

Article

Philistine Cult and Religion According to Archaeological Evidence

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Received: 6 January 2019; Accepted: 16 January 2019; Published: 23 January 2019



Abstract: The paper surveys and discusses the updated archaeological evidence for Philistine cult and religion, and cult and religion in Philistia during the Iron Age. The evidence can be related to public or official cult, represented in temple and shrine structures, and to that coming from households, representing possibly more popular religion. The evidence of public cult, so far mostly from peripheral sites, includes largely cultural elements linked with the local Canaanite cult and religion. Yet, within households at the Philistine cities there is more evidence for cultic elements of Aegean affinity during Iron Age I. In particular, figurines and ceramic figurative vessels and objects will be discussed. It seems that the Philistine religion may have retained certain distinctive elements also during Iron Age II. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to reconstruct the details of the nature of the Philistine religion due to the limited amount of evidence and lack of textual records.

Keywords: Philistines; Iron Age; Aegean-style; temples; shrines; household; figurines

1. Introduction

The evidence regarding Philistine cult and religion includes several biblical and extra-biblical references, but mainly archaeological evidence from excavation in sites of Iron Age Philistia (Figure 1). The Philistine material culture can be considered to be one of the most typical examples where a distinct material culture appears in a limited geographical and chronological context (Dothan 1982). This culture reflects the arrival of new population from the West to the southern coast of Israel as it includes components which are not found in the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age local cultures of the southern Levant, showing links to the Aegean region and Cyprus; thus, probably indicating the arrival of immigrant population during the beginning of the 12th century BCE (e.g., Dothan 1982; Yasur-Landau 2010; Ben-Shlomo 2010, 2014). During the subsequent stages of the Iron Age, late Iron Age I, and Iron Age II, the material culture of Philistia changes and many of the elements attesting to links with the West disappear. Yet, Philistia maintains a degree of political and cultural independence and distinction (see, e.g., Ehrlich 1996; Shai 2006) and, thus, it seems justified to continue and treat the material culture of Philistia throughout the Iron Age as a well-defined cultural unit. This material culture also includes certain cultic and religious aspects (e.g., Mazar 2000; Yasur-Landau 2001; Maier et al. 2013, pp. 15–22; Ben-Shlomo 2014) which will be the focus of this article.

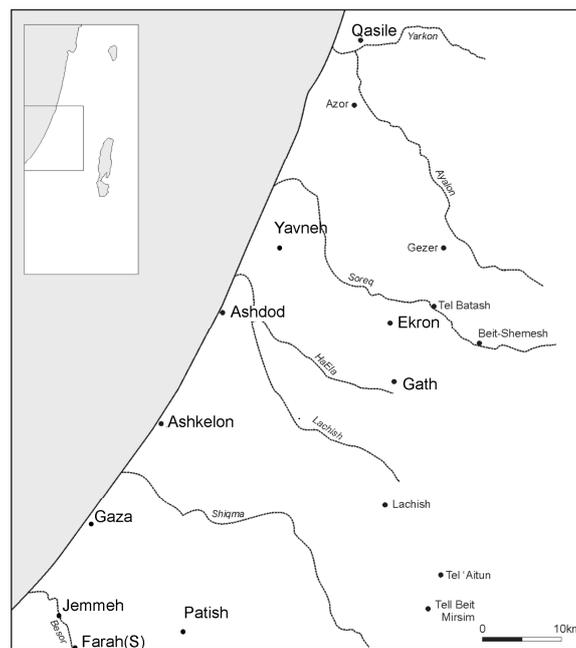


Figure 1. Map of Philistia.

The textual evidence on Philistine cult and religion is limited. The cult of a Near-eastern male god by the Philistines is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, either in regards to Dagon of Ashdod (1 Sam 5) or Gaza (Judg 16:23) or Ba'alZebub of Ekron (2 Kgs 1:2–3). (Singer 1992) related the Philistine god Dagon to the Hebrew *dag* (fish), yet it is more reasonable to associate this with the Semitic agricultural god of Dagon (related to '*dagan*' = grain). Another relevant story is the mentioning of the Philistines making five gold images of mice and '*Opalim*' (emeralds) in the story of the capture of the arc (1 Sam 6:4–5, see Maier 2007). This passage mentions the priests and the diviners of the Philistines, suggesting to construct these images, symbolizing the five Philistine cities of *Sereus* in order to make amends with the Hebrew god. Whether this reflects any actual religious practice carried out by the Philistines is of course doubtful. In any case, the few biblical passages related to the Philistine cult seem to comply with standard description of local Canaanite pagan cult. In addition, several inscriptions found in archaeological excavation may also contribute evidence towards the nature of Philistine religion. Several inscriptions from Philistine contexts mention the Canaanite generic god Ba'al (see below), while the royal inscription from Ekron (Tel Miqne Complex 650) mentions implicitly a goddess name with an Aegean background (see below); these will be discussed below.

Therefore, archaeological evidence can only shed more light of any specific characteristic attributes of Philistine religion and cultic practices. The material culture from the region of Philistia during the Iron Age related to cult will be inspected. The study of Philistine material culture including its cultic aspect has advanced substantially during the past years. This is mainly due to the increase of evidence from new archaeological excavation at the Philistine city sites of Ekron (Tel Miqne), Ashkelon, and Gath (Tell es-Safi). This adds up to the previous evidence from Ashdod and the peripheral site of Tell Qasile. Several studies describe various aspects of Philistine religion and cult both in Iron Age I (Mazar 2000; Yasur-Landau 2001; Dothan 2003) and Iron Age II (Gitin 2003; Ehrlich 1996; Maier 2006, 2007, 2008; Maier et al. 2013; Dagan et al. 2018). More data has emerged from excavations at peripheral sites of Philistia, as at an Iron Age IIA favissa pit near Yavneh (Kletter et al. 2006, 2010) and at a late Iron Age I temple at Nahal Patish (Nahshoni 2009; Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009). Specific aspects of Philistine material culture or finds from Philistia that can be related to cultic practices and religion were studied on various occasions (e.g., head cups, Maier 2006; Meiberg 2013; phallus-objects, Maier 2007; male figurine, Maier 2008; pomegranates, Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007; zoomorphic vessels, Ben-Shlomo

2008; figurines, Schmitt 1999; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009; altars, Gitin 1989, 1993, 2002, 2008, altars; household religion, Ben-Shlomo 2014).

While the boundaries between household or family religion and public, state, or official religion are not always straightforward, in relation to archaeological interpretation, this division should probably be maintained, as it is the most intuitive and achievable one. Generally, public and official religion is reflected in structures identified as temples or shrines, and the finds in them. These structures, which have an inherent and rather constant cultic function, can often be identified according to several objective parameters. These include a special ground plan, building techniques, separation of spaces, installations and type, quantity and location of specific finds (see Renfrew 1985, pp. 1–26).

Household religion is reflected by installations and artifacts found in domestic context, that can be considered cultic; on several occasions, areas within the household could be defined as ‘cultic corners’ or ‘house shrines’. If household religion is defined as the cultic practices conducted in the household, one still has to define a household, and how to recognize traces of cultic activity within it. While, as we know, almost any artifact, or immovable, within the house could on a certain occasion be used in relation to cultic or religious activities or beliefs, this approach cannot be very useful in common archaeological research. If one desires to identify ritual activity, a search for objects or behaviors that have *apparent* symbolic character, and cannot be regularly employed in daily activities, is warranted. Therefore, objects such as figurines, figurative models, stands and libation vessels, altars and incense burners are natural candidates for reflecting ritual in household contexts in most cultures.

The following discussion will be thus divided into two ‘types’ of cult: ‘official’ or public cult and religion and household, family or ‘popular’ cult. Along these lines, the discussion of the archaeological evidence relating to Philistine cult may be separated according to the chronological division of Iron Age I (ca. 1200–1000 BCE) and Iron Age II (ca. 1000–600 BCE) periods. Although this division is somewhat artificial, it represents to a high degree two different stages in the evolution of the Philistine society. The characteristics of cultic activities and items recovered from Philistine households will be compared with those from temples from Philistia. In addition, an attempt to reconstruct the character of the Philistine religion and its evolution during the Iron Age according to the archaeological evidence will be made.

2. Public (Official) Religion

Iron Age I Temples or shrines in Philistia: To date, three sites from Iron Age I Philistia can definitely be defined as temples. These include the temples of Tell Qasile (Figure 2; Mazar 1980, 1985, 2000), the temple in Nahal Patish (Nahshoni 2009; Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009); both of these are apparent temples, according to both their architectural plan and finds (which also resemble each other). In addition, an Iron Age I/IIA transition temple was reported from Area D at Tell es-Safi-Gath (Figures 3 and 4, Dagan et al. 2018; this will be discussed below). At Tell es-Safi-Gath, Area A, Strata A6–A4, under the Iron Age IIA shrine (see below), the excavators reported a possible temple (Maier et al. 2013, pp. 12–13, Figure 5) with two finely worked stone pillars. Note that all these structures are dated to the later phases of Iron Age I. A large structure in Field IV Lower at Ekron (Building 350, Strata V–IV) was also interpreted as a temple, in particular by (Dothan 2003). Yet, this identification is not secure and is more likely to be a public or affluent building (see e.g., Mazow 2005; Ben-Shlomo 2010, pp. 186–87). Therefore, the finds from this structure, which include many objects of possible cultic properties, will be discussed under ‘household’ cult section (see below). Thus, a major Iron Age I temple in the main Philistine cities is yet to be discovered.

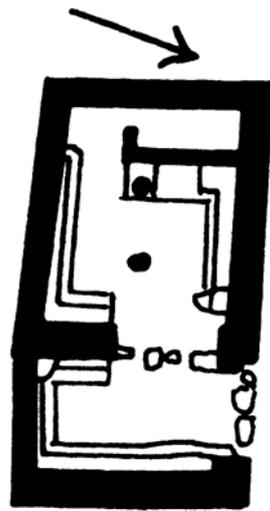


Figure 2. Tell Qasile Temple 131 schematic plan (after Mazar 1992: Figure 28).

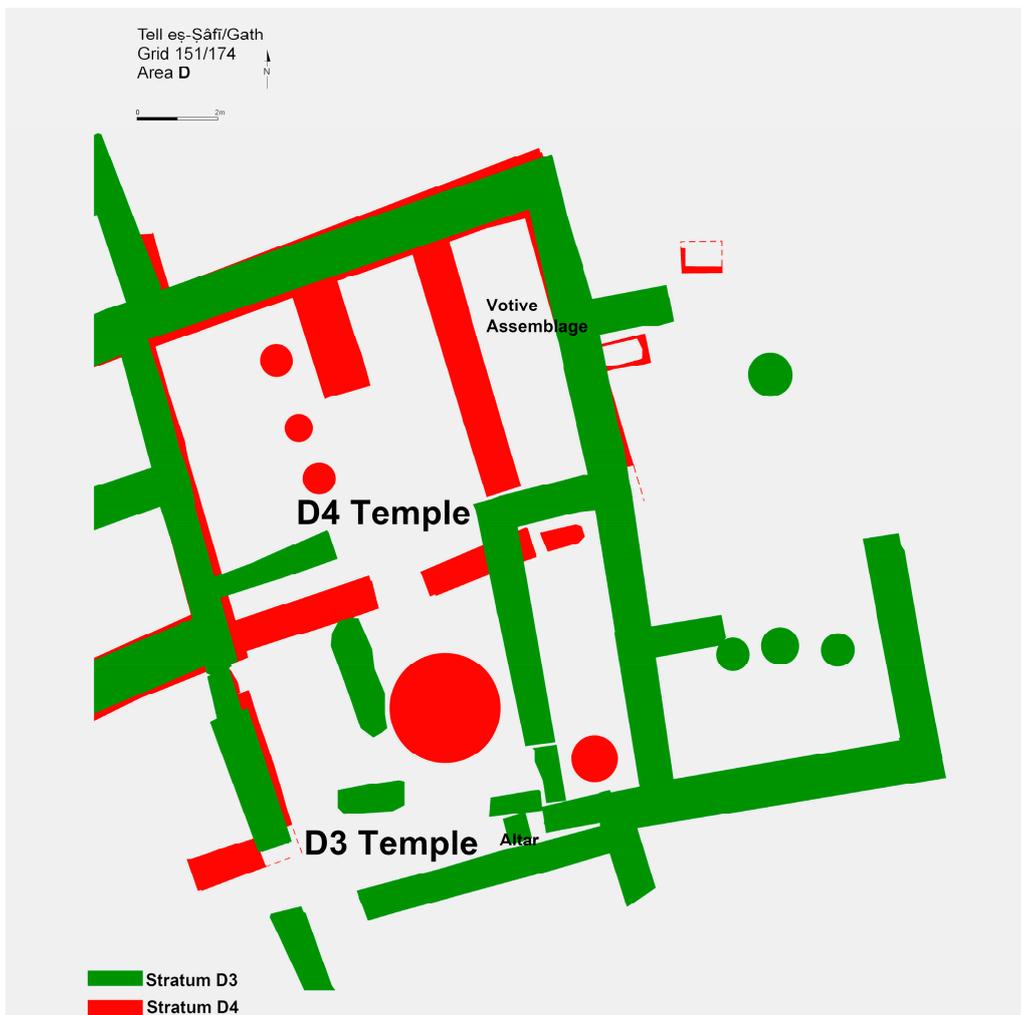


Figure 3. Gath Area D temples (Dagan et al. 2018: Figure 2, courtesy of A.M. Maeir).



Figure 4. Two-horned altar from Gath (Dagan et al. 2018: Figure 4, courtesy of A.M. Maeir).



1



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Figure 5. Stands from the Yavneh favissa (courtesy of R. Kletter).

The Iron Age I temples from Tell Qasile (Strata XII–X) are well known and published (Mazar 1980, 1985) and will only be briefly described here (Figure 2). In the lower level (Stratum XII), only a small one-room shrine with benches along the walls and a platform (bamah) was erected; it was somewhat enlarged in Stratum XI. The main evidence comes, however, from the later stage in Stratum X (Temple 131, Figure 2). In the phase, the structure was enlarged and included a rectangular structure with an indirect entrance, entrance room, main hall with pillars, and a back room (cela) with another indirect entrance. Adjacent to it, another small one-room shrine was located (Shrine 300) containing many cultic vessels (Mazar 1980).

The plan of the Qasile temples resembles LB II-Iron Age I temples from Beth Shean, Lachish, and other sites (denoted the ‘temples with raised cela’ or indirect entrance temple, possibly a reflection of Egyptian influence, see Mazar 1992, pp. 173–83) seem to be rooted in Late Bronze Age traditions (see, e.g., Negbi 1988; Mazar 2000). The similarities between the plans of the temples of Qasile and Phylakopi in the Aegean were noted (Negbi 1988), yet were interpreted to indicate a Canaanite influence on the Aegean.

The finds from the Qasile temples indicate ritual activity and include various anthropomorphic and zoomorphic libation vessels decorated in the Philistine Bichrome style (Mazar 1980; Dothan 1982),

yet their iconography do not indicate clear Aegean affinities; see Mazar 2000; Ben-Shlomo 2010). Other notable finds are a lion-shaped head cup, bowls in the shape of birds with cylindrical stands carrying them, and figurative stands and terracottas (including two pomegranate vessels; see Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007). Recently, (Hitchcock et al. 2016) suggested that a bronze axe found in Temple 131 at Qasile is related to the 'double axe' ritual motif known from Crete and possibly Cyprus; yet, clearly, the tool form is not of a 'double axe' and is more similar to local tools.

The temple at Nahal Patish was excavated in a small rural site of an area of 12 dunam (1.2 hectares) and dates according to the pottery to late Iron Age I (Nahshoni 2009; Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009). Its date and plan are similar to the Tell Qasile temples Strata XI–X (and the structure is accordingly interpreted). The structure is an asymmetric L-shaped building (Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009). The entrance is into a courtyard with favissae pits (depositories of cultic furnishings) and an altar in it; one figurative offering stand was found here (Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009, Figures 2–5), as well as spools (cylindrical loom weights). From the courtyard there are two passages: to the right, there is an entrance to a square store room with a pit/favissa with cooking vessels and other vessels and cooking pots; to the left, there is an indirect entrance to the temple's cela. This room includes stone benches, a stepped bamah, and a rubble standing stone *mazeva*; near the bamah, two jars, two rounded stands, a strainer spouted jug (in the 'Late Philistine' decoration style), a bronze knife, and gold foil pieces were found here. Outside the courtyard, another small rectangular structure was excavated with a pebbled floor; here, the intact lion head cup was found (Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009, Figure 18). The finds and plan show mostly local Canaanite characteristics, although the decoration of some of the cultic objects is in the Philistine Bichrome style. The figurative offering stand was published in detail (Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009). The stand decorated in Philistine Bichrome style includes several figures at its base depicting a human, a ram, and a palmette. The shape and iconography of the stand illustrate Cypriote (the shape is an imitation of Cypriote metal stands), Egyptian, and Canaanite characteristics (Nahshoni and Ziffer 2009, pp. 547–54).

Iron Age II temples or shrines in Philistia. There is now more evidence on temples in Philistia with the excavation of Area D at Gath (Dagan et al. 2018) and the very rich favissa from Yavneh (Kletter et al. 2010), which is located in the heart of Philistia (although not in one of the main cities); this adds to the excavation of the temple at late Iron Age Ekron (Complex 650).

In a recent publication (Dagan et al. 2018), two temples dated to late Iron Age I and Iron Age IIA were reported from Gath (Figures 3 and 4). While most cultic objects belong to Stratum D3 (Iron Age IIA, destroyed by Hazael, ca. 830 BCE), the area was used for cultic activities also during Stratum D4 (late Iron Age I) and maybe even Stratum D5 (Iron Age IB). The complete plan of the Stratum D4 temple is not known, yet it is comprised of two elongated rooms lined by three pillars oriented north to south, and a third elongated room on its eastern side (Figure 3; Dagan et al. 2018, p. 31); the entrance was on the south and led to an open courtyard. Among the finds of note from the building is the assemblage of seventeen votive ceramic vessels and a "Tonna Galea" conch shell (Dagan et al. 2018, Figure 3), the latter well known as a cultic object from the Aegean Bronze Age cultures (Hitchcock et al. 2016). The Stratum D4 structure went out of use without signs of destruction, and a temple and associated structures and features of Stratum D3 were constructed above it.

The Gath Stratum D3 temple structure (Figure 3) was comprised of an outer courtyard to the North, three lengthwise rooms (one with stone paving and one with plastered floors and walls), and a broad room at the back of the structure in which a unique monolithic two-horned altar was placed (Figure 4; Dagan et al. 2018, Figure 5). The two-horned stone altar is similar to Iron Age II 4-horned altars, yet the two-horned may allude to the Cypriote horned cultic items (e.g., Maeir 2012). The excavators suggested that the basic plan of the structure is similar, in part, to the plan of the 'four-room house' that is often associated with Israelite/Judahite culture. Many finds of cultic nature were found in the structure (Dagan et al. 2018, pp. 31–33), including 200 astragali; notably very few figurines were found. Next to this building, rooms with additional cult-oriented finds were located, and to the East of the temple, an area with evidence of metal production may also be related to the cultic function in this

area (see [Eliyahu-Behar and Workman 2018](#)). Additional cultic items from Tell es-Safi/Gath include decorated chalices (see below; [Gadot et al. 2014](#)).

The Yavneh favissa included at least 120 figurative house models or cultic stands depicting a rich iconographic world (Figure 5; e.g., [Kletter et al. 2010](#)). Other finds included over 1000 chalices, shovels, and few other stands and figurative vessels and hardly any figurines. This favissa reflects the furnishing of a nearby temple, probably at Tel Yavneh. The main themes appearing include naked females sometimes standing on lions, bulls, lions as architectural supporters, and the palm tree flanked by two ibexes. Also appearing are musicians in groups and individuals. All these are very distinctive and important Canaanite and Levantine iconographic and religious motifs (see, e.g., [Keel and Uehlinger 1998](#); [Ziffer and Kletter 2007](#)). Moreover, the bird motif which is a popular Philistine motif ([Dothan 1982](#); [Yasur-Landau 2008](#)), appearing in various media (pottery decoration, figurative pottery, ivories), is absent from the Yavneh assemblage. However, the style of the depictions, especially the human ones, recalls Philistine iconography, as appearing in Aegean-style figurines, Iron Age II figurines and the musicians stand from Ashdod, which also shares the theme (see [Ziffer and Kletter 2007](#); [Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009](#), pp. 41, 58).

The most important temple in Iron Age Philistia so far is the monumental temple-palace structure of Stratum IC dated to the 7th century BCE at Ekron (Figure 6; Temple-Palace Complex 650, sized 38×57 m; [Gitin 1998, 2003](#), Figures 1 and 2). The background for this temple is the flourishing of Ekron under Assyrian and Egyptian rule during the 7th century, and it is becoming a major center in the Near East for olive oil production. The structure was destroyed by the Babylonians in 604 BCE (Stratum IB). The plan of this structure, which was probably a palace or public building that contained a temple within it, resembles both Neo-Assyrian courtyard palaces and Phoenician public structures, especially from Kition (see, e.g., [Gitin 1998](#)).

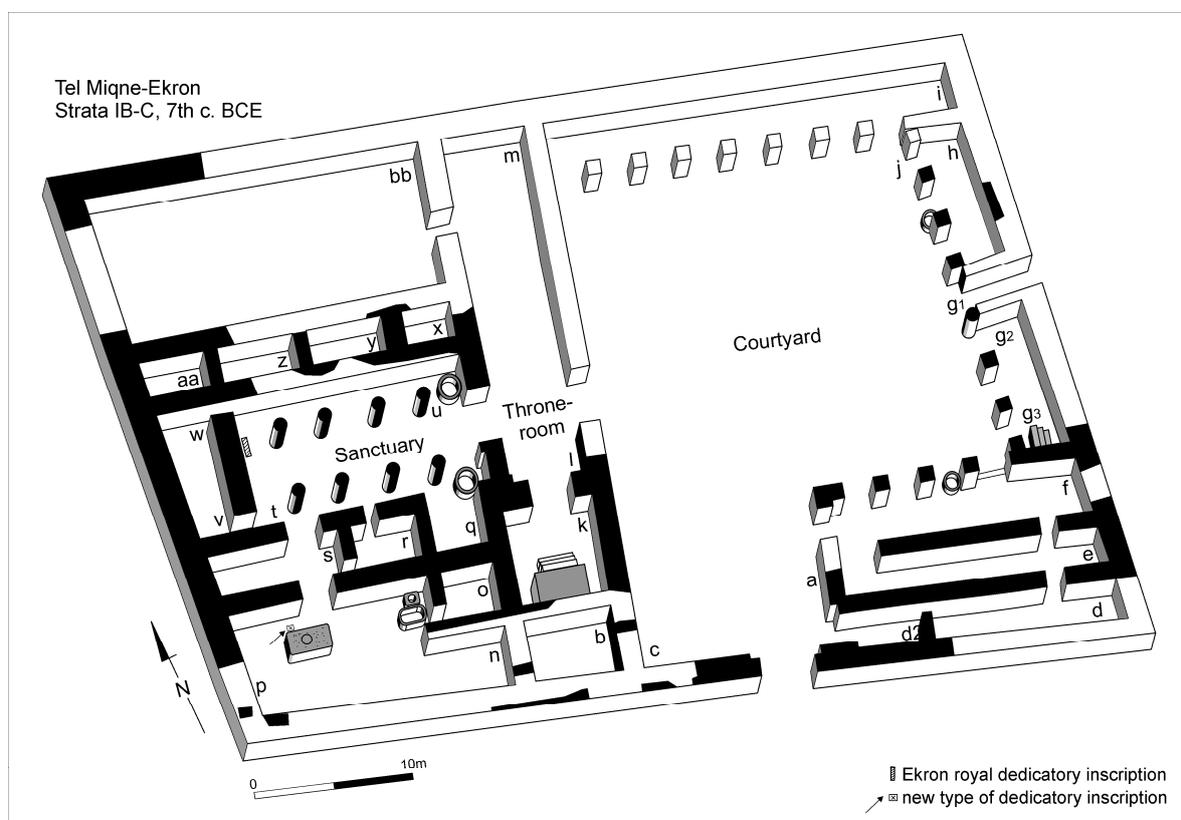


Figure 6. Complex 650 at Ekron ([Gitin and Naveh 1997](#); courtesy of S. Gitin).

The most important find in this structure is the royal inscription found on its cela (Figure 7; Gitin and Naveh 1997; Gitin 2003, pp. 284–86, Figure 3). It reads: “The house (which) Akhayush (Ikausu/Achish), son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya’ir, ruler (sar 𐤍) of Ekron, built for Pythogaia (Ptgyh), his lady. May she bless him, and protect him, and prolong his days, and bless his land.” This inscription mentioning explicitly a goddess of Ekron which is clearly non-Semitic and probably with Aegean affinities will be discussed in more detail below.

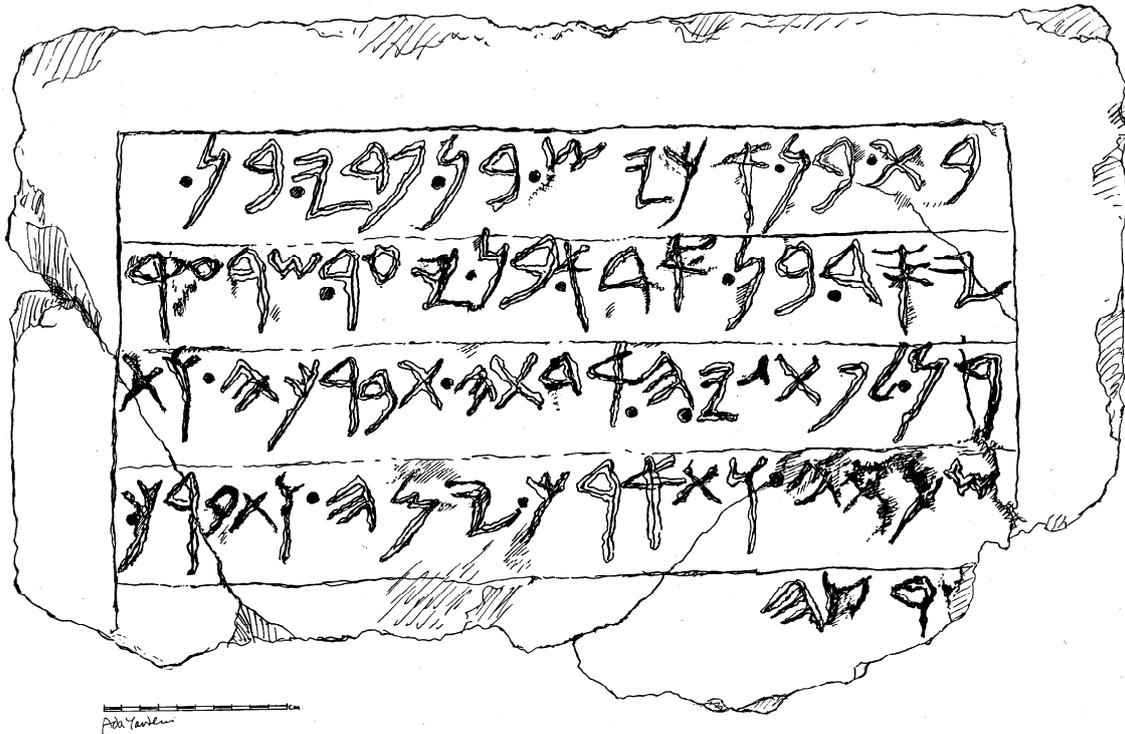


Figure 7. The royal dedicatory inscription from Ekron (Gitin and Naveh 1997; courtesy of S. Gitin).

The structure also contained hundreds of complete vessels, mostly storage jars, as well as a large assemblage of elephant ivories (some are very large and may come from earlier periods in Egypt). Figurative items from the temple and its vicinity are rare, including one hollow female figurine (see below Figure 14:1; Gitin 2003), a bovine zoomorphic vessel, and a possible fragment of a lion head cup (see Ben-Shlomo 2008, pp. 32, 40, Figure 8:3). This structure still awaits, however, a final publication.

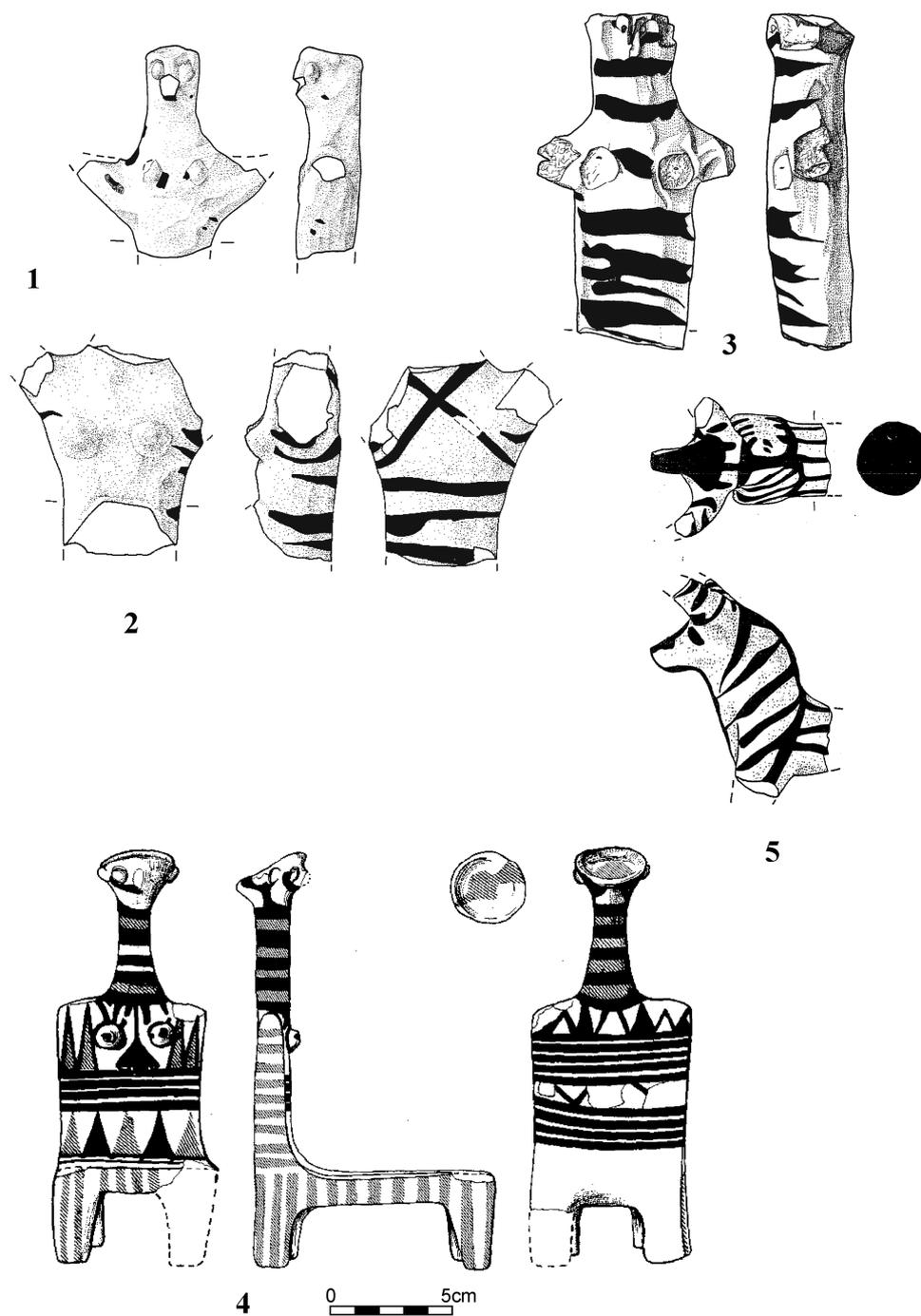


Figure 8. Aegean-style figurines from Philistia (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 1). 1: Psi-type figurine from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 1:1). 2: Psi-type figurine from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 1:2). 3: Psi-type figurine from Ashkelon (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 1:9). 4: Ashdoda figurine from Ashdod (Dothan 1971: Figure 91:1). 5: Bovine figurine from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 16:1).

3. Household ('Popular') Cult and Religion

Iron Age I household cultic corners: At Ashkelon Grid 38, a 'house shrine' dated to Iron Age I was reported (Master and Aja 2011). This feature is located in Building 572 of Stratum 20 (12th c. BCE), in a narrow room (Room 572, Installation 539) and is a lime-plastered earth installation, set against the wall, with four protrusions on its upper corners, appearing as a four-horned altar. The identification of the room with this installation as a cultic corner or a 'house shrine' is based on the shape of this unique

installation; Master and Aja relate it to ‘horns of consecration’ installation known from Cyprus (Master and Aja 2011, p. 139). Several objects were clustered nearby in the room, including loom weight, a pestle, and a faience grape cluster (Master and Aja 2011, p. 140). At Ekron Area INE 3, a cultic room was also reported from Stratum VI (Dothan 2003, p. 203, Figure 17; Ben-Shlomo 2010, p. 165), on account of its small size and a bench or a ‘bamah’ attached to the wall; also, a few figurative items were found here (an animal head and a zoomorphic figurine, Ben-Shlomo 2010, p. 165). Also at Ekron, Building 350 includes a room with a ‘bamah’ which may be a cultic corner or a ‘house shrine’ (for the finds see below).

Iron Age II household cultic corners: Excavations in Philistia have yielded some evidence for Iron Age II household cults (see Ben-Shlomo 2014). Important evidence comes from the industrial zone in Area D of the lower city (Dothan and Freedman 1967; Dothan 1971), and to a lesser extent from the gate area, in Area M (Dothan and Porath 1982). At Ashdod Area D, a shrine or cultic corner was defined near the pottery workshop (Dothan and Freedman 1967, pp. 130–36; Dothan 1971, pp. 86–92). It should be noted, however, that from the ‘shrine’ itself (Locus 1010; Platform 1022) no cultic objects were recovered, while many of these were found in refuse pits in the vicinity of the kilns. From the 7th century BCE, a commercial center of the port of Ashkelon was excavated (Grid 50) and some figurines and other cultic objects (as altars, see below) were found in the structures uncovered (Stager et al. 2008, pp. 1584–85;). A cultic corner was excavated in Area A, Stratum A3 at Gath (Locus 62023), probably within a household (Maier 2008; Maier et al. 2013, pp. 22–23). The finds in this corner include a ceramic pomegranate, a kernos with bird and cup/vessel, and a zoomorphic vessel (Maier et al. 2013, p. 22, Figure 9). Two elongated pottery vessels interpreted by Maier as phallus vessels (Maier 2007) were also found in the vicinity.

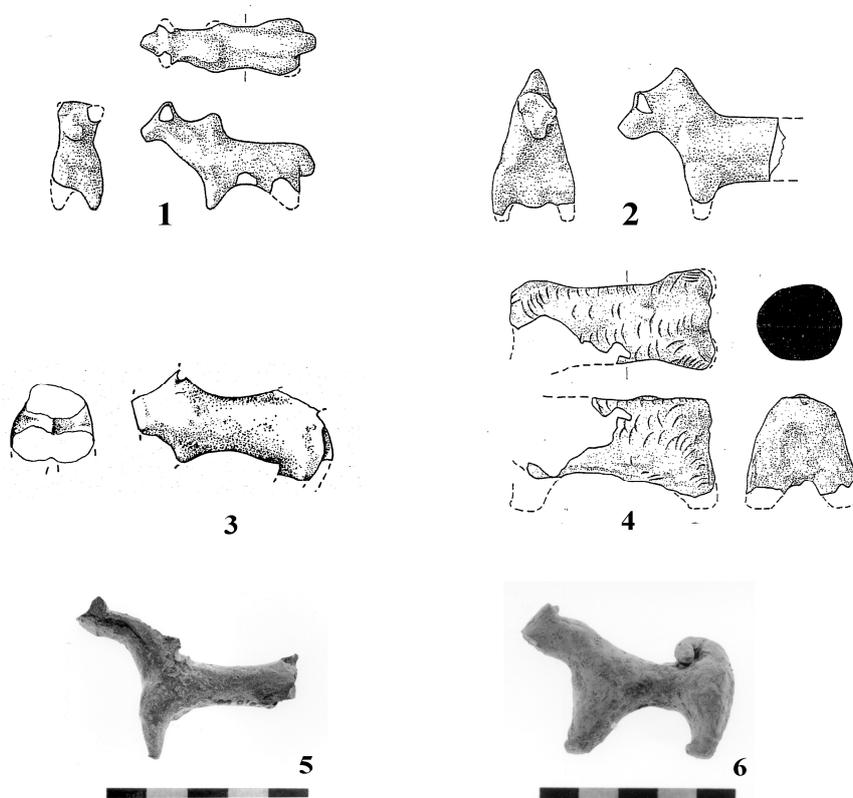


Figure 9. Undecorated animal figurines from Iron Age I Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 2).

During the late Iron Age II, Ekron flourished, and a vast quantity of olive oil installations were uncovered (see, e.g., Gitin 1998, 2003). From these, especially in Field III, some zoomorphic vessels

and altars were found; this could be considered an ‘industrial context’ and the interpretation of cultic activities here could be similar to those in Ashdod Area D (see below).

Several elements of material culture found in household or other domestic or industrial contexts that have apparent relationship to cult and religion will be described (although we have less data on some of these categories). These include mainly figurines, figurative terracottas (including stands and libation vessels), chalices, and altars.

The Iron Age I: Aegean-style figurines. One of the most important pieces of evidence for Philistine domestic cult practices is the Aegean-style figurines appearing in Ekron, Ashdod, and Ashkelon during Iron Age I (Figure 8; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009). While these finds are not very common, they are important both because of their links to Aegean and Mycenaean culture, and as they seem to be the only type of human figurines appearing in Iron Age I Philistine households. These depictions of clothed or partly clothed females are highly schematic in comparison to the naturalistic and nude Levantine and Canaanite tradition of plaque female figurines appearing during the late 2nd and early 1st millennium BCE (which the former replace in the Philistine cities). Three major types include standing, ‘Psi-related’ female figurines (Figure 8:1–3), seated female figurines (Figure 8:4, ‘Ashdoda’), and decorated bovine figurines (Figure 8:5).

Psi figurines (Figure 8:1–3; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, pp. 42–48, Figures 1–4) depict a schematic standing female with its hands uplifted (for the Mycenaean prototype, see Furumark 1941, p. 86; French 1971, pp. 133–39, pl. 22). This type of figurine appears at Tel Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, p. 122, Figures 3.36:2–3, 3.62:2, 3.80:4, 3.115:5), Ekron (Figure 8:1–2; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, Figure 1:1–2) and Ashkelon (Figure 8:3; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, Figures 1:3–4 and 4; Stager et al. 2008, p. 266; Press 2012) (Schmitt 1999, pp. 594–99, Type I), and a surface find from Tell Qasile (Mazar 1986, p. 14, Figure 6:2, pl. 3b). Various narrow heads with bird-shaped faces may also belong to this type (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, pp. 54–55, Figures 10–12), while shorter heads with a concave ‘*polos*’ hat (or hair-dress) may belong to seated female figurines or other unknown types of figurines. Several examples preserve the painted decoration depicting the dress and including horizontal lines and an X-shaped strap on the back (Figure 8:2) or a hatched pattern appearing on the front of a figurine, as seen in an example from Ashdod (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009). This decoration recalls similar Late Helladic (LH) IIIC figurines (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009; Ben-Shlomo 2014), and indicates that the Philistines had a knowledge of the details of the LHIIIC figurines.

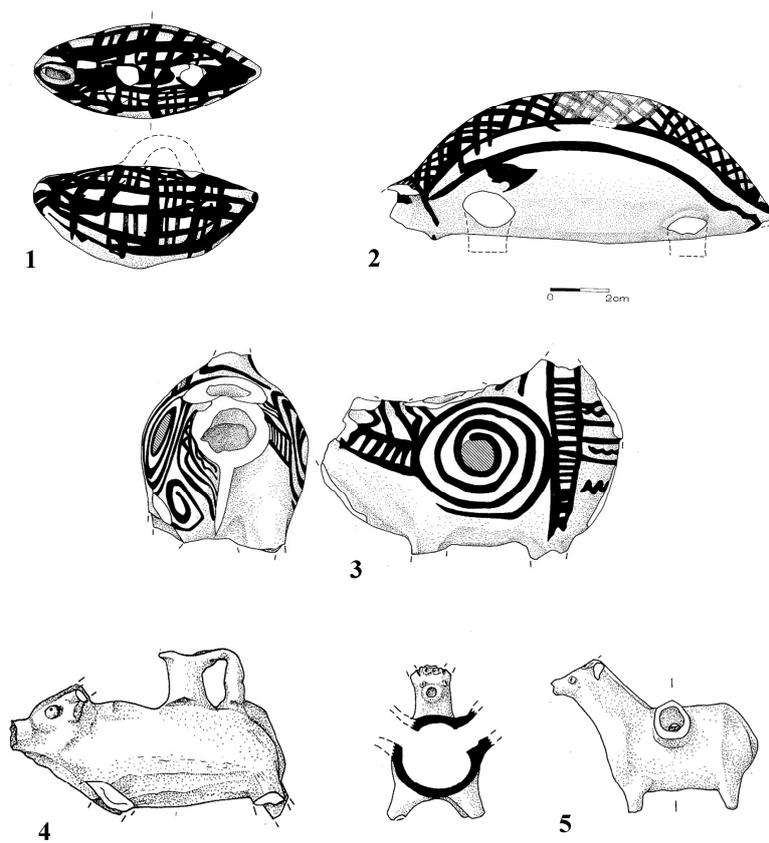


Figure 10. Libation vessels from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 3). 1: Bird askos (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 1:2). 2: Hedgehog vessel (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 1:1). 3: Bovine vessel decorated in Philistine style (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 2:1). 4: Bovine libation vessel (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 9:1). 5: Vessel in the shape of a donkey carrying jars (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 9:2).

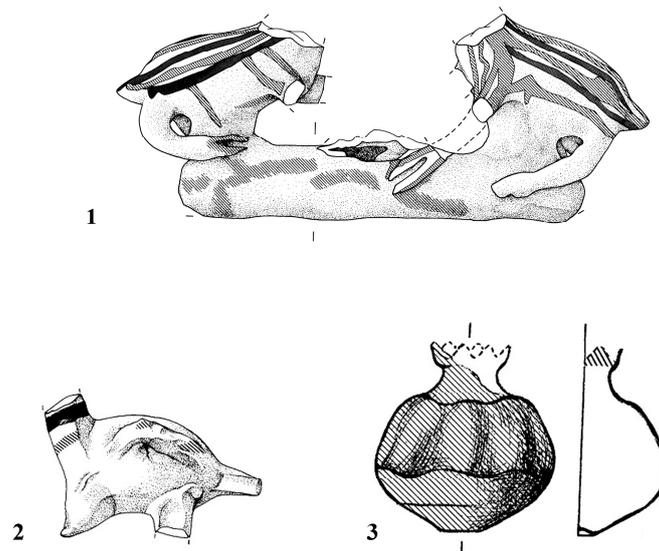


Figure 11. Various cult objects of Iron Age I (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 4). 1: A ring kernos from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 10). 2: A bird rattle from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.36:1). 3: A pomegranate vessel from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.61).

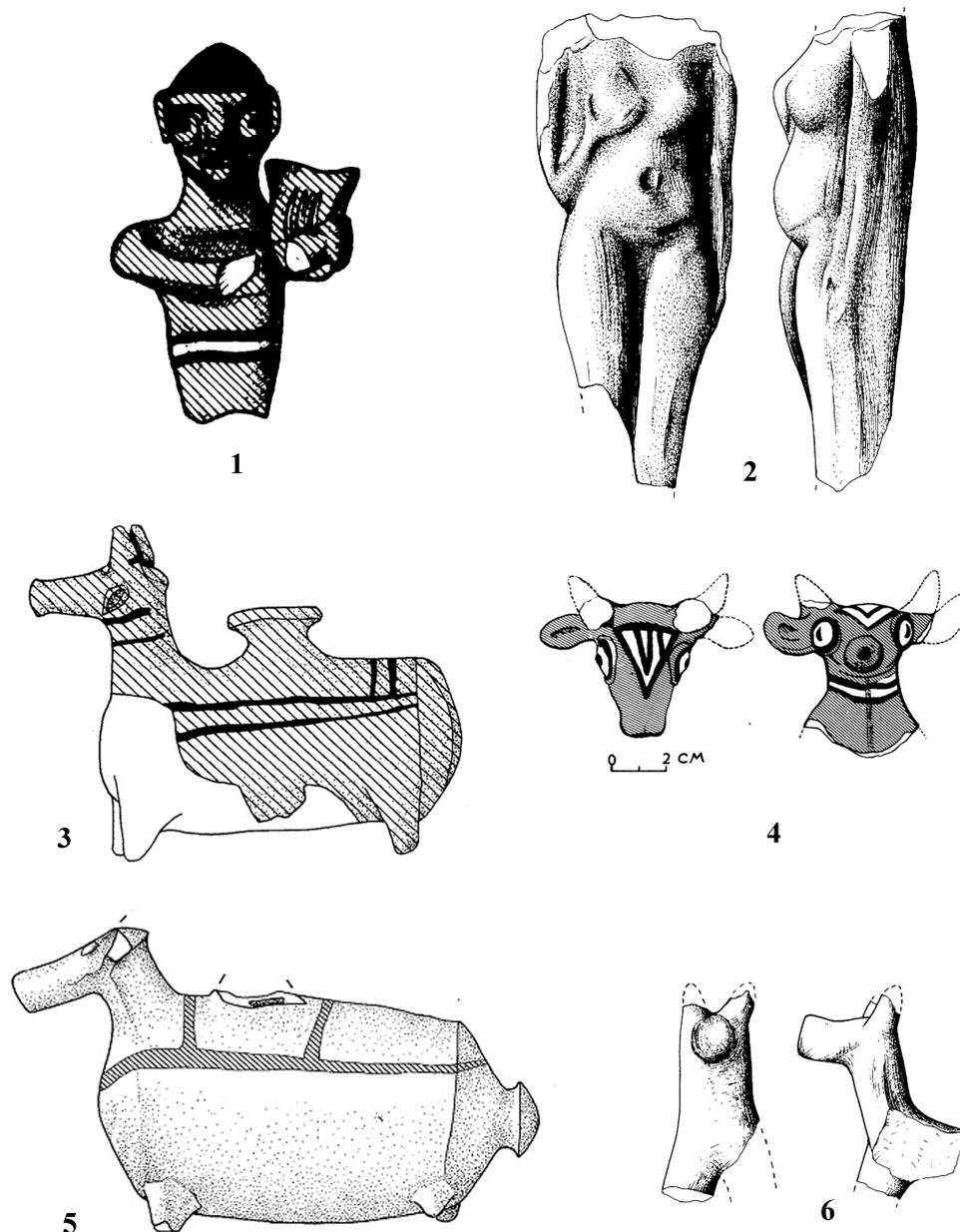


Figure 12. Various Iron Age II terracottas (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 5). 1: A male(?) figurine from Ashdod (Dothan 1971: Figure 62:1). 2: A female plaque figurine from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.96:5). 3: Bovine libation vessel from Ekron decorated in the 'Late Philistine style' (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 5:1). 4: A bull's head spout from Ashdod (Dothan 1971: Figure 68:6). 5: A late Iron Age bovine vessel from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 7). 6: tA 'Judean' style horse figurine from Ashdod (Dothan and Porath 1982: Figure 34:7).

A second type of terracotta figurine which is typical of the Philistine material culture throughout the Iron Age, and is better known, is the seated female figurine, nicknamed *Ashdoda* (Figure 8:4; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, pp. 49–54, Figures 5–9; Dothan 1971; Dothan 1982, pp. 234–37; Schmitt 1999, pp. 608–16, Type III; Yasur-Landau 2001; Press 2014). Based on the nearly complete example from Ashdod (Figure 8:4), which stands 17 cm high, the basic features of this type can be reconstructed. The figurine represents a seated female: there is a small schematic head with a low, flaring *polos*, a long neck, a very schematic vertical flat body with applied breasts, and a seat with four legs. The details of the face include two applied pellet eyes and applied nose, relatively prominent when preserved. Some head fragments also have applied ears (Dothan and Porath 1993). The breasts are usually very small,

adding to the schematic nature of this figurine. The shape of the seat is either rectangular or square. Larger examples of *Ashdoda* figurines also occur, as indicated by the large leg of a seated figurine found in Ekron Stratum IV, with Philistine Bichrome decoration, and possibly by large heads from Ekron and Ashkelon (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, p. 53, Figure 5:2, Figures 8 and 10:5). It is possible that the *Ashdoda* figurines were typically larger than other female figurines, specifically the Psi-type; the nearly complete example, however, is relatively small.

The *Ashdoda* figurine shows in its form a mixture of Aegean and Canaanite features (Brug 1985, p. 186), yet its concept originates from Mycenaean seated female figurines (French 1971, pp. 167–72; Dothan 1982, p. 234). According to the evidence from Ekron, Ashdod, and Ashkelon, this type of figurine does not appear before the latter part of the 12th century BCE, nor does it appear in the typical Philistine Monochrome decoration or fabric (the figurines are either decorated in Philistine Bichrome style or undecorated). Although there is only one complete example yet found, it seems that both the Psi-type and the *Ashdoda*-type appear in domestic contexts (Yasur-Landau 2001, pp. 336–37; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, pp. 61–62).

Another type of Aegean-type female figurine, the mourning female figurine (also depicted standing with raised arms), was noted by (Dothan 1969), yet none of these were found in archaeological excavations.

A type appearing so far only at the earliest Iron Age I levels at Ekron is the decorated bovine figurine (Figure 8:5; Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, pp. 58–60, Figures 16–18). Decorated zoomorphic figurines are not known otherwise in the early Iron Age southern Levant. The most complete example was found on the east slope of the acropolis in Stratum VIIA. Parallels come from the Aegean LH IIIc and Cyprus (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009).

Other Iron Age I zoomorphic figurines. Undecorated crude terracotta zoomorphic figurines from early Iron Age Philistia (Figure 9) appear in rather large numbers in the Philistine cities, especially at Ekron (Figure 9), and may be a significant phenomenon related to the Philistine material culture, as such figurines are not common in LBII contexts of southern Israel. More than forty undecorated zoomorphic figurines (most are fragments) were found in Iron Age I levels at Ekron (Figure 9). Few Iron Age I examples were published from Ashdod (Dothan 1971; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, p. 123, Figure 3.36:8; Dothan and Porath 1993, p. 79, Figure 35:7), and some were also reported from Iron Age I levels at Ashkelon (Press 2012). Most of these figurines are made of coarse clay rich with organic temper; they were not fired in a high temperature and in many cases carry black soot residues, as if they were put in a fire. The figurines are schematically modeled by fingertips and usually only few typical characteristic details are portrayed, although more detailed and naturalistically shaped ones occur as well (as in Figure 9:1). In the smaller figurines, most details are created by pinching the clay rather than by application; the only decoration of these figurines is by incisions or fingernail marks (Figure 9:4). In some cases, the animal depicted cannot be identified, as the objects are too fragmentary, or lack indicative anatomic details. However, it seems that the most dominant animal depicted is the bull (see Ben-Shlomo 2010, 2014). Undecorated crude zoomorphic figurines were published from LHIIIc contexts in the Aegean and Cyprus (see Ben-Shlomo 2014, pp. 80–81). These figurines were possibly used in Philistine houses for some sort of cultic practice. Similar crude zoomorphic figurines appear in various locations in the eastern Mediterranean during the 12th c. BCE and, although these finds are not predominant, they do not seem to occur prior to the 12th century BCE and their appearance at this stage could indicate a new culture. These figurines may represent domestic cult or other symbolic practices, maybe of a voodoo-like or ‘sympathetic witchcraft’ nature (similar in a way to those attested, for example, by similar Neolithic figurines, Schmandt-Besserat 1997).

The Aegean-style figurines from Philistia probably represent domestic cultic activities of Philistine immigrants, who retained elements of the religion of their motherland; the argument is based both on the contexts of these finds in Philistia, and on those of similar finds in the LHIIIc Aegean (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009). This evidence does not seem to indicate the presence or activities of an elite or priesthood class originating from a palatial Mycenaean society (related to the ‘*wanax*-hearth’ ideology),

but rather indicates nonpublic activities of a nonelite population. Analysis of numerous immigrant societies has shown that usually migrants do not belong either to the highest strata of society, neither to the lowest (see [Berry 1997](#); [Burmeister 2000](#), pp. 545–46 for references); they often are constituted from various groups of medium socioeconomic strength in their origin society. Thus, it may not be surprising that the Aegean elite affiliated *palatial* cultural elements are not evident so far in the Philistine culture. Burmeister has indicated that, when dealing with reflection of immigrants on material culture, more emphasis should be given to domestic daily practices and assemblages rather than to public, or burial ones ([Burmeister 2000](#), p. 542). It should be noted, however, that no clear public temple context was yet excavated from the Philistine main cities.

Iron Age I Libation vessels. Figurative libation vessels from Philistia (Figure 10), mainly in the shape of animals, were also probably used for some ritual or cultic activities (both in temples and in households). Several of these vessels show strong links to Mycenaean vessels, and can be added to the group of Aegean-style cultic objects appearing in early Iron Age Philistia ([Ben-Shlomo 2008](#)). These include bird-shaped ‘askoi’ ([Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), p. 25, Figure 1:2) and a hedgehog vessel (Figure 10:2; [Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), p. 25, Figure 1:1, references and discussion therein). These belong to the ‘Philistine Monochrome’ ware, and show similarities to LHIII B-C examples from the Aegean and Cyprus in their shape, decorative pattern, technique, and fabric. Other libation vessels appearing in Philistine houses at Ekron and Ashdod include bovine and bird vessels decorated in Philistine Bichrome decoration style (but showing local tradition in morphology and iconographic style, [Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), pp. 27–29, Figures 2 and 3). Other libation vessels depicting bovines (Figure 10:4) or equines carrying jars (Figure 10:5), which appear in Iron Age I Philistia, reflect a continuation of Canaanite and Levantine traditions ([Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), pp. 36–39, Figure 9).

A somewhat different type of ceramic figurative vessel is the kernos (Figure 11:1) which is a tubular ring with various head spouts and vessels attached to it. Kernoi appear during the late Iron Age I and Iron Age IIA in Israel and are essentially a Levantine form, but are especially popular in Philistia ([Mazar 1980](#), pp. 109–11; [Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), p. 39) also during Iron Age IIB-C (see below). A nearly complete kernos with two animals, probably ibexes or goats, was found in Building 350 at Ekron (Figure 11:1; [Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), p. 39, Figure 10). Bird-shaped rattles (Figure 11:3, from Ashdod) may also be related to cult.

Lion-shaped head cups decorated in Philistine Bichrome style were previously associated with Philistine cult ([Dothan 1982](#), pp. 229–334; [Mazar 1980](#), pp. 101–3, Figures 34 and 35; [Mazar 2000](#); [Maier 2006](#); [Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), pp. 34–35, Figure 8), yet this is probably a Levantine vessel-type as well (see [Ben-Shlomo 2008](#), p. 35, [Ben-Shlomo 2010](#), pp. 125–30; [Meiberg 2013](#); for references). These vessels are rare and appear mostly in temples (i.e., Tell Qasile and Nahal Patish, see below); it seems that this vessel continues to appear during Iron Age II as well ([Maier 2006](#); [Ben-Shlomo 2008](#)).

Pomegranate vessels, always decorated in red slip, are also probably a Canaanite vessel-type but, again, especially popular in this period, and appear both in temples and households (Figure 11:3; [Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007](#), with examples from Ekron, Building 350, Ashdod and the Tell Qasile temple).

The Iron Age II: Figurines and figurative stands and models. During Iron Age II, the typical Canaanite naturalistic nude female plaque figurines or the ‘Astarte’ figurines (see, e.g., [Pritchard 1943](#); [Tadmor 1982](#); [Keel and Uehlinger 1998](#), pp. 97–105; [Moorey 2003](#), pp. 35–46) reappears in Philistia (Figure 12:2). These figurines return to the Philistine sites during Iron Age IIA-B at Ashdod (Figure 5:2; [Dothan and Freedman 1967](#); [Dothan 1971](#); [Dothan and Porath 1982](#); [Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005](#), p. 213, Figure 3.96:4–5; see also [Keel and Uehlinger 1998](#), p. 228, Figure 217), Ashkelon ([Press 2007](#), pp. 105–9, Figure 9, cat. nos. 62–67), Ekron (Gitin personal communication) and Gath (Maier personal communication) (see Also Tell Jemmeh, [Ben-Shlomo et al. 2014](#)). The symbolism communicated by these figurines is quite clearly also associated with female fertility. Examples of a plaque figurine depicting a ‘drummer’ were also found at Ekron. These Canaanite style plaque figurines appear alongside with ‘debased’ or late Ashdoda figurines at Ashdod ([Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009](#), p. 53,

Figure 8:1 and Figure 9, references therein), possibly indicating influence or certain adaption of local religious practices. Also to be noted is a seated male figurine recently published from Gath (Maeir 2008); Maeir interprets it as depicting the Canaanite god *El*; this is so far a unique example of such a male figurine in Philistia.

During this period, Israelite- or Phoenician-type female figurines also appear, especially at Ekron (Figure 12:1; Gitin 2003, p. 287, Figure 4, an example which comes from the cela in Temple Complex 650), and Ashkelon (Press 2007, pp. 216–32, Figures 6 and 7, cat. nos. 31–61); these are rather rare at Ashdod. Judean pillar figurines ('JPF', e.g., Kletter 1996, 2001), probably related to some 'Asherah cult' (see, e.g., Olyan 1988; Hadley 2000, more references therein), were also found in small numbers in eastern Philistia as at Ekron (Gitin personal communication) and Gath (Maeir personal communication), as well as sites on the border of Philistia (as at Batash, Beth Shemesh and Gezer, see Kletter 1996, 2001). Very few of these types of figurines were found at Iron Age II Ashdod, presumably, due to its greater distance from Judah in comparison to Ekron and Gath (Kletter 2001, pp. 185–88). At Ashkelon, a regional style of Iron Age II hollow female figurines is suggested (Press 2007, pp. 216–32).

The typical Iron Age IIB-C horse or 'horse and rider' figurines (Figure 12:6), which are very common in Judah, are also very rare in the Philistine cities (except at Ashkelon). Another group of terracottas includes figurines and depictions on cultic stands that illustrate a certain continuation of the Philistine style. These include several figurine heads (of either male or female) from Ashdod (Figure 12:1), Ashkelon and Ekron (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009, p. 58, Figure 15:2–3) and the Musicians' stand from Ashdod (Figure 13) (as well as depictions on the cultic stands from Yavneh, see above Figure 5:2). The Musicians' stand (Figure 13; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, pp. 180–84, Figures 3.78–3.79), dated to Iron Age IIA (Stratum X), is a rare depiction of a complete ensemble of musicians from the Iron Age (Paz 2007, pp. 50, 68–71), now paralleled to some extent at Yavneh (Ziffer and Kletter 2007, pp. 24–25, 70–75, no. 1036; see below; the stand from Temple 131 at Tell Qasile depicts a group of dancers, Mazar 1980, pp. 87–89, Figure 23, is also made in the same technique). This could be a depiction of an orchestra (the 'Canaanite orchestra', Paz 2007, pp. 98–101) playing in a temple or in a certain religious ritual. The relationship between musicians and cult and temples is attested also in the Old Testament: musical instruments mentioned are cymbals, lyres, harps (violin), tambourines, and trumpets (e.g., 1 Chr 13:8, 15:16,19, 25:1,6; 2 Chr 5:12–13). These instruments, associated with prophets, priests, and Levites, facilitated emergence into an ecstatic state. For example, note the passage describing the anointment and prophecy of Saul, which specifies a group of prophets playing the flute, lyre, tambourine, and harp (violin) (1 Sam 10). In what way these themes were incorporated in the Philistine religion is still obscure to us.

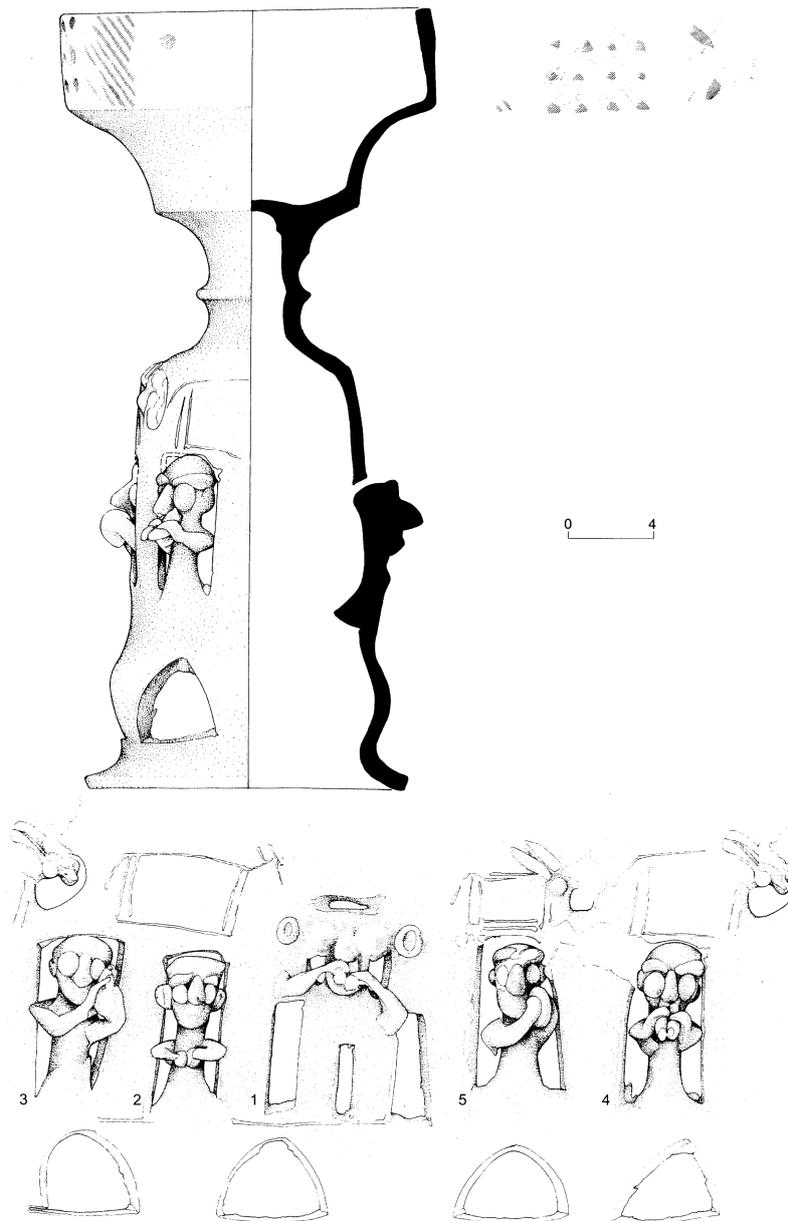


Figure 13. The Musicians' stand from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.76).

Also to be noted are rare and peculiar items unique to Ashdod, that may have been cultic objects used in Iron Age II in this Philistine city. These are 'knobbed stands' (Figure 14:2; having a row of knobs on their lower part) appearing in Ashdod in Area D in the cultic room or shrine (Dothan and Freedman 1967) and in a possible cultic corner from Area K (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, Figure 2.48).

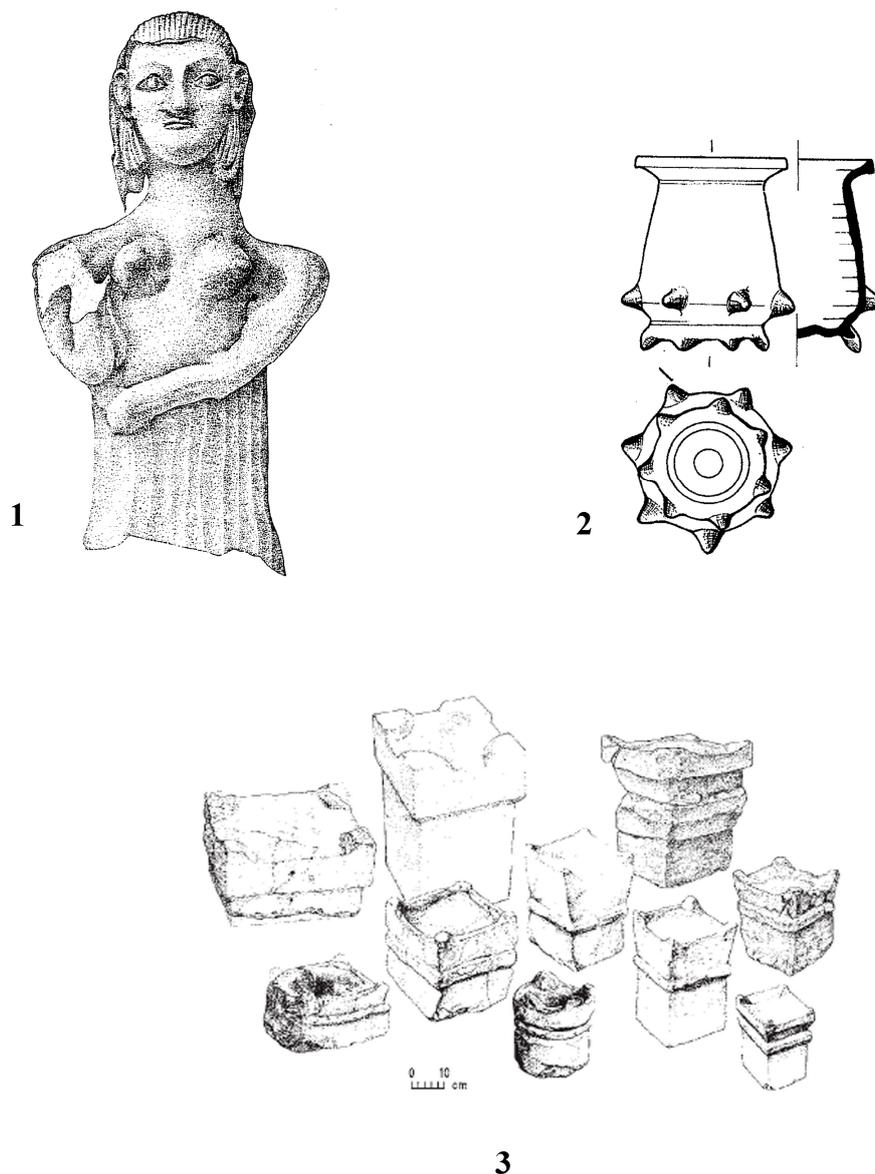


Figure 14. Late Iron Age II cultic objects from Philistia (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 7). 1: A hollow female figurine from Ekron, Temple Complex 650 (Gitin 2003: Figure 4). 2: A knobbed stand from Ashdod (Dothan and Freedman 1967: Figure 38:7). A group of four-horned portable altars from Ekron (Dothan and Gitin 2008, p. 1955).

Iron Age II libation vessels. Libation vessels (especially zoomorphic) continue to be popular in Philistia, and even more so, during Iron Age II (Figure 12:3–5). This is especially evidenced by a large group of kernoi and libation vessels from Ashdod (Figure 12:4; e.g., Dothan 1971, pp. 125–35, Figures 66–71; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, p. 197, Figure 3.86; dating mostly from the tenth–eighth centuries BCE (Strata X–VIII). Most are depicting bovines and are decorated in the Late Philistine Decorated style or Ashdod Ware (Figure 12:3,4; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2004) with red burnished slip and black and white painted patterns (Ben-Shlomo 2008, p. 30, Figure 5). Several of the horned head spouts are decorated with triangles, circles, or other shapes on their forehead (Figure 12:4; Dothan 1971; these also appear in Ekron). This could be a depiction of an ornament hung on the bull’s forehead, or possibly a reference to the Egyptian god Apis, depicted with the sun rising between his horns.

Another distinctive group of late Iron Age libation vessels comes from the 7th century BCE Ekron, and includes a large group of rather standardized and large schematic bovine vessels (Figure 12:5; Ben-Shlomo 2008, pp. 32–33, Figures 6 and 7, references therein). This is a large, wheel-made bovine

libation vessel with a large barrel-shaped body and a hollow button-shaped protrusion depicts the tail; the body is decorated with red design, probably depicting a harness. Two complete examples were found in relation to an olive oil installation in Field III NE (Figure 12:5); another complete example was found in the Stratum IB destruction debris in Room V of Temple Complex 650, just behind the sanctuary's cella (Gitin 1998, pp. 173–74, Figure 11). These wheel-made, schematically depicted uniform types of bovine zoomorphic vessel may have been produced on a more 'industrial' scale (and they also appear in connection to the olive oil industry).

Possibly, the concentration of kernoi, libation vessels, late *Ashdodas*, offering tables and plaque-type figurines in several pits in Area D at Iron Age IIB Ashdod (Dothan 1971; Hachlili 1971) may be related to the industrial activities taking place in this area as well. Cultic activities in local industrial contexts can also be linked or similar to 'household religion', as it is equally ranked on a lower sociohierarchical tier. Other examples of the industry–cult linkage come from the mining temple at Dan (Biran 1992, p. 143, Figure 118), Timna (Rothenberg 1988, pp. 270–76), the Iron Age at Khirbet el Mudeyina, Jordan (Daviau 2007), and Late Bronze Age Cyprus (Begg 1991, pp. 47, 69); these relate to metallurgical and agricultural industries. In the case of the bovine libation vessels from Ekron, the bull may represent an agricultural/industrial fertility symbol, a specific deity, or its vehicle.

It is difficult to reconstruct either the cultic practices conducted with these libation or figurative vessels or their exact ritual and religious meaning and significance without further archaeological and especially textual evidence. Yet, naturally, the bull as well as lion are important symbols in the Canaanite and Aegean cultures and religions (see Ben-Shlomo 2008, pp. 40–42, and more references therein); pomegranates are also important in various aspects of Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Israelite, and Greek religions and mythologies (see Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2007).

Chalices: Chalices found in Philistine sites during Iron Age II can also be considered cultic (Gadot et al. 2014), yet they probably reflect Canaanite religious culture. These vessels, often covered by white chalky slip and decoration applied after firing, may have been used in temple, shrine, or household rituals, related to religion or otherwise. A multidisciplinary study of chalices from temples at Philistia (at Yavneh and Nahal Patish) and domestic (Tell es-Safi) contexts, employing petrography and residue analysis, was carried out (Gadot et al. 2014). All chalices analyzed were locally produced and, according to residue analysis, were used as incense burners, employing mild head, in which an oily bed was liquefied probably in order to help evaporate hallucinogenic substances (as trimyristin compound was detected, highly abundant in plants that are known to cause hallucinogenic effects; Gadot et al. 2014, p. 71).

The Iron Age II: Altars and other items. Another important group of items relating to cult and religion in late Iron Age Philistia are the four-horned portable stone altars, studied in detail by Gitin (Figure 14:3; Gitin 1989, 1992, 1993, 2002, 2003, 2008). These appear especially at Ekron and Ashkelon also in relation to olive oil installations (at Ekron and Batash; see also at Jordan, Daviau 2007) and in the commercial center of the port of Ashkelon, and were probably used for incense burning. However, their connection to household cult and religion is rather questionable. Gitin sees them as evidence for 'decentralized' official religion, and as reflecting Israelite influence (2008). Other items occasionally found in Philistine sites and related to cult of some sort are masebot (standing stones), notched bovine scapulae (see Zukerman et al. 2007; Dagan et al. 2018).

4. Discussion: Can We Reconstructing a Philistine Religion?

The evidence so far indicates that temple or official cult in Iron Age Philistia shows stronger links to the local Canaanite culture continuing from the LB II through the Iron Age. In particular, this is evidenced in the ground plan of the temples known so far from Qasile, Gath, and Patish. Notably, these are mostly peripheral sites in Philistia, and a public Iron Age I temple from the main Philistine cities was not yet excavated. While these sites may not be considered originally Philistine (as the five main cities), they are located in the geographic region of Philistia, which was likely under influence from the Philistine material culture by late Iron Age I. The finds from these temples (including

the Yavneh Favissa) also indicate a continuity of Canaanite iconography in motifs, yet the style and decoration is often in the Philistine Bichrome style. On the other hand, especially during Iron Age I, evidence of household cult in Philistia, including the main Philistine cities, shows meaningful links with contemporary household cult in the Aegean and Cyprus (Ben-Shlomo 2014). In particular, this is evidenced by the figurines showing Aegean affinities in the main Philistine cities, while no traditional Canaanite figurines appear in Philistia during Iron Age I. This changes during Iron Age II, as Aegean affinities of household cult are fewer and the Canaanite and local-style figurines appear. This change could be due to a certain assimilation or acculturation of the Philistine population, intermarriages, etc., or a decrease in the motivation of this population to 'resist' local cultic practices.

Various modern examples show how immigrants are more faithful to their homeland practices in their private domain and confirm more with the host culture in the public domain (see, e.g., Ostergren 1988, pp. 199–203; Burmeister 2000, p. 542). The differences between household–temple and Iron Age I–Iron Age II Philistine cultic assemblages were summarized in Table 1 and seem to strengthen the immigrant nature of the Iron Age I Philistine phenomenon.

The issue of the actual contents and nature of the Philistine religion itself, as the identity of the gods worshipped, however, is still relatively obscure. This is due to the lack of texts and the fact that no major temple from the main Philistine cities was excavated during Iron Age I–IIA. Moreover, no temple was discovered dating to the initial stage of the Philistine settlement. Nevertheless, one may attempt to reconstruct at least segments of this religion according to the archaeological evidence from Philistia, the few short biblical references, and iconographic and textual references, though few and sometimes indirect, from contemporary Near Eastern sources.

The Aegean-style female figurines in Philistia could be interpreted in various ways. They can be seen as representing goddesses, priestesses, devotees, or votives. Concerning the identification of the seated figurines (Figure 15:3), it has been suggested that they depict an Aegean goddesses seated on a throne ('the enthroned goddess', see, Yasur-Landau 2001, 2008), in line with various Aegean depictions of a similar type of goddess (Figure 15:1, depicted on a seal from Mycenaean Tiryns; see, Nilsson 1968, pp. 350–51; Rehak 1995, pp. 106, 116–17). Similar seated figures appear on a cylinder seal from Ashdod (Figure 15:4), and possibly on a krater from Ashkelon (Figure 15:2; as suggested by Yasur-Landau 2008), there, holding a drinking vessel. The Ashdoda figurines have been interpreted as goddesses in several studies dealing with Philistine cult and religion (Singer 1992; Schmitt 1999, pp. 635–43; Mazar 2000; Yasur-Landau 2001), although the identity of this goddess has not been agreed upon: while (Dothan 1982, p. 234, Mazar 2000, p. 223), and (Yasur-Landau 2001, 2008) have stressed its Aegean identity, Brug proposed a Canaanite origin (Brug 1985, p. 186) and Sherratt suggested a connection with the cult of sailors and merchants of the eastern (Mediterranean, Sherratt 1998, pp. 306–8). Singer, meanwhile, suggested a connection to the Anatolian Kybele/Kubaba (Singer 1992).

Table 1. Comparison between cultic elements appearing in households, possible temples, and temples in Philistia.*

Object Type	Domestic	Ekron#350	Ashdod#	Qasile *	Yavneh *	Patish *	Gath *	Ekron * 650
Figurines	+	+	—	few	—	—	—	1
Libation vessels	+	+		+	-	+	+	1
Figurative stands	+	—	+	+	+	+	—	—
Altars	+	—	—	—	1	—	1	+
Theme/style								
Aegean-style female	+	?	—	—	—	—	—	—
Aegean style birds	+	?	—	few	—	—	—	—
Other Aegean-style	+	1–2	—	?	—	—	—	—
Canaanite/Levantine female	Iron II	ivory	—	hybrid	Hybrid	—	—	+
Other human	Iron II	—	—	+	Few	+	—	—
Bull (Canaanite)	+	+	—	few	+	—	+	+
Lion	few	+	—	+	+	+	-	+
Horse	few	—	—	?	Few	—	-	—
Bird (other)	+	?	—	+bird bowls	—	—	+	—
Palm tree	few	—	—	few	+	+	—	—
Pomegranate	+	+	—	+	-	—	+	—
Egyptian motifs	+	+	—	few	-	+	—	+
Other depictions and items	+	+	knobbed stands	figurative stands Metal adze	architecture	Metal knife	phallus? Shell, notched scapula, standing stone	—

* Note: 'domestic' is defined as all nonpublic/cultic contexts; cultic (*; possibly cultic—#) is defined as cultic corners, temples, and public buildings. Note also that the evidence from many of these contexts is not extensively published (Ekron-all contexts, N. Patish and Gath) and is thus provisional.

Given the iconographic depiction—a seated and clothed figure—the Aegean identity is most probable, and is likely to be related to the important or even principal role the seated female image (an 'enthroned goddess', queen goddess or 'mother goddess') played within the Aegean society and cult (Rehak 1995). Therefore, there is good reason to conclude that the deity worshiped by the dwellers of at least some of the households in the main Philistine sites during Iron Age I was depicted by these Ashdoda figures (and also possibly the Psi figurines), linking it with an Aegean or Mycenaean goddess.

Interestingly, there might be a late Iron Age II (8th century BCE) reference to this Philistine goddess (see also Ziffer and Kletter 2007, p. 29). A group of deity statues is seen on a depiction of a procession of god statues looted from captured cities from the Tiglath-pileser III southwest palace of Nimrud (Figure 15:5; Barnett and Falkner 1962). There is a good possibility that these gods come from Gaza in relation to the rebellion of king Hanun (Uehlinger 2002, p. 115, and references therein). In the procession, the female seated goddess on the far right (Figure 15:5, far right) seems to be depicted holding a conical cup (a kylix[?], similar to the Ashkelon depiction in Figure 15:2) (see also Ziffer and Kletter 2007, p. 29, though, the item held is interpreted there as a flower or a ring and sheaves of grain, linking it with the Anatolian goddess Kubaba). If so, it would be a depiction somewhat similar to Aegean depictions of the seated goddesses (see above). The other goddess in Figure 15:5 holds a ring and may not be clearly identified (as well as another small-sized standing god/goddess), while the male god depicted on the left resembles the Mesopotamian/Levantine weather god (e.g., Uehlinger 1997, p. 127). This Assyrian depiction could have thus indicated that the major official temples in the Philistine cities did have life-size (probably composite) statues depicting their gods in them.

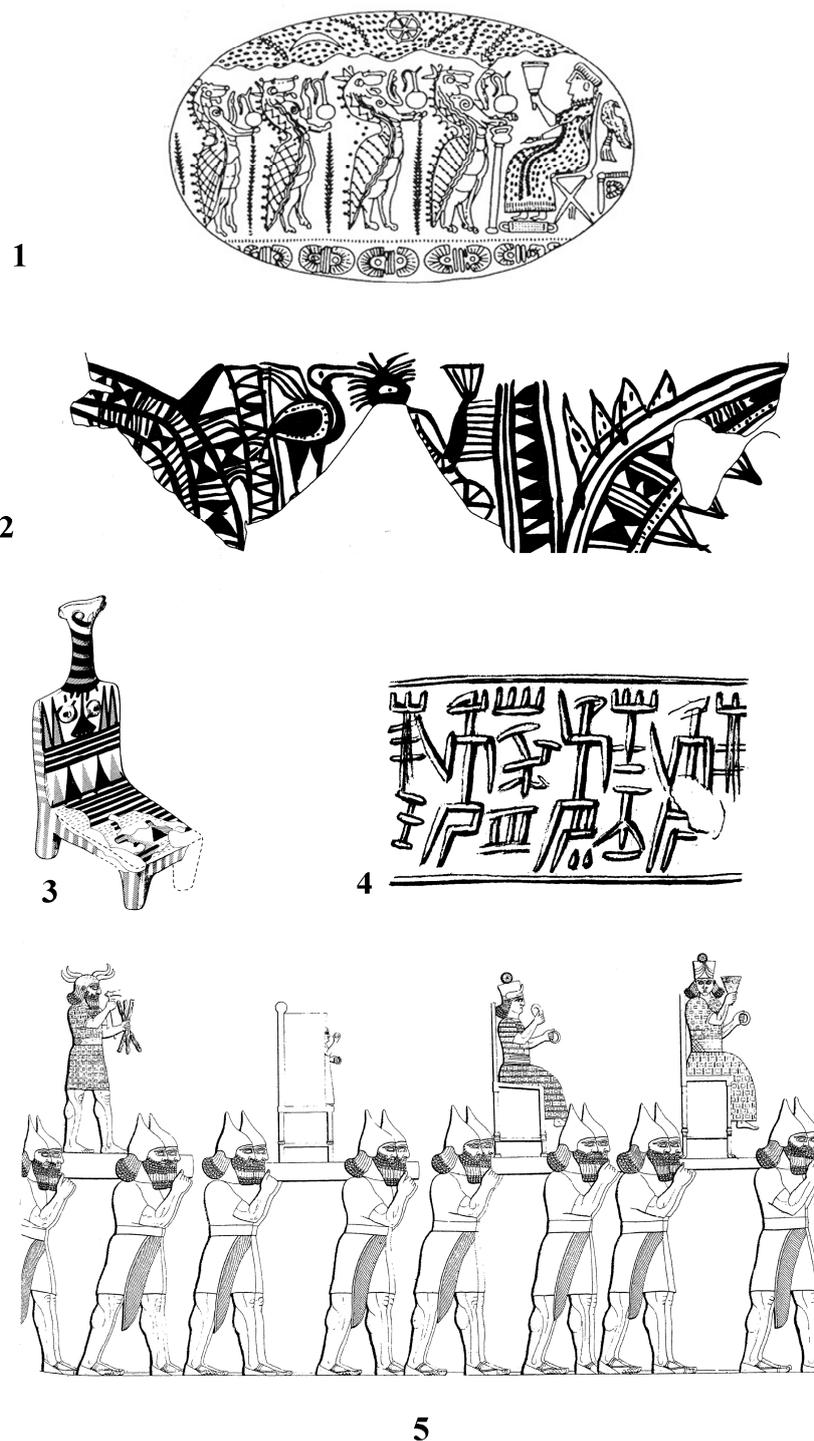


Figure 15. The ‘enthroned goddess’ motif (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 9). 1. A seal from Mycenaean Tiryns, Greece (after Yasur-Landau 2008: Figure 3:3). 2. A pictorial krater from Ashkelon (Stager et al. 2008: Figure 15.40; courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon). 3. The Ashdoda figurine (Dothan 1971: Figure 91:1). 4. A cylinder seal from Iron Age I Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.66). 5. A procession with statues of gods looted from Gaza(?), from the Tiglath-pileser III southwest palace of Nimrud (after Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. 92).

As noted, the royal inscription from 7th century Ekron (see above Figure 7) also mentions a goddess of a probable Aegean name: *Ptgyh*, king Ikausu’s ‘lady’ (note, *Potnia* in the Mycenaean world = lady). *Ptgyh* has been associated with the sanctuary at Delphi known as *Pytho*, the shrine of

Gaia, the Mycenaean Mother Goddess (e.g., Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2000; Gitin 2003, p. 286; Berlant 2008). This goddess is mentioned as the local king's 'lady' in the royal inscription found in the very cella of the large temple complex of Iron Age IIC Ekron (e.g., Gitin and Naveh 1997; Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2000). This is indeed the 'smoking gun' indicated by (Gitin 2003, p. 286) in regards to evidence of late Iron Age Philistine religion, probably linking it with the western origin of the immigrants, arriving at the Levantine coast some 600 years earlier.

On the other hand, the god Ba'al is mentioned in an inscription from the Temple Complex at Ekron ('to ba'al and Padi' לבעל ולפדי, Gitin and Coogan 1999; Stern 2001, pp. 120–29; Gitin 2003, p. 288, Figure 5). The cult of Asherah could fit the usage of Canaanite female figurines during Iron Age II, which could have been linked to the Asherah cult. Asherah is also mentioned in ostraca from the Ekron Temple Complex 650 ('to Asherat' לאשרת, Gitin 2003, p. 289, Figure 8:4), and may also be depicted by the only figurine found in its cella (Figure 7:1; Gitin 2003). Gitin also links this goddess with the Phoenician culture and its influence in this period (Gitin 2003, p. 288).

Both the evidence from Ekron and the Assyrian depiction may indicate a late Philistine cult combining Aegean and Canaanite gods. This 'pantheon' includes two or three goddesses (a Levantine one, maybe *Ashera* and an Aegean goddess, maybe *Ptgyh*), and one male Levantine god (a weather god, maybe Ba'al). The cult of a Near-Eastern male god by the Philistines is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, either in regards to Dagon of Ashdod or Ba'al *Zebub* of Ekron (see above). Thus, while in the household religion as well as at town temples at Yavneh the *Asherah* cult was probably practiced in some way, the main 'state' official temples also acknowledged the 'old time' Aegean goddess as well as a local male god (conceived by the bible and Near-Eastern tradition as the 'main god', see Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2000, p. 88). The Aegean deities or later variants thereof may have not been forgotten, and wereworshipped in a more locally Levantine manner.

Thus, from the evidence we have so far (biblical narrative, Assyrian reliefs and texts, and inscriptions and figurative representations from Philistia, see above), it seems that during the 8th–7th centuries BCE the Philistines worshipped a combination of deities with some Aegean background and the common Canaanite deities as Ba'al and 'Asherah (see for Ekron see, Dothan and Gitin 1993, p. 1058; Gitin 1993; Gitin and Coogan 1999; Stern 2001, pp.120–29; Gitin 2003). While it is still very difficult to reconstruct the details of the Philistine religion during the entire Iron Age, we have evidence of the existence of distinctive household religious practices of some sort. These practices seem to reflect the special origin and nature of the immigrant population of Philistia during the initial stage of the Iron Age. Later on, during Iron Age II, there is a fusion with the local religious traditions as both textual and material remains of Iron Age II in Philistia more explicitly indicate.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Captions:

Figure 1. Map of Philistia.

Figure 2. Tell Qasile Temple 131 schematic plan (after Mazar 1992: Figure 28).

Figure 3. Gath Area D temples (Dagan et al. 2018: Figure 2, courtesy of A.M. Maeir).

Figure 4. Two-horned altar from Gath (Dagan et al. 2018: Figure 4, courtesy of A.M. Maeir).

Figure 5. Stands from the Yavneh favissa (courtesy of R. Kletter).

Figure 6. Complex 650 at Ekron (Gitin and Naveh 1997; courtesy of S. Gitin).

Figure 7. The royal dedicatory inscription from Ekron (Gitin and Naveh 1997; courtesy of S. Gitin).

Figure 8. Aegean-style figurines from Philistia (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 1). 1: Psi-type figurine from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 1:1). 2: Psi-type figurine from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 1:2). 3: Psi-type figurine from Ashkelon (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 1:9). 4: Ashdoda figurine from Ashdod (Dothan 1971: Figure 91:1). 5: Bovine figurine from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo and Press 2009: Figure 16:1).

Figure 9. Undecorated animal figurines from Iron Age I Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 2).

- Figure 10. Libation vessels from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 3). 1: Bird askos (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 1:2). 2: Hedgehog vessel (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 1:1). 3: Bovine vessel decorated in Philistine style (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 2:1). 4. Bovine libation vessel (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 9:1). 5: Vessel in the shape of a donkey carrying jars (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 9:2).
- Figure 11. Various cult objects of Iron Age I (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 4). 1: A ring kernos from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 10). 2. A bird rattle from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.36:1). 3. A pomegranate vessel from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.61).
- Figure 12. Various Iron Age II terracottas (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 5). 1: A male(?) figurine from Ashdod (Dothan 1971: Figure 62:1). 2. A female plaque figurine from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.96:5). 3. Bovine libation vessel from Ekron decorated in the 'Late Philistine style' (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 5:1). 4. A bull's head spout from Ashdod (Dothan 1971: Figure 68:6). 5. A late Iron Age bovine vessel from Ekron (Ben-Shlomo 2008: Figure 7). 6. A 'Judean' style horse figurine from Ashdod (Dothan and Porath 1982: Figure 34:7).
- Figure 13. The Musicians' stand from Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.76).
- Figure 14. Late Iron Age II cultic objects from Philistia (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 7). 1: A hollow female figurine from Ekron, Temple Complex 650 (Gitin 2003: Figure 4). 2: A knobbed stand from Ashdod (Dothan and Freedman 1967: Figure 38:7). A group of four-horned portable altars from Ekron (Dothan and Gitin 2008, p. 1955).
- Figure 15. The 'enthroned goddess' motif (Ben-Shlomo 2014: Figure 9). 1. A seal from Mycenaean Tiryns, Greece (after Yasur-Landau 2008: Figure 3:3). 2. A pictorial krater from Ashkelon (after Stager et al. 2008: Figure 15.40; courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon). 3. The Ashdoda figurine (Dothan 1971: Figure 91:1). 4. A cylinder seal from Iron Age I Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: Figure 3.66). 5. A procession with statues of gods looted from Gaza(?), from the Tiglath-pileser III southwest palace of Nimrud (after Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. 92).

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