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Autor: Avioz, Michael
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The Philistines in Josephus' Writings

From Israel's conquest of Canaan until the early monarchic period, bitter, perpetual conflicts existed between the Israelites and Philistines.¹ Mentioned only a few times in the Pentateuch, the Philistines feature mainly in the «Deuteronomistic History», and are also referred to in the Latter Prophets, the Book of Psalms, and Chronicles. Their origin, language and religion have long been subject to scholarly scrutiny.²

Exum claims that in the book of Judges, the Philistines are represented as archetypal «Others». She notes several binary pairs – among them Israelite/Philistine; one of ours/a stranger; circumcised/uncircumcised; I/the other – wherein one element is always presented as preferential to the other.³ This article will explore how the Philistines are represented in Josephus' works: are they indeed represented as the «Other»? What function do they serve within Josephus' writings? Does his portrait of the Philistines represent a contemporary or symbolic struggle? To the best of my knowledge, no study has been written on this issue to date.⁴

Josephus' *Antiquities* mentions the Philistines 115 times, fewer than half of their biblical mentions.⁵ As this work constitutes the most concentrated source of references to the Philistines, *Antiquities* will be the main, though not exclusive, subject of this discussion.

The siege (11.320-350) and conquest of Gaza during Alexander the Great's campaign (*Ant.* 13.356-364) is described in the non-biblical section of *Antiqui-*

1 The name «Philistia» is mentioned eight times in the Bible. The word «Philistine», which is mentioned 33 times, should be added to another 253 times where the Philistines are mentioned as a group name, i.e. a total of 294 times. Compare P. Machinist: *Biblical Traditions: The Philistines and Israelite History*, in: *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment* (ed. E. Oren), Philadelphia 2000, 53-83.

2 The research literature on the biblical Philistines is enormous. See recently: A.E. Killebrew/G. Lehmann (eds.): *The Philistines and Other «Sea Peoples» in Text and Archaeology*, Atlanta, GA 2013 and the literature cited therein. See also R. Bunia et al. (eds.): *Philister. Problemgeschichte einer Sozialfigur der neueren deutschen Literatur*, Berlin 2011.

3 J.C. Exum: *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narrative*, Sheffield 1993, 85.

4 Translations of Josephus follow the Brill translation: S. Mason (ed.): *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Judean Antiquities*, Leiden 2000-2005.

5 See K.H. Rengstorff (ed.): *The Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus, Study Edition*, 2 vols., Leiden 2002.

ties (*Ant.* 11.297-20.268). Gaza is also mentioned as part of the land divided by Herod's descendants in *Ant.* 17.320.

In *War*, Joseph mentions cities previously under Philistine jurisdiction: Ashkelon is noted as a city hated by the Jews (3.9-10), although the cause for this hatred is not specified;⁶ he also describes the Jewish attack upon Ashkelon (2.460; 3.9-28) and the subsequent retaliation and massacre of the Judean aggressors a few years prior to the Destruction of the Temple (2.477). Ashdod-Azotus is mentioned four times (1.156, 166; 2.98; 4.130). Gaza is mentioned six times (1.87, 156, 396; 2.97, 460; 4.662).

Josephus' adaptation of the Bible in the first eleven chapters of *Antiquities* often omits or abbreviates the biblical narrative, and the number of references to the Philistines is therefore drastically reduced. Moreover, Josephus does not rewrite most of the Prophetic Literature, Psalms, or even, for the most part, biblical poetry featuring within narrative, so certain references to the Philistines are consequently omitted (*Exod* 15,14; *2 Sam* 1, 20). His reworking of *Gen* 26 (*Ant.* 1.259-262) deletes eight biblical references to the Philistines and Philistine place-names. He also omits the episode of Shamgar son of Anath's battle against the Philistines (*Judg* 3,31). The same is true of a significant part of the Latter Prophets, including all references to the Philistines (such as: *Isa* 2,6, 11,14; *Jer* 25,20; *Ezek* 25,16; *Joel* 4,4; *Amos* 9,7; *Zeph* 1,9, 2,5; and others).⁷ The Philistines feature sporadically in Josephus' rewriting of the Book of Samuel, and the material from Chronicles is incorporated into his version of the historiographic works of Samuel and Kings rather than recounted separately, which naturally further reduces the number of references to the Philistines.⁸

6 See discussion and bibliography in G. Fuks: Antagonistic Neighbours: Ashkelon, Judaea, and the Jews, *JJS* 51 (2000), 42-62. Hatred of the people of Ashkelon towards the Jews is mentioned in: Philo: On the Embassy to Gaius, 199-205.

7 On the Prophetic Literature in Josephus' writing see: C.T. Begg: Classical Prophets in Josephus' *Antiquities*, in: *The Place Is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (ed. R.P. Gordon), Winona Lake, IN 1995, 547-62; J. Maier: Studien zur jüdischen Bibel und ihrer Geschichte (*SJ* 28), Berlin 2004, 125-36; L.H. Feldman: Prophets and Prophecy in Josephus, in: *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism* (eds. M.H. Floyd/R.D. Haak), New York & London 2006, 210-39; P. Höffken: Josephus Flavius und das prophetische Erbe Israels (*Lüneburger theologische Beiträge* 4), Münster 2006.

8 On the manner of Josephus' rewriting of Chronicles see: I. Kalimi: *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature: A Historical Journey*, Winona Lake, IN 2009.

It is interesting to trace Josephus' references to the Philistine cities and nobility. Josh 13,3 mentions the five Philistine lords of the cities Ekron, Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gath. Josephus omits this reference; nor does he list them in his rewriting of Judg 3,3, where they are feature once again. However, in his rewriting of 1 Sam 5 (*Ant.* 6.6), he refers to «the five cities» of the Philistines without naming them. Two sections later he lists the cities' names (albeit their sequence differs from the MT), using the expression «Lords of the Philistines», even though both the MT and the Septuagint refer to Philistine priests and magicians throughout the passage.⁹ Josephus' non-inclusion of the word «priest» may have been designed to characterize the Philistine assembly with an official rather than ritual or magical nature.

In *Ant.* 6.319 Josephus parenthetically notes that Gath is one of the five cities of Philistia, an addition that has no parallel in the MT. Though 1 Sam 6,17 states there are five Philistine lords, nowhere does the biblical text explicitly mention that there are five Philistine cities, though the attentive reader ought to be able to deduce this himself. Josephus' note serves as a clarifying annotation.

Philistine Names in Josephus' Writings

In the Septuagint's version of the Pentateuch and the books of Joshua-Judges, the Philistines are referred to as Φυλιστειμ, whereas in the other books of the Bible they are translated as ἀλλόφυλος/οι.¹⁰ According to Robert Gordon,

For an illustration of the issue with reference to sources on the Philistines see: C.T. Begg: David's Initial Philistine Victories according to Josephus, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 20 (1999), 1-14.

9 For a comprehensive comparison between the Bible and Josephus regarding the description of the travels of the Ark in Philistine territory see: C.T. Begg: The Ark in Philistia according to Josephus, *ETL* 72 (1996), 385-97.

10 In the Septuagint (LXX) to the Bible, the term ἀλλόφυλος appears 317 times. For a discussion of this term in LXX see: I.L. Seeligmann: The Septuagint Version of Isaiah: a Discussion of its Problems, Leiden 1948, 87; R. de Vaux: Les Philistins dans la Septante, in: *Wort, Lied und Gottespruch: Festschrift für Joseph Ziegler* (ed. J. Schreiner)(FzB 1-2), Würzburg 1972, 185-94; R. De Sousa: The Land Is Full of Foreign Children: Language and Ideology in LXX Isa 2.6, in: *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon* (eds. G. Khan/D. Lipton), Leiden 2012, 188-89. To be more precise, in most of the appearances in the Book of Judges the term ἀλλόφυλος appears, and in a minority of the cases the term θυλιστειμ appears (so in LXX B for Judg 10,7; 13,1, 5; 14,2, 4). In the remaining manuscripts of LXX for Judges the term ἀλλόφυλος is more prevalent.

the latter Greek term emphasizes the Philistines' status as Others.¹¹ Josephus, however, who applies this term to himself (*War* 1.16), does not follow the Septuagint and instead refers to Philistines as Παλαιστῖνοι: *Ant.* 1.207; 2.323; 5.276-317; 6.13-29, 35, 54, 90-99, 105-106, 111, 115-129, 165, 170-177, 188, 191-193, 198, 201, 209, 213, 244, 245, 272, 281-282, 323, 325, 327, 351-356, 368-374; 7.71. He uses the term Φυλιστινός but once, in his rewriting of the Table of Nations in Gen 10, to generate a connection between the Philistines and the name «Palestine»: «but the land has preserved the name of one, Phylistinus, for the Greeks call his portion Palestine» (*Ant.* 1.136).¹²

From a textual-critical perspective, this serves as further evidence that Josephus does not necessarily adopt the Septuagint in his adaptation of the biblical text. In general, I hold that he worked with at least two Vorlagen, one similar to the MT and one similar to the version used by the translators of the Septuagint.¹³ Of course, there are countless examples of adaptations reflecting neither the Septuagint nor the MT.

The Philistines – Real or Symbolic Enemy?

Contrary to some post-biblical works, there is no evidence that Josephus makes symbolic use of the Philistines in order to allude to another enemy; neither a contemporary or future one. All Josephus' references to Philistines seem to denote the same historical enemy mentioned in the Bible.

The Philistines' Ethnic Identity and its Application in Josephus' Writings

Several scholars have attempted to define what differentiated the Philistines from the Israelites as an ethnic entity during Iron Age I.¹⁴ One opinion cont-

11 R.P. Gordon: The Ideological Foe: The Philistines in the Old Testament, in: *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart* (eds. C. McCarthy/J.F. Healey), London 2004, 33.

12 On the metamorphoses of the name Palestine see: L.H. Feldman: Some Observations on the Name of Palestine, *HUCA* 61 (1990) 1-23.

13 See: L.H. Feldman: *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, Berkeley 1998.

14 T.J. Barako: The Philistine Settlement as Mercantile Phenomenon, *American Journal of Archaeology* 104 (2000) 513-30; E. Bloch-Smith: Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What Is Remembered and What Is Forgotten in Israel's History, *JBL* 122 (2003) 401-25; T. Dothan: The Aegean and the Orient: Cultic Interactions, in: *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina* (eds. W.G. Dever/S. Gitin), Winona Lake,

ends that the Philistines differed in their cultic practices, ceramic culture, military superiority, architectural planning, seafaring, and certain dietary habits, such as the consumption of pork. In contradistinction, Jews were characterized by their ritual circumcision, ritual dietary restrictions, and military inferiority.¹⁵ I will now consider if and how these differences are manifest in Josephus' writings. The Philistines are not characterized by their consumption of pork in the Bible, nor in Josephus' writings, and I will therefore focus on the other aforementioned characteristics.

Circumcision as an Ethnic Characteristic

Circumcision is a unique mark of ethnic identity.¹⁶ While other peoples also adhered to this practice,¹⁷ it has nonetheless served as a Jewish ethnic symbol for generations. Tacitus already wrote that the Jews «adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference» (*Hist.* 5.5). The books of Judges and Samuel refer to the Philistines as «the uncircumcised».¹⁸ Scholars are divided as to whether the Philistines were customarily circumcised during the Iron Age II. Josephus, however, asserts that «no other of the Syrians that live in Palestine, besides us alone, are circumcised» (*Ant.* 10.262). Assuming this holds true,¹⁹ we can posit that Josephus does not use the Greek term

IN, 2003, 189-213; A. Faust/J. Lev-Tov: The Constitution of Philistine Identity: Ethnic dynamics in Twelfth to Tenth Century Philistia, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 30 (2011) 13-31.

15 Bloch-Smith: *Israelite Ethnicity* (n. 14), 415.

16 See N. Rubin: *The Beginning of Life: Rites of Birth, Circumcision and Redemption of the First-Born in the Talmud and Midrash*, Tel Aviv 1995 (Hebrew), 77ff. Other researchers emphasized the diverse attitudes that were common during the Second Temple period towards circumcision as an ethnic characteristic. See: J.J. Collins: *A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century*, in: *To See Ourselves As Others See Us: Christians, Jews, Others in Late Antiquity* (eds. J. Neusner/E.S. Frerichs), Chico, Calif. 1985, 163-86; S.J.D. Cohen: *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, Berkeley 2001.

17 See *Ag. Ap.* 2.137.

18 *Judg* 14,3.15,18; *1 Sam* 14,6.17,26.36.31,4; *2 Sam* 1.20. See also *1 Sam* 18,25.27; *2 Sam* 3,14. See: M. Thiessen: *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*, New York 2011, 44-47.

19 Faust claims that the Philistines were customarily circumcised, and bases this on *Jer* 9,24. See A. Faust: *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance*, London 2007, 88-90. But see the criticism of I. Shai: *Was Circumcision practiced in Philistia in the Iron Age II?*, *ErIs* 30 (2009) 413-18 (Hebrew).

for «uncircumcised» to differentiate the Philistines from the Jews in order to avoid offending his (uncircumcised) pagan audience.²⁰ This is corroborated by a similar adaptation Josephus makes to the book of Samuel, where Saul asks David for a dowry of six hundred heads (κεφαλή, *Ant.* 6.201) rather than the biblical dowry of one hundred Philistine foreskins (1 Sam 18,25), thus deviating from the Septuagint's literal translation of foreskins, ἀκροβυστίαις.

Josephus' attitude towards circumcision is ambivalent:²¹ On one hand, he recognizes the importance of circumcision as a ritual ethnic marker, as is evident from his rewriting of Gen 17: «in order to keep his posterity unmixt with others, that they should be circumcised in the flesh of their foreskin» (*Ant.* 1.192). However, he also seems to anticipate his pagan audience's reservations against an arguably violent act,²² omitting the story of the mass circumcision of Shechem in Gen 34 (see also *Life* 113) and the circumcision of the entire Jewish nation in Josh 5. Josephus seeks to present Judaism as a tolerant religion that does not discredit other creeds.

Israel's Military Inferiority versus the Philistines' Capabilities

Philistine metallurgic proficiency and their monopoly on iron is a well-researched subject.²³ These theories are supported textually in 1 Sam 13,19-22 as well as archaeologically.²⁴ Josephus' adaptation of 1 Sam 13 (*Ant.* 6.96) does not

- 20 Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Josephus Judean Antiquities 5–7, trans. C.T. Begg: Leiden 2005, 72, n. 801.
- 21 P. Spilsbury: *Contra Apionem* and *Antiquitates Judaicae*: Points of Contact, in: Josephus' «Contra Apionem»: Studies in Its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portion Missing in Greek (eds. L.H. Feldman/J.R. Levison), Leiden 1996, 348-68. Josephus also discusses circumcision in regard to the conversion of the royal family of Adiabene (*Ant.* 17.20-91). Some rely on this story to claim that Josephus allowed conversion without circumcision. Against this see: M. Finkelstein: *Conversion, Halakhah, and Practice*, Ramat Gan 2006, 202-207 (Hebrew) and the literature cited therein. On denunciation of circumcision in the Roman sources see: B. Isaac: *Roman Attitude towards Jews and Judaism*, *Zion* 66 (2001), 41-72, esp. 63-64 (Hebrew); P. Schäfer: *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World*, Cambridge 1997, 93-105.
- 22 The question of Josephus' target audience is given to intense scholarly dispute. See: G. Sterling: *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography*, Leiden 1992, 298-309.
- 23 P.M. McNutt: *The Forging of Israel: Iron Technology, Symbolism and Tradition in Ancient Society*, Sheffield 1990, 144.
- 24 See J.D. Muhly: *How Iron Technology Changed the World – And Gave the Philistines a*

characterize the Philistines as having superior metallurgical skills, but rather, following the Bible, describes how they prevent the Israelites from producing iron weapons. Josephus claims that the iron deposits under dispute were found in Gilead territory (*War* 4.454), a description echoed in Rabbinic Literature (Mishnah, Sukkah 3.1; Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 32b). In his rewriting of David's battle against the Philistines (2 Sam 5,17-25), Josephus emphasizes the extent of the Philistines' force and power, lest David's victory go unappreciated:

Let no one, however, suppose that the army of the Palestinoi that came against the Hebrews was small [or surmise] from the quickness of their defeat and their not displaying any brave deed or one worthy of mention, that this was [a matter of] sluggishness and cowardice on their part. Let it rather be known that Syria and Phoinike and many other bellicose peoples in addition to these jointly campaigned against them as well and participated in the war.

This was the only reason why, having been so often defeated and lost many tens of thousands, that they now came against the Hebrews with a still larger force. Indeed after they had been routed in these battles, an army three times as large advanced against David and encamped in the same region (*Ant.* 7.74-75).

The Philistines as Enemies, According to Josephus

Rather than demonizing the Philistines as stereotypical, caricatured monstrous villains, Josephus depicts them as human enemies who pose a real, existential threat to Israel. He refers to them as the «enemy» (πολέμιος, *Ant.* 6.186). Josephus attempts to explain the source of the animosity between the nations in *Ant.* 2.322 in an addition to the biblical story:

Moyses led the Hebrews by this route in order that, if the Egyptians should change their minds and should wish to pursue them, they would suffer punishment for their wickedness and transgression of their agreements, and because of the Palaistinoi, from whom he wished in every possible way to conceal his departure, because they had a hostile attitude due to an ancient enmity with them. For their land is adjacent to that of the Egyptians (*Ant.* 2.322).

The «ancient enmity» Josephus refers to can be traced to the verse in Ezek 25,15: «Thus says the Lord God: Because with unending hostilities the Phi-

listines acted in vengeance, and with malice of heart took revenge in destruction». Josephus was familiar with the Book of Ezekiel and mentions it explicitly in *Ant.* 10.79, 98, 106.²⁵

While the MT only mentions Goliath by name in 1 Sam 17,4, 23, and refers to him as «the Philistine» in the rest of the story, thus reinforcing his depiction as the Other, Josephus takes the opposite approach (*Ant.* 6.170-192). He uses the epithet «Philistine» just twice and the name «Goliath» eight times throughout the episode, a tactic which humanizes, rather than alienates, the enemy.²⁶

Josephus may have downplayed the caustic biblical animosity towards the Philistines in order to stave off accusations of Jewish xenophobia and reclusion.²⁷

Intermarriage

Josephus' backhanded description of Samson's parents' displeasure at their son's marriage to a Philistine woman, «because she was not of the stock of Israel» (μη ὁμόφυλον; *Ant.* 5.286)²⁸ implies that Jews should only marry amongst

25 Begg: *Classical Prophets* (n. 7), 561.

26 In LXX the name Goliath appears in verse 42 (as opposed to the MT: «The Philistine»). Verse 23 has no parallel in LXX, since it is found in an entire paragraph that is missing in LXX^B. Much ink has been spilled over the relation between the MT and LXX in chapters 17-18 of 1 Sam. See, for example: D. Barthélemy/D.W. Gooding/J. Lust/E. Tov: *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism: Papers of a Joint Research Venture* (OBO 73), Göttingen 1986; B. Johnson: *A Reading of the David and Goliath Narrative in Greek and Hebrew*, PhD. Diss.; Durham University 2012. In any case, the places in chapter 17 which contain an overlap between LXX and the MT both contain the term «Philistine». This is therefore another example of Josephus' textual independence. On the reception of this story in early Judaism, see S.A. Nitsche: *David gegen Goliath: Die Geschichte der Geschichten einer Geschichte: Zur fächerübergreifenden Rezeption einer biblischen Story* (Altes Testament und Moderne 4), Münster 1998.

27 See the references cited in: B. Bar-Kochva: *The Jewish Ethnography by Hecataeus of Abdera*, *Tarbiz* 75 (2006) 51-94 (Hebrew); idem: *The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature: The Hellenistic Period*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2010, 90, n. 1; Schafer: *Judeophobia* (n. 21), 173-77.

28 On Samson in Josephus, see D. Börner-Klein: *Die Samsongeschichte – jüdische Perspektiven*, in: *Philister. Problemgeschichte einer Sozialfigur der neueren deutschen Literatur*, eds. R. Bunia et al., Berlin 2011, 178-80; T.M. Jonquière: *Of Valour and Strength. The Samson Cycle in Josephus' Work: Jewish Antiquities 5.276-317*, in: *Samson: Hero or Fool? The Many Faces of Samson* (eds. E. Eynikel and T. Nicklas) (Themes in biblical narrative 17), Leiden 2014, 119-28.

their own people. Similarly, in *Ag. Ap.* (2.209-210), he emphasizes that Moses warmly welcomed «All those who wish to live under our laws» (*ibid.* 210) – non-Jews are excluded, but they will be accepted if they convert to Judaism. In *Ag. Ap.* 258-259 he notes that Jews were accused of avoiding association with people who are different from them, and claims in retaliation that Jews are no different from Greeks, who also tended to keep themselves to themselves. According to Feldman,²⁹ the apologetic vein in Josephus' presentation of the Samson episode stresses the political, and not the religious, nature of Israel's tendency towards self-containment.

*Josephus' Characterization of the Philistines Compared to his
Characterization of Other Peoples*

Josephus' characterization of the Philistines can also be assessed through comparison to his portrayal of other peoples. A yet broader view can be garnered through comparison to the ways in which other contemporary authors described «Other» nations. Benjamin Isaac³⁰ examines numerous sources which contain early expressions of racism, such as stereotypes, prejudices and hatred towards different ethnicities and nationalities. Juvenal expressed contempt for Egyptians, Jews, Syrians and Greeks. The Greeks displayed enmity towards the Persians, mistrusted Phoenicians, considered Syrians overly superstitious, and perceived Egyptians as unstable, rebellious, rude, xenophobic, greedy, and promiscuous. While the Romans showed reverence for Greece's magnificent past, they despised the Greeks of their own time and considered them frivolous, morally corrupt, deceitful, and so on.

Although Josephus is critical of the hatred expressed in ethnographic writing³¹ (*Ag. Ap.* 1.220), he does not refrain from criticizing Greek historiography and mythology. Nonetheless, he does not hesitate to point out analogies and similarities to the Greeks when it suits his rhetorical needs.³²

29 Feldman: *Josephus's Interpretation* (n. 13), 161.

30 B. Isaac: *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton 2004.

31 On the characteristics of ethnographic writing see: Bar-Kochva: *The Jewish Ethnography* (n. 27).

32 On this duality in Josephus' writings see T. Rajak: *The Location of Cultures in Second Temple Palestine: The Evidence of Josephus*, in: *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, vol. 4 (ed. R. Bauckham), Grand Rapids 1995, 1-14. Recently, Lim has shown that Josephus' attitude towards the Samaritans was also ambivalent. In some cases Josephus took

Josephus ridicules the Egyptian religion (ibid. 224-225) and makes every effort to emphasize the difference between Egyptians and Israelites, grappling with the identification ancient authors drew between Egyptians and Jews.³³ Josephus exploited the ridiculous, contemptuous characterization of the Egyptians in Hellenistic literature to generate positive propaganda towards the Jews. Philo also mocks the Egyptians in his writings. According to Niehoff,³⁴ Philo viewed the Egyptians as the «ultimate Other» and this helped him forge a positive sense of Jewish identity. Through denunciation of the Egyptians, he emphasized Jewish loyalty, tolerance and pacifism, which were considered core Hellenistic values.

In contrast, Josephus does not paint any such picture of the Philistines. He does not define them as the «ultimate Other», and their description is devoid of stereotypes and prejudices, and virtually free of contempt for their religion, beliefs, and leaders. This can be explained by the fact that unlike the Egyptians, no people referring to themselves as Philistines challenged or threatened the collective Israelite memory during the Second Temple period.

Conclusion

Through comparing Josephus' characterization of the Philistines in his adaptation of the Bible with his presentation of other nations, it is evident that his attitude towards them is largely neutral. They are not described in a degrading or humiliating manner; apparently, Josephus has no reason to degrade them. Unlike the Egyptians, the Philistines no longer existed in Josephus' own lifetime.³⁵ Josephus sought to present Judaism as a religion that does not shy away

a line of acceptance, and in some – of rejection. See S.K. Lim: Josephus Constructs the Samari(t)ans: A Strategic Construction of Judaeans/Jewish identity Through the Rhetoric of Inclusion and Exclusion, *JThS* 64 (2013), 404-31.

33 See: J.M.G. Barclay: The Politics of Contempt: Judaeans and Egyptians in Josephus' *Against Apion*, in: *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire* (ed. J.M.G. Barclay), London 2004, 109-27.

34 M. Niehoff: *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Texts and studies in ancient Judaism 86), Tübingen 2001, 45-47.

35 Compare: J. Lieu: Not Hellenes but Philistines?, *JJS* 53 (2002) 261. This cannot be deduced from the rewriting of the stories of Amalek in Josephus' writings, which are also about a people that was already extinct in his day. First, the Philistines were not anathema, as was Amalek. Second, if the assumption that Josephus identified them with Rome is correct, then it is clear why he found it necessary to devote so much room to them in his

from other religions. Josephus' writings give no indications of the Philistines' origins, language, or religion, questions that continue to intrigue scholars until this very day.

If so, what role did the Philistines play in Josephus' writings? It is possible that they served as a vehicle for various theological messages. Through the Israelites' victories over them, Josephus was able to emphasize God's place as the orchestrator of history, the puppeteer of the Jews' victories and defeats. His stirring oration on the wall of Jerusalem during the revolt against the Romans employs Israelite victory against the Philistines as a platform for God's glorification (*War* 5.384-386):

Did not Palestine groan under the ravage the Assyrians made, when they carried away our sacred ark? as did their idol Dagon, and as also did that entire nation of those that carried it away [...]. It was God who then became our General, and accomplished these great things for our fathers, and this because they did not meddle with war and fighting, but committed it to him to judge about their affairs.

It seems that Josephus privileged the transmission of such theological messages over the vilification and deprecation of the Philistines, an ancient enemy who no longer posed a threat to the Jewish people.

writings. See: L.H. Feldman: Josephus' View of the Amalekites, in: *Israel in the Wilderness: Interpretations of the Biblical Traditions in Jewish and Christian Narratives* (ed. K.E. Pomykala)(Themes in biblical narrative 10), Leiden 2008, 89-115. However, see also the reservations of: P. Spilsbury: *The Image of the Jew in Flavius Josephus' Paraphrase of the Bible*, Tübingen 1998, 119-20.

Abstract

One of the bitterest enemies of the Israelites that challenged them from the conquest of Canaan till the early monarchy period was the Philistines. They are mentioned mainly in the so-called «Deuteronomitic History» and some references to them are scattered throughout the Pentateuch, the Latter Prophets, and the Book of Chronicles. Josephus mentions the Philistines when he retells the biblical narratives from Joshua to Kings in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. My aim in this paper is to explore the ways in which Josephus constructs the Philistines' ethnic identity as «the others» in relation to his people. I shall show how Josephus' defines the Philistines through their titles, their military behavior, their unique practices and the overall relationship between them and the Israelites. I shall also examine the question whether Josephus is projecting his Greco-Roman present into his retelling of the Philistines' past.

Michael Avioz, Ramat Gan