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WE (AND) THE PHILISTINES:
MIGRATING ETHNIC GROUP? NEOLIBERAL ENTREPRENEURS? SETTLER-COLONIALISTS? OR GOOD PIRATES?

Raz Kletter

Abstract

In 1998, Neil Silberman showed how early scholarly portrayals of the Philistines reflected the values of the Victorians. The Philistines were presented by the Victorians either as good colonialists who brought an enlightened Indo-European civilization to the East, or as barbaric destroyers who ruined the supposedly decadent Canaanite culture. The time has come to reflect on more recent images of the Philistines. In the 1970–1980s, they went through a great transformation from a Bible-centered model or image of cruel invaders and enemies to that of an advanced, cultural people. Several other images have appeared since, competing for hegemony. I review them here, focusing especially on the most recent image of them as "merry pirates," which has not yet been studied critically. My aim here is not to support any particular "image" of the Philistines but to study these scholarly constructions and their relations to our time. Based on the results, it seems that the future of the Philistines may be as unpredictable as their past.
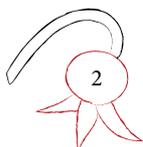
En 1998, Neil Silberman a montré comment les premières représentations savantes des Philistins reflétaient les valeurs des Victoriens. Les Philistins étaient présentés par les Victoriens comme de bons colonialistes apportant la civilisation indo-européenne héritière des Lumières à l'orient, ou comme des barbares qui détruisirent la culture cananéenne supposée décadente. Il est temps d'analyser des images plus récentes des Philistins. Dans les années 1970–1980, ils ont subi une grande transformation : décrits d'abord sur la base d'un modèle centré sur la Bible ou comme des envahisseurs et des ennemis cruels, ils sont maintenant devenus un peuple avancé et cultivé.

Plusieurs autres représentations sont apparues depuis, qui rivalisent pour s'imposer. Je les passe en revue ici, en me concentrant plus particulièrement sur l'image la plus récente de « joyeux pirates », qui n'a pas encore fait l'objet d'une étude critique. Mon but n'est pas de défendre une « représentation » particulière des Philistins, mais d'étudier ces constructions savantes et leurs liens avec notre époque. Au vu des résultats, il semble que l'avenir des Philistins soit aussi imprévisible que leur passé.

WE (AND) THE PHILISTINES: MIGRATING ETHNIC GROUP? NEOLIBERAL ENTREPRENEURS? SETTLER-COLONIALISTS? OR GOOD PIRATES?

Raz Kletter

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"The Philistines were mighty carousers" (Albright 1956, *115*)

"The Philistines were … cosmopolitan devotees of the grape" (Wilford 1992)

Introduction

In "The Sea Peoples, the Victorians, and Us," Neil Silberman (1998) showed how early scholarly portrayals of the Philistines related to the scholars' lives and worldviews.[1] Victorian scholars portrayed the

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[1] Cf. White (1984, 38): "In telling a story, the historian necessarily reveals a plot."

Philistines as good colonialists and Indo-European civilizers. For R. A. Stewart Macalister, they were:

> The only cultured or artistic race who ever occupied the soil of Palestine … Whatsoever things raised life in the country above the dull animal existence of fellahin were due to this people.[2]

The Philistines were—like Macalister—foreigners who came "from their healthy maritime life to the fever-haunted and sirocco-blasted land of Canaan" (Macalister 1913, 72). Another early view presented them as barbaric destroyers of a supposedly decadent Canaanite culture (Silberman 1998, 270–71).

More than a century separates us from the Victorians: it is time to reflect on more recent portrayals and, especially, widen our perspective to also study and review non-European scholars.[3] My aim in this article is not to support one specific interpretation of the Philistines over another. Rather, it is to investigate critically some of the scholarly constructions or "images" of these people and to discuss how these images relate to our time.
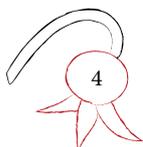
Migration of an Ethnic Group: The Enemies of Israel

From the beginning of research in the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, the Philistines were seen as a migrating ethnic group and the archenemies of Israel. Philistine ethnicity was a "given," easily identifiable in the archeological record—notably by the pottery called "Philistine" since 1908 (Albright 1931, 54) (Fig. 1).

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[2] Macalister 1912, 58; cf. Macalister 1913, 129.

[3] Perhaps it is also time to note that while Silberman's article was published in a volume honoring the distinguished Israeli scholar Trude Dothan, it ignored Israeli research, moving from the British Mandate directly to Muhly (1992). Silberman worked in Israel as an assistant to Dothan, including on finds from Philistia (Silberman 2013: ix).

Fig. 1: Philistine Bichrome Pottery of the Iron Age I: deep crater (right), bottle (center) and stirrup jar (left). (Wikimedia Commons, author Hanay, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7f/Philistine_pottery.JPG)

The ability of biblical archeologists of that era to look at the Philistines without a biblical lens was limited. The Philistines were part of the "biblical people" (Dothan 1985, 175)—just not the best part. The Israelite-oriented attitude of William Albright left little room for the Philistines. He saw them as "invading hordes" and "northern barbarians" (Albright 1923, 16, n. 6; 1931, 57):

> The Philistines and the Tsikal [came] from the regions of the Aegean, bringing a rude barbaric energy from the north as well as exotic culture of Mycenaean type. Before the end of the century, they were menacing Israel seriously.[4]

Albright followed the biblical picture of the Philistines as the bad guys. They "threatened to reduce Israel to hopeless servitude" and "neglected no effort to assure their domination, if we may judge by their

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[4] Albright 1940, 219. On Albright's ideological positions, see Sherrard 2011, 35–109.

ruthless control of the manufacture of iron tools and weapons," while their leaders, the *seranim*, "seem to have been tyrants after the Aegean model" (Albright 1940, 221–22). Philistine wine craters and beer jugs proved that they were boozers (Albright 1956, 115).[5] Once they "overwhelmed" the Canaanites, they turned their attention to Israel, initiating "a century of desultory conflict." Only Saul and David prevented them from becoming "permanent lords of Palestine" (Albright 1963, 38) (Fig. 2).

G. Ernest Wright (1966, 73) followed suit: soon after settling down, the "rapid advancing tentacles of Philistine power were reaching down
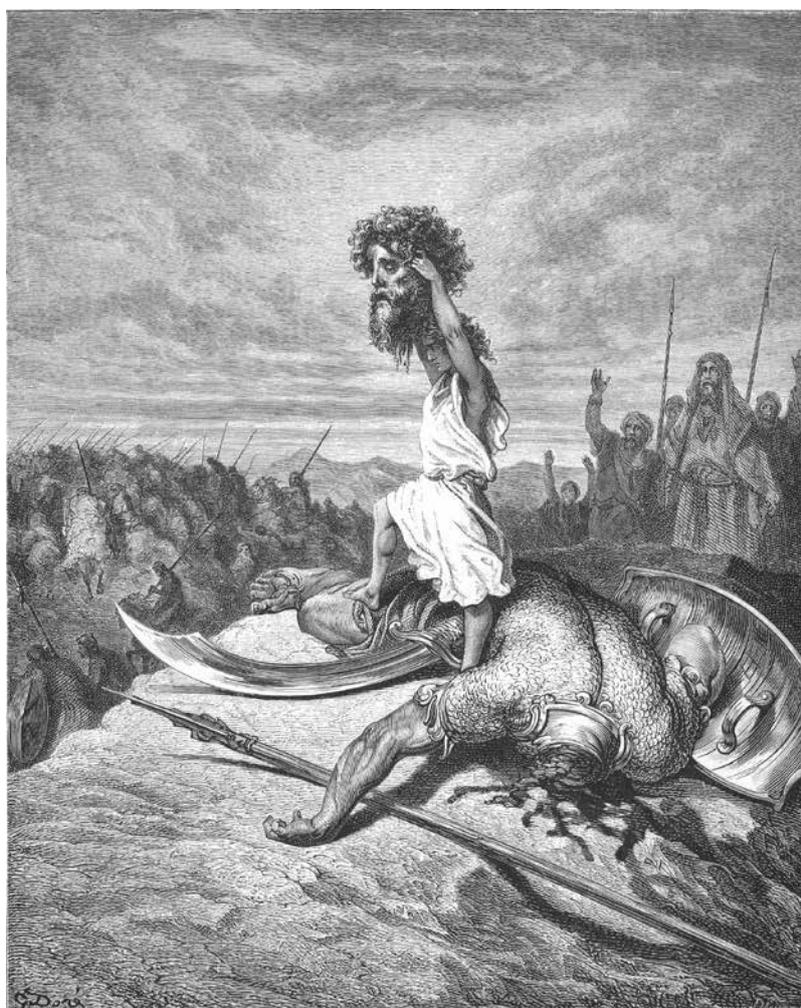

Fig. 2: David and Goliath (Gustav Doré, The Holy Bible with Illustrations, 1886, London: Cassel, Petter, and Galpin)

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[5] However, see Stager 1995, 345; Yasur-Landau 2005.

the Jordan Valley." Luckily, Saul and David saved the day (Wright 1966, 77–8). Trude Dothan's (1982, 296) classic book *The Philistines* concluded with the same happy ending.

Kathleen Kenyon (1979, 212, 232) followed the narrative of "barbaric groups" who produced a "dark age" that ended with King David's triumphs. Yet, her view was more balanced. The Philistines were settlers, not just raiders: they destroyed Canaanite cities, but also assimilated with the Canaanites (Kenyon 1979, 213–19).

Benjamin Mazar (1975, 268–69) described the "huge wave" of the Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, destroying, annihilating and looting; only Egypt was barely saved from this "holocaust." As usual, the historical role of the Philistines ended with their defeat by King David, but atypically Mazar (1975, 270; 1980) also described the Philistines positively as "tall people, of slim and erect stature" with an impressive material culture.

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From Ugly Ducklings to Beautiful Swans

Beginning with the 1970s, the Philistines underwent a great transformation, from being a despised people to being a cultured people. There were several factors behind this transformation.

The Copenhagen or "Minimalist" School (Thomas Thompson, Neils Peter Lemche, Philip R. Davies, and others) ushered in skeptical attitudes toward biblical historicity.[6] Hence, the biblically oriented, negative picture of the Philistines no longer carried the same weight. More important was the growth in excavations and publications about Philistia, as well as the development of ever-narrowing academic specializations. Iron Age Philistia become a full-fledged field of research, as exemplified by the career of the Israeli scholar Trude Dothan. Scholars who invest years in excavating and studying Philistia are likely to appreciate positively the material culture associated with the Philistines (Figs. 3–4).

For Amihai Mazar, the Philistines were part of a wave of "civilized immigrants" from the Mycenaean world:

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[6] See Ben Zvi 2002; Pfoh 2024.

Fig. 3: Tel Qasile, the Philistine Temple excavated by Amihai Mazar
(photo R. Kletter)

Fig 4: Philsitine Cult stand, Yavneh (9th Century BCE),
with standing female figures and palms (Photo R. Kletter

They should not be defined merely as sea raiders or pirates who caused destruction and devastation. … They retained a highly sophisticated urban culture and artistic traditions in a period of turmoil.[7]

In the opinion of Seymour Gitin:

The Philistines, contrary to the assumptions of some scholars, were not mere pirates who plundered and destroyed … Thus, on the basis of the archaeological record, we can conclude that the Philistines … were not the barbarians portrayed in the Bible, but rather the founders of a highly sophisticated society.[8]

Following the archeologists, the popular media reported that the Philistines "were not the bad guys, after all" but an "advanced society." Their pottery "demonstrates high artistic and esthetic abilities." They knew how to write, and formed "a great ancient civilization" (Pear 1983). They created grand architecture and imaginative, fine pottery—so they were no longer deserving of the withering epithet "Philistine" (Wilford 1992). A picture has emerged from the long-term excavations by Trude and Moshe Dothan "of the Philistines as great traders, master builders, and one of the most civilized peoples of their time" (Wilford 1992).

The supposedly Greek descent of the Philistines was a respectable, even "elevated" origin (Wilford 1992). Lawrence Stager called them "Mycenaean Greeks" (in Wilford 1992).[9] The Philistines' love of drinking turned from blemish to virtue. This new, positive image is an academic one, and is not yet shared by the public as a whole. The slur "Philistine" did not become obsolete.[10]

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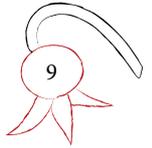
[7] Mazar 1985a, 105–6; cf. Mazar 1985b, 119–20.

[8] Gitin 2003, 59.

[9] Cf. Finkelberg 2005, 153; for criticism, see Middleton 2015. For the issue of imagining material cultures in the Aegean as "ethnic groups," see Maran 2022.

[10] It still lives in art, the academy, politics, etc. (Kistler 2016, 240). Intellectuals engage in a "Philistine controversy" (Beech and Roberts 2002), even if those who use this term are often placed in a worse light than their opponents (Jobling and Rose 1996, 383–84).

Earlier studies described a disappearance or assimilation of the Philistines during the tenth century BCE (Dothan 1982, 296; Bunimovitz 1990, 219). But the Philistines did not disappear:

> Their material culture shows signs of acculturation even though their sense of ethnic identity remained secure for at least another half millennium.[11]

> The Philistines did not disappear, but in fact continued to live and eventually prosper again at Ekron, where their history can be documented for four hundred more years.[12]

Migrants Out—Merchants In
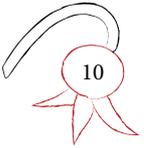
In the 1990s, scholars challenged the image of a migrating ethnic group, offering instead the picture of successful maritime merchants. This image came not from biblical archeologists but from scholars of the Cyprus and the Aegean. Discussing the Sea Peoples in Cyprus—in his view unrelated to the Philistines—James Muhly (1984, 1992) argued that the centralized Mycenaean palace economy blocked "entrepreneurial initiatives." After its collapse, people moved freely as "enterprising merchants and traders, exploiting new economic opportunities, new markets, and new sources of raw materials" (Muhly 1992, 19). Susan Sherratt (1998, 292) elaborated on this idea: the Sea Peoples were not an ethnic group, but an "economic and cultural community whose ostensibly 'ethnic' features are of structural rather than primarily genetic or linguistic significance."[13]

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[11] Stager 1995, 348.

[12] Gitin 2003, 60.

[13] In tandem, the pottery associated with the Sea Peoples is not "some kind of conscious ethnic denominator with genetic race or language embodied in the fabric" but "a continuation of the process of import substitution" (Sherratt 1998, 302). Arthur Knapp (2021) rejects the notion of large-scale migrations but without following the "mercantile model." On forced migration in archeology, see Hamilakis 2016.

Ethnicity started to become a bone of contention, but Sherratt's formulation of it was unfortunate. An ethnic community is, simultaneously, an economic and cultural community. Ethnicity is neither defined by "structural" nor by "genetic/linguistic" features. Such notions fit the older, "primordial" definitions of ethnicity. Newer definitions stress feelings and beliefs (Kletter 2014, with references).

According to Sherratt (1998, 294, 305–6), the Sea Peoples were the product of an expansion of international trade. They migrated and caused destruction, but these acts were of secondary importance and were the results of a greater initial cause. The "prime causes" were "changing economic strategies," namely, a shift from a centralized Bronze Age palace economy to a decentralized, entrepreneurial economy. The Sea Peoples were the "moguls" of Cyprus, who carried "low level uncontrolled trade" in an "aggressively open economy" (Sherratt 1998, 301, 305):

> They were probably a pretty cosmopolitan bunch … Many of them may have been living more or less where they were all the time, or have come from nowhere very far away at all … While the grouping of people under ethnic denominations was an important component of Egyptian and Hittite diplomatic and military rhetoric, [these denominations] may refer to little more than the inhabitants of a few individual cities whose names we cannot now identify—or indeed such ethnicities may not have existed consciously outside Egyptian diplomatic speak.[14]

Unexpectedly, Sherratt (1998, 307) ends her article by throwing in ethnic labels: the Sea Peoples were what the Greeks called "Phoenicians," "who saw themselves—insofar as they did collectively—first and foremost as *cnaʿani*" (Canaanite, in Hebrew).

Alexander Bauer applied Sherratt's model to the Philistines. They were an "emerging socio-economic group," or even an "emerging merchant class," forming a "network of decentralized maritime trade." Philistine settlements were not strongholds, but urban trading nodes (Bauer 1998, 149–52, 159). Places with a few Philistine items were not governed by Philistine elites but by locals. The Philistines did not "expand"

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[14] Sherratt 1998, 307.

into the periphery; rather, the Canaanites were drawn to the Philistine mercantile centers, which explains the Philistines' acculturation (Bauer 1998, 161).[15] Economic terms were used liberally to enhance this image ("freelance," "mercantile," "marketing strategy," etc.).

Michal Artzy employed this image to Tel Nami on the Carmel Coast. The "nomads of the sea" crossed the Carmel ridge, maybe to achieve "a more prosaic 'tax break.'". They were the employees of the economic powers, but when the latter collapsed, their "sailor's trade" became an "entrepreneurial vocation" (Artzy 1997, 439, 441, n. 4). A variety of economic terms garnishes her discussion: "subcontractors," "entrepôt," "capital," etc. However, the result is more romantic than capitalistic: the pirates of the sea meet the camel caravans, which carry exotic incense in (far too heavy, fragile) collar-rim jars.

Silberman (1998) tied the beginning of the "mercantile image" (Muhly 1992) to the rise of neoliberalism. Indeed, proponents of the "mercantile image" tend to use economic terms liberally and present economic agents as idyllic role models. Perhaps one should also see an influence of the discourse about globalization, which became popular in the 1990s. However, in this "mercantile model" these economic terms are often used as embellishments, not as core concepts.

Why did the "mercantile model" not become more popular? It seems that its formulation by Sherratt (1998) failed to convince. If the label "Philistines" was just "Egyptian diplomatic speak," how did the Philistines reach the pages of the Bible and give their name to a land or two (Shai 2009)? More crucially, the basic assumption of two contrasting types of trade (centralized/decentralized) is faulty. The ancient economy and trade were multifaceted and not separated along a clear private–public divide. Royal traders dealt with private business, and temples executed long-range trade through "private" traders. Since the written sources are mostly institutional, we know less about private trade and cannot quantify it.[16] Additionally, there is neither evidence for large-scale Philistine trade, nor evidence that many Philistines

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[15] Cf. Balter 1999, 36; Bauer 2014.

[16] Radner 1999; Steinkeller 2004; Monroe 2009; Jursa 2010, 208–28, 762–72; Graslin-Thomé 2016. See also Routledge and McGeough 2009.
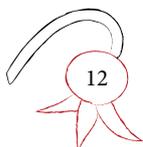
were wealthy merchants. Philistine settlements do not resemble trading posts.[17] Philistine Iron I trade is nondescript in comparison to the large-scale Late Bronze Age trade.[18]

The "mercantile model" does not explain how the Philistines overtook Philistia. As merchants, they would have had to cooperate with the "local" Canaanites. Groups of so-called "Sea Peoples" appear in the Late Bronze Age as mercenaries, not as merchants. They are also depicted as entire families moving on land.[19]

Colonial Settlers?

In the early twentieth century, about two-fifths of humanity lived under colonial rule (Dietler 2010, 19). After World War II, a postcolonial discourse started to form but did not immediately affect the images of the Philistines.[20] The "mercantile model" seldom acknowledged colonialism. Bauer (1998, 150, n. 13) called the Philistine settlements "colonies," and Sherratt and Sherratt (1991, 356–8) spoke of peaceful trading colonies but did not discuss colonization in terms of asymmetrical power relations.[21]

For John Wilford (1992), the Philistines were not "colonialists" but "refugees." Yet these are not contradictory terms: the Puritans in America were both. Stager toyed with the idea that "the ships [found

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[17] Barako 2000; Yasur-Landau 2010, 289–94.

[18] Master 2009; Monroe 2009, 281; Yasur-Landau 2010, 300–2, 339, 342; Master et al. 2015; Malkin 2016, 298.

[19] Drews (1998, 39) claimed: "No Canaanite nation vanished, and no Philistine nation suddenly appeared. It was only the names that changed." However, Canaanites/Philistines were not nations, and names of "ethnic groups" are a vital part of their identity. The argument that the Medinat Habu reliefs portray locals escaping Egyptian raids (Drews 1998, 58–9) does not hold water. The scene shows the carts advancing towards, not escaping from, the Egyptians. With the families are men dressed like Sea People warriors in other scenes. For claims that genetic evidence supports Aegean arrivals, see Meiri et al. 2013; Feldman et al. 2019.

[20] Young 2015, 150; 2016, 59. An exception perhaps is Wright (1966, 71, n. 17).

[21] Hodos 2006, 20–22; Dietler 2010, 18.

50 km off Philistia] were headed for Phoenicia's colony of Carthage, near present-day Tunis. It would have been a very nice cargo for the colonists" (in Balter 1999, 36–37).[22]

Research on the Philistines remains mostly a pre-postcolonial field. As Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò (2016, 5–6, 9–11) observed, studies of the Philistines seldom used terms related to the study of colonies (he thought that the reason could be a lack of data).

When one consults the appearance of words like "colony," "colonization," or colonialism in excavation reports on Philistia in the last decades, an interesting picture emerges. Focusing on excavation reports is natural: they are the major product of archeological excavations and carry a longer-lasting impact than articles. Such reports hold thousands of pages (Table 1).[23] "Colonization" and/or "colonialism" were seldom mentioned in some older reports. For example, Dothan (1978, 104) called the Philistines once "mercenaries or colonists." Thirty years later, in a more extensive report on the same site, there is not even one such mention (Dothan and Brandl 2010). In the *Qasile* I report, the Phoenicians but not the Philistines created colonies (A. Mazar 1980, 81, 84, 111). In the *Qasile* II report, colonization is accredited twice to the Phoenicians and once to the Sea Peoples (Mazar 1985b, 82, 124 and n. 220). In the *Ashkelon* 1 volume, colonization or colonialism never refer to the Philistines (Stager et al. 2008), while in *Ashkelon* 3 they refer only to later Greek colonies (Stager et al. 2011). The ten mentions of the terms "colonies," "colonization," and "colonialism" (and like terms) in the *Tel eṣ-Ṣafi* I report (Maeir 2012) are not an improvement: they all occur in bibliographical lists, except a sole reference to the Philistines as a "colonizing population" (Lev-Tov 2012, 604). In the *Tel eṣ-Ṣafi*

[22] Elsewhere, Stager (1995, 342) wrote that the Philistines "completely destroyed the Egypto-Canaanite centers before building their new cities on the smouldering ruins" and that their occupation "must have resulted in the extirpation or displacement of many of the Late Bronze Age inhabitants."

[23] Excluding Iron II reports (except Ashkelon 3), since they hardly discuss the arrival of the Philistines. The major excavation reports on Philistia in recent decades were published in English.

Table 1: Colonies, Colonization, etc., in Excavation Reports on Philistia

Report, Year, Excavator/s	Pages	Mentions of Philistine/s	Mentions of Colonies/ Colonization	Colonies/ Colonization in relations to the Philistines
1. Ashdod V, 1993, Dothan/Porath	312	77	–	–
2. Ashdod VI, 2005, Ben Shlomo	319	214	–	–
3. Ashkelon I, 2008, Stager	699	155	23	–
4. Ashkelon 3, 2011, Stager	836	116	30	–
5. Azor, 2012, Ben Shlomo	241	191	–	–
6. Deir el-Balah, 1978, Dothan	118	43	1	1
7. Deir el-Balah, 2010, Dothan	399	22	–	–
8. Qasile I, 1980, A. Mazar	203	113	4	–
9. Qasile II, 1985, A. Mazar	261	332	3	1
10. Tel es-Safi I, 2012, Maeir	964	922	10	1
11. Tell es-Safi II, 2020, Maeir	548	245	2	–
Total	**4900**	**2430**	**73**	**3**

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II report, such mentions are expunged: only two appear in the entire volume, both in bibliographic lists (Maeir and Uziel 2020).

Since the 1970s, Israeli scholars have led the archeological research of Philistia. There have been important foreign teams, but the majority of the fieldwork and of the publications have been by Israelis. Many Israeli archeologists ignore (post)colonialism, probably because of the sensitive issue of colonialism and modern Israel. For example, one article mentions, in the first page alone, Philistine "centers," "cities," "finds," "homelands," "frontiers," "polities," "settlement," "sites," "spatial expansion," and "territory" (Gadot 2006, 21) but not "colonists" or "colonization." In another article, a recolonization of pigs is acknowledged in Europe, but the Philistines just "established themselves" in Philistia (Meiri et al. 2013, 1, 6). Should one conclude that the pigs were colonists, but not the Philistines who took them to Philistia? In the study of the Philistines, we are not yet postcolonial (Hamilakis 2012).[24]

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[24] Postcolonialism is acknowledged in other disciplines in Israel, notably sociology and history (Malkin 1987; 2016; Hodos 2006; Ram 2018; for the Philistines, see Finkelberg 2003, 115; 2005, 153–58). To clarify, the accusation that Israel is colonialist is often hypocritical because it ignores other situations like Syria in

There are, perhaps, other factors that can explain why relatively few scholars have correlated the Philistines with (post)colonialism.[25] One perhaps relates to the difference between the situation in Bronze Age Philistia and the historically better-documented later Greek and Roman colonies. Scholars also point out that European colonialism, laden as it was with capitalism and industrialism, was very different than colonialism in the ancient world. However, the Classical period is a separate field of expertise from the Bronze and Iron Ages. Few studies on Philistia deal with the two disciplines together. So the avoidance is not due to a comparison with the Classical period. It is more likely the result of a lack of appreciation of (post)colonial theory in general.

One may argue that the Philistines did not have a long-lasting "motherland," having lost many or all of their cultural/political connections to it. However, we know that the Iron II Philistines kept connections to the Aegean World and Cyprus, since we can see as much from features of their pottery, iconography, and language. In any case, if the Philistines were migrants from a "motherland," there is no reason not to consider them in relation to (post)colonialism. I stress again that the aim of this article is not to promote the adoption of one "image." It is legitimate to argue that the Philistines were not colonists; but arguing so cannot be based on ignorance of (post)colonial theory.

Some scholars do acknowledge the Philistines as colonizers. For Ann Killebrew (2000, 244), they were "well-organized and relatively prosperous colonizers." Anthony Russell (2009) discussed the Philistines under a postcolonial model of hybridization, while Pitkänen (2014, 8) employed the frame of settler-colonialism to both the Philistines and Israelites. Among Israeli scholars, Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman (2011) grasped the Philistines as settlers, with a hybridization process in Philistia and Canaanite resistance in the periphery. Yasur-Landau (2003, 46, 49–51; 2007; 2010) compared the Philistines to Greek colonists. Their migration was a "violent colonization"; they

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Lebanon, Turkey in Syria, Russia in Ukraine, and so on, and it presents a complex historical conflict in "flat" terms: one side is guilty and colonial, the other innocent and local.

[25] I thank the readers for their comments on this aspect.

destroyed or subdued local settlements and took the land.[26] He also imagined the "others":

> The Canaanite elders at the end of the twelfth century saw their country changing before their eyes; their old rulers were gone and their small-town palaces replaced by fast-growing cities of foreigners … Many of their old villages were gone, and fewer people could be seen between the new cities. What had been Canaan was made into Philistia.[27]

Replace "Canaanite" with "Palestinian" and a recent past emerges. Behind the Canaanite elder is an elderly Palestinian, who is holding a key to a lost home.[28] The point is not whether Yasur-Landau thought about it when writing this section, but that some readers would. This explains, perhaps, the reluctance of other archeologists to acknowledge (post)colonialism as a possible conceptual reference for the Philistines.

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Merry Pirates?

According to the most recent "image" of the Philistines,[29] they never established colonies or were ever settler-colonists. Rather, they were good, cosmopolitan pirates, who were living happily side by side with the Canaanites. Interestingly, this image is largely based on an act of piracy: using (rather, abusing) postcolonial terms and concepts while denying their postcolonial nature. I will review it in more detail, since it has not yet been studied in depth.

In similarity to other scholars (above), proponents of the "piracy image" avoid mention of words like colonization, colonies, or colonialism, thus avoiding (post)colonialism. The Philistines are never

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[26] See also Fantalkin 2017, 108; Koch 2021. For lack of a general wave of destruction, see Millek 2021, 2022.

[27] Yasur-Landau 2010, 345.

[28] On the other side of the picture is both a distant past and the Holocaust. On settler-colonialism in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see Handler and Kotef 2023, with references.

[29] Advocated mainly by Aren Maeir of Bar Ilan University, with several co-authors.

colonists: they just "appear" or "settle" (Maeir et al. 2009, 72). When other studies that refer to (post)colonialism are cited, the proponents of the piracy image add negative evaluations to counter the argument or reference made in the citation. For example, a rare citation that mentions "colonial North America" is immediately qualified by the claim that historical archeology only "complicates the picture even more."[30] Historical archeology acknowledges colonialism: it cannot avoid doing so. In recent articles, advocates of the pirate image have suppressed mentions of colonies, colonists, or colonization completely.[31]

Sometimes, advocates of the piracy image equate "material culture" (in archeology, an assemblage of artifacts) and "culture" (in the sense of civilization):
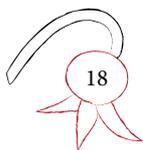
> After the initial stage of the Philistine culture, once there is no direct evidence of contact with the Aegean, and the Philistine material culture developed in independent directions, there is evidence [for] uniquely Cypriot influence on the Philistine pottery assemblage.[32]

Notice how the old-fashioned "influence" flourishes here under a thin façade of "hybridization" or "entanglement," and how material culture becomes the active agent, a synonym for culture. This is a simplistic equation, which presents relations between people as "objective" relations between people and objects:

> One must be careful not to fetishize material culture in such a way that relations between people become mystified as relations between objects and people. To do so … amounts to swallowing one of colonialism's frequent ideological conceits.[33]

Supposedly, the Philistines had a "pirate-like culture."[34] What is a "pirate-like" culture, given that no new typology of cultures is offered?

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[30] Maeir and Hitchcock 2011, 58*; cf. Maeir and Hitchcock 2011, 56*; Maeir et al. 2013, 10, 21.

[31] For example, Maeir and Hitchcock 2017; Maeir 2019.

[32] Maeir et al. 2009, 73.

[33] Dietler 2010, 20–21.

[34] Maeir and Hitchcock 2017, 250; cf. Maeir 2019, 311.

Substances of "pirate culture" are invented for the piracy image out of thin air: the *serens* of the biblical Philistines were "charismatic pirate leaders" because a similar-sounding Luwian title means "warlords."[35] But this Luwian title has no proven relation to pirates, and the same is true about the biblical term *seren*.

Louise Hitchcock and Aren Maeir (2014, 631) bring one example of pirates who converted to Islam in order to explain "early Iron Age anomalies showing aspects of local and imported cultural packages [*sic*]." They ignore many contradictory examples, like the pirates of Henry Avery, who looted, raped, and killed Muslim pilgrims, or the sinking of Muslim trading ships by colonial Portuguese.[36] Selecting isolated examples to fit a theory is poor methodology. Some Philistines could be pirates,[37] but piracy cannot explain the Philistine settlement in Philistia as a whole (Knapp 2020).

The supporters of the piracy image also romanticize piracy à la Hollywood (e.g., the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series). They glorify pirates as a merry tribe of good cosmopolitans, and portray them mainly as egalitarian, skilled people; maritime transporters of valuable commodities to areas inhabited by poor people; and peaceful people who assist coastal dwellers (Fig. 5).

This is a strange inversion. Only once do we find a mention of the "acquisition of slaves" by pirates (Hitchcock and Maeir 2014, 626). Such a polite euphemism masks the pain and suffering of the many victims of piracy. In history, pirates were not peaceful and beneficial people, but perpetrators of horrible acts of arbitrary, cruel, and repellent violence, who had a large part in the slave trade.[38]

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[35] Hitchcock and Maeir 2014; Maeir and Hitchcock 2017, 257; Maeir 2019, 312. Maeir et al. (2013, 4, n. 3, 15) object to Faust's treatment of Philistine ethnicity, but accept his treatment of Israelite ethnicity, which is based on the same "method" of identifying ethnicity by lack of material features (see Kletter 2014, 2016).

[36] Eklöf 2016, 7; Lewis 2019; Hanna 2020.

[37] Sherratt 1998, 305–6; Emanuel 2017, 2021.

[38] Eklöf 2016, 2; Lewis 2019, 94. Colonial administrators often branded acts of the colonized as "piracy" (Campo 2003).
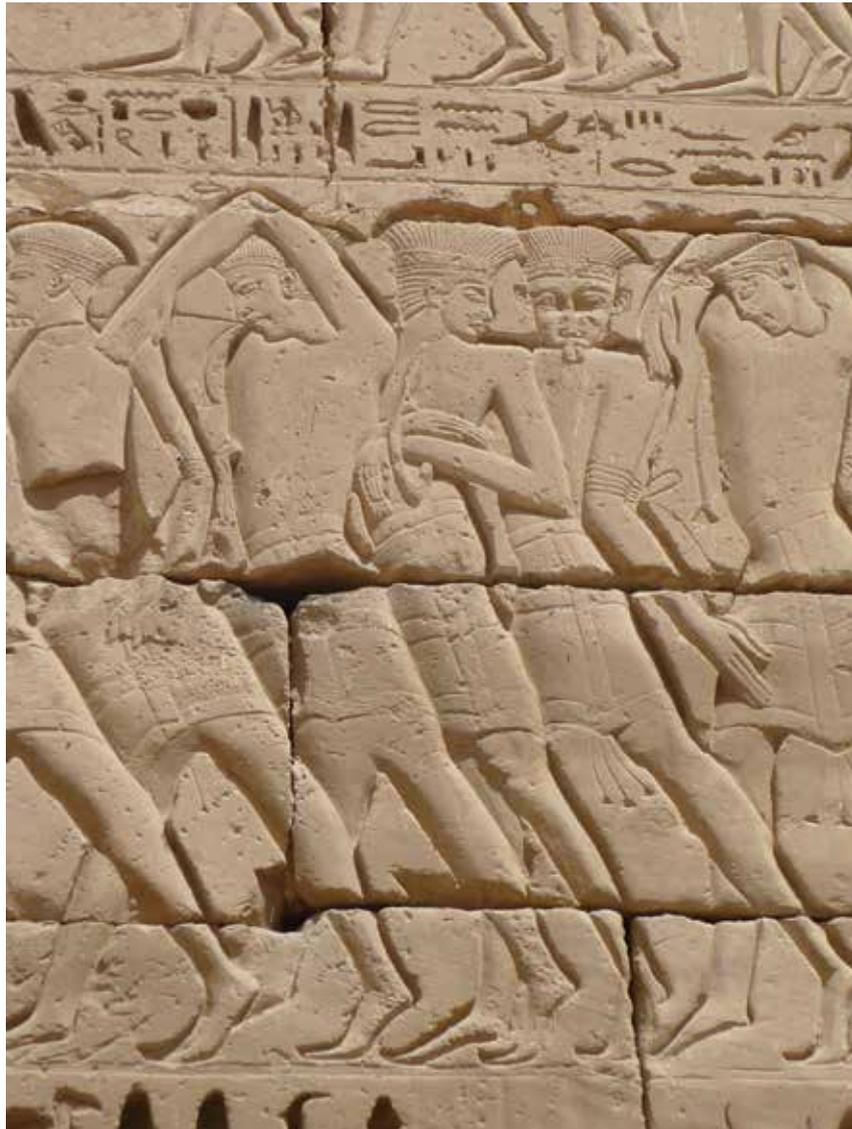
Fig. 5: Philistine Captives, Medinat Habu, Egypt (Wikimedia Commons, author Remih, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6f/Medinet_Habu_Ramses_III14.JPG). Were the Philistines good, peaceful pirates?

To deny the relevance of a colonial or postcolonial perspective, scholars of the piracy image paint a rosy picture in which Philistines and Canaanites live side by side in harmony. Maeir, for example, talks about the "amalgamation of various people of nonlocal origins … [who] settled in Canaan alongside the local Canaanites" (Maeir 2019, 312). "Not only were the Canaanites incorporated into Philistine culture," in his view, "but, at most, nonlocal elements took over elite roles at these sites and did not supplant the entire socioeconomic structure" (2019, 318).

How do nonlocal "elements" take over elite roles? Do elites give up voluntarily their positions of power to recently arrived outsiders?[39] The supposed idyllic life that both cultures shared is one-sided:

> The Philistine culture was less grandiose than the great, centralized city-states of the late Bronze Age. … Yet Philistine culture was a product of the internationalism of this age. … At the same time, the Philistines were also something more than a purely Aegean, Cypriot, Anatolian or Canaanite culture. The vibrancy and endurance of Philistine culture, and the fascination it holds for archaeologists studying the Mediterranean, lies rather in the plurality of its cultural, technological and artistic remains, its traditions and its practices.[40]

The Canaanite culture participated in the Late Bronze Age long-distance trade, but, as one can see, the scholars of the piracy image would not let it bask in the light of "internationalism." The Canaanite culture was no less vibrant, fascinating, or pluralistic than the Philistine culture. The above-cited passage betrays the very unequal power relations that it ties to obscure. Notice the use of the term "purely" in relation to Philistine culture. Purity is a term entangled in racial, xenophobic, and colonialist practices.[41] There is no pure culture, and no one culture is purer than another.

Entangled Terminology
Advocates of the piracy image shift between several theoretical terms about the arrival of the Philistines to Philistia. They use such terms in order to add theoretical weight to their arguments, and yet these terms are postcolonial terms. Postcolonialism is a vast field that has dealt, for a half-century now, with theories and practices of migration and col-

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[39] Consider the modern elite of professors. Can one give examples of professors who have given up their tenured positions voluntarily, to some "nonlocal elements", such as visiting guest-scholars? One could suggest that the Canaanite elites were removed earlier, say, by the Egyptians, who then put the Philistines in their place. However, such thing was not suggested by the supporters of the "merry pirates" image, nor is there completing evidence to support it.

[40] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 58.

[41] Bhabha 1994; Stockhammer 2012, 2; Greenberg and Hamilakis 2023.

onization.[42] As there is no other comparable framework, it is hard to ignore postcolonial terms. But the advocates of the piracy image try to detach these terms from their postcolonial matrix, and they avoid dealing with networks of asymmetrical power relations, which is a vital issue in postcolonial theory.[43] Let us now study the use of these theoretical (postcolonial) terms in relation to the piracy image.

Creolization

"Creolization" first appeared in relation to the Philistines in an unpublished lecture by Maeir in 2004. It was, reputedly, a preferred term, meaning the creation of new "hybrid" languages, usually by a dominated language under a dominant language.[44] Later, Maeir claimed that he used this term "largely [as] a sociolinguistic term" while others used it "mostly, but not always, in a colonial context" (Maeir 2012, 42; 2007, 19). His use of creolization was, supposedly, free of colonial overtones.[45]

In 2013, Maeir (in Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 47) admitted that he formerly saw the "emergence of the Philistines as a process of creolization that led to a blended [*sic*] culture," but he blamed other scholars for using this term:

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[42] On postcolonialism in biblical studies, see Rukundwa 2008; Nicolet-Anderson 2013; Sugirtharajah 2018. For archeology, see Dietler 2010; Lydon and Rizvi 2010; Hamilakis 2012; Greenberg and Hamilakis 2023.

[43] Some of these terms were used earlier in studies of the Aegean world and Cyprus, before being adopted to studies of the Philistines. However, this article is focused only on Philistia, as I do not consider myself an expert in Aegean/Cypriot archeology.

[44] Ben-Shlomo et al. 2004, 20, 28; cf. Uziel 2007, 169. Ben-Shlomo et al. (2004, 20) refer to a "paper in press" on creolization (cf. Shai et al. 2008, 240). That paper was seemingly published in 2013 (Maeir 2013, 191), but it does not discuss creolization. In 2007, Maeir (2007, 19) spoke about the appearance of bichrome Philistine pottery as evidence for a process of cultural change, "which in the anthropological terminology is defined as a process of acculturation, and in a term from socio-linguistics as a process of creolization." Anthropology and sociolinguistics can be acknowledged—but not postcolonialism.

[45] Only, there is no creolization free of (post)colonialism (see below).

> Creolization and acculturation are treated as processes that typify Philistine "colonialist activity" [citing Killebrew] … Creolization has come under criticism [citing Hitchcock] … for functioning as a thinly veiled substitution for the term colonialism, re-enforcing asymmetrical relationships and reifying a dualistic approach to Philistine identity over the multivocal approach argued for here.[46]

Soon, Maeir criticized the concept of creolization, not mentioning his prior use of the term (Davis et al. 2015, 140, n. 1), though, he still entertained the idea that the Philistines spoke creole languages "based on Late Bronze Age and/or Iron Age trade languages" (Davis et al. 2015, 144, 157).

Creole languages are not formed by equal relationships. The word "creole," first attested in 1590, meant "Spaniard born in the new world." In research, creolization has been used in "a wide range of colonial and post-colonial contexts."[47] It involves asymmetric power relations: among other things, locals under a process of creolization lose their own languages (Dietler 2010, 8, 19). Creolization and hybridization are used in postcolonial studies as "positive inversions of what were formerly derogatory terms of colonial racial discourse that viewed mixing as a threat to purity" (Dietler 2010, 51). Some scholars are calling for the abandonment of the term "creolization" because of its painful colonial and racist legacies.[48] Maeir did not abandon this term for this noble reason, but because one cannot invoke creolization without invoking colonialism. The use of this term was an abuse, which he tried later to disown.

Hybridization

Hitchcock used the term "hybridization" for Cyprus, while Maeir applied it to "Philistine" pottery.[49] Writing together at a later date, both criticized the use of this term sharply:

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[46] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 47.

[47] Webster 2016; cf. Baron and Cara 2011, 3–18.

[48] Palmié 2006; but cf. Stewart 2007.

[49] Maeir et al. 2013, 3, n. 2; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008. Maeir also recommended "acculturation" for a while (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008, 234). For an earlier use of "hybridization" for Cyprus, see Knapp 2008, 57–61; Knapp and Voskos 2008.

[Hybridization is] situated in nineteenth-century practices of cross-breeding plants and animals … In addition, social practices termed as hybrid have become associated with resistance by subaltern groups … The term has become greatly diluted to the point of contradiction.[50]

They tried to detach hybridization from postcolonialism:

The earliest shift from the migration narratives of the past to more nuanced approaches for understanding the region was by Knapp … for Cyprus in his discussion of hybridization processes. Hybridization processes refer to the interactions between agents from two or more social groups in any type of social situation.[51]

Feldman … explicitly takes her understanding of the term from biology, perceiving it as a neutral term and rejects the definition used in postcolonial studies.[52]

Can hybridization fit any type of social situation, including equal relationships between peoples? Can this term be made neutral? "Hybridity" and "hybridization" are terms employed by generations of racists and colonialists (Dietler 2010, 51). In post(colonial) studies, it refers to interactions and negotiations that take place between colonists and the colonized, and to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonialism.[53] One cannot detach this term from (post)colonialism.[54]

Transculturalism
Advocates of the "piracy image" also employed the concept of "transculturalism":

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[50] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 51.

[51] Ibid., 49.

[52] Ibid., 51, n. 6.

[53] Bhabha 1994; Young 1995; Canclini 2005, xxiii–xxxvii; Knapp 2008, 57. For the term "contact zone" as a place of meeting of cultures, often under highly asymmetric power relations, see Pratt 1991.

[54] Dietler 2010, 52; Stockhammer 2012, 52–54.

> A transcultural approach regards the transformation of Cypriot identity and the emergence of Philistine identity as multivocal, drawing on the symbolisms, objects, social practices and artistic and technical styles of a broad cultural and ethnic range of social actors from around the Mediterranean.[55]

This concept evolved in the twentieth century *from postcolonial thinking*. It was coined by Fernando Ortiz Fernández, a scholar of and activist for Afro-Cuban culture. It is a critical, loosely defined concept, which rejects fixed "cultures" and tries to transcend national and ethnic agendas. It recognizes individuals that have multiple cultural connections, which are not identical to national identities.[56] Although this term can be used in various situations, it does not enable one to eschew postcolonialism.

Entanglement

In recent years, those who follow the piracy image propose "entanglement" as their preferred term, an antidote to a "monolithic understanding" of a "straightforward invasion."[57] The Philistines were, supposedly "an entangled transcultural society, comprised of various groups deriving from the eastern and central Mediterranean, along with local Canaanites—all joining to form a unique culture" (Maeir 2019, 311), and "a group of very mixed origins (entangled), deriving from various regions and origins, including nonlocal and local Canaanite elements" (Maeir 2019, 318).

In the following quote, an "entangled culture" develops from "a set of influences", which transforms into a "new cultural entity" like an egg that breeds the chicken that lays the egg:

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[55] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 51; for use of this term earlier by an Aegean scholar, see Panagiotopoulos 2011.

[56] Welsch 1999; Herren et al. 2012; Bond and Rapson 2014, 8–15; Flüchter and Schöttli 2015, 2.

[57] Maeir and Hitchcock 2017, 249; Maeir 2019, 310; Maeir and Uziel 2020.

> This culture should be seen as a unique "entangled" culture, developing from a diverse set of influences, which transforms into a new and definable cultural entity.[58]

Hitchcock and Maeir (2013, 50) mentioned Aegean scholars as sources for this term, but once, in another article, Maeir admitted its postcolonial origins: "Perhaps, Dietler's … and Gosden's … 'entanglement' perspectives, although used by them in colonial cultural contexts, might be useful in relationship to 'interculturalism'" (Maeir 2012, 42, n. 43). He tries here to distance himself from "colonial contexts," but entanglement is a postcolonial term. It first appeared in anthropology, history and archeology in the 1990s in direct relation to postcolonialism:[59]

> Entanglement means the complex process by which alien colonists and native peoples became increasingly entangled in webs of new relations and through which there developed a gradual transformation of all parties to the encounter.[60]

It is not a neutral term, and cannot imply equal relations between parties that become "entangled."

So far, we have seen that proponents of the piracy image tried to empty the term "entanglement" of its postcolonial essence. Did they succeed? Let us check how they employed this term in practice by looking at three examples that they gave for "Philistine entanglement." The first relates to pottery:

> The use of the deep bowl and krater in Philistia would have appealed to both migrant and indigenous elements in the Philistine culture.[61]

Perhaps, but how does it prove noncolonial relations? The deep bowl and krater under discussion are pottery types of Aegean origin. So the Aegean culture, via the Philistines, provides civilization to the "indigenous elements." This is not an equal relationship. So far, the advocates

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[58] Maeir 2019, 312.
[59] Thomas 1991; Silliman 2016.
[60] Dietler 2010, 9.
[61] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 53.

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of the piracy image have not given even one example of Aegeans/ Philistines admiring objects of Canaanite origin. The second example relates to seals:

> It is quite plausible to suggest that the motif was re-introduced to the East by an Aegean patron and a Canaanite seal carver.[62]

This is a classic example of asymmetric power relations, the foundation stone of colonialism. The newcomer Aegean from the enlightened West is the patron of the local, Canaanite laborer in the passive East. So far, those supporting the piracy image seem unable to imagine a Canaanite patronizing a Philistine. The third example relates to altars:

> They may therefore have found their way to the Levant as a pottery motif [,] and their construction as three-dimensional objects … may be the result of patrons providing varied descriptions to the crafters who made them. In this way, the Ashkelon installation may be the result of local production … that was described in cultural traditions which were handed down generationally and ultimately became modified through a process of "Chinese whispers."[63]

> It is quite likely that they [two-horned altars] represent the Cypriot appropriation and interpretation of an Aegean symbol, which later found its way into Philistine culture through the amalgamation of a "western motif" with a pre-existing Levantine tradition of four-horned cultic objects.[64]

Knowledgeable Philistine patrons provide work to "local"—read Canaanite—"crafters." The entanglement boils down to an "amalgamation," which is easily undone to expose two stereotyped building blocks:

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[62] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 53.

[63] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 56. "Chinese Whispers" is a children's game, in which the participants whisper messages from person to person, and then compare the original message to the final one. Typically, the corruption of the message offers amusement. Many in North America know this game as "Broken Telephone."

[64] Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 57.

Philistines and Canaanites, West and East.[65] The game of "Chinese Whispers" carries an Orientalist burden of Chinese as an unintelligible or confused language. Messages in "Chinese Whispers" do not evolve into valuable communications: being corrupted, they become a matter of ridicule. Notice, again, the fetishism of material culture: objects seemingly "find their way" to various places on their own.

Supporters of the piracy image characterized other scholars (Dothan, Bunimovitz, Gitin, Faust, and Lev-Tov) as "simplistic proponents of migration or colonization narratives," who, supposedly, present the Philistines as "Mycenaean colonists imposing their civilization on backward Canaanite natives" (Hitchcock and Maeir 2013, 44–46). To the best of my knowledge, none of these scholars called the Canaanites "backward natives." In trying to discredit other scholars, the advocates of the piracy image replicate the language of colonialism.

Compare how they explain writing in Philistia:

> Thus, if someone of an Aegean, Cypriot, or Anatolian background in Iron I Philistia required an inscription, it is very likely that this individual would have had to patronize a local scribe writing in Canaanite … or to seek out a (perhaps foreign-born) scribe who knew Cypro-Minoan or some other "western" writing system—or alternatively, to devise some other (perhaps experimental) solution.[66]

It seems that they cannot imagine a Canaanite owning an inscription.[67] A Canaanite could write in Philistia only under the orders of a Philistine

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[65] Yet Philistines/Canaanites were not fixed identities that met and mixed (Hodos 2006, 14–17). In the process of colonialism "both parties eventually become something other than they were" (Dietler 2010, 18).

[66] Davis et al. 2015, 146.

[67] Compare the definition of the "truly definitive corpus" of Philistine inscriptions (Davis et al. 2015, 146–47) as "those inscriptions found at or coming from sites in Philistia in conjunction with material cultural attributes usually associated with the Philistine culture." Have you not declared that this culture is multivocal, entangled, and transcultural? Compare "the person who wrote this inscription may have been non-Semitic because the inscription was found in a Philistine level" (Davis et al. 2015, 150).

patron.[68] This patronage was based on an enlightened Western origin, whether Anatolian, Cypriot, or Aegean. In a few "entangled" Philistine inscriptions, they recognized some "Canaanite letter forms." The base metal of the Philistine culture could be Canaanite; but it became valuable only under a Western veneer:

> Likely, it was necessary in this early period to turn to a Canaanite scribe to execute an inscription … for reasons discussed above. Thus, the language of the patron may not necessarily have been the same as that of the scribe who executed the inscription.[69]

How could a Philistine patron tell a Canaanite scribe what to write, if the two did not share a common language? If the Canaanites were merely engravers, they were not "scribes."

It is difficult to employ postcolonial terms while denying postcolonialism. This explains why some of these writings retreat into empty jargon, betraying a fundamental lack of clarity. For example, Maeir et al. suggest that the Philistine culture and identity

> drew on a plethora of social and cultural practices that were heterogeneous and multi-regional … This culture may have undergone a complex "ethnogenesis" … or "transcultural" processes …, or a complex "hybridization" … The result was encounters, entanglements, appropriations and merging of numerous constituent groups, due to shared economic and/or socio-political interests.[70]

Must one combine all the leftovers in a one-pot *salmagundi*, like pirates far from civilization? Do "cultures" become "encounters" or "entanglements"? The result is that nothing of value is said:

> The complex sociocultural background of the Philistines can be seen in the very diverse connections and subregional differentiation of

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[68] Patronage can be supportive or abusive, but it is never an equal relationship (Pfoh 2022). The advocates of the piracy model employed patronage one-sidedly, with Philistines as patrons and Canaanites as clients.

[69] Davis et al. 2015, 150.

[70] Maeir et al. 2013, 2–3.

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the Philistine culture, indicating complex origins, relations, and developments.[71]

The "very diverse connections" supposedly show a past, complex "background"; but at the same time, they indicate future, complex "developments." The "complex sociological background" leads to itself ("complex origins") like a snake eating its tail.

If one is unwilling to acknowledge the postcolonial nature of the terms one uses, and is unable to clarify how they can (supposedly) be made neutral, one finds shelter in jargon. The proponents of the piracy image proclaim the discovery of a noncolonial, entangled good life lived between people side by side, only to describe asymmetrical, abusive domains, replicating the colonial order. Postcolonial terms cannot be "purged" and used as a shield from postcolonialism. Our languages and our disciplines are deeply entangled by hundreds of years of colonialism:
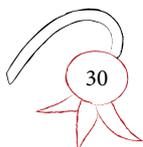
> The language used to enact, enforce, describe or analyze colonialism is not transparent, innocent, ahistorical or simply instrumental.[72]

> Archaeology was already born colonized … Archaeology often constituted an instrument, as well as a product, of colonialism defining, constructing, controlling, and even appropriating the past of colonized peoples.[73]

Conclusion

I have read a wide array of literature for this article: sometimes troubling, always interesting. It shows how the drastic changes in the conceptualization of the Philistines relate to our own changing lives and ideologies.

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[71] Maeir 2019, 311.

[72] Young 1995, 163.

[73] Dietler 2010, 3–4. Even those opposing it admit that "postcolonial theory is one of the main frameworks for thinking about the world and acting to change the world" (Saltzman and Divine 2008).

Sixty years ago, the Philistines were the rightful owners of the slur "Philistine."[74] They were a migrating ethnic group, whose history matched the biblical stories, and hence were negatively portrayed as the archenemy of Israel (they were also "mighty carousers"). To the admiring eyes of the archeologists who excavated sites in Philistia, past the heyday of biblical archeology, the Philistines became an advanced culture of civilized folks (they were "cosmopolitan devotees of the grape"). When neoliberalism and globalization were "hot," the Philistines became daring economic entrepreneurs, connecting cultures, supplying vital commodities and enriching the world. For others, the Philistine lived in a pre-postcolonial world, in which one could use postcolonial concepts but claim that they can be purified and used neutrally. Few claim the Philistines as fathers and mothers (Jobling and Rose 1996, 381); but scholars have casted the image of the Philistines in their own image.

Barbarous invaders, boozers, civilized town-builders, great connoisseurs of wine, rich entrepreneurs, settler-colonialists, and good pirates. Need we mention that these are not necessarily conflicting terms, and that a people includes a variety of "types"?

What will the future images of the Philistines be? Based on this study, I am unwilling to make a prediction. The limitations of the data, coupled with a nearly endless human imagination, hint that the future of the Philistines may be as unpredictable as their past.

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74 Jobling and Rose 1996; Ingram 2020, 16.
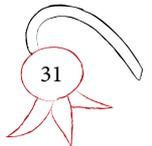
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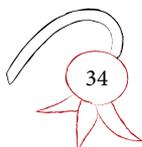
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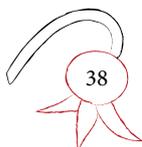
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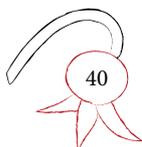
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