

## THE MOTHER(S) OF ALL PHILISTINES? AEGEAN ENTHRONED DEITIES OF THE 12<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> CENTURY PHILISTIA\*

“I will sing of well-founded Earth, mother of all, eldest of all beings”  
*Homeric Hymns*, XXX, To Earth mother of All

### 1. “Ashdoda,” an Aegean goddess?

Moshe Dothan’s excavations at the Philistine site of Ashdod first brought to light the so called “Ashdoda” figurines –all long-necked, bird-faced, female figured and wearing a polos. These figurines were found later in sites such as Aphek,<sup>1</sup> Tel Qasile, Tel Batash/Timnah as well as Gezer, Tel Miqne Ekron and Ashkelon.<sup>2</sup> Most of these figurines were found in levels of the late 12<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C., which also contain various Aegean-derived material culture traits, such as bichrome pottery and Aegean-style cooking jugs, connected with the settlement of the Philistines in the southern Levant. The “Ashdoda” figurines immediately attracted much attention, since they were without parallel in the coroplastic art of the Levant.

Trude Dothan, in her ground-breaking book *The Philistines and their Material Culture* interprets the “Ashdoda” figurines as: “...evidently a variant of the Mycenaean female figurine seated on a throne, and sometimes holding a child...”<sup>3</sup> It was made clear, however, that the “Ashdoda” figurines were not “purely” Mycenaean in form, but also may show some Cypriot features.<sup>4</sup> Many scholars such as Mazar,<sup>5</sup> Bunimovitz, Stager and Keel and Uehlinger have accepted Dothan’s views. Others stress the “composite” or “mixed” nature of the figurines such as Brug who suggests mixture of Canaanite and Aegean features.<sup>6</sup> Still others propose a non-Aegean origin for the figurines. Singer<sup>7</sup> shows similarities between the “Ashdoda” figurines and

\* I am very grateful to Freya Evenson for her help in the editing of this paper, to Prof. Carol Lawton for many useful comments, and to Deborah Brown for the references to Πόρνια Γαῖα/Γῆ in Greek sources. Special thanks are owed to Dr. Mary B. Richardson who edited the text presented in the conference.

1 Aphek: P. BECK and M. KOCHAVI. “Aphek (In Sharon),” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (1993) 64-72; Tel Qasile: A. MAZAR. “Some Aspects of the “Sea Peoples” Settlement,” in *Society and Economy in the eastern Mediterranean (c. 1500-1000 B.C.)* (1988) 251-260; Tel Batash/Timnah: G.L. KELM and A. MAZAR, *Timnah, A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley* (1995) 83, fig. C21; Gezer: W.G. DEVER, *Gezer IV: The 1969-71 Seasons in Field VI, the “Acropolis.” Part 2, Plates, Plans* (1986) pl. 62,18; W.G. DEVER, H.D. LANCE and G.E. WRIGHT, *Gezer I: Preliminary Report of the 1964-66 Seasons* (1970) pl. 36:3. The object comes from L. 1014.1. in Field I, as is a throne fragment (i.e. it may not be figurine but rather an “offering table”).

2 No “Ashdoda” figurines are yet published from Tel Miqne/Ekron, although such figurines are reported from Field I. See T. DOTHAN and S. GITIN, “Miqne, Tel (Ekron),” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (1993) 1051-1059. For Ashkelon see L.E. STAGER, “The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan (1185-1050 BCE),” in T.E. LEVY (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (1995) 332-348.

3 T. DOTHAN, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (1982) 234.

4 DOTHAN (*supra* n. 3) 234.

5 MAZAR (*supra* n. 1) 257, 260; S. BUNIMOVITZ, “Problems in the ethnic identification of the Philistine material culture,” *Tel Aviv* 17 (1990), 210-222; STAGER (*supra* n. 2) 346; O. KEEL and C. UEHLINGER, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (English edition. trans. Thomas H. LAPP) (1998) 122.

6 J.F. BRUG, *A Literary and Archaeological Study of the Philistines (BAR International Series 265)* (1985) 186. The Canaanite influence may be seen in the “Bichrome” decoration; cf. B.J. STONE, *The Philistines and Acculturation: Culture Change and Ethnic Continuity in the Iron Age*, *BASOR* 298 (1995) 7-32, arguing for an “Egyptianizing” decoration.

7 I. SINGER, “Towards the image of Dagon, the god of the Philistines,” *Syria* 69 (1992) 431-450.

depictions of Kybele/Kubaba, and suggests an Anatolian origin. Finally, Sherratt<sup>8</sup> identifies the “Ashdoda” with Astarta/Aphrodite “which combines supervision of fertility and technology with an association with the sea....”

## 2. Setting the scene: aim and methodology

Although so many scholars have expressed their opinions about the nature of the “Ashdoda” figurines, and so much information has been accumulated in the last 20 years on Philistine religion in general, surprisingly no research has been specially dedicated to the study of these figurines.<sup>9</sup>

Many questions remain unanswered, or only partially answered, such as the identification of the deity depicted in the figurines, her realm and roles. Other questions arise from the hypothesis that the general concept of the “Ashdoda” figurine is of Aegean origin, and was brought to Canaan by Aegean migrants. If such is the case, how was the cult transferred to Canaan? Even more intriguing are questions of the relationship between the “old” and “new” goddess(es) in Philistia; is the “imported” goddess(es) different in her nature from local “Canaanite” deities? Do the cult(s) of the migrants and those of the local population attempt to suppress each other or do they continue side by side?

How should we read these figurines, then? The first problem we encounter, and the one to which most research is devoted, is the identification of the function of the figurines, to which we can add the question of whether the figurines represent a human or divine character. A further and related question is interrelated, (yet less attended to in the Prehistoric Aegean research), is the problem of identifying the nature (realm) of a god/goddess by his/her attributes?

Understanding the function of figurines in prehistoric societies, from which we have no literary sources, is a complicated affair since the function of the figurines and their social role, as well as other modes of artistic expression, is sometimes dependent on the presuppositions of scholars about the investigated society and “trendy” modes of interpretations in research.<sup>10</sup> Different interpretations allow different measures of flexibility in the role of figurines in society.<sup>11</sup> It seems that no interpretation of the function of figurines can be complete without comparing data from iconographic analysis and the context of the finds of the figurines.<sup>12</sup>

8 S. SHERRATT, “Sea Peoples and the Economic structure of the Late Second Millennium in the Eastern Mediterranean,” in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition. Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE. In Honor of Professor Trude Dothan* (1998) 292-313 (especially 306, 307 and note 31). This identification, however, is not based on an iconographical analysis of the figurines, but rather on a passage from Herodotos about the most ancient temple of Aphrodita Urania in Ashkelon (i 199) and the notion of a “multi-roled east Mediterranean goddess complex.”

9 Even SINGER's (*supra* n. 7) study was concerned mainly with the matter of Dagon, the Biblical god of the Philistines.

10 For relevant recent studies in the interpretation of iconography see N. HAMILTON *et al.*, “Can We Interpret Figurines?,” *CAJ* 6(2) (1996) 281-307; D.W. BAILEY, “Reading Prehistoric Figurines as Individuals,” *WorldArch* 21(3) (1994) 321-31; S. TRINGHAM and M. CONKEY, “Rethinking Figurines. A critical View from Archaeology of Gimbutas, the ‘Goddess’ and Popular Culture,” in L. GOODISON and C. MORRIS (eds) *Ancient Goddesses. The Myth and the Evidence* (1998) 23-45; L. MESKELL, “Twin Peaks. The Archaeology of Çatalhöyük” in GOODISON and MORRIS (*supra*) 46-62.

11 Interpretation vary from BAILEY (*supra* n. 10) 325 who suggests that (for the case study of Golyamo Delchevo) all the investigated figurines represent individuals in the society, to P.J. UCKO in N. HAMILTON *et al.* (*supra* n. 10) 300-307, who argues for different uses for different types of figurines, and different meanings of the same figurines for different individuals.

12 See BAILEY (*supra* n. 10) 323; J. MARCUS, “The Importance of Context in Interpreting Figurines” in N. HAMILTON *et al.* (*supra* n. 10) 285-291; P. BEGG, *Late Cypriot Terracotta Figurines: A Study in Context* (1991) 14. However, the risk of a circular argument is lurking within the use of both sources for interpretation, since one may have to decide what is more significant - the iconography or the context of the finds. Even this comparative approach can cause much methodological confusion, as seen in possible different approaches to the understanding of the Mycenaean figurines. Can the meaning of the figurines be extracted from the context in which they are found (for example, E. FRENCH in *Sanctuaries and Cults* 173-178; BEGG [*supra*] 14) or is there a widespread and overall meaning to all figurines, and can this meaning, once grasped, be used for the understanding the context of the finds?

Some criteria offered by Renfrew<sup>13</sup> for differentiating between cult image and votive may help to solve the problem of interdependency between context and the nature of the image, since they include some variables that are purely iconographic.<sup>14</sup> The criteria that are of more help to the present study are those that emphasize the importance of different gestures, indicative symbols and attributes, as well as the presence of monsters or supernatural beings which are important variables in distinguishing between a depiction of a god from that of a mortal. Renfrew's very coherent and straightforward methodology may, however, encounter difficulties in identifying the nature of simplified and schematized depictions. Sometimes symbols or attributes, or accompanying figures, are omitted from a depiction (for example, of a figurine). This may be a type of shorthand, where the artist supposes (whether consciously or not) that only a few selected attributes (according to agreed-upon conventions, and those that are relatively easily portrayed in the chosen artistic mode) are enough for the identification of the depiction by the client/worshiper. Thus, in order to understand such images, the iconographical "shorthand" (i.e. the schematization) should be set against the background of more detailed depictions, in which the same figure that appears in the "shorthand" is shown with more attributes and placed within a specific scene or environment. In order to try to form the most complete and unbiased answer to the questions posed above, the results of three types of analysis will be compared:

1. Iconographical analysis of features and attributes appearing on the figurines.
2. Iconographical analysis of the roles played by images similar to the "Ashdoda" in Aegean art.
3. Analysis of the "Ashdoda's" find context.

### 3. Typology

At least two types of "Ashdoda" figurines exist: *type a*, the seated figure, known from complete and fragmentary examples from Ashdod (Pl. XCIXa; see Table 2), and *type b*, with hands holding an infant, as seen in the fragmentary figurine from Tel Qasile (Pl. XCIXb; Table 2). It is impossible in this case to determine if this figurine is standing or sitting, but since there are no examples of a *standing* figurine, it may be taken as a working hypothesis that most, if not all of the "Ashdoda" figurines were *seated*. Other fragments of "Ashdoda" figurines mostly consist only of the typical bird-like heads, or a flat torso, making further assignation to the above-mentioned types or to other types impossible.

### 4. The identification of a figurine: determining the origin of the iconography

Before analyzing the iconographic message encrypted in the figurines, one should first see in which language this message is conveyed: i.e. the cultural tradition from which the iconography of the "Ashdoda" figurines comes. The small size of the sample and poor preservation are problems here, as unfortunately the only details of clothing and jewelry come from the single complete figurine from area H of Ashdod. The other fragmentary figurines do not show any trace of paint; whether this is due to poor preservation or to the fact that they were not painted to begin with is unclear.

13 C. RENFREW, *The Archaeology of Cult. The sanctuary at Phylakopi* (1985) 23-24.

14 Renfrew's first and second criteria, dealing with the scale and number of images, as well as their location is of little use for this research, since very few, if any, of the "Ashdoda" figurines were found in primary contexts. The finds allow, therefore, some hints on their context of use, but not their original position within it (cf. TRINGHAM and CONKEY [*supra* n. 10] 28 for the important information that can be extracted from figurines in secondary contexts).

In this analysis (see Table 1), single iconographical elements of the “Ashdoda” figurines will be compared to the array of Cypriot<sup>15</sup> and Aegean figurines and other representations of the 14<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries (since these traditions show the most similarity to the “Ashdoda” figurines, as proven in Dothan’s work). The examination of every element on its own was conducted in order to have more control over the outcome of the analysis and to prevent generalizations in assigning attributes to one tradition or the other. The results can be summarized as follows:

1. The head, the bird-like facial features, and the neck seem to be a combination of Cypriot and Aegean prototypes (Pl. XCIXc-d). The applied eyes and ears seem to be of either Cypriot or Mycenaean origin. The form of the head, with a slightly flaring headress, suggests a *polos*, which appears to stem more from a long tradition of Aegean priestesses and goddesses wearing a polos, than of the Cypriot figurines which have slightly *concave* heads or the Late Bronze Age Levantine examples of tall hats. The long neck adorned with painted necklaces finds good parallels in Aegean, Cypriot and perhaps Levantine iconography.

2. If the head and neck show a combination of Cypriot and Aegean traditions, from the neck down the “Ashdoda” figurine seems to be portrayed in a predominantly Aegean fashion. The long dress exposes or emphasizes the breasts in the Aegean manner, and the large triangular pendant has parallels in Aegean iconography, yet not in the Cypriot coroplastic art, where all female figurines appear nude.

3. The only element which is unrelated to both Cypriot and Aegean iconography is the design of bichrome triangles on the dress. This pattern appears frequently on “Philistine Bichrome” pottery, and is most probably a schematization of the lotus flower (Pl. XCIXe).<sup>16</sup>

The result of the detailed iconographic analysis above support the views brought by Dothan. The “Ashdoda” figurines stem, therefore, mainly from the Aegean iconographical tradition, but with an addition of a local/Levantine iconographic component.

##### **5. The identification of a figurine: establishing the divine nature of the figurines and determining the realm of the goddess**

Establishing the divine nature of the figurines may be easier after establishing the predominantly Aegean origin for their iconography. Preliminary observation within the Aegean iconographical context indicates the very high status of the “Ashdoda,” shown by her jewelry and *polos*. Those, however, seems to have adorned both Goddesses and high status women (e.g. priestesses). The depiction of “Ashdoda” as an enthroned figure seems to be more indicative for the establishment of her divine nature. Enthroned women is a relatively common theme in Aegean art. Many, if not most of the images of seated women collected by Rehak<sup>17</sup> clearly depict goddesses, since they are flanked by images of animals, some of them imaginary such as griffins<sup>18</sup> (Pl. Ca-d). It is likely that this type of representation was generally reserved for the portrayal of Aegean goddesses,<sup>19</sup> and therefore it is more likely that the “Ashdoda” figurines represent goddess(es). Further support for this argument may come from mainly domestic context that can be reconstructed for the figurines, negating the possibility that those were votaries.

15 For datable examples of Cypriot figurines of Type B, see V. KARAGEORGHIS, *The Coroplastic Art of Ancient Cyprus. II. Late Cypriot II-Cypro-Geometric III* (1993) 12, 13. Unique in Cyprus is an unprovenanced figurine from the Nicosia Museum, showing a female figure with a polos a painted chin and applied eyes and ears (H.-G. BUCHHOLZ and V. KARAGEORGHIS, *Prehistoric Greece and Cyprus* (1973) no. 1729). This figurine, however, show very strong Aegean influence, and is much different from the local Cypriot tradition. I am grateful for Dr. E. French for kindly referring me to this figurine.

16 DOTHAN (*supra* n. 3) 215.

17 P. REHAK, “Enthroned Figures in Aegean Art and the Function of the Mycenaean Megaron” in *Ruler* 95-127.

18 REHAK (*supra* n. 17) pls. XXXVII, a, d; XXXVIII, c, d, e; XXXIX: b, c.

19 Although it is possible that some representations may depict high-status human women (e.g. below, the “Homage Krater”).

Iconographic analysis can yield much information on the realm and duties of the “Ashdoda” goddess(es), although most probably not her name.<sup>20</sup> In order to achieve optimal results, two independent modes of inquiry will be employed, their results then compared. The first is the extraction of meaning from the symbols used on the figurines by themselves. The second seeks additional information by examining the iconography of Aegean parallels for the “Ashdoda” figurines.

As argued above, the schematization seen in the “Ashdoda” is the iconographical equivalent of a language written in a shorthand: an emphasis is placed on the attributes that can identify the deity in the eyes of worshipers, while less crucial details are left out.<sup>21</sup> This schematization may well help in the identification of the realm of the goddess, by focusing only on the important details connected with her nature. It seems that most important to creators of these figurines was the depiction of a woman seated on a throne, wearing a *polos*, clothed in a rich dress with a stylized plant decoration, and richly adorned with necklaces and a pendant. Since these details were of greater importance than the depiction of many anatomical details (mouth, hands, legs etc.), they seem the key to the understanding of the deity’s realm. If so, much can be said about the realm of the goddess from her own iconography. The enthroned position of the goddess, as well as her rich attire, indicate power and rulership. Her role, may be indicated in the design of the dress and have strong associations with vegetation and therefore to earth and regeneration. The Tel Qasile fragment, in which an infant is depicted in the arms of the figurine suggests an additional,<sup>22</sup> yet related, role as a *kourotrophos*.

As observed by Dothan, the most obvious parallels are seated Mycenaean goddesses figurines. More detailed depictions of enthroned deities (or deities wearing a *polos*) in the Aegean,<sup>23</sup> also help in determining the roles and realms of the enthroned “Ashdoda.”

Several scenes and depictions bear evidence for the chthonic nature or at least close connection to the earth of enthroned and/or *polos*-wearing female deities. The most complete scene in which an enthroned deity is the famous Tiryns gold ring<sup>24</sup> (Pl. Ca) The goddess is seated on a throne with a bird behind it. She is wearing a *polos* and necklaces, very similarly to the “Ashdoda.” She is approached by a row of *Genii* holding beakers. Above the top border of the scene are depictions of plants, as well as the sun and crescent. Thus it may be that the upper border may represent the line of the ground, below with the scene takes place-probably in the netherworld.

Two fragments of LHIIIB large Mycenaean terracotta statue(s) from the Amykleion by Sparta<sup>25</sup> show a part of a *polos* and a hand holding a kylix with a snake on it, again a chthonic symbolism. Petterson<sup>26</sup> suggests connecting the Amykleion find to the LHIIIC krater from Tiryns, depicting a seated figure with a kylix by a chariot race,<sup>27</sup> and to the cult of the dead. *Polos* (or high hat)-wearing female deities are seen also in the eastern side of the Agia Triada sarcophagos,<sup>28</sup> where they are in a chariot drawn by griffins, with a bird flying above them,

20 It is still unwarranted to assign names (even those in Linear B sources) to prehistoric Aegean depictions of deities, since none are inscribed with the deity’s name (see O. DICKINSON, *The Aegean Bronze Age* [1994] 291). It is also possible that different deities with similar roles were depicted similarly in the Aegean world, and visa-versa - that the same deity was depicted in different manners (cf. *Minoan Religion* 165-166; RENFREW [*supra* n. 13] 432).

21 Cf. BEGG (*supra* n. 12) 11 for schematization and stereotyping as important components in the understanding of Late Bronze Age Cypriot figurines.

22 That is, if both types of figurines represent different aspects of the same goddess and not different goddesses.

23 Cf. the thorough investigation of the concept of enthroned female figures in Aegean art by REHAK (*supra* n. 17).

24 Belonging to the LH II period or Later; CMS I 202-203 (no. 179); REHAK (*supra* n. 17) 103.

25 M. PETERSON, *Cults of Apollo at Sparta* (1992) 95-96; REHAK (*supra* n. 17) 108.

26 PETERSON (*supra* n. 25) 95-96; following K. KILIAN in *Sanctuaries and Cult* 49-58.

27 Cf. REHAK (*supra* n. 17) 108.

28 C.R. LONG, *The Ayia Triadha Sarcophagos. A Study of Late Minoan and Mycenaean Funerary Practices and Beliefs* (1974) 29; MARINATOS (*supra* n. 20) 35.

similar to the Tiryns gold ring. The deities are interpreted by Long<sup>29</sup> as the protectors of the dead, while Marinatos sees them as celestial goddesses.<sup>30</sup>

The “White Goddess” from Pylos is another possible examples of a *polos*-wearing goddess, in a scene reconstructed by Lang as a seated goddess approached by a procession of smaller figures, including a priestess.<sup>31</sup> If this reconstruction is accepted, then an enthroned deity is approachable by also humans, in addition to the netherworld connections seen on the Tiryns gold ring and other examples. Finally, the LHIIIA “Homage Krater”<sup>32</sup> (Pl. Ce ) depicts two enthroned women. Similarly to the Tiryns gold ring, they are both dressed in a dotted dress, and their necks are adorned with necklaces. A bird sits on the top of her chair of one of the women. She is approached by a procession of naked(?) man carrying a lance as well as women, dressed similarly in dotted dresses and many necklaces, yet carrying swords.<sup>33</sup>

Further iconographical evidence comes from Philistia itself. Two seals found in Ashdod depict seated figures, yet their schematic execution creates more questions that it provides answers, since it impossible to determine the sex of the enthroned figures.<sup>34</sup> The recent excavations in Ashkelon and Tel Miqne/Ekron provide us with somewhat more substantial iconographical evidence.<sup>35</sup> A bronze chariot linchpin is decorated with a head wearing a *polos*, and with facial features depicted in a very similar manner to the “Ashdoda” figurines. The goddess depicted is, as argued by Stager, connected with martial activities: “she leads and protects the elite corps of charioteers as they enter battle.”<sup>36</sup> Another linchpin, depicting a head with a double face and what may be a *polos* was found in Field IV, stratum VI, in Tel Miqne/Ekron, dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Other evidence from Ashkelon is a late 12<sup>th</sup> century krater, depicting in bichrome style images similar in style to those found in LHIIIC Kynos.<sup>38</sup> The figure on the right seems to be seated(?) and holding a cup in her hand, reminiscent of some of the Mycenaean seated goddesses.

29 LONG (*supra* n. 28) 30-32.

30 Minoan Religion 35-36. The second pair of goddesses wearing a *polos* on the other side of the sarcophagus, is interpreted by Marinatos to be chthonic goddesses.

31 M.L. LANG, *The Palace of Nestor in Westers Messenia. Volume II. The Frescoes* (1969) 83-85; REHAK (*supra* n. 17) 103; Cf. N. LURZ, *Der Einfluß Ägyptens, Vorderasiens und Kretas auf die Mykemischen Fresken. Studien zum Ursprung der Frühgriechischen Wandmalerei* (1994) 93-95, who interpreting the “white goddess” as a figure in a procession.

32 E. VERMEULE and V. KARAGEORGHIS, *Mycenaean Pictorial Vase Painting* (1982) 23-24; pl. III: 29.

33 Still, one may take into account the possibility that although similar in symbolism to the Tiryns goddess on the gold ring, it is impossible to determine if the seated women on the “Homage Krater” is a goddess or a high status mortal.

34 The earlier is a cylinder seal from Area H, stratum XIII (DOTHAN [*supra* n. 3] pl. 6; T. DOTHAN and M. DOTHAN, *People of the Sea. The Search for the Philistines* (1992) pl. 11. This seal depicts in a crude, linear style three seated figures, each raising one hand on a blessing (?) gesture. The figures are separated from one another by linear or Cypro-Minoan(?) inscription. Unfortunately, no other attributes are depicted, yet the theme of the seal and the gesture of the figures suggest Near Eastern rather than Aegean origin for the iconography: of the many examples of sated figures lifting one arm, for example D. COLLON, *First Impression. Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (1987) fig. 304 (three male figures sitting in and holding cups); fig. 312 and 316 (seated god lifting his hand in blessing).

The second seal was found in a late Iron I-Iron II context (Area G, stratum X) yet it most probably originated from an earlier stratum (M. DOTHAN, *Ashdod II-III. The Second and Third Seasons of Excavations 1963, 1965* [‘Atiqot IX-X] [1971] fig. 76, 1). Only half of the seal survived, and it depicts an enthroned figure, playing the lyre. The top of the figure’s head is flat (as if the figure is wearing a *polos*), and the schematic representation of the figure is reminiscent of the “Ashdoda” figurines. There are no indications of the sex of the figure, yet most, of the figures playing the lyre in both Aegean and Near Eastern context are men. c.f. B. LAWERGREEN, “Distinction among Canaanite, Philistine, and Israelite Lyres, and their Global Lyrical Contexts,” *BASOR* 309 (1998) 41-68. J.B. CARTER, *Ancestors cult and the Occasion of Homeric Performance in The Ages of Homer: A Tribute to Emily Townsend Vermeule* (1995) 285-312.

35 I am very grateful for Prof. Lawrence E. Stager, director of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon for referring me to the latest finds from Ashkelon, providing me with the slides of the pictorial Krater, as well as discussing many other matters concerning Philistine religion.

36 L.E. STAGER, “Foraging and Identity. The Emergence of Ancient Israel,” in M.D. COOGAN (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, 123-175.

37 T. DOTHAN, “A Double Headed Bronze Linchpin from Tel Miqne-Ekron” in *Eretz-Israel* 24 (Malamat Volume) (1993) 62-67 (Hebrew).

38 STAGER (*supra* n. 36) 164.

The evidence from Aegean iconography seems to strengthen the conclusion reached in the analysis of the “Ashdoda” figurine by itself. The “Ashdoda” of Ashdod seems to be an Aegean goddess, connected to vegetation, earth and perhaps regeneration. If the Tel Qasile “Ashdoda” indeed represents the same goddess, it is easy to connect her role also to human fertility.

## 6. Function through contextual analysis

In order to make a preliminary examination<sup>39</sup> of the patterns of use of the “Ashdoda” figurines, 31 figurines (both certain and possible) were examined (see Tables 2 and 3). The vast majority of which (25) came from Ashdod, while other (6) came from Aphek, Gezer and Tel Qasile. The results of the Iron I period were compared to those of the Iron II period. Although the results for both periods are similar at the first sight,<sup>40</sup> in respect to the archaeological *features* in which these figurines are found, there is great difference in the *function of the structures* to which the figurines were related. None of the Iron I figurines were found connected to a cult place,<sup>41</sup> while three fragments, found on floors or courtyards in Area G, clearly come from a domestic context. The complete “Ashdoda” from Area H at Ashdod is not connected to the unique apsidal building found in the area, but comes from a building on the opposite side of the street.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the “Ashdoda” from Tel Qasile comes from a domestic context, while no examples of these figurines were found among the hundreds of cultic items in the nearby sanctuaries.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it seems that these figurines function within a private/domestic and popular domain of cult, rather than an official and public cult.<sup>44</sup> The fact that none of these figurines are found as votaries in a temple, strengthens the notion that they depict goddesses, rather than mortal women (queens, priestesses etc.).<sup>45</sup> That is since while it may be possible to interpret votaries as both human (voters) and divine figures, figures in domestic context which are not dolls, magical objects or portraits, are more likely to represent goddesses. This picture changes radically in the Iron II period, when many figurines were found in area D at Ashdod, in connection with the cult place or in levels above it. The appearance of two figurines in contexts such as L. 1067, which probably served as a *favissa*, indicates that in the Iron II period the “Ashdoda” figurines were used as votives in cult places, at least in Ashdod, while none comes from a clear domestic context.

## 7. Before the “Ashdoda;” Late Bronze Age representation of female deities in the southern Levant

The new “Ashdoda” iconography, and the new emphasis on roles of the deity seen in the “Ashdoda” figurines, are best explained against the background of the typical depictions of nude goddesses, frequently found in Late Bronze Age contexts in the southern Levant.

39 Naturally this study of context is only a prolegomena and an invitation for a more complete study that will include other sites in which “Ashdoda” figurines were found. The publication of the context of find of the figurines from Ashkelon, Tel Miqne Ekron and Tel Batash, can confirm or show different tendencies than the ones seen for the three sites surveyed.

40 This similarity may, however, have a significance to the study of the use and disposal of the figurines in both periods, and to that of post-depositional processes.

41 I.e., a shrine or a cult room that is identified as such by other cult objects except the figurines, or differentiated by its special architecture.

42 Cf. DOTAN (*supra* n. 3) 234.

43 MAZAR (*supra* n. 1) 260.

44 Cf. RENFREW (*supra* n. 13) 402, for a typology of cult places based on the variables of “private/domestic,” “public,” “popular” and “officially administrated.”

45 Since votives in temples may just as well depict humans as divine figures.

One such type is a creator goddess, depicted nursing two infants, with a palmetto tree flanked by caprides shown on each thigh<sup>46</sup> (Pl. Cf). This is most probably the great mother goddess Asherah/Atirat of the Canaanite traditions, the consort of El (and perhaps later of Yahweh<sup>47</sup>) and the mother of gods.<sup>48</sup>

Another type of nude goddess, holds a papyrus plants in both hands, and is sometimes depicted standing on a lion or a horse<sup>49</sup> (Pl. Cg). These may be representations of the goddess Anat (displaying both sexual appeal and warlike nature seen in the horse<sup>50</sup>), or the above mentioned Asherah/Atirat.<sup>51</sup>

To these types one may add the “Astarte plaques:” depictions of naked women on pottery plaques, which seem to represent goddesses rather than wet-nurses or concubines.<sup>52</sup>

The type of power portrayed in the “Canaanite” depictions of goddesses is a combination of rulership and domination (seen in the presence of horses or lions, or the enthroned position), nurturing and creative power (seen in the presence of plants, animals and infants) as well as erotic power (manifested in the emphasized nakedness). The latter attribute seems an essential part in the representation of the goddess, since even in the case where other attributes are omitted (as in the case of the “Astarte plaques”) the naked body remains un-schematized.<sup>53</sup> To the eye of the current beholder, the “Ashdoda” figurines tell a tale of different iconographic “priorities:” the fact that the figurine represents a women is important, but the schematization of almost all anatomical features shows that it was of *secondary* importance to the depiction of her as a *ruling figure*. Other attributes, such as the floral decoration and the infants further specify the realm of the ruling deity.

## 8. The introduction of cult of goddesses in migration

How and by whom was the cult of Aegean goddess(es) brought to the shores of Canaan? One possible direction may be given by the traditions of the Greek colonization, where there are several examples of the important role of priestesses in the introduction of cults of female deities to the newly-found colonies.<sup>54</sup> A Greek woman named Cleoboea (Paus. X. 28.3) brought the cult of Demeter to Thassos from Paros, while Aristarcha (Strabo 4.1.4) was not only appointed by Artemis of Ephesos to guide the Phocaeans to Massalia, but she also founded the cult of the goddess and became her priestess. The foundation of cult is done by the transfer of an *Aphidruma*; a statue or another sacred object. In the case of Massalia the *Aphidruma* was a cult statue.<sup>55</sup> The participation of a priestess is in this, as perhaps in other cases of

46 KEEL and UEHLINGER (*supra* n. 5) 73-74, 75 fig. 82; O. KEEL, “Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh. Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible” (*JSOT Supplement 261*) (1998) 34-35. A possible connection already in the Late Bronze Age between the Asherah and Aegean seated goddesses may be seen in the pyxis lid from Ugarit (P. REHAK and J.G. YOUNGER. “International Styles in Ivory Carving in the Bronze Age” in *The Aegeans and the Orient in the Second Millennium. Proceedings of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium. Cincinnati, 18-20 April 1997, Aegaeum 18* (1998) 229-254; KEEL [*supra* n. 46] 30-31). It is depicting a semi-naked goddess between two caprides. Although the origin of the iconography of the scene is most likely Mycenaean, the execution is more eastern in nature. Without entering into the problem of the origin of the artist, the attributes of the goddess and the scenery would have easily been recognized by both Ugaritian/Canaanites and Aegeans as belonging to “their” earth/mother goddess.

47 K. VAN DEN TOORM, “Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion” in GOODISON and MORRIS (*supra* n. 10) 83-97. 1998: 88-91; cf. KEEL and UHLINGER (*supra* n. 5) 210-248.

48 KEEL and UHLINGER (*supra* n. 5) 74; J. GOODNICK-WESTHOLZ, “Goddesses of the Ancient near East 3000-1000 BC” in GOODISON and MORRIS (*supra* n. 10) 63-82. Two of the three known examples of the Goddess holding infants were found in Tel Mique/Ekron and in Aphek (KEEL [*supra* n. 46] 34-35 n. 45), both sites from which “Ashdoda” figures are later known.

49 KEEL and UHLINGER (*supra* n. 5) 66-68.

50 KEEL and UHLINGER (*supra* n. 5) 68; GOODNICK-WESTHOLZ (*supra* n. 48) 79.

51 Two of these figurines/plaques were found in Gezer in a Late Bronze Age context (DEVER, LANCE and WRIGHT (*supra* n. 1) 108, pl. 25A and B, pl. 37: 10, 11).

52 KEEL and UHLINGER (*supra* n. 5) 97-105. Such a plaque was found in a Late Bronze Age context at Ashdod Area B, stratum XVII (local stratum 4; DOTHAN [*supra* n. 34] pl. XXXI: 11).

53 Cf. MARINATOS (*supra* n. 20) 280 n. 65 On the rarity of nudity in the Aegean depiction of deities.

54 A.J. GRAHAM, “The Colonial Expansion of Greece” in *CAH*. Vol. III: Part 3 (1982<sup>2</sup>) 83-162.

55 I. MALKIN, “What Is an Aphidruma?” *ClAnt* 10 (1991) 77-96.



transfer of cult of female deities, an essential one: only women could wash and adorn a female cult image.<sup>56</sup> Although it is impossible to determine if such was the process that brought the Aegean goddess(es) to Philistia, the possible identification of women of Aegean origin among the Philistine migrants seen in the Medinet Habu “Land Battle” relief<sup>57</sup> leaves open the possibility that Aegean goddessess was brought by Aegean women.

### 9. Asherah and *ptgyh*: Canaanite and Aegean goddesses in Philistia

The cult of the local “Canaanite” goddesses did not cease after the migration of the Philistines (and other “Sea Peoples”), rather it seems to continue side by side with the newly-introduced “Ashdoda” figurines. Depictions of naked goddesses in the “Canaanite” manner continue in Gezer in the Iron I period,<sup>58</sup> and even appear together with an “Ashdoda” head in pit 2001 in Ashdod area C, in a dump of mostly Iron I material.<sup>59</sup> The best example of this “coexistence” is seen in the Iron II cultic area D of Ashdod, which yielded many anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines.<sup>60</sup> “Ashdoda” figurines continue well into Iron II period,<sup>61</sup> at least as late as the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>62</sup> Naked, mould-made figurines are also found in the same strata and sometimes the same locus as the “Ashdoda” figurines.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, there is no further evidence for the name of the deity/deities worshipped in this area.

Some missing pieces of the puzzle may come from the excavation of a temple/palace complex at Tel Miqne/Ekron, field IV. A complex south of the temple provided 14 dedicatory storage jar inscriptions, among them *qdš lašrt* (“holy/dedicated to Asherah”) and *lmqm* (“to the shrine”) indicating that the cult of Asherah existed at the site in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>64</sup> The temple itself yielded more surprising details to the identity of the deity worshipped. A monumental inscription, in the Phoenician script, discovered in the temple states both the name of the king who built the temple, and the deity to which it is dedicated:

“The temple which (he) built, `kyš, son of Padi, son of Ada, son of Ya’ar, ruler of Ekron, for *ptgyh* his lady, may she bless him, and prote[ct] him, and prolong his days, and bless his [l]and.”<sup>65</sup> Achish, the ruler of Ekron, is Ikausu, mentioned in an Assyrian inscription. His non-semitic name is derived from \*Ik(h)ayus/š= “the Achaeon.”<sup>66</sup> The goddess’ name, *ptgyh*, is also non-semitic.<sup>67</sup> The name was interpreted by Schäfer-Lichtenberger<sup>68</sup> as derived from Πύθω-Γαῖα = Gaia from Pytho. Another possibility is a derivation from Πότ[υ]λα-Γαῖα = “the Lady

56 MALKIN (*supra* n. 55) 84-85.

57 D. SWEENEY and A. YASUR-LANDAU, “Following the Path of the Sea Peoples: The Women in the Medinet Habu Reliefs,” *Tel Aviv* 26 (1999): 116-145. Cf. the later 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. non-semitic women’s names Qsryh and Bršyh from Tell Jemmeh in Philistia. See J. NAVEH, “Writing and Script in 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. Philistia: The New Evidence from Tell Jemmeh,” *IEJ* 35 (1985) 8-21.

58 Area VI: DEVER (*supra* n. 1) pl. 55:4; 58: 8.

59 M. DOTHAN and D.N. FREEDMAN, “Ashdod I. The First Season of Excavations 1962” (*Atiqot* VII) (1967) fig. 35: 3, 4.

60 M. DOTHAN, “Ashdod” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (1993) 93-102.

61 By that time, the back of the seat of the figurines became much lower, with only the stem of the neck rising from it (as well as some “Ashdoda” heads) still indicates that this is a figurine, and not a model of an offering table (as suggested sometimes in the excavation reports).

62 DOTHAN (*supra* n. 34) fig. 63: 2, 4, 5, 6, 7; 65; 12, 13; DOTHAN and FREEDMAN (*supra* n. 59) fig. 43: 5, 9.

63 DOTHAN (*supra* n. 34) fig. 64: 1-12; DOTHAN and FREEDMAN (*supra* n. 59) fig. 43: 4, 6). According to DOTHAN (*supra* n. 60) 100, most figurines belong to Stratum VIII (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) yet deep ploughing in the area caused the appearance of many figurines and “offering tables” on the surface and in higher strata.

64 DOTHAN and GITIN (*supra* n. 2) 1058; S. GITIN, “Seventh Century B.C.E. Cultic Elements in Ekron,” in *Biblical Archaeology Today. Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology. Jerusalem, June-July 1990* (1993) 248-258; S. GITIN, “Philistia in Transition: The Tenth Century BCE and Beyond” in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition* (*supra* n. 8) 162-183.

65 S. GITIN, T. DOTHAN and J. NAVEH, “A Royal Dedicatory inscription from Ekron,” *IEJ* 47 (1997) 1-16; GITIN (*supra* n. 64) 173, 178.

66 J. NAVEH, “Achish-Ikausu in the Light of the Ekron Dedication” *BASOR* 310 (1998) 35-37.

67 GITIN, DOTHAN and NAVEH (*supra* n. 65) 11-12.

68 C. SCHÄFFER-LICHTENBERGER, “PTGYH - Göttin und Herrin von Ekron,” *BN* 91 (1998) 64-76.

Gaia.”<sup>69</sup> Demski,<sup>70</sup> however, argues against the reading of the letter *gimel* in the name of the deity, claiming that this is rather an unfinished *nun*. He therefore suggest a reading of *ptynh*= Πότνια, referring to the occurrence of the term in Linear B sources. Although it is hard to decide in this matter, it seems less likely that a letter will remain incomplete in such an official dedicatory inscription.

At any case, if the reading “*ptgyh*” is accepted, the component of “Gaia” in both other proposals is indeed a happy surprise, putting an Aegean Earth Goddess, with Mycenaean origins<sup>71</sup> as the protector of the well being of the dynasty in the Philistine city of Ekron. Gitin Dothan and Naveh suggested, without relating to the name Gaia<sup>72</sup> the possibility that *Ptgyh* was “identified with the local Semitic deity of Asherah.” To my mind, this is not only exactly the case, but also hints at the identity of the earth goddess “Ashdoda.” The cult of the Aegean great mother goddess Gaia, a ruling earth goddess and “the mother of all,” gods, plants and animals, seems to have been preserved in Philistia from the time of the Aegean migration at the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It cannot be proven, but it may make a lot of sense if some, if not all, of the images of seated ruling earth goddesses grouped under the “Ashdoda” label were called “Gaia” by people of Aegean descent. It is also very possible that people of local, Canaanite descent identified this goddess as “Asherah,” after their own mother-of-gods, animal and vegetation goddess. This inter-identification of goddesses between people of different origin in Philistia may have contributed to the situation of the contemporaneous use of two types of figurines through the centuries: the Canaanite great mother and the Aegean/Philistine great mother.

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69 Cf. *Homeric Epigrams* VII (Πότνια Γῆ). Otherwise reference to Πότνια Γαία/Γῆ are rare, with very few examples, virtually none comes from inscriptions: Athenagoras Legatio 18.6.6; Hesichius Πότνια Γῆ; *Fragmenta Orphica frag.* 13: 41; *Vita Homeri* 249.

70 See A. DEMSKI, “The Name of the Goddess of Ekron: A New Reading,” *JANES* 25 (1997) 1-5.

71 For the Mycenaean origins of Gaia, a deity known from linear B sources from Thebes and Knossos as ma-ka, “Mother Earth,” see L. GODART and A. SACCONI, “Les dieux thébains dans les archives mycéniennes,” *CRAI* (1996) 99-113, as well as GODART, this volume. The Mycenaean origin of the name of the deity (and possibly her realm and roles) remains intact, off course, also in the case of accepting Demsky’s reading. Some measure of referring to Potnia still remains in the other proposals, since SCHÄFFER-LICHTENBERGER (*supra* n. 68) 66-68, suggests a connection between *ptgyh* as the “mistress” of Achish, in the Ekron inscription, and the Mycenaean title Potnia to goddesses.

72 GITIN, DOTHAN and NAVEH (*supra* n. 65) 12, yet obviously relating to the name of Asherah found nearby the temple.









## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. XCIXa “Ashdoda” from Ashdod, Area H (After DOTHAN [*supra* n. 34] fig. 91:1).
- Pl. XCIXb “Ashdoda” from Tel Qasile (after MAZAR [*supra* n. 1] 259 fig. 2).
- Pl. XCIXc Terracotta figures from Tiryns: detail (after K. ΔΗΜΑΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Ο Μυκηναϊκός Κόσμος* [1988] 100).
- Pl. XCIXd Cypriot type B figurine (after KARAGEORGHIS [*supra* n. 15] pl. VIII, X).
- Pl. XCIXe Schematized lotus plants on “Philistine bichrome” pottery (after DOTHAN [*supra* n. 3] fig. 50).
- Pl. Ca-d Aegean enthroned figures with animals (after REHAK [*supra* n. 17] pl. XXXVIIa, d; XXXVIIIc; J.G. YOUNGER in *Ruler* pl. LXIX: g).
- Pl. Ce Enthroned woman from the “Homage Krater” (after VERMEULE and KARAGEORGHIS [*supra* n. 32] pl. III: 29).
- Pl. Cf A figurine from Revadim (after KEEL and UEHLINGER [*supra* n. 5] fig. 82).
- Pl. Cg Canaanite goddesses on lions or horses (after KEEL and UEHLINGER [*supra* n. 5] fig. 69-72).