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## **CULTURAL DIVERSITY, ETHNICITY AND POWER IMBALANCE IN EARLY IRON AGE PHILISTIA**

### **Introduction**

Philistine material culture is often seen as a relatively homogenous culture characteristically found at all pentapolis sites (Dothan 2000: 145; Stager 1995: 345; Barako 2000: 522–24). Similar, contemporary phenomena have also been observed on Cyprus (Iacovou 1998). Meanwhile, the political organization of the Philistines during the early Iron Age has been described as either a ‘confederation’ or an alliance of city-states (e.g., Dothan 1982: 17). Archaeological excavations have revealed distinctive Aegean and/or Cypriot-affiliated material culture at the sites of Tel Ashdod (e.g., Dothan and Dothan 1992; Dothan and Porath 1993), Ashkelon (Stager 1991, 1993, 2006), Tel Mique-Ekron (e.g., Gitin and Dothan 1987; Dothan and Dothan 1992: 239–54; Dothan and Gitin 1993; Dothan 1998; Gitin 1998; Dothan 2000; Dothan 2003a; Dothan and Zukerman 2004: 3–4, fig. 2) and Tell es-Safi/Gath (Maeir 2003); Gaza has not been substantially excavated, and the Iron I remains are minimally reported (see Burdajewicz 2000). Yet, when the archaeological data are examined more closely, certain variations can be identified between these sites, especially between Ashdod and Ekron, which have been the most extensively studied. The differences are illustrated by diachronic variations in the size and nature of these sites and in elements of their material culture. This paper attempts to define these differences and interpret their significance.

### **Settlement Patterns**

The most noticeable difference is in the varying size of the settlements (see Table 1; see also Finkelstein 2000: Table 8.2). Ekron grows to a size of 20 ha at the very beginning of the Iron I (Fig. 1; Stratum VIIB, Dothan 1992: 96–97; Dothan 1998; 2000), built on a relatively small 4 ha Late Bronze Age II (henceforth, LBII) city. It expands to the lower city in Areas III, IV and X, where the early Iron I levels lie on MBIIIC remains. There is evidence for fortification in the form of a city wall, which was built during the early Iron Age. At Ashkelon, the early Iron Age city is reported to be 50 to 60 ha in size, lying on a Late Bronze Age settlement of a mere 6 ha (Stager 1993). Iron I fortifications have also been reported lying on the MB II rampart, although very little of these remains have thus far been published.

Table 1. The main Philistine sites (area in hectares).

Site/period	Late Bronze	Iron I	Iron IIA	Iron IIB	Iron IIC
Miqne-Ekron	4	20 fortified	4	4	20 olive oil industry, temple complex
Ashdod	8 fortified?	10 fortified?	22 fortified	26 fortified	22/26 open areas; fortified?
Ashkelon	6	50-60? Fortified?	?	?	Commercial quarter
Safi/Gath	Areas A,E 27	Areas A,E 23	Areas A,C 50	Areas A, F 25	?

At Ashdod, on the other hand, the size of the first Iron I settlement (Stratum XIII) is very similar to the LB II town, extending only across the upper tell, for a total of 8 ha (Fig. 2) (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 2–6), and there is no clear evidence of fortifications, at least until Stratum XI, which is dated to the later Iron I (Dothan 1971: 136; Dothan and Porath 1993: 92). Unambiguous evidence for fortifications appears only in the Iron IIA (Strata X–VII) in Area M (Dothan and Porath 1982). In contrast to Ekron, there are hardly any indications at Ashdod for such an extensive LB destruction level, while the situation at Ashkelon is not yet clear (Stager 2006: 9), although there is evidence of an LB destruction in Pythian-Adams' section (Dothan 1982: 35–36). The Tell es-Safi/Gath excavations thus far have only reached Iron I levels in a limited area; in Area E there is possible evidence for an LB II destruction layer (Maier et al. 2004). However, on the basis of probes below the Iron II strata and a survey of the mound, it has been estimated that the Iron I settlement was 23 ha. In contrast to other Philistine settlements, however, the LB II town was larger at 27 ha, and grew again substantially during the Iron IIA (see Uziel 2003: Table 3; Uziel and Maier 2005; Maier 2003).

At Ekron the size of the settlement persists until the end of the Iron I, and then diminishes in the Iron IIA after a violent destruction in the lower city. At Ashdod the site begins to expand during the Iron IIA (Stratum X in Area M; Dothan and Porath 1982), and includes the construction of fortifications (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 6–7). The site reaches a peak of 28 ha in the Iron IIB during the 8th century BCE, and then decreases in the 7th century at roughly the same time that Ekron becomes a large fortified settlement of 20 ha. Gath experiences a similar settlement history, reaching a peak of 50 ha in the later Iron IIA, during the 9th century (Stratum A3), although its decline starts in the 8th century (25 ha). Thus, Ekron and Ashkelon preserve settlement histories that reflect a pattern of "urban imposition", as Stager has described it (1995: 345), while Ashdod and Gath experienced a different development.

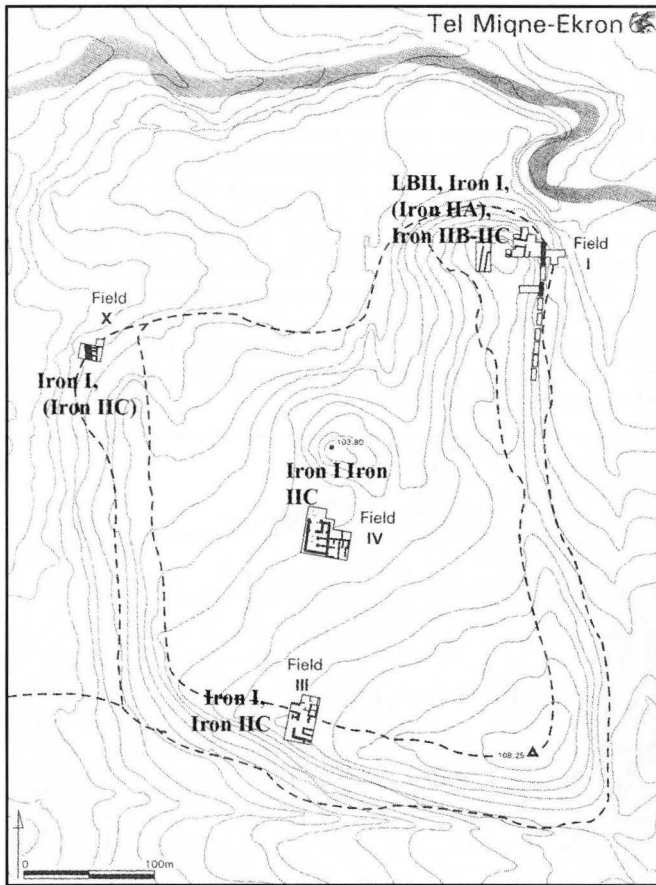


Fig. 1. Extent of the Iron Age settlement at Tel Migne; adapted from Dothan 1992: 96–97; Dothan 1998; 2000).

## Material Culture

### *Pottery*

The material culture of Tel Migne-Ekron and Ashdod show more subtle differences, especially during the initial stages of the Iron I (see Table 2). Ashdod seems to lack several of the more 'pure' or restricted Aegean-style characteristics that first appear in the initial Iron I phase at Ekron, while at the same time preserving material culture that show few Aegean characteristics. The distribution of Philistine Monochrome, or Myc III C:1 pottery (Dothan and Zukerman 2004), represents a good example. Several types of Philistine Monochrome appear only at Ekron. These include the Type A rounded bowls (Figs.

3: 1–2), the tray (Fig. 3:3), and rare closed forms, such as Types L, M, N and O: trefoil rim jug, pyxis and bottle (Fig. 3: 4–6; Dothan and Zukerman 2004: 28). There are also several decorative techniques, such as the inner slip and motifs, which have appeared thus far only at Ekron (Dothan and Zukerman 2004: 36, fig. 6:8). Also, at Ekron, the Monochrome pottery made of fine light-colored and well-levigated clay (defined as fine Monochrome pottery; see Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 65, Group A) is much more common, reaching 50% in certain areas, while at Ashdod it represents about 10% of the Monochrome pottery assemblage (Dothan and Zukerman 2004: 31; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 65–66; Ben-Shlomo 2006a: 24). A majority of the Philistine Monochrome pottery at Ashdod is made of a coarser, reddish or grayish clay (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 65, Groups B–C). In addition, the Philistine Monochrome pottery accounts for a smaller percentage of the entire pottery assemblage at Ashdod compared with Ekron.

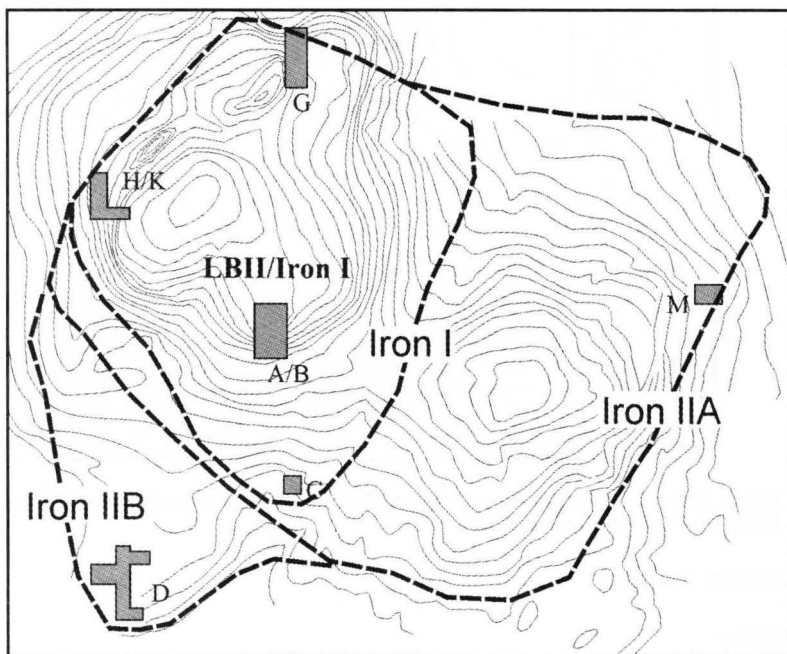


Fig. 2. The extent of the Iron Age settlement at Ashdod (adapted from Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 2–6).

An archaeometric study of the Philistine Monochrome pottery from the four excavated Philistine sites (Ben-Shlomo 2006a), using both petrographic and chemical analyses (ICP-AES and ICP-MS), has demonstrated that Ekron was a center for the production of the fine Monochrome fabric (Fig. 4), a fact further confirmed by the discovery in Field I of the Early Iron Age (Strata VII and VI) pottery

kilns that produced this pottery (Killebrew 1996: 146–47; figs. 13–15). Archaeometric analysis of the vessels made of this fabric found at Ashdod has shown that they were imported from Ekron. The other fabrics of Philistine Monochrome, as well as the Philistine Bichrome present at Ashdod, were produced locally, as they were at each site. The fine Monochrome fabric is characterized by a calcareous clay that is distinguishable both petrographically and by chemical fingerprinting (Fig. 5; note the high and variable calcium contents of this clay). Killebrew has identified it as Fabric ME-A1 (Fig. 6; Killebrew 1998a: 201–2, figs. IV:2, IV:3: upper), or *wadi loess*. This clay recipe was not used later in Iron II wares, and its appearance imitates Mycenaean prototypes to a high degree. This also suggests that Ekron had stronger Aegean connections in the initial phases of the Iron I.

**Table 2.** Various elements of the Philistine material culture from Tel Miqne.

<b>Monochrome pottery forms</b>	<b>Tel Miqne-Ekron</b>	<b>Ashdod</b>
Type A (T. Dothan and Zukerman 2004) bowls	+	-
Types B-K	+	+
Types L-M-N-O	+	-
Cooking jugs	+	+
Kalathoi	+	+
<b>Decorative motifs (Monochrome)</b>		
Inner slip	+	-
Hanged semicircles	+	+
Stemmed Tongues	+	-
Stemmed spirals	+	+
Running tongues	+	-
Hatched spirals	-	+
Drops	-	+
Hatched Triangles	-	+
Delicate lozenge	-	+
Complex spirals	-	+
Bird	+	+
Fish	+	+
<b>Other elements of material culture</b>		
Monochrome Psi figurines	+	-
Ashdoda figurines	+	+
Monochrome bovine figurines	+	-
Monochrome Aegean-style zoomorphic vessels	+	-
Incised scapulae	+	-
Pig bones	+	?
Cylindrical loom-weights	+	+
Aegean style ivories	+	-

According to the chemical and petrographic evidence, the other Monochrome and Bichrome pottery fabrics were made of clays similar to those used in local, Canaanite-style vessels. These wares were produced locally at all of the Philistine pentapolis sites.

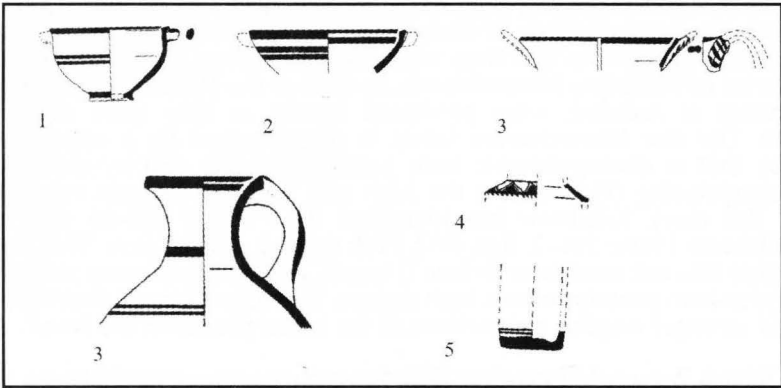


Fig. 3. Rare Philistine Monochrome forms (after Dothan and Zukerman 2004; not to scale).

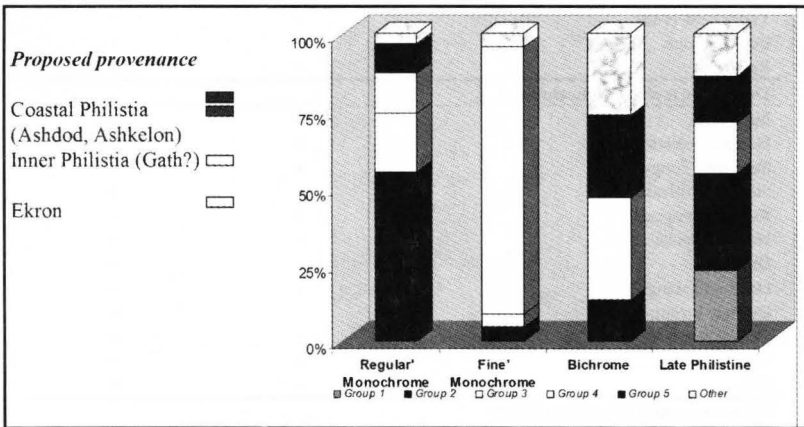


Fig. 4. Proposed provenance of Philistine pottery from Philistia according to chemical analysis by ICP.

Another important pottery form is the so called Philistine cooking jug. These jugs, which find many parallels from the Aegean and Cyprus, appear throughout the Iron I at all Philistine sites (Killebrew 1999; Dothan and Zukerman 2004: 28–31, figs. 36–37, Type P, and references therein; Yasur-Landau 2005; Ben-Shlomo 2005: 47–48; Ben-Shlomo et al. in press). Yet, at Ekron they almost completely replace the traditional Late Bronze Age Canaanite cooking pot type in the initial Stratum VII settlement, dated to the early 12th century BCE, while at Ashdod both forms appear together throughout the Iron I (Dothan and Zukerman 2004: 37). This difference may indicate that cooking habits at early Iron Age Ekron were more influenced by Aegean traditions.

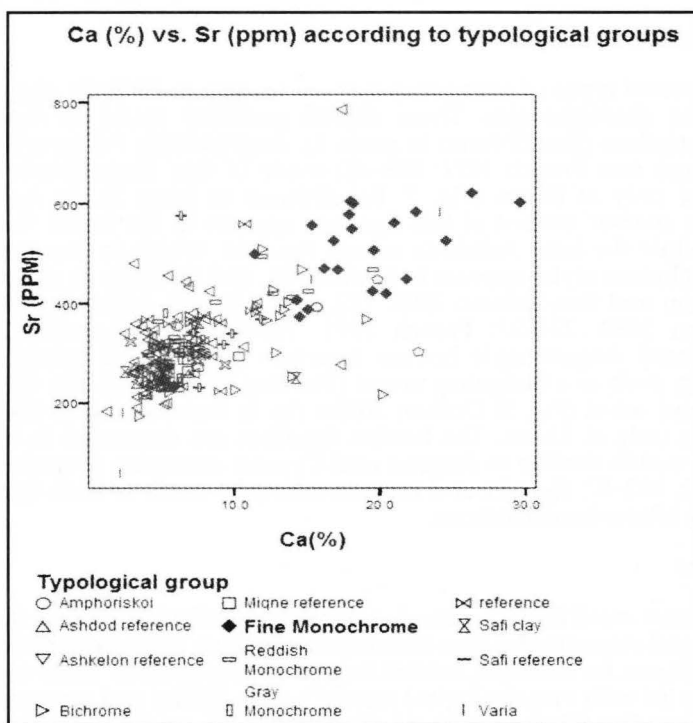


Fig. 5. Bivariate plot showing high Calcium (and Sr) values of 'Fine' Monochrome Philistine pottery (Chemical Group 4).

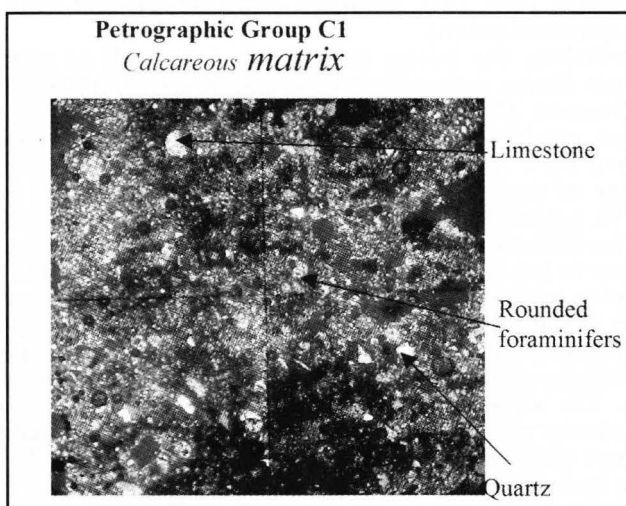


Fig. 6. Thin section of fine Philistine Monochrome pottery, showing calcareous matrix and inclusions (XPL, field width 1.7 mm).

### *Terracottas*

Several types of terracottas that are unique to Philistia also show Aegean characteristics. These objects probably relate to domestic cult practices (Ben-Shlomo in press 1). Aegean-style Psi-type female figurines (see French 1971: 128–42) made of fine Monochrome clay appear only at Ekron (Fig. 7; Ben-Shlomo in press 2). At Ashdod, only a coarser variant of this figurine appears in the initial Stratum XII, while the later Ashdoda seated figurine, which is decorated in the Bichrome style, appears in Stratum XI, and similarly at other sites (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 122, figs. 3.36:2–3, 3.62:1–4, 3.80:1–4; Dothan 1982: 234–37; French 1971: 167–72; Yasur-Landau 2001). Decorated Aegean-style bovine figurines (Fig. 8) and zoomorphic vessels, such as a hedgehog vessel (Bierling 1998: 23–25, pls. 4:1, 10a) and bird askoi (Fig. 9; Dothan 2003a: fig. 4; Ben-Shlomo in press 1), appear only at Ekron. The bovine figurines are decorated in linear/spine motifs similar to Aegean and Cypriot examples (French 1971: 151–52, 155–57, fig. 11), and include examples made of both fine and coarse Monochrome fabrics.

### *Ivories*

Other small finds, such as ivories, suggest ethnic influence in their form and iconography (Ben-Shlomo and Dothan 2006). Several ivories from Ekron, for example, exhibit Aegean characteristics. These include a large lid with a mythological scene (Dothan 2003b) and pommel ring knife handles (Dothan 2002: 14–22, figs. 12–18). At the same time, no incised scapulae, objects assumed to reflect Cypriot influence, have been found at Iron I Ashdod, even though they have been found at Ekron (Dothan 1998: 155), Ashkelon (Stager 1991) and Gath (Maier personal communication).

Nevertheless, the ivories from Ashdod, as well as most of the ivories from Ekron, reflect Canaanite and/or Egyptian influence (for Ashdod Stratum XII, see Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 127–30, fig. 3.39). Most notable are several inlays that depict Egyptian scenes which have been found in well-stratified 12th century contexts at Ekron. One of these consists of a large inlay from a box found in Stratum VI, which depicts two female swimmers in a Nilotic scene (Fig. 10; Ben-Shlomo and Dothan 2006: fig. 4). The right figure holds a lotus flower in her right hand and has two or three bracelets. A band is depicted in her hair, which flows backwards freely. Papyrus plants are shown in the background. The figure on the left is empty-handed and has a shorter hairstyle. Both figures are adorned with a belt and upper clothing; which consists of a girle and blouse with a dotted X design. The wide empty space between the figures is peculiar. Either the ivory piece is not finished or the artist intentionally chose a less dense composition. The two women are depicted differently, especially in their facial details and hairstyle, and arguably could be of a different social class or ethnicity. The right figure, with jewelry on her arms and ears and carrying a lotus flower, appears to be a lady of

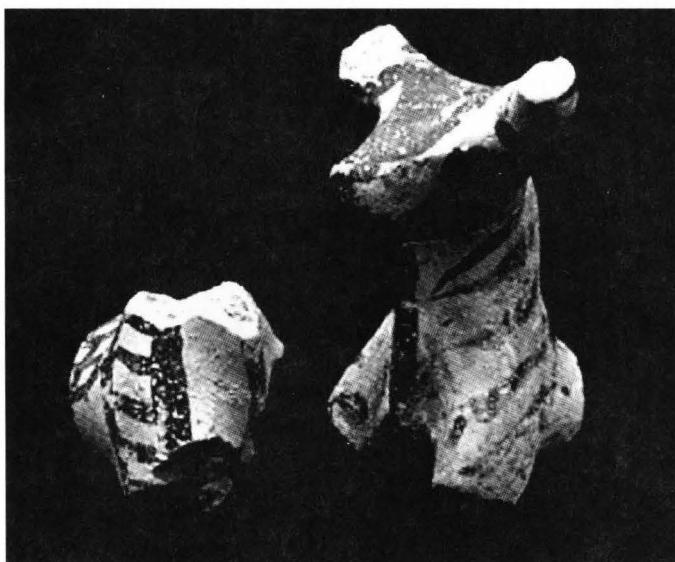


some standing, while the left figure may be her maid. The left figure also appears to be of African descent (on account of her hairstyle), and the right figure an Egyptian or Canaanite girl. Although the carving technique is distinctively Canaanite, a continuation of the LB II style, the motif is clearly Egyptian (for a nearly identical scene, see the silver and gold plate from Psusennes I tomb [Dynasty XXI, 1039–991 BCE] at Tanis [Keimer 1952: 64]).

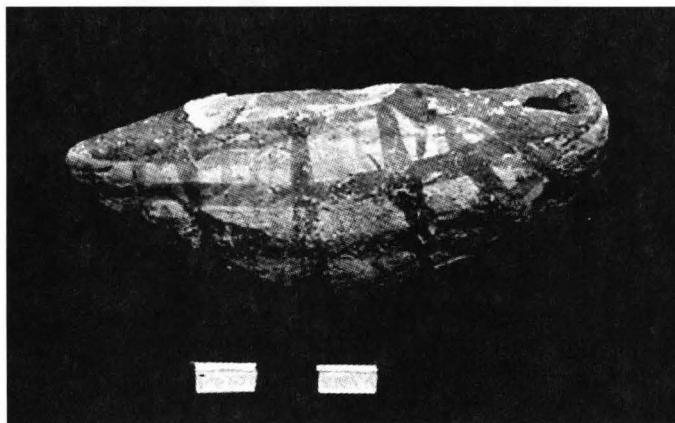


Fig. 7. Psi type female figurine from Ekron.

Other ivory fragments from Ekron show a striding man in a Nilotic scene (similar to a large inlay from Tell Farah South; cf. Petrie 1930: pl. LV; Ben-Shlomo and Dothan 2006: figs. 6–8), and a Nilotic bush in carved high relief (Fig. 11). Another object, probably in secondary use (Fig. 12; Ben-Shlomo and Dothan 2006: figs. 6:3, 8:1), has a partial hieroglyphic inscription that reads *Ra* or *Her Akhty* (a seated falcon-headed deity); the right two signs are *em-heb*, meaning *Ra* (the sun god) or “Horus of the two horizons in feast” (reading by Daphna Ben-Tor). The inscription, a typical phrase used on votives dedicated to gods in New Kingdom Egyptian temples, or alternatively a personal name, is located on the rear side of a box inlay. Parallels for ivory inlays with hieroglyph signs come from Tell el-Ājjul (Petrie 1933: 11,



**Fig. 8.** Decorated bovine figurines from Ekron.



**Fig. 9.** Monochrome bird-askos from Ekron.

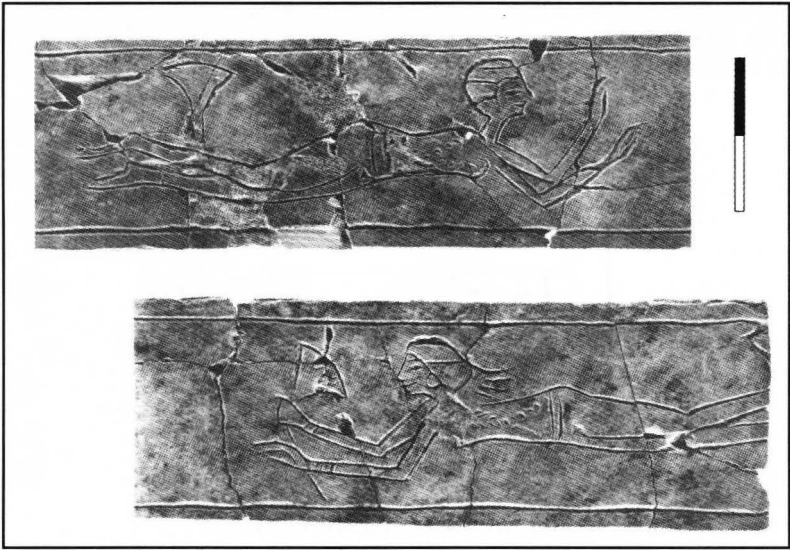


Fig. 10. Ivory inlay from Ekron.

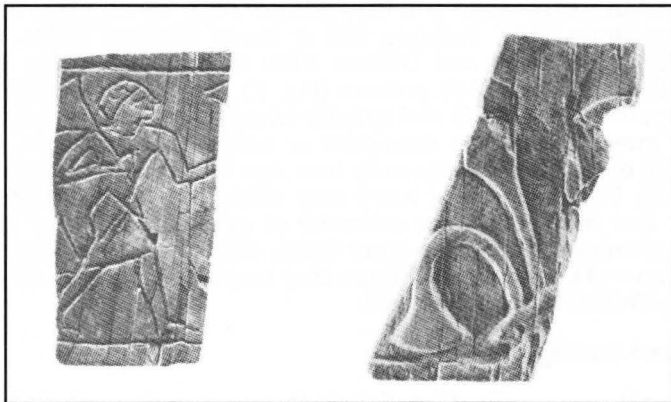


Fig. 11. Ivory inlays from Ekron.

pl. XXVIII:8), on the back of an animal procession scene displayed on a wand, Megiddo Stratum VIIA, which has produced inscribed boxes, either pencil cases or writing palettes, (Loud 1939: 11–13, 21, pls. 62–63), and New Kingdom Egypt (e.g., Hayes 1959 [1990]: 296, fig. 183). However, no parallel has been found for such an inlay inscribed on its rear side.

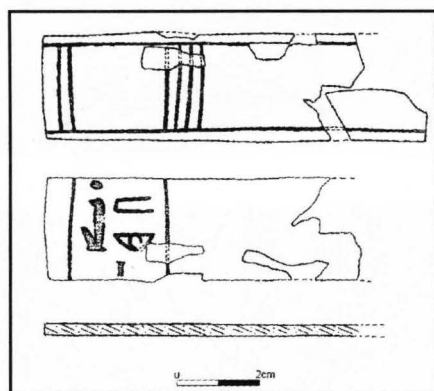


Fig. 12. Ivory inlay with hieroglyphic signs from Ekron.

Additional inlays and other ivory objects from Ashdod and Ekron show a continuation of Canaanite traditions (see Ben-Shlomo and Dothan 2006: 27–31 for a detailed discussion). Some of these have been found in elite or public buildings, as in the Stratum XII Building 5337 at Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 26–28, plans 2.6–2.7), and the Strata V–IV Building 350 at Ekron (Dothan 2003a, 2003b) (Fig. 13; Ben-Shlomo and Dothan 2006: figs. 11–14). These include cosmetic boxes (Fig. 13.3), palettes (Fig. 13.2), pins, combs (Fig. 13.1), pomegranates (Fig. 13.4) and spindle whorls. This group of domestic items, mostly related to cosmetics or toiletries, sheds light on the daily life of the elite in these early Iron Age Philistine settlements. The relatively large amount of ivory may stem from their owners' high status, and may reflect the existence of an elite 'Philistine' class in these communities. On the other hand, since the ivories also reflect Egyptian and Canaanite traditions, they may also have been displayed by non-Philistine groups as well.

### *Seals and Sealings*

Another category of small finds that might reflect ethnicity more explicitly are stamp and cylinder seals and their impressions. Several seals from Ashdod Strata XII–XI (Dothan and Porath 1993: 81, fig. 36:9; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 165–67, figs. 3.66–67) are carved in a linear style that resembles Cypriot seals from Maa-Palaeokastro (Porada 1988: 305, pl. G:4, No. 560) and Kition (Porada 1985: 251, pl. A:2; Karageorghis 1974: pl. XCII:293). In fact this is the only element

of Aegean or Cypriot character that is uniquely found at Ashdod. It has been suggested that these represent cypro-linear signs, or some type of Philistine-Aegean script (Stieglitz 1977; Keel 1994: 21), and that their presence at Ashdod might indicate that the site was inhabited by immigrants from Cyprus, perhaps from Enkomi, as Na'aman has suggested (1997). However, these signs can also be interpreted as iconographic symbols (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 166), and the direct Cypriot connection is not supported by any other material evidence.

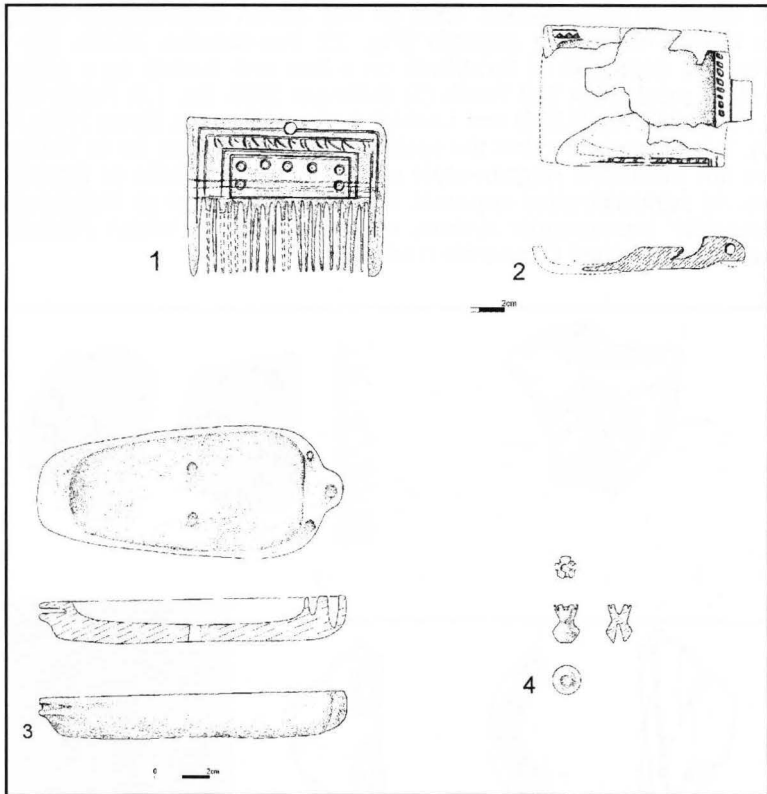


Fig. 13. Various ivory objects from Ekron.

Anchor seals have also been identified as a distinctively Philistine phenomenon (Keel 1994), even though they appear all over the southern Levant during the Iron I and early Iron II, reflecting a general trend towards a more intensive use of stamp seals. At the same time, new iconographic representations, involving combinations of animal and human motifs, appear on the seals. However, this could also be interpreted as a Canaanite or Israelite development, related to the

rise of new and independent cultures and political groups during this period. It should be noted that the stamp seals are better suited technologically for sealing sacks, boxes, vessels and papyri than are cylinder seals.

A few impressed clay sealings from Ashdod and a larger number from Ekron were found in Iron I contexts (Fig. 14; Ben-Shlomo 2006b). All of the sealings preserved impressions of scarab style seals engraved with typical Iron I Canaanite (Figs. 14.1–2) or Egyptian (Fig. 14.3) motifs, mostly consisting of figures combined with animals. Several Ekron and Ashdod sealings produced at least two identical impressions. One of the Ekron impressions depicts two figures riding on animals (Fig. 15; Ben-Shlomo 2006b: fig. 1), perhaps a depiction of Ba'al/Seth on a lion and Reshef on a gazelle. Parallels exist from Tell Farah (S) (Münster 2003: fig. 1:8; Petrie 1930: pls. XXXI:287, XLIII:534) and Lachish (winged figures, Rowe 1936: No. 575). It is noteworthy that the sealings uncovered thus far in Philistia have not produced Aegean-style motifs, only Canaanite or Egyptian ones. As administrative apparati, the sealings suggest an indigenous, 'Canaanite' bureaucratic system, or at least one in which Philistine officials maintained Canaanite traditions.

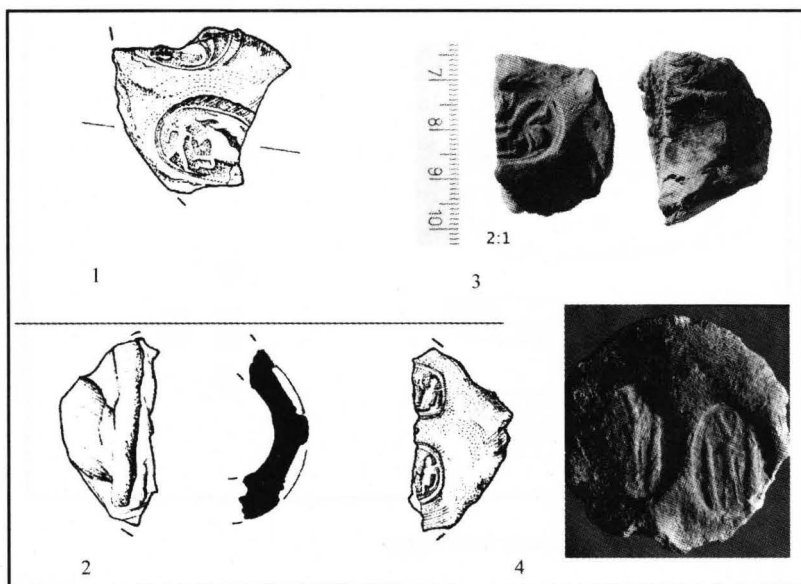


Fig. 14. Impressed clay sealings from Ekron.

The differences in site size and settlement history of the Philistine pentapolis cities have caused some scholars to challenge the 'five city culture' model of Philistia (Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2001: 239). However, despite their differences, these sites nevertheless also shared

many cultural attributes, including large proportions of the distinctive Aegean-style Monochrome pottery (Ben-Shlomo 2003), architectural features such as the 'megaron' type building, with its long-room, twin pillars and hearth, as found at Ekron, Ashdod and Ashkelon (Dothan 1992: 96; 2003a: 200–2, 204, fig. 15; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 26–29, plans 2.5–2.7; Stager 2006: 12; see also at Tell Qasile, Mazar 1986), and various types of hearths and tubs (Dothan 2003a: 202–6; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 29–30, plan 2.5; Karageorghis 2000: 266–74). The homogeneity of this material culture and its relative dominance at these four excavated sites stands out as a distinctive cultural identity when compared to other contemporary sites and regions in the southern Levant. The differences that I have noted occurred on a smaller, more local scale, and are more pronounced in the initial settlement phase. Ekron appears to have experienced more direct Aegean contact than did Ashdod in this initial phase (early 12th century BCE), while Ashdod underwent a more graduate development, with its 'Philistine' identity becoming more pronounced over the Iron I period.



Fig. 15. Sealing from Ekron depicting two mounted figures.

### The 'Expansion' to the North

During the later part of the Iron I, the distribution of Philistine material culture expanded to the north as far as the Yarkon Basin, appearing at such sites as Tell Qasile, Azor, Tel Gerisa and possibly Aphek and Izbet Sartah. This expansion is best exemplified by the appearance of the so called 'degenerate' Philistine Bichrome pottery. In addition to Philistine Bichrome, at Azor, cremation burials and a figurine bearing krater may provide further evidence of an Aegean or Philistine cultural identity. These kraters could have carried Aegean-style female mourning figurines, as similarly found in the Aegean (Dothan 1961, 1989; Dothan 1982: fig. 14:2, pl. 32; Ben-Shlomo forthcoming). The spread of Philistine Bichrome pottery to the Yarkon Basin, or 'Greater Philistia', or even to the northern inner valleys

of Israel has been seen as evidence for the expansion of Philistine political power in the late Iron Age I (Wright 1966: 74–78; Dothan 1982: 217–18; Raban 1991). However, these concentrations of Philistine pottery may also be attributable to isolated groups of Philistines, or an increase in the popularity of Philistine tableware among the Canaanite population.

Petrographic analysis has demonstrated that inscribed clay tablets and Ashdoda style figurines from Aphek did come from southern Philistia (Yasur-Landau 2002: 230). However, petrographic analysis has also shown that the Philistine Bichrome pottery found in the Azor burials was locally made. This pottery was made, similarly to the non-Philistine pottery, from the *hamric rendzina*-derived soil typical of the central coastal plain, which does not occur in Philistia to the south (Fig. 16; Ben-Shlomo forthcoming). At least some of the Philistine Bichrome from Tell Qasile and Aphek was probably also locally produced. Thus, either Philistine potters did settle in this region and then developed their own local style, or indigenous, non-Philistine potters copied their work. Further archaeometric analysis will be needed to clarify these apparent patterns.

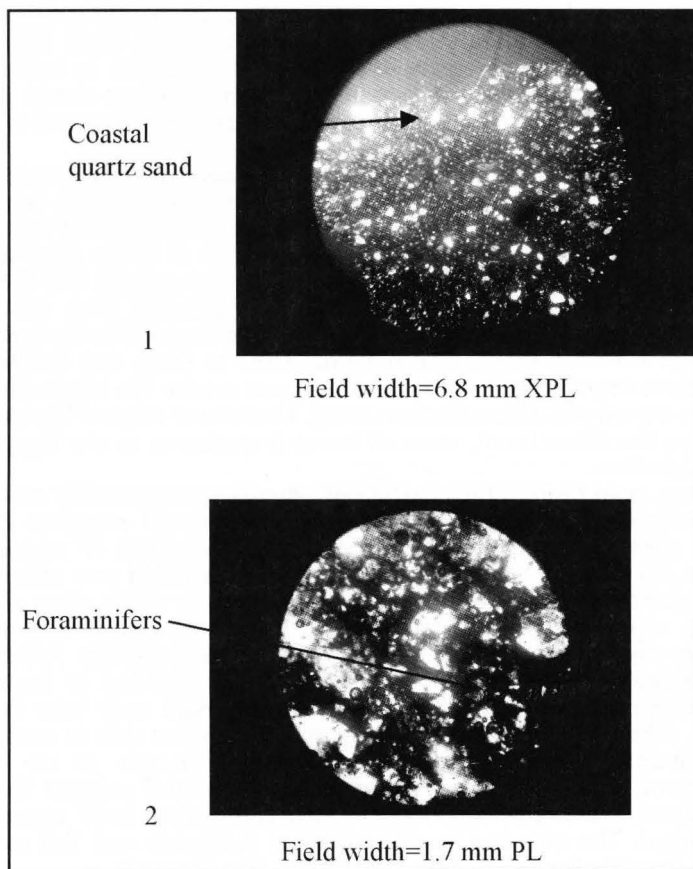
The possible presence of Philistine Bichrome pottery in northern Israel has received additional attention recently (Ilan 1999: 93–95, 208–10; Gilboa 2001: 401–13; Gilboa et al. 2006), particularly concerning assemblages recovered from Tel Dan, Tel Dor and Tel Keisan. The Bichrome pottery from these northern sites appears to be divided into two groups: 1) classic Philistine Bichrome vessels, mostly closed forms or bell-shaped bowls, that are assumed to have been imported from Philistia, and 2) related forms that sometimes also exhibit Canaanite or hybrid characteristics, or copy Philistine vessel types. These latter vessels display a variety of decorations (such as birds or geometric motifs) that resemble or are identical to Philistine motifs. It has been assumed by some scholars that these vessels are mostly made locally in the north, and are associated with other Sea Peoples groups, such as the Sikila or the Shardanu (see Dothan and Dothan 1992: 105; Stern 1998: 349; 2000; for a different view, see Gilboa and Sharon 2003: 9, 31; Gilboa et al. 2006). Archaeometric analysis should also help to clarify the source(s) of these assemblages.

## Discussion

Yasur-Landau (2002: 207–11, 244, 256) has proposed that groups of Aegean immigrants from different regions in the Aegean settled at the different Philistine cities, thus explaining the subtle cultural differences reflected at Ashdod and Ekron. He has also noted a difference in settlement hierarchy, with a greater ranking of sites within inland Philistia, such as in the territory of Ekron, which also had urban satellite settlements such as Batash and Gezer (cf. Finkelstein 2000). Alternatively, Yasur-Landau proposes that each city might have been settled by immigrants at slightly different times, with the settlement at Ekron predating Ashdod. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the characteristics of Philistine material culture are not identical to any



specific sub-region in the Aegean, and therefore probably involve some sort of blend and/or local development. The debate concerning



**Fig. 16.** Thin section of Philistine Bichrome vessel from Azor showing calcareous soil rich in foraminifers and coastal quartz sand.

the origin of the Philistines, and the Sea Peoples more broadly, is a long and unresolved one (for reviews see Singer 1988; Yasur-Landau 2002: 207–11). Many suggestions have been proposed, ranging from the Aegean (T. Dothan and others), to Crete (Macalister 1914: 1–28), Cyprus (Killebrew 1998b: 401–2; 2000), western Anatolia (Singer 1988, relying on the etymology of Philistine/Sea Peoples names), and the Dodecanase (Yasur-Landau 2002). Some scholars have also suggested that the Sherden originated from the island of Sardinia (Dothan 1986; Zertal 2001).

The ethnic explanation for the variability in material culture in Philistia should be examined according to the archaeological evidence. If there were different Aegean elements in the material cultures of Ashdod and Ekron in the earliest Philistine settlements this would better fit an ethnic demarcation. However, there seems to be a difference in the intensity of the Aegean influence, as well as in the settlement sizes of these two sites, and it therefore seems more appropriate to attribute these differences to local developments within Philistia.

I believe that the differences documented in this paper can be explained by two primary dynamics. The first dynamic was the interaction that occurred between Philistine newcomers and the local Canaanite (and Egyptian) inhabitants resident at these sites when they arrived. The 13th century remains at Ashdod suggest that the site continued to have a stronger Egyptian, and possibly even stronger Canaanite, presence during the transition from the LB II to the Iron IA. A similar situation might also have occurred at Gaza and Ashkelon, given their importance as ports and outposts on the Via Maris during the 13th century BCE (see Dothan 1992). The inland cities of Ekron and Gath, on the other hand, were of lesser importance to the Egyptian administration.

Thus, even though the coastal settlements were probably reached physically before those inland, the cultural record suggests these inland sites were the first to absorb sizable numbers of migrating settlers. As a result, the Philistine presence at Ashdod was relatively small, and therefore socially and politically weak, while other ethnic groups, representing the Egyptian and Canaanite population, were stronger and consequently more visible archaeologically. Although a Philistine presence was likely established at Ashdod at the very beginning of the Iron I, it became more dominant only later in the period, while at Ekron, the Philistine migrants were able to establish a dominant presence from the beginning, although, as we have seen, some elements of the material cultural record suggest that at least some existing administrative structures may have remained unchanged. The ongoing investigations at Ashkelon and Tell es-Safi should provide further insight concerning this dynamic.

The second dynamic that might explain the intra-regional cultural variation is the possibility of a shift in the balance of power between the different pentapolis cities over the course of the Iron I. This power balance continued to evolve during the Iron Age II, until their destruction by the Babylonians around 600 BCE. This mechanism is more evident during the Iron IIA and onwards, when the political structure of the Philistine pentapolis stabilized. This power imbalance is particularly evident between Ashdod, Gath and Ekron during the 10th through 7th centuries, both in historical sources (e.g., Tadmor 1966; Shai 2006) and the archaeological record (mainly in site size and fortifications). Thus, during the 9th century, Gath appears to have been the stronger, Ashdod during the 10th and 8th centuries, and Ekron (and possibly Ashkelon) during the 7th. This dynamic thus was very likely also operative during the earlier Iron Age as well, with Ekron

(and possibly Ashkelon) strongest during the initial settlement phase, and Ashdod becoming stronger later, during the 11th century BCE.

In summary, according to the available evidence, the cultural differences exhibited between the cities of Philistia appear to have been largely the result of internal dynamics. During the initial settlement phase, of which its exact origin cannot be defined, there is greater evidence for extensive Aegean contact at the inland site of Ekron, than there is at the coastal settlements of Ashdod (and possibly Ashkelon). Later, a power imbalance developed between these settlements. This imbalance continued down through the period, shifting from one site to another, such that during each sub-period of the Iron Age a different city dominated Philistia.

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