

COEXISTENCE AND IMPERMEABILITY: EGYPTIANS AND PHILISTINES IN SOUTHERN CANAAN DURING THE TWELFTH CENTURY BCE

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I. INTRODUCTION¹

In the absence of chronological anchors for the twelfth century BCE in southern Canaan, scholars have often relied on two interrelated, geopolitical events that affected the region at this time: first, the migration and settlement of the Philistines; and, second, the withdrawal of the Egyptian hegemonic presence. According to the traditional paradigm, the Philistines wrested control of southern coastal Canaan from Egypt ca. 1175 BCE. Recent revisionist theories, however, hold that the Philistines arrived after the Egyptian withdrawal from the region at about 1130 BCE. At the heart of the matter lie the following questions: Did the Philistines and Egyptians coexist and, if they did, were their material culture boundaries impermeable? An examination of sites that possess either Philistine or Egyptianized material culture may provide an answer. An analysis of the excavations at Tel Mor, a small Egyptian outpost located close to the Philistine city of Ashdod, is an especially important case study in this regard.

The date of the Philistine settlement is determined largely by Egyptian texts. According to the notice at Medinet Habu, Ramesses III repelled the Sea Peoples (including the Philistines) in the eighth year of his reign, which corresponds to 1174 BCE following the Low Egyptian Chronology (WENTE and VAN SICKLE 1977).² Papyrus Harris I reports that they were then settled in strongholds (76.7–8), generally assumed to be in southern coastal Canaan, which was the location of the Philistine Pentapolis according to the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Josh 13:3; I Sam 6:3–4, 17). Excavations in this region produced an intrusive material culture with affinities to the Philistines' presumed area of origin – namely, the Mycenaean cultural ambit. More

importantly, this material culture appeared suddenly in strata dated to the early twelfth century BCE. Thus, the traditional paradigm for the chronology of the Philistine settlement was formed.

In recent years, Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin have argued that the date of the Philistine settlement should be lowered by roughly fifty years – that is, to about 1130 BCE.³ Briefly described, their argument is as follows: Because certain sites located near the Philistine Pentapolis contain strata that are clearly datable to the reign of Ramesses III, but have not yielded Philistine pottery, this type of pottery found at sites elsewhere must have been produced for the first time after the destruction of these strata. The two key sites mentioned in this regard are Lachish Stratum VI and Tel Sera^c Stratum IX. In both these strata, Egyptian inscriptions dating to Ramesses III were found (GILULA 1976; GOLDWASSER 1982; 1984) and Philistine pottery was absent. On the other hand, neighboring sites thought to be contemporaneous, particularly Tel Haror Strata B3–2, did produce both Philistine Monochrome and Bichrome pottery (OREN 1993:582–583).

The underlying assumption of this argument is that cultural boundaries must be permeable for all types of material culture. A corollary holds that two neighboring sites that do not possess the same full range of material culture cannot be contemporaneous. Amihai Mazar, however, has adduced examples from the archaeology of Syria-Palestine to demonstrate that different material cultures have coexisted side by side with little or no interaction (1997:158; see also BEN-TOR and BEN-AMI 1998:31). Furthermore, as pointed out by S. BUNIMOVITZ and A. FAUST (2001), even intensive interaction between cultures

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² Cf. KITCHEN, however, who assigns the dates 1173–1142 BCE for Ramesses III's reign (2000:table 3).

³ See especially FINKELSTEIN 1995 and, most recently, 2000. USSISHKIN (1985) was the first to propose the "Low Chronology" based on his excavations at Lachish; however, Finkelstein has been, by far, the more vocal advocate for chronological revision.

does not necessarily lead to material culture exchange. Indeed, in order to maintain group identity and strengthen solidarity during times of conflict with a neighboring group, people tend not to acquire items emblematic of their rivals. A comparison of the material culture assemblages belonging to the Philistine city at Ashdod and the nearby Egyptian garrison at Tel Mor during the twelfth century BCE further undermines the proposed Low Chronology for the Philistine settlement.

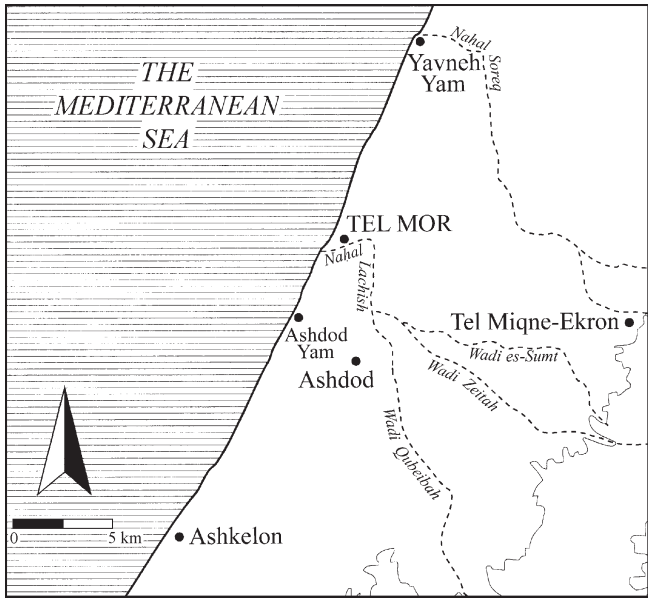


Fig. 1 Map of the southern Levantine coastal region (adapted from T. DOTHAN 2000:fig. 7.1)

II. CASE STUDY: PHILISTINE ASHDOD AND EGYPTIAN TEL MOR

A. Ashdod

Tel Ashdod is a large mound located a few kilometers inland along the southern Levantine coast (Fig. 1). According to the excavator Moshe Dothan, the large fortified building excavated in Area G, which was in use throughout the Late Bronze Age (= Strata XVI–XIV), served as an Egyptian-style “Governor’s

Residence” or palace (DOTHAN and PORATH 1993:10, 39–49, plan 7). With this “Residence” the excavators associated an inscribed stone fragment, possibly from a doorjamb, which was found in a later fill context (= Stratum XIIB) from the same area.⁴ The inscription reads “Fanbearer on the Kings’ Right Hand” (*t3i hw [hr] wnmy n nsw*), an honorific accorded only to high officials in the pharaonic court (KITCHEN 1993). Egyptianized bowls (DOTHAN and PORATH 1993:45, figs. 10.1, 11.1–6, 8–12), a beer jar (fig. 11.24), and an alabaster vessel (fig. 12.15) were also found in Area G, Stratum XIV.⁵ Mycenaean and Cypriote imports still arrived at Ashdod before the Stratum XIV Canaanite city was largely destroyed at the end of the thirteenth century BCE (e.g., DOTHAN and PORATH 1993:48–49, fig. 12.2–4).

More than anything else, the initial appearance of locally-produced, Mycenaean IIIC:1b (or Philistine Monochrome) in large quantity characterizes the rebuilt settlement in Stratum XIII (e.g., DOTHAN and PORATH 1993:fig. 14). In this same stratum, Mycenaean and Cypriote imports and Egyptianized pottery are absent. Dothan correlated Stratum XIII and Philistine Monochrome pottery with an early wave of Philistines prior to Year 8 of Ramesses III’s reign. He associated Philistine Bichrome pottery, which first appears in abundance in Stratum XII, with a second wave after Year 8. The gradual shift from Monochrome to Bichrome pottery in tight stratigraphic sequence at two other Philistine Pentapolis sites, Tel Miqne-Ekron and Ashkelon, however, indicates otherwise – namely, stylistic change over time within a single population group (MAZAR 1985:102–107; SINGER 1985:112; STAGER 1985:62). Therefore, the appearance of Monochrome marks the arrival of the Philistines during the reign of Ramesses III, and Bichrome corresponds to the second generation of Philistine ceramic production. To sum up, the stratigraphy and associated material culture changes at Ashdod may be broadly tabulated as follows.

Stratum	Philistine pottery	Mycenaean and Cypriote Imports	Egyptianized pottery
XIV	absent	present	present in small amount
XIII	present in large amount (Monochrome)	absent	absent
XII	present in large amount (Bichrome)	absent	absent

Table 1

⁴ Note also that a surface survey in the area between Ashdod and Tel Mor produced a fragment of a monumental statue of a queen of Ramesses II (SCHULMAN 1993).

⁵ At Late Bronze Age Ashdod, Egyptianized bowls were

found also in Areas A (M. DOTHAN 1971:fig. 1.1), B (DOTHAN and FREEDMAN 1967:fig. 22.1–4), and H (M. DOTHAN 1971:fig. 81.3). Another beer jar was found in Area H (fig. 81.14).

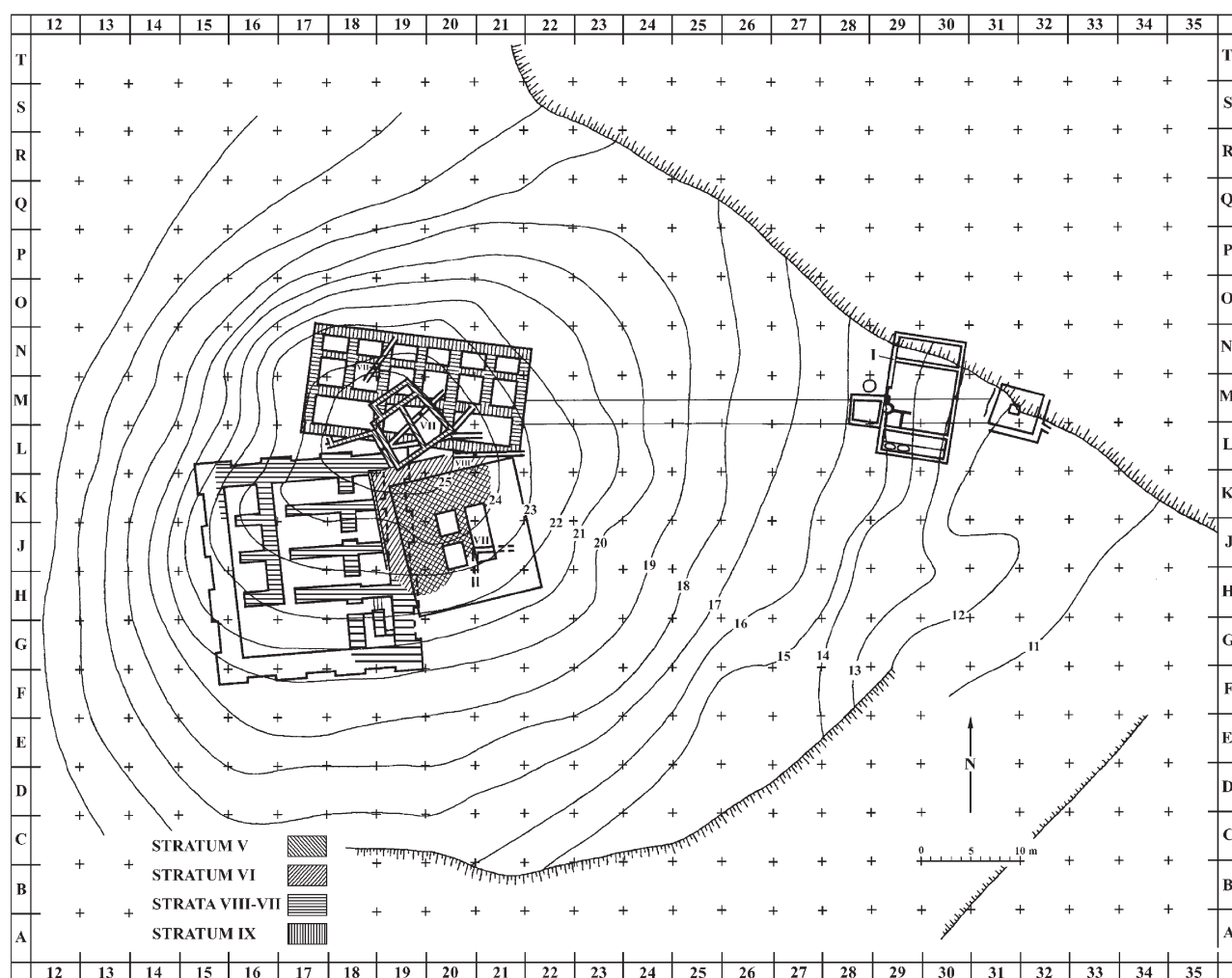


Fig. 2 Topographic plan of Tel Mor (drawing by I. Dunayevsky)

B. Tel Mor

Moshe Dothan also directed excavations at Tel Mor, a small site located only six km northwest of Tel Ashdod (Fig. 1).⁶ By virtue of its location along the Naḥal Lachish approximately one km from the Mediterranean Sea, Tel Mor offered a rare protected anchorage along the southern Levantine coast. The base of the mound covers an area of six dunams, whereas the summit, which has been reduced considerably by erosion, encompasses only one dunam (Fig. 2). During the thirteenth century BCE (= Strata VIII–VII), a large Egyptian-style building dominated the summit

(for an isometric reconstruction, see M. DOTAN 1993:1073). Egyptianized pottery, mostly shallow bowls and beer jars, accounted for nearly 10% of the registered sherds from Stratum VII (MARTIN and BARAKO in press). Toward the end of the thirteenth century BCE, Stratum VII ended in a violent and thorough destruction. A layer of ash and burnt mud brick, in places a meter and a half thick, covered the entire Egyptian-style building. A thin layer of wind-blown sand over this destruction indicates a subsequent period of abandonment.

In Stratum VI a much smaller *migdol*-type fortress (= Building F) was constructed above and

⁶ Results of these excavations appear only in preliminary reports and encyclopedia articles (e.g., M. DOTAN 1960; 1993). Through generous funding from the Shelby White - Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications, the

present author will publish the excavations at Tel Mor in a forthcoming volume of the Israel Antiquities Authority Monograph Series.

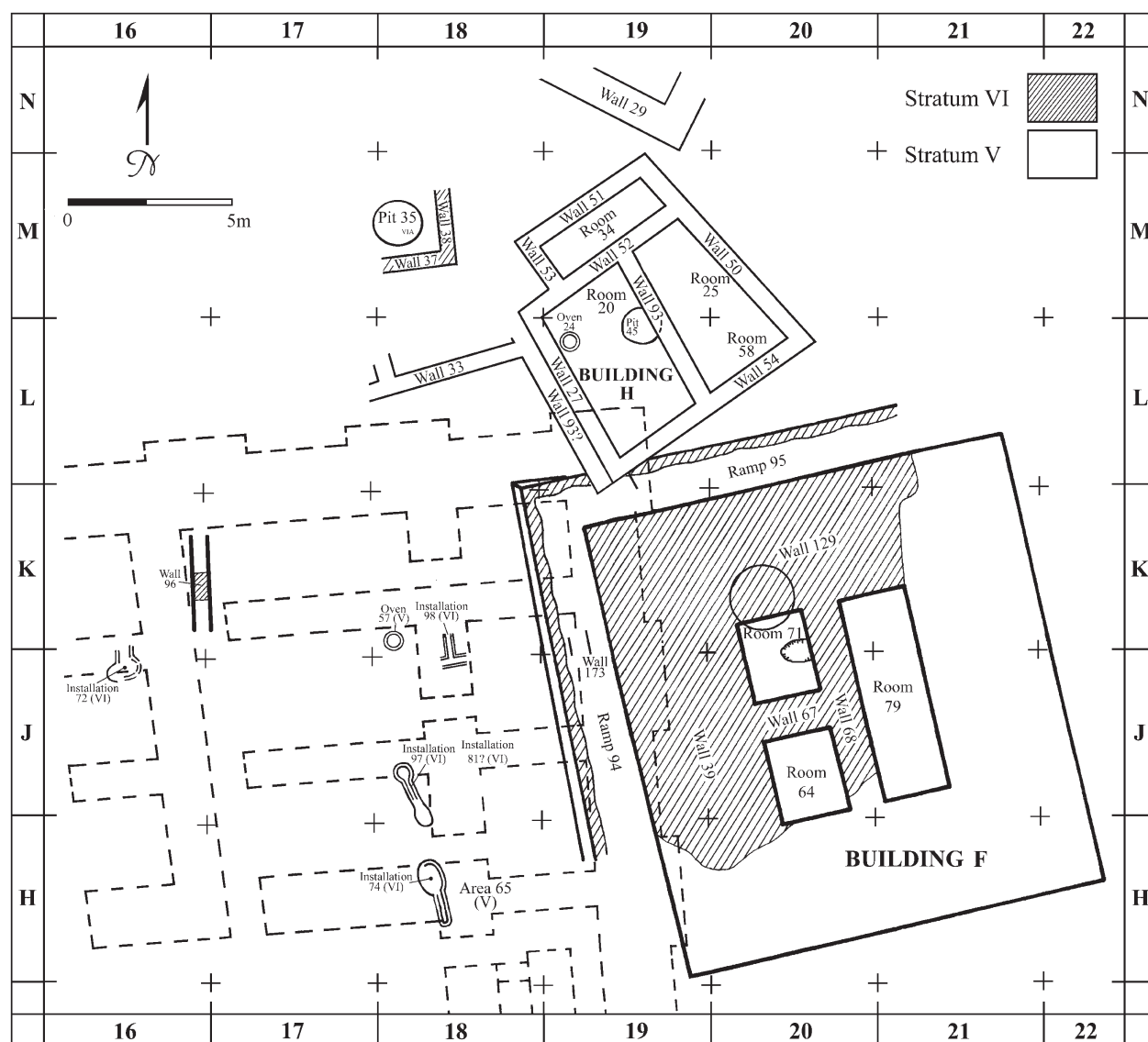


Fig. 3 Tel Mor, Strata VI–V (drawing by I. Dunayevsky)

partially over the larger building of Stratum VII (Fig. 3). In terms of pottery types present, there are no major differences between the assemblages of Strata VI and VII. The amount of Egyptianized pottery in Stratum VI, however, nearly doubled from 9 to 15% of the total number of registered sherds. Imported Cypriote pottery continues to appear in this stratum.⁷ Notable in this regard are a couple late White Slip II bowls (= Type IDβ) found in Room 71 of Building F (Fig. 4). Sloppily drawn, parallel line decoration characterizes the type, which belongs to the end of the White Slip ware sequence (POPHAM

1972:466, figs. 57.3–5, LXXXVI:2–3; GITTLEN 1977:473–474, Pl. 18). These bowls appear in Canaan primarily in the Late Bronze Age IIB at sites such as Aphek in Stratum X-12 (BECK and KOCHAVI 1985:36, fig. 2.6) and Ashdod in Strata XV (DOTHAN and FREEDMAN 1967:80, fig. 21.8) and XIV (82–83, fig. 23.14, Pl. XIII:2).

Stratum VI ended in destruction. Numerous whole or almost whole vessels lay smashed on the floors of Building F, particularly in Room 71. On top of these vessels were fallen mud bricks and then more broken pots, which, taken altogether, indicates a sec-

⁷ The author is grateful to Celia Bergoffen, who, based on an examination of drawings and photographs, made many valuable suggestions concerning the White Slip and Base Ring ware found at Tel Mor.

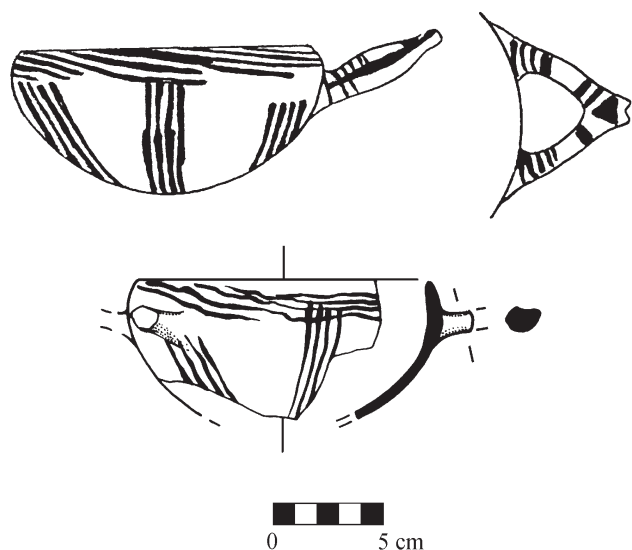


Fig. 4 Late White Slip II bowls from Tel Mor, Stratum VI (drawing by J. Rudman)

ond story collapse. In Stratum V, Building F was rebuilt, and a smaller building (H) was constructed to the north of it (Fig. 3). Egyptianized pottery comprised about 12% of the registered sherds from this stratum. Noteworthy is an intact globular cooking

jar found in Room 34 of Building H (Fig. 5). It is probably a Nile B Egyptian import that dates to the period of the Twentieth Dynasty (David Aston, pers. comm.). Egyptian imports either made of Nile clay or used for cooking are rarely found at sites in Canaan.⁸

With the exception of small, probably residual sherds, neither Cypriote nor Mycenaean pottery was found in Stratum V. It appears that Stratum V, including Building F, simply fell out of use. In the succeeding four strata, the character of the site changed considerably. A single massive structure no longer dominated the tell. Instead, the settlement became more open with relatively little architecture. Stratum IV, for example, consists only of a poorly preserved building, the walls of which roughly follow the outline of Building H from the preceding stratum. Virtually no Egyptianized pottery was found in Stratum IV or any subsequent strata. For the first time, however, small amounts of Philistine Bichrome pottery appeared in Stratum IV. The following Stratum III, which is comprised mostly of pits, contained even more Bichrome. Altogether about 70 sherds and whole vessels that may be described as “Philistine” were found at Tel Mor. Most of the Philistine pottery



Fig. 5 Egyptian globular cooking jar from Tel Mor, Stratum V (photograph courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority)

⁸ The author wishes to thank Mario Martin, who provided much of the information regarding the Egyptianized and imported Egyptian pottery at Tel Mor.

<i>Stratum</i>	<i>Philistine pottery</i>	<i>Mycenaean and Cypriote Imports</i>	<i>Egyptianized pottery</i>
VII	absent	present in small amount	9% of assemblage
VI	absent	present in small amount	15% of assemblage
V	absent	absent	12% of assemblage
IV	present in small amount (Bichrome)	absent	absent
III	present in small amount (Bichrome)	absent	absent

Table 2

is the familiar Bichrome with smaller amounts of “Aegean-style” cooking jugs and “Ashdod Ware” present (BARAKO forthcoming). Surprisingly, no Philistine Monochrome pottery was found in this or any other stratum at Tel Mor. The stratigraphy and associated material culture changes at Tel Mor may be tabulated, then, as in Table 2.

The critical strata at Tel Mor are V and IV, wherein, respectively, Egyptianized pottery last appeared and Philistine pottery first appeared. Based on the initial appearance of Philistine Bichrome, the stratigraphic sequences of Tel Mor and Ashdod match up as in follows:

	<i>Ashdod</i>	<i>Tel Mor</i>
<i>Stratum</i>	XIII	V
<i>Pottery</i>	Philistine Monochrome	Egyptianized
<i>Strata</i>	XII–XI	IV–III
<i>Pottery</i>	Philistine Bichrome	Philistine Bichrome

Essential to the question of coexistence and impermeability are Ashdod XIII and Tel Mor V, both dated by Moshe Dothan to the first half of the twelfth century BCE. Ashdod XIII produced significant amounts of Philistine Monochrome but no Egyptianized pottery; whereas, conversely, the ceramic assemblage of Tel Mor Stratum V was comprised of approximately 12% Egyptianized pottery but no Philistine Monochrome.

III. SYNTHESIS

For some Syro-Palestinian archaeologists, this marked patterning of Egyptianized and Philistine material culture is best explained by chronological revision.⁹ The evidence from Tel Mor shows, however, that two propinquitous sites can, indeed, be both contemporaneous *and* possess different material culture assemblages. A more convincing explanation holds that in response to the Philistines’ carving out

their homeland from the southern coastal plain, the Egyptian administrative and military system in Canaan adopted a policy of containment. Or, as M. BIETAK (1993) and L. STAGER (1995:342–344) have argued, a *cordon sanitaire* was created, whereby Egypt strengthened its outposts on the periphery of Philistia. As part of this policy, the Egyptians re fortified Tel Mor to counter the establishment of the nearby Pentapolis site of Ashdod along the northern boundary of Philistia.

Tel Mor was of added strategic importance to the Egyptians on account of its protected anchorage along a mostly harbor-less coast. Although Tel Mor was undoubtedly also a point of entry to the interior, it was probably bypassed by many of those traveling overland along the Via Maris, which stretched a few kilometers to the east, beyond the sand dunes. In any event, the garrison (Egyptian *iw’yt*) at Tel Mor could have provisioned troops travelling by land or sea along the coast, similar to how the harbors in Lebanon supplied Thutmose III’s forces during his seventh Asiatic campaign (ARE II §472). The strength of the garrison stationed at Tel Mor need not have exceeded 50 soldiers. The Amarna tablets record requests made by Canaanite mayors to Pharaoh that a contingent of this approximate number be sent to defend their respective towns (EA 108:67, 238:11, 289:42). A petty officer probably commanded the small garrison at Tel Mor, which might have been visited periodically by a circuit official along the lines of Haya mentioned in the Aphek Letter (OWEN 1981; SINGER 1983).

The reign of Ramesses III, the greatest pharaoh of the Twentieth Dynasty, offers the best geopolitical context for the refortification of Tel Mor in Strata VI–V. At this time a reinvigorated Egypt attempted to reassert hegemony over southern Canaan. The numerous Egyptian finds that date to

⁹ Often this revision involves the insertion of “post-Mycenaean IIIB/pre-Monochrome” strata at Philistine Pentapolis sites (for Tel Mique-Ekron, see FINKELSTEIN 2000:164;

for Ashdod, see FINKELSTEIN and SINGER-AVITZ 2001:234–239).

the Twentieth Dynasty/twelfth century BCE excavated at sites in Canaan reflect this attempt. Most of these sites are located in the northern Negev, inner Shephelah, and along the interior valleys (i.e., Jordan and Jezreel). At Philistine Pentapolis sites, on the other hand, there is an almost complete absence of evidence for an Egyptian presence during the Twentieth Dynasty (WEINSTEIN 1992:145; BIETAK 1993:299–300; STAGER 1995:344; BARAKO 2004). It is significant that this evidence is missing from strata, regardless of the absolute dates assigned to them, which both precede and correspond to the period of the Philistine settlement.

This lack of Egyptian activity during the Twentieth Dynasty in southern coastal Canaan/Philistia is no mere coincidence. The Egyptians were not in the

region during this period because a people hostile to Egypt – namely, the Philistines – were present in their place. The weight of the evidence from Philistine Pentapolis sites is considerable: Several seasons of excavations in wide exposures of twelfth-century-BCE strata at Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Tel Mique-Ekron have produced virtually no Egyptianized material culture. This pattern cannot be dismissed due to the vagaries of archaeological discovery. Instead, it reflects a historical development that offers a more reasonable explanation of the archaeological data than does chronological revision. In short, Egyptians and Philistines coexisted in southern Canaan during the twelfth century BCE and their material culture boundaries (at least for certain types of pottery) were impermeable.

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