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New Discoveries Among the Philistines: Archaeological and Textual Considerations

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Perhaps no other culture of the Bible is more notorious than the Philistines. As the ever present foes of Israel, they are the people who brought about the downfall of Samson (Jdg 16). The Philistines are the only people who ever captured the ark of God (1 Sam 4-6). The Bible records the story of the Philistine giant Goliath, who challenged the armies of Saul and was then defeated by a boy named David whose practiced aim was blessed by the Lord (1 Sam 17). Later David avenged the deaths of Saul and Jonathan at the hands of the Philistines (2 Sam 5:17-25). So the Philistines have become part of the childhood imagination wherever Bible stories are told, epitomizing evil and rebelliousness before the God of heaven. Mention of them brings to mind images of a barbaric, uncivilized, and uncouth people. While the first association is biblical, the second is a sociocultural assumption that requires further investigation.

Before the dawn of archaeology as a systematic discipline in the Middle East during the last century, these recorded events, renowned as they were through the Judaeo-Christian world, lacked any specific historical context. Today, that picture has changed. We know a great deal more about the everyday life of this ancient people, for the Philistines, more perhaps than any other no ancient culture of the Bible, have been vividly illuminated through archaeological excavations during the past two decades.¹ I have been personally involved in excavating several Philistine and “Sea People” sites in Israel, so this topic is of particular interest

¹ Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982); Trude Dothan and Moshe Dothan, *People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan, 1992); Amihai Mazar, “The Emergence of the Philistine Material Culture,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 35 (1985):95-107. For the most comprehensive discussions, see *The Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries B.C.E.*, ed. Seymour Gitin, Amihai Mazar, and Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998), reviewed by Michael G. Hasel, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, in press.

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to me.² This paper will consider the textual, iconographic, and archaeological evidence that has recently new life to this people.

Origins: Textual Considerations

Biblical Accounts. According to the Bible, the Philistines originated from the islands and coast lands of the Aegean sea. In the table of nations of Gen. 10:14 the Philistines are mentioned as originating from Caphtor.³ Jeremiah 47:4 and Amos 9:7 also specifically associate them with Caphtor, which can be identified with the area of Crete.⁴ Ezekiel 25:15-16 and Zephaniah 2:5 portray the Philistines in poetic parallel with the Cherethites (also from Crete).⁵ The Biblical record regarding their origin is rather clear, but are there other historical indications?

Egyptians and the “Sea Peoples.” In 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte landed on the beaches of Alexandria with a massive French force. Napoleon’s main goal was of course to secure a valuable colony for the young French Republic, but he also had hopes of scientific conquest as well. He brought along with him a “Scientific and Artistic Commission” composed of 167 distinguished scholars and scientists who were to record and study the things found there.⁶ One of the most impressive sites discovered in Thebes in southern Egypt was the enormous temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu.⁷ On the walls of this temple,

² These sites include Ashkelon, Dor, and Tel Miqne-Ekron. For a recent discussion, see Michael G. Hasel, “Excavations at Tel Miqne-Ekron, 1994,” *Horn Archaeological Museum Newsletter* 15/4 (1994): 5; idem, “New Discoveries Among the Philistines,” *Ministry* (March, 1998):21-23; idem, “A Silent Mound Reveals Its Secrets,” *Perspective Digest* 3/1 (1998):30-33.

³ Gary A. Rendsburg, “Gen 10:13-14: An Authentic Hebrew Tradition Concerning the Origin of the Philistines,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 13 (1987): 90 n. 3.

⁴ F. R. Bush, “Caphtor,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 610-611; Richard S. Hess, “Caphtor,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 869-870; cf. D. M. Howard, Jr., “Philistines,” *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, ed. Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 232.

⁵ Although it is generally assumed that this group also originated in Crete, the identity of the Cherethites is not certain. Indeed, some passages in the OT juxtapose the Cherethites and the Philistines (Ezek 25:16; Zeph 2:5), yet there remains some ambiguity whether the “Cherethites were identical with the Philistines, a subgroup of the Philistines, or a separate ethnic entity,” Carl S. Ehrlich, “Cherethites,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 898-899. William F. Albright (“A Colony of Cretan Mercenaries on the Coast of the Negev,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 1 [1920-21]: 187-194) believed that they were a mercenary group employed by the Egyptians long before the incursion of the “Sea Peoples” at the time of Ramses III, while M. Delcor believes that they did not arrive from Crete until the time of David (“Les Kéréthim et les Crétois,” *Vetus Testamentum* 28 [1978]: 409-422) during whose reign they were used as guards (2 Sam 8:18; 15:18; 20:7; 20:23; 1 Kgs 1:38-44; 1 Chr 18:17).

⁶ Dothan and Dothan, *People of the Sea*, 13.

⁷ On the Medinet Habu reliefs, see The Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu II: The Later Historical Records of Ramses III*, Oriental Institute Publications 9 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago); For translations of the text see W. F. Edgerton and John A. Wilson,

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as on many funerary temples in Egypt, military campaign records were written in Egyptian and accompanied with reliefs that illustrated these actions vividly.⁸ Often in these military scenes the king is shown smiting the captives he has brought back to Egypt.⁹

In one of these scenes at Medinet Habu an account is given of the arrival of the “Sea Peoples,” warriors who met the forces of Ramses III in boats,¹⁰ presumably somewhere in the mouth of the Nile Delta.¹¹ Several of these “Sea Peoples” already appeared in earlier records of Ramses II¹² and Merenptah.¹³ Among those mentioned on the Medinet Habu reliefs, including the Tjeker, Denyen, Sharduna, and Weshesh, the *prst* (Peleset) or Philistines are mentioned

Historical Records of Ramses III: The Texts in Medinet Habu Volumes I and II. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 12 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).

⁸ For a complete analysis of the use of military terminology in the texts of the entire period, see Michael G. Hasel, *Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, ca. 1300-1185 BC*, *Probleme der Ägyptologie* 11 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998); more specifically cf. Barbara Cifola, “Ramses III and the Sea Peoples: A Structural Analysis of the Medinet Habu Inscriptions,” *Orientalia*, n.s. 57 (1988):275-306. On the reliefs, idem, “The Terminology of Ramses III’s Historical Records with a Formal Analysis of the War Scenes,” *Orientalia*, n.s. 60 (1991):9-57; E. van Essche-Merchez, “La syntaxe formelle des reliefs et de la grande inscription de l’an 8 de Ramsès III à Médinet Habu,” *Chronique d’Égypte* 134 (1992):211-239.

⁹ Michael G. Hasel, *Domination and Resistance*, 36-38; Emma S. Hall, *The Pharaoh Smites His Enemies: A Comparative Study*, *Münchener Ägyptologischer Studien* 44 (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986).

¹⁰ On the boats of these invading groups, see Shelley Wachsmann, “The Ships of the Sea Peoples,” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration* 10/3 (1981):187-220; idem, “The Ships of the Sea People: Additional Notes,” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration* 11/4 (1982):297-304; Avner Raban and Robert R. Stieglitz, “The Sea Peoples and Their Contribution to Civilization,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17/6 (1991):34-42, 92-93.

¹¹ Trude Dothan, “What We Know About the Philistines,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8/4 (1982):30-35; N. K. Sanders, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean 1250-1150 B.C.*, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

¹² In the reign of Ramses II, the Lukka and Sherden, two Sea People groups, are mentioned (Alan H. Gardiner, *The Kadesh Inscriptions of Ramesses II* [Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1960]). The Lukka are mentioned as allies of the Hittites (KRI II:17), while the Sherden are listed as mercenaries fighting for Egypt (KRI II:6-10). The Tanis Stela describes a group of Sherden who overpowered in raids and assaults from the sea vessels (translation in J. Yoyotte, “Les stèles de Ramsès II à Tanis,” *Kemi* 10 (1949):60-74, lines 13-16; KRI II:345,3); and the Assuan Stela of Ramses’ Year 2 refers to the king who “destroys the warriors of the sea” (James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents, vol. 3* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1906] 779; KRI II:345,3). The Sherden are also listed among Egypt’s military in Papyrus Anastasi I (Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Hieratic Texts* [Leipzig, 1911] 58).

¹³ Several groups of Sea Peoples are mentioned in Merenptah’s campaign against the Libyans in the Great Karnak Inscription (KRI IV:2-12) and the Athribis Stela (KRI IV:19-22). These include the Eqwesh, Teresh, Lukka, Sherden, and Shekelesh as “northerners coming from all lands.” Only the Eqwesh in this list are eventually said to be “coming from the sea” (KRI IV:8,9; IV:22,13). These groups are not mentioned in the Merenptah (Israel) Stela (KRI IV:12-19; on the military campaign of Merenptah to Canaan, see Michael G. Hasel, “Israel in the Merneptah Stela,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 296 [1994] 45-61).

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for the first time during the eighth year of Ramses III (1185 B.C.).¹⁴ Taking a closer look at these warriors, we notice distinctive features. We certainly can be thankful for the careful and meticulous scribes and artisans who preserved such a detailed record of what peoples of the ancient world looked like. Asiatics and Egyptians are clearly distinguished from these groups of newcomers. Other reliefs show whole families of these groups traveling in ox-drawn carts and warriors riding on horse-drawn chariots as they engage the Egyptians in land battle.¹⁵

According to the reliefs, the Philistines wore a plain shirt jerkin under some armor. All wore elaborate feather headdresses similar to a mohawk haircut. They are clearly fighting against the Egyptians, and by the look of it they are not winning. The same hairstyle or feathered headdress appears as a coffin lid from Beth Shan, an Egyptian stronghold in Palestine during the Late Bronze Age.¹⁶ Other ceramic coffins of this type occur at coastal sites like Tell Far'ah (S) and Lachish.¹⁷

Some scholars have made a connection between these coffin lids and various early "Sea Peoples"¹⁸ or Philistines.¹⁹ However, Larry Stager, of Harvard University, has pointed out that the dating of coffins found at the Egyptian garrison site of Deir el-Balah²⁰ may preclude an association with the Philistines since they appear a century or two before the "Sea People" invasion described in the records of Ramses III.²¹ Stager, with others, assumes that the first arrival of the Philistines did not occur until shortly before the campaign described by Ramses

¹⁴ The ethnic name *prst* was first noticed by Jean François Champollion, see Dothan and Dothan, *People of the Sea*, 22.

¹⁵ Dothan and Dothan, *People from the Sea*, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pl. 4.

¹⁷ Dothan, *The Philistines*, 260-279.

¹⁸ Some scholars believed that these coffins contained the Denyen, see E. Oren, *The Northern Cemetery at Beth Shan* (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

¹⁹ So G. Ernest Wright, "Philistine Coffins and Mercenaries," *Biblical Archaeologist* 22 (1959):54-66. Sir Flinders Petrie, when excavating Cemetery 500 at Tell el-Far'ah (S), first associated these coffins with "five lords [seranim] of the Philistines," see Jane Waldbaum, "Philistine Tombs at Tell Fara and Their Aegean Prototypes," *American Journal of Archaeology* 70 (1966):331-340. Waldbaum and others have associated the appearance of this form of burial with the Aegean world (cf. William H. Stiebing, Jr., "Another Look at the Origins of the Philistine Tombs of Tell el-Far'ah [S]," *American Journal of Archaeology* 74 [1970] 139-143. Trude Dothan associated the first of these tombs at Deir el-Balah with the Egyptians and suggests that this burial practice was later adopted by the Philistines (Dothan, *The Philistines*, 288).

²⁰ On excavations at Deir el-Balah, see Trude Dothan, *Excavations at the Cemetery of Deir el-Balah. Qedem 10* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979); *idem*, "Deir el-Balah," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 343-347.

²¹ Lawrence E. Stager, "The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan (1185-1050 BCE)," *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. T. E. Levy (Leicester: Leicester University, 1995), 341; see already on this point, James D. Muhly, "The Role of the Sea Peoples in Cyprus during the LCIII Period," *Cyprus at the Close of the Late Bronze Age*, ed. Vassos Karageorghis and James D. Muhly (Nicosia: Zavallis, 1984), 46.

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III in 1185 B.C. While the evidence from the coffins alone make such a connection difficult, it might also be possible to conclude that they represent an earlier Philistine presence, as described in earlier biblical accounts. While later coffins could also have served the Philistines,²² they may also have been used by the Egyptians who dominated Palestine during the Late Bronze Age.²³

Most scholars have concluded from the Egyptian evidence that the Philistines at this stage were part of a massive invasion from the Greek islands across the Mediterranean both by land and by sea. What caused this massive migration? Various theories abound: 1) a volcanic eruption;²⁴ 2) massive earthquakes;²⁵ 3) famine or drought;²⁶ 4) overpopulation; 5) or a systemic theory of collapse that may include several of these factors. There is no certain explanation. What does become clearer from the textual, iconographic and archaeological record is where they came from and the method of their settlement along the coastal plain of Israel.²⁷

²² So Dothan, *The Philistines*, 288.

²³ So Stager, "Impact of the Sea Peoples," 341.

²⁴ On the eruption of Thera and its influence on migrations around the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age transition, see Spyridon Marinatos, "The Volcanic Destruction of Minoan Crete," *Antiquity* 13 (1939):425-439; L. Pomerance, *The Final Collapse of Santorini (Thera) 1400 or 1200?* SMA 26 (Göteborg: Aströms, 1970); but see P. Kuniholm, "Overview and Assessment of the Evidence for the Date of the Eruption of Thera," *Thera and the Aegean World. Proceedings of the Third International Congress, vol. 3: Chronology*, ed. D. A. Hardy and A. Colin Renfrew (London: Thera Foundation, 1990), 13-18.

²⁵ On the hypothesis that earthquakes caused many of the destruction of Late Bronze Age cities, see C.F.A. Schaeffer, "Commentaires sur les lettres et documents trouvés dans les bibliothèques privées d'Ugarit," *Ugaritica*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1968), 753-768; but see Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe ca. 1200 B.C.* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), 33-47.

²⁶ On drought or famine as the causative factor for the migration of "Sea Peoples," see Rhys Carpenter, *Discontinuity in Greek Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1966); August Stobel, *Die spätbronzezeitliche Seevölkersturm* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976), 173-174; William H. Stiebing, Jr. *Out of the Desert? Archaeology and the Exodus/Conquest Narratives* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989), 182-187; but see Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age*, 77-84.

²⁷ There has been a question whether they were settled into Egyptian garrisons after their alleged defeat under Ramses III (William F. Albright, "The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim, I: Pottery of the First Three Campaigns," *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 12. [New Haven, CT: ASOR, 1932]; Albrecht Alt, "Ägyptische Tempel in Palästina und die Landnahme der Philister," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 67 [1944] 1-20; Dothan, *The Philistines*, 288; I. Singer, "The Beginning of Philistine Settlement in Canaan and the Northern Boundary of Philistia," *Tel Aviv* 12 [1985] 109-122; idem, "Egyptians, Canaanites, and Philistines in the Period of the Emergence of Israel," *From Nomadism to Monarchy*, ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994]: 232-238) or whether they were invading conquerors that settled in the southern coastal plain of Palestine despite the efforts of the Egyptians to quell their advance (on this view see, Bryant G. Wood, "The Philistines Enter Canaan: Were They Egyptian Lackeys or Invading Conquerors?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17 [1991] 44-90; Manfred Bietak, "The Sea Peoples and the End of Egyptian Administration in Canaan," *Biblical Archaeology Today: 1990: Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, June-July, 1990*, ed. A. Biran and J. Aviram [Jerusalem: Israel Explora-

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From Biblical records we know that there were at least five Philistine cities along the southern coastal plain in Israel. They were called Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gaza (Jer 25:20; Amos 1:8; Zeph 2:4), and Gath (Josh 11:22; 1 Sam 5:8; Amos 6:2). Three of these sites have been excavated extensively, and at two sites, Gaza²⁸ and Gath (Tell es-Safi),²⁹ excavations were initiated last year. We turn now specifically to the recent excavations at Tell Miqne-Ekron.

Origins: Recent Discoveries at Ekron

Architectural Affinities. The eighty-five acre site is located southeast of modern Tel Aviv on the southern coastal plain. The first stages of Philistine occupation followed the massive destruction of a Canaanite city.³⁰ This same pattern of destruction is found at sites throughout Philistia, including Ashdod³¹ and Ashkelon.³² At Tel Miqne-Ekron over a meter and a half of debris included charred roof beams and a beautiful bowl, intact, with dried figs that were made into charcoal as a result of the intensive heat and thereby preserved. The first stage of settlement was marked by numerous pits and storage areas. The Philistines probably camped for awhile before building more monumental structures.

Later this first phase was followed what became known as the “hearth” room excavated in Field IV Lower. The hearth functioned as a large fireplace in a room with mudbrick walls that were covered with fine plaster. The hearth was found and cleared in 1990, but was saved for thorough excavation in 1995, when I was made responsible for carefully sectioning it and analyzing its contents. The hearth was surrounded by standing mudbricks that formed the perimeter and several sunken storage jars. We found considerable remains of charcoal in the upper levels but it later dissipated as we excavated further. It turned out, in fact, that the so-called hearth served initially as a storage silo that was nearly two meters deep and lined with mudbrick at the bottom. The conclusion was reached, on the basis of the architecture surrounding this unique feature, that the building built

tion Society, 1993] 292-306; Rainer Stadelmann, “Die Abwehr der Seevölker unter Ramses III.,” *Saeculum* 19 [1968] 156-171; Stager, “Impact of the Sea Peoples,” 340-341).

²⁸ Hershel Shanks, “Gaza: Nascent Palestinian Authority Tackles a New Dig,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23/2 (1997):52-53.

²⁹ Tammi J. Schneider, “New Project: Tel Safi, Israel,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 60/4 (1997):250.

³⁰ Trude Dothan, “The Arrival of the Sea Peoples: Cultural Diversity in Early Iron Age Canaan,” *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology*, AASOR 49, ed. Seymour Gitin and William G. Dever (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 6.

³¹ Dothan and Dothan, *People of the Sea*, 127-188; M. Dothan, *Ashdod I*, Atiqot 7 (Jerusalem: Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, 1967); M. Dothan and Y. Porath, *Ashdod IV*, Atiqot 15 (Jerusalem: Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, 1982); idem., *Ashdod V*, Atiqot 23 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1993).

³² Lawrence E. Stager, *Ashkelon Discovered: From Canaanites and Philistines to Romans and Moslems* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1991), 13; cf. idem., “Merneptah and the Sea Peoples: New Light on an Old Relief,” *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985):64* n. 37.

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around it belonged to a later phase, when the storage silo was converted to a hearth for ritual purposes. The hearth room at Tell Miqne-Ekron has striking affinities to similar hearth temples in the Aegean.³³ At Pylos in Greece a similar hearth room sanctuary was excavated.³⁴ It also had plastered walls, in this case beautifully and ornately painted. These types of sanctuaries are altogether unknown in Palestine, and only one other sanctuary of this type has been found, at another Philistine site called Tell Qasile.³⁵ In summary, both sanctuaries were surrounded by plastered walls, and the hearth was the center object in the sanctuary, leading us to conclude that the sanctuaries at Tell Miqne-Ekron and Tell Qasile were diminished versions of similar sanctuaries at Pylos, Mycenae, and Tiryns.

Cultic Figurines. In addition to architecture features, such as the hearth sanctuaries at Miqne and Qasile, we also have a number of figurines that indicate cultic affinities with the Aegean world. At the Philistine site of Ashdod a very interesting figure was found shaped like a chair, but with some prominent female characteristics.³⁶ This chair/woman wore a small necklace in the shape of a lotus. The prominent breasts and other designs immediately pointed to some type of female fertility deity. Called "Ashdoda" after the place it was found, this figurine resembled very closely the figurines found in Mycenae, Greece, and other locations. A similar figurine depicts a figure seated in a chair with the same prominent features, but holding a small child.³⁷ Another example from Greece shows a similar design and painting.³⁸ Not only does this indicate another connection between the Philistines and the Mycenaean world of Greece, but it also reveals that they transported their own religious and ideological practices with them.

Other cultic artifacts include a stand used for burning incense that was found at Ashdod, the design of which emphasizes close association of music with religion.³⁹ Music evidently held a very prominent role in worship practices of the Philistines, as can be seen from another figurine of a lyre player.⁴⁰ These cultic figurines and other elements seem to signify that the early settlers brought with

³³ Such temples existed at Pylos, Mycenae, and Tiryns, where they are as much as four m in diameter, see Stager, "The Impact of the Sea Peoples," 347.

³⁴ Dothan and Dothan, *People of the Sea*, 242-245.

³⁵ Amihai Mazar, *Excavations at Tell Qasile*, Qedem 12 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980); idem, "Some Aspects of the Sea Peoples Settlements," *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 23, ed. M. Heltzer and E. Lipinski (Leuven, Peeters, 1988), 251-260.

³⁶ On the significance of the "Ashdoda" figurine, see M. Dothan, *Ashdod II-III: The Second and Third Seasons of Excavations, 1963, 1965, Soundings in 1967*, *'Atiqot* 9-10 (1971):20-21.

³⁷ G. E. Mylonas, "Seated and Multiple Mycenaean Figurines in the National Museum of Athens, Greece," *Aegean and the Near East: Studies Presented to Hetty Goldman*, ed. S. Weinberg (New York, 1956), pl. XV:7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pl. XIII.

³⁹ M. Dothan, "The Musicians of Ashdod," *Archaeology* 23 (1970): 310.

⁴⁰ M. Dothan, *Ashdod II-III*, pl. LV:1.

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them the religious practices of their homeland, but as we will see, soon thereafter they began to adapt to the local religious practices.

Ceramic Affinities. Perhaps the most important of cultural affinities with the Aegean comes from the ceramic forms excavated at sites along the southern coastal plain of Israel. In 1994, just north of the hearth sanctuary, and at a level below its foundation, a heavy concentration of a specific type of pottery called Mycenaean IIIC:1b was found in the initial level of occupation. This pottery is painted in typical Mycenaean style in either black or, less frequently, red. There are several different motifs, including birds, concentric shapes, and other styles.⁴¹ Painted pottery is quite rare in this region, usually found only on imported wares or some typical Late Bronze forms,⁴² so connections to this type of painting and motifs were sought in other areas. It was found that much of the pottery was related to forms and styles found throughout mainland Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Syria, and Turkey.⁴³ This confirmed the documentary and textual evidence of an incursion of Philistines over land (from the north) and over sea (from the west). What was even more striking was that the motifs and traditions found in this ceramic type did not continue in the Aegean world after about the twelfth century B.C. “The Philistines appear to have been cut off from the rest of the Aegean world for some still unexplainable reason.”⁴⁴

Trude and Moshe Dothan have suggested that the Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery was the precursor that influenced and led to Philistine bichrome pottery of subsequent occupation levels.⁴⁵ Their theory is that there were two waves of settlement, one prior to the campaign by Ramses III, characterized in the material culture by Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery found above the destruction of sites like Ashdod and Tell Miqne-Ekron. The second wave of settlement came “in the aftermath of their defeat by Ramesses III” in 1185 BC.⁴⁶ Another view, argued by

⁴¹ For an analysis of these motifs, see T. Dothan, *The Philistines*, 94-217.

⁴² See Ruth Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Masada, 1969). for local Late Bronze wares that include “chocolate-on-white” (pp. 158-159, pl. 49); the “palm and ibex” motif (pp. 161-163, pl. 50) and certain pilgrim flasks with concentric patterns (166-170, pl. 51).

⁴³ One of the first individuals who recognized this similarity was Walter Abel Heurtley, “The Relations Between ‘Philistine’ and Mycenaean Pottery,” *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquity in Palestine* 5 (1936):90-110.

⁴⁴ Dothan and Dothan, *People of the Sea*, 51-52.

⁴⁵ On Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery and the question of Philistine origins, see Heurtley, “The Relations Between ‘Philistine’ and Mycenaean Pottery,” 90-110; A. Furumark, *The Mycenaean Pottery: Analysis and Classification* (Stockholm: K. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1941); P. Mountjoy, *Mycenaean Decorated Pottery—A Guide to Identification* (Gothenburg: Paul Aströms, 1986); Trude Dothan, “Mycenaean IIIC:1b Pottery and the Arrival of the Sea Peoples at Tel Miqne-Ekron,” *Sixth International Colloquium on Aegean Prehistory* (Athens: The Ministry of Culture, 1987); B. Kling, *Mycenaean IIC:1b and Related Pottery in Cyprus* (Gothenburg: Paul Aströms, 1989).

⁴⁶ T. Dothan, *The Philistines*, 295-296; idem, “Arrival of the Sea Peoples,” 6-9; idem, “Tel Miqne-Ekron: The Aegean Affinities of the ‘Sea Peoples’ [Philistines] Settlement in Canaan in Iron I,” *Recent Excavations in Israel: A View to the West*, *Archaeological Institute of America*

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Larry Stager, also sees two stages of settlement and expansion, the first occurring during the initial settlement of Philistia before the, but unlike earlier treatments, Stager does not accept that the first stage of settlement occurred with the settlement of the Philistines in Egyptian garrison cities. Instead, he sees them as conquerors who the Egyptians could barely contain.⁴⁷ Regardless of the two possible interpretations, the consensus remains that the Mycenaean IIC:1b pottery precedes and influences the Philistine bichrome which later replaces it.

Having established that the style and painting designs were very similar to Aegean forms, another question arose. Were these pottery forms imported or were they locally made? Neutron Activation Analysis⁴⁸ confirmed that the pottery was of local origin.⁴⁹ The large number of pottery manufacturing kilns that were found confirmed the results of neutron activation analysis.⁵⁰ Together with the architectural elements like the hearth, the cultic elements such as the seated figurine found at Ashdod, and the painted themes on the pottery, these aspects provide crucial connections between Philistine culture and the Aegean world.⁵¹

We thus have several lines of evidence pointing to an Aegean origin for the settlers of these cities. 1) Egyptian military records not only mention several groups originating from across the Mediterranean Sea, but also depict what the Philistines looked like. 2) Local Canaanite cities were destroyed and new settlements were established. 3) Architectural designs of buildings and other features, such as the hearth at Tel Miqne-Ekron and Tel Qasile, indicate a strong Aegean connection. 4) The pottery designs and forms, as exemplified first by Mycenaean

Colloquia and Conference Papers 1, ed. Seymour Gitin (Dubuque, IA: Archaeological Institute of America, 1995), 41-59; idem, "Initial Philistine Settlement: From Migration to Coexistence," *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition*, 148-61.

⁴⁷In this he follows such leading Egyptologists as Manfred Bietak, "The Sea Peoples," 292-306; Rainer Stadelmann, "Die Abwehr der Seevölker," 156-171; and archaeologist Wood, "The Philistines Enter Canaan," 44-52, 89-93.

⁴⁸NAA is a test performed on pottery to detect some of the rarest elements present. The pottery is bombarded with neutrons. The unstable radioactive isotopes then release gamma rays as they decay into stable isotopes. Measuring the gamma ray energy emitted allows one to determine what elements the pot is composed of and in what quantities, thus providing a chemical fingerprint. When these elements are known they are compared with various clay sources to determine the provenance of pottery, see Maureen F. Kaplan, "Using Neutron Activation Analysis to Establish the Provenance of Pottery," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 2/1 (1976); Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: Theory, Methods, and Practice* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 317.

⁴⁹F. Asaro, Isadore Perlman, and Moshe Dothan, "An Introductory Study of Mycenaean IIC:1 Ware from Tel Ashdod," *Archaeometry* 13 (1971):169-175; F. Asaro and Isadore Perlman, "Provenience Studies of Mycenaean Pottery Employing Neutron Activation Analysis," *The Mycenaeans in the Eastern Mediterranean: Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium* (Nicosia, Cyprus: Department of Antiquities, 1973), 213-224; Jan Gunneweg, Trude Dothan, Isadore Perlman and Seymour Gitin, "On the Origin of Pottery from Tel Miqne-Ekron," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 264 (1986):3-16

⁵⁰Dothan, "The Arrival of the Sea Peoples," 4.

⁵¹Trude Dothan, "Tel Miqne-Ekron: The Aegean Affinities of the Sea Peoples' (Philistines') Settlement," 41-59.

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IIIc:1b, a monochrome type, and later the bichrome wares of the 12th-10th centuries indicate the pattern of settlement and diffusion throughout the Southern Levant. 5) The Ashdoda figurine and the musician stands indicate Aegean affinities.

A sixth connection between the ancient Philistines and the Aegean world was discovered during the final season at Tel Miqne-Ekron in 1996. But before we turn to this point let us look how the Philistine occupation of the site continued.

Philistia in Transition

Philistine culture flourished at Ekron throughout the next two centuries. In the early tenth century B.C. Ekron was completely destroyed and abandoned “in the wave of destruction that swept over Philistia.”⁵² Although excavators remain uncertain whether the destruction was caused by the Israelites under David or the Egyptians under Siamun, David could in fact have been responsible. Following this destruction, a small settlement was reestablished on the site, but it was a mere reflection of the great fortified city that had preceded it. The ten-acre occupation was restricted to the northern acropolis and was constructed on a series of monumental stone platforms. The occupation of this smaller, fortified site extended, according to the ceramic sequence, to the eighth century B.C.⁵³

Assyrian Domination

Beginning already in the ninth century, the Assyrians in the east became a much more powerful force and began to extend their empire.⁵⁴ As Isaiah writes in the eighth century: “I will give them charge to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. . . . For I have removed the boundaries of the nations, and I have plundered their treasures. Like a bull I have pushed down those who sat on thrones” (Isa 10:13). The prophet’s description of the Lord’s action aptly predicts and describes the activities of the Assyrians as they swept through Syria-Palestine. One of the most vivid Assyrian pictorials is Sennacherib’s attack on the ancient city of Lachish in 701 B.C.⁵⁵ These reliefs, found in the Southwest Palace at Nineveh, the same city from which Jonah fled and which he finally led to repentance, show the grue-

⁵² Dothan and Dothan, *Peoples of the Sea*, 252.

⁵³ Seymour Gitin, “Ekron of the Philistines, Part II: Olive-Oil Suppliers to the World,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/2 (1990):34.

⁵⁴ On Assyrian military expansion, see Walter Mayer, *Politik und Kriegskunst der Assyrer, Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens* 9 (Münster: Uagrit-Verlag, 1995).

⁵⁵ On the comparison of the archaeological evidence at Lachish with Sennacherib’s reliefs, see David Ussishkin, “The ‘Lachish Reliefs’ and the City of Lachish,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 30 (1980):174-175; idem, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1982); idem, “Defensive Judean Counter-Ramp Found at Lachish in 1983 Season,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10/2 (1984):66-73.

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some war tactics of the Assyrians. It can be fairly assumed that these tactics were also applied against the Philistines.⁵⁶ In the same chapter of Isaiah, however, a promise is given to Israel, “The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the Mighty God” (Isa 10:21 NKJV). God would be with His remnant.

It was not until the seventh century that Ekron became a vassal city-state of the Assyrian empire.⁵⁷ At that time it expanded extensively to encompass more than eighty-five acres. The Neo-Assyrian kings Sargon II and Sennacherib captured and held it under their imperial jurisdiction in the same campaign that took place against Lachish in 701 B.C. During the time of their successors, Esarhad-don and Ashurbanipal, the city became a highly developed and centralized olive oil production site boasting the largest capacities for olive oil production in the Near East.⁵⁸ To date 105 olive oil installations at Ekron are estimated, producing 1,000 tons of oil annually, requiring over 48,000 storejars.⁵⁹

During the 1994-1996 seasons, a Neo-Assyrian type temple of monumental proportions was uncovered, including frontal and side entrances with four meter long, single stone thresholds, thus far unique in Palestine. Thousands of whole vessels were found in the building, as well as a stele-like stone with incised lines and a rosette—an Assyrian royal/cultic symbol. The building also contained a number of Assyrian-type cultic vessels and a unique carved elephant tusk with the figure of a queen and the name of the Egyptian king Merenptah. In 1995 a 23-cm long, coiled, gold Egyptian cobra, or uraeus, was found, and other Egyptian objects were discovered in other areas.⁶⁰ These objects indicate strong Egyptian influence during the final stage of occupation. The warnings of the Hebrew prophets against an alliance with Egypt, predicting their destruction and captivity, were based on the realities that were soon to take place (Jer 42:14-19; Ezek 17:11-24). The influence and domination of Egypt over the Philistine cities in the final years of the seventh century would not save them from the onslaught of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar

⁵⁶ On the tactics of the Assyrian military, see Erika Bleibtreu, “Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17/1 (1991):52-61, 75.

⁵⁷ Seymour Gitin, “Tel Mique-Ekron in the 7th Century B.C.E.: The Impact of Economic Innovation and Foreign Cultural Influences on a Neo-Assyrian Vassal City-State,” *Recent Excavations in Israel: A View to the West, Archaeological Institute of America Colloquia and Conference Papers 1*, ed. Seymour Gitin (Dubuque, IA: Archaeological Institute of America, 1995), 61-79.

⁵⁸ Seymour Gitin, “Ekron of the Philistines: The Rise and Fall of a 7th Century BCE Neo-Assyrian Vassal City-State” *Orient-Express* (1994): 20-22.

⁵⁹ D. Eitam, “Tel Mique-Ekron—Survey of Oil Presses: 1985-1986,” *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 1986, 72-74. See also, Gitin, “Ekron of the Philistines, Part II” 32-42, 59.

⁶⁰ Samuel R. Wolff, “Archaeology in Israel,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 100 (1996):745-747, fig. 21; Seymour Gitin, “Philistia in Transition: The Tenth Century BCE and Beyond,” *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition*, 178-79.

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The Dedicatory Inscription. It was in Ekron that perhaps the most impressive discovery was made. In the 1996 season an inscription was found in the destruction debris of the sanctuary of the temple complex.⁶¹ Found upside-down, the rectangular limestone block is similar to those used for building purposes at Ekron. Its find spot suggests that it was originally part of the western wall of the sanctuary—perhaps its focal point as a royal dedicatory inscription.⁶² The inscription is complete, containing five lines that are translated by renowned epigrapher Professor Joseph Naveh of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem:

1. The temple (which) he built 'kys son of Padi, son of
2. Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron,
3. for Ptgyh his lady. May she bless him, and
4. prote[ct] him, and prolong his days, and bless
5. his []and.⁶³

The most important factor is that it identifies the ancient site of Tel Miqne as Ekron. It is the only confirmation of the name of the site since it was first identified by J. Naveh in 1957.⁶⁴

The ruler of that city is identified as *Ikausu*, also mentioned as the king of Ekron in the Assyrian records of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.⁶⁵ Its consonantal spelling is the same as *Achish*, the name of the well-known king(s) of Gath identified in the Bible during the time of David and Solomon (1 Sam 21; 27; 28; 29; 1 Kings 2: 39-40)⁶⁶ three and half centuries earlier. Padi, the father of *Ikausu*, is identified as the king of Ekron in the annals of Sennacherib in the context of his third campaign in 701 B.C.⁶⁷ The additional forefathers identified in the dedicatory inscription at Ekron appear here for the first time, yet their significance cannot be overestimated. They indicate a dynastic period of succession that lasted at least from the eighth through most of the seventh century. Moreo-

⁶¹ Seymour Gitin, Trude Dothan, and Joseph Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron," *Israel Exploration Journal* 47/1-2 (1997):1-16; Joseph Naveh, "Achish-Ikausu in the Light of the Ekron Inscription," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 310 (1998):35-37.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴ Joseph Naveh, "Khirbet al-Muqanna'—Ekron," *Israel Exploration Journal* 8 (1958): 87-100, 165-170.

⁶⁵ A. Leo Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition, ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 291, 294.

⁶⁶ The name in the dedicatory inscription has the identical spelling of the Old Testament Achish. This puts to rest some earlier theories that found a Trojan origin of this name as Anchises. The translators suggest that the name derived from Akhayus or Achaeon, meaning 'Greek.' This has important implications for the origin of the Philistines. Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh, "Royal Dedicatory Inscription," 11. Cf. D. L. Christensen, "Achish," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 55-56.

⁶⁷ Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian," 287.

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ver, they help to secure a founding date for the temple complex around 650 B.C.⁶⁸

Finally, the mention of Ptgyh, the goddess to whom this temple is dedicated, provides an important insight into Philistine cultic and religious practices. The name is of non-Semitic origin, perhaps a Philistine or Indo-European name, and even though unknown to us she “must have been a deity of considerable power to safeguard the well-being of the dynasty and the city.”⁶⁹

Her power proved inadequate, however, for the commercial activities of this Neo-Assyrian vassal city-state, now under the influence of Egypt, were abruptly cut short with the invasion of Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 603/4 B.C.⁷⁰ A massive destruction level evidenced by tumbled columns, thousands of smashed storage vessels, and collapsed upper floors of the monumental temple and throughout the site attest to the destructive force of the invading Babylonians. Other Philistine cities, such as Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Timnah, suffered similar destructions at the hand of the Babylonians. Unable to regain momentum, and with its cultural core lost, Philistine culture, too, collapsed. Its people, either dispersed or deported, were quickly assimilated into the surrounding cultures.⁷¹

Today only their remains are left to speak. Traces of what was once a flourishing culture continue to provide clues to the now distant past. The words of the prophet Zephaniah continue to echo over the silent mounds of ruins:

For Gaza shall be deserted,
and Ashkelon shall become a desolation;
Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon,
and Ekron shall be uprooted.
Ah, inhabitants of the seacoast,
you nation of the Cherethites!
The word of the Lord is against you,
O Canaan, land of the Philistines;
and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left (Zeph 2:4-5).

The eschatological words of Zephaniah are couched in another message. The message of warning to the nations is couched in a call to repentance for Israel (Zeph 2:1-3) and a promise for the remnant.⁷² Zephaniah 3:9 says “I will restore

⁶⁸ Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh, “Royal Dedicatory Inscription,” 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁰ Gitin, “Philistia in Transition,” 179-80; for this activity against Ashkelon, see Lawrence E. Stager, “Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction: Kislev 604 BCE,” *Eretz-Israel*, 25 (1996):61-64; *idem.*, “The Fury of Babylon: Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 22/1 (1996):56-69, 76-77.

⁷¹ Gitin, “Ekron of the Philistines,” 22; Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh, “Royal Dedicatory Inscription,” 3; For another view on the process of acculturation, see B. Stone, “The Philistines and Acculturation: Culture, Change, and Ethnic Continuity in the Iron Age,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 298 (1995):7-32.

⁷² On the concept of the remnant in Zephaniah, see Greg A. King, “The Remnant in Zephaniah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (1994):414-427; on the concept of remnant in general, see Gerhard

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to the peoples a pure language, that they may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord.”

Today we too are faced with cultural influences of the world around us. Little has changed over the millennia. Like the Philistines’ relationship to Israel, the technologies, cultural advancement, intellectual, and religious achievements of the world may seem to dwarf at times the simple yet profound truths of Scripture. Like the Israelites, Seventh-day Adventists have been called to give a message, a message to be proclaimed to all nations, kindred, tongues and people. How will this remnant respond to the call of God? May we be faithful to Him who has foretold that all this too will come to an end and who promises that He will be faithful to establish a new heaven and a new earth for the remnant that persevere to the end.

F. Hasel, *The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1980); idem, “Remnant,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 130-131.