



**ALPHABETS,  
TEXTS AND ARTIFACTS  
IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST**

Studies presented to  
**Benjamin Sass**

edited by  
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**VAN DIEREN ÉDITEUR**

**“AND THE CANAANITE WAS THEN IN  
THE LAND”? A CRITICAL VIEW OF THE  
“CANAANITE ENCLAVE” IN IRON I  
SOUTHERN CANAAN**

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Alphabets, Texts and Artifacts, Studies Presented to Benjamin Sass

Benjamin Sass has written several studies that deal with the Philistines and Philistia in the Iron Age (e.g., Sass 1983; 2010; Golani and Sass 1998; Finkelstein *et al.* 2008; Finkelstein and Sass 2013). As we have spent the last 20-odd years studying the Philistine culture, it is with much pleasure that we present in Benny’s honor this study of the definitions and relations between the Philistines and their neighbors in the region of the Shephelah during the early Iron Age.

In a few recent discussions on the early Iron Age in southern Canaan and the cultural and ethnic entities existing at the time, particularly in Philistia and the Shephelah, the suggestion was raised that a distinct Canaanite entity (or enclave) can be identified in the Shephelah, e.g., Bunimovitz and Lederman 2009, 2011; Na’aman 2010; Faust and Katz 2011, 2015; Faust 2013, 2015d; Lederman and Bunimovitz 2014. This enclave was supposedly situated between the Philistines located to the west on the Coastal Plain and the Israelites located to the east in the Central Hills. In this brief paper, we would like to examine some of the suppositions, and relevant data, regarding the existence of this putative Canaanite enclave.

The study of the Philistines and their culture has seen a floruit in the last few decades. Excavations at major urban and smaller rural sites, along with many topical studies, have produced much new data and many new interpretations. Among other issues, the question of how to identify a site as being of the Philistine culture, and even more basically, how the various levels of “Philistine identity” can be archaeologically defined, has been avidly discussed. Unfortunately, some of the attempts to differentiate between the “Philistines” and other ethnicities in the Iron Age Levant on the basis of a small set

of material correlates have led to simplistic or simply mistaken differentiations. Thus, suggestions to characterize what we might call the “Philistinicity” of a site based on a small group of traits (often related to as Philistine *type fossils*) such as the presence/absence of decorated Philistine pottery (particularly in drinking sets), consumption of pig and dog meat, “Aegean-style” pinched loom weights (“spools”), hearths, “Cypriot-style” notched scapulae, rectangular halls with worked column or pillar bases, are problematic at best. As already noted in the past, many of these specific cultural attributes can appear on “both sides” of the supposed Philistine/Israelite ethnic boundaries—and even beyond (Hitchcock and Maeir 2013; Maeir *et al.* 2013; Maeir and Hitchcock in press).<sup>1</sup> Clearly, when viewed as a whole, the material assemblages at major sites in Iron Age Philistia are different from those of sites in regions associated with other groups (Israelite, Judahite, Phoenician, etc.). But time and again, specific types of objects can be seen in many areas and are used by many groups (such as pottery types appearing in different cultural areas; see, e.g., Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2008). The appearance of supposedly Philistine objects should not be seen as necessarily indicating the expansion of the Philistine culture into other zones, and similarly, for the appearance of Israelite/Judahite facets among the Philistines. Rather, artifact assemblages should be examined in their contexts in order to draw out different cultural encounters, functions and entanglements as well as to elucidate new ones (e.g., Ross 2012).

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1 To add to the many examples of the “fuzzy nature” of the appearance of material culture, supposedly typical of this or that culture, many of which have been discussed previously, the recent publication of the finds from Tell Jemmeh are quite indicative. While pig bones are absent from the faunal assemblage from the site (Maher 2014), the Iron I pottery assemblage (Ben-Shlomo 2014) is a rather clear indication of a strong connection to the Philistine culture. This strengthens previous suggestions (e.g., Maeir *et al.* 2013; Sapir-Hen *et al.* 2013; contra, e.g., Faust and Lev-Tov 2011, 2014; Faust 2015a, 2015b, 2015d) that pig consumption cannot be simplistically used to identify a site as Philistine, but may be part of the economic and subsistence strategy of the inhabitants. Unfortunately, Faust (e.g., 2015b: 285–86, n. 46) seems to be somewhat enamored with the emblematic quality of pig consumption and with trait lists in general, for example, in his discussion of Qubur el-Walaydah, a site clearly set within the “Philistine country side.” Excavations there revealed a small village which exhibited a mixture of so-called Philistine traits (lack of pig consumption; Aegean style pottery; pinched loom weights), while lacking others (e.g., hearths). In light of this, the ethnic and cultural identity of the site was questioned, and the excavator suggested that the mixed nature of the material remains, makes it difficult to identify the inhabitants—as Philistines or others (Lehmann 2011: 296–97). Thus, Faust’s (e.g., 2015b: 285–86, n. 46) insistence that the site is Canaanite not only misrepresents the excavators’ views, but is an example of just what we are arguing against—defining ethnic identity on the basis of a small set of attributes. Thus, whether in Philistia or in the Shephelah simplistic identity tags, while perhaps making a modern narrative easier, most likely do not reflect the on-the-ground past reality.

Philistine cultural identity is often seen as being simplistically set in binary opposition to Israelite group identity.<sup>2</sup> And more so, mirroring the biblical narrative, many have suggested that this “otherness” is to be seen as a major impetus for the formation of Israelite identity (most recently, this view is particularly espoused by Faust [e.g., 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2015d, Faust and Lev-Tov 2011, 2014]). Though serving a clear ideological purpose within the biblical narrative, the “on-the-ground” reality behind this is hard to accept, and this is for several reasons. To begin, most of the assumptions regarding the antagonistic relations between the Philistines and the “Israelites” are based solely on the biblical text—and it is not clear how much of this represents actual early Iron Age reality, and what part of this is a reflection of later Iron Age—or even post-Iron Age—realities and ideologies (on this, see Lemche 2012). For example, there is very little archaeological evidence of weaponry (and other aspects of warfare-related material culture) in early Iron Age Philistia (for lack of weaponry, see Koller 2012: 191–192), despite the very martial image depicted in the biblical narrative regarding the early Iron Age Philistines and in the earlier Egyptian texts on the Sea Peoples. To this one can add that the very assumption that it is possible to explicitly define and relate to a singular “Israelite” identity, which in turn can serve to define the Philistines as the “other” in the early Iron Age, is far from clear. Thus, for example, even in the Iron II, with its much better documentation, one must define disparate Israel and Judahite identities (e.g., Fleming 2012; Maeir 2013a, 2013b, 2014, in press).

The supposed confrontational relationship between the Philistines and the Israelites might very well be based on the commonly held view that sees the Philistines (and other Sea Peoples) as having arrived in the southern Levant in a rather unified process of invasion, conquest and forced settlement (for traditional interpretations, see Dothan 1982; Sandars 1985; Dothan and Dothan 1992; Oren 2000; most recently, see Faust 2015a<sup>3</sup>).

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- 2 This approach to the understanding of cultural identity implies that this is established through paradigmatic meaning, whereby meaning and identity are established through binary oppositions, e.g., up/down, day/night, male/female, and so on. Instead, we argue here that meaning is established syntagmatically, relationally, temporally, and spatially distributed through a range of contextual relationships (on these terms and for a brief overview of Sassurean linguistics, see Hitchcock 2008: 29–34).
  - 3 Although Faust (2015a: 168–174; 176–179; also Faust and Lev-Tov 2011: 13; 2014: 3) repeatedly claims that he does not deal with issues relating to the first arrival of the Philistines, he in fact assesses this extensively, both implicitly and explicitly, since the understanding of the character and underlying mechanisms of the appearance of the Philistine culture is of paramount importance in explicating various aspects relating to the later socio-cultural history of the Philistines. This point will be returned to later on in this study.

And it is against this already problematic background that the recent view of the Canaanite enclave in the Shephelah rests. According to this theory, not only can we clearly identify and differentiate archaeologically the Philistine and Israelite/Judahite ethnicities, the claim is that one can also define an additional “Canaanite” group in the archaeological record—in the “Shephelah” (Judean foothills) buffer zone between the Philistines and Israelites. This has been suggested for the early Iron Age phases at sites such as Beth-Shemesh (e.g., Bunimovitz and Lederman 2009, 2011; Lederman and Bunimovitz 2014), Tel ‘Eton (e.g., Faust and Katz 2011, 2015; Faust 2013, 2015d) and Khirbet Qeiyafa (e.g., Na’aman 2010).

We believe that these recent suggestions on the existence of a “Canaanite enclave” might very well be seen as an “objective facticity”—in other words something (such as an institution or concept) that is perceived to be objective from a specific socio-cultural point of view—in this case, current modes of interpretation in Levantine Iron Age archaeology (on this, see Berger and Luckmann 1966: 30). And in this light, a critical review of these suggestions is warranted.

Let us start with the evidence and discussions relating to the site of Beth-Shemesh. The excavators have suggested that they can identify a process of “resistance” among the local, “non-Philistine” population. In their view, at the time of the arrival of the Philistine migrant communities, the non-Philistine local inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh stopped eating pork and using decorated Philistine pottery, which these locals supposedly associated with the Philistines (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2009, 2011; Lederman and Bunimovitz 2014). Although one cannot completely deny the validity of their arguments, several cautionary notes are warranted: a) examples of Philistine decorated pottery have in fact been found at Beth-Shemesh (see Münnich 2013; and add to this that in the recent 2014 season, additional quantities of such items were found [Z. Lederman, personal communication]); b) as will be noted below, the Philistines themselves were comprised of both foreign and local Canaanite components; c) further, caution is warranted simply given the constantly changing understanding of this region as a result of intensive archaeological investigation.

As opposed to such a tight, site-specific interpretation, we believe that attempts to formulate an overall definition of ethnic groups living in a clearly defined and bordered region (such as suggested by Na’aman 2010; Faust and Katz 2011, 2015; Faust 2013, 2015a, 2015d), is harder to justify. The very definition of “who is” and “who is not” a Philistine or an Israelite/Judahite is hardly agreed upon (see Maier and Hitchcock in press). Thus, explicitly defining the supposedly static ethnic identity of a group living in the contact zone between

these groups remains complicated. The very fact that “Canaanite” (local Levantine) features are seen in Iron Age Philistia (see above) and at the same time, a major part of the so-called “early Israelite” culture can be traced to local Levantine (“Canaanite”) origins, makes it difficult to distinguish between a “real” Canaanite—supposedly living in this buffer zone—and a “transformed” Canaanite—living in the Philistine regions on the one hand and/or Israelite/Judahite regions on the other.

Recently, Faust (2015d) has added an additional facet to his understanding of the “Canaanite enclave”: that the relations between the Philistines and the Shephelah Canaanites reflect a colonial-like connection. Accordingly, the Philistines, who arrived in Canaan in the early Iron Age and forcibly took over the southern Coastal Plain (Philistia), destroying in the process the various Canaanite cities, became the overlords of the Canaanites, both in the Coastal Plain and further inland, in the Shephelah. He believes that in the earliest stages of the Iron I the Canaanites in the Shephelah preferred not to use emblematic Philistine cultural items due to boundary definition. Later on though, in the mid/late Iron I, the Canaanites, and in particular their elites, started to use certain classes of Philistine material culture, in classic interaction-patterns between colonizer and colonized peoples.

While we applaud Faust’s recent interaction with post-modern and post-colonial theory, we believe there are serious problems with this specific suggestion. To begin, Faust’s understanding of the initial stages of the development of the Philistine culture appears to hinge on an outmoded understanding of these processes. As opposed to traditional suggestions, which saw the appearance of the Philistine culture as the result of a clear cut invasion of a foreign group (or groups), recent studies (e.g., Yasur-Landau 2010; Maeir and Hitchcock 2011, in press; Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 2014, Cline 2014) have suggested a very different picture. To start with, the Philistines are a very mixed, entangled socio-cultural entity, deriving from various foreign and local Levantine groups—as evidenced in the early Philistine material culture. Likewise, the mechanisms through which the Philistine culture appeared is quite complex, including, *inter alia*, collapse of the Mediterranean Late Bronze Age “world order” and the appearance of pirate-like groups in the eastern Mediterranean (Hitchcock and Maeir 2014, in press a; in press b). Significantly, there is very little evidence of substantial destruction at the Canaanite sites in the southern Coastal Plain, despite Faust’s (2015d: 215) claims to the contrary.

To this one can add, as noted above, the very meager evidence of warfare-related aspects in the Iron I Philistine culture—which makes it difficult to see the Philistines as a full-fledged

conquering and dominating colonial force. While we fully acknowledge that colonialism encompasses a very broad range of cultural interactions (e.g., Gosden 2004; van Dommelen 2012), a *sine qua non* for the definition of a colonial relationship is characterized as patterns of domination by one party on the other (e.g., Horvarth 1972; Mohanty 1984: 333; Jordan 2009; Kohn 2011; Ypi 2013: 162; Steinmitz 2014: 79–80; Loomba 2015: 20). Or, as Osterhammel (2005: 8) succinctly defines it, “Kolonialismus ein Herrschaftsverhältnis” (colonialism [is] a relation of domination).

Thus, since the colonial dominance of the Philistines vis-à-vis the Canaanites of the Shephelah is not clear, the assumption that the relations between the Philistines and the peoples of the Shephelah reflect a colonial situation rests on shaky ground. Furthermore, colonialism is not a viable explanation for limited migration, which usually depends more on relationships established through prior contact (e.g., Anthony 1990: esp. 897; Voskos and Knapp 2008: 679).

The definition of ethnic identity is a major issue here. Quite a few of the recent archaeological and historical studies of the ancient Levant that deal with questions of ethnicity—and in particular those with discussions on the identification of archaeological criteria for defining ethnicity and group identity—place much emphasis on Barth’s (1969) seminal contribution to the study of ethnicity. In particular, focus is placed on Barth’s observations, which have been accepted, and stressed by many social theorists, that “boundary definition” is perhaps the most important aspect of group (and in some cases, ethnic) definition. In other words, this stresses that the prime criteria for defining between groups is how one group sees itself as different from the other—and those aspects of choice through which this difference is manifested.

Barth’s understanding of ethnicity is of utmost importance—and in fact defines the modern study of ethnicity—but several issues should be mentioned: 1) Barth’s views represent one of the “schools” of the understanding of ethnicity in modern social theory—other views are espoused as well<sup>4</sup>; 2) While “boundary

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4 These various “schools” (Sokolovskii and Tishkov 2010), with various offshoots of their own, are often divided into the “primordialists” (e.g., Geertz 1963), the “instrumentalists” (e.g., Cohen 1969), and the “constructivists” (Barth [1969] being the best-known proponent of this school). While the constructivist view is that which is most often espoused, it is not without its critics (e.g., Cohen 1978; Chun 2009; Blanton 2015). Attempts were made to bridge the divide between these schools (e.g., Wimmer 2008; Brubaker 2009). For a recent call for a stricter theoretical use of ethnic identity in archaeology, see now Reher and Fernández-Götz 2015.

maintenance” is seen as a crucial aspect in the definition of ethnic groups, in many recent discussions on ethnicity (e.g., Wimmer 2008; 2013; Brubaker 2009; 2014; Eriksen 2010; Jiménez 2010), it is taken as one facet of a complex and multi-layered inter-relationship of various factors—hardly the sole, or at least most focussed on factor—as often portrayed in discussions of the definition of ethnic groups based on the archaeological remains; while the differences between groups, and their boundaries, are crucial, so are internal social factors (e.g., Eriksen 2010; Wimmer 2008; Blanton 2015); 3) As Barth (1969; 2000) himself noted, ethnic identity is fluid and mutable (see as well, e.g., Eriksen 2010), and a person’s (or group’s) ethnic identity can quickly change and is contingent upon a given situation; 4) Likewise, Barth (2000) and others (e.g., Jenkins 2008: 26–27) note that the concept of a “boundary” has many meanings in various cultural contexts, and one cannot define it based on modern conceptions.

Accordingly, suggestions to simplistically define early Iron Age ethnic groups based on a list of archaeologically-identified “markers” that served for boundary definition (e.g., Finkelstein 1997; Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Faust 2015a, 2015b, 2015d; Faust and Lev-Tov 2011, 2014; Faust and Katz 2011) should be viewed with caution. Can we be sure that the very definition of ethnic groups in the Iron I is not an ideological reflection of later texts? Can we ascertain that there were distinct Philistine and Israelite ethnicities in the early Iron Age, or were there several groupings, some of them somewhat difficult to define? And even if these groups did exist, did the suggested archaeological markers (such as pig consumption, pottery, etc.) serve as boundary markers? As noted above (and, e.g., by Maeir *et al.* 2013; Maeir and Hitchcock in press), the variability in the appearance of some of these supposed markers in early Iron Age Philistia itself, raises questions regarding the validity of using them simplistically.

The fluidity and quickly changing character of ethnic identity is well known (e.g., Hall 2000; Malkin 2001; Dougherty and Kurke 2003; Casella and Fowler 2005; Siapkas 2014). Perceptions in modern research on group identities during the early Iron Age, which are based, by and large, on written sources, reflect most probably more on the social and/or ideological environment of the periods of compilation of the texts than on the purportedly described earlier periods. Thus, it is far from self-evident that one can speak of distinct and neatly-packaged ethnic identities that are archaeologically visible during the early Iron Age. A more heterogeneous and constantly



changing matrix of identities might have existed at the time (see Bauer 2014).<sup>5</sup>

This suggestion that a Canaanite enclave survived between the Philistines and the Israelites might be influenced by a modern reading of the biblical text—in particular the mention of Canaanites in this region in the “Tamar and Judah narrative” in Genesis 38. Since very few biblical scholars would date this text to the early Iron Age (see Leuchter 2013), one wonders whether this text in fact reflects a historical reality at all.<sup>6</sup> Can we speak of a Canaanite group identity in this region during the early Iron Age, and if so, how can this be identified archaeologically?<sup>7</sup> Hakenbeck (2011: 39) has described a very similar problem regarding the use of “self-referencing circular logic,” in the identification of

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- 5 Ethnographic studies long ago taught us that ethnic markers can include very subtle and archaeologically invisible “markers”— such as gestures (Kendon 1984; Wulf *et al.* 2011). Due to an almost complete lacuna of iconographic depictions (e.g., Ben-Shlomo 2010), Philistine “gestures” during the Iron I are for the most part unknown, and have not been adequately studied in, e.g., seals, which itself may be entangled with Egyptian and Cypriot artistic traditions (e.g., Keel 1994). Similarly, significant facets paramount for defining group identity, made of perishable materials, would also be archaeologically invisible. In this light, clear-cut suggestions of trait lists of the ethnic markers of a given group should be treated with caution (e.g., Shai 2011; Maeir *et al.* 2013). Faust’s (2015b) recent reiteration of a claim that starting from the Iron II the Philistines begin to practice circumcision (as opposed to a lack thereof in the Iron I), while a possibility, can hardly be seen as proven. There are several problems with this argument. To start with, the archaeological evidence is ambiguous. And more importantly, a central foundation of his argument is a lack of mention of the Philistines as being non-circumcised in the “later prophetic texts” in the Bible (as opposed to them being mentioned as such in “earlier” texts). The very supposition that one can relate to the biblical text in such a manner runs in the face of modern biblical research (for recent studies of the prophetic literature, see, e.g., Nissinen 2005; 2014; Floyd and Haak 2006; Tiemeyer 2007; Edelman and Ben Zvi 2009; Day 2010; Albertz *et al.* 2012; Machi *et al.* 2012; Römer 2012; Jeremias 2013; Kratz 2011, 2013, 2015; Brettler 2014; Kelle 2014; Nagolski 2014). While it is clear that there are earlier and later texts in the biblical corpus; to make such generalizations is unwarranted. One has to deal with each specific text in question separately, and not lump them together as Faust does (see now similar comments on Faust’s views on this in Smith 2014: 379, n. 296). A similar problem exists with his suggestion that Herodotus’ description of the “Syrians of Palestine” as being circumcised reflects the cultural behaviors of the Iron Age Philistines (Faust 2015b: 280–281). Herodotus wrote in the 5th century BCE. What he writes is not always accurate, and if in fact he is referring to the inhabitants of Philistia (and this is not clear at all), the southern Coastal Plain of Canaan at this time was settled by Phoenicians and not Philistines (e.g., Stern 2001: 407; Stager and Schloen 2008: 9). Thus, Herodotus’ description is of questionable relevance to this issue.
  - 6 The biblical traditions of the Canaanites residing in the Shephelah (as manifested in Gen 38), might be seen in the context of the shaping of the group identities of later Israelites/Judahites—manifested by “collective memories” of a real or imagined past. See, e.g., Halbwachs 1941, 1992; Mendels 2004; Ben Zvi and Levin 2012; Gehrke 2014. Perhaps the Shephelah itself should be seen as a “lieu de memoire” (site of memory; Nora 1989) of the Israelite/Judahite collective identity. For the creation of identity in the ancient world, see, e.g., Alcock *et al.* 2001; Harmanşah 2014; on the role of the Canaanites in biblical and post-biblical ideologies, see Berthelot *et al.* 2014.
  - 7 For suggestions that the mention of the Canaanites in these texts should be seen in the context of exilic and post-exilic ideologies, see, e.g., Cohn 1994; Zehnder 2005; Berge 2014.

ethnicities in early medieval central Europe, where ethnic groups mentioned in historical documents are identified in the archaeological remains, which are then used to explain the historical documents. All told, we believe that the supposition of the identification of such a “Canaanite enclave” rests on shaky foundations. While we fully accept the existence of a Canaanite “identity” (or better, identities) during the Late Bronze Age, this does not mean that this identity continued, largely unchanged, into the Iron Age, in a period when demographic, technological and socio-political structures were in flux. Such a supposition would require one to assume that the groups living in the border zone between the Coastal Plain and the Central Hills—where later sources located the Philistines on the one hand and Israelites/Judahites on the other (and the archaeological evidence indicates that these identities were in fact in the process of formation and transformation, albeit in complex mechanisms, already in the early Iron Age)—retained the cultural and ethnic identities of the Late Bronze Age. This cannot be taken for granted. Ethnic, cultural and other identities can quickly change, and there is no reason to assume that the Late Bronze Age identities “froze” and sustained over such an extended period of social and cultural upheaval (e.g., Cline 2014). Changes in settlement pattern and layout in the early Iron Age indicate social fragmentation (Hitchcock and Maeir in press b). The fact that certain aspects of the material culture continue between the Late Bronze and early Iron Age does not, by definition, enable one to assume that there is a continuity in Canaanite (or for that matter Aegean or Cypriot) identity. The lack of explicit evidence of this supposed “identity continuum,” whether archaeological or textual, and not simply the fact that similar pottery or other material aspects are seen in Late Bronze and early Iron Age sites in the Shephelah, makes such a claim hard to accept. Nestor (2010) rightfully cautions against simplistic attempts to demonstrate explicit continuity between Iron I and Iron II Israelite identity, and it goes without saying that in the case of the supposed Canaanite identity in the early Iron Age Shephelah, where we are completely dependent on scholarly assumptions, a guarded and sceptical approach is warranted. While one cannot deny the theoretical possibility of the existence of such a “Canaanite identity,” this is but a contemporary postulate!

As Eriksen (2010: 213–214) cautions:

...[T]he existence of ethnic anomalies or liminal categories should serve as a reminder that group boundaries are not unproblematic. These are groups or individuals who are “betwixt and between,” who are neither X nor Y and yet a bit of both. Their actual group membership may be open to situational negotiation, it may be ascribed by a dominant group, or the group may form a separate ethnic category.

Perhaps even more to the point is that both the Philistines and the Israelites/Judahites had substantial “Canaanite” components in their formative stages (e.g., Maeir and Hitchcock in press). As noted above, one wonders how one can differentiate between “Philistine Canaanites,” “Real Canaanites” (supposedly living in the Shephelah), and “Israelite Canaanites”!

Perhaps it would be preferable to look at the transition Philistia>Shephelah>Central Hills, as a region in which boundaries did exist, but which were “fuzzy” and constantly changing (compare, e.g., Bernardini 2005, 2011; Gardner 2007; Ylimnaunu *et al.* 2014). There is no question that during the early Iron Age there were peoples who identified themselves separately—perhaps as “Philistines” (and they resided mainly in Philistia) and as Israelites/Judahites (and they resided mainly in the Central Hills)—and for the sake of argument, perhaps even as “Canaanites” (residing in the Shephelah). But it would be hard to define, at any given time, based on the available archaeological data, the cultural/ethnic affiliation, and more than that, the exclusive or even static group identity of the inhabitants of a given site in the border zones (see Lehmann and Niemann 2014 and Mazar 2014: 362–364 for attempts to deal with certain facets of the flux in the cultural identities in the early Iron Age Shephelah).<sup>8</sup>

Overlapping “micro-identities” in this region (e.g., Whitmarsh 2010; Poblome *et al.* 2014) is a very likely scenario. Following van Nijf’s (2010) perspective on cultural interactions in Roman Asia Minor, it can be suggested that intensive cultural “code-switching” occurred in the Iron I Shephelah between emblematic identifying facets, dependent on specific contexts and needs. Perhaps one should look at the identities in the Shephelah region as “nested identities,” where ethnicity and other identities operated simultaneously at different levels,<sup>9</sup> and over time, and these various identities were reflected in various ways in the archaeological record. Once again, we stress that suggestions that material differences and related changes directly reflect ethnic identity without taking into account other facets of identity is all too simplistic.

As previously suggested (Maeir and Hitchcock in press; see now as well Faust 2015d), viewing the Shephelah as a “Middle Ground” (e.g., White 1991; Woolf 2011; Reger 2014) or a “Third Space” (Bhabba 1994; Knapp 2008) may be insightful. Accordingly, the material culture “packages” observed in this region may reflect the

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8 On the faults of “static” and “homogenous” interpretations of archaeological cultures, see now Gramsch 2015.

9 On “nested identities” in general, see Herb and Kaplan 1999. For archaeological applications, see, e.g., Janusek 2005; Hakenbeck 2007; 2011; Roberts 2011; Salazar *et al.* 2014; Scopacasa 2014.

“Social Imaginaries” (Castoriadis 1975; Taylor 2002; Strauss 2006; Stavrianopoulou 2013) in this region of intense intercultural contacts (see Mengoni 2010). Some of these “social imaginaries” may perhaps be reflected in later biblical sources mentioning the alleged cultural and ethnic makeup of the region; but this does not necessitate that these biblical portrayals accurately reflect the complex socio-cultural makeup and identity politics of this region during the Iron I.

We believe that simplistic interpretations of the archaeological correlates for identifying “ethnic” Philistines as opposed to other groups in the Iron Age Levant should be viewed with caution. Similarly, attempts to identify a unified “Philistine identity” are problematic as well. Not only are the Philistines of a very mixed origin; there are discreet regional and intra-regional differences between the material culture at various Philistine sites (e.g., Maeir and Hitchcock 2011, in press). This is hinted at, *inter alia*, by the fact that the Philistines defined themselves based on their cities of origin, and not as generic “Philistines” (e.g., Eph’al 1997).

In summary, we believe that the suggested “Canaanite enclave” in the early Iron Age Shephelah, is far from proven. In order to continue arguing for this suggestion, much more explicit archaeological evidence is needed. Until then, *caveat emptor*.

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