

The Philistines were among the Sea Peoples, probably of Aegean origin, who first appeared in the E Mediterranean at the end of the 13th century B.C. These peoples were displaced from their original homelands as part of the extensive population movements characteristic of the end of the LB Age. During this period, the Egyptians and the Hittites ruled in the Levant, but both powers were in a general state of decline. The Sea Peoples exploited this power vacuum by invading areas previously subject to Egyptian and Hittite control, launching land and sea attacks on Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, to which various Egyptian sources attest.

The various translations of the name *Philistine* in the different versions of the Bible reveal that even in early times translators and exegetes were unsure of their identity. In the LXX, for example, the name is usually translated as *allosyloi* ("strangers"), but it occurs also as *phylistieim* in the Pentateuch and Joshua. In the Hebrew Bible, the Philistines are called *Pelishtim*, a term defining them as the inhabitants of *Peleshet*, i.e., the coastal plain of S Palestine. Assyrian sources call them both *Pilisti* and *Palastu*. The Philistines appear as *prst* in Egyptian sources.

Encountering the descendants of the Philistines on the coast of S Palestine, the historian Herodotus, along with sailors and travelers from the Persian period onward called them *palastinoi* and their country *palastium*. The use of these names in the works of Josephus, where they are common translations for *Philistines* and *Philistia* and, in some cases, for the entire land of Palestine, indicates the extent to which the names had gained acceptance by Roman times. The emperor Hadrian officially designated the province of Judaea *Provincia Palaestina*, and by the 4th century C.E., the shortened name *Palaestina* had become the general term for the whole of Palestine.

The biblical references to Philistine origins are few and enigmatic. The first appears in the "Table of Nations" in Gen 10:14. The probable meaning of this verse, insofar as it relates to the Philistines, is ". . . and the Caphtorim, out of whom came the Philistines." The homeland of the Philistines, Caphtor (cf. Amos 9:7, Jer 47:4, Deut 2:23), is generally recognized by scholars as Crete, although some believe Caphtor to be located in Cilicia in Asia Minor. In other biblical references, the Philistines are synonymous with the Cherethites, that is Cretans (cf. Zeph 2:5, Ezek 25:16). Various biblical traditions, then, suggest that the Caphtorim are to be identified with the Cherethites, thus linking the Philistines with a Cretan homeland. The evidence supplied by the architectural remains, material culture and pottery from archaeological sites in Israel, strongly suggests that the Philistines originated in the Aegean.

Several key references to the Sea Peoples have been identified in Egyptian sources. According to inscriptions of Pharaoh Merneptah (ca. 1236-1223 B.C.), the Sea Peoples attempted to invade Egypt from the direction of Libya. The attack was led by

Libyans joined by "foreigners from the Sea" - the Sherden, Sheklesh, Lukka, Tursha (Teresh), and Akawasha. This list of Sea Peoples does not, however, include references to the Philistines and Tjekker, who are first mentioned as invaders during the reign of Rameses III (ca. 1198-1166 B.C.). The reliefs and inscriptions at his mortuary temple at Medinet Habu in Thebes describe fierce naval and land battles with the Sea Peoples. An inscription under the land battle scene indicates that the Egyptian army fought the Sea Peoples in the "land of Djahi," i.e., the Phoenician coast and hinterland down to Palestine.

This information is supplemented by the Harris Papyrus I, in which Rameses' decisive defeat of the Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, is described. Subsequently, Rameses gave the Philistines permission to settle on the S coastal plain of Palestine. There they vied with the disunited Canaanite city-states and the newly arrived Israelites for cultural and political domination of the country.

The Onomasticon of Amenope, which dates from the end of the 12th or beginning of the 11th century, mentions the areas settled by the Sea Peoples in Palestine, as part of the sphere of Egyptian influence. It records a number of peoples, lands, and cities. Three ethnic groups, the Sherden (*srhn*), the Tjekker(*tkr*), and the Philistines (*prst*) are listed, together with Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Gaza, cities situated in the territory controlled by the Philistines.

Philistia, "The land of the Philistines," consisted of five major cities - Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron - which were united in a confederation. In addition to the Pentapolis, several smaller Philistine cities, called "villages" or *banot* ("daughters"), are mentioned in the Bible. These include Ziklag, Timna, and Jabneh. The role of these smaller cities was as secondary, nearly autonomous centers under the control of the capitals of the city-states.

The territory of the Philistines as defined in Josh 13:2-3 designates the Brook of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish) and the Sihor as the S border, the N boundary as defined by the region N of Ekron, Judah as the E border, and the Mediterranean Sea as the W boundary. This region, as corroborated by archaeological evidence, was occupied by the Philistines for several generations after their arrival in Palestine and before their expansion in the 11th century. Major excavations have established a clear stratigraphic sequence by which the initial appearance, then the flourishing, and subsequently the assimilation of the Philistines can be traced, a process spanning most of the Iron I period (c. 1200-1000 B.C.E.). The discovery of archaeological remains of unmistakably Philistine character at sites quite distant from this area has raised the question of how Philistine culture spread beyond the confines of Philistia—through military conquest, through the establishment of military outposts, or through peaceful trade and commerce.

Four of the cities of the Philistine Pentapolis have been positively identified—Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. The location of the fifth, Gath, remains an open question. At Gaza, the ancient tel lies beneath the modern city and as a result, large-scale excavations have not been undertaken. Excavations at Ashkelon have revealed that the last Canaanite stratum was destroyed, followed by a Philistine settlement. The most extensive evidence of Philistine settlement and expansion is provided by excavations at Ashdod, Ekron, and Tell Qasile on the N border of Philistia. These sites provide complementary data on the nature of Philistine urban settlement, facets of their material culture, and cultic structures and practices.

Philistine occupation at Ashdod began in the early 12th century B.C.E. The first indication of the arrival of a new population was the partial destruction of the Egyptian-Canaanite fortress over which was built an open-air cultic installation. Adjacent to this installation was a potter's workshop in which was found a rich assemblage of locally made Mycenaean IIC:1b pottery, Aegean in style and a precursor of the earliest Philistine bichrome pottery. In the following occupational phases, Ashdod was a well-planned, fortified city. Two building complexes were uncovered, one of which included an apsidal structure with adjacent rooms and a courtyard. The last phase of Philistine settlement (ca. 1050 B.C.E.) at Ashdod was the largest and most prosperous. At that time, the lower city outside the acropolis area was occupied for the first time and massive mudbrick walls and a gate were built to protect the enlarged city. While the Philistine population had grown and flourished, the pottery and material culture reflect assimilation of local tradition and new Phoenician influences.

A clear understanding of the ceramic repertoire within the stratigraphic sequence is one of the keys to defining the settlement pattern of the Philistines, both within the borders of Philistia and beyond. The initial phase of Philistine settlement has been recognized at Ashdod and Ekron by virtue of the appearance of locally made Mycenaean IIC:1b pottery (see Fig. PHI.01), while the second phase of Philistine settlement and expansion is associated with the Philistine bichrome wares. The shapes and decorative motifs of Philistine pottery were a blend of four distinct ceramic styles: Mycenaean, Cypriot, Egyptian, and local Canaanite. The dominant traits in shape and almost all the decorative elements were derived from the Mycenaean repertoire and point to the Aegean background of Philistine pottery. Philistine shapes of Mycenaean origin include bell-shaped bowls, large kraters with elaborate decoration, stirrup jars for oils and unguents, and strainer-spout "beer jugs." A few of many decorative motifs are stylized birds, spiral loops, concentric half-circles, and scale patterns. Although Philistine vessels were richly decorated with motifs taken from the Mycenaean repertoire, these motifs were rearranged and integrated with other influences to create the distinctive "signature" known as Philistine.

Excavations at Ekron (Tel Miqne) have revealed a LB Canaanite city-state which was transformed by the Philistines in the 12th century B.C.E. into a large, well-planned, fortified city which included industrial and elite quarters. A monumental building, possibly a palace with shrines, was discovered at the heart of the city in the elite quarter. See Fig. PHI.02. This building, probably part of a larger complex, included rooms which contained mudbrick altars and a number of bronze and iron artifacts of cultic significance. These rooms opened onto a hall in which was constructed a circular hearth flanked by two pillar bases. Hearths are an important feature in the Aegean and Cyprus where they are the central architectural element in the plan of the megaron. Mudbrick altars, a continuation of local Canaanite tradition, are also well-known in Cyprus and the Aegean at such sites as Enkomi, Kition, Phylakopi, and Mycenae.

The city at Tell Qasile was founded by the Philistines in the first half of the 12th century B.C.E. on the N bank of the Yarkon River. The site was obviously chosen because it was a perfect inland port site. Established on virgin soil, Tell Qasile was undoubtedly part of the Philistine expansion which followed their initial phase of settlement. In addition to industrial and residential structures found in other quarters of the city, three superimposed temples dating from the end of the 12th to the beginning of the 10th century B.C.E. were uncovered in the sacred precinct. These structures in their various phases included raised mudbrick platforms, mudbrick benches, pillars, and small chambers at the back of the temples interpreted variously as holy-of-holies or treasuries. A related building adjacent to the earliest temple (12th century B.C.E.) contained a hearth and two pillars, similar in plan and conception to the hearth and pillars found at Ekron.

There is both agreement and discrepancy between the Bible and the archaeological record with respect to Philistine religious organization and beliefs. The Aegean background of Philistine religion, which is not disclosed in the Bible, is evident through cultic architectural features such as the hearth mentioned above, as well as through small finds such as the "Ashdoda," a ceramic figurine found at Ashdod. See Fig. PHI.03. The Ashdoda is most likely a schematic representation of a female deity and throne, and is evidently a variant of the Mycenaean female figure seated on a throne, sometimes holding a child. These figurines are usually associated with the worship of the "Great Mother" or "Great Goddess." Several figurine fragments of the "Ashdoda" type have also been discovered at Ekron and Tell Qasile. At Ekron, head fragments with spreading headdress and birdlike features resemble the Ashdoda, while at Qasile the torso of a flat figurine of the Ashdoda type was found.

Archaeological evidence has revealed that in the Aegean, female, not male deities were primarily worshipped. Apparently by the 11th century this predominantly female pantheon was replaced by a male Canaanite pantheon reflecting the Philistines' more

recent cultural milieu. The head of the Philistine pantheon appears to have been the Canaanite god, Dagon (1 Chr 10:10), to whom the temples of Gaza and Ashdod, and possibly also at Beth-shan, were dedicated. Another god, Baal-zebub (Baal-zebul), has his oracular temple in Ekron. The goddess Ashtoreth apparently also had a temple at Beth-shan (1 Sam 31:8-13). Philistine priests appear only once in the Bible, when the Ark was captured and taken to Ashdod (1 Samuel 5). The Bible also refers to the Philistine custom of carrying idols into battle (2 Sam 5:21) and to "Houses of Images," apparently a reference to temples in which images of the gods were kept. Among the few specifically Philistine religious beliefs that appear in the Bible are the golden images of mice and boils that were sent as a guilt (*asham*) offering to God (1 Sam 6:4-16).

Philistine cult vessels also provide insights into Philistine rituals and beliefs. The *kernos*, reflecting Aegean influences, is a hollow ceramic ring on which objects such as birds, bulls' or rams' heads, or pomegranates are set. See Fig. PHI.04. It was apparently used for the pouring of libations in some religious ritual. Examples of *kernoi* decorated in Philistine style are known from Ashdod, Ekron, Gezer, and Megiddo.

A distinctive Philistine cult vessel is the one-handled lion-headed rhyton, a ritual or drinking cup. Similar rhyta have been found at Tell Jerishe, Tell Zeror, Megiddo, Tell es-Safi, Tell Qasile, and Ekron. The Philistine rhyton is a ceramic adaptation of animal-headed rhyta in metal and stone of Mycenaean-Minoan tradition.

Three high cylindrical cult stands from Tell Qasile were found in the Philistine temple. Each had a bowl topped with a bird's head. Another cult stand found at Ashdod features five musicians around its base. Each of the five figures plays a musical instrument: cymbals, double pipe, frame drum, and stringed instrument that is probably a lyre. These musicians represented on the stand were probably part of a Philistine cult, their role similar to that of the "Levites who were singers" in the temple of Jerusalem (2 Chr 5:12-13).

Other facets of Philistine life, such as mourning customs and burial practices, may be understood through several interesting types of finds. For example, terra-cotta female mourning figurines from Philistine burials at Tell 'Aitun and Azor show women with both hands on their heads, or with one hand on their heads and one on their breasts. Similar mourning figures are closely associated with the burial customs and the cult of the dead found in the Aegean world at the end of the Mycenaean period.

Burial customs are generally a sensitive indicator of cultural affinities, and Philistine burial customs reflect the same fusion of Aegean background with Egyptian and local Canaanite elements that distinguishes every other aspect of their culture. The use of

anthropoid clay coffins (an Egyptian custom) and interment in rock-cut chamber tombs (of Mycenaean affinities) are two such indicators.

Anthropoid coffins are built roughly in the outline of a body. The lids are ineptly modeled with faces in what has been termed the "grotesque" style, with only a schematic outlining of facial features and arms. Five such coffins dating from the 12th-11th centuries B.C.E. were discovered at Beth-shan. The distinctive feature of the Beth-shan "grotesque" lids is the applique headdress. However, one lid portrays a headdress crowned by vertical fluting, identical to the "feathered" cap worn by the Peleset (Philistines), Tjekker, and Denyen on the Medinet Habu reliefs of Rameses III. This headgear provides decisive evidence that the bodies buried in these coffins were Sea Peoples, quite possibly Philistines.

Several stamp seals found in 12th-century strata at Ashdod may provide the only extant examples of Philistine language and writing. Used to imprint a lump of clay affixed to a letter, the text is apparently related to the Linear A and B scripts and the Cypro-Minoan syllabary utilized in the Aegean during the LB Age. Philistine words and personal names as they are preserved in the Bible are another possible key to the enigma of the origins of the Philistines and their language. The word *seren*, the head of each Philistine city-state, seems to be linguistically related to the Greek *tyrannos* ("tyrant"), likely a proto-Greek Illyrian or Lydian word that later entered the Greek language. The name Achish, *Agchous* in the LXX and Homer, which closely resembles the name Ikusu, king of Ekron in the Essarhadon annals, is sometimes compared with *Agchiseus* (Homer, *Il.* 2.189). *Agchise* □s, in Greek tradition, was related to the Dardanians, one of the Illyrian tribes that later migrated to Asia Minor and Greece. Scholarly opinion is divided on Goliath, which is sometimes compared to the Lydian *Alyatteus*.

Archaeological finds illuminating Philistine material culture are not limited to the ceramic medium. Though it is the latter that appears in greater quantities at excavations, no less significant is the Philistine contribution in the area of metallurgy. A key biblical reference in 1 Sam 13:19 reads: "Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, 'Lest the Hebrews make them swords and spears.'" Here it is clear that a worker in metal, without specifying whether the material was bronze or iron or both, is intended. Material evidence for bronze-working has been found at numerous sites associated with the Philistines, including Ekron, Tel Mor (harbor of Ashdod), and Tell Qasile. Significant small finds in bronze from the city of Ekron include wheels of a cultic stand similar to the type found at Cypriot sites of the same period, and a double-headed peg with suspension hole which may have parallels in Crete.

The discovery of various iron artifacts, including several bimetallic knives from 12th century strata at Philistine sites, raises the question of the role of the Philistines in the introduction of iron-working technology to Israel. Though it cannot be demonstrated with certainty that it was they who introduced this new technology, it is very likely that these new settlers brought with them a knowledge of iron-working which acted as a stimulus to local industry.

A superior knowledge of metal-working, whether in bronze or iron, may have given the Philistines a military advantage in their early conflicts with the Israelites. The well-known biblical account in 1 Samuel 17 of the duel between David and Goliath provides a detailed description of Philistine armaments. Unlike the Philistines in the Medinet Habu reliefs, which depict an earlier period, Goliath of Gath wears a bronze helmet rather than a "feathered" headdress. Nevertheless, Goliath's spear, helmet, coat of mail, and bronze greaves, as well as the duel itself, are all features of Aegean arms and warfare. The Bible compares Goliath's spear to a "weaver's beam" because this type of weapon was new to Canaan and had no Hebrew name. Mycenaean warriors are depicted very similarly equipped on the 12th century Warriors' Vase from Mycenae.

Philistine material culture is a syncretistic blend of Aegean, Egyptian, and Canaanite elements. The dominant element is Aegean, as demonstrated by decorative motifs on pottery, cult practices, burial customs and funerary rites, and architectural styles. The same period which witnessed the collapse of empires in the Levant with the resulting cessation or reduction of trade (13th century B.C.E.), also produced migrations of populations, among them the Sea Peoples. When they settled, as they did on the coastal plain of Israel, these peoples introduced by means of material culture, cultic practices, and architecture a new ethnic element which reflected their origins in the Aegean. This period, from the beginning of the 12th century to the end of the 11th century B.C.E. was the Philistines' most flourishing era, both historically and culturally. From the early 10th century on, the Philistines gradually lost their cultural distinctiveness and assimilated into the Canaanite population, steadily declining in importance until they played no more than a minor role in the history of Palestine.

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