Political system of the Early Iron Age Philistia: summary

This paper deals with the problem of the changing political situation in the Early Iron Age Philistia (the territory around the cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gath). The changes took place in the late 13th and during the 12th century BC coinciding with the Eastern Mediterranean crisis. Two questions are looked into: how the political system of the region changed from the Late Bonze Age to the Early Iron Age and what kind of mechanisms may have led to these changes.

The paper first gives an overview of the predominant system, which characterizes the political system of the Late Bronze Age in the area. These are the Egyptian imperial power, which controlled the region with its military power, but whose influence also affected politics and trade. Though subjects to Egypt, the local kings of the city-states, the number of which is a matter of debate, also had considerable autonomy, even in many military matters.

In the 12th century (and possibly starting already in the late 13th century) the political order of the region underwent a change. There are signs of destruction or abandonment in the cities of Philistia and signs of new group of people arriving, probably connected to the Peleset in the Egyptian sources and predecessors of the biblical Philistines. At the same time Egyptian dominance in the region ceased.

There were differences compared to the Late Bronze Age in Philistia: physical transformations of many cities, the new group of people who probably changed the political order in the region, changes in the trade contacts and seemingly, a reduction of political complexity. Many nearby city-states were destroyed but the small-state structure was characteristic of the Philistines even in later times.

The transformations had many different causes like the climate change and changing trade contacts. Two reasons, however, are even more important specifically in the Southern Levant. Egypt pulled out of the region, but only after attacking some of the local polities. After Egyptian forces left, the cities were more independent but less secure and may have fallen in the hands of different enemies. The other factor were the Peleset (Philistines), who arrived in the region and took over some polities. However, the Philistines also contributed to the preservation of the small-state model. As they were probably originally from small polities and had limited military capacity they could have only created small

polities and they did not manage to create larger territorial states during the Iron Age, differently from their neighbours.

This discussion about political changes connects to the topic of my PhD thesis. The working title of the thesis is “The aspects of the Late Bronze Age migration in Cyprus and the Southern Levant: comparison of sites on Cyprus and Philistia”.

The purpose of the thesis is to research the changes that were brought about by the series of migrations (of people originating from the Aegean) to the selected settlements in the Cyprus and Philistia. The main questions relate to which kind of changes the migrations brought about in the demographics of settlements and socio-political order. If possible, questions of cultic changes are also researched, as far as they relate to the previous.

The basis for this thesis is archaeological data and the material culture. As the period has few written source, the analysis of textual sources is limited.

To analyse the changes, two regions are compared. However, there are many sites and abundant archaeological data. For that reason I will concentrate only on two sites (possibly adding two more in the course of the research). One of the sites will be selected from Cyprus and another from Philistia. The background research for choosing the sites is still ongoing, but at this stage I am concentrating on Ashkelon (with the possibility of substituting that with Gath) and Maa-Palaekastro (alternatively Pyla-Kokkinokremos or Kition). The sites are selected according to the following criteria: there have to have been relatively recent excavations in the sites, as well as recently published reports and the sites must have notable signs of migration (in or out of the settlements). Other sites in the region can be used as comparison material, but it will not be the focal point.