

PHILISTINE BURIAL PRACTICES IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

By

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SUMMARY

This paper traces burials from Iron Age I Canaan that reflect an influence of Philistine culture. This influence can be measured by the presence of Philistine bichrome pottery or other evidence related to this ancient biblical people. A major road block to the clearest possible understanding of Philistine burials is that no cemeteries have been found at any of the earliest settlements of the biblical Philistines, the Pentapolis. The Old Testament lists these cities as Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza (e.g. Joshua 13:3). Though extensive excavation has been conducted at most of these sites, they have yet to yield a necropolis. Excavations are still being done at Tell es-Safi/Gath and Ashkelon, so hopefully the future will supply researchers with data to help clarify this rather vague area of Philistine studies.

Recognizing these limitations, the paper presents a “symbiotic model,” which identifies some of the areas of shared culture from the Canaanite context. Examples of this symbiosis are seen as the amalgamated result of people groups living in close proximity to each other and influencing the customs and practices of their neighbors. A Mycenaean origin of the Philistines is an underlying supposition of the research laid out in this paper. Because of this origin, and the other influences upon the early Philistine settlers in Canaan, a certain amount of cultural comparison becomes necessary to be able to understand the developing Philistine culture of Iron I.

The paper includes a map of tombs and burials bearing Philistine influence and a map identifying different types of tombs and their locations. The variety of tomb types is an important facet of Philistine custom. The strong Egyptian influence upon Canaan and

the surrounding area at that time in history is inescapable. Evidence of this influence will be explored. The inclusion of a chapter on the anthropoid clay coffins, and the Philistines' relationship to them, struggles with the scholarly interpretations. Finally, a chapter on literary implications strives to shed light on possible Philistine burial practices from the perspective of the Old Testament and other applicable literatures of the ancient Near East.

KEY TERMS

Anthropoid Coffins

Biocultural Profile

Burials

Cult of the Dead

Death

Funerary

Iron Age

Mourning

Philistines

Symbiosis

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