

# The Philistines in the Highlands: A View from Ashkelon

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## Abstract

The collapse of Bronze Age Mediterranean trade was a long-term process that took place through the 12th and 11th centuries BCE. The effects of this decline were particularly acute for coastal cities such as Philistine Ashkelon. This paper examines the response to this crisis in Philistia by examining redactional strata in the Deuteronomistic History that might speak to the period of early Philistine activity in the highlands. Through the memories preserved in these texts and in archaeological results from the late Iron Age I–early Iron Age IIA, it is argued that the Philistines reacted to the loss of Mediterranean trade by conducting raids that devastated rural highland settlements.

**KEYWORDS:** Philistines, Deuteronomistic History, David, Israel, Iron Age

## 1. Introduction

Jerusalem is a city of outsized religious importance. Venerated by each of the world's major monotheistic religions, its influence far outstrips its size. Yet in ancient times, the hills of Cisjordan were just one more hinterland for the Mediterranean and just one link in the land bridge linking the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This paper takes the view of the ancients and seeks to understand the development of the highlands and some of the earliest writings

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of the Hebrew Bible in light of broader trends in Mediterranean politics and economy in the 11th century BCE.

## **2. Change and Continuity in the 13th and 12th Centuries BCE**

In the middle of the 13th century BCE, it would have been hard for anyone in the Southern Levant to imagine the collapse of Egypt's commercial and military empire. During the reign of Ramses II, the Egyptians had expanded along the coast to the west, both to quell the growing power of Libyan tribesman and to protect the sea routes that ran from the Aegean to the African coast – and thence to the Nile Delta (Hulin 2002; Russell 2002; Snape 2003; Wilson and Snape 2007: 66–67). Ramses II also continued to push north, famously fighting with the Hittites at the battle of Kadesh (Kitchen 2002: 32–38).

Just a few years later, during the reign of Merneptah, however, cracks in the empire began to appear. The western fortresses were abandoned, and Merneptah was left to face coalitions from the west that included not only the Libyans but also the Eqwesh of the Sea, Sheklesh, and Teresh, groups often included among the “Sea Peoples” of the 13th and 12th centuries BCE (Adams and Cohen 2013). In the east, Merneptah was fighting much closer to home in cities such as Ashkelon and Gezer (Hasel 1998: 188–189).

Then, in the early 12th century BCE, during the reign of Ramses III, Egypt was attacked from east and west, most notably by a coalition of groups known as the “Sea Peoples,” including the Peleset (Redford 2018: 21–41). This was not an attack in some remote northern fringe of the 19th Dynasty empire; the Philistines, linked to the Peleset of the Egyptian texts, settled in the Southern Levant in cities that had been part of the Egyptian empire (Dothan and Dothan 1992; Stager 1998; Yasur-Landau 2010; Feldman et al. 2019), and even Egypt itself was directly attacked (Hoffmeier 2018; Redford 2018: 105–106). Some have argued that this was the critical moment when Mediterranean trade collapsed and that during these attacks the Mediterranean networks outside of coastal Lebanon were dealt a fatal blow (Cline 2014). Indeed, this is the impression left by inscriptions of Ramses III, which list cities and lands across the Mediterranean destroyed by the “Sea Peoples” (Redford 2018: 36).

Still, Egypt and its Levantine empire survived. The invasions were beaten back, and the 20th Dynasty continued to rule the Southern Levant for another generation as far as Jaffa (Burke et al. 2017), Megiddo (Harrison 2004: 107), and

Beth-Shean (Mazar 2009: 25). Ashkelon too fits into the same pattern.<sup>1</sup> Despite a host of cultural changes that mark the arrival of the Philistines, international trade continued robustly through much of the 12th century BCE. Connections with the Lebanese coast have been demonstrated by petrographic analysis of storage jar rims and handles found on the earliest Iron Age floors at Ashkelon (Master 2009). Connections with Cyprus can be seen in the Cypriot IIIC pottery, which was imported directly (Master, Mountjoy, and Mommsen 2017). And it has recently been shown that Philistine potters changed their decorative styles in concert with potters in Cyprus, mirroring the change from Cypriot IIIC Early to Cypriot IIIC Middle within the Philistine repertoire (Mountjoy 2018).

Further, despite the record of conflict between Ramses III and the Peleset, Egyptian cultural influence remained extensive during the early 12th century BCE at Philistine Ashkelon. Christian Hermann suggests a connection between Ashkelon's amulets and Egypt, especially the production taking place at the Ramesside delta capital of Qantir (Herrmann 2020). Abigail Limmer notes that the jewelry may have Egyptian influence (Limmer 2020). Omri Lernau reports that the fish remains indicate a sustained connection with Egypt (Lernau 2020). During this era, scarabs are abundant, and there is even a royal name scarab of the Pharaoh Ramses III (Brandl 2020; Keel 2020). More than this, Egyptian practice seems to be in view. For instance, an Egyptian-style faience grape cluster was placed next to an enigmatic four-horned altar-like installation at Ashkelon (Master and Aja 2011) and was being used, contextually, in a way similar to the use of single grape clusters found in household shrines at Amarna homes in Egypt itself (Salland 2008: 15–16); that is, the usage of the object, not just the find, shows an ongoing familiarity with Egyptian practice. A text from Egypt itself, dated to the reign of Ramses IV, speak of imports from Ashkelon including a silver goblet given to an honored servant of the king (Janssen 1963: 69).

In sum, in the early and middle 12th century BCE, after the battles between the “Sea Peoples” and Ramses III but before the withdrawal of the Egyptian empire, Philistine Ashkelon was still participating in Mediterranean trade, and it flourished. Egypt may have prevented any expansion of Philistia to the east (Stager 1995), but the region could still thrive economically.

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1. This paper will use the framework established in Grid 38 of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon as the backbone for the discussion of Ashkelon's Iron Age I sequence. This sequence includes four major architectural phases, numbered 20–18, lasting from the arrival of the Philistines through the end of the 11th century BCE (Stager, Schloen, and Master 2008: 256–274).

### 3. Egypt's Withdrawal and Mediterranean Collapse

Sometime in the late 12th century BCE, however, Egypt withdrew entirely from Canaan, marking a final end to the empire of the Egyptian New Kingdom. This is most plausibly connected with the transition at Ashkelon between the local Phase 19 and Phase 18 stratigraphic sequence of Grid 38. At Ashkelon, the moment is marked by a sharp decline in Egyptian objects (Master and Aja 2020), but more broadly, the spread of Philistine Bichrome pottery outside the Pentapolis seems closely correlated with this withdrawal of Egypt from the region. This synchronism is based on David Ussishkin's observation that, while Lachish Stratum VI lasts until the end of the Egyptian Empire, it shows no sign of the spread of any Philistine pottery (Ussishkin 1983; 2007). The data from more recent excavations support the conclusion that Philistine pottery did not spread beyond the Pentapolis until this moment.<sup>2</sup>

Almost no ceramics from Phases 20–19 appear outside Philistia. Once the empire ends, however, the ceramics of Ashkelon's Grid 38 Phase 18 are precisely those that begin to appear in places outside Philistia, including sites such as Megiddo.<sup>3</sup> This ceramic correlation with Ashkelon and Megiddo links Ashkelon's ceramic sequence to radiocarbon dates from Megiddo. Currently H-12, the Megiddo phase with the Philistine 2 pottery is said to begin in 1146–1084 and end in 1115–1060 BCE (Finkelstein et al. 2017).

With Egypt's withdrawal from the region, remains uncovered in the excavations

2. After many years of excavation, only one published pre-Bichrome (Philistine 1) sherd is known from outside the core region of Philistia. This sherd, from Qubur el-Walaydah, supports an early or mid 12th-century date for the use of these forms (Asscher et al. 2015: 91). A sherd from an unsealed pit at Gezer is often cited as a second example (Finkelstein 2018b), though this is an odd shape for the Philistine 1 repertoire and the context is problematic (Dever 1986: 79–80). Other unpublished examples are said (Finkelstein 2018b) to come from Haror (which Stager [1995] long ago argued was inside the Philistine boundaries during this period), Khirbet al-Ra'i (one sherd in a later context?), and Tell Jerishe (about which little is known). From any reasonable quantitative perspective, these numbers are negligible.

3. The earliest Philistine pottery at Megiddo has recently been summarized and petrographically analyzed by Martin (2017). The bell-shaped bowl from Megiddo H-12 is most chronologically determinative (Fig. 7:6). The Megiddo example is just a small rim fragment, and so several options exist for its form. However, its decoration is telling. This decoration is absent from the Philistine 1 repertoire, and is even absent from the earliest Philistine 2 (Bichrome) material at Ashkelon. Instead, the pattern of red on the lip combined with a black antithetic spiral first appears (rarely) in Phase 19A at Ashkelon and is most typical of Phase 18, becoming the most common decorative pattern there. This pattern also emerges at Ekron in Stratum VIA (IBL 24, Zuckerman and Gitin 2016: Fig. 5.50). All of the Megiddo examples which Martin has shown to come from Philistia fit best into Ashkelon Phase 18.

at Ashkelon show economic decline (Master and Aja 2020). The percentage of pottery imported via maritime networks declined by almost fifty percent between Phase 19 and Phase 18 (Master 2020). The number of Egyptian objects, including scarabs, declined precipitously (Brandl 2020; Keel 2020). Pottery imported from Cyprus ceased entirely, and changes in pottery style were no longer correlated with Cyprus (Mountjoy 2020). The architecture was a mess of hovels, pitiful even by the standards of Iron Age Ashkelon (Aja 2020a). For the first time, bitter vetch, a famine food plant, appeared (Kislev, Simhoni, and Melamed 2020). The number of bronze tools declined (Aja 2020b). Flotation analysis (Lass 2020) showed a considerable increase in rodent activity, a well-known pathogenic pathway. And even the textile industry shifted away from the production of fine threads and fabrics, which would have been more labor-intensive, to products with thicker threads (Walton and Aja 2020). All these smaller studies have found this moment to be anomalous.

Taken independently, these strands could have several explanations, but taken together they point to a relative impoverishment of the population in Phase 18. Further, this would correspond to a long-term pattern at Ashkelon in which Ashkelon's prosperity in all eras was related to the strength of the Mediterranean economy, and particularly the Mediterranean economy as experienced in Egypt. During this moment, the Mediterranean economy was at its nadir. It is not necessary to assume immediately that the very same pattern appears at other Philistine sites such as Ekron, Gath, or Ashdod. It is clear that each of these sites had its own trajectory through the Iron Age based upon local geographic and historical factors. However, Ashkelon's geographic location left it particularly sensitive to one aspect of life that influenced all of Philistia – the degree of maritime trade.

The Tale of Wen-Amun, which is set in the 11th century BCE, does capture a certain 11th-century reality in its description of trade at this time, despite its literary embellishments.<sup>4</sup> The tale tells of a moment when things are not as they were: the Egyptian trade that was common in the Bronze Age is now much more difficult. The first town of note that is mentioned on the route is Dor. This also has the ring of authenticity; at Tel Dor of this period, excavators have uncovered

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4. There is considerable discussion concerning the date of Wenamun (Sass 2002; Gilboa 2005: 41 n. 2) and the literary nature of the text (Egberts 1998; Baines 1999; Schipper 2005). However, even if the tale is historical fiction, and even if it was composed as late as the campaign of Sheshonq, the text could authentically represent the earlier era. See Kitchen (1986: 16–17) for an acceptance of the basic historical accuracy of the 11th-century BCE political scenario described in the text.

a substantial number of pottery fragments from Egypt itself (Gilboa and Sharon 2017). At Ashkelon, Egyptian sherds are not absent but for the most part are very small fragments which could easily be residual. A basic count of seventy fragments that can be securely identified as Egyptian becomes somewhat more problematic when it is made clear that only a single sherd from Phases 19–17 at Ashkelon has a rim fraction greater than ten percent. The only surely contemporary Egyptian form from Phase 18 is from a burial context in which an infant was interred in a re-used Egyptian jar (Birney and Doak 2011). Without question, the Egyptian material is far more abundant at Dor than at Ashkelon. In the 11th century BCE, from the perspective of Mediterranean trade, both textual and archaeological evidence seems to argue that Ashkelon could be safely ignored. Whatever occasional trade that did come northward from Egypt was not enough to sustain it.

#### **4. Philistine Imperialism in the Highlands**

Several historians have connected the Egyptian withdrawal, the wider dispersal of Philistine pottery, and the Hebrew Bible's description of Philistine expansion into the highlands. Nadav Na'aman (2012) argues that the late Iron Age I site of Khirbet ed-Dawwara, one of the few fortified towns in the highlands at this time, was the site from which the Philistines consolidated their rule over Benjamin, leaving the site manned by bands of local outlaws operating under Philistine orders. Mario Liverani (2003: 89) expresses a common idea about this moment by arguing that the 11th-century Philistines were heirs to the Canaanite city-state system, expressing political and fiscal control over the highlands. Carl Ehrlich (1996: 24) speaks of Philistine "regional dominance" in the 11th century BCE. Somewhat earlier, Itamar Singer had argued that the 11th-century Philistine "hegemony" extended from the Jezreel Valley to the Negev. According to Singer (1994: 324), Gibeah in Benjamin was a permanent Philistine administrative center, and from that center the Philistines ruled after the Egyptian style. Singer ultimately claimed that "military forces were allocated to the general staff under the command of an agreed upon army commander" at Gibeah. Earlier still, Benjamin Mazar had argued that the 11th-century Philistines succeeded in controlling the major overland communication routes of the region, continuing Late Bronze Age Pharaonic policy in both goals and methods. For Mazar (1985: 73–74), it was the tyrannical Philistine rule of the hill country that caused later revolts. In every case the picture is of the Philistines ascendant, expressing some variety of imperial control over the neighbors.



From the perspective of Ashkelon, this seems an unlikely scenario. Rather than operating from a position of strength, safely backed by Mediterranean trade or Egyptian imperial connections, Ashkelon was suffering an economic decline. Yet, before taking a final dismissive step, it is worth revisiting some of the ancient texts in the Hebrew Bible which have given rise to these historical syntheses. Obviously, any attempt to use the Deuteronomistic History (Dtr) to reconstruct lifeways of the late 11th or 10th century BCE is fraught with controversy. Indeed, some archaeologists reflexively link any use of the text in these early periods to a “pre-Spinoza approach to the Hebrew Bible” (Finkelstein and Fantalkin 2012: 48). Fortunately, there are far more sophisticated and responsible redaction critical studies of this material which argue that original cores to some of the narratives can plausibly be traced back to apologia for the rise of Saul and David.<sup>5</sup>

In many of these texts, Philistine–Israelite interactions in the highlands revolve around a particular institution or office which appears primarily in those portions of Dtr claiming to describe the world of the 11th and 10th century BCE, often in connection with the Philistines. The underlying terms **מַצֵּב** and **נָצִיב** (occasionally **נִצְבִּי**), are, of course, from the same root – usually with the sense of standing in a particular place (so BDB). When used as **נָצִיב**, the term seems to be connected to some sort of official, sometimes translated as a “prefect.” It is hard to know what to make of this office, since the title never appears in inscriptions or seals that name royal officials, and its predominant usage is in parts of Dtr purporting to describe early times. When **מַצֵּב** appears, it is frequently in a passage describing the Philistines and it names a place of some type, often translated as “garrison” of the Philistines. This is a rather technical sense for the term, lacking any clear etymological foundation, and hence it is worth revisiting its usage in context.

1 Sam 10 contains the story of Saul’s oracular commissioning. There have been several attempts to address the extensive redaction critical issues in 1 Sam 9–10 (examples in Green 2018: 183–184), including the postulation of an early strand sometimes called the *Narrative of Saul’s Rise* (NSR<sub>A</sub>), which might precede a Davidic apologetic redaction and includes 1 Sam 10:2–5a (Green 2018: 212–213). This reconstruction is not above criticism, particularly given the variety of redactional options that other scholars have proposed, but given that it was undertaken

5. This article depends on some of the groundwork laid by the recent work of Jeremy Hutton (2009) and two of his students, Jonathon Wylie (2018) and Nathaniel Greene (2018). While I do not follow all of the conclusions of this school, I am relying on some of their basic analytical work to distill a relative chronology of the textual production and the *Sitz Im Leben* of some of the early fragments.

based on criteria that have nothing to do with the Philistines, it at least bypasses the most obvious kind of redactional circularity if we are using this text to extract information about the Philistines. In 1 Sam 10:2–5a, Saul is to receive a sign at the Tomb of Rachel, then at the Oak of Tabor, and then at the Giv’at Ha’Elohim, “the hill of the gods,” where there is a **מצב** of the Philistines. All three of these oracular encounters appear in places where one might expect divinatory guidance in the ancient Near East: the tomb, the oak, and the high place (King and Stager 2001: 108–109, 320–322, 363–372).<sup>6</sup> For our purposes, this isolated narrative emphasizes the presence of Philistines at or near an oracular center.<sup>7</sup>

Redactional work on 1 Sam 13–14 has argued for the continuation of the early narrative centered on Saul.<sup>8</sup> In 1 Sam 13:2, Jonathan is to have defeated a **מצב** / **נציב** at Geba (MT), and later the **מצב** is at Mizpah. Whether this refers to one and the same event, whether Geba should be read as Gibeah, and even whether the protagonist is Saul or Jonathan are all significant textual questions.<sup>9</sup> For our purposes, however, it is the explanation of the context of the form of the **מצב** / **נציב**. In 1 Sam 13:17–18 the Philistine assembly is described as an encampment at Michmash which functions as a temporary base from which groups of scavengers head north, east, and west.<sup>10</sup> Another snapshot of this type of assembly follows in chapter 14. In this narrative, Jonathan (or Saul after Hutton 2009) crosses over Wadi Suwenit to the **מצב** at Michmash. Having arrived, the hero uses the Philistine response as an oracular signal. Significantly, in the story no built structure separates the hero from his opponents and the melee immediately begins. In the ensuing battle, the **מצב**, the scavengers, and the rest of the defeated group flee back down the hills to Philistia.

A final reference to this institution appears in 2 Sam 21, in the appendices

6. As it relates to this particular high place, one must acknowledge that the Geba/Gibeah/Gibeon complex is a notorious crux in 1 Sam for the geography of Benjamin, leading to several ideas about the precise location of Givat Ha’Elohim (Stoebe 1965; Miller 1974; Rainey and Notley 2006: 145).

7. This conclusion, based upon the redactional conclusion of Green and Wylie, might point to Gibeon as the best reference. given its cultic significance in later texts.

8. All of the texts in 1 Sam 13–14 presented here are judged by Green to belong to NSR<sub>A</sub> (2018). Wylie (2018) is less definitive about the details of this redactional horizon, but places these texts in his earliest textual stratum.

9. At this point I part ways with Hutton, who seems to view the “take-over” of the capital of Gibeah/Geba by Saul as an important original thrust of this passage (2009: 345–6). In what follows, I would hope to argue that this political event is unlikely, as the Philistines were never capable of holding a fortified city in any permanent sense that would require such a campaign.

10. One might ask why they did not go south. Perhaps this is related to the fragment in 1 Sam 13:2.



describing the exploits of David's compatriots. This is somewhat more difficult to assign to a compositional stratum because it is so isolated. In this narrative, at the time of the barley harvest the Philistine raiders have moved up into the Rephaim Valley while David is in Adullam. One Philistine **מִצֵּב** has made camp in/near Bethlehem. This reference to Philistines in the Rephaim Valley in 2 Sam 21 has been connected to the earlier references in 2 Samuel 5 (Halpern 2001: 321), which have themselves been linked with the *History of David's Rise* (HDR). Others have connected this fragment to Adullam traditions of 1 Sam 22 (again connected to HDR; e.g., Halpern 1981: 166; McCarter 1984: 495). In any case, the proposed function of the **מִצֵּב** is consistent with other sources. The strategy of the Philistines closely parallels the description in 1 Sam 13–14. A larger group ascends along one of the routes from the lowlands and smaller itinerant groups are sent out to surrounding towns to collect tribute. In this case, the **מִצֵּב** description is now applied to one of the smaller offshoot groups. In the ensuing narrative, David's heroes pass through the Philistine camp, reach the well, and steal away with water, never clearly entering the gate or town. It seems that the writer pictures the Philistine group as stationed somewhere outside the gate, not inside the town at all.

Before summarizing these fragments from the Hebrew Bible, one final passage unrelated to the **מִצֵּב** completes the picture. 1 Sam 23:1–5 (frequently attributed to HDR) records an attack of the Philistines at Keilah (Wylie 2018: 308–328). This site, located at the border of the hills, was often a point of contention between the territorial kingdom of Jerusalem and lowland city-states, dating back to the 14th century BCE (Na'aman 2010). In the narrative, word arrives that the Philistines are attacking the city. It is notable that in this text the attack is specifically on the threshing floors, not on the city itself, despite the fact that the city is so close to Philistia proper. In the narrative, David successfully drives off the threat, recovering cattle which had been seized.

Taken together, these early narrative strands never picture the Philistines as attacking or occupying any fortified position outside their core coastal regions. All the conflicts take place in open fields, passes, or threshing floors.<sup>11</sup> The strategy portrayed in these texts involves harvest raids along the major trunk routes into the highlands, splitting off into smaller armed groups positioned at key

11. This is also true in 1 Sam 31. Although the generic “house of the goddesses” or (reconstructing from the LXX) “House of Astarte” is unclear, it appears to be in Philistia (if one follows **כְּלִי** in 1 Sam 31:9). In such a case, the text preserves no claim that the Philistines were even inside Beth-Shean, much less exercising political control.

nodes – oracular centers, passes, or city gates. After losses, the Philistines flee to Philistia and seem to have no recourse to any fortified positions in the highlands. The texts do not recall any moment in which there was an infrastructure to support Philistine imperial hegemony in the highlands. There are no walls, forts, towers, palisades, or administrative buildings.

Several historians have sought a fortified city for the Philistines to have ruled. Tell el-Ful was suggested by Benjamin Mazar (1985) and Itamar Singer (1994). Khirbet ed-Dawarra was suggested by Na’aman (2012), but this seems an unnecessary reaction to a misreading of the texts. Further, it is not supported archaeologically. All the Philistine pottery at Tell en-Nasbeh comes from the earlier unfortified village of Phase 4 (Zorn 1993). None of the newly fortified sites in this period, including Tell el-Ful and Khirbet ed-Dawwara, has produced any Philistine pottery. While these ceramic forms are not a certain way of determining Philistine presence, their absence hardly strengthens the case for Philistine hegemony. It is further notable that none of these fortified sites was very large or had massive fortifications, and none would withstand a major regional power. They are, however, about the right size to dissuade small seasonal bands of raiding foreigners. Even Khirbet Qeiyafa, following the idea that the site was a temporary projection of some configuration of highland power (Garfinkel and Ganor 2009: 12–15; Levin 2012; Finkelstein and Fantalkin 2012), had a wall to stop just these types of raids and was not conquered, despite being, like Keilah, at the doorstep of Philistia itself.

Wylie argues that one of the core political functions of at least one version of HDR is to defend David’s reputation from the accusation that he was one of these Philistine raiders. In 1 Sam 27, David is described in these terms as part of his service to the King of Gath. And, in the aforementioned complex of narratives around Keilah in 1 Sam 23 (this time in 23:6–14, which may originally have been an independent strand; McCarter 1980), David is advised by an oracle to avoid the fortifications of Keilah. Such fortifications are dangerous for brigands, since one can be trapped inside by the inhabitants.

In the context of these recollections, the *מצב* appears to be merely a place where a group of armed foreign tribute-collectors stationed themselves to extract the goods. In these snippets, the *מצבים* were all temporary and seasonal, showing no attempt to rule the highlands on a day-to-day basis, no “garrisons” or “prefects” as the translators assume. Within these same texts, the antidote to the Philistine annoyance is clear. Even at their most powerful, the 11th-century Philistines did not conquer fortified cities in these narratives.

It is no mere coincidence that, according to Avi Faust, the rural sector in the highlands collapsed during the 11th century BCE (Faust 2003).<sup>12</sup> If indeed these texts preserve an authentic memory of Philistine incursions, part of the solution to these annual or occasional raids would have been to stay inside fortifications, whether pre-existing or newly built.

## 5. Conclusion

The end of the Egyptian empire and the decline of Mediterranean trade changed the landscape for the Philistine cities. At Ashkelon, the result seems to have been decades of decline. But the decline of the Mediterranean economy was precisely the type of systemic negative feedback that could cause a general change in perspective for Philistine society in general, and, so, for some decades, the Philistines found some new success by raiding rural highlanders at harvest time.

But this approach worked for only a short while. Snippets from the earliest redactional fragments of the Dtr argue that the coordination of the highlanders countered raids earlier and more successfully than before. Archaeological

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12. Faust (2003; 2015) argues that the collapse of parts of the rural sector in the Iron Age I could also be an intentional move undertaken by a growing political power in the highlands. This seems unnecessary and unlikely. First, as described above, raids by Philistines are a more direct explanation for the phenomenon in the highlands and in peripheral areas. Further, it is unclear why this would be a necessary part of “state formation” in any socio-evolutionary sense. Omer Sergi (2017) recently argued that the growth of this rural sector was an important part of the rise of Late Iron I and Iron IIA Jerusalem, particularly in connection to the Stepped Stone Structure, though Finkelstein has rightly pointed out that Sergi’s chronological sequence here does not work. Jerusalem was a fortified city from the Middle Bronze Age onward, and the Stepped Stone Structure and the walls of the city were probably repaired many times from the Late Bronze Age onward (2018a). Whenever David or the “house of David” was so fortunate as to slip through the ancient fortifications at Jerusalem to install a new dynasty, Jerusalem’s kingdom – even in the 9th century – was still little more than the territorial kingdom of Abdi-Hepa *Redivivus*, with an expansion to the southwest. None of these political moves required or was even related to the presence or absence of a rural sector. As Brendon Benz (2016) has recently outlined, the *Ad Hoc* collective action of tribal groups connected to early Israel, as described in the stories of Abimelech or Shechem or Samuel or Saul (whatever their compositional history), was entirely typical of the late second millennium. Whatever one refers to as ancient “state formation” in the 10th century, whether in the territorial state of Jerusalem or the scattered confederation of tribal groups called Israel (Master 2019), I would agree with Benz (2016) and Na’aman (2010) that the discussion is less about any fundamental social evolution and more about a series of political moves taken from a menu of existing choices common to patrimonial societies of the late second and early first millennia.

investigation has revealed that 11th-century highlanders either fortified their towns or moved to some place that was already fortified.

More importantly for Philistia, in the late 11th and 10th centuries BCE a newly revived Mediterranean economy reached the southern coast and started to reverse the trends that had pushed the Philistines east to begin with. At Ashkelon, much of what had declined in Phase 18 revived in Phase 17: trade rebounded, foodways stabilized, even the architecture was refreshed (Master and Aja 2020).

This new world of Mediterranean trade, however, was somewhat different from before, in that Ashkelon was now completely in the shadow of Tyre and Sidon (Master 2018). From this moment, every coastal and inland group began a gradual process of orienting their economic and political lives toward the commercial empires of Tyre and Sidon. This orientation is apparent at Dor from its earliest Iron Age deposits; at Ashkelon, which is so sensitive to these currents, the evidence begins a few generations later. By sometime in the 10th century BCE, huge swaths of Ashkelon's economic, political, linguistic, and religious life had been influenced by the cities of the Lebanese coast. This reconfiguration of Philistia, pulled again toward the Mediterranean, was to become the primary pattern for the rest of Philistine history.

Before this recalibration, however, there was a moment in the 11th century BCE when Philistia turned to the east – not out of imperial ambition, but out of necessity because of broader Mediterranean patterns. Philistine desperation influenced the politics of the highlands, pushing scattered tribal groups to work together, diminishing the rural sector, and possibly influencing a clan from Bethlehem to insert their dynasty into the safety of Abdi-Hepa's fortified Bronze Age capital. But to the writers and editors of the biblical texts, the era of the 11th and 10th centuries BCE became something more, and the memories of these raids were connected to the origin stories of the Kingdom of Israel and the House of David. Such writings began to form a new world, a world in which Jerusalem was the center and the Mediterranean economy was an afterthought for the people of the Southern Levant.

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