to the Mycenaean culture, and that the origins of the Philistine culture cannot be explained as a monolithic migration of peoples of Mycenaean origin, one cannot deny that substantial and significant portions of the Philistine culture derives from non-Levantine context. As we argue here, and in other previous publications (which surprisingly, MIDDLETON seems unaware of any of them), a set of complex and multi-faceted foreign origins and influences – along with local components – should be suggested for the Philistines.

Mediterranean basin impossible to find. This is perhaps why the Philistines adopted the Luwian term of *tarwanis* (later *seren*), meaning military leader, for their leaders, rather than the Mycenaean Greek term *wanax*, meaning king. GIUSFREDI (2009) recently discussed the term *tarwanis*, noting that it appears in Luwian inscriptions from the 10th to 8th centuries BCE, including, most importantly, at the site of Tell Ta'yinat, which might very likely be connected to the so called "northern Sea Peoples/Philistines" through its identification as the land of Palastin (HAWKINS 2009; SINGER 2012; see also MEIJER, this volume). Perhaps the initial use of this term by a "Sea Peoples" group occurred in this northern region, and from there it spread to the "southern" Philistines during the early Iron Age.

At the same time, changes can be seen throughout the entire Levant that are of significance as well, even if they are of a very different character. In some cases, there seems to be continuity in the material culture of the local, so-called "Canaanite" culture, at early Iron Age sites in the Southern Levant, long into the Iron Age. E.g.: Megiddo (FINKELSTEIN *et al.* 2006: 848–850) and Beth Shemesh (BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2011; LEDERMAN and BUNIMOVITZ 2014); the transformation of the Canaanite culture in Phoenicia during the early Iron Age – as at Dor (SHARON and GILBOA 2013); while at other urban sites, sudden and dramatic ends can be seen (e.g. Lachish: USSISHKIN 2004). In various peripheral regions in the Southern Levant (e.g., Central Highlands, Upper Galilee; in general, FINKELSTEIN 1988; FAUST 2007), the appearance of new settlement forms indicates the possible presence of new cultural units, whose origins have been highly debated (whether of internal Canaanite, external origin, or mixed origins), some of which most probably served as the core of what eventually developed into what has come to be called the Israelite and Judahite kingdoms in the later Iron Age (but see cautionary remarks on this supposition of continuity in e.g., NESTOR 2010). It is clear then that the entire Southern Levant, way beyond the actual region of Philistia was in a state of flux and change, but not of an even or uniform character, during the extended period of the Late Bronze/Iron Age transition.

From the very early stages of its appearance, the Philistine culture was characterized by an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation between various cultural groups of local and foreign origin. As a result of such entanglements, the emergence of the Philistine culture should not be viewed through the lens of a simplistic process of cultural change. We cannot view and understand the appearance of Aegean-style pottery and other supposedly Aegean features (such as was suggested in the past regarding hearths – which in fact show Cypriote influences; see MAEIR and HITCHCOCK 2011, and earlier research there) and see this as being the result of "Mycenaean colonists" imposing their civilization on "backward" Levantine natives. Instead, multivalent patterns of identity negotiation occurred between the various groups within, and on the margins, of Philistia, which are evidenced in distinctive material culture patterns and regionalisms. This is so between the various "Philistine" sites in Philistia (e.g., pebbled hearths vs. clay hearths (MAEIR and HITCHCOCK 2011); different patterns of pottery decoration at Philistines sites (BEN-SHLOMO 2008); different patterns of food consumption (MAEIR *et al.* 2013), but also in the connections between sites within Philistia and between cultural, political and ethnic groups in the regions surrounding Philistia, with influences travelling in multiple directions (e.g. BEN-SHLOMO *et al.* 2008). Throughout the Iron I and II, one can see an influx of "Levantine" elements into the Philistine material culture (such as in pottery types), and at the same time, "Philistine" cultural elements appear in surrounding Levantine cultures (MAEIR *et al.* 2013). The same thing can be said about the material remains of the Philistine cult (e.g. VIEWEGER 2012) and iconography (BEN-SHLOMO 2010; PRESS 2012; 2014), in which a wide range of intermixed facets can be seen with the appearance of horned altars and the persistence of Aegean-stylistic elements on Canaanite-style chalices.

It should be noted that there are quite a few inherent problems with many of the commonly-used, mostly modern definitions of the various groups in the Aegean (Mycenaean, Minoan, etc.) and

the eastern Mediterranean during the LB/Iron Age transition. In fact, not only are some of these labels completely modern (e.g. Minoan), others are oversimplified, “essentializing” definitions of complex cultural and ethnic groupings which existed in each of the regions supposedly described by these overall cultural/ethnic names (for discussions relating to Aegean ethnonyms, see, e.g. ROESSEL 2006; MARAN 2011; but see FEUER 2011 who retains a somewhat conservative view on this). Caution is thus warranted in the all-too-facile use of ethnic determinations in the identification of various groups in the early Iron Age Levant. It is clear that various “ethnic” groups did in fact exist in the Iron Age Southern Levant, and are noted as such in the various textual materials. For the most part, the terms used for the identification of the various groups in these texts are etic (external) – and very rarely emic (internal). “Neatly packaged” group definitions most likely reflect the *ideologies* of the texts in which these ethnonyms appear, as opposed to the realistic, and at time perhaps “fuzzy” identities of these groups. This is most surely the case in border zones between groups – such as in the Judean foothills [the *Shephelah*] – the contact zone between the Philistines and the Israelites. This should raise red flags against attempts to simplistically define this site, or that region, as belonging to a specific cultural group (e.g. Philistines, Israelite, Canaanite, etc.), based on a relatively narrow set of archaeological correlates. While one must acknowledge the existence of different social (possibly also “ethnic”) groups in early Iron Age Philistia and surrounding regions, it is also cardinal not to confuse an emic with an etic perspective, and attempt to view fluid and ever-changing group identities – as “frozen” cultural/ethnic manifestations.

The very term Philistine and/or Philistia is not attested in Iron Age Philistine inscriptions (albeit there are not a large number of these), but rather only from texts of biblical (some of which are clearly of Iron Age dating), Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian origin. Thus, while it is clear that the region of Philistia, and peoples within this region, were identified as Philistines during the Iron Age, it is not clear what were the emic group-name definitions of the Philistines themselves (see, e.g., LEMCHE 2012, who already stressed this point). A hint to the problematic character of this issue can be seen in post-Iron Age cuneiform documents from Babylonia (ZADOK 1978), in which people from Philistia who had been exiled from Philistia and resettled in Mesopotamia by the Babylonians, were not identified as “Philistines” – but rather as being from various cities within Philistia (e.g. men of Gaza, men of Ashkelon, etc.). Thus, while the term “Philistine” may have been used in the Iron Age as an ethnic designator – for sure by others describing the Philistines, but perhaps as an emic Philistine term as well, smaller-scale group identities were also of importance in defining cultural affinities and group identities of people from this region.

Attempts to differentiate between the “Philistines” and other ethnicities in the Iron Age Levant, on the basis of a small set of material correlates can lead to simplistic, or simply mistaken differentiations. Suggestions to characterize what we might call the “*Philistinicity*” of a site based on a small group of traits such as the presence/absence of decorated Philistine pottery, consumption of pig and dog meat, “Aegean-style” pinched loom weights (“spools”), hearths, and such singular items (often related to as Philistine *type fossils*) are problematic. As already noted in the past, many of these specific items can appear on “both sides” of the supposed Philistine/Israelite ethnic boundaries – and even beyond (MAEIR *et al.* 2013; HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2013).² Without a doubt, when viewed as a

² The recently published faunal assemblage from Tell Jemmeh (MAHER 2014) reiterates this issue. While the Iron I pottery assemblage of the site (BEN-SHLOMO 2014) clearly indicates a strong connection with the Philistine culture, pig bones are absent. This strengthens our previous claims (MAEIR *et al.* 2013; contra FAUST and LEV-TOV 2014) that pig consumption, which was often seen as a primary marker of Philistine identity, should not be viewed as a *conditio sine qua non* for the identification of a site as Philistine. Other factors, whether environmental or organizational (more pig in urban sites; less in rural) seem to play a substantial role as well (MAEIR and HORWITZ in press). The presence of closed cooking jugs and cylindrical loomweights, very possibly influenced by “western” cultural traditions, at the site of Tell Abu el-Kharaz in Transjordan (FISCHER

whole, the material assemblages at major sites in Iron Age Philistia are different from that of sites in regions associated with other groups (Israelite, Judahite, Phoenician, etc.). But time and again, specific types of objects can be seen in many areas and used by many groups (as noted above regarding pottery types appearing in different cultural areas; BEN-SHLOMO *et al.* 2008). The appearance of supposedly Philistine objects should not be seen as evidence of Philistine expansion into these other zones (unless the evidence is unequivocal), and vice-a-versa for Israelite/Judahite facets among the Philistines. Rather, artefacts need to be interrogated in the context of their assemblages and architectural spaces in order to draw out different cultural encounters, functions, and entanglements as well as to elucidate new ones (e.g. ROSS 2012).

The Philistine cultural identity is often regarded as clearly opposing the Israelite group identity, and following the biblical text, it is seen as a major impetus for the crystallization of Israelite identity (most recently, this view is particularly espoused by FAUST (e.g., 2013; FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011; 2014). This opinion is problematic. To start with, most of the assumptions on the antagonistic relations between the Philistines and the “Israelites” are based on the biblical text – and it is not clear how much of this represents actual early Iron Age reality, and what part of this is a reflection of later Iron Age - or even post-Iron Age – realities and ideologies (on this, see LEMCHE 2012). For example, there is very little archaeological evidence of weaponry in early Iron Age Philistia (e.g. KOLLER 2012: 191–192), despite the very martial picture depicted in the biblical narrative regarding early Iron Age Philistia. In addition, the very assumption that one can define and relate to a singular “Israelite” identity in the Iron Age is fraught with difficulties. Although the biblical texts do portray such a unified group character at various stages of the Iron Age, the archaeological, epigraphic, and historical documents indicate that this was far from being the case – and in fact one should relate to disparate Israel and Judahite identities (e.g., FLEMING 2012; MAEIR 2013).

Recently, it has been repeatedly suggested that not only can the Philistine and Israelite/Judahite ethnicities be clearly identified archaeologically, an additional “Canaanite” group can be seen in the archaeological record, in the “Shephelah” (the Judean foothills) buffer zone between the Philistines and Israelites. This has been suggested for the early Iron Age phases at sites such as Beth Shemesh (BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009; 2011; LEDERMAN and BUNIMOVITZ 2014), Tel Eton (FAUST and KATZ 2011; Faust 2013) and Khirbet Qeiyafa (e.g. NA’AMAN 2010).

Bunimovitz and Lederman have suggested that it is possible to identify a process of “resistance” among the local, “non-Philistine” population at Tel Beth-Shemesh. According to their view, at the time of the arrival of the Philistine migrant communities, people at Tel Beth-Shemesh refrained from consuming pork and from using the decorated Philistine pottery, which they associated with the newcomers (BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009; 2011; LEDERMAN and BUNIMOVITZ 2014). While there is validity to their suggestions, one must remember that: a) Philistine decorated pottery has been found at Beth-Shemesh (see MÜNNICH 2013; and add to this that in the recent 2014 season, additional quantities of this decorated pottery was found; LEDERMAN pers. comm.); b) as noted above, the Philistines themselves were comprised of both foreign and local Canaanite components. Further, caution is warranted simply given the constantly changing understanding of this region as a result of intensive archaeological investigation.

As opposed to such a tight, site-specific interpretation, attempts to formulate an overall definition of ethnic groups living in clearly defined and bordered regions is harder to justify (such as suggested by NA’AMAN 2010; FAUST and KATZ 2011; FAUST 2013). As pointed out above, the very definition of “who is” and “who is not” a Philistine or an Israelite/Judahite is hardly agreed upon. And thus, suggesting to explicitly define the supposedly static ethnic identity of a group living in the

and BÜRGE 2013), only stresses the need to be careful with defining objects types as being typical of specific ethnic and cultural groups (thanks to P. FISCHER for suggesting this reference).

contact zone between these groups remains complicated. The very fact that “Canaanite” (local Levantine) features are seen in Iron Age Philistia (see above) and at the same time, a major part of the so-called “early Israelite” culture can be traced to local Levantine (“Canaanite”) origins, makes it difficult to distinguish between a “real” Canaanite – supposedly living in this buffer zone, and a “transformed” Canaanite – who lives in the Philistine regions on the one hand and/or Israelite/Judahite regions on the other.

A short digression on the use and definitions of ethnic labels in the early Iron Age Levant is called for at this point. Time and again, many of the recent archaeological and historical studies of the ancient Levant which deal with questions of ethnicity – and in particular – those with discussions on the identification of archaeological criteria for defining ethnicity and group identity, place much emphasis on BARTH’s (1969) seminal contribution to the field of the study of ethnicity. In particular, focus is placed on Barth’s observations, which have been accepted, and stressed, by many social theorists, that “boundary definition” is perhaps the most important aspect of group (and in some cases, ethnic) definition. Meaning, that the most important criteria for defining between groups is how one group sees itself different from the other – and those aspects of choice through which this difference is manifested.

While without a doubt BARTH’s understanding of ethnicity is of utmost importance, several caveats should be mentioned: 1) BARTH’s views represent one of the “schools” of the understanding of ethnicity in modern social theory – other views are espoused as well;³ 2) In contemporary discussions on ethnicity in social and cultural anthropology and sociology (e.g. WIMMER 2008; 2013; BRUBAKER 2009; 2014; ERIKSEN 2010; JIMÉNEZ 2010), even if “boundary maintenance” is seen as a crucial aspect in the definition of ethnic groups, “boundary maintenance” can be viewed as but one aspect of a complex and multi-layered inter-relationship of various factors – as opposed to being the sole, or at least most focussed on factor – as often portrayed in attempts to illustrate the existence of ethnic groups in the archaeological remains. For example, while the supposed differences seen between groups – and their boundaries - are crucial, so are internal social factors (e.g., ERIKSEN 2001; WIMMER 2008); 3) Ethnic identity, as BARTH (1969; 2000) himself noted, is fluid and mutable, and a person’s (or group’s) ethnic identity can change within a relatively short time; 4) As BARTH (2000) and others (e.g. JENKINS 2008: 26–27) have noted, the very concept of a “boundary” has different meanings in various cultural contexts, and one cannot simplistically define a boundary based on western conceptions of geographical boundaries. Such boundaries may have archaeologically-invisible characteristics.

In this light, attempts to clearly and to neatly delineate ethnic groups in the early Iron Age Southern Levant, based on a list of what is seen as archaeologically-identified “markers” which served for boundary definition (e.g., FINKELSTEIN 1997; BUNIMOVITZ and FAUST 2001; FAUST 2006; 2007; FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011; 2014; FAUST and KATZ 2013) should be viewed with caution. How can we be sure that the very definition of supposed ethnic groups in the Iron I is not an ideological reflection of texts from a later period? Can we be certain that in fact there were distinct Philistine and Israelite ethnicities in the early Iron Age – or were there several groupings, some of them at times rather nebulous in character? And even if there were – did the archaeological markers, which have been suggested (e.g. pig consumption, pottery, etc.), in fact serve as boundary markers for the different

³ The various “schools” on the understanding of ethnicity (see, e.g. SOKOLOVSKII and TISHKOV 2010), which have various offshoots of their own, are usually divided into the “primordialists” (e.g. GEERTZ 1963), the “instrumentalists” (e.g. COHEN 1969), and the “constructivists” (BARTH [1969] being the best-known proponent of this school). While the constructivist view is that which is most often espoused, it is not without its critics (e.g. COHEN 1978). In addition, attempts to find a middle ground between these schools have been suggested as well (e.g. WIMMER 2008; BRUBAKER 2009; thus, it is hard to accept LEMCHE’s [2012] claim that such a middle ground is theoretically impossible).

groups at that time? As noted by MAEIR *et al.* (2013), the variability in the appearance of some of these supposed markers in early Iron Age Philistia itself raises questions regarding the validity of simplistically using such markers.

As mentioned above, ethnic identity is often fluid and can quickly change (e.g., HALL 2000; MALKIN 2001; DOUGHERTY and KURKE 2003; CASELLA and FOWLER 2005; SIAPKAS 2014). Thus, modern perceptions of group identities during the early Iron Age, which are based, by and large, on written sources from later periods (dating to the late Iron Age and post-Iron Age periods), more than anything else may reflect on the social and/or ideological environment of these later periods than that of the supposedly described earlier periods. Thus, can one confidently speak of distinct and neatly packaged ethnic identities which are archaeologically visible (of e.g., Israelites, Philistines and Canaanites) during the early Iron Age, when in fact – a more heterogeneous and constantly mutating matrix of identities might have actually existed during this time (see as well BAUER 2014)?⁴

This suggestion, that the Canaanites lived in between the Philistines and the Israelites, might be influenced by a modern reading of the biblical text – in particular the mention of Canaanites in this region in the “Tamar and Judah narrative” in Genesis 38 – as there is no clear corroboration of this in contemporaneous Iron Age texts. As very few biblical scholars would date this text to the early Iron Age (on the dating of this text [to no earlier than Iron Age IIB], see now LEUCHTER 2013), one wonders whether this text in fact reflects a historical reality at all.⁵ Can we speak of a Canaanite group identity in this region during the early Iron Age – and even if so – how can this be identified archaeologically?

To a large extent, the problems inherent with attempts to identify this “Canaanite enclave” is reminiscent of Hakenbeck’s description of the problems with identifying ethnicities in early medieval central Europe:

“Furthermore, studies of ethnicity in the early medieval period have relied heavily on a literal reading of historical sources, creating a self-referencing circular argument. The sources are thought to provide a framework of facts and dates into which archaeological evidence can be fitted. Fragments of information gained from historical sources are taken out of context and used to identify the movements and settlement areas of the barbarian peoples. Distribution maps of specific artefact types then apparently identified these areas on the ground. The next step is to identify the ethnicity of individuals by making a connection between these artefacts and the identity of those that were buried with them. Once the tribal areas became populated with people, these people then turned fully-clothed into the actors mentioned in the historical sources” (HAKENBECK 2011: 39).

⁴ Not to mention, that even if some of the supposed ethnic markers are archaeologically visible, one must take into account that modern ethnography has demonstrated that ethnic markers can include very subtle, and archaeologically, virtually invisible “markers” – such as gestures (e.g., KENDON 1984; WULF *et al.* 2011) – which due to the lack of relevant iconographic materials (e.g. BEN-SHLOMO 2010), Philistine “gestures” are *terra incognita* (and this is true as well for most other early Iron Age groups in the Levant). Similarly, significant items for the definition of group identity, which were made of perishable materials (and ethnographic studies demonstrate that this is most often the case), would also have no “signature” in the archaeological record. Thus, over confidence in suggesting what were the ethnic markers of a given group (such as, e.g., decorated pottery, dietary preferences, or circumcision) should be treated with caution (e.g., SHAI 2011; MAEIR *et al.* 2013).

⁵ Perhaps, a better way to view the biblical tradition of the Canaanites residing in the Shephelah (as manifested in Genesis 38), would be in the context of the shaping of the group identities of later Israelites/Judahites – as seen through their “collective memories” of a real or imagined past. See, e.g., HALBWACHS 1941; 1992; MENDELS 2004; BEN ZVI and LEVIN 2012; GEHRKE 2014. Through such a perspective, perhaps the Shephelah itself should be seen, following P. NORA (1989), as a “lieu de memoire” (site of memory) of the Israelite/Judahite collective identity. For examples of the use of landscapes in the creation of identity in the ancient world, see, e.g., the essays in ALCOCK *et al.* 2001, and most recently, HARMANŞAH 2014. For a recent collection of studies in which the role of the Canaanites in biblical and post-biblical ideologies are discussed, see now BERTHELOT *et al.* 2014.

Thus, we believe that the supposition of the identification of such a “Canaanite enclave” in the early Iron Age Shephelah (e.g., BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2011; FAUST and KATZ 2013; FAUST 2013) rests on shaky foundations. If one accepts the existence of a Canaanite “identity” (or better, identities) during the Late Bronze Age (and we are of the opinion that one should), this does not by necessity mean that this identity continued unchanged into the Iron Age in a period when technological and socio-political structures were in flux. This would require one to assume that groups living in the border zone between the regions in which the cultural identity in later sources was seen as Philistine on the one hand and Israelite/Judahite on the other (and the archaeological evidence indicates that these identities were in fact in the process of formation and transformation, albeit in complex mechanisms, already in the early Iron Age) continued to grasp onto the cultural and ethnic identities of the Late Bronze Age. This is hardly to be taken for granted. As ethnic and cultural identities can quickly change, unless there is clear evidence of this, there is no reason to assume that the ethnic identities of the Late Bronze Age “froze” and continued to exist over such an extended period. Observed continuities in certain aspects of the material culture between the Late Bronze and early Iron Age do not, by definition, allow one to claim that there is a continuity in Canaanite (or for that matter Aegean or Cypriot) identity. The lack of explicit evidence of this supposed “identity continuum” – whether archaeological or textual – and not simply the fact that similar pottery or other choice material aspects are seen in Late Bronze and early Iron Age sites in the Shephelah, makes such a claim hard, if not impossible to accept. Just as NESTOR (2010) rightfully cautions against simplistic attempts to demonstrate explicit continuity between Iron Age I and Iron Age II Israelite identity – even when there was perhaps some evidence for this – it goes without saying that in the case of the supposed Canaanite identity in the early Iron Age Shephelah, where we are completely dependent on the suppositions of scholarly opinion – a cautious approach is warranted. While one cannot deny the theoretical possibility of the existence of such a “Canaanite identity” in the Shephelah, it is far from proven!

Quoting ERIKSEN (2010: 213–214):

“... the existence of ethnic anomalies or liminal categories should serve as a reminder that group boundaries are not unproblematic. These are groups or individuals who are ‘betwixt and between’, who are neither X nor Y and yet a bit of both. Their actual group membership may be open to situational negotiation, it may be ascribed by a dominant group, or the group may form a separate ethnic category.”

In addition, as demonstrated both archaeologically and textually, both the Philistines and the Israelites/Judahites had substantial “Canaanite” components in their formative stages, so it would be somewhat difficult to demarcate clear borders between “Philistine Canaanites”, “Real Canaanites” (supposedly living in the Shephelah), and “Israelite Canaanites”!

Perhaps then, one should prefer to look at the transition between the Philistia-Shephelah-Central Hills, as a region in which boundaries did exist, but which were “fuzzy” and constantly changing (compare, e.g., GARDNER 2007). While there is no question that during the early Iron Age there were peoples that identified themselves separately – perhaps as “Philistines” (and they resided mainly in Philistia) and as Israelites/Judahites (and they resided mainly in the Central Hills) – and for the arguments sake – perhaps even “Canaanites” (residing in the Shephelah), it would be very hard to define, at any given time, based on the available archaeological data, the cultural/ethnic affiliation, and more than that – the exclusive, or even static, group identity – of the inhabitants of a given site in the border zones (see now LEHMANN and NIEMANN 2014 and MAZAR 2014: 362–364 for attempts to deal with certain facets of the flux in the cultural identities in the early Iron Age Shephelah).

It would be most logical to assume that overlapping “micro-identities” existed in this region (e.g. WHITMARSH 2010; POBLOME *et al.* 2014). Building, for example, on VAN NIFF’s (2010)

perspective on cultural interactions in Pisidian Termessos during the Roman period, the inhabitants of the Shephelah might have been actively involved in cultural “code-switching” – in which they could actively switch between emblematic identifying characteristics – according to specific contexts and needs. This can even be taken further if one looks at the identities in the Shephelah region (and in fact, in all contexts), as “nested identities” – in which various identities (including ethnicity) operate simultaneously at different levels – very much like a Russian “Babushka” doll.⁶ These various levels of identity could be manifested simultaneously, and over time, in different manners in the archaeological record – and the supposition that material differences and changes reflect ethnic identity is all too simplistic.

It might be suggested to view the Shephelah as an example of a “Middle Ground” (e.g. WHITE 1991; WOOLF 2011; REGER 2014) or a “Third Space” (BHABBA 1994), also discussed in KNAPP (2008) with regard to Cyprus. In this light, the varied material culture “packages” seen at sites in this region could be seen as the developing “Social Imaginaries” (e.g., CASTORIADIS 1975; TAYLOR 2002; STAVRIANOPOULOU 2013) that evolved during the Iron Age in this region of intense intercultural contacts (see as well MENGONI 2010 for the complexity of identifying ethnic groups in a border situation).

Simplistic interpretations of the archaeological correlates for identifying “ethnic” Philistines as opposed to other groups in the Iron Age Levant should be viewed with caution. Similarly, attempts to identify a unified “Philistine identity” may be problematic as well. Not only are the Philistines of a very mixed origin, there are discreet (and not so discreet) regional differences between the material culture at various Philistine sites as noted above, and the Philistines themselves defined themselves based on their cities of origin – and not necessarily as “Philistines” in general.

An additional hint to the complex nature of the group name “Philistines” has now emerged, with the new evidence of the name “Palistin” – very similar to “Philistine” – in use in early Iron Age Syria – by other groups with Aegean connections as noted above (e.g., HARRISON 2009; SINGER 2012; WEEDEN 2013; see though SCHNEIDER 2012). If this is the case, then the very definition of what it means to be a Philistine, or to be called a Philistine, becomes even more multifaceted. In addition, in light of our suggested understanding of some of the Sea Peoples as tribes of pirates (HITCHCOCK and MAEIR 2014), the northern Philistines could represent a breakaway group or splitting off of such a tribe, a phenomenon that is well-known in the historical era of piracy (e.g., REDIKER 2004, 80–81, esp. fig. 4). The loosening grip of the Hittites on Anatolia and of the Egyptians on Canaan may have facilitated settlement by the Sea Peoples in these areas (e.g. GILAN 2013).

Summing up, during the early Iron Age in Philistia, a complex process of cultural negotiation took place – between various foreign and local groups, bringing about the formation of an entangled cultural identity. The on-going interaction of groups within Philistia, and of other groups outside of Philistia, created a fluid and very complex set of dynamic processes and “identity politics”. The clear cut definitions of who belonged to which group(s), how regions were defined as “Philistine” or not, and how these processes developed and changed, are clearly not as simplistic as often suggested. This said, despite the difficulties in defining and identifying who and what “being a Philistine” was during the Iron Age, and when did this identity (or rather, identities) form, one should not “throw out the baby with the bathwater” and completely deny the existence of group identities relating to the Philistines and to the Israelites in the Iron Age (as LEMCHE 2012 seems to be inclined to suggest). Ethnic identities, and for that matter, national identities, were very much in existence during the Iron

⁶ For a classic study of “nested identities”, see HERB and KAPLAN 1999. For recent applications in archaeology, see, e.g., JANUSEK 2005; HAKENBECK 2007; 2011; ROBERTS 2011; SALAZAR *et al.* 2014; SCOPACASA 2014.

Age⁷ – it just may not be so simple to define and delineate them, and to demarcate their development and change over time (for similar views, see now KLETTER 2014). Employing more nuanced and multifaceted approaches may pave the way for a better understanding of these issues.⁸

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⁷ As opposed to the very commonly-repeated mantra of contemporary historiography and social theory, that nationalities are a modern phenomenon (e.g., KOHN 1969; ANDERSON 1980; HOBBSAWM 1990), we completely agree with GAT’s (2013) *tour de force*, in which he demonstrates that nationalism has deep historical roots (contra, e.g., LEMCHE 2012).

⁸ It should be stressed that we do not, in any way, subscribe to the view that ethnicity cannot be identified in the archaeological record (e.g. BRATHER 2004; 2011 – but see CURTA 2013), but rather that its definition and identification remains a constant challenge and that it is more complex than often assumed (also MCINERNEY 2014).

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