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RAMESSES III AND THE 'SEA-PEOPLES': TOWARDS A NEW PHILISTINE PARADIGM

Summary. *The Philistine paradigm attempts to answer fundamental questions in Philistine history, namely the how and when of Philistine settlement in the southern Levant. According to the traditional paradigm, the Philistines, among other 'Sea-Peoples', came from the Aegean islands and were settled in Egyptian strongholds in the south Canaanite Coastal Plain in the eighth year of Ramesses III. Formulated on the basis of Egyptian texts and Philistine archaeological remains, the paradigm has been criticized over the reliability of both source materials. Therefore, it is the aim of the present study to conduct a methodological analysis of the pillars on which the paradigm rests and to offer a new reconstruction of the events that took place in the Levant in the twelfth century BCE.*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Philistine culture in the southern Levant is clouded in ambiguity and as such is one of the most hotly debated issues in the history of the Iron Age in Israel. The prevalent reconstruction sees the Philistine settlement as tightly linked to the attacks of the 'Sea-Peoples' against Egypt in Ramesses III's eighth year. This reconstruction has been criticized on both historical and archaeological grounds (Cifola 1988; Bauer 1998; Sherratt 1998; 2003; Silberman 1998; Sharon 2001; Cline and O'Connor 2003; Finkelstein 2007; Maeir *et al*. 2013; Middleton 2015). Therefore, it is the aim of the present study to reassess the validity of the traditional Philistine paradigm by presenting a new analysis of the three basic pillars on which it stands:[1]

1. Papyrus Harris I, which describes the resettlement of 'Sea-Peoples' captives in Egyptian strongholds, presumably in southern Canaan.
2. Philistine material culture – commonly associated with the arrival of new Aegean populations.

1 A fourth pillar is, of course, the biblical account regarding the Philistine entity, but this will not be dealt with in the present study. Suffice it to say here that according to current scholarship, the material was put in writing centuries after the events described here and hence using it for historical reconstruction is difficult, demanding the separation of genuine 'memories' or traditions from later layers that portray realities and goals of the authors (Finkelstein 2002; Römer 2005; Schmid and Person 2012).

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3. The Medinet Habu records of Ramesses III, which document the emergence of the 'Sea-Peoples' in the Levant.

Two of the pillars – Papyrus Harris I and Philistine material culture – have been challenged previously on various grounds, to which the present study adds some new observations. The third pillar – namely, the interpretation of the texts and reliefs at Medinet Habu – is here re-evaluated and radically re-interpreted, resulting in a revised historical reconstruction of early Philistine history.

THE TRADITIONAL PHILISTINE PARADIGM

Conventional reconstructions of the Philistine settlement process relied on the interpretation of Egyptian texts and reliefs together with the dispersal of Philistine pottery.

According to the textual sources, comprising the Medinet Habu reliefs and inscriptions together with the great Papyrus Harris I, Ramesses III defeated the 'Sea-Peoples' on the northern frontiers of the Egyptian empire and proceeded to settle them in his strongholds in southern Canaan; the 'Sea-Peoples' subsequently forced the Egyptians out of Canaan and seized control of the region of Philistia (Albright 1932; Alt 1944). Alternatively, the 'Sea-Peoples' were defeated at the Nile Delta (Stadelmann 1968; Bietak 1993; Redford 2000), and retreated to settle southern Canaan.

The discovery of locally-produced Aegean-style pottery (Monochrome and Bichrome) in the south Canaanite Coastal Plain was interpreted as representing the arrival of those defeated 'Sea-Peoples' (Dothan 1982; Killebrew 2005; Yasur-Landau 2010; *contra* Bauer 1998 and Sherratt 2003).

Shortly after its identification, Monochrome pottery became the definitive marker of the initial Philistine settlement in southern Canaan (Mazar 1985; Dothan 2000, 153; Dothan and Zukerman 2004; Yasur-Landau 2010).[2] A paradigm was born: the earliest strata of the Philistine settlement, which yielded Monochrome pottery, represent the resettlement of the defeated 'Sea-Peoples' in Ramesses III's eighth year, *c.*1175 BCE.[3]

The paradigm assumes Egyptian involvement in the Philistine settlement process – either directly, by stationing the defeated Philistines in Egyptian-Canaanite strongholds, or indirectly, by simply losing their sovereignty over Canaan in the aftermath of the conflict against the 'Sea-Peoples'.

Both scenarios should have been easily discernible in the rich archaeological record of southern Canaan, but have been surprisingly hard to prove. Deliberate resettlement of 'Sea-Peoples' captives in Egyptian forts should have created some overlapping between Egyptian and Philistine material culture. However, the main Egyptianized strata of south-western Canaan which can safely be dated to the early twentieth Dynasty (Lachish VI, Tel Mor V and Tel Sera' IX) have not yielded any Monochrome pottery. The opposite is also true: the principal strata of the Philistine settlement (Ashdod XIII, Ashkelon XVII and Ekron VII) have not yielded any significant Egyptian/ized assemblages (Ussishkin 1985; Bietak 1993; Finkelstein 1995; 2000; Dothan 2000, 153 for Ekron; Martin 2008 for Ashkelon). Indirect Egyptian involvement in the process is just as difficult to

2 In the present article the terms Monochrome, Mycenaean IIIC:1b or Aegean derivative pottery will be used.

3 This traditional date is no longer viable as Ramesses III's reign is now dated to 1195–1164 BCE (Schneider 2010), dating the references to the 'Sea-Peoples' in his fifth and eighth regnal years to 1190 and 1187 BCE respectively.

substantiate. The pre-Philistine strata show no clear signs of conflict that would attest to their violent transition from Egyptian to Philistine hands (Yasur-Landau 2010, 292).

This, briefly, is the heart of the problem: how to reconcile the Egyptian historical record with the complete lack of interaction between Egyptian and early Philistine archaeological finds in Canaan, particularly in light of the considerable Egyptian presence in Canaan under the rule of Ramesses III (Morris 2005, 703–4, 740–73; Martin 2011, 246–9).

Two possible solutions have been put forward. According to one, the lack of interaction between Philistine and Egyptian finds stems from an inevitable territorial division between the Philistines on the southern Coastal Plain and the last Egyptian rulers of the Northern Valleys, the Shephelah and the northwestern Negev (Bietak 1993; Stager 1995; Mazar 1997; Dothan 2000, 156; Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Dothan and Zukerman 2004, 43). This supposed cultural segregation would continue until the cessation of Egyptian rule in Canaan, dated to Ramesses IV (Weinstein 1992, 146; Brandl 2004, 61) or even Ramesses VI, as suggested by the presence of his inscribed statue base at Megiddo (Loud 1948, 135–8; Bietak 1993; Mazar and Mullins 2007, 571).

A different solution rejects the cultural and political segregation, suggesting that the absence of any interaction between neighbouring Egyptian and Philistine sites (such as Ashdod and Tel Mor) should negate their contemporaneity. Therefore, the initial Philistine settlement should be down-dated to *c.*1140 BCE – that is, after the Egyptian withdrawal from Canaan (the end of Ramesses VI's rule according to the revised chronology by Schneider 2010, 403).

This view, Finkelstein's 'Low Chronology' (1995, 213–39; 1996, 180; 1998; see also Ussishkin 1985, 240–67), introduced an intense chronological debate (Dothan 2000, 145; Mazar 1997; 2005, 19 with references; 2011) and initiated an ambitious radiocarbon dating project intended to resolve the chronological disputes (Boaretto *et al.* 2005; Sharon *et al.* 2007; Tofollo *et al.* 2014). In terms of providing the date of the first Philistines in Philistia, this project has proved unsatisfactory (Mazar 2005, 16) due to the lack of samples from clean Monochrome contexts (Asscher, Lehmann *et al.* 2015; Asscher, Cabanes *et al.* 2015; Finkelstein 2016) – although a general compatibility with the low chronological framework was demonstrated (Sharon *et al.* 2007, 41, table 8 for Ekron VIIB; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2007; 2010; and see also Fantalkin *et al.* 2015, 36).

Thus, the question of Egyptian-Philistine interaction in the initial phase of the Philistine settlement continues to vex scholars. In a recent article by the excavators of Ashkelon, the authors presented two Egyptian small finds from the first Philistine stratum as evidence for a date within the reign of Ramesses III (Master *et al.* 2011, and see below). In doing so the authors realized the unavoidable collision with theories of cultural segregation and territorial division and suggested they should be re-examined (*ibid.*, 275, fn. 12).

THE FIRST PILLAR: PAPYRUS HARRIS I

Various scholars have already pointed out that the conventional reading of Papyrus Harris I relies on a misconception (Kahn 2011, 2–3; Barako 2013, 39). The text does not in fact state that the 'Sea-Peoples' captives were settled in Canaan. Instead the text plainly reads that they were brought back to *Egypt – Km.t* – a term that cannot be confused with Egypt's territories in the Levant (Erichsen 1933, pls. 76,6–76,9; Grandet 1994, Vol I, 336):

> I extended all the frontiers of Egypt. I felled the aggressors—they were in their lands. I slew the Danuna (that came) from their isles. The Sikila and the Philistines were made into ashes. Sherden and Weshesh of the sea they were made non-existent, captured at one time, **brought as captives to Egypt** like the sand of the shore. I settled them in strongholds bound in my name *(author's translation)*.

This strategy of dealing with prisoners of war is attested elsewhere in New Kingdom records concerning Libyan and Nubian captives, as also in the Papyrus Harris itself (regarding the captive Libyans, see pl. 77: 3–6) and in the Medinet Habu records (MH I, pl. 28, 40 = KRI V, 24: 2–3; KRI V, 91: 6). Moreover, Egyptian policy consistently resulted in the settlement of foreign captives within Egypt itself and as far away as possible from their respective homelands (Morris 2005, 733–4; Kahn 2011, 2–3). Therefore, interpreting Papyrus Harris I as a record of Philistine resettlement in Canaan not only adds hypothetical information to the text but also contradicts well-known Egyptian strategies regarding war captives.

To these known reservations I would add two texts that attest to the presence of 'Sea-Peoples' captives in Egypt and to the incorporation of Philistine warriors within the Egyptian army, probably in the western Delta.

A royal stela dated to Ramesses III's sixteenth regnal year records the endowment of captives from the 'Great Green', a term used for the 'Sea-Peoples' in the Egyptian records (KRI V, 234.7). Found in the temple of Qus, the inscription attests to the installment of 'Sea-Peoples' in Upper Egypt.

A second source, though undated, is Papyrus Louvre N 3136 describing the mobilization of 100 Philistines against the attacking Libyans, making it unlikely that they were stationed in Canaan (Spalinger 2002, 359–65, pl. III, 8–9):[4]

> We caused 100 of the Philistines to go forth…at the time.
> 200 Sherden of the great strongholds.

The affiliation to the 'strongholds' implies that both Sherden and Philistines were counted among the Egyptian forces (Manassa 2010, 259), stationed perhaps in the (Western?) Delta. The papyrus can be dated to the reign of either Ramesses III or Merenptah (Spalinger 2002, 361); however, Philistines are not mentioned in Egyptian records prior to the reign of Ramesses III (Manassa 2003, 125–33).

The iconographic record also supports the view that 'Sea-Peoples' captives were stationed in Egypt, as 'Sea-Peoples' are depicted among the Egyptian forces both before and after the campaign against their compatriots (Widmer 1975, 71; MH I, pls. 9, 17, 19, 24; MH II, pl. 72).

To conclude, the plain reading of the text, the comparison with other Egyptian treatments of enemy captives and the recorded presence of Philistine warriors within the Egyptian army in Egypt itself, no longer justify reading Papyrus Harris I as evidence of Philistine settlement in southern Canaan.

4 Although the papyrus may well belong to the 'historical fiction' genre, it nevertheless relies on true historical background, as Egyptian stories of this genre often tend to do (Manassa 2010, 256).

THE SECOND PILLAR: PHILISTINE MATERIAL CULTURE

The second pillar has also generated considerable controversy regarding the validity of Aegean-style pottery in identifying the Aegean migration to Philistia (Dothan 1982; Bunimovitz 1990, 211–12; Bunimovitz and Yasur-Landau 1996; Sherratt 1998; 2003; 2006; Yasur-Landau 2010).

First, the origin of Philistine Monochrome pottery has proven to be far more complex than implied by the term 'Aegean'. Typologically, it has been identified as a local imitation of Cypriot pottery traditions (Killebrew 1998, 393–7; 2000, 243–4; 2005, 230; Sherratt 1998, 293, 303–4; 2003, 46–7; 2006, 367–8; Mountjoy 2010; 2013; Rutter 2013), therefore undermining the theory of an Aegean origin for the migration. Consequently, recent studies have stressed the multiple origins of the Philistine migration (Yasur-Landau 2010; Ben-Shlomo 2010; Maeir *et al.* 2013; Frumin *et al.* 2015), instigated perhaps by severe climate changes (Langgut *et al.* 2013) and the collapse of the Late Bronze palatial system (Cline 2014; but see Knapp and Manning 2016).

Furthermore, while the appearance of Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery in Philistia was interpreted as the result of the 'Sea-Peoples' migration, other occurrences of the same pottery in the Levant were given different interpretations. In Cyprus and south-west Asia Minor, local production of Aegean-style pottery began already at the end of the thirteenth century BCE, examples of which were exported to the Levant well into the twelfth century BCE (Lehmann 2007; Iacovou 2013). Therefore, this phenomenon began before the 'Sea-Peoples' ever appeared on the pages of history and was the result of continuous cultural exchange with the Aegean world.

During the twelfth century BCE local production of the Cypriot-style pottery, which itself was a derivative of Mycenaean pottery, expanded to Syria, Lebanon and Philistia (Lehmann 2007). But while in Philistia it has been considered to mark the Aegean migration, this was not the case for the northern Levant, where it has been perceived as a local cultural process.

In an attempt to establish a unified methodology to distinguish between processes of migration and cultural exchange through the appearance of Aegean-style artefacts, Yasur-Landau (2010) suggested that migrating populations should create a 'deep change' in the local material culture, whereas cultural exchange would result in a lesser effect.

According to this distinction, most of the north Levantine sites did not exhibit additional Aegean elements to accompany the local production of Aegean-derived pottery and were therefore interpreted as unrelated to a large-scale migration (see Lehmann 2013 for an overview of sites and finds). However, a clear break in continuity followed the destruction of some sites such as Tarsus (French 1975; Mee 1978, 145; Yasur-Landau 2010, 229–31), Tell Kazel (Badre 2006; Jung 2007; 2012; Lehmann 2013, 275), Tell Afis (Venturi 2011, 144–5, 148; Cecchini 2011, 198) and Ras Ibn Hani (Bounni *et al.* 1978, 282; Lehmann 2013, 268).[5] The subsequent appearance of Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery at these sites may therefore be regarded as a result of some migration. It is no coincidence, then, that the Orontes Valley, from Hama to Iskenderun, would later be associated with the kingdom of Palistin (Hawkins 2009; 2011; Singer 2012; Dinçol *et al.* 2015), exhibiting Anatolian traditions as well as Aegean-derived pottery and tools (Janeway 2006–07; 2011; Lehmann 2013, 324).

In Philistia, the initial appearance of Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery at Ashdod XIIIb (Area G) and Ashkelon XVII did not follow any destruction (for Ashdod, see Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2001; Ben-Shlomo 2003, 85; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, 2, 13; for Ashkelon, see Stager

5 Note, however, that the finds have yet to be properly published (Caubet 1992, 124–7).

Figure 1
Monochrome vessels, Tel Miqne-Ekron. © I. Sztulman and E. Kessel, Tel Miqne-Ekron Publications Project. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

et al. 2008, 257) and the same is probably also true for Ekron.[6] A general continuity in local traditions is evident at all three sites. However, a 'migrationist' interpretation is generally favoured following Yasur-Landau's focus on the appearance of three manifestations of 'deep change': Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery (Fig. 1), cylindrical loom weights (Fig. 2) and rectangular hearths (Yasur-Landau 2010, 234–8, 267–8).

While it is acknowledged that these elements do attest to the arrival of new populations to Philistia, one should note that they do not appear simultaneously, therefore placing the main phase of the migration at a slightly later date. The first appearance of Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery in Ashdod XIIIb (Area G) is not accompanied by loom weights or rectangular hearths (Dothan and Porath 1993, 55–8). Ashkelon XVII yielded loom weights but no hearths (Stager *et al.* 2008, 257–8), and the opposite situation marks Stratum VII at Ekron, where rectangular hearths are unaccompanied by loom weights (Mazow 2005, 55–6; Ben-Shlomo 2010, 21). Aegean-style cooking jugs occurred sporadically in both Ashdod XIIIb and Ekron VIIB (Yasur-Landau 2010, 231), being far more abundant in the subsequent Bichrome levels of those sites (see Dothan and Zukerman 2004, 34, table 16).

Therefore, the appearance of Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery in the earliest Iron Age strata, whilst unaccompanied by Bichrome ware or other Aegean traits, should be viewed as the product of a specific cultural exchange between southern Canaan and Cypriot ceramic traditions. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the entire Monochrome phase in Ashdod XIIIb is limited to an assemblage of bell-shaped bowls concentrated in a single locus (Dothan and Porath 1993, 55–8), possibly a workshop (*ibid*: 54; Dothan and Zukerman 2004, 6), and in Ekron VII, the Monochrome phase is largely confined to an industrial area on the Acropolis, namely the kilns

6 The circumstances surrounding the end of stratum VIIIA are still highly debatable. No evidence of destruction was traced in Field INE East Slope (Gitin *et al.* 2006, 28–9; Killebrew 2013, 85) but a massive destruction was reported in the as yet unpublished north-east section of the Acropolis (Gitin *et al.* 2006, 31). Killebrew, however, assigns that destruction to the preceding Stratum VIIIB (Killebrew 2013, 82).

Figure 2
Cylindrical loom weights, Tel Miqne-Ekron. © Gabi Laron Tel Miqne-Ekron Publications Project. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

(Gitin *et al.* 2006, 34–44). Note that the publication of the Monochrome vessels from Ekron VII Field IV in the lower city (Dothan and Zukerman 2004) preceded the stratigraphic report presented by Mazow (2005) – therefore, the vessels were published with no archaeological contexts. When they are assigned to their relevant loci, it is apparent that the majority originated from fills or debris.[7] In other words, the so-called 'Monochrome' layers in Philistia were never really dominated by this style, which flourished only in the following so-called 'Bichrome' phase that yielded the two styles together.

These observations indicate that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the arrival of new populations in Philistia should not be correlated with the strata that yielded only Monochrome pottery. Rather, the evidence points to the following strata, which produced both Monochrome and Bichrome ware, as the crucial point of Philistine migration, e.g. Ashdod strata XIIIa (Area G), XIII (Area H), and XII; Ashkelon XVI; Ekron VI. It is only during this stage that new plant and animal species (Meiri *et al.* 2013; Frumin *et al.* 2015), as well as new technologies, household activities, and cultic objects, were introduced into the local culture of the southern coastal plain (on the paucity of cultic objects in the Monochrome phase see Yasur-Landau 2010, 302). These new elements include not only Cypriot (Maeir and Hitchcock 2011) and Aegean traditions but also other traditions acquired from Egypt (Birney and Doak 2011; Ben-Dor Evian 2012) and the Levant (Gilboa 2006–07; 2009; see also Ben-Shlomo 2010).

Having distinguished between the different regional manifestations of Aegean-derived pottery in the Levant, one should ask what, if any, is the relation between its northern and southern Levantine distribution? The appearance of Aegean/Cypriot traits in Cilicia, Syria and Philistia may

7 Loci 7107, 43092, 41082.1 defined as 'surface'; Loci 26132, 26116, 24091 as 'debris'; L. 43116 – fire installation; L. 26135 – pit; L. 24092P – silo; L. 43107 – mudbrick platform; Loci 43129 and 41084 – unpublished.

be regarded as connected to a single phenomenon through which one can trace the land route taken by the 'Sea-Peoples' as they advanced from western Anatolia to southern Canaan (Yasur-Landau 2010). However, if a land route is to be visualized, it is surprising that no significant depositions of Aegean-derived pottery have been found along the route from Tell Kazel in the north to Ashdod in the south. The geographical *lacunae* of Aegeanizing features between Syria and southern Canaan stand in contrast to the reconstruction of a land trail followed by the invading 'Sea-Peoples' and denote that the northern and southern Levant should be considered separately.

The gap is also a chronological one. While the local production of Aegean-derived pottery in Cilicia and Syria is dated to 1190–1150 BCE (based on the post-Ugarit destruction level at Ras Ibn Hani and Tell Tweini; see Kaniewski *et al.* 2011), its Philistine counterpart should be dated slightly later, to *c.*1150–1140 BCE. This gap has already been noted in ceramic studies, as some of the Philistine examples were found to be comparable with LH IIIC *Middle* rather than Early, making them typologically later than the north Levantine pottery (French 1998, 4; 2013, 347; Killebrew 2000, 242; Dothan and Zukerman 2004, 44; Fantalkin *et al.* 2015).

Moreover, the well-dated Late Bronze Age III assemblage at Beth Shean VI (S3), also dated to the same time frame as the post-Ugarit destruction (1190–1150 BCE), includes only LH IIIC imports and no local Aegeanizing pottery (Sherratt and Mazar 2013). This implies that while the northern Levant suffered a cessation of imports, which promoted local imitations, the southern Levant was still enjoying the fruits of internationalism under Egyptian rule (see also Fantalkin *et al*. 2015, 36). Recent finds from Qubur al-Walaydah confirm that the appearance of Mycenaean IIIC:1b vessels followed the Egyptian abandonment of the site (Asscher, Cabanes *et al*. 2015). Royal Egyptian finds from the earliest Philistine strata, although spanning the reigns of Ramesses III–IV (Brandl 1993, 138, no. 13; Master *et al.* 2011), cannot provide an earlier date for the Monochrome layers as they were mostly found in secondary contexts (Brandl 1993, nos. 6–12), as is typical of New Kingdom scarabs from Iron Age layers (Schipper 2003, 250–1), providing at best, a *terminus post quem* (Master and Aja 2011, 130).

To sum up, the local production of Monochrome pottery in its earliest form was the result of cultural exchange between the Levant (southern Canaan, Cilicia and Syria) and certain Cypriot traditions, which in southern Canaan may or may not have begun under Egyptian rule, although the present state of research leans towards a later date. However, significant accumulations of Aegean-derived pottery, accompanied by signs of 'deep change' and indicative of migrations, can be traced in specific sites within Cilicia/Syria in the north and Philistia in the south. As no signs of 'deep change' exist between these two regions (Cilicia/Syria to Philistia), an overland trail of migration from Syria to Philistia remains an implausible event. The gap between the events of the 'Sea-Peoples' in the northern and southern Levant is not only geographical but also chronological. The main part of the Philistine settlement should be ascribed to the Bichrome phase, which no doubt followed the end of Egyptian rule in Canaan. The traditional insistence on a date within the reign of Ramesses III has largely been due to the misinterpretation of the Papyrus Harris I. Once that link has been severed there is no more need to ignore the implications of the typological and stratigraphical data.

But how to account for the chronological gap of several decades between the documented emergence of the Philistines in the Levant, as recorded in Ramesses III's eighth year (*c.*1187 BCE), and their subsequent settlement in Philistia (*c.*1150–1140 BCE)? Filling this gap demands a far better reconstruction of the events that took place in the first decade of Ramesses III's reign, particularly with regard to the chronology and the geographical setting of the campaign against the 'Sea-Peoples'.

THE THIRD PILLAR: THE RECORDS OF RAMESSES III

The monumental reliefs and the great inscriptions of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu have provided the main sources for reconstructing early Philistine history (Dothan 1982, 1–13; Sandars 1985; Redford 1992, 243–55; Yasur-Landau 2010). However, the religious and royal ideologies that these records aim to fulfill have masked the actual historical events in a veil of repetitive formulae of text and image that should not be taken at face value (Lesko 1980; Cifola 1988; 1991; Drews 2000; Cline and O'Connor 2003; Spalinger 2011).

The present paper cannot introduce the reader to the complex world of ancient Egyptian narrative inscriptions and reliefs, nor to the expansive record at Medinet Habu. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that neither the reliefs nor the inscriptions can be treated as readily available 'annals' for the use of historians.

The depictions are iconic, rendering each detail according to ancient Egyptian artistic conventions that pre-determine the mode of depiction. As icons they assume a symbolic role that can only be deciphered by a careful examination of all the occurrences of a specific icon within its various contexts. Only then can one begin to extract information from ancient Egyptian reliefs.[8]

Likewise, the great inscriptions are largely rhetoric, promoting an ideological perception of the Pharaoh by using recurring prose and metaphor, thus undermining their historical reliability (Wilson 1930; Spalinger 1982; Bleiberg 1985–86; Cifola 1988; 1991). As such, they belong to a wider genre of royal narratives that follow common styles, compositions, lexical and semantic units. Correct historical analysis of such inscriptions must therefore disregard the generic aspects of the text and concentrate on the non-typical inclusions, which may be assigned a higher degree of credibility.

Acknowledging these basic interpretative hazards, one can now consider the historical reconstruction. Being a rhetorical rendering of the events, the Egyptian record lacks crucial historical facts concerning the battles against the 'Sea-Peoples', most notably their location. The records of the land battle suffer from a complete lack of placement, and the naval battle is said to have taken place at the 'river-mouths', traditionally interpreted as the Nile Delta.

Early research placed the clashes with the 'Sea-Peoples' in the far northern reaches of the Egyptian empire (Albright 1932; Alt 1944; Schaeffer 1968, 678; Singer 1994, 291). Later research by Stadelmann (1968) stressed the lack of foreign toponyms in the texts relating to the campaign and therefore suggested that the battles occurred at Egypt's doorstep, probably near the Pelusiac – the easternmost branch of the Nile Delta (followed by Bietak 1993, 293; Redford 2000; Hoffmeier 2013, 190; *contra* Morris 2005, 697–8; Kahn 2011).

Yet Stadelmann's observations do not account for the fact that campaign-related toponyms are typically rendered not in battle reliefs or in rhetorical inscriptions but rather in the topographical lists that accompany triumphal reliefs (Simons 1937). Such a list, often overlooked, accompanies the final scene of the campaign against the 'Sea-Peoples', providing a clear northern itinerary (MH I, pl. 43 = KRI V, 35: 1–5: Qatna, Tunip, Naharyn – see Addendum in Ben-Dor Evian 2016). Original northern toponyms are also present in the much longer toponym list on the first Pylon of the Medinet Habu temple (Kahn 2013), but unlike the short list, these cannot be associated with a particular campaign.

8 The principal studies on Egyptian war reliefs in general, and on the 'Sea-Peoples' reliefs in particular, include: Moscati 1963; Groenewegen-Frankfort 1972; Assmann 1975; Gaballa 1976; Lesko 1980; Tefnin 1981; Hornung 1982; Derchain 1993; Baines 1996; O'Connor 2000; Heinz 2001; Cline and O'Connor 2003; Spalinger 2011; Ben-Dor Evian 2016.

While topographical lists cannot be viewed as exact reflections of a given campaign, their general geography is often correct (Wilson 2005; Kitchen 2009; Kahn 2013). The reliability of a given list can be determined on the basis of its originality in comparison to earlier lists. In the present case, the original list dating to Seti I (Simons 1937, 137, List XIII, with variations in Lists XIV and XV) was modified to suit altered conditions and the town of Kadesh was substituted for the more relevant Tunip. The Ramesses III list was therefore updated to suit current affairs and was not just a mere copy, affording it some historical relevance. Another short list accompanies the poem of the second Libyan campaign, exclusively dedicated to Libyan placenames (MH II, pl. 85), thus attesting to the realities presented in such short lists at Medinet Habu.

Therefore, the Egyptian record does in fact include toponyms related to the 'Sea-Peoples' campaign, clustering in Syria's hinterland. This coincides well with the explicit emphasis on Amurru in both the great inscriptions of the fifth and eighth years (KRI V, 21: 13–15; V, 40: 1; see also Kahn 2011).

The same northern location is also attested in the icons employed in the land battle relief (MH I, pl. 32). In Egyptian battlefield compositions, the location is often inferred from the artistic conventions applied in the relief (Spalinger 2011, 95, 203; see also Assmann 1975). These conventions are iconic, recurring images that symbolize a standardized, well-known concept. By using non-ambiguous icons, war reliefs convey vital information on the enemy's ethnicity (hair-style, dress), his technological abilities (weapons, chariots, fortified towns) and his location (the fortified towns of Western Asia, the unique flora in the Nubian campaigns, and the cedar trees in the Syrian campaigns).

Bearing in mind the symbolic nature of the reliefs, one may now point to the following iconic conventions that convey location in the land battle depiction: humped zebu, which typically appear in depictions of Syrian battlefields such as Kadesh (Naville 1930, pl. XVII; RIK IV, pl. 23) and Mutir (Wreszinski 1923, pls. 71, 183; see also Keel 1975, fig. 4); the Hittite and Asiatic appearance of the women in the relief (Sweeney and Yasur-Landau 1999); the sacrifice of a child, typical of Asiatic campaigns (Spalinger 1978); and the composition of civilians on ox-carts, imitating the composition of civilians on a walled town in Asia (Fig. 3; for a full discussion see Ben-Dor Evian 2016). None of these icons is ever used for campaign-reliefs set in north Sinai but they are regularly used for depicting campaigns in the far north. Furthermore, while the icons of the walled city and the child sacrifice can appear also in Canaanite campaigns, the zebu oxen are restricted to Syrian depictions of war.

Contrary to traditional scholarship, the present analysis of the Egyptian images interprets icons such as humped zebu, ox-carts, Hittite women and children, and their compositional scheme, as markers used for locating the events in Syria's hinterland and not as images of migration – a theme that was immaterial to Egyptian war reliefs.

However, there is no reason to assume that the land and sea battles were co-ordinated attacks that occurred in close geographic proximity. The texts themselves do not presuppose a single location, and differentiate between clashes in the 'frontier in Djahy' (KRI V, 40, 7, 15) and others at the 'river mouths' (KRI V, 40, 8, 16–17). Furthermore, the reliefs of the land and sea battles are separated one from the other by a large relief of the king hunting lions from his chariot while rows of soldiers march on the bottom registers, symbolizing movement from one battle to the next.

The unique composition of the lion hunt and its intrusive position can be interpreted by comparison with other sequences of battle reliefs in which such scenes (not directly related to combat activities) were inserted between battle reliefs. Such non-military scenes were inserted for

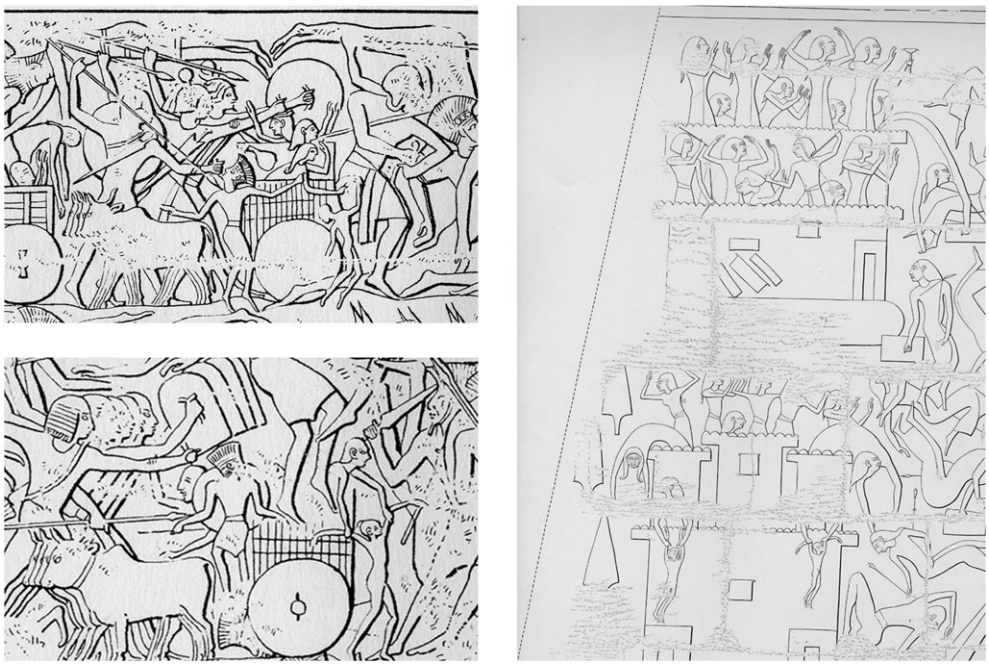

Figure 3
Ox-carts as Asiatic towns (after MH I: pl. 32 and MH II: pl.87).

symbolic reasons but also in order to imply movement from one battle to the next (for example, Seti I felling trees between the battle on the Ways of Horus and the battle at Pa Canaan-Gaza (RIK IV, pls. 1–5; see a detailed discussion in Ben-Dor Evian 2016). Thus, the iconographic design intentionally created a geographical and temporal separation between the two battles.

The naval battle, therefore, did not occur in the north but was more probably fought in the Nile Delta, as already noted in previous studies (Redford 2000; Morris 2005, 697–8; Hoffmeier 2013, 190).

These clashes were not restricted to the eighth regnal year of Ramesses III, but no doubt began already in his fifth year. Traditionally, the battle reliefs were associated with the inscription of the eighth year, mainly because that text deals exclusively with the 'Sea-Peoples', while the fifth year inscription records, in addition, a campaign against the Libyans. However, the mention of the 'Sea-Peoples' in the fifth year text is not just a passing reference but a complete narrative sequence consisting of all the semantic units regularly used in describing a campaign (Cifola 1988, 291) and it should therefore be awarded a place of its own (Ben-Dor Evian 2015).

The initial conflict against the 'Sea-Peoples' should therefore be re-dated to the fifth year of Ramesses III, *c.*1190 BCE, and located in Syria's hinterland, followed by a raid on the Nile Delta. Similar events recurred in the eighth regnal year, *c.*1187 BCE.

This reconstruction coincides well with other Ancient Near Eastern records of dated attacks in Syria on both land—Mukish-Alalakh (RS 34.143; KTU 2.33 = RS 16.402, see Singer 1999, 723–725), Amurru (RS 20.162, Singer 1999, 721), Emar (Singer 2000, 25) — and sea—Ugarit (RS. 20.238; RS 34.129; RS 20.162; see Singer 1999, 721). All these well-recorded events suggest that

the major share of the hostilities took place in the *northern* Levant during the second decade of the twelfth century BCE (Weeden 2013, 7–8; Emanuel 2016, 267–9).

A final issue to be addressed is the origin of the 'Sea-Peoples'. The Egyptian records refer to them as coming from either the 'northern foreign lands' (KRI V, 25: 4), the 'isles' (KRI V, 33: 4–6; 39: 14) or 'the northern foreign lands, which were in their isles' (KRI V, 32: 6–7). These terms, together with some disputable parallels between the names of the 'Sea-Peoples' and some classical Greek ethnonyms (Cline and O'Connor 2003; Woudhuizen 2006), have prompted the Aegean origin hypothesis.

However, as discussed above, local production of Mycenaean IIIC:1b in Syria and Philistia during the twelfth century BCE was an imitation of Aegean-derived pottery that was typical not of Greece but rather of Cyprus and south-west Asia Minor. This western Anatolian area of origin is hinted at also in the Egyptian record, which refers to the 'Sea-Peoples' as *thr* – a word reserved for Syrian warriors from Tunip and the allies of the Hittites in the great battle of Kadesh, providing yet another clue to the north Levantine origin of the Philistines (Ben-Dor Evian 2015; see already Singer 1988).

A NEW PHILISTINE PARADIGM

Five main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis above:

1. The land battles between Egypt and the 'Sea-Peoples' occurred along the northern frontiers of the Egyptian empire in the Levant.
2. The naval clashes were most likely raids on the prosperous Egyptian cities of the Nile Delta.
3. The 'Sea-Peoples' were essentially north Levantine (including western Anatolian) populations known as former allies of the Hittites.
4. There is no textual or archaeological evidence that Philistines were ever settled by the Egyptians in Canaan. There is, however, evidence of their settlement in Egypt and in Syria soon after the battles.
5. Some of those 'Sea-Peoples' established the kingdom of Palistin in the 'Amuq Plain. Others reached Philistia, probably by sea, as Egyptian rule over the Levant deteriorated.

A synthesis of all the data presented above and its new analysis may lead to the following historical reconstruction. The Philistines, among other 'Sea-Peoples', were displaced populations from Anatolia, Cilicia, Cyprus and Syria. Some of them were previously affiliated to the great armies of the Hittite and Syrian kingdoms of the Late Bronze Age (known as *thr*). Various groups, in search of subsistence, raided the shores of the eastern Mediterranean in the early twelfth century BCE. Other groups were involved in clashes in the hinterland of Cilicia and Syria. Once these populations presented a real threat on the northern frontiers of the Egyptian empire, clashes between them and the Egyptians began in Ramesses III's fifth year. The hostilities were halted in Syria, therefore allowing for the appearance of markers of 'deep change' following some severe site destructions (Tarsus, Tell Kazel, Tell Afis and Ras Ibn Hani). The Egyptian defence was successful in maintaining the Egyptian empire in the Levant under Ramesses III, hence the dearth of significant Aegean influences from Tell Kazel in the north, to Ashdod in the south, and the continued Egyptian control over Canaan from Beth Shean to Tel Sera'. This continued control is precisely the reason why early so-called 'Philistine' strata did not display evidence of 'deep change' in the Mycenaean

IIIC:1b phase, nor did they suffer any massive devastation at this point, as opposed to other sites in the northern Levant. Only after Egypt's loss of control over the Levant did new populations occupy areas in southern Canaan that were now a 'no man's land'. These new populations came from established settlements across the Levant, thus bringing with them Syrian, Egyptian and Cypriot traditions, inducing the emergence of Philistine culture known as the Bichrome phase.

Thus, Philistine history is far more complex and intriguing than previously assumed. This revised paradigm may well provide a basis for new research in a way that better accommodates the archaeological evidence.

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ABBREVIATIONS

MH I	Epigraphic Survey1930: *Medinet Habu I: Earlier Historical Records of Ramesses III* (Chicago, OIP 8).
MH II	Epigraphic Survey1932: *Medinet Habu II: Later Historical Records of Ramesses III* (Chicago, OIP 9).
RIK IV	Epigraphic Survey1986: *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak IV: The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I* (Chicago, OIP 107).

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