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The End and Disappearance of the Biblical Philistines: Archaeological and Historical Evidence and Comparison to the Israelite and Judahite Exiles

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Introduction

The biblical Philistines and the archaeological evidence of the Philistine culture have been extensively discussed for more than a century.[1] Most of the

1 E.g., T. Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982); J. F. Brug, *A Literary and Archaeological Study of the Philistines*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series 265 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1985); N.K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean*, Ancient Peoples and Places (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985); E. Noort, *Die Seevölker in Palästina,* Palaestina Antiqua 8 (Kampen: Pharos, 1994); L. E. Stager, "The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan (1185–1050 BCE)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* , ed. Thomas E. Levy (London: Leicester University, 1995), 332–48; C. S. Ehrlich, *The Philistines in Transition: A History from Ca. 1000–730 B.C.E.*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); E. Oren, ed., *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment*, University Monograph 108: University Symposium Series 11 (Philadelphia: University Museum, 2000); A. Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration at the End of the Late Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); A. M. Maeir and L. A. Hitchcock, "The Appearance, Formation and Transformation of Philistine Culture: New Perspectives and New

attention on the textual and archaeological evidence relating to the Philistines has focused on the appearance, development and interactions during the Iron Age. Much less focus has been placed on the final phases of the Philistine culture,[2] and even more so, on the evidence for the disappearance of the Philistines from the historical stage.[3] In this paper, I will survey the final stages of the Philistine

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Finds," in *The Sea Peoples Up-To-Date: New Research on the Migration of Peoples in the 12th Century BCE* , ed. P. Fischer and T. Bürge, Denkschriften der Gesamtakademie 81: Contributions to the Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean 35 (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2017), 149–62; A. Maeir, "Innovations in the Study of the Philistines Following Twenty Five Years of Research at Tell Zafit/Gath," *Qadmoniot* 163 (2022): 2–23 (in Hebrew); A. M. Maeir, "Chapter 36. Philistines and Israelites/Judahites: Antagonism and Interaction," in *The Ancient Israelite World*, ed. K. H. Keimer and G. A. Pierce (Routledge Worlds; London: Taylor & Francis, 2023), 549–64.

2 For a few examples of those dealing with the Philistine in the late Iron Age, see, e.g.: L.E. Stager, "Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction: Kislev 604 BCE," *Eretz Israel* 25 (1996): 61*–74*; L. E. Stager, "Ashkelon on the Eve of Destruction in 604 B.C," in *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century B.C.*, ed. L. E. Stager, D. M. Master, and J. D. Schloen, Harvard Semitic Museum Publications, Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 3–11; S. Gitin, "Late Philistines," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East, Vol. 4*, ed. E.M. Meyers, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 311–13; S. Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings," in *The Book of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception*, ed. A. Lemaire and B. Halpern; Supplement to Vetus Testamentum 129 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 301–64; L. E. Stager, D. M. Master, and J. D. Schloen, *Ashkelon 3*; D. Master, "Nebuchadnezzar at Ashkelon," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 7 (2018): 79–92; S. Gitin, T. Dothan, and Y. Garfinkel, *Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavations 1985–1988, 1990, 1992–1995. Field IV Lower: The Elite Zone, Part II. The Iron Age IIC Late Philistine City*, Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Semitic Museum, 2017); S. Gitin, S. M. Ortiz, and T. Dothan, *Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavations 1994–1996, Field IV Upper and Field V, The Elite Zone Part 1: Iron Age IIC Temple Complex 650* (Tel Miqne 10/1; University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2022).

3 E.g., I. Eph'al, "The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th–5th Centuries B.E.: Maintenance and Cohesion," *Orientalia* 47 (1978): 74–90; I. Eph'al, "The Philistine Entity and the Origin of the Name 'Palestine'," in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and*

culture in the late Iron Age, and discuss what happened to this culture (and related populations) at the very end of the Iron Age and in the following Babylonian and Persian Periods. This will include a short review of the archaeological and textual evidence relating to Philistia during this time frame. In addition, I will discuss what happened to the Philistines and their culture after the Iron Age, and the evidence for the exile of people from Philistia to Mesopotamia by the Babylonians, and textual evidence for their presence there, and their ultimate disappearance. I will summarize what became of the Philistines and their culture, and was there any cultural or toponymic continuity of the Philistines and their culture in later periods. Finally, I will then present a brief comparison between the evidence of the Philistine exile in Mesopotamia to that of the Israelite and Judahite exiles.

The Philistines and their Culture in the Late Iron Age

Following the destruction of Philistine Gath, the largest city in the southern Levant (and Philistia) by Hazael of Aram in ca. 830 BCE,[4] the four other major

Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg, ed. M. Cogan, B.L. Eichler, and J.H. Tigay (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 31*–35*(in Hebrew); I. Eph'al, "The First Generations in Babylonian Exile: Onomastic Observations," *Eretz Israel* 32 (Joseph Naveh Volume) (2016): 12 (in Hebrew with English abstract); R. Zadok, "Phoenicians, Philistines and Moabites," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 230 (1978), 61; Stager, "Ashkelon and the Archaeology"; Stager, "Ashkelon on the Eve"; Gitin, "Late Philistines"; Gitin, "Philistines in the Book".

4 E.g., A. M. Maeir, "The Historical Background and Dating of Amos VI 2: An Archaeological Perspective from Tell es-Safi/Gath," *Vetus Testamentum* 54 (2004): 319–34; A. M. Maeir, "Philistine Gath After 20 Years: Regional Perspectives on the Iron Age at Tell es-Safi/Gath," in *The Shephelah during the Iron Age: Recent Archaeological Studies*, ed. O. Lipschits and A. M. Maeir (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 133–54; A. M. Maeir, "The Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi/Gath Archaeological Project: Overview," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 80 (2017): 212–31; A. M. Maeir, "Gath of the Philistines: A New View of Ancient Israel's Archenemy," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2024): 38–45;

Philistine sites, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron, continue to exist.[5] In fact, throughout the 8th and 7th centuries BCE, these cities seemingly thrive and exhibit vibrant material culture and development. While archaeologically, little is known about the city of Gaza, excavations on the periphery of the city, as well as in nearby sites, indicate the ongoing development and prosperity in the region.[6] Ashkelon at the time was a major trading hub, with evidence of impressive international connections throughout the Mediterranean.[7] Similarly, Ekron is extensively developed and from at least the late 8th century BCE and until the late 7th century BCE, is major economic power, becoming a major producer of olive oil, exporting olive oil throughout the Mediterranean.[8] Ashdod's picture is less clear. While it has been posited that the city continues to exist until the late 7th century BCE (and I tend to agree with this),[9] others suggest that it lost importance in the late 8th century BCE, following the campaigns of Sargon II.[10]

As opposed to the highly unique culture of the Philistines in the early Iron

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D. Namdar, et al., "The 9th Century BCE Destruction Layer at Tell es-Safi/Gath, Israel: Integrating Macro- and Microarchaeology," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 38, no. 12 (2011): 3471–82; S. Gur-Arieh and A. M. Maeir, "Area C: The Siege Trench and Other Features," in *Tell es-Safi/Gath II: Excavations and Studies*, ed. A. M. Maeir and J. Uziel, Ägypten und Altes Testament 105 (Münster: Zaphon, 2020), 117–88.

5 For surveys of the archaeological and textual evidence on these four cities, see, e.g., Gitin, "Philistines in the Book"; A. M. Maeir, "Thoughts on the Development of Urbanism in Iron Age Philistia," in *Urbanism in the Iron Age Levant and Beyond,* ed. A. M. Maeir, S. Albaz, and A. Berlejung, Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times (RIAB) 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 185–224.

6 E.g., Maeir, "Thoughts," 201.

7 E.g., Stager et al., *Ashkelon 3*; Maeir, "Thoughts," 198–200.

8 E.g., Gitin, "Late Philistines"; Maeir, "Thoughts," 192–195.

9 D. Ben-Shlomo, "The Iron Age Sequence of Tel Ashdod: A Rejoinder to 'Ashdod Revisited' by I. Finkelstein and L. Singer-Avitz," *Tel Aviv* 30 (2003): 83–107; Maeir, "Thoughts," 196–198.

10 I. Finkelstein and L. Singer-Avitz, "'Ashdod Revisited' - Maintained," *Tel Aviv* 31, (2004): 122–35.

Age, in which a broad range of foreign (mainly Aegean, but not only) and local influences can be seen in the Philistine material culture, and which is quite different from the material culture of many other regional cultures in the southern Levant during this period, in the late Iron Age, the material culture in Philistia is less distinctive in comparison to other regional cultures. While there is some continuity in Aegean-related customs in the late Iron Age (such as in names), for the most part, the material culture of Philistia is quite similar to the material culture of other adjacent regions (Israelite, Judahite, Phoenician, etc.), even if there are specific regional aspects that can be defined (such as in pottery). That said, it is clear from biblical and extra-biblical texts that both the Philistines themselves, and other peoples as well, related to the Philistines as a unique and defined cultural group.[11]

In any case, it is clear that Philistia, and the Philistine cities, played an important role in the late Iron Age, both as centers of trade, but perhaps more so, as being situated on the land bridge connecting the Levant with Egypt, and the ongoing attempts of the Assyrians in the 2nd half of the 8th century BCE and the 1st half of the 7th century BCE, to invade and conquer Egypt.[12]

Intense Assyrian interest in the region begins in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, particularly with his campaign to Philistia in 734 BCE, during which the cities of Gaza and Ashkelon, and their respective kings, Hanno, and Mitinti, were made

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11 For discussions on the material culture of the Philistines in the early and later Iron Age, see, e.g., the studies noted above in Note 1. For a review of the late Iron Age pottery of Philistia, as one of the regional late Iron Age pottery assemblages with the Southern Levant, see S. Gitin, "Chapter 3.5. Iron Age IIC: Philistia," in *The Ancient Pottery of Israel and Its Neighbors from the Iron Age to the Hellenistic Period*, Vol. 1, ed. S. Gitin (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2015), 383–418.

12 For summaries and discussions, see, e.g., H. Tadmor, "Philistia Under Assyrian Rule," *Biblical Archaeologist* 29 (1966): 86–102; Y. Thareani, "The Empire and the 'Upper Sea': Assyrian Control Strategies Along the Southern Levantine Coast," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 375 (2016): 77–102; J. T. Walton, "Assyrian Interests in the West: Philistia and Judah," *Eretz Israel* 33 (Stager Volume) (2018): 175*–182*.

vassals.[13] In 720 BCE, Sargon II campaigned to Philistine due to a rebellion against Assyria. Gaza was captured, and its king Hanno, was exiled. At this time, due to the importance of southern Philistia, both as a hub of trade (from Arabia and beyond) and as a gateway to Egypt, the Assyrians established a karu, a sealed port.[14]

Azuri, the King of Ashdod, rebelled against Assyria in 713 BCE, and Sargon II placed his brother, Ahimiti, in his place. His reign did not last long, as he was deposed by Iamani (who was perhaps of Greek origin). Iamani created a coalition with other Philistine cities and other southern Levantine polities, which led Sargon II to campaign again to Philistia in 712 BCE. During this campaign, Ashdod was recaptured, and the city and the region around was turned into an Assyrian province, and an Assyrian palace was built at this time next to city of Ashdod. Ekron may have also been conquered in this campaign.

From the time of Sargon II and into the 7th century BCE the impressive economic growth in Philistia can be seen. Documents recording tributes from Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron are dated to his reign.[15]

Following the death of Sargon II in battle, in 705 BCE, and his son Sennacherib becoming King of Assyria, insurrections occurred throughout the Assyrian Empire. In Palestine, Hezekiah, King of Judah, led a rebellion against the Assyrian, including among other participants, the king of Ashkelon and the leaders of Ekron (who deposed their king, Padi, and turned him over to Hezekiah of Judah). In 701 BCE, Sennacherib campaigns of the region. He spared Ashdod after its king Mitinti pays tribute, but then goes on to campaign in Philistia and Judah,

13 On Tiglath-Pileser III's impact in Philistia, see e.g.: Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings," 314; J. Elayi, *Tilgath-Pileser III, Founder of the Assyrian Empire*, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 31 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2022), 135–138.

14 E.g. Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings," 314–316.

15 For recent surveys of Sargon II's campaigns to Philistia and in particular to Ashdod and related issues, see: Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings," 316–317; J. Elayi, *Sargon II, King of Assyria*, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 22 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 57–61.

during which the king of Ashkelon, Sidqi is overthrown and replaced by the son of the former king Rukibtu, Sharru-lu-dari, who is loyal to Assyria. Sennacherib then besieges Ekron, which capitulates, kills the rebellious leaders of the city, and reinstates Padi as the king, who had been released by Hezekiah after Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE.[16]

From this point, Philistia is under the complete control of the Assyrian Empire, and its crucial strategic, economic and political role is seen. It is during this period, most probably, that Philistia is an important player in the so-called *Pax Assyriaca*.[17]

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16 For a recent survey of Sennacherib's campaign in Philistia in 710 BCE and related issues, see: J. Elayi, *Sennacherib, King of Assyria*, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 24 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), 61–69.

17 On the *Pax Assyriaca* in general, see most recently, B. Toro, *The Pax Assyriaca: The Historical Evolution of Civilisations and the Archaeology of Empires* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2022). There is a debate on its impact in Philistia. For those who stress this impact, see, e.g.: S. Gitin, "The Neo-Assyrian Empire and Its Western Periphery: The Levant, with a Focus on Philistine Ekron," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995*, ed. S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 77–103; S. Gitin, "Neo-Assyrian and Egyptian Hegemony Over Ekron in the Seventh Century: A Response to Lawrence E. Stager," *Eretz Israel* 27 (2003): 55*–61*; Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings"; F. M. Fales, "On Pax Assyriaca in the Eight-Seventh Century BC and Its Implications," in *Swords Into Plowshares: Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations*, eds. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 18–3; K. L. Younger, "The Assyrian Impact on the Southern Levant in Light of Recent Study," *Israel Exploration Journal* 65 (2015): 179–204; Y. Thareani, "The Empire and the 'Upper Sea': Assyrian Control Strategies Along the Southern Levantine Coast," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 375 (2016): 77–102. For suggestions that the impact of the Assyrian Empire on Philistia were less dramatic, see, e.g.: N. Na'aman, "Ashkelon Under the Assyrian Empire," in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager,* ed. J. David Schloen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 351–59; Stager, "Ashkelon on the Eve," 10; A. Faust, *The Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Southwest: Imperial Domination and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Archaeological evidence of the flourishing of Philistia is well-evidenced at Ekron, where large scale monumental buildings, including a massive temple, and extensive evidence of a large scale, top-down construction of an olive industry is found.[18] Similarly, at Ashkelon, rich evidence of economic and trade activity is found from this period.[19] Assyrian style architecture and finds at, e.g., Tell Jemmeh,[20] Tel Sera[21] Ashdod,[22] and Ashdod-Yam[23] can be connected to this period as well.

In light of their loyalty during the 701 BCE revolt, Sennacherib transferred to the kings of the Philistine cities, territories in western Judah that were wrested from the Kingdom of Judah during the campaign, and in turn, the Philistine cities remain loyal vassals.[24] Throughout the 1st half of the 7th century BCE, this status is retained. They support Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon's military campaign towards Egypt in 679 BCE,[25] and Ikausu of Ekron, Ahimilki of Ashdod, Mitinti of Ashkelon, and Sillibel of Gaza, are among the kings who come to Nineveh in

18 E.g., Gitin, "Late Philistines"; Maeir, "Thoughts," 192–195.

19 Stager, et al., *Ashkelon 3*; Maeir, "Thoughts," 198–200.

20 D. Ben-Shlomo, "Tell Jemmeh, Philistia and the Neo-Assyrian Empire During the Late Iron Age," *Levant* 46 (2014): 58–88.

21 E.g., E. D. Oren, "Ethnicity and Regional Archaeology: The Western Negev Under Assyrian Rule," in *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990: Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, June-July 1990* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 102–5.

22 E. Kogan-Zehavi, "An Assyrian Building South of Tel Ashdod," *Qadmoniot* 130 (2005): 87–90.

23 A. Fantalkin, et al., "Iron Age Remains from Ashdod-Yam: An Interim Report (2013–2019)," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 12 (2024): 250–97.

24 See, e.g., Elayi, *Sennacherib*, 78–79.

25 Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian Rule," 98; M. Cogan, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel*, The Biblical Encyclopedia Library 19 (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 132–137 (in Hebrew); Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings," 317.

677 BCE, to assist in the construction of Esarhaddon's palace there.[26]

Following this campaign, the Assyrian presence continues, but there is much less documentary evidence of this. Among the limited evidence, Assyrian texts found at Gezer, dating to 651 and 649, along with other Assyrian related finds, inform us of the continued presence.[27]

Sometime in the early parts of the 2nd half of the 7th century BCE, the situation in Philistia becomes less stable. Although uncorroborated through other textual or archaeological evidence, Herodotus tells of a 29-year long Egyptian siege of Ashdod,[28] and that the Scythians destroyed a temple dedicated to Astarte in Ashkelon.[29] But there is no evidence that the Assyrian control of the region waned up until ca. 623 BCE when there was a major revolt against the Assyrian Empire in Babylonia.[30]

With the Assyrian withdrawal, whatever the exact date of this was, the Egyptian Kingdom steps into the imperial vacuum that was created.[31] The Egyptian involvement as an ally of the Assyrians in their battle against the King of Akkad in 616 BCE on the upper Euphrates, most likely indicates Egyptian control

26 E.g. Cogan, *Raging*, 133; Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings," 317–319.

27 E.g., R. Reich and B. Brandl, "Gezer Under Assyrian Rule," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 117 (1985): 41–54; M. Cogan, *Bound for Exile: Israelites and Judeans Under Imperial Yoke. Documents from Assyria and Babylonia* (A Carta Handbook; Jerusalem: Carta, 2013), 25–29; T. Ornan, S. Ortiz, and S. Wolff, "A Newly Discovered Neo-Assyrian Cylinder Seal from Gezer in Context," *Israel Exploration Journal* 63 (2013): 6–25.

28 Herodotus, *Histories* 2:157.1.

29 Herodotus, *Histories* 1:105.

30 For a recent review and discussion of the background, processes and results of the collapse of the Assyrian Empire in general, including in the Southern Levant, see Toro, *Pax Assyriaca*, 183–196. For specific discussions, Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah Under Josiah," *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 3–71; Gitin, "Philistines in the Book of Kings," 318.

31 See, e.g., D. Kahn, "Some Remarks on the Foreign Policy of Psammetichus II in the Levant (595–589 B.C.)," *Journal of Egyptian History* 1 (2008): 140–57; B. U. Schipper, "Egypt and the Kingdom of Judah Under Josiah and Jehoiakim," *Tel Aviv* 37 (2010): 200–226.

in Philistia, which enabled them to move through this region. In 609 BCE, the Egyptian king Necho II once again campaigns through the Levant, to assist the Assyrians in battle against the Babylonians (and along the way apparently kills Josiah of Judah at Megiddo), once again indicating Egyptian control of Philistia. It has been suggested that archaeological evidence of the Egyptian rule in Philistia can be seen at the fortress of Mezad Hashavyahu, north of Ashdod.[32] The final phases of the Iron Age at Ekron[33] and at Ashkelon,[34] provide impressive evidence of the material culture of Philistia during this time.

The geopolitical picture in Philistia soon changes. In 605 BCE, the Babylonian King Nebuchadrezzar captures the southern Levant, and the Babylonians replaced the Egyptians, who had earlier replaced the Assyrians, as imperial rulers of this region. Soon after, in 604/603 BCE, the Philistine cities revolt against Babylon, which caused him to campaign to the region and capture and utterly destroy Ashkelon.[35] It is during this campaign that most probably the other cities of Philistia (Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza) were destroyed as well.[36] The scorched earth policy of the Babylonians, somewhat different from that of the Assyrians, wrought destruction and havoc on Philistia and the Philistines. The surviving people of Philistia, those who had not been killed in the onslaught, were taken as captives to Babylonia.[37]

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32 A. Fantalkin, "Mezad Hashavyahu: Its Material Culture and Historical Background," *Tel Aviv* 28 (2001): 3–165.

33 E.g., Gitin, "Late Philistines"; Maeir, "Thoughts," 192–195.

34 Stager et al., *Ashkelon 3*; Maeir, "Thoughts, 198–200.

35 Stager, "Ashkelon and the Archaeology"; Stager, "Ashkelon on the Eve"; Master, "Nebuchadnezzar at Ashkelon."

36 Gitin, "Philistines in the Book," 319.

37 Gitin, "Philistines in the Book," 319.

Philistia after the Iron Age

After the Babylonian destruction of sites in Philistia, there is a major cultural break in the region. Many sites are abandoned, and those that are occupied show a material culture closely connected to that of Phoenicia, most likely indicating a change in the cultural affiliation and population.[38] To this one can add that according to Herodotus, Gaza was controlled at this time by an Arab king.[39] As Rainey suggested, this change in political affiliation, and perhaps population, in Gaza may have occurred in the mid-6th century BCE, during the reign of the Babylonian King Nabunaid.[40] This likely dovetails with the fact, mentioned above, that the Iron Age population in Philistia was probably either killed or exiled to Babylonia in and after the Babylonian campaigns to the region. That said, it is hard to believe that all of the Iron Age population of Philistia was completely eradicated, but there

38 See, e.g., E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, Vol. II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods (732–332 B.C.E.)*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 407–412; L. E. Stager and J. D. Schloen, *Introduction: Ashkelon and Its Inhabitants* (Harvard Semitic Museum Publications, Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 9; Y. Shalev, "Between the Tyrian Ashkelon and Sidonian Dor: Settlement Patterns in Southern Phoenicia in the Persian Period," *Eretz-Israel* 33 (2018): 238–51; S. Martin and Y. Shalev, "The Reoccupation of Southern Phoenicia in the Persian Period: Rethinking the Evidence," in *Material, Method, and Meaning: Papers in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology in Honor of Ilan Sharon*, ed. U. Davidovich, S. Matskevich, and N. Yahalom-Mack, Ägypten und Altes Testament 110 (Münster: Zaphon, 2022), 101–116; R. Boehm, "The Status of Gaza in the Persian Period: Imperial Dynamics, Local Agency, and Long-Distance Trade," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 11 (2024): https://doi.org/10.1515/janeh-2023-0015

39 Herodotus, *Histories* 3:5.

40 A. F. Rainey, "Herodotus' Description of the East Mediterranean Coast," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 321 (2001): 59–60. See though R. Boehm ("The Status of Gaza") who believes that Gaza was not under Arabian control in the Achaemenid period.

is little if any evidence of continuity. In fact, the only evidence of some sort of cultural continuity in Philistia in later periods, is the mention of the destruction of the Temple of Dagon in Gaza by Jonathan the Hasmonean, in the Book of Maccabees, in 147 BCE.[41]

Literary evidence of Philistines after the Iron Age can be found in Babylonia. In 592 BCE, Babylonian ration lists mention the sons of Aga, the last king of Ashkelon, and other Ashkelonites.[42] Similarly, the kings of Ashdod and Gaza are mentioned in 570 BCE connection to the construction of a new palace by Nebuchadnezzar.[43] The latest references to people from Philistia (or at least that their families were originally from there) is from the Murašû archives of Nippur, from the second half of the 5th century.[44] There, people identified by their supposed cities of origins, "Iš-qal-lu-nu" (Ashkelon) and "Ḫa-za-tu" (Gaza), as well as Bit Ar- ṣa-ʿa (Arza, most likely identified at Jemmeh[45]). In addition to this, a settlement called pal(-la)-áš-ti – (seemingly named after the region of Philistia) from the region of Babylon, is also mentioned in a Neo-Babylonian text (possibly dating to the reign of Nabopolassar).[46] This might indicate that until this point some of the exiles from Philistia still retained some sort of local group identity,

41 1 Macc 10: 83–84.

42 E. F. Weidner, "Jojachin, König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschriften" (Tome Second Mélanges Syrien offerts a Monsieur René Dussaud; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1939), 923–35; D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon,* Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1983 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 25.

43 James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edition no. 3 with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), 308.

44 I. Eph'al, "The Western Minorities in Babylonia," 80.

45 D. Ben-Shlomo and G. V. Van Beek, "Introduction," in *The Smithsonian Institution Excavation at Tell Jemmeh, Israel, 1970–1990*, ed. D. Ben-Shlomo and G. V. Van Beek, Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology 50 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2014), 3.

46 R. Zadok and T. Zadok, Neo/Late Babylonian Geography and Documentation, *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* (2003/2): 35–36.

based on their places of origin, whether specific cities or the general region of Philistia, while in exile in Babylonia.

From this point onwards, there is no additional textual, or archaeological, evidence of people who identify as being connected to the Iron Age Philistine culture in general, and to the Iron Age cities of Philistia specifically. It should be noted that as opposed to what happened with the Israelite/Judahite exiles in Babylonia (as reflected in the biblical and cuneiform texts [see below]), those exiled from Philistia display no clear evidence of political organization that reflected their origins, or a significant retention of cultural, ethnic or other identities (save for those preserving their association with their cities of origin). That said, the limited textual evidence might hide this. In any case, during the Achaemenid Period, at the time that the Jews receive official sanction to return to Judah and rebuild some sort of ethno-religious identity (in the *pahwat yehud*), there is not a parallel process that occurred with exiled Philistines, most likely indicating that at least at that time, the group and community identity of the Philistines had waned (and as mentioned above, Philistia was inhabited by a population largely associated with Phoenician culture).

Despite the disappearance of the Philistine group identity, the group's name didn't disappear. The region of Philistia was defined as a distinct region with a well-known toponym during the Iron Age (known in biblical, Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian texts). This toponym continued to be used, in the biblical texts (some of which clearly date to post-Iron Age times) and in Greek sources, Herodotus uses the term Palaestina (Παλαιστίνη).[47] The name for this region continued to

47 Herodotus, *Historiae II*, 104: 3. For various discussion of this, see, e.g., M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences, 1976), Volume I, 2–4; B. Lewis, "Palestine: On the History and Geography of a Name". *International History Review* 2/1 (1980): 1–12; Eph'al, "The Philistine Entity," 34*–35*; Rainey, "Herodotus' Description," 57–63; C. A. Alonso Serrano, "The Name 'Palestine'

be used in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods. Following the defeat of the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 132–135 CE (the Bar-Kochba Revolt), the Roman Emperor Hadrian changed the name of the Roman province (as one of the punishments to the Jews for their revolt), from Judea to Syria-Palaestina, borrowing the name for the region of Philistia to encompass the entire southern Levant.[48] This in turn led to the region being called Palestine in later periods and cultures, up until modern times, when the British Mandate over Palestine, after World War I, was called "Palestine," and those who lived in the region were termed "Palestinians."[49]

Thus, the region continued to be called Philistia (or a related name) long after the Philistines and their culture had disappeared. While there is no direct cultural and/or genetic continuity between Philistines and the current Palestinians, the name of the region (Palestine), and from there its inhabitants (Palestinians) is connected to the original Philistines.

Comparing the Philistine and Judahite/Israelite Exiles in Babylonia

In light of the discussion above of the evidence for Philistines following their exile to Babylonia in the late 7th century BCE, I'd like to briefly compare this

in Classical Greek Texts," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 20/2 (2021): 146–179

48 E.g., L. H. Feldman, "Some Observations on the Name of Palestine," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 61 (1990): 1–23;

49 It should be noted that in official stamps and coins of the British Mandate, the Hebrew letters aleph and yod were added, symbolizing the Hebrew name of the land, Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel). E.g., H. Gerber, "'Palestine' and Other Territorial Concepts in the 17th Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998): 563–572; Howard Grief, "The Name Palestine and the Meaning of Palestinian Nationality during the Mandate Period," *The Legal Foundation and Borders of Israel Under International Law: A Treatise on Jewish Sovereignty Over the Land of Israel* (Mazo Publishers, 2008), 470–482

to what is known about the Judahite/Israelite exiles in Babylonia, whether those exiled yet during the Iron Age, first by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians, or the major Babylonian exiles at the very end of the Iron Age.

As mentioned, the Israelite and Judahite exiles commence in the 8th century BCE, and continue until the early 6th century BCE. This can be seen in sources from the late 8th century BCE through late 6th century BCE. These exiled people were settled by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires in northern and southern Mesopotamia.[50]

50 The literature on the Israelite and Judahite exiles in Mesopotamia, from the 8th and 7th centuries BCE (under the Assyrians, followed by the 6th century (under the Babylonians), and into the Achaemenid period is immense, particularly in the last decade or so, due to the publication of the el-Yahudu tablets. See, e.g., F. Joannès and A. Lemaire, "Contrats Babyloniens d'Époque Achéménide du Bît-Abî Râm avec une Épigraphe Araméenne," *RA* 90 (1996): 41–60; F. Joannès and A. Lemaire, "Trois Tablettes Cunéiformes à Onomastique Ouest-sémitique (Collection Sh. Moussaieff)," *Transeu* 17 (1999): 17–34; K. Abraham, "West Semitic and Judean Brides in Cuneiform Sources from the Sixth Century BCE: New Evidence from a Marriage Contract from Āl-Yahudu," *Archiv für Orientforschung* (2005): 198–219; C. Wunsch, "Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia," in *Aramaeans, Chaldaeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.*, ed. A. Berlejung and M. Streck, LAOS 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 247–260; C. Wunsch, *Judeans by the Waters of Babylon: New Historical Evidence in Cuneiform Sources from Rural Babylonia* (Babylonische Archive 6; Dresden: Islet, 2022); W. Horowitz, Y. Greenberg, and P. Zilberg, *By the Rivers of Babylon: Cuneiform Documents from the Beginning of the Babylonian Diaspora* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, 2015); L. E. Pearce and C. Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia In the Collection of David Sofer*, Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology, Vol. 28 (CDL Press, 2015); R. Zadok, "Israelites and Judeans in the Neo-Assyrian Documentation (732–602 B.C.E.): An Overview of the Sources and a Socio-Historical Assessment," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 374 (2015): 159–89; I. Eph'al, "The First Generations in Babylonian Exile," 11–15; A. Berlejung, "New Life, New Skills, and New Friends in Exile: The Loss and Rise of Capitals of the Judeans in Babylonia," in *Alphabets, Texts and Artifacts in the Ancient Near East: Studies Presented to Benjamin Sass*, ed. I. Finkelstein et al (Paris: Van Dieren, 2016), 12–45; A. Berlejung, "Social

Evidence of this can be seen in a wide range of documents, including court documents (Jehoiachin), contracts, loans, administrative documents, marriage contracts, as well as Assyrian reliefs depicting Judahites in captivity.[51] Interestingly, as of now there is no direct archaeological evidence of these exiled populations.

The various strands of evidence can be mined to show a broad range of behaviors of these exiles while in Mesopotamia. This includes some retention of identity (use of Yahwistic names), but on the other hand, some evidence of intermarriage. Socio-economic processes can be seen, such as "social climbing" and attempts of economic improvement. Similarly, some Mesopotamian influenced behaviors can be discerned, such as, e.g. agriculture, and possibly, an overall preference of endogamous marriage.

In the Achaemenid period, when the exiles return to the Levant, to Yehud, several things can be seen.[52] To start with, as noted above, the Jews return to

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Climbing in the Babylonian Exile," in *Wandering Arameans: Arameans Outside Syria: Textual and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. A. Berlejung et al., LAOS 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017), 101–124; A. Berlejung, "Social Demarcation Lines and Marriage Rules in Urban Babylonia and Their Impact on the Golah," in *Tell it in Gath: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Israel: Essays in Honor of Aren M. Maeir on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. I. Shai et al., ÄAT 90 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 1051–1077; A. Berlejung, "A Sketch of the Life of the Golah in the Countryside of Babylonia: Risks and Options of Unvoluntary Resettlement in the Sixth Century BCE," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 11 (2022): 224–64; T. Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE*, CHANE 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 110–222; L. Pearce, "New Perspectives on the Exile in Light of Cuneiform Texts," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Historical Books of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. B. E. Kelle and B. A. Strawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 130–46.

51 As seen in the various studies in the previous note.

52 Numerous studies cover these processes during the Achaemenid Period. E.g., C. E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period*, JSOT Supplement 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1999); D. V. Edelman, *The Origins of the "Second" Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005); L. L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period. Vol. 1, The*

Yehud with official Persian recognition – clear evidence that they are considered a defined ethnic/national identity and that this identity serves as the basis for the formation of the Jewish group identity in this period. Even if the extent of the Jews returning from exile, and their influence when they arrived might be exaggerated in the biblical texts, nevertheless, some Jews did return to the land.[53] The very name of the province, Yehud, is evidence of this identity. At the same time, these returnees seem to bring with them some customs and behaviors that they absorbed in Babylonia, such as, possibly, endogamous marriage (as seen in Nehemiah's decrees against marrying foreign women), and perhaps some, albeit limited, Mesopotamian and Persian influences in cult and material culture. To this one can add the apparent tensions between the returning exiles and the local Judahites who had remained in the land.

With this in mind, we can now compare the Philistine and Israelite/Judahite exiles (Table 1): How can these differences be explained? I believe several possible aspects may have contributed to these dissimilarities.

To start with, during the period of exile in Mesopotamia, there was an extended period in which the Israelite/Judahite exiles formed and retained their identities, and distinct "communities of identity". On the other hand, there is no evidence of such processes among the Philistine exiles. To this can be added that from the Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions, it is clear that large numbers of Israelites/

Persian Period (539–331 BCE) (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006); O. Lipschits and M. Oeming, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006); O. Lipschits, G. N. Knoppers, and M. Oeming, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

53 E.g. O. Lipschits, "'Those Who Live in These Ruins in the Land of Israel' (Ezekiel 33:24): Some Thoughts on Living in the Shadow of the Ruins in Persian Period Judah," in *Yahwism Under the Achaemenid Empire: Professor Shaul Shaked in Memoriam*, eds. G. Barnea and R. G. Kratz, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 548 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), 279–303.

Table 1 Comparison of the Philistine and Israelite/Judahite ExilesComparison of the Philistine

Israel/Judah	Philistia
Destructions and Exiles over Extended Period (8th–6th cent.)	Destructions over Extended Period; Exiles only in late 7th cent.
Large numbers exiled	Not clear how many exiled
King of Judah in Exile	Kings of Ashkelon, Gaza and Ashdod in Exile
Extensive evidence of Judahites in exile	Minimal evidence of Philistines in exile
Apparent retention of city/national/ ethnic identities	No clear evidence of long-term retention of identities, save for a few named by city
Judeans recognized by Persians as distinct identity	Philistines not recognized as distinct political/ethnic identity
Tensions between locals and returnees in Yehud; new material culture appears	Culture in Persian Period Philistia is wholly Phoenician
Full "package" of Judean material and cultural identity in Persian Period Yehud and beyond.	Region retains name, but no other retention of Philistine identity (save for Hellenistic temple of Dagon)

Judahites were exiled. There is no such evidence regarding the Philistines, and perhaps, during the destruction of the Philistine cities, most of the population was killed and fewer people were exiled to Babylonia. An additional factor might have been that due to the massive destruction in Philistia, there were few if any remaining "Philistines," while in Judah – there was a certain amount of population from the original Judahite population that remained in the land, who continued to live there in the Achaemenid period, and were later joined by the returnees. As

mentioned above, when Philistia was resettled, it was resettled by people with a Phoenician affiliation, who brought in new traditions and memories. All this led to what was noted above: Yehud/Judah retains, or at least partially continues the identity of the Iron Age Judahites,[54] while the Philistine group identity disappears. Only the toponym of the region, Philistia, is retained, which continues to be used, over the centuries, as Palestine.

Summary

In summary, we can see that the Philistine culture and identity of the Iron Age, faced a major transformation at the end of the Iron Age. With limited continuity of identity following the exile of the remains Philistines to Babylonia, in later periods, the only clear continuity and memory of this culture is the retention of a toponym, Palestine, clearly connected to the original Iron Age toponym of the region. When compared to the process of retention and continuity of group identities, between the Philistines and the Israelites/Judahites, we can see a very contrasting pattern, of disappearance on the one hand, and rebuilding/reinventing on the other, seemingly classic examples, of the ebb and flow of historical circumstance.

54 The conflict between the Judeans and the Samaritans on their historical identity develops during this time as well, but is beyond the scope of this paper. See, e.g., G. N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); K. Weingart, "What Makes an Israelite an Israelite? Judean Perspectives on the Samarians in the Persian Period," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testatment* 42 (2017): 155–75; M. Kartveit, "Theories of the Origin of the Samaritans—Then and Now," *Religions* 10 (2019): 661.