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ABBREVIATIONS

- AASOR Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ADAJ Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
AJA American Journal of Archaeology
AfO Archiv für Orientforschung
ANET Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament³, ed. J.B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1969
BA The Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BT Babylonian Talmud
CAD Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
CIS Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum
DJD Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSD Dead Sea Discoveries
EI Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies
ESI Excavations and Surveys in Israel
IAA Reports Israel Antiquities Authority Reports
IEJ Israel Exploration Journal
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JCS Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JEA Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies
KAI W. Donner and W. Röllig: *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* 1–3, Wiesbaden, 1962–1964; 1⁵, 2002
NEAEHL The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (English Edition), Jerusalem, 1993
PEQ Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PT Palestinian Talmud
QDAP Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine
RA Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale
RB Revue Biblique
RE Pauly-Wissowa's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
RQ Revue de Qumran
VT Vetus Testamentum
ZA Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZDPV Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins

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Zoomorphic Vessels from Tel Miqne-Ekron and the Different Styles of Philistine Pottery*

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PHILISTINE pottery has been a widely discussed issue for the past decades, notably with the works of T. and M. Dothan, Killebrew, Gitin and Zukerman (Dothan 1982; Dothan and Dothan 1992; Killebrew 1998; Dothan and Zukerman 2004; Dothan, Gitin and Zukerman 2006). Recently, Iron Age IIA Philistine decorated ware (Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maeir 2004), as well as Iron Age IIB–C Philistine or coastal assemblages, were also defined (Gitin 1998). In these publications, zoomorphic vessels were not incorporated into the typological development scheme of the pottery assemblages.

This article attempts to show how this class of objects can be integrated into the scheme of the development of Philistine pottery during the Iron Age by presenting a group of unpublished vessels from Tel Miqne-Ekron. The site of Tel Miqne-Ekron (henceforth Ekron), excavated for 14 seasons during 1981–1996, is known as one of the Philistine Pentapolis from biblical sources and Assyrian documents, and the identification of the site was confirmed by the royal dedicatory inscription found there.¹ Several complete zoomorphic vessels, out of a larger assemblage of 251 vessels and fragments found at Iron Age Ekron, are discussed.² It will be shown that these vessels illustrate the early Philistine Monochrome (according to form and decoration), the Philistine Bichrome and Late Philistine style (according to decoration), and possibly also an Iron Age IIC bovine libation vessel typical of Philistia. Some of these latter vessels could have been associated with a cult practice related to the olive-oil industry at Ekron during the seventh century BCE. The interpretation of the stylistic characteristics, function and symbolism of the zoomorphic vessels are discussed.

* The article is partly based on sections of the author's M.A. thesis (Ben-Shlomo 1999), supervised by T. Dothan. Many thanks go to T. Dothan and S. Gitin, the directors of the Tel Miqne-Ekron project, for their assistance. Drawings are by M. Zeltzer; photographs are by G. Laron and Z. Radovan.

1 For a general description of the results from the Tel Miqne-Ekron excavation project, see, e.g., Dothan and Dothan 1992: 239–254; Dothan and Gitin 1993).

2 Note that the definition of zoomorphic vessels here includes all ceramic containers in the shape of animals, and not only libation vessels or rhyta.

I. PHILISTINE MONOCHROME ZOOMORPHIC VESSELS

This group includes two types of vessels inspired by Mycenaean pottery vessels: the hedgehog vessel and the bird askos. A complete hedgehog vessel of Philistine Monochrome ware ('Philistine 1' [Dothan, Gitin and Zukerman 2006: 72, 80–87] or 'Mycenaean IIIC:1b') was found on the Stratum VIIA floor of a room near the massive city wall in Field X (fig. 1:1; Dothan 1998a: 23–25, pls. 4:1, 10a; Dothan 2003: 207, fig. 16). Visual examination and CT scanning (personal communication by N. Appelbaum) show that it was handmade by folding a round flat slab of clay. The vessel's only aperture is through the short pointed head. The monochrome reddish-brown decoration in a net pattern extends over the entire back. Mycenaean IIIA–B hedgehog vessels are well known (see Buchholz 1995; Guggisberg 1996: 237–241, 310–11, 348 and references therein);³ they are mostly wheelmade from a folded slab (Guggisberg 1996: fig. 7), and all have filling spouts on their backs and attached handles. The vessel from Ekron is different, being handmade and having no filling spout or a handle; in addition, its decoration is less elaborate. It is conceivable that the manufacturer of this vessel vaguely knew of Mycenaean hedgehog vessels and created an imitation that was not totally accurate (note also that there are no known Mycenaean IIIC hedgehog vessels from the Aegean or Cyprus).

Two bird askoi (fig. 1:2) were identified at Ekron, together with locally-made Philistine Monochrome pottery. The depiction of the animal is highly schematic and is expressed only in the shape of the body and possibly the legs. The vessel has only one aperture, and may be defined as a zoomorphic container or vase, rather than a libation vessel. These objects can be identified as bird-shaped askoi on the basis of parallels from Cyprus and the Aegean (Furumark 1941: 68; FS 194).⁴ The complete, intact example (fig. 1:2) was found on a Stratum VIB floor of Building 357, near a rectangular hearth (Dothan 2003: 208, fig. 4). The monochrome decoration is a net pattern, covering the entire vessel except for its lower part. Another fragmentary Monochrome askos comes from Stratum VIIA, and is decorated with a closed 'ladder' pattern on both sides, typical of Mycenaean IIIC:1b pottery (obj. no. 7023, Ben-Shlomo 1999: fig. 17:2). A similar Mycenaean IIIC:1b bird askos comes from Maa-Palaeokastro, Floor II (Karageorghis and Demas 1988: 119, pls. LX:544, CLXXXIII:544).

3 Note also a Mycenaean IIIA hedgehog vessel from Shiqmona (Elgavish 1994: fig. 12), and probable fragments from Tell Abu Hawam (Balensi 1980: fig. 39:5–7), Tell Shari'a (Leonard 1994: 95) and Lachish (Leonard 2000: 310).

4 Similar Mycenaean vessels come from Ialysos, Mycenae and Tiryns (Guggisberg 1996: 41, nos. 95–97, 148, pl. 6:7–8), and Sub-Minoan Kavousi in Crete (Guggisberg 1996: nos. 461–466, pl. 36:1–4). Cypriote and Aegean bird vases from the Iron Age are discussed by Desborough (1972). Particularly similar to the askoi from Ekron are Desborough's vessels 27 (from Kourion), 55 and 56.

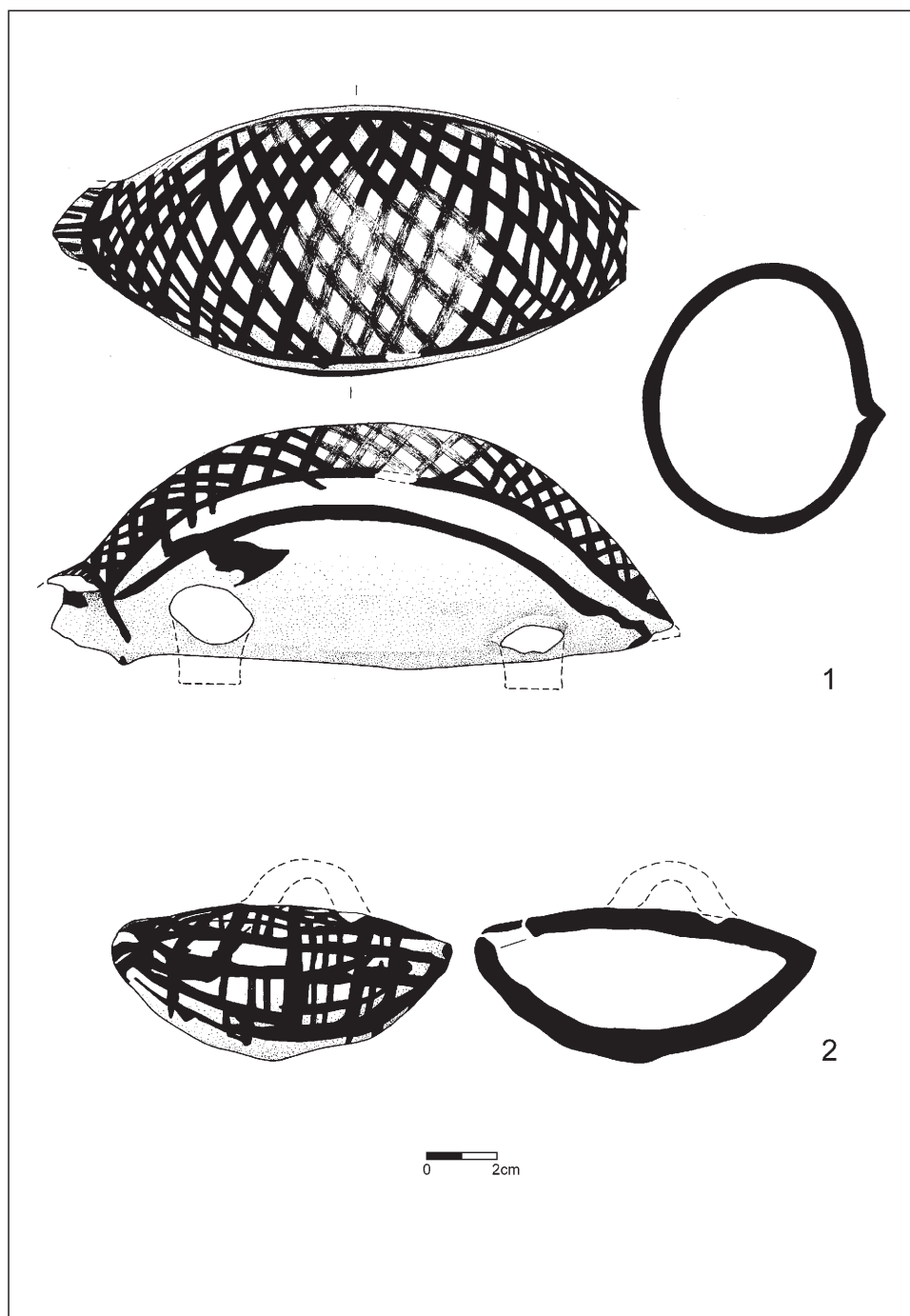


Fig. 1. Philistine Monochrome (Mycenaean IIIC:1b) zoomorphic vessels from Ekron; 1) hedgehog vessel (IAA no. 2000-722); 2: bird askos (obj. no. 6630)

These two zoomorphic vessel types show features of technique, fabric, form and decoration that are foreign to Canaanite pottery and can be considered as part of the early phase of Philistine material culture, concurrent with the appearance of locally-made Philistine Monochrome pottery.

II. ZOOMORPHIC VESSELS DECORATED IN PHILISTINE BICHROME STYLE

Philistine Bichrome (or 'Philistine 2' [Dothan, Gitin and Zukerman 2006: 72]) zoomorphic vessels are characterised by their typical black-and-red decoration and thick chalky white slip, sometimes with typical Philistine motifs. The shapes of these vessels, however, do not show any Philistine or Aegean affinities. A small cylindrical body (*c.* 0.125 litre in capacity) of a zoomorphic vessel (fig. 2:1) is decorated by straight and wavy lines and spirals in red and black over a white wash. The animal depicted cannot be positively identified, although the stout body and dewlap suggest a bovine. The decoration is a rendering of known common motifs on Philistine pottery, and does not attempt to depict realistic features of the animal or to integrate them with the shape of the vessel.

A complete and intact handmade bovine libation vessel, found in a Stratum VIA room, is somewhat larger, white-slipped and decorated (fig. 2:2). The vessel has many anatomical details (somewhat similar to fig. 9:1 below). The main decoration is a black net pattern on both sides of the body and on the forehead, over a white slip. Patches of red paint emphasise the hump, the forehead and the dewlap. Although the design is not typically Philistine, the technique of red-and-black decoration on white slip is. The design may depict either a harness or a mat laid on the animal's back. A similarly decorated zoomorphic vessel was found at Tel Dor, associated with the Sikil city of the twelfth century BCE (Stern 2006: 391, fig. 4:a). Headless zoomorphic vessels with a similar decoration have been found at Gezer (Macalister 1912: fig. 205) and at Tell Abu Hawam (Hamilton 1935: 41, no. 248). A similar zoomorphic vessel body with a harness design, albeit dated to the tenth century BCE, was found at Horbat Rosh Zayit (Gal and Alexandre 2000: 80, fig. III.92:1).

Other zoomorphic vessel fragments decorated in the Philistine Bichrome style from Ekron include an unhorned head spout, with a very long handmade neck decorated in the Philistine Bichrome style (fig. 3), possibly depicting a bird, and a bird-shaped vessel or rattle (9 cm. long; fig. 4).⁵ A bird-shaped rattle decorated

⁵ Other body fragments of zoomorphic vessels with a chalky white slip and Bichrome decoration were also found at Ekron, some in Late Iron Age contexts. The bodies were either handmade or wheelmade (object nos. 5687, 7341, 7514, 9641, 11441). Other Philistine Bichrome zoomorphic terracottas include a vessel fragment from Ashdod (Dothan 1971: 30, fig. 3:5), and head cups from Megiddo, Qasile and Tell eṣ-Ṣafi (Dothan 1982: 229–234), discussed below.

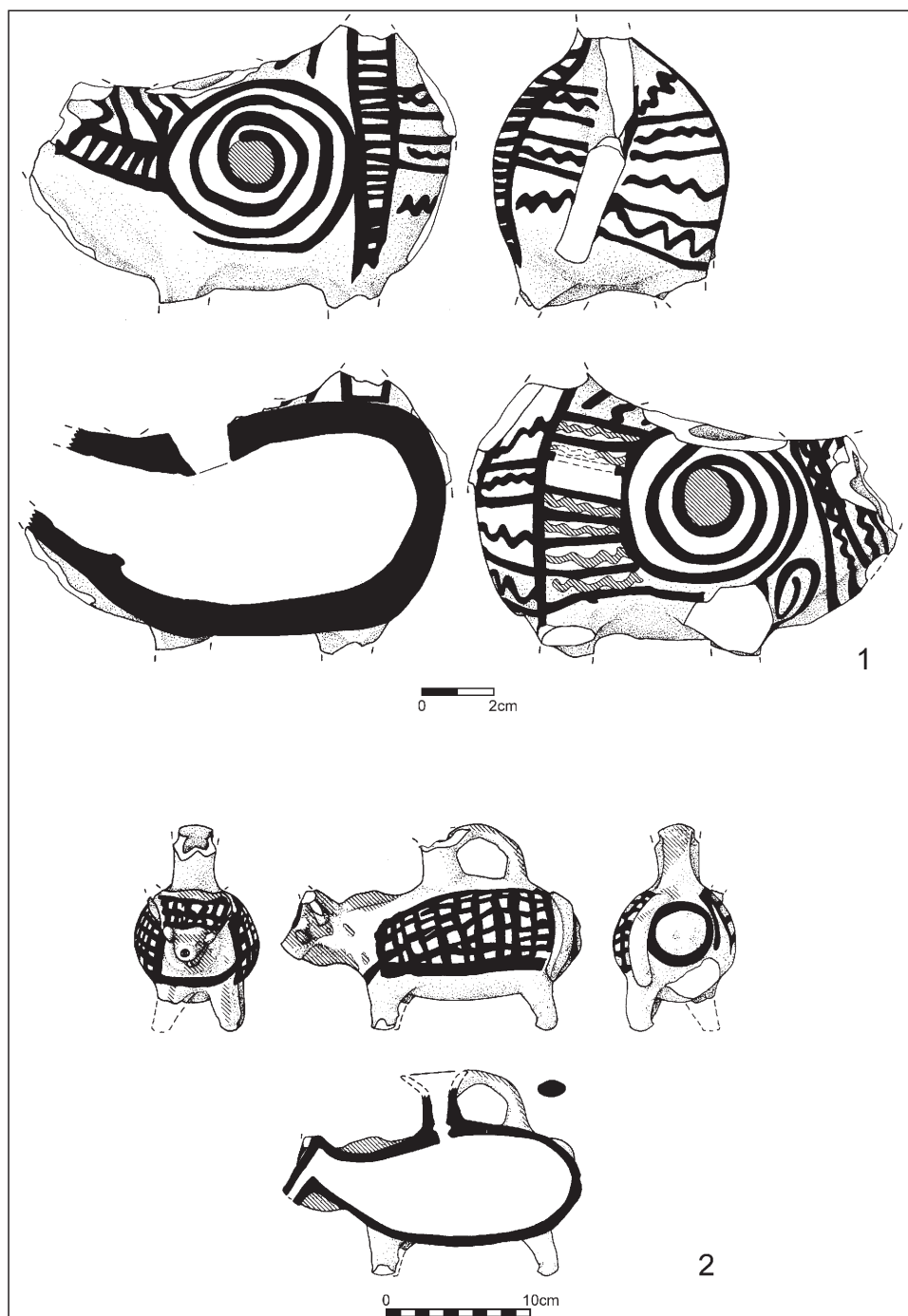
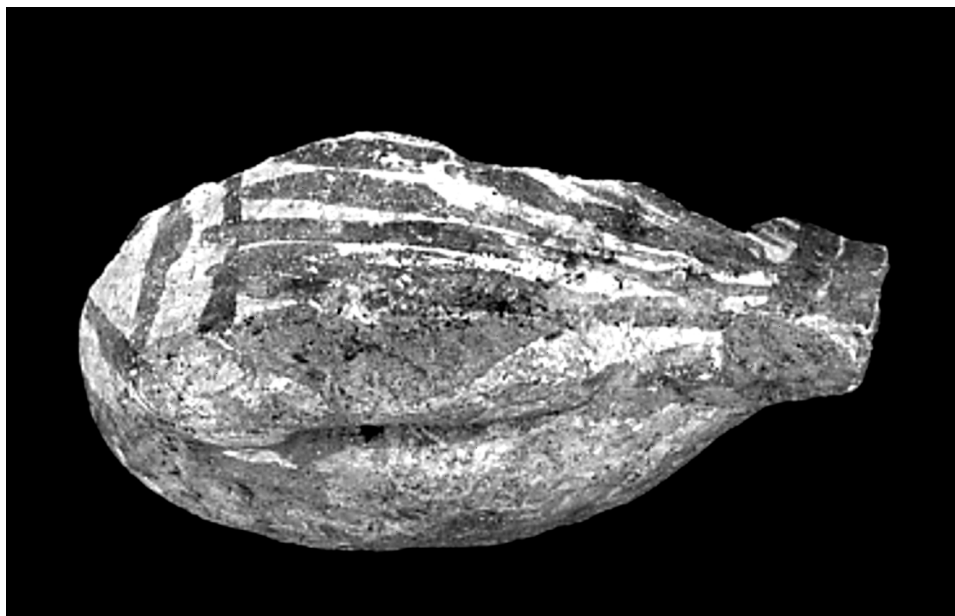


Fig. 2. Zoomorphic vessels decorated in Philistine Bichrome style; 1): bovine (?) (obj. no. 4694); 2): bovine (obj. no. 11450)

in white slip and black-and-red decoration was also found in Building 5337 at Ashdod, Stratum XII (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 120, fig. 3.36:1). Two other bird rattles were also found at Ashdod (Dothan and Freedman 1967: fig. 46:4; Dothan and Porath 1982: fig. 6:4), while other Philistine bird vessels were found at Gezer (Macalister 1912: figs. 389, 390:1; Dothan 1982: 219–227). Apparently, birds were very common in Philistine iconography, and were frequently depicted on pottery, appearing as ceramic ‘bird-bowls’ (Mazar 1980: 27–28, pls. 14–15; Ben-Shlomo 1999: Type D), as well as on the bows of the Sea Peoples ships in the Medinat Habu reliefs (e.g., Dothan 1982: 227).



Fig. 3. Zoomorphic head spout of a bird(?) decorated in Philistine Bichrome style (obj. no. 2322; photograph by G. Laron)



0 2cm

Fig. 4. Bird-shaped vessel/rattle decorated in Philistine Bichrome style (obj. no. 6402; photograph by G. Laron)

III. ZOOMORPHIC VESSELS DECORATED IN LATE PHILISTINE (‘ASHDOD WARE’) STYLE

During the Iron Age IIA (tenth–ninth centuries BCE) and the early Iron Age IIB, another style of decorated pottery appearing mostly on coastal forms, previously named ‘Ashdod Ware’, can be defined as Late Philistine Decorated Ware (Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maeir 2004). The decoration style is characterised by thick red slip, vertical hand burnish and black and white linear decoration. Of the distinguishable forms of this pottery are zoomorphic vessels and kernoi (Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maeir 2004: 9, fig. 3:9–10). An almost complete wheelmade bovine libation vessel of the Late Philistine style was found at Ekron (figs. 5:1, 6:bottom right; baulk context; Ben-Shlomo, in press: fig. 17). It has an applied vertical tail, a flaring shape of the intake, and burnished red slip. The vessel is decorated by black decoration, with traces of white colour over a burnished red slip. The black lines around the body create a harness design.

A somewhat similar, albeit smaller, vessel was found in Stratum X at Ashdod (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 184, fig. 3.79:1). Many zoomorphic vessels and kernoi decorated in this style were found in Iron Age II Ashdod (e.g., Dothan 1971: 125–135, figs. 66–71; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 197, fig. 3.86), dating mostly from the tenth–eighth centuries BCE (Strata X–VIII). Several of the Late Philistine horned head spouts are decorated with triangles, circles, or other shapes on their forehead. Examples come from Ekron (obj. nos. 2333, 2461; Ben-Shlomo 1999: fig. 20:3–4) and Ashdod (Dothan 1971: fig. 69:1–6). This could be a depiction of an ornament hung on the bull’s forehead, or possibly a reference to the Egyptian god Apis, depicted with the sun rising between his horns (Hornung 1982: 109–113).⁶

A bird-shaped vessel could also be included in this group (fig. 5:2), although found in a later, Iron IIC, context (Stratum IB destruction debris). Its wheelmade body (c. 0.35 litre in capacity) has traces of the head pouring spout and rear filling spout. Two small wreaths, applied on the sides, depict the wings, and there are traces of three broken legs on the bottom. The decoration consists of red slip with white bands around the front opening and along the upper part of the body. Parallels for this vessel come from a Late Iron Age tomb at Lachish (Tufnell 1953: pl. 30:25) and from Tell Jemmeh (Petrie 1928: pl. XV:4). A similar unslipped vessel was found at Ashdod, Area D (Dothan 1971: 132, fig. 72:2). The style of decoration relates this vessel to the Late Philistine ware. In addition, a fragment of a zoomorphic head cup decorated in the Late Philistine style is described below.

⁶ Note that the same decoration appears on Iron Age bull masks from Cyprus (Karageorghis 1971: fig. 7).

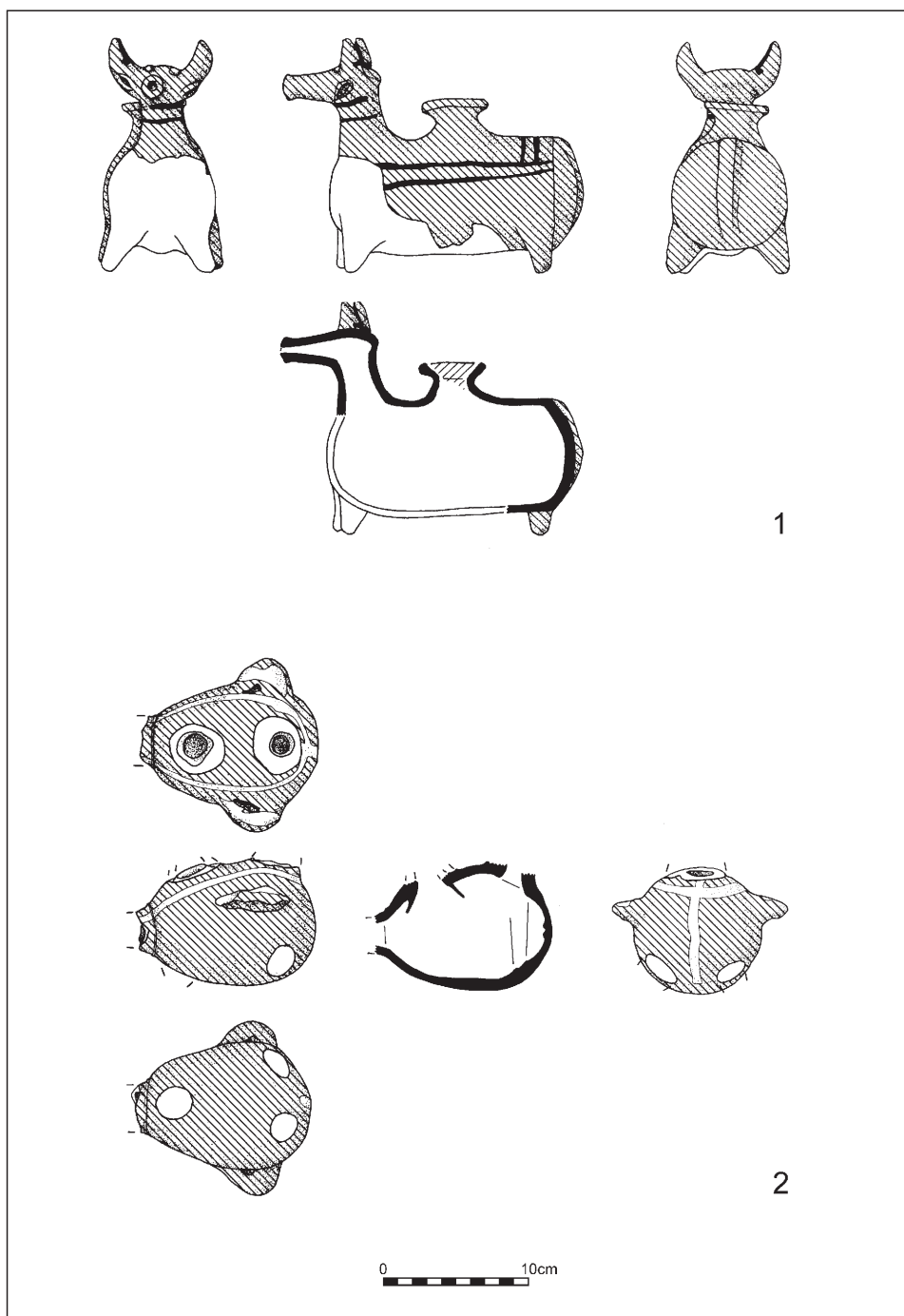


Fig. 5. Zoomorphic vessels decorated in Late Philistine ('Ashdod Ware') style; 1) bovine (obj. no. 1221); 2) bird-shaped vessel (obj. no. 7198)

IV. SEVENTH-CENTURY BCE BOVINE VESSELS: A LATE PHILISTINE TYPE?

A new type of a zoomorphic vessel appears during the Iron Age IIC (Stratum IB, representing the destruction debris at Ekron, dated to 604 BCE). It is a large, wheelmade bovine libation vessel (figs. 6–7; *c.* 25 cm. long; 16 cm. high; *c.* 1 litre in capacity), occurring in large quantities: five complete vessels and at least 25 head spouts and body fragments were found (figs. 6–7; Ben-Shlomo, in press: figs. 12–16). The head spout and body are wheelmade, and the body is large and jug- or barrel-shaped. A hollow button-shaped protrusion depicts the tail. The body is decorated with red design probably depicting a harness.

Two complete examples were found in relation to an olive-oil installation in Field IIIINE (fig. 6: left, centre); another complete example was found in the Stratum IB destruction debris in Room V of Temple Complex 650, just behind the sanctuary's cella (Gitin 1998: 173–174, fig. 11; Ben-Shlomo, in press: fig. 16). These wheelmade, schematically-depicted uniform types of bovine zoomorphic vessel may have been produced on a more 'industrial' scale. Their relatively large capacity, compared to the Early Iron Age vessels, for example, may indicate that they were in fact used as containers and libation vessels.

Similar, although not identical, bovine libation vessels have been published from various contemporary sites: Tel Batash (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 210, pl. 56:4); Beer Sheba, Stratum II (Aharoni 1973: pl. 28.4); Tell Beth Mirsim, Stratum A (Albright 1943: pls. 27:b1, 58:1); Beth Shemesh, Stratum II (Grant 1934: pl. XXVIII:73); Lachish, Strata III–II (Tufnell 1953: 198, 376, pl. 30:26, 8); and



Fig. 6. Iron Age II bovine vessels (photograph by Z. Radovan)

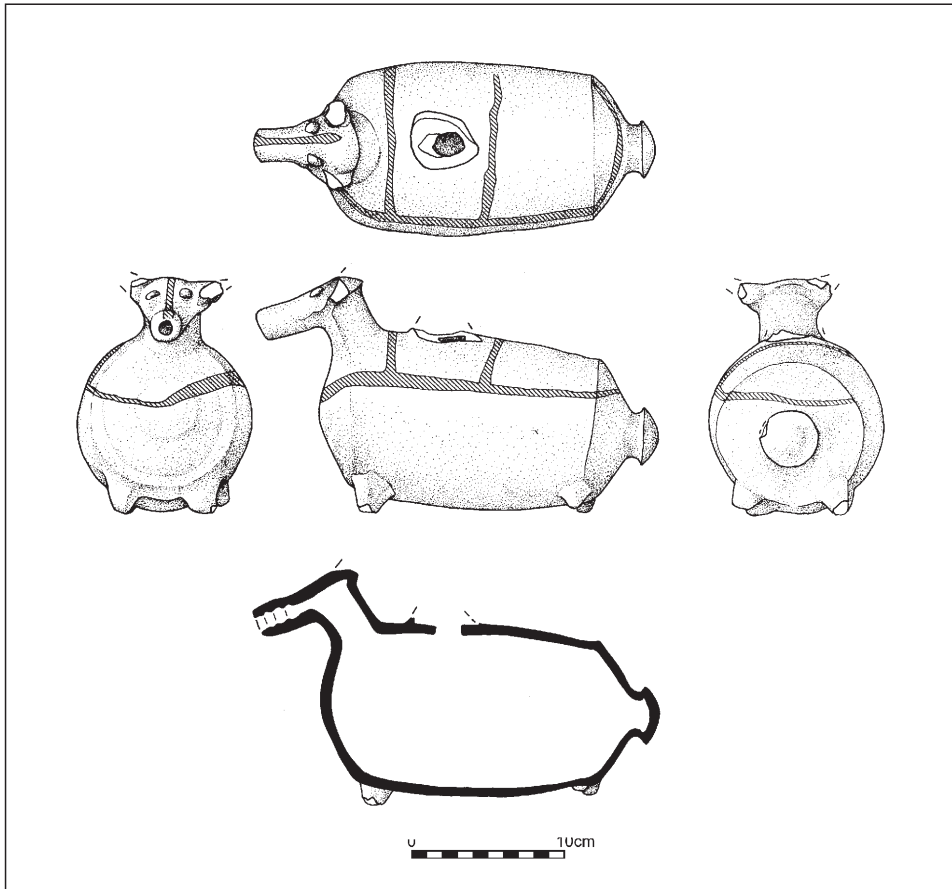


Fig. 7. Seventh century BCE bovine vessel (obj. no. 7666)

possibly Gezer (Dever, Lance and Wright 1970: 58, fig. 37.9). A similar zoomorphic vessel found at Tyre can be dated to the eighth century B.C.E. (Bikai 1978: pls. VI:1, LXXXIII:6) and may be the earliest known example, possibly indicating a Phoenician origin.⁷ Yet while similar vessels do appear in the late Iron Age in the Southern Levant, they are not as uniformly executed or as common as those from Ekron. Thus, the vessels appearing at Ekron may be considered as a local type, possibly representing a late Philistine style of zoomorphic vessels, influenced by the contemporary style of zoomorphic vessels in neighbouring regions.

⁷ Similarly shaped bovine vessels or hollow figures with a button-shaped tail also appear in Cyprus (Karageorghis 1996: 33, pl. XVIII:4-7), but they are dated somewhat later, to the sixth century BCE.

V. ZOOMORPHIC HEAD CUPS

Three zoomorphic head or face fragments found at Ekron may come from animal head-shaped cups (fig. 8). The handmade face of an unidentified animal was found on a Stratum V floor in the vicinity of a cultic room in Field INE (fig. 8:1; Dothan and Dothan 1992: 242, pl. 20; Dothan 2003: 208, fig. 17). The eyes are unusual, composed of two large disks. The dark brown and red decoration emphasises the eyes with concentric circles and includes Bichrome geometric patterns. The animal is unidentified and may depict an imaginary creature; the decoration is in the Philistine Bichrome tradition. Another modelled animal face comes from a mixed Iron Age context (fig. 8:2); only part of the face is preserved, precluding a definite identification of the depicted animal, which may be a lion, a bull, or a bear *inter alia*. The object is red-slipped and decorated with black and white geometric motifs, relating it to the Late Philistine Decorated Ware style of the Iron Age IIA. Somewhat similar objects were found at Gezer (Macalister 1912: fig. 125:21) and Megiddo (May 1935: pl. XXXVII:M1468), probably also dating from the Iron Age IIA. A handmade feline face was found in the Stratum IB destruction debris in Temple Auxiliary Building 652 Room A (fig. 8:3). The entire object is red-slipped and hand-burnished. The animal depicted is probably a lion or another species of large cat. The modelling of the mouth and tongue is very similar to the head cup from Tell Qasile (Mazar 1980: figs. 34–35).

Zoomorphic head-shaped cups with Philistine Bichrome decoration have been found in several Iron Age I sites, as at Dor (Stern 2006: 387, fig. 1:a), Tell Gerishe, Megiddo, Tell Qasile, Tell eš-Šafi and Tel Zeror (see Mazar 1980: 101–103; Dothan 1982: 229–234; Zevulun 1987).⁸ They were associated with the Sea Peoples, as zoomorphic head cups and head rhyta in various media — stone, gold, silver and ceramic — appear in the Mycenaean and Minoan world (Marinatos and Hirmer 1960: pl. 175; Koehl 1981), the examples from Israel were associated with the Philistines (Dothan 1982: 229–234; Stern 2006: 388).⁹ However, head cups depicting lion heads are known from Late Bronze Age Ugarit (e.g., Yon 1987: 343–349) and elsewhere, and are essentially a Levantine form as well.¹⁰

8 A similar lion-faced head cup, and possibly another head cup fragment, were found in the recent excavations at Tell eš-Šafi/Gath (Maier 2006).

9 Zoomorphic head cups are depicted in LB Near Eastern iconography as precious objects, included in diplomatic gifts. These vessels are made of precious metals, stone or ivory, and the clay examples may have been cheaper imitations. Most of these depictions appear in New Kingdom officials' tomb paintings (see Wachsmann 1987: 56–64, pls. XXXVI:a-b, XXXVII:a, XXXVIII, XLI). Other depictions appear on a Late Bronze Age ivory from Megiddo (Loud 1939: pl. 4:2b).

10 Two lion head cups were found at Ugarit, one with a *Reshef* dedicatory inscription, mentioning a lion's face — *pn arw* (Yadin 1985: 265–267). These vessels are also considered by Zevulun (1987) to be in the Syrian tradition, showing continuity throughout the second millennium B.C.E.

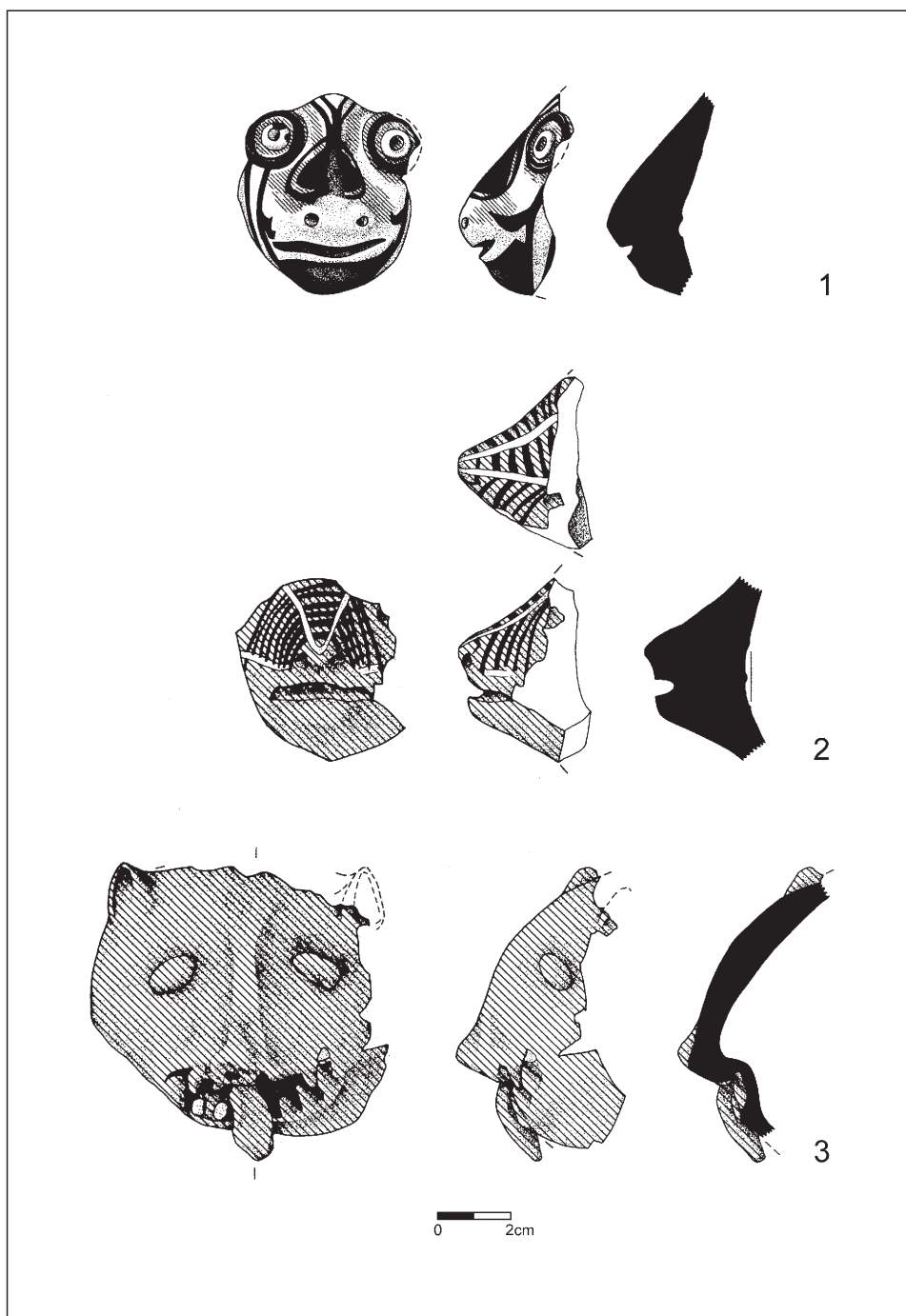


Fig. 8. Fragments of zoomorphic head cups ; 1) unidentified animal (obj. no. 812); 2) lion, bull, or bear (?) (obj. no. 3821); 3) feline face (obj. no. 3976)

VI. OTHER ZOOMORPHIC LIBATION VESSELS

This group includes zoomorphic libation vessels (and kernoi) which, on the basis of their shape and decoration, do not display Philistine characteristics, but rather relate to local Canaanite traditions. These include a complete handmade bovine libation vessel (fig. 9:1; c. 0.16 litre in capacity), found in an open area of Field IVNW, Stratum VIIA (see Dothan 2003: 196, fig. 4). A filling spout was applied to the back of the vessel, and the four applied legs are spread outwards to create a 'leaping' posture. The dewlap and a hump, typical of Asiatic *zebu* type bovines (*Bos Indicus*), are also depicted. The vessel is incised near the neck and along the body, and there is some scraping near the legs. The naturalistic modelling is not common in zoomorphic vessels of the Late Bronze or Iron Ages in Palestine, and the scraping may indicate an attempt to imitate Cypriote pottery.¹¹ While this vessel may have been a late echo of Aegean and Egyptian depictions, it does not have parallels from the Aegean or from Cyprus.

An almost complete vessel in a shape of an animal bearing two jars or loads (fig. 9:2) was found on a Stratum VA floor, to the north of Building 350 in Field IV. The animal is probably a horse, as indicated by its incised mane and vertical ears. The cylindrical wheelmade body (c. 0.17 litre in capacity) has two perforations on which miniature vessels — one partially preserved — were attached, serving as filling spouts. Terracottas depicting beasts with burdens appear in Palestine from the Chalcolithic period (Epstein 1985), and seem to have become more popular during the Late Iron Age.¹² These equine vessels probably reflect the economic importance of donkeys or mules in the Bronze and Iron Ages, and do not appear to depict a divinity or to be directly related to cult places.

A ring kernos from Room A of Building 350 (Stratum IVA) at Ekron (fig. 10)¹³ also includes a zoomorphic depiction. The object was part of an assemblage or cache containing typical late eleventh–early tenth century BCE pottery, a

11 The 'leaping' posture occasionally appears on Base Ring II bovine vessels, e.g., from Maroni (Johnson 1980: pl. XXIV:128) or the Persian Garden (Gershuny 1991: 42, pl. 7:51). Images of bulls in a similar leaping posture appear on the Ayia Triadha sarcophagus (Long 1974: 47–48, figs. 17, 37, 52), and offering vessels with the same posture appear in depictions in Theban tombs (Wachsmann 1987: pl. XXVIII), and were probably made of precious materials.

12 Examples can be found at Beth Shemesh (Grant 1929: 167, fig. 196:503), Lachish (Tufnell 1953: pl. 30:23, 27, 29–30) and Tell Abu el-Kharaz (Fischer 2001: fig. 9), among other sites. Many of these vessels come from tombs, e.g., at Beth Shemesh and Lachish. Zoomorphic vessels portraying laden animals also appear in Cyprus and the Aegean, especially during the Geometric Period (see Guggisberg 1996: 220–223, the *Pferde A1* type). These vessels can probably be considered as examples of Levantine influence or inspiration, which increased during the eleventh century BCE.

13 This kernos is on display at the Israel Museum.

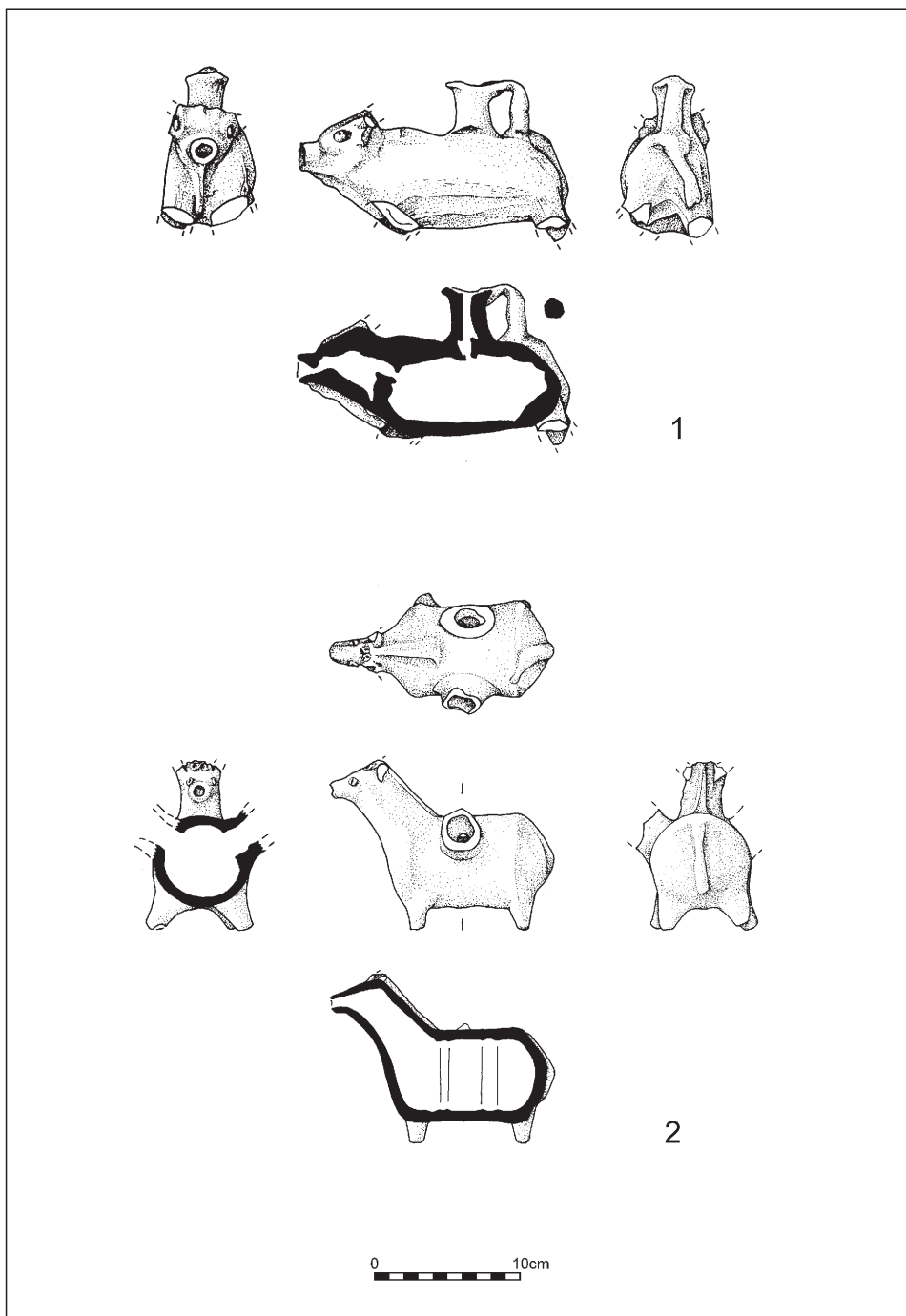


Fig. 9. Various Iron Age I zoomorphic vessels ; 1) bovine (obj. no. 7674); 2) horse or donkey with two loads (obj. no. 4661)

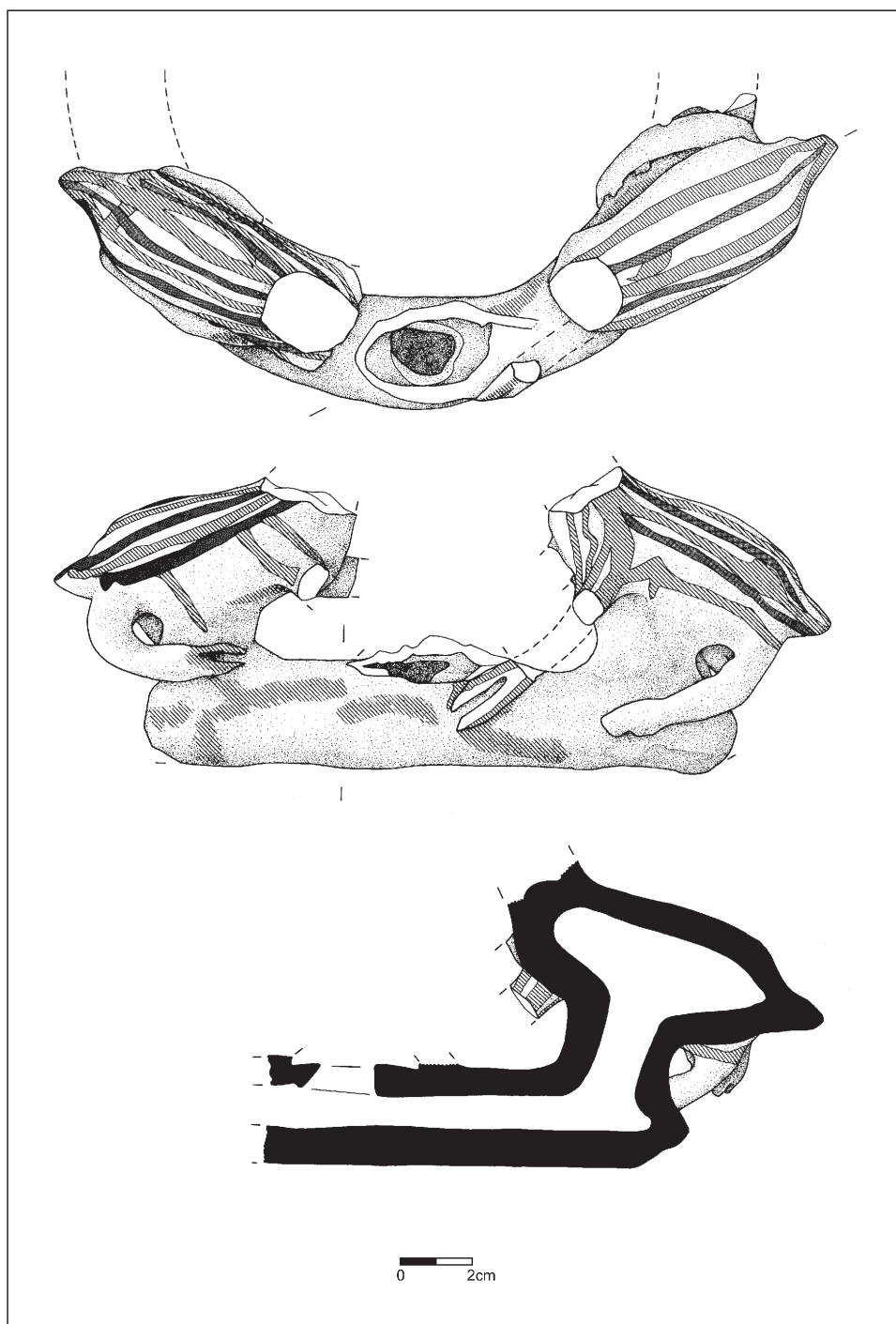


Fig. 10. Kernos fragment (obj. no. 652)

pomegranate-shaped vessel, as well as other unique finds (Dothan 1998b; Dothan and Dothan 1992: pl. 32). The kernos has two hollow non-spouted animals standing in a heraldic position, on either side of a ring hole representing the place of another kernos vessel that was not preserved, perhaps a vessel from which the animals are drinking. One of the animals is female, with its udder applied on the stomach. The shape of the body and udder suggests that these animals are probably goats, but they could also be ibexes or rams, given that the heads are broken. The kernos has a white wash and two shades of a reddish-brown decoration.

A kernos fragment from Tell eṣ-Şafi (Bignasca 2000: pl. 11:O109) might be the only known parallel. The composition of two animals drinking from a vessel between them appears on a kernos from Megiddo (May 1935: pl. XIV).¹⁴ Other fragments of kernoi, including zoomorphic head spouts, were found at Ekron, mostly from Iron Age I contexts (Ben-Shlomo 1999: Type C), as well as at other sites (Mazar 1980: 109–111; Bignasca 2000: 104–132).

Ring kernoi should be seen in principle as a Canaanite vessel type that also appears in earlier periods (Mazar 1980: 109–111; Bignasca 2000), yet they are especially popular during the Iron Age in Philistia. Their appearance in vast quantities during the eighth–seventh centuries BCE in Area D of Ashdod (e.g., Dothan and Freedman 1967: figs. 44:1, 45:1, 5–7; Dothan 1971: fig. 71; and many other unpublished fragments) reflects a continuity of material culture in Philistia throughout the Iron Age. These later examples are often decorated in red slip and black and white paint, and should be considered as Late Philistine style vessels (Ben-Shlomo, Shai and Maeir 2004: 12, fig. 3:10).

VIII. DISCUSSION

The Development of Philistine Pottery

The typology of the zoomorphic vessels from Philistia illustrates the development of Philistine pottery during the Iron Age. Earlier examples from Ekron introduce new types strongly related to Mycenaean forms, similar to Philistine Monochrome pottery. Later, during the Iron Age I, various zoomorphic vessels are decorated in the Philistine Bichrome style, while during the Iron Age II several vessels are decorated in the Late Philistine Decorated style. During the final Iron Age II, a type of wheelmade bovine libation vessel is very common at Ekron; it may also be considered a Philistine type. Throughout this period, there are also zoomorphic vessel types of a completely local or Canaanite tradition. Similarly,

¹⁴ Alternatively, the missing object between the animals may have been a tree. The Canaanite motif of two animals, usually goats or ibexes, on either side of a sacred tree is well known during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages (see, e.g., Beck 1982: 13–16, fig. 4).

the Iron Age I pottery assemblage of Philistia also contains local or Canaanite forms, such as simple hemispherical and carinated bowls, storage jars, flasks and other types (Dothan and Zukerman 2004: 7, table 1; Killebrew 1998: 397; Dothan, Gitin and Zukerman 2006: 91–94). Thus, it is clear that on the one hand, zoomorphic vessels are fully integrated into the pottery assemblage of Philistia, and that on the other hand, at least some of the vessels retain a distinct style, whether in form or decoration, which is characteristic of the Philistine material culture throughout the Iron Age.

The Function and Symbolism of Zoomorphic Vessels

The function and symbolism of the zoomorphic vessels should be inferred primarily from their context, especially that of the complete or nearly complete examples. Twelve zoomorphic vessel fragments (Ben-Shlomo, in press: fig. 7) were found in or near Building 350, which may be either a public or cultic building (see Dothan 2003: 195–196; for Field IV at Ekron, see also Mazow 2005), and seven objects found in or near a possible cultic room at Field INE, Stratum V (Ben-Shlomo 1999: fig. 6) may also have a cultic function. The bird askos (fig. 1:2) comes from the Stratum VIB ‘hearth room’ (Room 357; see Dothan and Zukerman 2004: fig. 2:3), underlying Building 350. Generally, however, most objects come from what may be categorised as domestic or unspecified contexts. During the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, zoomorphic vessels were frequently associated with burials (e.g., Gershuny 1991: 117), but at Ekron, the assemblage is non-funerary. During the Iron Age IIC, the two complete vessels from a Stratum IB olive-oil factory in Field III (Dothan and Gitin 1993: 1056, Building 507) may indicate a connection between the zoomorphic vessels and the olive-oil industry. Another complete example from Temple Complex 650 may suggest that the zoomorphic vessels have a cultic connection. The appearance of zoomorphic terracottas in particular, or cultic paraphernalia in general, in connection with industrial installations is not surprising. The four-horned altars and chalices found near olive-oil installations in the industrial zone at Ekron (Gitin 1989: 60) are examples of the cultic-industrial connection. Other examples come from the mining temple at Timna (Rothenberg 1988: 270–276) and Late Bronze Age Cyprus (Begg 1991: 47, 69), relating to both metallurgical and agricultural industries. In the case of the bovine libation vessels from Ekron, the bull may represent an agricultural/industrial fertility symbol, a specific deity, or its vehicle.

Renfrew, in his discussion of cult and the meaning of cult objects in antiquity (1985: 1–26), mentioned several definitions of religion and notes that cultic ceremony, civil ceremony and games could all appear similar to the outside observer. Clearly, distinguishing between these possibilities on the basis of the archaeological record alone is difficult (Renfrew 1985: 15), yet all of these practices include many repetitions, also reflected in the similarity of the associated objects.

At Ekron, bovine depictions are predominant in Iron Age terracottas.¹⁵ If bovine vessels had a purely religious meaning, they could be interpreted generally as fertility symbols, as depictions of deities or their vehicles, or as sacrificial symbols, possibly serving as containers for the sacrificed animal's blood (see below). The predominance of bovine libation vessels may also derive from the role of bulls in cultic practices in Canaan (e.g., Flemming 1999), Egypt (e.g., Rice 1998: 116–152), Cyprus (e.g., Rice 1998: 237–250) and the Aegean (e.g., Nilsson 1927: 140–161; Rice 1998: 198–219).¹⁶ The possible religious symbolic meaning of bovine vessels may lie in their depiction of a deity or a divine creature, or an incarnation of a deity (for example, the Egyptian Hathor or Apis bulls, Hornung 1982: 109–113, Rice 1998: 144–145). It is more likely, however, that candidates for such a function would be zoomorphic vessels made of metal or some other precious material, or else figurines or large figures.

Another possibility is that the animal depicted is sacred, and is connected with a deity or a mythological story. A zoomorphic vessel could also have served as a sacrificial substitute, a votive offering or a symbol. This would account for a larger number of simpler figurines or vessels. Clay cow figurines were used in this manner in various Hathor temples in Egypt and Sinai (Pinch 1993: 162–163, fig. 1:21–34).

With regard to their functional use, zoomorphic vessels could have been related either to religious practice and libation ceremonies or to use as valuable tableware. The term libation (לִּבְיָן), both in biblical texts (Exod. 29:42; 2 Chron. 11:18)¹⁷ and in Hittite (Gurney 1954: 151), means ritual anointment with liquids, as well as sacrifice in the general sense. This may derive from liquid offerings and from the importance of the blood of the sacrificed animal in the ritual. The blood

15 Bovines appear to be the most common zoomorphic vessel type found throughout the Iron Age at Ekron, with an assemblage of five complete horned vessels and 53 fragments and head spouts. Most of the identifiable zoomorphic figurines from Ekron are also bovine. This runs counter to Holland's conclusion that the horse is the most commonly depicted animal on Iron Age terracottas (Holland 1995: 167).

16 It should be noted, however, that zoomorphic libation vessels are in fact quite rarely found in distinctive Late Bronze–Iron Age sanctuaries in Canaan. The Late Bronze–Early Iron Age temples at Megiddo (Loud 1948: 102–105), the Fosse temple at Lachish (Tufnell 1940) and the temples at Tell Qasile (Mazar 1980) all lack animal-shaped vessels. This is in contrast to the Aegean region, where zoomorphic vessels or figures appear in sanctuaries, for example at Mycenae (French 1981), Phylakopi (French 1985) and Tiryns Unterburg (Kilian 1981). Zoomorphic bovine vessels are more commonly found in burials from these periods (such as at Beth Shemesh, Gezer, Lachish and Minet el-Beida; see Gershuny 1991 for an overview).

17 The biblical text also mentions the libation of wine as pagan cultic practice (e.g., Exod. 30:9; Hos. 9:4). The sacrilegious nature of this libation may have laid in its dilution with water, an Aegean practice that could have been brought to ancient Israel by the Philistines or other Sea Peoples.

is the essence of the animal; its pouring or libation would constitute the essence of the sacrificial ritual. Zoomorphic vessels may have served as containers for the sacrificed animal's blood and from this derived their shape and significance (Marinatos 1986; Hägg 1990: 183). The use of libation vessels, whether zoomorphic or not, and libation installations is known from the Late Helladic Aegaeon cult, especially at Mycenae and Tiryns (Hägg 1990). In burials, zoomorphic vessels could have been used either in the funerary ritual or could have contained or symbolised provisions for the deceased.

Bulls and cows also had great economic importance and served as symbols of power and fertility, which alone could explain the popularity of bovine zoomorphic vessels. The harness design on the body of many of these vessels, which appears throughout the Iron Age, may imply a symbolism related more to the agricultural and economic significance of the bull than to its mythological connotations. Another possibility is that the bull symbolism was of a more secular nature, representing fashionable decorative ware. Other zoomorphic libation vessels, such as the 'beast with burden' type (fig. 9:2), may have symbolised the economic importance of donkeys or horses.

In sum, the assemblage of Iron Age zoomorphic vessels and kernoi from Ekron presents an opportunity for creating a large and significant database for typological analysis of this class of vessels. As most of the finds come from well excavated and stratified contexts, some of the types can be now securely dated and their spatial distribution properly investigated. The stylistic characteristics of these vessels clearly mirror the development of Philistine pottery in Iron Age Philistia. Bovine representations seem to predominate, but birds and other animals appear as well. While the exact function and meaning of these vessels is difficult to ascertain, in most cases they are probably related to certain cultic practices throughout the Iron Age.

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