

## THE ROLE OF THE PHILISTINES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE\*

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Although hope for discovery is high among some archeologists,<sup>1</sup> Philistine sources for their history, law, and politics are not yet extant.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the fullest single source for study of the Philistines is the Hebrew Bible.<sup>3</sup> The composition, transmission, and historical point of view of the biblical record, however, are outside the parameters of this study. The focus of this study is not how or why the Hebrews chronicled the Philistines the way they did, but what they wrote about the Philistines. This study is a capsule of the biblical record. Historical and archeological allusions are, however, interspersed to inform the biblical record. According to the Hebrew Bible, the Philistines mi-

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\* Table of Abbreviations:

*Ancient Near Eastern Text: ANET; Biblical Archeologist: BA; Biblical Archeologist Review: BAR; Cambridge Ancient History: CAH; Eretz-Israel: E-I; Encyclopedia Britannica: EB; Journal of Egyptian Archeology: JEA; Journal of Near Eastern Studies: JNES; Journal of the Study of the Old Testament: JSOT; Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement: PEFQSt; Vetus Testamentum: VT; Westminster Theological Journal: WTS.*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. LAWRENCE STAGER, "When the Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," *BAR* (Mar.-April 1991), 17:36. Stager is hopeful:

When we do discover Philistine texts at Ashkelon or elsewhere in Philistia... those texts will be in Mycenaean Greek (that is, in Linear B or some related script). At that moment, we will be able to recover another lost civilization for world history.

<sup>2</sup> Some discoveries are cause for hope. At Deir 'Alla, clay tablets resembling a Cypro-Mycenaean script are presently imperfectly understood. H. J. FRANKEN, "Clay Tablets from Deir 'Alla, Jordan," *VT* 14: 377-79 July, 1964); JO ANN CARLTON, "Studies in the Plaster Text from Tell Deir 'Alla," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Harvard University); compare BARUCH A. LEVINE, "The Deir 'Alla Plaster Inscriptions," *JAOS* 101 No. 2:195-205 (April-June 1981). Albright suggested that the clay tablets are an early text of the Philistines or other Sea Peoples, *CAH*, vol. II, pt. 2, ch. 33, p. 510. For a refutation of Albright's suggestion, see H. J. Franken, *CAH*, vol. II, pt. 2, ch. 26, pp. 33-37.

<sup>3</sup> The term "Philistines" appears 149 times in Samuel.

grated from Crete, established their own cultural and political identity, worshipped their own pantheon, and maintained their nationhood until 605 B.C.

## THE ORIGIN AND MIGRATION OF THE PHILISTINES – FROM WHERE DID THEY COME?

### The Point of Origin

#### *Biblical Evidence*

According to the Hebrew Bible, the Philistines migrated from Caphtor – that is, Crete (Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7; Gen. 10:14; Deut. 2:23; I Chron. 1:12).<sup>4</sup> In two passages (cf. Ez. 25:16; Zeph. 2:5, 6; consider also the phrase “Negeb of the Charethites” in Is. 30:14), the plural form “Philistines” appears in synonymous parallelism with “Charethites.” The “Charethites” in these passages may mean Cretans.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Akkadian words describing the Philistines in Assyrian texts are *pilistu* and *palastu* – names that are not Semitic but Indo-European.

#### *Graeco-Cretan Evidence*

The similarity of material culture between the Philistines and Mycenaeans is compelling.<sup>6</sup> Philistine pottery is Mycenaean

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<sup>4</sup> Caphtor was Crete, not Cappadocia. For a brief discussion that Caphtor is Crete, not Cappadocia, compare TRUDE DOTHAN and MOSHE DOTHAN, *People of the Sea – The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), pp. 8-9; for arguments that Caphtor is Cappadocia, see A. Wainwright, “Keftiu,” *JEA* 17 (1931): 26-43 and “Caphtor, Keftiu and Cappadocia,” *PEFQSt* (1931): 203-16.

<sup>5</sup> Unpublished lecture notes, Professor LAWRENCE STAGER, “Philistines,” Ancient Near Eastern History – Syria and Palestine to Alexander the Great, Harvard University, March 23, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> “Exploring the Philistine Origins on the Island of Crete,” *Biblical Archeologist*, March-April 1984, pp. 16-28; “Archeological Evidence for the Philistines and the Old Testament,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, Spring 1973, pp. 315-23.

IIIc:1b in style (post 1500 B.C.),<sup>7</sup> not Minoan (3000 B.C. to 1500 B.C.).<sup>8</sup> The Philistine bichrome ware is distinctive; however, Trude Dothan and Moshe Dothan argue for an earlier migration of a smaller number of Sea Peoples because of discoveries of monochrome ware.<sup>9</sup>

Further material evidence underscores the Philistines' Aegean connection. The military title *salis* applied to chariot warriors may imply the three-manned chariot (cf. Ex. 14:7).<sup>10</sup> All triads in the Trojan War were on the Trojan side.<sup>11</sup> The Philistines' distinguishing mark was the feather headdress and the round shield. These appear on the Phaistos Disc, imports from Crete dating to the late Middle Minoan III period, and therefore the seventeenth century B.C.<sup>12</sup> Further, the way Goliath carried his javelin "slung between his shoulders" (I Sam. 17:5-7) and engaged in single combat implies Aegean practices.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Trude Dothan and Moshe Dothan date the Mycenaean III period from ca. 1225-1050 B.C. *People of the Sea – The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), p. 89. For a description of Aegean material culture dating post 1200 B.C., including iron smelting, physical appearance, dress, society, commerce, transport, warfare, and religion, see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 20, pp. 236ff.; YOHANAN AHARONI, "An Account of the Israelite Occupation of Canaan," *BAR* June 1982), 8:21-22.

<sup>8</sup> For a description of early Aegean tools, pottery, burial practices, linear A and B scripts, and frescoes dating from 3000 B.C. to 1200 B.C., see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 20, pp. 228-36.

<sup>9</sup> TRUDE DOTHAN, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1982); Trude Dothan, "The Arrival of the Sea Peoples: Cultural Diversity in Early Iron Age Canaan," pp. 1-22; Moshe Dothan, "Archaeological Evidence for Movements of the Early 'Sea Peoples' Canaan," pp. 59-70, in *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology*, ed. Seymour Gitin and William G. Dever, Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 49 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> G. A. WAINWRIGHT, "Some Early Philistine History," *VT* 9:78 (Jan. 1959).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Iliad* 12 88ff.; 8 312ff.; *Odyssey* 14 470ff.

<sup>12</sup> Sir ARTHUR EVANS, *The Palace of Minos; – A Comparative Account of the Successive Stages of the Early Cretan Civilization as Illustrated by the Discoveries at Knossos* (London: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1921-35), I, pp. 647ff.; TRUDE DOTHAN and MOSHE DOTHAN, *People of the Sea – The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the struggle of champions between Hector and Achilles in the *Iliad*, Book VIII, with I Samuel 17:1ff.

### *Egyptian Evidence*

Egyptian records describe Ramses III's successful repulsion of the invading "Sea Peoples," which included the Philistines, Tjekkar, and Danians.<sup>14</sup> The invasions of the Sea Peoples resulted in the downfall of the Hittite Empire, including the destruction of the Hittite capital, Hattusas, and the city of Ugarit. Apparently, Ramses III and the Philistine leadership contracted for the coastal plain east of the Shephelah. The "Story of Wenamon" dates the invasion/colonization of the southern coast of Palestine to the 11th century. Of course, Philistine hegemony over the eastern coastal plain without the acquiescence of Egypt would have been impossible. The Egyptian narrative of Wenamon, which dates to the early 11th century, describes the Philistine domination of the coast of the eastern Mediterranean through its powerful fleet. Further, the Wenamon scroll records another constituent of the "Sea Peoples," the Sikkels or Tjekkar (*tj-k-r*), who successfully invaded and defended the coastal city of Dor. Having a formidable fleet of their own, the Sikkels traveled to the Phoenician coastal cities, Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos.<sup>15</sup> Another Egyptian record, the Onomasticon of Amenemope, mentions "Ashkelon," "Ašhdod," "Gaza," "Asher," "Sherdan," "Sikkel," and "Phileshet." The first three references are Philistine cities; "Asher" refers to the Israelite tribe which settled in Acco; Sherdan, Sikkell, and Pileshet are references to Sea Peoples.<sup>16</sup>

### The Time of Migration

The differences between the Egyptian wall reliefs at Kamak and Medinet Habu imply the approximate time of arrival of the Philistines in Palestine in force.<sup>17</sup> Depictions of Mernepthah's campaigns in Canaan in 1207 B.C. appear on the wall relief in

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<sup>14</sup> JOHN A. WILSON, transl. in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 262-63.

<sup>15</sup> YOHANAN AHARONI, "An Account of the Israelite Occupation of Canaan," *BAR* aune 1982), 8:21-22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 20:1ff. describes the king of Gerar, a contemporary of Abraham, as a "Philistine." Compare John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, ICC* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980), p. 316.

the temple of Kamak in Thebes. Combatants against the Egyptians in this relief do not don distinctive Philistine headgear and clothing. Assuming the Philistines donned the same distinctive wear at this time, Stager concludes the Philistines arrived after 1207 B.C.<sup>18</sup> Depictions of Ramses III's repulsion of the "Peleset" or Philistines in 1175 B.C. appear on the wall relief of Medinet Habu.<sup>19</sup> Ramses III described the invaders as a confederation of "Philistines, Tjekker [Sikils], Shekelesh, Denye[n] and Weshesh."<sup>20</sup>

### The Territory of Disembarkation

The Philistines embarked upon approximately two hundred square miles of territory, extending from Joppa to Gaza.<sup>21</sup> The

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<sup>18</sup> LAWRENCE STAGER, "When the Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," *BAR* (Mar.-April 1991), 17:33. Three groups are distinguishable in the Medinet Habu reliefs. The Pelest, Tjekker, and Denyen wear feathered plumes. The Serden wear horned helmets. The Sheklesh wear fillet headbands. G. A. WAINWRIGHT, "Some Sea Peoples," *JEA* 47 (1961), p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; LAWRENCE E. STAGER, "Merenptah, Israel and Sea Peoples: New Light on the Old Relief," *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985), pp. 61-62; but compare G. A. Wainwright who sees the accession of Rameses III slightly earlier – approximately 1170 B.C.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN A. WILSON, transl. in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 262; According to Redford, invaders against Amenophis III included the Lukka, Sharden, Danuna, and Meshwesh. Against Rameses II, the Lukka, Sharden, Qarqisha, and Labu fought. Merenptah repelled the Lukka, Sharden, Eqwesh, Teresh, Shekelesh, Labu, and Meshwesh. Rameses III repelled two invasions, in his fifth year against the Qayqisha, Labu, Meshwesh, Asbata, Shayu, Hasa, Baqan. Rameses III Shekelesh, Weshesh, Danyen, Tjakker, and Peleset. Hittite sources describe the Lu-uk-ka (Lukka), Ta-ru-i-sa (Teresh), Si-ka-la-yu (Shekelesh), Kar-ki-sa (Qayqisha), Daniya-wana (Danyen). Classical sources include Lycia (Lukka and Lu-uk-ka), Sardonians (Lydia or Sharden), Koos (Eqwesh), Tursenoi (Lydia, Ra-ru-i-sa, and Teresh), Sagalassos (Pisidia, Si-kala-yu, or Shekelesh), Caria (Kar-ki-sa, Qayqisha, or Qarqisha), Wassos (Caria or Weshesh), Danaoi (Argos, Daniya-wana, Danyen), Teucrians (Troad or Tjakker), Pelasgiotis (Illyiria? or Peleset), Libya (Labu), Maxyes (Cyrene or Meshwesh), Asbytae (Cyrene or Asbata), and Auses (Libya or Baqan). Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 241-56, particularly Table 1, p. 246.

<sup>21</sup> For delineation of this area, see "Student Map Manual 'A,'" coordinates 165 by 150 to 180 by 190.

country side surrounding the five cities included sand dunes on the immediate coast and heavy alluvial soil inland. East of the beaches the land is extremely fertile – among the richest and most desirable agrarian real estate in the ancient Near East. The five key Philistine cities, the “Pentapolis,” included Ashkelon, Gaza, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. Ashkelon was directly on the sea coast. Gaza and Ekron, although a few miles inland, built their own seaports. Gath and Ekron were inland.

### THE PHILISTINES’ POLITICO-LEGAL SYSTEM – HOW DID THEY GOVERN THEMSELVES?

#### Implications of the Biblical Record

The Hebrew Bible does not analyze the political and legal system of the Philistines. But, the biblical record implies an oligarchy composed of five “kings” (cf. I Sam. 29:1-7), each ruling his own city with its surrounding villages and countryside (cf. I Sam. 6:8). In contradistinction to ancient Near Eastern records,<sup>22</sup> the biblical record describes a unified Philistia. Although autonomous internally, each king operated as part of a central executive body (cf. Ju. 16:5, 8) unifying Philistia militarily in wartime (cf. I Sam. 5:11; I Sam. 7:9; 29:1-7). Perhaps the Philistine city-states united against a common enemy as the tribes of Israel united against a common enemy in the Judges’ period. The means of appointment of the five kings – whether hereditary, democratic, or executive appointment – is unknown. Whether a single executive functioned as commander-in-chief is also unknown. Further, the five kings were not only civil administrators but also religious. Possessing both political and ceremonial functions, the five personed oligarchy could offer sacrifices to the Philistine pantheon (cf. Ju. 16:23).

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<sup>22</sup> Unpublished lecture notes, Professor LAWRENCE STAGER, “Philistines,” Ancient Near Eastern History – Syria and Palestine to Alexander the Great, Harvard University, April 4, 6, 1995.

## Comparisons of Historical and Biblical Records

### *Ancient Amphictyonies Compared*

Martin Noth defines an amphictyony as a league of semi-autonomous smaller states bound in a cult revolving around a common shrine. Bound in a politico-religious contract, the member states agreed to protect the central shrine.<sup>23</sup> Noth's "cookie-cutter" paradigm of six and twelve member amphictyonies, however, is dubious. Nothing in the Hebrew Bible or related historical records stipulates constituencies of six or twelve. To be sure, the Hebrew Bible records twelve Ishmaelite tribes (Gen. 25:15-16), twelve Edomite tribes (Gen. 36:10-14), and twelve Horite tribes (Gen. 36:20-28). Conversely, the Hebrew Bible records coalitions of five Mesopotamian kings, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (Gen. 14:1ff.), five "kings of Midian" (Num. 31:8), five kings of the Amorites Josh. 10:5), and five sons of Judah (I Chr. 2:4).

Greek and Etruscan amphictyonies appear in related historical records. Some of these ancient amphictyonies had twelve members, others did not. The Delphic league, revolving around the temple of Demeter at Amphela, near Thermopylae, had twelve constituents.<sup>24</sup> The Achaean League, according to Herodotus, apparently had twelve members.<sup>25</sup> The Helikian and Samikonian leagues had either six or twelve constituents. Livy chronicles the Etruscan League in Italy composed of twelve constituents.<sup>26</sup>

In the Helikian League's development, however, its nine Ionic city-constituents built a temple to Poseidon near Ephesus. The Kalaurian league had seven members — Nauplia, Prasia, Hermione, Epidauros, Aiginia, Athens, and Orchomenos.<sup>27</sup> Dur-

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<sup>23</sup> Each of the following works presupposes Noth's thesis that the Hebrew tribes in the period post-Joshua pre-Saul composed an amphictyony: C. KUHL, *the OT, its Origin and Composition* (Richmond, Va., 1961), pp. 97ff.; JOHN BRIGHT, *A History of Israel* (Phil., 1959), pp. 142ff.; N. K. COTTWALD, *A Light to the Nations* (New York, 1959), pp. 162, 170; BRUCE DONAL RAHTHEN, "Philistine and Hebrew Amphictyonies," *JNES* 20: 100-104 (1965).

<sup>24</sup> J. A. D. LARSEN, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1953), p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> *JNES*, 20, 1965, pp.100-104.

<sup>26</sup> LIVY, IV, 23

<sup>27</sup> STARBO, IV, 842.

ing the life of the Boeotian League (776-387 B.C.), the constituents numbered ten, eleven or twelve members. The Lykian League, as described by Strabo and evidenced by numismatics, had a membership of twenty-three cities.<sup>28</sup>

Despite some similarity between the Philistine political structure and ancient amphictyonies, the term "oligarchy" better describes the Philistine political structure because "oligarchy" lacks the Aegean, Ionian, and Etruscan overtones. Violating Noth's paradigm of six or twelve member amphictyonies, the biblical record never includes more than five constituents in the Philistine oligarchy. The Boeotian Boeotarchs and the Etruscan Lucumones ruled their jurisdictions with combined executive, legislative, and judicial power.<sup>29</sup> Although no trace of separation of powers in the Philistine political structure appears in the biblical records, if and how the Philistine oligarchs shared executive, legislative, and judicial power remains to be discovered.

Unlike the unified oligarchy in the biblical record (the Philistines in the biblical record were generally at war), historical records describe a divided Philistia in the Eighth and Seventh centuries. Ashkelon, for instance, revolted against Assyrian vassalage under Yamani. Yamani in Akkadian is "Tonian," perhaps the title for a Greek who replaced the previous vassal. Confederating with Judah, Edom, and Moab against Assyria, Yamani was exiled by Sargon II along with his Jewish allies. More generally, Stager remarks about Philistine disunity:

The Philistines never really had unified political action. One king would go with one power and another king with another. They seemed to have quite a degree of independence like the Phoenecian city-states. The smaller but very rich coastal states... would unite depending on interests.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> PAULY WISSOWA, VII, col. 2857.

<sup>29</sup> B. D. RAHTJEN, *The Philistine Amphictyony* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University; University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Mich., 1964), pp.111ff.

<sup>30</sup> Unpublished lecture notes, Professor LAWRENCE STAGER, "Philistines," Ancient Near Eastern History – Syria and Palestine to Alexander the Great, Harvard University, April 25, 1995.



*Israelite and Egyptian Federalism Compared*

In Israel, the political super-structure, composed of the ruling judges or the later monarchs, did not have absolute power (compare the story of Naboth's vineyard, I Kgs. 21). Whitelam sees the segmentary understructure of Israel ordered by family law (Gen. 31:38; cf. II Kgs. 14:6; Deut 24:16; Jer. 31:29-30; Ez. 14:12-20; 18:10-20), clan law, and sacral law. The appellate system included three tiers - the lower "court" was the paterfamilias, clan or town councils of elders constituted the immediate appellate "court," and local Levitical priests could hear further appeals.<sup>31</sup> The ultimate court of appeal was the ruling judge or monarch (cf. II Kgs. 3:16-28). Neither the paterfamilias nor the supreme executive in Israel could impose capital punishment (Deut. 22:13-21; I Kgs. 21:1-29).<sup>31</sup> Trude Dothan extrapolates that the Philistine social organization was a military aristocracy because of the "superb military organization, fighting ability, and weaponry that allowed them to dominate larger populations."<sup>32</sup> Militarily, the Philistines were organized in hundreds and thousands according to the biblical record (I Sam. 29:2). But precisely how the understructure of the Philistines' society compared to the Israelites' is unknown.

How the superstructure of the Philistines' society compared to the Israelites' and Egyptians' is imperfectly known. In Egypt, the single supreme executive, Pharaoh, had the prerogatives of deity -- he was god. In Israel, the supreme executive was subject to checks and balances (cf. Dt. 17:17).<sup>33</sup> The Israelite king could not unilaterally effect the death penalty (I Kgs. 21). How the Philistine oligarchy fit into the political power spectrum of ancient Near Eastern cultures is only speculation. The biblical record, however, never implies a single supreme executive of Philistia.

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<sup>31</sup> But compare Jacob's authority to impose capital punishment on Judah in Genesis 38. KEITH W. WHITELAM, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1970).

<sup>32</sup> TRUDE DOTHAN, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Contra* NORMAN K. GOTTWALD, *Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979).

## THE PHILISTINES' RELIGION – HOW AND WHAT DID THEY WORSHIP?

The Philistine pantheon included Dagon, Baal, and Ashteroth. The Philistines constructed temples in Gaza (Jud. 16:21, 23-30), Ashdod (I Sam. 5:1-7), and Bethshan (I Chron. 10:10; I Sam. 31:10), to their god of grain, Dagon. They built a temple in Ekron to the storm god, Baal (II Kgs. 1:1-16.). Herodotus records they built a temple in Ashkelon to Ashteroth (cf. I Sam. 31:10).<sup>34</sup> The names "Ashteroth," "Baal," and "Dagon" are Semitic, not Indo-European.<sup>35</sup> Upon interacting with their Canaanite neighbors, the Philistines may have adopted Semitic names for their pantheon. Alternatively, the Philistines may have adopted Canaanite deities.

The Philistine cult allowed both "laity" and "nobility" to offer sacrifices to the pantheon — "kings" (Jud. 16:23) and "people" sacrifice (I Sam. 6:2-9). The Philistines' "priests and diviners" recognized other deities besides their own (I Sam. 5:1 - 6:18.). After the Philistine oligarchy captured the ark they moved it from the temple of Ashdod to Gath, then from Gath to Ekron (I Sam. 5:3-12). The oligarchy then sought out the counsel of the religious community — the "priests and diviners" (I Sam. 6:2). According to the biblical historians, the Philistine religious community recognized a jurisdiction of Yahweh beyond the territorial limits of Yahwehism (I Sam. 6:3-9). No other historical records illumine the how the Philistines viewed the reason for and act of returning the ark.

The Philistines' religious practices included the wearing of amulets and soothsaying. Soothsaying was a normal Philistine religious expression (Is. 2:6). Philistine warriors carried idols to battle (II Sam. 5:21). Unlike the religious experience of males in surrounding cultures, the Philistines did not practice circumcision of any kind (Jud. 15:8; 1 Chron. 10:4.). Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, Israelites, and Egyptians practiced some kind of circumcision (Jer. 9:25, 26).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> HERODOTUS 1.105.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. HARTMUT SCHMOKEL, "Der Name Dagan," in *Der Gott Dagan* (Borna-Leipzig: Universitatstverlag von Robert Noske, 1928), pp. 9-11.

<sup>36</sup> Unpublished lecture notes, Professor LAWRENCE STAGER, "Philistines," *Ancient Near Eastern History – Syria and Palestine to Alexander the Great*, Harvard University, March 23, 1995.

## THE CONCLUSION OF PHILISTINE NATIONHOOD – HOW DID THEY END?

### The Zenith of Philistine Hegemony

The Hebrew Bible implies that Philistine power climaxed under Samuel's judgeship. Philistine hegemony expanded over Israel. So much so, Philistine hegemonies forbade blacksmiths in Israel. Israelites had to hire Philistine blacksmiths to sharpen their farm implements (I Sam. 13:19-21).<sup>37</sup>

Following their victories at Eben-ezer and Aphek, they took Shiloh and advanced up the Via Maris to take Megiddo and Bethshean (I Sam. 4; Jer. 7:12-14; Ps. 78:60).<sup>38</sup> Because Philistine garrisons were stationed in the heart of Hebrew territory (I Sam. 10:5; 13:3, 23), the Hebrews sought a life-tenured commander-in-chief, of an hereditary ruling caste, over a standing professional army (I Sam. 8:4-22). Saul, the first king of Israel, contended with the Philistines throughout his forty year reign, losing his life in the conflict (I Sam. 31:1-6).

### The Attrition with Judah

David played the role of both friend and foe with the Philistines. Under Saul's reign, David kills the Philistine champion (I Sam. 17:1-18:7) but later flees from Saul (I Sam. 18:8; 19:18; 20:33; 22:1; 27:1), taking refuge with the Philistine king of Achish as a mercenary (27:5-7). When David was crowned king in Judah, the house of Saul continued to reign in the northern tribes for seven years – perhaps the Philistines relaxed their hostility with Judah to promote the division (II Sam. 3:1). David even-

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<sup>37</sup> Because Samuel records that the head of Goliath's spear was iron, some extrapolate the Philistines brought the technological edge of iron weapon making to Canaan from the Aegean. Although large scale iron production at this time is not impossible, bronze was still the metal of choice for weaponry until the eleventh century B.C. TRUDE DOTHAN and MOSHE DOTHAN, *People of the Sea – The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), p. 174; compare Judges 1:18,19.

<sup>38</sup> TRUDE DOTHAN, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 15.

tually took Gath (I Chron. 18:1) and Ekron (I Chron. 18:1). Solomon brought Gaza, Ashdod, and Ashkelon under his hegemony (I Kgs. 4). Pharaoh later leveled Gezer and gave the ruins to Solomon (I Kgs. 9:16).<sup>39</sup>

David's successors and the Philistines experienced a political tug of war. Jehoshaphat exacted tribute from Gibbethon but Baasha could not (II Chron. 17:11). The Philistines raided Jehoram's installations (II Chron. 21:16, 17). Uzziah turned the tide — he invaded Philistia successfully, destroying their fortifications and building his own, including Gath (II Chron. 26:6). Ahaz suffered from Philistine retaliatory attacks (II Chron. 28:18; Is. 4:28-32). But, Hezekiah was able to retake Gath (II Kgs. 18:8).

### The Babylonian Captivity

Portents of the Philistine debacle came in the reign of the Assyrian king Adad Nirari (810-782 B.C.), who boasted collective tribute from them (cf. Jer. 25:20; Amos 1:6-8; Zeph. 2:4; Zech. 9:5-7). Sargon, king of Assyria, boasted of his conquest of Ashdod in 712 B.C. on the walls of his palace:

I besieged [and] conquered the cities of Ashdod, Gath, and Ashdudimmu; I declared [Yamani's] images, his wife, his children, all the possessions and treasures of his palace as well as the inhabitants of his country as booty ... I installed an officer of mine over them and declared them Assyrian citizens and they pulled [as such] the straps [of my yoke].<sup>40</sup>

The Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captured, deported, and relocated the Philistines in Babylon in 605 B.C. Philistia and Judah, enemies for seven centuries, fell together (cf. Zeph. 2:5, 6).

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<sup>39</sup> TRUDE DOTHAN and MOSHE DOTHAN, *People of the Sea – The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), p. 182.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

## CONCLUSION – THE PHILISTINE LEGACY

The slur “Philistine,” meaning smugly uncultured, does not suit the legacy of this culture. The Philistine invasion of Canaan was a military triumph. A depth of creativity blossomed into the Philistine material culture. The Philistine religion motivated cultural development (Ju. 16:29; II Sam. 5:21). The internecine conflict with Judah, Assyria, and Babylon derived from the Philistine commitment to national independence. The scholarly community awaits the day that “Linear B” Philistine texts are discovered to further unlock the secrets of this remarkable people and vindicate their legacy.