Maritime-Related Cults in the Coastal Cities of Philistia during the Roman Period

Legacy and change

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To Elia and Itamar

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Cults are ceremonies and customs which are the expression of myths. The primary meaning of 'myth' (μύθος) in Greek is 'word', 'speech' or 'saying' (from the verb μυθέομαι — to speak, say). Its secondary meaning is 'tale', 'story', 'narrative' (from the verb μυθιάζομαι — to relate a fable).[1] In modern times 'myth' has been defined as 'A complex of stories — some no doubt fact, and some fantasy — which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of inner meaning of the universe and of human life'.[2] The creation of myth, like the creation of art, is a response to exrnal reality, and an attempt to reduce it to order: to analyse it, understand it, organize it and express it in human language, and thereby to attain a degree of control over it. This reality includes the geographical environment, social and political conditions, and contemporary events. The myth illuminates it, even though it is not an objective, rational and scientific analysis, but, rather, a subjective and imaginative interpretation created by the human mind. Thus, the study of myths and cults will expand our knowledge of human beings and the communities from within which they have developed, of their physical surroundings, their living conditions and their spiritual world, and will afford us additional insights into their history.

Not every myth is religious, but this study is concerned with cults and myths associated with religious belief. In the ancient world atheism was rare. As a rule every person's identity was determined by his or her religious belief. In the biblical story of Jonah, the sailors ask him: 'What is thy country, and of what people art thou?' and he replies 'I am a Hebrew, and I fear the God of heaven.'[3] Religious belief was, however, not static; it was subject to various influences and modifications. The sailors in Jonah's ship, who were of foreign origin, came to believe in his God; and Jonah's own conception of God

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[1] Liddell & Scott 1985: 521. Cf. *ίστρία* means inquiry, the knowledge so obtained, an account of one's inquiry, a narrative, history: Ibid, p. 385.
[2] Watts 1953: 7.
[3] *Jonah*, 1: 8–9.

underwent development and change. This dynamic can also be seen in the Roman period, which is the subject of this study. Ancient myths disappear or take on new forms, and new myths are born. Pagan cults decline, and Christianity, originally a tiny sect, becomes the official religion of the empire.

This study deals with the cults that were practiced in the Roman period by the peoples who dwelt on the Mediterranean coast of southern levant, mostly concentrated in the coastal cities. Unlike inland cities, coastal towns are not completely surrounded by land. The sea is always in sight and constitutes the background to the city's architecture and way of life. Transport and communication of the coastal cities with their environment were partly conducted by sea. The sea also formed part of their agricultural hinterland, and was one of the bastions of their economy. The harbour is the place where the force of nature — the sea — meets the work of man — the city. It is an indivisible part of the city's way of life, even if it is sometimes located in a special quarter. Within its bounds a variety of activities take place: loading and unloading, fishing, commerce, industry and services. In ancient times, because of their economic and strategic importance harbours were in the vanguard of technological development. Many of them were built in magnificent style, and attained fame as architectural masterpieces that attracted visitors and tourists. Josephus described Sebastos, the splendid harbour of Caesarea Maritima, with deep admiration.[4] Two of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Pharos of Alexandria, and the Colossus, the huge statue of Helios at Rhodes, were harbour installations; both of them were lighthouses. A passage in the autobiographical account of Ven-Amon illustrates the extent to which the sea is woven into every aspect of the lives of those who dwell in the coastal cities. Ven-Amon was an Egyptian official who was sent to Gebel/Byblos at about 1100 BCE to buy cedars to build the sacred ship of the god Amon. He was granted an audience in the palace of Zakarbaʿal the ruler of Gebel. '...(The statue of) the god stayed in the tent where he was, (on) the shore of the sea. And I found him (Zakarba ʿal) sitting (in) his upper room, with his back turned to a window, so that the waves of the great Syrian sea broke against the back of his head'.[5] They discussed religious matters, maritime commerce, and the political relationships between Egypt, Gebel, and other cities on the coast of Syria and the Land of Israel.

The peoples of ancient times sometimes saw the sea as a barrier, a distancing and divisive element; and, indeed the Greek word for sea, πέλαγος pelagos is close to the Hebrew terms haflaga, peleg, and pilug (setting sail, section, and split). Jonah set sail from Jaffa to Tarshish, and thought that in this way he could even escape from God. But the Phoenicians and the Greeks, who were expert sailors, saw the sea as a means of transport and communication, just like land routes. According to the Odyssey men would sail in 'ships with beautiful prows...to visit the cities of the world, like men who traverse the seas on their lawful occasions' and it was customary for the host to ask his

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[4] Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, I, 21: 5–7.
[5] Pritchard 1954: 26.

guest: 'On which boat did you come here? For you surely did not come on foot.'[6] One of the Greek words for the sea is πόντος *pontos*, and its changes in meaning reflect the conception that it was a connecting medium that brought people close to each other. The most common type of ship in the Mediterranean in Roman times was called a *ponto*.[7] *Pons* in Latin means 'bridge', as does *ponte* in Italian.[8] And, in fact, sea transport is easier, more capacious and cheaper than land transport, since it does not require the energy of man or beast, but uses winds and ocean currents. It was also much faster. Cato the Elder persuaded the Romans to destroy Carthage by showing them a date that had been picked there and was still fresh after three days of sea travel: *'Tam prope a moeris habemus hostem*!' (So near is the enemy to our walls).[9] Ancient thinkers were aware of the difference between the inhabitants of maritime and inland cities, and the fact that because of their numerous contacts with foreign peoples and cultures they were more receptive to new ideas and customs. Plato, Aristotle and Cicero maintained that their acceptance of change destabilized the social and moral life of these cities, weakened their resilience, and endangered their very existence.[10]

Since the sea played a central role in the material and cultural life of the coastal cities, it may be assumed that many of their beliefs and cultic customs were linked to the sea, particularly since it was always associated with or likened to the primary instincts and deepest emotions of the human soul: the desire for life and sex, love, the fear of death, the longing for rebirth and spiritual salvation, the desire for enquiry and knowledge, introspection and fear of God. The Hebrew expression mayim hayim (living water) expresses the concept of water as the source of life. The sea's vitality was proved by its dynamism and perpetual motion, in contrast to the stability, the permanence and the confined nature of the land (*terra firma*). The sea was associated with the sexual and procreative urge, and in all Mediterranean cultures the fishes of the sea were a symbol of fertility. Aphrodite, the goddess of sex, fertility, love and beauty, was born from the sea, which was the symbol of love, because of its unending and all-embracing nature. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet says: 'My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep... for both are infinite.'[11] The fear of death is likened to the torments of drowning: 'The sorrows of hell compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid'; 'He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters'; 'Save me O God; for the waters are come into my soul'[12] The desire for knowledge and discovery is embodied in Dante's Ulysses. In the canto twenty-sixth of the *Inferno* he relates: 'L'ardore ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto... missi per me l'alto mare aperto; ...quando venimmo a quella foce stretta, dov'Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi acciò che

[6] Homer, *Odyssey*, I, 170–173; XIV, 187–190; XVI, 59.
[7] Rougé 1996: 185, 187. The ponto was portrayed in mosaics from the Roman period: Pomey 1997, see fig. p. 83; Friedman 2003: 208, and p. 222, fig. 3.8.26. The Greek ποντοπορεύω means 'to cross the ocean': Liddell & Scott 1985: 661
[8] Mir & Calvano 2000: 490.
[9] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 15: 20.
[10] Plato, *The Laws*, 704–707; Aristotle, *Politics*, 7.1327a; Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, 2:4–2:10. For the words of Cicero, see: Vishnia 1994: 128–137.
[11] Shakespeare, 'Romeo and Juliet', Act II, Sc. 2.
[12] *Psalms*, 18: 1, 18: 18, 69: 1

l'uom più oltre non si metta... 'O frati', dissi,'...considerate la vostra semenza: fatti non foste a vivere come bruti, ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza!' ('The desire I had to be experienced of the world, and of the vice and virtue of mankind... I put forth on the high and open sea... When at that narrow passage we arrived where Hercules his landmarks set as signals, that man no further onward should adventure', he persuaded his shipmats to continue: 'consider ye the seed from which ye sprang: Ye were not made to live like unto brutes, But for pursuit of virtue and knowledge!')[13]

But man is compelled to recognize his impotence and his ignorance of the secrets of the universe, whose infinitude is also symbolized by the sea: 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding.... Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? Or hast thou walked in the search of the depth?'[14] The Greeks, too, condemned man's arrogance (ὕβρις) and any deviation from his place in the universe whereby he frees from their shackles the forces of nature which were restrained by Providence. These forces are embodied in the sea, with its storms and monstrous creatures, and they rise up to destroy him. Arrogance is both the sin and the punishment, as signified by the Hebrew word for arrogance, rahav, which is the name of the Leviathan or primeval monster. When Jonah rebels he falls into the sea and is swallowed up by this creature. Andromeda, whose mother boasted that she was fairer than the sea nymphs, is cast out and given to this creature to devour, and Ulysses' ship sinks to its depths: 'Three times it made it whirl with all the waters, at the fourth time it made the stern uplift, and the prow downward go, as pleased Another, until the sea above us closed again'. 'Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l'acque; a la quarta levar la poppa in suso e la prora ire in giú, com'altrui piacque, infin che 'l mar sovra noi richiuso.'[15] The abysses and turmoils of the sea are also likened to the turmoils of the soul. When Jonah was cast into the deep he attained inner peace: 'When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.'[16] He was born again out of the belly of the monster. The Bible also compares the universal recognition of the greatness, fear and worship of God with the sea: 'For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'[17] The Latin word *pontifex* (high priest, sacred servant) expresses a similar conception: it is composed of the verb *facio* (to make) and the noun *pons* (bridge), which is derived from *pontus*, the sea.

The geographical area with which this study deals is the southern coastal plain of the Land of Israel. This region, between the El ʿArish valley in the south and the Yarkon Valley in the north, was called from the Biblical period onwards Philistia (Hebrew: Peleshet) after the Philistines (Hebrew: Pelishtim). Who were the Philistines and how did they come to inhabit Philistia? During the Late Bronze Age (1550–1100 BCE)

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[13] Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 26: 97–120.
[14] *Job*, 38: 4, 38: 16.
[15] Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 26: 139–142.
[16] *Jonah*, 2: 8.
[17] *Isaiah*, 11: 9.

the southern coastal plane of the Levant was inhabited by the Canaanites who lived under Egyptian control. Already than there were foreigners and traders of diverse origins active in its harbour sites. But in the first decades of the twelfth century BCE the migrant influx increased. At the transition between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (c. late thirteenth-late twelfth centuries BCE), numerous states in the Mediterranean coastal regions either disappeared or experienced significant constraction, or transformed into other political entities: the palace centers of Mycennean Grece, the Hittite Empire, Egypt's empire in the Levant, and city-states in Syria and Canaan. Recent evidences point to social, economic and ecological factors, such a global drought, that caused masses of homeless peoples to move across the Mediterranean Sea and its coastlands, disrupting or destroying, and later settling among, the local populations. Egyptian records regarding the reigh of Ramses III (1186–1155 BCE) are the first to mention the Philistines. The wall reliefs of his temple at Medinet Habu and Papyrus Harris from Ramses IV's time (1155–1149 BCE), relate that a confederation of Peleset (Philistines), Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denyen and Weshesh from 'the islands' or 'the northern countries' attacked and destroyed the Hittite Empire and city-states in Cilicia (Southern Anatolia) and northern Syria and came to attack Egypt from both land and sea. These peoples are called by modern scholars, following E. de Rougé (1855) and G. Maspero (1895) 'Sea peoples'. Ramses III defeated them, acquired their loyalty and settled them in strongholds (Pritchard 1954: 262–263). Peleset and Denyen warriors served in his army in his war against the Lybians. The Onomasticon of Amenope, dating to the twelfth-eleventh centuries BCE, lists the Peleset, Tjeker and Denyen among the peoples who inhabit Canaan.

In the Bible there are contradictory statements about the origins of the Philistines: from Egypt (*Genesis,* 10: 13–14; I *Chronicles,* 1: 11–12), from Caphtor (Crete) (*Amos,* 7: 9; *Jeremiah,* 47: 4; *Ezekiel,* 25: 16) (see chap. 4, sec. 1, archaeological evidences for the link between Minoan Crete and Philistia). They found in Philistia a political federation of five city-states comprising Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod (by the sea shore) Ekron and Gath (more inland) (*Joshua,* 13: 3 and *1 Samuel,* 6: 17). The Bible describes several features of Philistine culture, among them their worship of Dagon, their skills in metal working, their lack of circumcision. They are portrayd as the main enemy of the children of Israel.

According to historians from the Classic, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods some of the Philistines, led by Mopsus of Phrygia and Askalos of Lydia came through Syria from Anatolia and settled in Ashkelon. (It is accepted in research that Philistine words mentioned in the Bible originated in Luwian language, spoken in Anatolia and Northern Syria during the Second and First Millennia BCE, such as *kupahi* — kova כובע, *tyrannoi* — seranim סרנים). Other Philistines came from Crete, and settled in Gaza and Rafiah. During the Roman period, Cretan gods and heroes were worshiped in Gaza. Another group were the Denyen, or Danaoi/Danaites, who hailed from Mycenean Argolis or Cilicia and are usually identified by modern scholars with the tribe of Dan, which dwelt in Jaffa and the coastal plain, and also in Dan in Upper Galilee. Following

the decline of the Egyptian rule, the Philistines became the dominant element in the Land of Israel. At the peak of their expansion they reached as far north as Jaffa and Tel Qasile, close by the Yarkon Valley. They bordered to the north with the Kingdom of Israel, while their eastern border was along the foothills of the Judaean Kingdom, on the line of Beith-shemesh.

Some archaeological evidences suggest a gradual migration and settlement of the Philistines: they initially setteled in Amuq plain (in today's southern Turkey) and only later in Philistia. Indeed, the Medinet Habu inscription relates that prior to the Sea Peoples attack on Egypt they had founded a camp within the Amurru kingdom (in today's western Syria and northern Lebanon); the reliefs depict the warriors accompanied by ox-carts laden with women and children. 'Achaeans' is the common term for Greeks, together with 'Danaens' and 'Argives' in the Homeric epic. Achaea (in Hittite 'Ahhiyawa') was a kingdom mentioned in Hittite documents, located on the Greek mainland or in the Aegean Sea. In the thirteenth century they invaded cities and vassal states of the Hittites. After the decline of the Hittite Empire, neo-Hittite kingdoms were established in Anatolia and Northern Syria. A bilingual Luwian-Phoenician inscription found in Çineköy (near Adana in Cilicia) mentions Warika king of Dnnym/Hiyawa; inscriptions from Tel Tayinat and Aleppo tell about Taita, king of Palastin. The precise period of Taita is not yet clear, in the range between the twelfth and the ninth centuries BCE. According to Harrison (2012) Palastin was a powreful Luwian-Aegean-Syrian kingdom. In modern research the origins of the Philistines is still under debate. The most distinct feature of their early material culture, the Mycenean style pottery IIIC: 1b has not been identified with a specific region in the Greek world that can point to a single origin for it. Recent study demonstrated that it is a typological branch of Cypriot and Cilician pottery while the decorative style corresponds with motifs known from Crete, the Dodecanese and western Anatolia. Apparently the Philistines were comprised of different populations amalgamated along the way. However, part of the Philistines arrived directly from southern Europe and the Aegean world. Recent study (Feldman et al. 2019) of DNA from skeletons excavated in Ashkelon shows that the first immigrants came there across the Mediterranean. Genetically they mixed quickly through intermarriage with the native inhabitants. In the course of time, the Philistines adopted many features of the Canaanite culture, language and religion. Nevertheless, and although their genetic profile changed, archaeological and historical evidences show that many Aegean cultural traditions carried on, and also according their neighbors they remained Philistines. Some scholars maintain that they gradually assimilated into the local population and after 604 BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar II king of Babylon conquered their cities and exiled them to Mesopotamia, they ceased to exist as a separate nation.

The coastal cities of Philistia thrived due to their geographical postition. In every period the southern coast of the Land of Israel served as a bridgehead between three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. From the Bronze Age onwards the roads that

connected Egypt with Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia passed through the region. The sea route through which wide-ranging and intensive trade was conducted ran parallel to it. Moreover, this coast was the western outlet of the extensive trade routes from China, India, Arabia and Africa over which were carried the most scarce and valuable merchandise in the ancient world: spices, perfumes, silk, and exotic animals. From the cities of the coast of Philistia merchandise was passed on by sea or land to every part of the Mediterranean. Their commerce flourished despite poor conditions of anchorage in their harbours: reefs and storms in the waters of Jaffa, and sandbanks and shallow water on the shores of Ashkelon, Gaza and Rafiah. The cities of Philistia also grew prosperous as a result of their fertile soil, highly developed agriculture and their expertise in maritime industries such as fishing, purple dye, salt and preserves.

In the Roman period, which is the subject of this study, Jaffa, Ashkelon, Gaza, and Rafiah were the biggest and most important cities in Philistia. They had many features in common. From the point of view of their location and surroundings, they were all situated close to the international trade routes. This both ensured their prosperity and exposed them to a great many cultural influences. In all of them the sea was both the source of their livelihood and the means of their communication and contact with other cultures. As to their ethno-cultural character, they were cosmopolitan centres, in which people from many different ethnic, social, cultural, and religious origins interacted on a daily basis. Their population was a mixture of the descendents of Philistines and Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans. They all treasured and nurtured traditions of their ancient Aegean foundation, and prided themselves on their Hellenic culture, but also on their local heritage. In their socio-political structure they had absorbed the values of the Greek and Roman world. Nonetheless, there were many differences between these cities, in the topographical situation of their harbours conditions, in the relationships between the various sectors of their populations, in their foreign relations and in their political fate.

In the First Temple period Philistia was not included in the territory of either Israel or Judah. Gaza, Ashkelon and Rafiah were independent city-states with monarchic regimes. Only Jaffa was conquered by David and annexed to his kingdom, but at the time of Hezekiah it was subject to Ashkelon.[18] The cities of Philistia were, indeed, united in a confederation, but while Gaza was always hostile to Judah, Ashkelon sometimes contracted alliances with it. In the period of Persian dominance Sidon and Tyre were granted the coastal area of the Land of Israel down to Ashkelon,[19] in consideration of the services in trade and sea warfare that they rendered to the Persians. The Arabs, who managed the caravan traffic throughout the empire, controlled the region from Gaza to Jenissus (modern ElʿArish or Khan Yunis) by the dispensation of the Persians.[20]

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[18] From the Annals of Sennacherib, Sancherib Prism in the Oriental Institute in Chicago (689 BCE), Galil 2001: 142.
[19] According to the Eshmunazar II inscription: Slouschz 1942: 25. Pseudo-Scylax, *Periplus*, ll. 2–6.
[20] Neither the Eshmunazar sarcophagus inscription nor Pseudo-Scylax includes Gaza in the list of coastal cities of the Land of Israel ruled by Tyre or Sidon. See also: Herodotus, *Histories*, III, 5.

During the Persian period the international maritime trade of the coastal cities of Philistia flourished, and they were subject to the cultural influence of Phoenicia, Greece, the Aegean world, and Egypt. By contrast, the inland regions of the country (Judah, Shomron/Samaria, and Trans-Jordan) were characterized by local eastern culture, and influenced by Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt.

In 332 BCE Alexander the Great conquered the Land of Israel. In 301 it was annexed to the Ptolemaic kingdom, and in 200 BCE it was conquered by the Seleucids. Hellenization was spread by the soldiers who inhabited the settlements founded in cities such as Gaza, Shomron/Samaria, Geresh/Gerasa and Pehel/Pella, and through the agency of the great numbers of immigrants and traders who came from all parts of the Greek world, as well as Ptolemaic and Seleucid administrators and soldiers, many of whom owned businesses and estates in the Land of Israel. The Reiner Papyrus attests to the frequency of mixed marriages.[21] Syncretism — the amalgamation of gods and cultures — furthered integration between Greeks and local inhabitants. The Greeks knew of the Eastern religions long before they conquered the region, and were accustomed to comparing their gods with easterm deities.[22] The immigrants were impressed by the ancient local religions and their colourful ceremonies. The Hellenistic rulers, too, paid them homage, in order to ensure the loyalty of the local inhabitants. Alexander the Great himself married a Bactrian princess, made pilgrimages to local shrines, and encouraged his soldiers to display sympathy with the Eastern way of life.[23] Immigrants and local inhabitants emphasized the common features of their gods, and sometimes combined them. In an inscription dating from the second century BCE the following prayer appears: 'To Anoubis, who is also Amon, to Satet, who is Hera, to Anuket, who is Hestia, to Petepamentes, who is also Dionysus, to Petesentis, who is also Cronus, and to Petesenis, who is also Hermes.'[24] The Greeks believed they should pay respect to local gods in the places they aquired, but also in their right to bring their own. Moreover, they legitimized their conquests by claiming that each of the important cities in the East was founded by a Greek god or hero, such as Dionysus, Perseus or Heracles, all of whom made journeys in the east. The indigenous peoples did not oppose this, since by this means their city became a *polis*, self-governing and exempt from tax. Citizens of a *polis* belonged to the social elite of the Hellenistic world, and were integrated into its economic and cultural life. In the Hellenistic period there began the demographic and urban growth in the Land of Israel which continued in the Roman and Byzantine periods. Existing towns grew, and new towns were founded. Many of them, including the cities of Philistia, attained the status of *polis*. For this a number of conditions had to be fulfilled: the area of the *polis* had to be greater than that of a village; there was a minimum number of citizens; independent institutions of management and

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[21] Stern 1990: 49.

[22] See, for instance, the attempts of Herodotus to identify Heracles with the 'Tyrian Heracles' (apparently Melqart) and the 'Egyptian Heracles'. Herodotus, *Histories*, II, 43–45.

[23] Plutarch, *The Lives,* 'Alexander', 820, 850.

[24] *OG* 130.24 apud: Kershaw, 1986, vol. 2, p. 5/61.

government; ownership of rural territory; a water system (for drinking, baths and sewage), and, usually, also a city wall; social and professional stratification including an aristocracy, land-owners, common people and slaves; and, above all, sufficiently developed industry and commerce for the *polis* to be a commercial centre and the focal point of the local economy. In each *polis* there was a civic cult to one or more god or a goddess; temples were built for them and they were represented on the coins minted in the city. Religion was the core of the Greek and roman *polis* and its central ideology. It provided the framework and the symbolic focus of the *polis*; the *Polis* provided the fundamental framework in which religion operated.[25] The *polis* was first and foremost a Hellenistic settlement in respect of its culture and way of life — at least, of that of some of its citizens, since Iason the High Priest tried to establish a *polis* for the Hellenizers of Jerusalem; in the Roman period *poleis* were also established in Lod, Tzippori, and Tiberias, where most of the inhabitants were Jews, and in Shechem in the region of Shomron/Samaria. In every city there was a *gymnasion* and an *ephebeion*, where young men were educated and engaged in sports. These institutions were a prime method of spreading the culture and values of Greek society. The Greek language became the *koine* — the common language of all parts of the Near East.

However, Hellenization was not an all-inclusive phenomenon. The Jews and Samaritans, who lived mainly in villages in the mountain regions of Judah and Shomron/Samaria, remained faithful to their monotheistic religion. The Jews, led by the Hasmonean family, rebelled against Antiochus Epiphanes' enforcement of idolatry and fought against the Helleno-Phoenician towns of the Land of Israel that supported his regime. In 164 BCE they overcame the Seleucid regime and established a state that, at the height of its power, ruled over the whole of the Land of Israel and Trans-Jordan, Idumaea and the Golan Heights. The Hasmoneans persecuted the pagan population of the Land of Israel. They destroyed some of the cities on the coast (Stratonos Pyrgos and Gaza) and in Trans-Jordan, and exiled their inhabitants. They conquered all the cities of Philistia except Ashkelon. They expelled all the foreigners from Jaffa, and forcibly converted the Edomites and the Itureans. As a result, the Jews became the majority in the Land of Israel.

This began to change after the Roman conquest of 63 BCE. The Romans tended to support the pagan population, which received them enthusiastically, whereas the Hasmoneans supported Rome's enemies, the Parthians. Moreover, the disputes within the Hasmonean dynasty threatened the stability of the region. The Romans liberated the Hellenistic cities from Jewish rule, and assisted in their rehabilitation. Gaza and Rafiah were rebuilt, and, together with Ashkelon, were joined to the province of Syria. In 40 BCE the Romans made Herod king of Judah. He ruled under the tutelage of Rome, and promoted its cultural values throughout his kingdom. After his death in 4 BCE his kingdom was divided among his heirs. The Jews aspired to national and religious

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[25] Safrai 1980: 6–7; Sourvinou-Inwood 2000: 18–26, 36–37.

independence, and frequently rebelled, but the Hellenistic cities remained faithful to Rome. The Romans put down the rebellions harshly with the help of the pagan population; as a result, the proportion of Jews in the population of the Land of Israel was greatly reduced. After the Great Revolt (66–70 CE) Judah became a Roman province under the name of Judaea, and after the revolt of Bar Kochba (132–135 CE) it was renamed Palaestina, after the Philistines, the ancient Aegean settlers of the country. In the next four centuries, as a result of the destruction of the Second Temle and the old spiritual leadership, Judaism underwent deep changes. Christianity gradually became the dominant religion in the Land of Israel.

During the Roman period the cities of Philistia flourished economically and culturally. They participated in international trade, and exported their agricultural and industrial products to all parts of the Roman Empire. They also became centres of world culture, and were a home for intellectuals in every sphere of art and science. In Ashkelon alone there flourished the philosophers Antiochus and Aristos and the poet Euenus, the philologists Dorotheus and Ptolemy, and the historians Artemidorus and Apollonius. Other famous men of Ashkelon were the actor Apeles, the architect Julianus and the mathematician Euthocius.[26] As in the other Hellenistic cities of the Land of Israel, local patriotism thrived in the cities of Philistia: they prided themselves on their status, and competed with each other in the splendour of their buildings and festivals. Games, competitions in the performing arts and spectacles, dedicated to a local deity or in honour of an emperor, were held in buildings for mass entertainment, which were constructed espessialy in the second and third century CE. They were organized by the cities' authorities and endorsed by the local elites.[27]

This study covers some five hundred years, from Pompey's conquest of the East in 63 BCE until the official termination of paganism in the cities of Philistia at the beginning of the fifth century CE. Obviously, however, an investigation of the spiritual and religious world of the people of these cities cannot be limited to this period alone. Just as in our personal consciousness we experience the past and the future as well as the present, it is impossible to understand the period under consideration without some knowledge of preceding and succeeding ages. Some of the cults that existed in the cities of Philistia were, in fact, created during this period; but some originated hundreds of years earlier. The people of these cities took pride in their Greek culture, but also, no less, in their ancient origins and Phoenician/Philistine culture. They cultivated the worship of special local gods and heroes such as Andromeda, Derceto, Phanebalos, Marnas and Io. Some of their inhabitants spoke Syriac (Aramaic), and did not speak Greek, even as late as the fifth century CE. The cities of Philistia also displayed stubborn opposition to Christianity, and were among the last bastion of paganism in the Roman Empire.

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[26] Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnika*, 131; Fuks 1983: 66–67.
[27] Geiger 1989: 261–269. See also the speeches of Chorikius of Gaza in honour of his city, in Rabinovich 1949: 173–187; Weiss, E. 2017: 23–24.

This study's basic hypothesis is that the coastal cities possessed unique characteristics. The sea was a major factor in their environment, and a decisive component of the inhabitants' daily life, economic activities, and religion. As a result of frequent conquests and waves of immigration, they were distinguished by their mixed population and cultural pluralism. The study will consider how the sea influenced their religious cults, and their maritime aspects as expressed in art and literature. We shall also discuss the contribution of other elements — the inhabitants' ethnic origins, the different cultural influences which they absorbed, and the political circumstances of the time — to the formation of the cults and their symbols; and also to what extent ancient local elements continued to exist, and what Greek and Roman components were added to them. We shall be using a wide variety of sources: historical and literary texts, and epigraphic sources such as papyri and inscriptions. These will be the background to an analysis of the varied archaeological and artistic discoveries which have emerged from the excavations and surveys that have been conducted in the region since the late nineteenth century: works of architecture, sculpture and relief, paintings and mosaics, gems, *tesserae* (tokens) and jewellers' artefacts. Some of these were produced at the initiative of the authorities, and were designed for use in public and official rites; others were used by individuals and for domestic ceremonies. They will cast light on ritual practices in all sectors of society of the coastal cities of Philistia.

* The book is based on my doctoral research: *Maritime-related cults in the coastal cities of Philistia during the Roman Period: Legacy and change*, 2005 (in Hebrew). It was translated to English by Professor Henry Near. The book includes archaeological updates.

** I use the term Land of Israel for the geographic region in the southern Levant, which extends from the upper Galilee in the north to the Red sea in the south, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Jordan river in the east. It is the traditional Jewish term to this area. Related biblical, historical and religious terms are the Land of Canaan, Palestine, the Promised Land, and the Holy Land. In the Bible there are two versions for its limits: 'from the entrance of Hamath unto the brook of Egypt', and 'from Dan to Beersheba'. Both differ from the borders of the established historical United Kingdom of Israel, the two separated kingdoms of Israel (Shomron/Samaria) and Judah, the Hasmonean Kingdom, and the Herodian Kingdom which at their heights ruled lands with similar but not identical boundaries and included also the Golan and Trans-Jordan.