The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE

Culture and History

Proceedings of the International Conference
held at the University of Haifa,
2–5 May, 2010

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preface</th>
<th>ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reinhard Achenbach  
Divine Warfare and Yhwh’s Wars: Religious Ideologies of War in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament ............................ 1

Michal Artzy  
Continuation and Change in the 13th–10th Centuries BCE Eastern Mediterranean: Bronze-Working Koine? .......................................................... 27

Michael Avioz  
The Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7: Conditional or Unconditional? .................. 43

Yigal Bloch  
Assyro-Babylonian Conflicts in the Reign of Aššur-rēša-iši I: The Contribution of Administrative Documents to History-Writing .......................... 53

Walter Dietrich  
David and the Philistines: Literature and History ........................................ 79

Frederick Mario Fales  
“Ḫanigalbat” in the Early Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: A Retrospective View................................................................. 99

Avraham Faust  
Between Israel and Philistia: Ethnic Negotiations in the South during the Iron Age I ................................................................. 121

Gershon Galil  
Solomon’s Temple: Fiction or Reality? ................................................................. 137

Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor and Michael G. Hasel  
The Iron Age City of Khirbet Qeiyafa after Four Seasons of Excavations........... 149

Moshe Garsiel  
Ideological Discordance between the Prophets Nathan and Samuel as reflecting the Divergence between the Book of Samuel’s Authors................. 175
Moti Haiman
Geopolitical Aspects of the Negev Desert in the 11th–10th Centuries BCE .......................................................... 199

Larry G. Herr
Jordan in the Iron I and IIA Periods .............................................................. 207

Richard S. Hess
The Distinctive Value of Human Life in Israel’s Earliest Legal Traditions ........ 221

Victor Avigdor Hurowitz
Yhwh’s Exalted House Revisited: New Comparative Light on the Biblical Image of Solomon’s Temple .......................................................... 229

Sandra Jacobs
A Life for A Life” and napšāte umalla .................................................. 241

Dan’el Kahn
A Geo-Political and Historical Perspective of Merneptah’s Policy in Canaan .... 255

Aaron Koller
The Kos in the Levant: Thoughts on its Distribution, Function, and Spread from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age II .............................................. 269

André Lemaire
West Semitic Epigraphy and the History of the Levant during the 12th–10th Centuries BCE .................................................. 291

Yigal Levin
Ideology and Reality in the Book of Judges ............................................. 309

Mario Liverani
Me’lid in the Early and Middle Iron Age: Archaeology and History ............. 327

Aren M. Maeir
Insights on the Philistine Culture and Related Issues: An Overview of 15 Years of Work at Tell eš-Ṣafi/Gath .................................................. 345

Alan Millard
Scripts and their Uses in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE .................................. 405

John P. Nielsen
Nebuchadnezzar I’s Eastern Front ............................................................... 413

Troy Leiland Sagrillo
Ṣišaq’s Army: 2 Chronicles 12:2–3 from an Egyptological Perspective .......... 425

Itamar Singer
The Philistines in the North and the Kingdom of Taita ................................ 451
CONTENTS

Ephraim Stern
Archaeological Remains of the Northern Sea Peoples along the Sharon and Carmel Coasts and the ‘Akko and Jezreel Valleys ................................................................. 473

Christoffer Theis and Peter van der Veen
Some ‘Provenanced’ Egyptian Inscriptions from Jerusalem: A Preliminary Study of Old and New Evidence .......................................................... 509

Koert van Bekkum
Coexistence as Guilt: Iron I Memories in Judges 1 ................................................ 525

Assaf Yasur-Landau
Chariots, Spears and Wagons: Anatolian and Aegean Elements in the Medinet Habu Land Battle Relief ................................................................. 549

Ran Zadok
The Aramean Infiltration and Diffusion in the Upper Jazira, 1150–930 BCE .... 569

Wolfgang Zwickel
Cult in the Iron Age I–IIA in the Land of Israel .................................................... 581

Wolfgang Zwickel
The Change from Egyptian to Philistine Hegemony in South-Western Palestine during the Time of Ramesses III or IV .............................................. 595

Index of Authors .................................................................................................... 603
Index of Biblical Sources ...................................................................................... 619
Index of Subjects .................................................................................................... 629
PREFACE

The history of the ancient Near East in the 12th–10th centuries BCE is still an unsolved riddle. At times the veil is lifted and tiny components of this elaborate puzzle glow in a new light. But many questions are as yet unanswered, and most details are still vague. Nevertheless, the broad outlines of this age are fairly well agreed by most scholars: the three superpowers Egypt, Hatti and Assyria gradually lost their hold and their influence in the area: first the Hittites, just after 1200 BCE, and a few dozen of years later, Egypt and Assyria. Historians generally concur that after the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1208 BCE), Assyria plunged into a prolonged decline, gradually losing its western territories to the Aramaean invaders. This process is clearly demonstrated by the ‘Chronicle of Tiglath-pileser I’ and by the ‘Broken Obelisk’ (see Zadok’s and Fales’s articles). The rare complete silence of the Assyrian annals between 1055 and 934 BCE is the best indication that the Assyrians, under immense pressure from the Aramaeans, retreated to their homeland and fought a protracted and bitter war of survival. Concurrently, there are good indications that the Egyptians forfeited their influence in Canaan (the Wenamun report; see Kahn’s and Stern’s articles). Most Canaanite city states gradually disappeared, and by the end of the 10th century BCE only few survived as independent city states, mainly on the Phoenician coast. The ‘newcomers’ (the Aramaeans, the Sea Peoples, the Israelites and the Transjordanian peoples) became the masters of the land from the Sinai Peninsula to the sources of the Tigris, and from the Amuq Plain to Assyria.

The studies presented in this book touch on diverse aspects of human activities (political, social, economic, and cultural), and refer to different parts of the ancient Near East: from Melid and Hanigalbat in the north to Egypt and Kush in the south and from Assyria and Babylonia in the East to the Kingdom of Taita and (southern) Philistia in the west. They do though center mainly on the Bible and the history of ancient Israel and its western and eastern neighbors, as compared with other ancient Near Eastern cultures. The papers present an extensive vista of views—from biblical and archaeological perspectives and indeed most of them were written from an interdisciplinary standpoint.

The Syro-Mesopotamian and Anatolian spheres are the subjects of papers by Livrerani (on Melid), Fales (on Ḫanigalbat), Zadok (on the Aramean diffusion into the Upper Jazira), Bloch (on the Assyrian-Babylonians conflicts during the reign of Aššur-rēša-išši I), and Nielsen (on Nebuchadnezzar I’s wars to the east).

Outlooks on Egypt and her imperial holdings are presented by Theis and van der Veen (New Kingdom epigraphic finds in the Jerusalem area), Kahn (on the 19th and 20th Dynasties in Canaan), Zwickel (second paper on Egyptians and Philistines) and Sagrillo (Ṣīšaq’s army).

The history of ancient Israel and its eastern neighbors is the focus of several papers. Galil and Hurowitz deal with various aspects of the Solomonic Temple. Haiman studied the phenomenon of the ‘Negev Fortresses’; and Jordan in Iron Age I and IIA is discussed by Herr. The papers by Dietrich, Garsiel, Avioz, Levin and van Bekkum analyze the composition, ideology and historicity of the books of

*The 'Sea Peoples' phenomenon* is the topic of several papers. Various aspects of the Philistines are discussed by Dietrich (literary evidence for relations with David), Faust (identity vs. the Israelites), Maeir (excavations at Philistine Tell es-Sa‘i/Gath), Yasur-Landau (iconographic aspects of Philistines at Medinet Habu), and the second paper by Zwickel (Philistines vs. Egyptians). Old and new evidence on this issue in the Syro-Cilician sphere is the topic of Singer’s paper, and Stern discusses ‘Sea Peoples’ other than the Philistines in Canaan/Israel. Artzy’s paper rather emphasizes elements of continuity over the Bronze/Iron Age transition both in Canaan/Israel and in Cyprus.

Several ideological and legal aspects of biblical vis-à-vis ancient Near Eastern texts are the focus of papers by Achenbach (holy wars), Hess (value of human life), Koller (the term kos), and Jacobs (“a life for a life”).

Scripts and literacy in this time span are overviewed by Lemaire (the west Semitic sphere) and Millard.

We wish to express our deep thanks to all the scholars who have contributed to this volume, most of whom participated in the conference held at the University of Haifa. Others who were unable to attend that meeting—Reinhard Achenbach, Mario Fales, Richard Hess, Mario Liverani, John Nielsen, Itamar Singer, Christoffer Theis, Koert van Bekkum and Peter van der Veen—kindly accepted our invitation to publish their important studies in this volume. We also thank Dr. Kai A. Metzler for his editorial comments. Dr. Ruth Fidler and Mr. Murray Rosovsky improved the English style; Ms. Galit Rozov and Ms. Maya Mokady took care of the indices.
The Iron Age I was a formative period, which shaped the political landscape of the region for more than half a millennium, and left an impact which influences our world even today.

This is the period in which the Canaanites were weakened and the Israelites and Philistines came to the fore. In the present article I wish to discuss the changing ethnic relations in southern part of the country (Fig. 1) after Egyptian hegemony waned (i.e., during the second half of the 12th and the 11th centuries BCE).

Fig. 1: Map showing the main sites discussed in the text
I. Background

1. Ethnicity in Archaeology

Identifying ethnic groups in the archaeological record has long been an important theme of archaeological research, but it is clear today that such identifications are notoriously difficult.1

In the past, scholars tended to equate archaeological cultures with ethnic groups, or peoples, and this is epitomized in the following oft-quoted paragraph by Childe: “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’”.2

Various advances in archaeology, however, changed the approach to the study of ethnicity. The development of the New/Processual Archaeology and its critique of the culture history school, 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.3 It is further likely that the disinterest in the study of ethnicity also resulted from the horrifying outcomes of the racial archaeology so prevalent in Europe until the Second World War.4

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,5 it became apparent that ethnic groups are not “culture-bearing units”, i.e., groups sharing core values that find representation in cultural forms.6 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”.7 Ethnic identity is not determined by biological or genetic factors but is subject to perception and is adaptable.

Clearly, ethnicity is too complex to be merely identified with a material or an archaeological culture; it is fluid, it is only one of several attributes of an individual’s complete identity, and it is subjective.8 This has led some scholars to question

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7 Idem, ibid., pp. 10–11.
8 Idem, ibid., pp. 11, 13.
the ability of archaeologists to identify ethnic groups in the material record of extinct societies.\textsuperscript{10} Yet in most cases, clear relationships between material culture and ethnicity can be identified, however complicated they may be.\textsuperscript{11}

It is accepted today that groups define themselves in relation to, and in contrast with, other groups.\textsuperscript{12} 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.\textsuperscript{13} As a consequence, emphasis shifted from the shared elements or characteristics of a group to the features that distinguish it from others. It is the contact between groups that is seen as essential for the formation of the self-identity of a group, which is thus clearly manifested in its material culture. Ethnic identity can be identified in certain artifacts that came to carry a symbolic meaning,\textsuperscript{14} or by identifying ‘ethnically specific behavior’, or more accurately, the material correlates of such behavior.\textsuperscript{15}

2. Historical Background

Before addressing some Iron Age I material traits, a few words on the settlement in the south in this era are in order.


\textsuperscript{15} McGuire, \textit{op. cit.} (note 11), p. 163; Faust, \textit{op. cit.} (note 1); cf., J. Deetz, \textit{In Small Things Forgotten, An Archaeology of Early American Life} (New York, 1996), pp. 187–211. 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 I. Hodder, \textit{Symbols in Action, Ethnoarchaeological Studies of Material Culture} (Cambridge, 1982). Some boundaries might, therefore, be represented with sharp falloffs in distribution patterns of certain traits, while others may be more blurred, see W. R. De Boer, “Interaction, Imitation, and Communication as Expressed in Style: the Ucayali Experience”, in M. W. Conkey and C. A. Hastorf (eds.), \textit{The Uses of Style in Archaeology} (Cambridge, 1990), p. 102. Moreover, in some cases, differences can exist between different areas of interaction of the same groups, Hodder, ibid., pp. 27–31.
As far as the highlands are concerned, following a settlement nadir in the Late Bronze Age, the Judean highlands experienced a relative surge in settlement during the Iron I. Although not as dense as in Samaria, many settlements were established in the region, from the late 13th century, and onwards.16

In the coastal plain, this is the period of the Philistine settlement.17 Politically, the Philistines were the dominant and complex group, especially in the south, during the Iron I.18 They occupied large cities and exhibit a high level of urbanism, social complexity and socioeconomic hierarchy.19 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 and north.20 Although settling in large cities, the number of small settlement in the southern coastal plain of Philistia shrunk significantly, and one can speak about the abandonment of the countryside, leading scholars to suggest that the Philistines enacted a policy of forced urbanization, and concentrated the local population in central urban settlements.22

As far as the buffer area of the Shephelah is concerned, the area was almost devoid of settlements, and the few settlements that existed were mainly located in its eastern part, in the trough valley.23

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3. Ethnic Traits in the Iron Age I

A few traits or types of behaviors appear to be ethnically sensitive, at least in some contexts, during this formative era.24

3.1 Philistine Pottery. A long time ago, in the spirit of the notorious pots equal people equation of the culture history school, it had been assumed that the presence of Philistine pottery indicates the presence of Philistines.25 This simplistic equation fell into disfavor on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Theoretically, 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, and 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.26 Since ethnicity is only one factor in a very complex web of choices that influence the distribution and use of material items, equating pottery with 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.

Empirically, scholars noted that Philistine pottery is found in many instances in faraway places, e.g., in the northern valleys,27 and it is difficult to simply label the strata in which those vessels were found as ‘Philistines’.28 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 that the Philistine pottery was not distributed randomly across the landscape, with its percentage gradually decreasing with distance from its production centers. While there is no doubt that its center is in the Philistine heartland of the southern coastal plain, Philistine bichrome pottery is found in the faraway northern valleys,29 but is absent from

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24 For extensive discussion, see Faust, op. cit. (note 1; much of the following section is based on insights from this work); Faust and Katz, op. cit. (note 23); A. Faust and J. Lev-Tov, “The Constitution of Philistine Identity: Ethnic Dynamics in 12th-10th Centuries Philistia”, OJA 30 (2011), pp. 13–31.
28 See now also A. Gilboa, “Stratum VI at Megiddo and the ‘Northern Sea People Phenomenon’”, EI 29 (2009), pp. 82–91 (Hebrew).
29 Dothan, op. cit. (note 17); Raban, op. cit. (note 25); Mazar, op. cit. (note 27).
the relatively close Hebron hill country\textsuperscript{30} and even parts of the coastal plain.\textsuperscript{31} While its percentage in the northern valleys is indeed very small, and seems to represent a reasonable fall-off with the distance from its place of manufacture, its almost total absence in the highlands cannot be explained along similar lines (see more below).

Clearly, Philistine pottery was seen as meaningful in ethnic communication and boundary maintenance during the Iron I, and 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.\textsuperscript{32}

3.2 Collared Rim Jars. Just like the Philistine pottery, collared rim jars were identified in the past with a group—the Israelites,\textsuperscript{33} but this equation also came into disfavor.\textsuperscript{34} In addition to the theoretical reasons mentioned briefly above many scholars pointed out that collared rim jars were found in non-Israelite sites, e.g., in the northern valleys and Transjordan.\textsuperscript{35} 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 Israelite,\textsuperscript{36} hence reducing the number of the ‘exceptions’.\textsuperscript{37} The cultural significance of collared rim jars is most clearly visible in Philistia, where such jars are practically absent,\textsuperscript{38} hence showing that its distribution

\textsuperscript{30} Faust, \textit{op. cit.} (note 1), pp. 209–211, and references.


\textsuperscript{32} E.g., S. Bunimovitz and A. Faust, “Chronological Separation, Geographical Segregation or Ethnic Demarcation? Ethnography and the Iron Age Low Chronology”, \textit{BASOR} 322 (2001), pp. 1–10, and see more below.


\textsuperscript{37} See extensive discussion in Faust, \textit{op. cit.} (note 1), pp. 221–226.

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.

The combined pattern of the distribution of collared rim jars and Philistine pottery is even more revealing—both are found together in the faraway northern valleys, e.g., at Megiddo, but none is crossing the Shephelah/trough valley borderline.

3.3 The Ceramic Assemblage. As noted by many, one of the main characteristics of the highlands’ material culture is the limited and poor ceramic assemblage. At Giloh, for example, storage vessels and cooking pots account for some 80% of the assemblage, and various scholars have noted the cultural and even ethnic significance of this for the study of Iron Age I societies in the region.

3.4 Pork Consumption. Ever since the early studies of Hesse it is well known that Philistines consumed large amounts of pork, while the Israelites did not. This cannot be attributed to ecology of course, as in other periods the highland population consumed pork, while the population in the coastal plain sometimes consumed much smaller quantities of pigs. Although not only Israelites avoided pork 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. Notably, the significance of pork is accepted even by skeptical scholars, and Finkelstein, for example, notes 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 a given, single Iron I site”. Interestingly, while the Israelites of the highlands avoided pork, the Philistines even enlarged its percentage in their diet during the Iron Age I (see below). It is quite clear, in this light, that despite the possible reservations, pork consumption was ethnically sensitive during the Iron Age I.

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II. Philistines and Israelites

When the settlement process in the highlands started, the population there—the Israelites—defined itself against the Egypto-Canaanite system. I do not wish here to refer to this early phase, but rather to the ethnic negotiations which took place after the arrival of the Philistines, from the time the new inhabitants of the coast met the highland settlers.

Since groups define themselves in relations to other groups, and often utilize material items to transmit messages of difference, it is not surprising that the interaction between the dominant Philistines and the highland settlers left behind clear archaeological footprints. Indeed, the influence of the Philistines on the development and formation of Israelite ethnic identity has often been written about. The most notable example of this influence is the Israelites’ avoidance of pork (above). Many scholars believe that the mere fact that the Philistines consumed pork as a dietary staple led the Israelite population to avoid consuming this type of meat, as part of their self-definition vis-à-vis the Philistines. It is most likely, of course, that the same population did not consume large quantities of this meat even earlier, and that perhaps there was even a taboo on its consumption—a taboo that was prevalent among many societies in the ancient Near East. However, the Israelites’ interaction with the Philistines—their archenemies who consumed this meat as a regular practice—made this avoidance important.

Philistine influence on Israelite identity seems to have had additional forms, e.g., the latter’s tradition of not decorating pottery and the avoidance of imported pottery. In fact, both might have partially resulted from the avoidance of the Philistine decorated pottery of the Iron I (above). The significance of circumcision also seems to have resulted from the Israelites’ interaction with the un-circumcised Philistines.

1. Israelite Influence on the Philistines

A topic that received much less attention, if any at all, is the influence of the Israelites on the Philistines’ self-definition. By this I am not referring to the acculturation the Philistines went through during the Iron Age II, rather we refer mainly to the impact the interaction with the Israelites had on the Philistines’ ethnic self-definition during the Iron I.

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46 Regarding the Israelites, see extended discussion in Faust op. cit. (note 1); Regarding the Philistines, see also Faust and Lev-Tov, op. cit. (note 24). The following section is based to a large extent on these works.

47 E.g. Stager, op. cit. (note 19), p. 344; Faust op. cit. (note1), pp. 35–40 and additional discussion.


49 Faust, op. cit. (note 1), and references.

50 Faust, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 85–91, and references.


52 The following is a summary of some of the main points of Faust and Lev-Tov, op. cit. (note 24).
2. Pork Consumption and Philistine Identity

It appears that when we attempt to decipher the material aspect of Philistine identity, food habits are the most obvious and sensitive index.

It is clear from archaeozoological studies that the Philistines were regular consumers of pork during the Iron Age I. Interestingly an examination of the animal bones unearthed at Ekron clearly shows that pigs appear quite suddenly in Stratum VII, dated to the early Iron Age I. The percentage of pork in this stratum was about 14%, and it rises to 17% in Stratum VI, and to 26% in Stratum V—the last Iron Age I stratum.53

Notably, not only does the increase cease with the transition to the Iron Age II, but during this time there is even a drastic decrease in the importance of pigs in the Philistine diet—a drop to some 7% in Stratum IV at Ekron, and even less later.24

It is quite clear that the Philistines consumed significant quantities of pork starting from the first phase of their settlement. This can clearly be seen in the finds at Ekron VII, as well as at Ashkelon and at other sites.55 The Philistines, who migrated from the Aegean world, brought this habit with them,56 even if it did not originally serve as an ethnic marker.57

But why did the Philistines increase their pork consumption over time during the two centuries of the Iron Age I? None of the other groups that inhabited the greater expanse of the entire Near East at the time consumed such large quantities of pork.

If cultural influences from another group were the deciding factor in this dietary shift, then we should see a decrease in the significance of pork in the Philistine diet after their settlement, and not an increase.

Ethnic self-identity, however, is a very complex process, and interaction between different groups does not necessarily lead to similarities in their material culture, or at least not in all material traits. Interaction may lead to similarities in many traits, but not in those traits that a group uses for demarcating itself in relation to the other.58

It seems that pork avoidance was a key trait for demarcating identity for the Israelites, and they defined themselves as not eating pork in order to differentiate themselves from the Philistines. We argue, however, that the Philistines, too, did not consume pork only as what one might call a ‘passive’ habit—brought with them from the Aegean world. Even if this was the case during the first phase of their settlement in Canaan, they subsequently used this habit actively in their ethnic negotiations with their neighbors. As the interaction between Philistines and Israelites intensified—reaching a peak toward the end of the Iron Age I—each became the ultimate ‘other’ for the rival group, the different, the stranger, and the enemy. Each group chose elements from its own culture—elements that were the diametric oppo-

54 J. Lev-Tov, “Zooarchaeology and Relations of Power during the Neo-Assyrian Empire: An Example from Tel Miqne-Ekron”, unpublished paper presented at the ASOR Annual Meeting (Boston, November 17–19, 1999).
55 Faust and Lev-Tov, op. cit. (note 24), and references.
56 Stager, op. cit. (note 19), p. 344.
58 McGuire, op. cit. (note 11); Hodder, op. cit. (note 15); Faust op. cit. (note 1), pp. 13–19, and references.
site of those of the other group—and used them to mark and symbolize the differences between the groups. The Philistine habit of consuming pork and the simultaneous near absence of this meat from the Israelite diet, even if it was simply a result of regional food habits that initially had nothing to do with ethnicity, made pork an ideal component in this process of ethnic negotiation and boundary creation. As the interaction between the groups intensified, they needed to stress and demarcate the differences between them, and as the process of boundary maintenance intensified, each group stressed the habits that were different from those of the other group.

3. Philistine Pottery

But are faunal remains the only means by which we can analyze the process the Philistine society went through? A closer examination of the archaeological record shows that other ethnically sensitive elements in the Philistine material culture went through similar processes during the Iron Age I.

We have already seen that Philistine pottery was ethnically sensitive, and was used in the process of self-definition and strategy of boundary maintenance. This can also be seen in the absence of Philistine monochrome pottery not only in Lachish, but also in Tel Batash, Tel Beth-Shemesh and Gezer, as well as by the almost total avoidance of the bichrome pottery in the highlands, and by its rarity in one area at Tell Qasile (area A) and its abundance in another one (area C).

We can understand the pottery’s ethnical significance also by examining its percentage within Philistia. We will begin the discussion with the detailed information published from areas H and K at Ashdod. Ben-Shlomo recently published a quantitative analysis of the rims unearthed in the various levels of these areas. In Stratum XIII, which he dated to the early-12th century, some 73% of the vessels were in Canaanite tradition, and only 24% were of Philistine style—monochrome

59 E.g., Bunimovitz and Faust, op. cit. (note 32); Faust and Lev-Tov, op. cit. (note 24); Faust, op. cit. (note 1), and many references.
64 Faust, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 205–213, and references.
and bichrome alike. In Stratum XII, which is dated to the 12th century BCE, 52% of the pottery was in the local tradition, while 47% percent was Philistine. In Stratum XI, dated to the 11th century BCE, the percentage of local pottery in the assemblage decreased to 41%, while Philistine pottery increased significantly, reaching 58%. Philistine pottery disappeared almost completely in Stratum X, dated to the 10th century BCE.

This picture seems to be supported by the available evidence from Ekron, which although only partial, presents a similar pattern, and at Ashkelon (the data is not published yet, but D. Master kindly informed me that the percentage of Philistine pottery in Ashkelon also increases during the Iron Age I, until disappearing in the beginning of the Iron Age II).

While it is important to await the publication of more data, it seems that we can already discuss the general patterns which seem quite clear. Similar to the evidence regarding the percentage of pork in Philistia, decorated Philistine pottery became more significant as the Iron Age I progressed, reaching a peak at the final stage of this era, before practically disappearing in the beginning of the Iron Age II.

Indeed, various lines of evidence indicate that the Philistines gradually saw the Israelites, or what became Israel at this time, as their main ‘other’. As the interaction between those groups intensified, and the struggle between them deepened, both groups raised the boundaries between them, and the cultural traits which had previously distinguished them became more pronounced.

In sum, the complex relations between Israelites and Philistines are exemplified in Fig. 2. We can identify a high level of boundary maintenance between themselves, and more open relations with other groups; some playing with the Israelite and Philistine symbols for their own benefit. This is best exemplified, on the local scale, in Megiddo Stratum VI and perhaps also at Tell Qasile Stratum X.

68 Ben-Shlomo, op. cit. (note 66), pp. 70, 78.
69 Idem, ibid., p. 120.
70 Idem, ibid., pp. 132, 161.
71 Idem, ibid., p. 185.
73 Faust, op. cit. (note 1); Faust and Lev-Tov, op. cit. (note 24).
74 See extensive discussion in Faust, op. cit. (note 1).
75 Unless some of the settlers in those sites were Israelites of course. See Faust, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 213–218.
III. The Canaanites

It is clear, however, that ethnic negotiations did not involve only Israelites and Philistines, but also Canaanites. We know that Canaanite population continued to exist in the Land of Israel in the Iron Age, and it probably even prospered in the northern valleys. But what about the southern part of the country?77

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We have seen above that while the population of the coastal plain concentrated in large settlements, and the number of settlements in the highlands grew dramatically in the Iron Age I, the Shephelah was practically devoid of settlement at the time. The few settlements that existed were concentrated in the trough valley. It appears that the reason behind this settlement emptiness is the above mentioned Philistine policy of urban imposition or forced urbanization, but why were the few settlements—Tell Beit Mirsim, Tel ‘Eton, Tel Yarmuth and Tell Beth-Shemesh—concentrated in the trough valley of the eastern Shephelah? Who were the settlers?

Were the settlements Philistine strongholds, erected to keep the hostile highland population in checks? Or were they part of the highland settlement system? It seems that it is worth examining the ‘ethnically sensitive’ items found in those sites. As far as Philistine pottery is concerned, it is striking that such pottery is found in practically all of the sites in the trough valley i.e., Tell Beit Mirsim, Tel ‘Eton, and also at Tel Yarmuth and Tel Beth-Shemesh farther north.

As far as collared rim jars are concerned, it is therefore striking to note that hardly any collared rim jars were found in Beth-Shemesh. At Tell Beit Mirsim only one such jar was reported, making it an extremely rare find, and practically non-existent for 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.

As far as the entire ceramic assemblage is concerned, it is quite clear that the assemblage in the discussed sites in the trough valley is very different from that of the highlands and shows close affinities to the Late Bronze Age traditions, as well as to contemporaneous sites in the coastal plain, like Tell Qasile.

77 For a more detailed discussion of the Canaanites in the south (in the Iron I), see Faust and Katz, op. cit. (note 23; the following section is to a large extent based on this article).
79 Cf., Albright, op. cit. (note 78), p. 36; regarding phase B3 at Tell Beit Mirsim.
85 Greenberg, op. cit. (note 80), pp. 64, 71.
86 One example of a collared rim jar was unearthed in the late-11th century or early-10th century level, but none were found yet in the main 12th–11th centuries occupation, see Faust and Katz, op. cit. (note 23), forthcoming.
87 E.g., Greenberg, op. cit. (note 80), p. 76; Bunimovitz and Lederman, op. cit. (note 83), p. 123.
88 E.g., at Lachish.
89 Greenberg, op. cit. (note 80), p. 76; De Miroschedji, op. cit. (note 82), p. 17; Bunimovitz...
As far as pork consumption is concerned, it is striking that no pig bones were found in the only trough valley site whose faunal assemblage was thoroughly analyzed, i.e., Tel Beth-Shemesh, where a large assemblage of more than 13,000 Iron Age I bones was examined and it contained practically no pig bones. Although the Iron Age I bone assemblage at Tel ‘Eton is limited, the pattern is similar. Pigs constitute 0% in the second half of the 12th century and most of the 11th century assemblage.

1. The Identity of the Settlers 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 regarding Tell Beir Mirsim, and by Bunimovitz and Lederman regarding Tel Beth-Shemesh. At Tel ‘Eton, too, the overall assemblage seems Canaanite, and does not resemble the poor repertoire of the highlands.

As far as food habits (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, although it was not always as low as in Iron I Israelite sites.

So who were the settlers of the trough valley: Israelites, as the avoidance of pork suggests or Philistines, as is perhaps hinted by the pottery?

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.

\[\text{References}\]

90 Bunimovitz and Lederman, ibid., p. 123.
91 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.
92 This refers to 141 bones, out of which 82 were identified. Note that pigs constitute about 1.6% of the 13th century – 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 (based on a report by R. Bouchnic).
93 Greenberg, op. cit. (note 80), p. 76.
96 See also Bunimovitz and Lederman, op. cit. (note 62); idem, op. cit. (note 83).
97 Cf., Albright, op. cit. (note 78), p. 36; see also Mazar, op. cit. (note 76), pp. 273, 286; Finkelstein, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 54–55.
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 I, while others perhaps migrated from nearby sites when they were destroyed and abandoned, like Lachish. As Greenberg suggested, regarding Tell Beit Mirsim, there was ‘continued Canaanite presence’ there.

Identity, however, is not simply ‘inherited’. It is fluid and in an endless process of negotiation and renegotiation. As time progressed, the way the Canaanite population defined itself changed, just like the groups in relation to whom it defined itself changed.

The ‘others’, in relation to whom those settlers in the eastern Shephelah 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).

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 both groups. Most of the local pottery was of the traditional Canaanite style of course, but Philistine pottery was not avoided, unlike the situation in the highland sites. Moreover, collared rim jars 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, was similar to that of the Israelites, and was a response to the Philistines habit of consuming large amounts of pork.

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 region was another enclave in which Canaanite culture survived during the Iron Age I, similar to the situation in the northern valleys.

IV. Summary

In summary, the above survey showed how the Iron I population in the south ‘played’ with material traits in their ethnic negotiations and boundary maintenance. The Israelites interacted with the dominant Philistines, and defined themselves in contrast to them. The Philistines, too, viewed the Israelites as their ‘other’, and prior to their rapid acculturation in the Iron II, continuously raised the boundaries between the Israelites and themselves. Finally, in-between those two large and dominant groups, the Canaanites found refuge in the fertile trough valley, and maintained a distinct identity, until assimilating into the Israelites in the Iron Age II.

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98 Greenberg, op. cit. (note 80), p. 76.