4. BETWEEN THE AEGEAN AND THE LEVANT: THE PHILISTINES

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The Philistines, *Peleset* in Egyptian, first make their appearance in history during the reign of Ramses III. They are mentioned in the inscription of the year 8 of the temple of Medinet Habu (Edgerton and Wilson 1936, 53; Kitchen 1983, 39 lines 14–40 line 5). They formed part of the coalition of northern migrant peoples, known as the “Sea Peoples”, whom the Pharaoh fought in around 1175 B.C., according to the low chronology. The Philistines are also referred to in some inscriptions, in particular the *Harris Papyrus* that states that after their capture Ramses III placed them in fortresses under his suzerainty (Breasted 1906, 201; Erichsen 1933, 93 lines 16–94 line 5). These fortresses were in all likelihood situated in Palestine, because the *Onomasticon* of Amenope that dates from the 12th century B.C. mentions the settlement of the Sherden, the Tjekker and the Philistines in a territory belonging to the Egyptian sphere of influence, listing their towns as Ashkalon, Ashdod and Gaza (Gardiner 1947, 24, 190*-91* Nos. 262–264, 194*-200* Nos. 268–270).

From the time of their settlement in the coastal zone to the south of Canaan, a country that still preserves their name, Palestine, the Philistines formed a constant and serious threat to the Israelites. One also comes across a series of allusions to them in the Old Testament (see: Dothan 1982, 13–6; Brug 1985, 5–15). On two occasions the Bible states that they came from Caphtor (Amos 9. 7; Jeremiah 47. 4; see Strange 1980, 75–7 Nos. 23–24) a toponym that is generally identified as Crete. The captions accompanying the bas-reliefs of

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1 There is also a mention in the inscription of the year 5 of Medinet Habu (Edgerton and Wilson 1936, 30–1; Kitchen 1983, 25 lines 4–8). Giving an account of first Libyan war, this inscription was edited a posteriori, which is why it devotes some lines to the events of the year 8.

2 Northern tower of the fortified gate of Medinet Habu (Kitchen 1983, 104 lines 12–14); inscription of the year 12 of the same temple (Kitchen 1983, 73 lines 9–10); stele at Deir el-Medineh (Kitchen 1983, 91 lines 11–12).

3 The most convincing argument for the localisation of Caphtor, which is an
the temple of Medinet Habu point out concerning the peoples conquered by Ramses III in the year 8 that they were “northern foreigners living in their islands” (Kitchen 1983, 32 lines 6–7) or that they “came from their country in the islands that are in the middle of Wadj-Wr” (Kitchen 1983, 33 line 3). Notwithstanding the variety of interpretations (Nibbi 1972, 11–32; 1975, 35–62; Vandersleyen 1985, 44–6; 1988; 1991), these expressions are normally regarded as referring to the islands of the Aegean Sea (especially after the case put by Vercouter 1956, 125–58, see, for instance Erman and Grapow 1971, 269 s.v. w3d wr). Armed with these Biblical and Egyptian accounts, historians and archaeologists have thus argued that the Philistines came from the Aegean, an origin that at first sight the ceramic ware that the Philistines produced after their settlement in Palestine, with its similarities with one of the last classes of Mycenaean pottery, would seem to confirm.4

It is not our intention to subject the Egyptian and Biblical documents to a new analysis, but rather to examine the material remains that are typical of Philistine culture. In the absence of any Philistine written document, they remain the only evidence of the identity of the Philistines. At the very most one can state that the majority of Philistine anthroponyms that we know of and the names of their gods originate in the Western Semitic world (Delcor 1966, 1278, 1282–85; Kitchen 1973, 67, 68; Brug 1985, 198–9) but this could be the result of their adapting to the surroundings in which they settled. On the other hand, a few rare anthroponyms, such as Akish or Goliath, and terms such as koba “helmet” or seren “lord”, might have some affinities with the Anatolian group of languages (Delcor 1966, 1280; Kitchen 1973, 67; Brug 1985, 197–8, 199, 200 [who does not rule out the possibility of a Canaanite origin for seren]; Kempinski 1987).

approximation of the Egyptian toponym kefiu and the Akkadian Kaptara, is to be found in Vercouter 1956, 33–123; Helck 1979, 26–37; Strange 1980, 16–112 (for the list of Eastern sources, without however accepting the identification with Cyprus [see the criticism of Merrillees 1982 and Vincentelli 1984]); Weipert 1981; Wachsmann 1987, 93–103. G. Wainwright and C. Vandersleyen however situate Caphtor and its Egyptian equivalent kefiu in the South of Asia Minor, and specifically in Cilicia (Wainwright 1931; 1952; 1956; Vandersleyen 1985); this localisation has, however, been refuted in detail by J. Strange (1980, 126–38).

4 Dothan and Dothan 1992 give a summary of the research into the origin and identity of the Philistines from their earliest beginnings.