

PHILISTINES, ISRAELITES AND CANAANITES IN THE SOUTHERN TROUGH VALLEY DURING THE IRON AGE I*

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Following a relative prosperity in the Late Bronze Age (about 24 settlements and additional “find spots”; DAGAN 2000, fig. 15), and despite significant demographic increase throughout most of the country at the time, settlement in the Shephelah reached an unparalleled nadir during the Iron Age I.¹ With the exception of the Philistine cities in the northwestern Shephelah (Gath/Tel Zafit/Tell es-Safi/ and Timnah/Tel Batash), settlement remains from this period were unearthed only in its eastern part, i.e., at Tel Beth-Shemesh, Tel Yarmuth, Tel ‘Eton and Tell Beit Mirsim (e.g., DAGAN 2000, fig. 16). Practically no other settlements were identified in the comprehensive Shephelah survey, and most of the region was practically devoid of real settlement at the time (DAGAN 2000, 191, see also fig. 16). While various explanations might be suggested to the phenomenon, it is agreed that there was very limited settlement in the region at this time. The few settlements that have existed, seems to have concentrated in the eastern part of the Shephelah, in and around the trough valley which separates the high Shephelah and the Hebron hill country, and connects the Beersheba valley in the south and the Ayalon valley in the north.

Luckily, all the above mentioned sites were excavated, at least to a limited extent, and this enables a relatively detailed discussion of the phenomenon. In the present article we would therefore like to discuss the reasons for the relative emptiness of the Shephelah on the one hand, and the causes for the population concentration in its eastern part, on the other hand. Discussing those issues will result with an analysis not only of settlement patterns, but also of social dynamics in this border area.

BACKGROUND

The Iron Age I is a formative period. This is the time in which the Philistines arrived to the southern coastal plain of Israel, leaving a clear mark on the archaeological record of the Iron Age (e.g., DOTHAN 1982; MAZAR 1992; STAGER 1995; 1998). This is also the period in which the Israelites crystallized in central highlands (e.g., FINKELSTEIN 1988; STAGER 1998; FAUST 2006). As far as the local population of Canaan, mainly this of the lowland and valleys (usually called simply Canaanites, despite possible differences within this group) is concerned, this was a period of decline, and it is usually agreed that significant Canaanite population concentrated only in the Northern Valleys (e.g., MAZAR 1992, 296–297; see also FINKELSTEIN 2003; BENTOR 2003, 52).

The present paper analyzes the development in southern Canaan, and for our purposes, the region can be divided into three longitudinal zones: the southern coastal plain in the west, the Judean highlands in the east, and, in between, the Shephelah (Fig. 1).

In the coastal plain, this is the period of the Philistine settlement. Although most likely not a completely homogeneous group, and despite the possible various origins of the settlers, they clearly developed some form of shared identity at the time (STAGER 1995; 1998; FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011, and references), which justify the term “Philistines”. Politically, the Philistines were the dominant group, especially in the south, during the Iron Age I, and there is a consensus that they were the most complex society in the region during this period (e.g., HAUER 1986,

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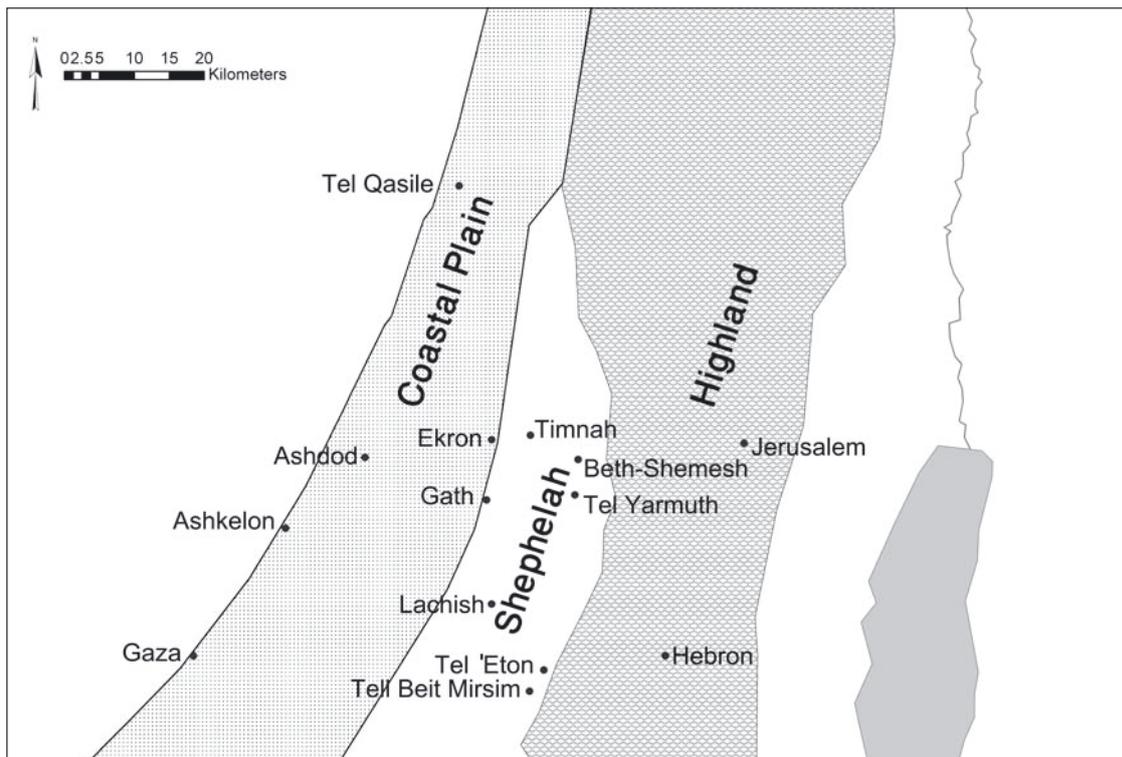


Fig. 1 Schematic map of the discussed regions

9; FINKELSTEIN 1996b, 236; STAGER 1998, 168; SINGER 1994, 299). They occupied large cities which seem to exhibit a high level of urbanism, social complexity and socioeconomic hierarchy (e.g., BUNIMOVITZ 1990; STAGER 1995; 1998, 166–168; SINGER 1994, 299). While their initial phase of settlement was limited to a small part of the southern coastal plain, it appears that after some time they began to expand to the east (toward the Shephelah and probably also the highlands) and north (toward the Yarkon basin) (e.g., FINKELSTEIN 1989; SINGER 1994; STAGER 1998, 153–154). The Philistines settled in large cities, and while their origins and the exact process of their settlement is debated, it is clear that their cities were large, well organized and planned (e.g., STAGER 1995; 1998, 165–166). At the same time, the number of small settlement in the southern coastal plain of Philistia shrunk significantly, and one can speak of the abandonment of the countryside (cf., FINKELSTEIN 1996b; 2000; see also SHAVIT 2008), leading scholars to suggest that the Philistines enacted a policy of forced urbanization, and concentrated the local population in central urban settlements (BUNIMOVITZ 1998, 107–108).

The question of the identity of the highland settlers during the Iron Age I had received a signifi-

cant amount of scholarship (e.g., FINKELSTEIN 1988; DEVER 2003; KILLEBREW 2005; FAUST 2006, and references). The majority of scholars today accept the Israelite label attached to those groups (e.g., MILLER 2004; KILLEBREW 2005; FAUST 2006), and this is the general header we will use here when referring to this group (for a more detailed discussion of ethnic dynamics at the time, see below). The Israelite settlement in the highlands seems to be concentrated in the north, mainly in the region of Samaria, and although the limited archaeological information we possess on the Hebron hill country should caution us against arriving at firm conclusions on the basis of the number of settlements in this region, the figures does indicate that this region was relatively peripheral in the process of Israelite settlement (FINKELSTEIN 1988, 53, 326–327; STAGER 1998, 134, see also figures on pp. 130–131, and table on p. 135). Still, it was part of the Settlement process in the highlands, as the evidence from the excavated sites clearly attests. The number of sites in this region grew significantly when compared with that of the Late Bronze Age (e.g., OFER 1998, 45–46; from one to 18), in accordance with the situation in the rest of the highlands (cf., FINKELSTEIN 1988).

It is the zone in-between those two regions on which we would like to concentrate, and especially on its eastern part. The settlement reality in the Shephelah during the Iron Age I was quite dark. While some 24 settlements appear to have existed in this region during the Late Bronze Age (based on DAGAN 2000, 162–163, see also fig. 15), the number shrunk to 4 (or 6)² in the Iron Age I (*ibid.*, fig. 16, see also p. 186), and vast regions seem not to have been settled at the time (see also DAGAN 200, 191).³

Iron Age I Settlement in the Trough Valley

Interestingly, we have seen that the limited settlement that did exist in the Shephelah, seem to have concentrate in or near the trough valley, i.e., the eastern part of the Shephelah, just below the Hebron hill country. Evidence for settlement was identified at a number of sites, all of which were excavated, i.e., Tel Beth-Shemesh (e.g., BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009), Tel Yarmuth (DE MIROSCHEJJI 1988, 92; 1999, 17), Tel 'Eton (Faust 2009; 2011) and Tell Beit Mirsim (ALBRIGHT 1943, 1–38; GREENBERG 1987). Notably, practically no additional Iron Age I settlements were identified in the survey (DAGAN 2000, 191).⁴ Since the following discussion will concentrate mainly on those, excavated sites, a few introductory words on the nature of the finds there are in order.

Tel Beth-Shemesh

The recent excavations at Tel Beth-Shemesh revealed four levels of Iron Age I occupation at the site (BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009, 121). The

excavators note (*ibid.*, 121–123) that the pottery and architecture show clear continuity with that of the Late Bronze Age (their claim that the “Level 6 buildings show a general affinity to the typical Iron Age I “four-room house” plan” [*ibid.*, 123] should be doubted). They also note that the pottery assemblage show clear affinities to other inland sites, and it is different from that of the period’s highlands sites. In this connection, they note, for example, the high percentage of bowls at Tel Beth-Shemesh as well as the almost complete lack of collared rim jars there (*ibid.*). They also note that Philistine monochrome pottery is completely missing, and that Philistine bichrome pottery comprises 5% of the total assemblage. Pig bones, an issue of special attention among scholars who study Iron Age sites, are completely missing from Iron Age I Tel Beth-Shemesh (*ibid.*).

The character of the settlement changed dramatically in the early Iron Age II, when the large village was turned into a fortified city (*ibid.* 123, 124–136).

Tel Yarmuth

Most of the finds at the site date to the Early Bronze Age, and only limited later remains were excavated on the upper part of the mound (DE MIROSCHEJJI 1999, 17). For our purposes, it is relevant to mention one stratum from the LBII, and three Iron I strata. As far as the former is concerned, no buildings nor floors were unearthed. The pottery is comprised of both local types and imported Cypriote and Mycenaean vessels. De Miroschedji suggested that the site was a mere vil-

² The Number of sites is four when the Philistines settlements of Gath (Tel Zafit/Tell es-Safi) and Timnah (Tel Batash) are excluded. When those two are included, the number of sites is six.

³ Notably, it is very likely that there were additional sites that were not yet identified. We therefore stress the relative number of sites that were unearthed in the surveys and excavations in the various regions and periods (as sites were missed in all regions, and those “missing sites” are spread randomly between regions and periods), and the observed patterns seems to be representative. We must note that it is theoretically possible that there was some unknown bias which somewhat lowered the number of identified sites specifically in the region, but even if this was the case the number of sites would still be extremely limited (clearly we cannot blame scholarship’s inability to identify Iron I sites in the surveys, as both Philistine bichrome pottery and col-

lared rim jars are easily identified. A relative infrequency of such types in the region might have, theoretically, reduced the number of identified sites, but as we will see below, Philistine pottery seems to have been present in the Shephelah in no small quantities).

⁴ Notably, 1 or 2 “find spots” were reported in the Amaziah Map (DAGAN 2006: 29). It should be stressed, therefore, that only a very limited amount of pottery was found scattered at the place(s), and it is likely that there was no settlement there, and that the pottery was brought from another place, perhaps in order to fertilize the fields (perhaps from Tel 'Eton; for such a practice, see, e.g., DAGAN 2000: 75–77; FAUST 2011; FAUST and KATZ forthcoming). It should also be noted that the two spots are located in close proximity to each other, and should for all practical purposes be regarded as one. At any event, DAGAN (2000, 76–77) himself did not usually count those find-spots as settlements.

lage at the time. From the first Iron I level (Stratum Acr-V) limited architectural remains were exposed, and the finds include a series of floors with pottery which was dated to the transition from the LB to the Iron I and to the late 12th century BCE. The following stratum (Stratum Acr-IV) included an industrial installation, and several rooms were unearthed in Stratum Acr-III. This stratum was sealed by a burnt layer, in which many vessels were found, including fragments of Philistine painted pottery. The excavator compared the finds to coastal Philistine settlements in the 11th century BCE. No Iron Age II remains were found in situ (*ibid.*).

Tel 'Eton

The Iron Age I levels were exposed only in a very limited area (three squares), where the Iron Age IIB stratum was cut, probably by a Byzantine agricultural terrace (FAUST forthcoming). Below the Iron Age I remains we reached a level, dated to the final years of the Late Bronze age, of burnt mudbricks which might be a destruction layer.

We must stress that the finds are limited, and the results discussed here are preliminary. Still, since the finds at Tel 'Eton are in general accordance with the finds in the adjacent sites, we feel it is appropriate to discuss it in this context.

The main Iron Age I assemblage includes mainly Canaanite forms, and there is clear continuity with the Late Bronze ceramic tradition in the region (FAUST and KATZ forthcoming). Still, a few Philistine bichrome sherds were unearthed in the 11th century level, and a relatively significant number of Philistine bichrome vessels were unearthed in the "Philistine tomb" that was unearthed just below the mound (EDELSTEIN and AURANT 1992; the tomb will be discussed in more details below).

Notably, the finds in the higher Iron Age I level – that of the late Iron Age I or the transition to the early Iron Age IIA is somewhat different. The sample is much more limited, but includes one example of a collared rim jar.

Petrographic examination of the Iron I pottery reveals that the vast majority of it was produced locally (Ben Shlomo, personal communication; see more below).

Tell Beit Mirsim

The Iron Age I remains at Tell Beit Mirsim are disturbed, and includes a limited architecture and many silos (ALBRIGHT 1943, 1–38; see also GREENBERG 1987). Albright identified three phas-

es in his B stratum, which spans the 12th–10th centuries (his Iron Age I): B1, B2 and B3. The last of those strata (B3) was dated to the 10th century, and belong to the beginning of the Iron Age II, when a larger settlement was founded at the site. In the following we will discuss mainly the smaller Iron I settlement which, according to GREENBERG (1987, 57), was "an unwalled, sparsely population settlement".

ALBRIGHT (1943, 36–37) interpreted the finds at Tell Beit Mirsim as representing the following sequence: the Late Bronze Age settlement (stratum C2) was a Canaanite city which was devastated and resettled as an Israelite village (stratum B1). This was taken over by the Philistines (stratum B2), and the settlement was captured and rebuilt by the United Monarchy under David and Solomon (stratum B3). Greenberg reexamined the plans and finds, and came to a number of observations regarding the nature of the settlement at Tell Beit Mirsim (he also challenged Albright's basic scheme, see below). He notes (1987, 61) that while some of the Late Bronze Age structures continued in use, others were abandoned, and the excavated area served for grains storage during the Iron Age I. He interprets the architecture as exhibiting no new features, and "the picture is one of gradual decline within the framework of the Late Bronze Age settlement" (*ibid.*; see also p. 76). As far as the pottery is concerned, Greenberg noted the continuity between the various Iron Age I phases (p. 76). The assemblage is different from that of the highlands sites, storage vessels are only a small part of the total assemblage, and the decoration is completely different from what one finds in the highlands at the time (*ibid.*, 76). Collared rim jars are practically absent, and only one (certain) such example was found at the site (*ibid.*, 64, 71). Philistine pottery was unearthed, but not in significant quantities (GREENBERG 1987, 76; see also ALBRIGHT 1932, 61–64; 1943, 1, 4, 9–10, 25, 36). Greenberg stressed that the similarities (in both architecture and ceramics) with highland settlement are superficial (*ibid.*, 76). Finally, Greenberg also noted that the site was not Philistine, that "the amount of Philistine pottery is negligible", and that it lacks the urban character of such sites (*ibid.*, 76). He concluded that this was a Canaanite settlement (*ibid.*, 76–78, and more below).

DISCUSSION

Why was most of the Shephelah nearly empty during this period of increased demography in most

parts of the country (FINKELSTEIN 1988), and why were so many settlements concentrated in the eastern part of the region, just below the highlands. It seems to us that both questions are related, and we would like, first of all, to address the first question, which had already received some scholarly attention, whether directly or indirectly.

The Relative “Emptiness” of the Shephelah: Philistine Settlement Patterns and Policies

Notably, many of the Late Bronze Age cities in the Shephelah were destroyed in the transition to the Iron Age (e.g. Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth-Shemesh; see also DAGAN 2000, 172–174; FINKELSTEIN 1988, 295–302, and references), but this in itself cannot account for the relative emptiness of the region during the Iron Age I. Many sites were destroyed in the same time in other parts in the country, e.g., in the Lower Galilee and the Jezreel valley, but no such desolation was identified there (e.g., GAL 1994). Furthermore, a process by which a large number of sites were destroyed is identified in additional periods, for example during the middle of the second millennium BCE, and many of the destroyed sites were simply resettled (e.g., GONEN 1992, 216–217). No matter who was responsible for the destructions (Israelites, Philistines, Egyptians, or perhaps another group; e.g., DAGAN 2000, 172–174, and references), the question is why were practically all the sites not resettled – the abandonment of many is logical, but not of practically all of them.

It seems that in order to assess the situation in the Shephelah, we need to look at the reality in the neighboring area of the coastal plain. Finkelstein, in his discussion of the “Philistine countryside” (FINKELSTEIN 1995; see also FINKELSTEIN 2000), notes that while 102 sites seem to have existed in Philistia (including, in his discussion, parts of the Shephelah) during the Late Bronze Age (p. 228), only 49 sites existed in the very same region during the Iron Age I (p. 231). Still, Finkelstein notes that the overall estimated built up area did not change much between those two eras (p. 231), and the population simply concentrated in larger sites. FINKELSTEIN summarized (1995, 231–232): “(W)e are facing a two-fold process here: on the one hand, an almost complete abandonment of the countryside, and on the other hand, a very impressive expansion of urban life” (see also the discussion in FINKELSTEIN 2000, 166–173).

Indeed, SHAVIT (2008, 135) opens his article on “settlement patterns of Philistine city-states” with

the following statement: “(A)n analysis of a regional study in Israel’s southern Coastal Plain showed that the settlement pattern of most of the cities of Philistia, from the beginning of the Iron Age until the 8th century BCE, was characterized by urban centers and by an almost total absence of a rural hinterland”. SHAVIT (2008, 156–160) discussed the reasons for this pattern, and after noting how exceptional is this pattern in ancient Israel, concluded that it was “influenced by a culture originating in the Aegean World” (p. 160).

BUNIMOVITZ (1998), in his comparative study of the Sea Peoples immigration, argues that the evidence support a process of synoecism (pp. 107–108). This seems to have been practiced already in Greek and Cyprus, and was, according to Bunimovitz, implemented by the new Philistine settlers in the southern coastal plain – they “adopted a purposeful policy of urban nucleation, displacing the Canaanite rural population from their own territory and relocating them in the Pentapolis” (p. 107). While the evidence pertains mainly to the coastal plain, Bunimovitz noted that this was probably also true regarding the population of other sites in the region, including Lachish, Gezer, and more (*ibid.*).

It is quite clear, therefore, that the relative emptiness of the Shephelah cannot be divorced from the Philistines presence in the coastal plain. It appears that the Philistines have indeed carried out a policy of forced urbanization, and the population in the Shephelah – those who stayed alive after the destruction of the Late Bronze Age cities – was forced to move into central settlements, or to flee the region (more below). Although the above mentioned studies (FINKELSTEIN 1996b; 2000; SHAVIT 2008; BUNIMOVITZ 1998) concentrated on the coastal plain, it appears that the relative emptiness of the latter region was even more extreme than that of the coastal plain, and the suggested Philistine policy is more than likely to have been responsible for it. Once this region became under Philistine hegemony, the policy of forced urbanization was simply implemented in the Shephelah too.

It is also possible that the Philistine policy was especially severe in this region, since it was a buffer area between them and the settlers in the highlands (cf., DAGAN 2000, 174). Another, somewhat similar, explanation for the relative emptiness of the region could also relate to the hostile relations between those warring groups (Israelites and Philistines) which, as a consequence, forced

the inhabitants of the Shephelah to leave their houses.⁵

While it is possible that more than one factor contributed to the desolation of the Shephelah, it seems to us that the main reason was indeed the Philistine intentional policy, and it is possible that this was perhaps augmented by the security situation in the region.

This, however, leads us to the second question, which is more important for our purposes: Why were the existing settlements concentrated in the trough valley and, consequently, who were the settlers?

Why the Trough Valley, and Who were the Settlers?

Given the above background, several theoretical explanations can be suggested regarding the identity of the inhabitants of the trough valley sites, and the causes for population concentration there:

The settlements in the trough valley were under Philistine control, and were erected as strongholds to keep the hostile highland population in checks (cf., ALBRIGHT 1943, 36, regarding phase B2 at Tell Beit Mirsim).

The settlements there were part of the highland settlement phenomenon, and the settlers were therefore Israelites (or proto-Israelites if someone prefers this term), sloping down from the highlands as part of settlement expansion to nearby regions (cf., ALBRIGHT 1943, 36; regarding phase B3 at Tell Beit Mirsim).

Another option is that this is where the original population of the Shephelah found refuge, after many Late Bronze Age sites were destroyed (e.g., AHARONI 1979, 220; GREENBERG 1987; see also DAGAN 2000, 190).

While some of the above suggestions might seem more plausible than others, we would like to

discuss some of the finds in those sites, in order to shed light on the “cultural affiliation” of those settlements (more below). Since such a discussion requires the identification of ethnic groups in the archaeological record of various sites, a few words on the relations between ethnic identity and material culture are in order.

Ethnicity in Archaeology

Identifying ethnic groups in the archaeological record has long been an important theme of archaeological research, but as is clear today, such identifications are notoriously difficult (cf., RENFREW 1993, 20; for good summaries, see JONES 1997; EMBERLING 1997; see also FAUST 2006).

In the past, scholars tended to equate archaeological cultures with ethnic groups, or peoples, and this is epitomized in the following oft-quoted paragraph written by CHILDE (1929, V–VI): “We find certain types of remains – pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms – constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall term ‘cultural group’ or just a ‘culture.’ We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today would be called a ‘people’”.

Various advances in archaeology, however, changed the approach to the study of ethnicity. The development of the New Archaeology (later Processual Archaeology) and its critique of the culture history school and its normative approach to culture, along with the new paradigm’s search for “laws of human behavior,” relegated the study of “unique” phenomena like ethnic or tribal identity to the fringes of archaeological inquiry (e.g., JONES 1997; TRIGGER 2006). It is further likely that the disinterest in the study of ethnicity also resulted from the horrifying outcome of the racial archaeol-

⁵ But this had to happen at the very beginning of the Iron Age I, as no settlement from the Iron I itself were unearthed in the area. According to BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN (2008: 27), LEDERMAN (1999) “pointed to cultural connections between the Shephelah and the central hill region and suggested that economic entrepreneurship – establishment of settlements specializing in horticulture (e.g., Khirbet Radana) to provide Philistia with their produce – initiated movement of lowlanders to the highlands”. This, however, runs against the data we possess. First of all, the Shephelah was almost empty during most of the Iron Age I, and one cannot speak of “movement” of people from the lowland to the highlands at this time (one should also note that in the above quoted article Bunimovitz and Lederman referred to

the data about the reduction in the number of settlement in the coastal plain, but did not appreciate the relative emptiness of the Shephelah. It appears that this also lies behind Lederman original suggestion). Furthermore, there are practically no “cultural connections” between the lowland and the highlands. On the contrary, the differences are striking (architecture, ceramic assemblage and even presence and absence of forms like the collared rim jars and Philistine pottery; see more below). Recently, after the article was submitted, BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN (2011) published an updated article, suggesting that the population of Iron Age Beth-Shemesh was indeed Canaanite, pretty much in line with what we suggest regarding the trough in general.

ogy so prevalent in Europe until the Second World War (e.g., HALL 1997, 1–2).

At the same time as the New Archaeology was emerging, changes in the perception of ethnicity were taking place in the anthropological literature. Following the work of BARTH (1969), it became apparent that ethnic groups are not “culture-bearing units” (*ibid.*, 10–13), i.e., groups sharing core values that find representation in cultural forms (*ibid.*, 10–11). Barth defines ethnic groups as, in essence, a form of social organization; its critical criterion is an ability to be identified and distinguished among others, or in his words, allowing “self-ascription and ascription by others” (*ibid.*, 11, 13). Ethnic identity here is not determined by biological or genetic factors but is subject to perception and is adaptable (for an assessment of Barth’s influence on archaeological thinking, see also EMBERLING 1997).

In this light, it is clear today that ethnicity is too complex to be merely identified with a material or an archaeological culture (see, e.g., HODDER 1982); it is fluid, it is merely one of several attributes of an individual’s complete identity, and it is subjective (e.g., SHENNAN 1989; 1991; EMBERLING 1997; SCHORTMAN, URBAN and AUSEC 2001; JONES 1997; FAUST 2006). Thus, for example, the adoption or avoidance of some artifacts might result from its cost, its place of production, the occupation of the owner, the ecology of the region, and many others factors, and is not necessarily related to the ethnicity of the owners. This has led some scholars to question the ability of archaeologists to identify ethnic groups in the material record of extinct societies (see JONES 1997, 109–110, 124; with regard to the Levant, see HERZOG 1997). Yet in most cases, clear relationships between material culture and ethnicity can be identified, however complicated they may be (MCGUIRE 1982; KAMP and YOFFEE 1980; EMBERLING 1997; FAUST 2006, and others; see also HOWARD 1996, 239–240).

It is accepted today that groups define themselves in relation to, and in contrast with, other groups (BARTH 1969; see also R. COHEN 1978, 389; A. COHEN 1985, 558). The ethnic boundaries of a

group are not defined by the sum of cultural traits but by the idiosyncratic use of specific material and behavioral symbols as compared with other groups (MCGUIRE 1982, 160; see also KAMP and YOFFEE 1980, 96; EMBERLING 1997, 299; BARTH 1969, 14, 15; HALL 1997, 135). As a consequence, emphasis shifted from the shared elements or characteristics of a group to the features that distinguish it from others. It was the contact between groups that was seen as essential for the formation of the self-identity of a group (see also A. COHEN 1985), which is thus clearly manifested in its material culture. Ethnic identity can be identified in certain artifacts that came to carry a symbolic meaning (MCGUIRE 1982, 163; HODDER 1991, 3), or by identifying “ethnically specific behavior,” or more accurately, the material correlates of such behavior (MCGUIRE 1982, 163; FAUST 2006; cf., DEETZ 1996, 187–211).⁶ One should remember, however, that equating pottery forms, for example, with a certain people is very risky, and cannot be attempted before other factors are studied and being accounted for. Only a comprehensive study of the society (or societies) involved, allows us to reach conclusions regarding the ethnic identity of the population (or some of it), which is perhaps the most difficult to identify (e.g., RENFREW 1993, 20; see also EMBERLING 1997; JONES 1997; FAUST 2006).

MATERIAL TRAITS AND THE IDENTITY OF THE SETTLERS IN THE TROUGH VALLEY

The material traits to be discussed include pottery, and mainly the presence and absence of Philistine pottery and collared rim jars as well as the overall nature of the assemblage, and food habits, i.e., the presence or absence of pigs in the faunal assemblage, as those were already shown to be culturally and even ethnically sensitive (e.g., BUNIMOVITZ and YASUR LANDAU 1996; HESSE 1990; BUNIMOVITZ and FAUST 2001; DEVER 2003; FAUST 2006, and many references; see more below).

Philistine pottery

A long time ago, in the spirit of the notorious pots equal people equation of the culture history school,

⁶ We should also note that boundary maintenance varies greatly in time and space. An object symbolizing ethnicity of a certain group in one context might be of less importance in another contemporaneous one, and something of importance at one time may become unimportant later (see HODDER 1982). Some boundaries might, therefore, be represent-

ed with sharp falloffs in distribution patterns of certain traits, while other traits will exhibit a more blurred pattern (see DE BOER 1990: 102). Moreover, in some cases, differences can exist between different areas of interaction of the same groups (HODDER 1982: 27–31).

it had been assumed that the presence of Philistine pottery indicates the presence of Philistines (e.g., RABAN 1991). This simplistic equation fell into disfavor on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Theoretically, we have already seen that it is clear that there are many elements that influence the way the archaeological record is created, and which items are used where, when and why. Ethnicity is only one factor in a very complex web of choices that influence the distribution and use of material items (McGUIRE 1982, 164; see also KAMP and YOFFEE 1980, 97; LONDON 1989; SKJEGGESTAND 1992, 179–180; ORSER and FAGAN 1995, 215–216; EMBERLING 1997, 305–306, 310–311; see also FINKELSTEIN 1996a, 204).

Empirically, scholars noted that Philistine pottery is found in many instances in faraway places, e.g., in the northern valleys (e.g., DOTHAN 1982; RABAN 1991; MAZAR 2002; FAUST 2006, 207–209), and it is difficult to identify the strata in which those vessels were found as “Philistines” (see now also GILBOA 2009). Clearly, Philistine pottery could arrive at sites through trade and exchange, and it is impossible to attribute its presence only to the arrival of Philistines.

Despite the above cautionary notes, however, it became quite clear in recent years that the Philistine pottery was not distributed randomly across the landscape, with its percentage gradually decreasing with distance from its production centres. While there is no doubt that its centre was in the Philistine heartland of the southern coastal plain, Philistine bichrome pottery is found in the faraway northern valleys (DOTHAN 1982; RABAN 1991; MAZAR 2002), while it is absent from the relatively close Hebron hill country (FAUST 2006, 209–211, and references), and parts of the coastal plain (GILBOA, COHEN-WEINBERG and GOREN 2006). It is true that its percentage in the northern valleys is indeed very small, and seems to represent a simple fall-off with the distance from the place of manufacture in the southern coastal plain, but its almost total absence in the highlands and parts of the coastal plain cannot be explained along similar lines. And the same is true regarding the Philistine monochrome. It is found in all Philistine centres (e.g., Ekron, Gath, Ashkelon and Ashdod), but is absent from nearby Canaanite (or Egypto-Canaanite) towns, e.g., Gezer (DEVER 1998, 47–49; NA’AMAN 2000, 2–3), Beth-Shemesh (MAZAR 1994, 251; BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2008, 24), Lachish (USSISHKIN 1985), and also Tel Batash (MAZAR 1994, 251; see also BUNIMOVITZ and FAUST 2001; FAUST 2006, 145).

The above clearly shows, therefore, that Philistine pottery was seen as meaningful in ethnic communication and boundary maintenance during the Iron Age I, and it was consequently avoided by some people, e.g., in the highlands, while at the same time it was used by people, even non-Philistines, who did not find its usage problematic, and perhaps even actively manipulated it in defining their own local identities (see also BUNIMOVITZ and YASUR-LANDAU 1997; STAGER 1998; SHARON 2001; GILBOA, COHEN-WEINBERG and GOREN 2006; FAUST 2006; BARAKO 2007).

It is therefore striking to note that such pottery is found in practically all of the excavated sites in the trough valley, i.e., Tell Beit Mirsim (ALBRIGHT 1932, 61–64; 1943, 1, 4, 9–10, 25, 36; GREENBERG 1987, 76), Tel ‘Eton (e.g., FAUST 2009, 118; EDELSTEIN and AURANT 1992; see also above), and also at Tel Yarmuth (DE MIROSCHEJJI 1999, 17; see also DAGAN 2000, 180) and Tel Beth-Shemesh farther north (BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2008, 24; 2009, 123). Before discussing the implications of this to our understanding of the situation in the trough valley and the identity of the settlers, however, we would like to discuss additional traits.

Collared Rim Jars

Collared rim jars were identified in the past with the Israelites (ALBRIGHT 1937; AHARONI 1970; see also ESSE 1991; 1992), but this equation came into disfavor (e.g., LONDON 1989; IBRAHIM 1978; FINKELSTEIN 1996a, 204; see also ESSE 1991, 103–104). Just like in the case of the Philistine pottery, the reasons for this change of attitude were both theoretical and empirical. The theoretical reasons are similar to those already mentioned briefly above, and there is no need to repeat them here. The empirical reasons are, naturally, different, and it is worth mentioning them here in a few words.

Many scholars pointed out that collared rim jars were found in non-Israelite sites, e.g., in the northern valleys (for example at Megiddo; ESSE 1992, 93; see also HARRISON 2004, 31–32) and even in Transjordan (IBRAHIM 1978). While not the place for an intensive discussion, it must be stressed that many of the sites that were mentioned in this context in Transjordan were actually Israelites (JI 1995; 1997; HERR 2000, 178; HERR and CLARK 2001; YOUNKER 1999, 16), hence reducing the number of the “exceptions”. Furthermore, the cultural significance of collared rim jars is most clearly visible in Philistia, where such jars are practically absent (ESSE 1991, 107; FAUST

2006, 195–196), hence showing that its distribution is non-random. The above presents us with an interesting phenomenon, in which collared rim jars are found in the north, but not in Philistia. Furthermore, the combined pattern of the distribution of collared rim jars and Philistine pottery is even more intriguing – both are found together in the faraway northern valleys (along with local pottery of course), e.g., at Megiddo (cf., MAZAR 2002; ESSE 1992, 93; FAUST 2006, 215–218), but hardly any is crossing the Shephelah/trough valley borderline. Collared rim jars are not found in the lowland while Philistine pottery does not cross into the highlands (for a detailed discussion of the collared rim jar and the possible reasons behind its association with the Israelites, see FAUST 2006, 194–205).

It is therefore striking to note that hardly any collared rim jars were found in Beth-Shemesh (BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009, 123). At Tell Beit Mirsim only one such jar was reported (GREENBERG 1987, 64, 71), making it an extremely rare find, and practically non-existent for any statistical purposes. Although only a limited Iron Age I assemblage was unearthed so far at Tel ‘Eton, collared rim jars are absent so far from the local repertoire.⁷

The Ceramic Assemblage

As already noted, one of the main characteristics of the highlands’ material culture is the limited and poor ceramic assemblage (e.g., FINKELSTEIN 1988; BUNIMOVITZ and YASUR-LANDAU 1996; DEVER 2003; FAUST 2006; see already ALBRIGHT 1934, 12). At Giloh, for example, storage vessels (mainly of the collared rim jar type) and cooking pots account for some 80% of the assemblage (MAZAR 1981, 31). This is the situation in additional highlands sites like Mt. Ebal (ZERTAL 1986–1987) and Izbet Sartah (FINKELSTEIN 1986, 46), where many bowls (and juglets) were also unearthed (see also ESSE 1992, 93). Various scholars have noted the cultural and even ethnic significance of this for the

study of Iron Age I societies in the region (e.g., ALBRIGHT 1961, 119; BUNIMOVITZ and YASUR-LANDAU 1996, 96; FAUST 2006, 66–69, and references).

It is therefore important to note that the assemblage in the discussed sites in the trough valley is very different from that of the highlands (e.g., GREENBERG 1987, 76; BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009, 123) and shows close affinities to the Late Bronze Age traditions (e.g., at Lachish), as well as to contemporaneous sites in the coastal plain, like Tel Qasile (GREENBERG 1987, 76; DE MIROSCHEDEJI 1999, 17; BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009, 123).

It is quite clear that as far as pottery is concerned, the trough valley sites behave more like Philistia (or at least like coastal sites) than the highlands. One should remember, of course, that the percentage of Philistine pottery in the trough valley is much smaller than in Philistia proper, but such pottery was not avoided in the region. Collared rim jars, on the other hand, seem to have been practically barred from the area.

It is time, however, to examine our final trait, the consumption of pork.

Pork Consumption

The consumption of pigs is gradually becoming a main avenue to the study ethnicity in the Iron Age I. Ever since the early studies of HESSE (1986; 1990) it is well known that Philistines consumed large amounts of pork, while the Israelites did not. Although not only Israelites avoided pork (HESSE and WAPNISH 1997) it is clear that Israelites did not consume this type of meat, and whenever pigs are significant part of the faunal assemblage one may deduce that the site was not Israelite (FAUST 2006, 35–40, see especially p. 37). Notably, even a scholar as skeptic as FINKELSTEIN (1996a, 206) suggested that: “...pig taboos, are emerging as the main, if not only avenue that can shed light on ethnic boundaries in the Iron I. Specifically, this may be the most valuable tool for the study of ethnicity of

⁷ It must be admitted that the Iron I assemblage (we exclude the loci from the second half of the 11th century – early 10th century) at Tel ‘Eton is quite small, and the examined sample includes only 123 rims. Still, no collared rim jar rims were unearthed in this collection, and this clearly shows that in contrast to the highlands, collared rim jars were not very prevalent at Tel ‘Eton. Interestingly, the more limited

assemblage of the late 11th century or early 10th century that was examined (41 rims only) produced one example of a collared rim jar. Due to the limited exposure this is most likely a mere chance, but if it is not, it might show the changing relations of Tel ‘Eton with the highlands toward the transition to the Iron Age II.

a given, single Iron I site". It is clear that the settlers in the highlands avoided pork, while the Philistines of the coastal plain consumed large quantities of this meat, and even enlarged its percentage in their diet during the Iron Age I (LEV-TOV 2006; FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011).

It is quite clear, in this light, that despite the possible reservations, pork consumption was ethnically sensitive during the Iron Age I (see also FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011).

It is therefore striking that no pig bones were found in the main trough valley site whose faunal assemblage was systematically analyzed, i.e., Tel Beth-Shemesh. A large assemblage of more than 13,000 Iron Age I bones was examined and it contained practically no pig bones (BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009, 123).

Although the Iron Age I bone assemblage at Tel 'Eton is limited (only some 521 bones were examined, of which 327 were identified, all from one square, dated to the period from the late 13th century – mid/late 11th century), the pattern is similar. Pigs constitute 0% in the second half of the 12th and most of the 11th centuries assemblage (141 bones, out of which 82 were identified).⁸

Clearly, as far as pig consumption is concerned, the finds at Tel Beth-Shemesh and Tel 'Eton indicate that the sites were more akin to the highland villages, and show marked differences from the practices of the Philistine population.

The Identity of the Settlers: Ethnic Negotiations in the Trough Valley

While each of the above traits seems quite straightforward, presumably hinting at the cultural identity of the inhabitants of the trough valley sites, the complete picture seems confusing.

As far as pottery is concerned, the pattern is more similar to Philistia, or if to be more precise, it is completely different from that of the highlands. This is indicated not only by the presence of Philistine bichrome pottery and the almost complete absence of collared rim jars, but also by the overall appearance of the assemblages at these sites. This was noted by Greenberg (1987, 76) regarding Tell Beir Mirsim, and by BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN (2009, 123) regarding Tel Beth-

Shemesh. At Tel 'Eton, too, the overall assemblage seems Canaanite, and does not resemble the poor repertoire of the highlands (see more below).

As far as food habits (i.e., the avoidance of pork) were concerned, however, the local population completely marked itself as different from that of Philistia, and was very similar to that of the highlands. One should remember, however, that low percentage of pig consumption is also typical of many Canaanite sites of the Late Bronze Age (e.g., LEV-TOV 2006, 212, see also p. 210, chart 6.1; CROOFT 2004, 2259, table 33.3; ZEDER 1998, 12, table 2; HESSE 1990, 215–216, table 3), although it was not always as low as in Iron I Israelite sites (more below).

So who were the settlers of the trough valley? Israelites, as the avoidance of pork suggests (see also BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2008; 2009) or Philistines, as is perhaps hinted by the pottery (cf., ALBRIGHT 1943, 36; see also MAZAR 1992, 273, 286; FINKELSTEIN 1988, 54–55)?

It seems to us that the apparently contradicting picture is exactly what the local inhabitants wanted to convey. The population of the trough valley wanted to show that they were neither.

The population that settled in the trough valley sites was Canaanite, descendent of the population of the Shephelah during the Late Bronze Age. Some of them perhaps lived in the very same sites before they were destroyed during the end of the Late Bronze Age or the beginning of the Iron Age I (no matter who the agent of the destruction was) and simply resettled there after the destruction (evidence for destruction was found at Tell Beir Mirsim [ALBRIGHT 1943, 36], Tel Beth-Shemesh [BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 1993, 250], and seems to have been hinted also by the excavations at Tel 'Eton). Others perhaps migrated from nearby sites when they were destroyed and abandoned (e.g., Lachish; see also GREENBERG 1987, 78), and preferred to settle in the relatively remote (as far as the Philistines were concerned) area. As GREENBERG (1987, 76) wrote regarding Tell Beir Mirsim:

"If, as it appears, the development evidenced at Tell Beir Mirsim is not related to Israelite and Philistine activities, what does it represent? Clearly, the answer to this question must be related to

⁸ Note that pigs constitute about 1.6% of the 13th–first half of the 12th century (i.e., the very end of the Late Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age–Iron Age I transition) assemblage,

i.e., 4 out of 245 identified bones; the data is based on an unpublished report by Ram Bouchnic. A larger assemblage is currently being studied and will be published in the future.

continued Canaanite presence, such as that long since identified at sites in the northern valleys (e.g., Megiddo)” (see also p. 78).

This seems to suggest that the settlers were descendent of the Canaanite population of the Late Bronze Age in the region. Identity, however, is not simply “inherited”. It is fluid and in an endless process of negotiation and renegotiation, and we have already seen that groups define themselves in relation to, and in contrast with, other groups (BARTH 1969; see also R. COHEN 1978, 389; A. COHEN 1985, 558). As the factions with which a certain group interacts change, so do the symbols and modes of behaviors which the group uses to demarcate its boundaries. It is therefore clear that as time progressed, the way the Canaanite population in the Shephelah defined itself changed.

When discussing the finds at Iron I Beth-Shemesh, BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN wrote (2008, 28):

“Philistine expansion north and east of their original enclave must have initiated competition and struggle over the fertile lands and resources of the Soreq Valley. In the face of this strenuous situation the indigenous population of the valley had to define sharply its identity and establish social and cultural boundaries to distinguish itself from the new aggressive neighbors – or joins them...”.

And they added (*ibid.*): “the indigenous population was forced to redefine its identity as a result of daily existential competition with the Philistines”.⁹

The “others”, in relation to whom those settlers defined themselves, were different from those their forefathers interacted with. The Iron Age I settlers in the trough valley negotiated their identity with both the newcomers to the coastal plain (i.e., the

Philistines) and the settlers in the highlands (i.e., the Israelites). Regardless of the question who destroyed which of the Late Bronze Age cities in the Shephelah, it is more than likely that both coast dwellers and highlanders were responsible for some of them, and that relations between the remaining population that concentrated in the trough valley and both was not always on good terms. This was probably especially true regarding the Philistines. The latter, being a complex and organized society (above) probably had a general and relatively consistent policy which was followed, e.g., regarding the forced urbanization of the population of the Shephelah and most coastal plain small sites, whereas the highland settlers probably had no “fixed” policy, and relations probably changed significantly over time and from one sub-region to another.

Under such circumstances, the local population attempted to use the new material symbols that dominated the non-verbal symbolic language of the Iron Age I, in order to show its uniqueness and difference from its neighbors. Most of the local pottery was of the traditional Canaanite style of course (GREENBERG 1987, 76–78; BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009, 123), but Philistine pottery was not avoided, unlike the situation in the highland sites. Moreover, collared rim jars, highly symbolic highland items, were avoided, just like in Philistia. Pottery, therefore, while not identical to that of Philistia, was used to show that the population was different from that of the nearby highlands. Pork, on the other hand, was avoided. This trait, which drew on earlier, Late Bronze Age habits of consuming small amount of pork (LEV-TOV 2006, 212, see also p. 210, chart 6.1; CROOFT 2004, 2259,

⁹ BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN (2008; 2009), however, considered only the Philistines as the settlers “other”, and even suggested that many Israelite ethnic markers were first negotiated at this region, and only afterward became ethnically significant. It is clear from the above, however, that the settlers were not Israelites and, moreover, that the Israelites were quite significant as the trough valley settlers’ “other”. This is evident, first and foremost, by the material language the inhabitants of the region used, and the corresponding messages they transmitted, e.g., the practical absence of collared rim jars which cannot be a coincidence (above). We should add that 5% Philistine pottery in the assemblage is a rather high percentage, and seems to be a conscious attempt of the population to differentiate itself from the Israelites (notably, Bunimovitz and Lederman were aware of the clear

differences between the material culture of the Beth-Shemesh inhabitants and that of the highlands, see above). The only material element which seems to correspond with that of the Israelites is the lack of pig bones in Beth-Shemesh. This is insufficient to make the settlers Israelites (as other groups could avoid pork; cf., HESSE and WAPNISH 1997), and moreover, low consumption of pork was also common among Canaanites (above). It seems as if this trait was chosen not only by the Israelites, but also by some Canaanite communities, to differentiate themselves from the Philistines. At any event, such custom was practiced in the highlands already in the very beginning of the Iron Age I, probably in the late 13th century (e.g., HORWITZ 1986–1987: 185), and could not have been **brought** from Beth-Shemesh or other sites.

table 33.3; ZEDER 1998, 12, table 2; HESSE 1990, 215–216, table 3; cf., FAUST 2006, 152–155), was similar to that of the Israelites, and was a response to the Philistines habit of consuming large amounts of this meat (also FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011).

Thus, the material symbols which seems to confuse modern scholars who try to label the settlers as either Israelites or Philistines, were probably very clear to the population at the time – the inhabitants of the trough valley sites were neither. The trough valley was another enclave in which the local, Canaanite culture survived during the Iron Age I, similar to the situation in the northern valleys. The inhabitants negotiated their identity vis-à-vis the other groups and “played” with the material symbols of the period in order to show differences and similarities with other groups, but maintaining their unique identity in this troubled era.

Notably, while the Canaanite enclave in the northern valleys was large enough, and the population there was not Israelite even during the Iron Age II (FINKELSTEIN 1999, 44, 47–48; FAUST 2000), the situation in the trough valley was different. The area was small and the population limited. As the hostility between Israelites and Philistines intensified, the trough valley settlers had to choose, and they gradually became Israelites, especially since the hand of the latter won, and the Philistines withdrew to the coastal plain (in the 10th century BCE, according to the conventional, or modified conventional chronology). This, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper. Notably, the situation at Kh. Qeiyafa, which existed during the transition to the Iron Age II, will be discussed elsewhere (FAUST forthcoming).

Petrography and Tel 'Eton's Interaction with the Highlands and the Coast¹⁰

Interestingly, the local and isolated nature of the Iron I settlement at Tel 'Eton is also supported by the results of petrographic examination; the Iron Age I appears to be the most “local” period of all the periods we examined so far (from the Late Bronze Age to the Persian-Hellenistic period), with 65% of the vessels examined (14 bowls, cooking pots and storage jars) manufactured at Tel 'Eton and its immediate vicinity. Only one of the vessels was manufactured in the highlands, and 1 was brought from the coastal plain (the rest were manufactured in the nearby Shephelah or northern

Negev, or came from an unknown source). In all other periods we examined local pottery comprised only 21–50%. While those are only preliminary results of the first stage of the work, they clearly show that the pottery support the view that Tel 'Eton was quite isolated at this time, and did not have much interaction with other sites.

A Note on the “Philistine Tomb” near Tel 'Eton

Following the systematic robbery of the large necropolis surrounding Tel 'Eton, a number of salvage excavations were carried out. One of the excavated tombs was dated to the Iron Age I (EDELSTEIN and AURANT 1992). Since some beautiful Philistine bichrome pottery ware were found in the tomb, it was labeled “the Philistine tomb”, although the excavators did not suggest that that it was used by Philistines, and actually left the question of the identity of those who were buried in it open (EDELSTEIN and AURANT 1992, 30–31).

We must note that despite the fact that the finds include one of the best example of bichrome decorated jugs (*ibid.*, 27, fig. 5), along with additional Philistine pottery, the vast majority of the assemblage is local – about 88% of all the pottery that was unearthed in the tomb was produced in the vicinity of the site (*ibid.*, 24–25), and while 12% belong to two “coastal” groups, those includes pottery which is not of the bichrome family. The actual percentage of the Philistine pottery is therefore quite small (the data supplied does not enable exact statistics).

It is quite clear from the content of the tomb, which included many metal artifacts, that those who were buried in it were an important family or group. But can we say more than this?

It seems to us, in light of the above, that more can be suggested. As just noted, it is quite clear that those who were buried were among the elite of the inhabitants of the Iron I settlement at Tel 'Eton. We have suggested above that they were Canaanites, and this is reflected by the overall assemblage in the tomb. One must remember that at Philistia proper the percentage of Philistine pottery is about 40–50% (e.g., BEN-SHLOMO 2005; see also FAUST and LEV-TOV 2011, and additional references), so those who were buried clearly differ. As suggested above, the usage of Philistine pottery was part of the process in which the local population defined its unique identity, in contrast to the nearby settlers in the high-

¹⁰ The following is based on an unpublished report by D. Ben-Shlomo.

lands. Such usage, however, need not be viewed only (and in every context) as part of ethnic negotiations with other groups, i.e., as an emblematic style (WIESSNER 1990). The fact that those who were buried at the tomb were members of the elite allow us to see the process in which the elite adopts symbols and uses them, probably in order to define their status in relation to other members of their own group, or in other words, as part of what can be defined as an assertive style (e.g., WIESSNER 1990).

It is possible that the adoption of Philistine items for status purposes by members of the elite, like those who were buried in this tomb, led to its adoption also by other members of the group, and hence its existence in all the sites discussed, and probably among all members of this society (cf., HODOS 2006, 131, 204). This is perhaps an example on how elements that are used for intergroup communication can, as a by-product, also teach about the boundaries of this group (DAVID *et al.* 1988, 378; see also HODDER 1982, 54).

The question how the symbols were adopted and adapted in such a unique context (cf., STEIN 2005) deserves closer attention, but this is beyond the scope of the present article.

Canaanites in the Trough Valley? A Hint from the Texts

Genesis 38, is the story of Judah and Tamar. Judah settled near a certain Adullamite (Hirah), met the daughter of a Canaanite called Shua, and married her. She bore him three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. Judah took a wife, by the name of Tamar, to his eldest son, Er. Er died childless, and Tamar was given (in accordance with the biblical law) to Onan, who also died without giving Tamar children. Judah was reluctant to give Tamar to his third son, Shelah, and she returned to her father's house. Realizing she will not be given to Shelah, Tamar pretended to be a prostitute, seduced Judah, and bore him twins, Perez and Zerah.

Although the story is inserted between two components of the Joseph story, and refers to the period of the Patriarchs, there seems to be a general agreement among many scholars that it represents the period of the Israelite Settlement in Canaan, i.e., the Iron Age I (SINGER 1994, 306; WEINFELD 1993, 213; RAINEY and NOTLEY 2006, 115–116; AHARONI 1979, 219–220). It is commonly agreed that the story teaches about the relations between the tribe of Judah and Canaanite groups at this time in the central part of the southern trough valley, where the story is taking place, and that it explains the exis-

tence of Canaanite elements within the tribe of Judah in this area (LIVER 1982, 117; WEINFELD 1993, 213; RAINEY and NOTLEY 2006, 115–116; AHARONI 1979, 220, 231; see also SINGER 1994, 306, 312).

Thus, SINGER (1994, 306) notes: “(T)o the northeast of the Lachish region, cities with a Canaanite population apparently continued to exist during the Iron Age I. This emerges from the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. While the story is included among the Patriarch's narratives, it is, nevertheless, a clear reflection of life close to the beginning of the Israelite monarchy”. And RAINEY and NOTLEY (2006, 115) write that “(F)urther evidence for peaceful symbiosis with sheep-raising Canaanites is reflected in the story of Judah and Tamar, which takes place in the northeastern Shephelah, near the junction of the Valley of Elah with the geographical “trough” separating the Shephelah from the hill country of Judah”.

It is quite clear that the literary tradition and its understanding by previous generations of scholars is in accordance with the above proposal that the settlers in the trough valley were Canaanites, who later became Israelites and assimilated into Judah (see also I Chronicles 2). It shows that the population was regarded as being of Canaanite origins, and although it eventually became Israelites, its origin was not forgotten.

Concluding Remark

It must be noted that the study of the material from Tel 'Eton is only at its beginning, and it is likely that the results will show that the trough valley was not a completely homogenous unit, and that there were also differences between the various sites (c.f., the differences within Megiddo VI [FAUST 2006, 215–218] or the differences between Megiddo VI and contemporary Afula [*ibid.*, 217–218]). It seems to us, however, that the overall picture is not likely to change significantly, and that the inhabitants of the region were Canaanites, in the process of defining themselves in relation to both the Israelites in the highlands and the Philistines of the coastal plain. They found refuge in this fertile area, which was far enough from Philistia as not be annexed by it (although it was probably politically and militarily dominated by it during at least part of the period), and struggled to define their unique identity and their difference from the other groups in the region. They managed to do it for almost two centuries, until gradually having to choose between the two dominant identities, and eventually assimilated into the growing Israelite group of the highlands.

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