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Chapter One

Early Philistine Religion in Text and Archaeology
Even casual readers of the Hebrew Bible are familiar with the Philistines, portrayed as the Israelites’ perpetual antagonists from the time of the Judges to the postexilic period, when Zechariah prophesied an end to the “pride of the Philistines” (Zech. 9:6). Mentioned nearly 300 times in the Bible, the Philistines are accused of virtually every quality, trait, and action that Israelites found unsettlingly or abhorrent, including paganism, idol worship, lack of circumcision, and consuming unclean animals.

Some of the accusations were true; others almost certainly were not. But the Bible’s demonization was so thorough that “Philistine” is still used to this day to refer to an uncultured individual or population. But how well does the Bible’s depiction dovetail with historical and archaeological evidence? The answer begins by considering Philistine religion, as described in the Bible and understood from excavations of four of their major cities, with an emphasis on the critical period of the Early Iron Age (roughly 1200-1000 BCE).
The transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age after 1200 BCE was a time of major changes around the Eastern Mediterranean. The Mycenaean palaces and Hittite empire collapsed, major cities like Ugarit, a key port on the coast of Syria, were destroyed, migratory peoples were on the move, and Egypt began its decline from the unified New Kingdom into the fragmented Third Intermediate Period, when it would be ruled by dynasties from Libya and Nubia. The Philistines, like the Israelites of the biblical narrative, were among the groups on the move, arriving in Canaan in the late second millennium BCE and establishing their “pentapolis,” or five major cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Gath (Josh. 13:2-3).

The Philistines are synonymous with the Peleset, one of the groups who appear in Egyptian records as invaders by land and sea at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Egypt's interactions with these “Sea Peoples” are vividly depicted on the walls at Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of the pharaoh Ramesses III, who ruled ca. 1185 to 1153 BCE. Two imposing reliefs show battles on land and at sea between Egyptian forces and various groups of “Sea Peoples.” The sea battle, perhaps the first ever depicted, is notable for its portrayal of Sea Peoples vessels as Mycenaean-style galleys, and for the appearance of new maritime technology (loose-footed sail, brailed rig, and crow’s nest) on both sides’ ships. The land battle depicts ox-carts, women, and children alongside the invading warriors, suggesting a migratory movement, which is in keeping with the archaeological understanding of the Philistines as immigrants to the southern Levant. Medinet Habu also provides the first documentary evidence for the Philistines as a group, who are mentioned in three separate inscriptions.
Not long after these events, they seem to have settled on the southern coastal plain of Canaan, founding their pentapolis and living in what archaeologist Lawrence Stager, the excavator of Ashkelon, described as “a diverse community of warriors, farmers, sailors, merchants, rulers, shamans, priests, artisans, and architects.” Four of the five major Philistine cities have been excavated, with only Gaza remaining inaccessible under the heavily populated modern city. There are enough differences between each to suggest that the people we refer to with the term “Philistines” were by not culturally homogenous. But similarities create a template of Aegean and Cypriot (“Cypro-Aegean”) traits for Philistine sites, and for some customs and material culture. This includes cult-related objects and architecture.

**Biblical views**

The biblical description of Philistine religion seems straightforward. Their chief god in the Early Iron Age was Dagon, and his sacrificial cult was practiced at temples in at least two Philistine cities, Gaza and Ashdod. The former was home to the last act of Samson, who brought down the building by collapsing its supporting pillars (Judg. 16:26-30), while the latter was home to a battle between the captured Ark of the Covenant and the divine image of Dagon (1 Sam. 5:1-8). The Philistines were also
Digging into the biblical narrative both raises new questions and shines a light on the Bible’s pejorative discussion of Philistine culture, including religious practices. Ba’al-Zebub (“lord of flies”), for example, is almost certainly a corruption of Ba’al-Zebul (“Ba’al the prince”). Dagon, on the other hand, despite being presented as a deity exclusively associated with the Philistines, has no place in a southern Canaanite pantheon – let alone in one maintained by Cypro-Aegean immigrants.

Dagon, in his linguistically earlier form Dagan, was an established deity in Syria and Mesopotamia by the late third millennium BCE. By the Late Bronze Age, his influence had spread as far west as Ugarit, where he was an equivalent of El, father of Ba’al. However, by the later years of the second millennium BCE his influence had waned significantly, and there is no clear evidence outside the Bible to connect Dagon to the southern Levant at all!

The most convincing argument for Dagon in the Philistine pantheon was made by the late historian Itamar Singer, who suggested the Philistines encountered Dagan along their route to the southern Levant and integrated him into their pantheon as an equivalent of the Great Mother Goddess, perhaps Cretan Rhea or Anatolian Kybele, whose gender they altered to conform to this new identity. While there is still no material or written extrabiblical evidence for Dagon’s presence in Canaan, Singer’s theory may be supported by the recent discovery of an Early Iron Age kingdom of Palistin centered on Tell Ta’ynat in the Plain of Antioch. If this polity and its people are associated with the Philistines, then we have a possible connection between Dagan’s Bronze Age territory and the southern coastal plain. However, until extrabiblical evidence is found for the presence of Dagon in Philistine cult, this hypothesis remains untested.
The Bible itself displays confusion about the Philistine pantheon. Judges 10:6, for example, reads, “The Israelites again did what was offensive to the LORD. They served the Baalim and the Ashtaroth…and the gods of the Philistines.” This verse, an extended version of a common Deuteronomistic theme of forsaking Yahweh and falling into worship of the Canaanite deities Ba’al, Asherah, and Astarte (Judg. 2:11–13, 3:7, 8:33; 1 Sam. 12:10), can be read as evidence that “the Baalim and the Ashtaroth” were associated with Canaanites but not with Philistines, whose gods were separate and distinctive from their contemporaries.

Just who these “gods of the Philistines” were, into whose worship the Israelites strayed, is never made clear, despite specific references to Dagon in other Deuteronomistic narratives. However, a Philistine connection to Ashtaroth is specifically mentioned in 1 Sam. 31:10, as Saul’s weapons were placed in this temple after his death. Thus the Bible depicts the West Semitic pantheon, and Canaanite religion as a whole, as being as attractive to Philistines as it was to the continually relapsing Israelites.

The material evidence for early Philistine cult is less straightforward than the Bible’s description. It consists primarily of handmade figurines and other Aegean–Canaanite style items such as lion-headed cups and incised scapulae in the Cypriot tradition, as well as a small number of altars and buildings. Figurines, the most common Iron I find, are divided into two types: “Philistine Psi” and “Ashdoda.” As archaeologist Michael Press, an authority on Philistine figurines, has noted, both both represent females, and are frequently decorated in geometric fashion similar to Philistine ceramics, whose form and decoration is derived from Aegean and Cypriot styles. The former takes its name from the figurine’s form (upraised arms give the appearance of the Greek letter Psi) and seems to be a direct continuation of the Mycenaean Psi. Ashdoda, on the other hand, is uniquely Philistine. Named for the city of Ashdod,
where the most complete example has been found, this figurine represents a seated woman, featuring a *polos* headdress and appliqued breasts, whose body has been fused with her chair. As Press has shown, both experienced a surge in popularity in the 11th century; however, the Mycenaean-derived Philistine Psi is found in 12th century contexts, while the uniquely-Philistine Ashdoda, with its combination of Aegean and Cypriot elements, does not appear before around 1100 BCE. Both forms went out of use by the end of the beginning of the first millennium. Ashdoda in particular has been seen as evidence that the Philistines worshiped a Great Mother Goddess, but since most Ashdoda figurines – including the complete example – have been found in pits and rubble piles, rather than on floors or identifiable contexts, Ashdoda’s nature, like her cult, remains unclear.

Ashdoda, a figurine type named for the city of Ashdod, where the most complete example has been found. The figurine represents a seated woman, featuring a polos headdress and appliqued breasts, whose body has been fused with her chair.

Few Early Iron Age Philistine temples have been found. However, a temple with two pillars, similar to that described in the Samson saga (although not large enough to hold 3,000 people on its roof!), was found at Tell Qasile, a city likely founded by the Philistines in the late 12th century. A slightly smaller structure, used from the 12th century into the early Iron II, was found at Gath (modern Tell es-Safi), suggesting that the two-column design was a regular feature of Philistine cultic architecture. At Ashkelon, a lime-plastered, four-horned installation in the center of a multi-roomed structure may be a Philistine horned altar. At Ashdod, a large building whose wide central hall featured two columns and an Aegean-style hearth is either a cultic structure or an upscale private dwelling. Just south of this was another building with a unique apsidal southern end that has been connected to the cult of Ashdoda because of its proximity the complete figurine’s findspot.
Our difficulty interpreting the archaeological evidence is compounded by the question of just how representative they are of Early Iron Age Philistine cult. A similar situation is found in one of the Philistines’ possible points of origin: Mycenaean Greece. Archaeological picture from the Aegean—primarily iconography and figurines—suggests a small, exclusively-female Mycenaean pantheon, possibly dominated by the Great Mother Goddess, much like our current picture of the Philistines’ Ashdoda-centric cult. But the Mycenaean evidence contains something absent from early Philistine culture: Linear B texts from Mycenaean Greece and Crete, which meticulously record the palaces’ involvement in Bronze Age cult. They reveal dozens of deities, including familiar names like Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Dionysos, and more. The records from Knossos, for example, include at least 34 male and female deities. The mixed pantheon in the written evidence directly contradicts the all-female terracotta figurines and other iconography that make up our archaeological evidence.

Without texts to complement archaeological evidence, a great deal about Philistine religion will remain unknown. Identifying the deity represented by Ashdoda, and its implications both for the Philistine cult of Dagon and for the reconstruction of the early Philistine pantheon as a whole, all the more problematic.
The biblical writers can name the Philistines’ chief deity, but uninscribed material remains cannot. Further, the human element in narrative – innate biases, ulterior motives, and purposes that may have been clear to the intended audience but are lost on us – can make it unreliable as a source of information about a specific culture. This is doubly true when, like the Bible’s portrayal of the Philistines, such descriptions are dripping with polemic.

Of course, “archaeological silence” is not firm ground from which to make an argument. Without contemporary written evidence we will continue to have significant gaps in our understanding of early Philistine cult. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, new evidence will help remedy that situation.

**Conclusion**

The Mycenaean script, used by the Bronze Age forerunners of the Archaic and Classical Greeks, included Linear B for official records, such as records of production and offerings to gods and goddesses. This tablet, discovered by Sir Arthur Evans at the Mycenaean center at Knossos on Crete and called FP 13, mentions the gods in general, a goddess named “Pipituna,” and the “Priestess of the Winds.”

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For Further Reading


Chapter Two

Kemosh, YHWH’s Counterpart and “Abomination”
Kemosh, YHWH’s Counterpart and “Abomination”

By: Collin Cornell

Sitting in a seminary classroom and translating the famous Mesha Inscription from Moab can create a unique sense of unease and confusion. Here is a god so similar to, well, God; to Yhwh that is, the god of the Hebrew Bible! So who was Kemosh, really?

The Hebrew Bible often proclaims Yhwh’s stark uniqueness and repudiates other gods – like Kemosh of the Mesha Inscription. Kemosh is named eight times in the Hebrew Bible (Num 21:29, Judg 11:24, 1 Kgs 11:7[5], 33, 2 Kgs 23:13, Jer 48:7, 13, 46). In all but one of these occurrences (Judges 11:24), Kemosh is associated with the land of Moab, located across the Dead Sea from Judah. Kemosh is also called a šiqquṣ (1 Kgs 11:7[5], 33, 2 Kgs 23:13), a Hebrew word the King James Version translates as abomination – the same noun underlying, for example, the climactic and evil “abomination of desolation” in the Book of Daniel. Because king Solomon showed disloyalty to Yhwh and built an altar to the foreign god Kemosh (“the abomination of the Moabites”), Yhwh grew angry with him and tore the kingship from his dynasty (1 Kgs 11). Jeremiah anticipates a day when “Moab will be ashamed of Kemosh” (48:13).

According to the Hebrew Bible, then, Kemosh was a shameful abomination and a cause for rage to Yhwh; that is, they were not similar. But the Mesha Inscription gives a different impression. Rediscovered in 1868, the Mesha Inscription is a stone monument almost four feet tall. It dates to the 9th century BCE and voices the exploits of Mesha, the Moabite king. Mesha commissioned the stele to honor his patron deity Kemosh, “because he saved me from all the kings, and because he let me gloat over all my enemies” (line 4). The Moabite script and language are close to contemporary Hebrew and only emphasize the similarities between Moab and Israel.
The inscription tells the story of how Kemosh “was angry with his land” and so permitted a neighboring king, the Israelite king Omri, to oppress Moab. But Kemosh then worked Moab’s deliverance: he speaks by oracles to Mesha and commands him to fight against various cities. As directed by Kemosh, Mesha drives out Moab’s occupiers, ritually slaughters the entire population of the city Nebo, “seven thousand male citizens and aliens, female citizens and aliens, and servant girls” (line 16), and parades cultic vessels captured from a temple of Yhwh in front of his god.

Each of these points finds a parallel with Yhwh in the Hebrew Bible. Yhwh, too, experiences anger with his people and so permits them to fall into the power of their enemies (e.g., Judg 2:14, 2 Kgs 17:20). Yhwh also speaks by oracles to his kings – in words nearly identically to the Mesha Inscription – commanding them to fight against specific cities (cf. “Go up!” in 1 Sam 23:2, 2 Sam 5:19, 1 Kgs 22:12, 15). In Deuteronomy and Joshua, Yhwh is (infamously) the recipient of cultic slaughter, described with the same word ḫerēm that the Mesha Inscription uses. 1 Sam 5 narrates how Yhwh’s ark was captured and paraded in front of the god Dagon, but also how Yhwh turned the tables and humiliated his captor.
Several royal psalms from the Hebrew Bible show the same basic configuration of relationships as the Mesha Inscription. Yhwh as patron deity favors his king, blesses his country’s war-making, and demonstrates anger towards their enemies (Pss 2, 20, 21, 110, among others). So obvious are the parallels that soon after the Mesha Inscription was first published, the scholar Theodor Nöldeke wrote: “it is plain that Moab felt herself in the same relation to Chemosh as Israel did to Jahve…Change the name, and we have the religious language of the [Hebrew Bible].”

But in fact Nöldeke was only partly right, and seminarian queasiness, only partly justified. “Change the name, and we have the religious language,” not of the Hebrew Bible writ large, but only select passages, especially those that many scholars deem early relative to the rest of the biblical text. That is to say, Yhwh looks most like
Kemosh in texts such as the royal psalms, or the royal annals that underlie Samuel and Kings, (arguably) among the oldest biblical materials. In such texts, to borrow words from the 19th century German critic Julius Wellhausen’s, Yhwh is bound to his nation “as indissolubly as body and soul.” As the “soul” of Israel and its divine patron, Yhwh was “always on Israel’s side”; so likewise with Kemosh and the national cause of Moab in the Mesha Inscription. As Julius Wellhausen described it, for these early texts the idea that the national god could turn wholly in wrath against his own king and country represented a “paradoxical thought.”

On the other hand, in vast swathes of the Hebrew Bible, Yhwh is very dissimilar to Kemosh, exactly because he is capable of annihilating rage against his own nation and its leadership. Consider the impassioned ‘divine husband’ of the prophetic books, the jealous Lord of Deuteronomy, or the destroying sovereign of Samuel and Kings. It seems that if Yhwh and Kemosh initially mirrored one another as patron deities in early royal psalms and stories, they later parted ways. Yhwh was written down, and became a more tempestuous, complex, and literary deity. Kemosh was not written down, and experienced no comparable enrichment in his profile. He remained a generic war deity, and as such, would later merge with another war deity, the Greek god Ares. Although Yhwh, too, edged towards a merger with his Greek counterpart Zeus (e.g., 2 Macc. 6:2), he had become too distinctive for the equivalence to stick.

But why did the historical paths of these two deities fork? Already in 1878, Wellhausen gestured towards an explanation: “One reason for the difference…is obvious. Israel received no gentle treatment at the hands of the world…Moab meantime remained ‘settled on his lees’ (Jer 48:11).” Wellhausen thus suggests that the final difference between Yhwh and Kemosh grew from their countries’ varying experiences of defeat. The northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed in 722 BCE. The southern kingdom of Judah, which shared the same patron deity Yhwh, survived another 136 years before, it, too, met a catastrophic end – all of which catalyzed theological reflection of
an intense and anguished scale. Moab, by contrast, did not watch its sister kingdom that worshiped its same deity fall. Also, when the Neo-Babylonian invasion came in the early 6th century BCE, Moab underwent a rather milder incorporation into imperial jurisdiction than Judah. For Kemosh this meant there was much less stimulus to rethink his identity, and – most crucially – the scope of his anger.

Translating the Mesha Inscription in seminary is like looking at an old photo album, and seeing (shockingly) that Yhwh and Kemosh resembled one another – but only (as it turns out) in their “youth.” Whereas Kemosh suffered arrested development and languished in obscurity, Yhwh faced challenges that would expand his character and would lead, most importantly, to his immortalization through being written down in the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

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For Further Reading

Chapter Three

Cyber-Archaeology at UC San Diego – Introducing the New 3-D CAVEkiosk
By: Thomas E. Levy

The University of California San Diego’s futuristic Geisel Library has unveiled its first virtual-reality 3-D display system. The life-size CAVEkiosk (“cave automated virtual environment”) will also allow researchers to analyze and visualize 3-D data from at-risk archaeological sites in Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Israel, Greece, Morocco and Cyprus.

The Geisel Library kiosk is one of four planned for University of California campuses at San Diego, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Merced. All are partners in a California-wide collaboration that I direct.

The At-Risk Cultural Heritage and Digital Humanities project, funded by a UC President’s Research Catalyst Award, leverages a 10-100 Gigabits-per-second network—the National Science Foundation-funded Pacific Research Platform (PRP)—to harness and preserve and safeguard “big data” on endangered cultural heritage resources. The Catalyst project is the signature project of the new UC San Diego Center for Cyber-Archaeology and Sustainability at the Qualcomm Institute.
The installation of the 3-D CAVEkiosk in UC San Diego’s Geisel Library marks the completion of a major research goal of the project. In addition to catalyzing cyber-archaeology work and providing virtual reality-equipped network bandwidth with which UC scholars can collaborate, share, store and visualize at-risk cultural heritage data, members of the campus communities and visitors to the kiosks can “travel” to cultural heritage sites and explore them as if they were there.

In addition to Geisel Library, 3-D kiosks are being installed at UC Merced’s Kolligian Library, with two more opening at UC Berkeley’s Phoebe Hearst Museum and UCLA’s Fowler Museum in 2017. While the project’s most urgent goal is to preserve at-risk cultural heritage data and digital artifacts, a growing collection of 3-D archaeological data will also be used to study, forecast and model the effects of human conflict, climate change, natural disasters and technological and cultural changes on these sites and landscapes. The CAVEkiosk is the first large-scale 3-D immersive environment designed expressly for public engagement, so that members of the campus communities and the public can experience at-risk cultural heritage first-hand in libraries, museums and other public places.

Thomas Levy at CAVEkiosk opening.
Brian Schottlaender, UC San Diego’s University Librarian praised the effort, saying “We are thrilled to have the 3-D CAVEkiosk in Geisel Library. The Library is a place for discovery, collaboration, and creativity, and the hundreds of students who come to Geisel each day will be stimulated and inspired. I’m also pleased that the Library’s Research Data Curation team is in on the ground floor of this important effort, and is preserving these vast amounts of data in our long-term digital preservation repository.”

The Catalyst grant project is a collaboration among archaeologists from four UC campuses: Tom Levy (UC San Diego), Benjamin Porter (UC Berkeley), Nicola Lercari (UC Merced), and Willeke Wendrich (UCLA). Each campus team has collected digital archaeology data from at-risk sites in the Middle East. Last fall, I led a team to Israel and the Palestinian territories, to conduct research along the famous Kidron Valley that has its origin near the Temple Mount—Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem— and flows eastward through the Judean Desert to the Dead Sea.
Along this drainage system is the famous Mar Saba Greek Orthodox monastery, dating to the 5th century AD. This is the second oldest continuously occupied monastery in the world. Our team used a helium balloon system to take hundreds of high-definition digital photographs from which to construct Structure-from-Motion (SfM) 3-D computer models of this beautiful site. Earlier this year, analysis of satellite imagery showed that the Islamic State (ISIS) destroyed a similar, 1,400-year-old monastery, St. Elijah (Dair Mar Elia in Arabic), in Iraq. While Mar Saba is not in immediate danger, our project highlights the importance of creating 3-D digital archives of important heritage sites around the world.

The Catalyst project employs a number of undergraduate students who are honing valuable data science and VR technology skills. At UC San Diego, a team of students has been working to visualize the Mar Saba dataset for 3-D viewing in both the Geisel Library CAVEkiosk and in personal VR devices such as Oculus Rift and Google Cardboard. The students are all members of the campus VR club and amazingly talented 20 year olds.

Unfortunately, the Kidron Valley stream is totally polluted with raw sewage that is damaging both the cultural heritage and the natural environment as it flows through both Israeli and Palestinian territory. But I believe it may be possible to achieve small steps toward peace—through sewage! If we can use the tools of cyber-archaeology and scientific visualization to create VR platforms that engage all stakeholders in the area—through immersive VR like the CAVEkiosk—we can drive tourists, especially eco-tourists, to the Kidron Valley. If we can accomplish this we will create more economic value out of the invaluable and at-risk heritage sites such as Mar Saba.

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Chapter Four

Mari: A Taste for Diplomacy
The archives they retrieved came from a large palace of the early eighteenth century BCE and would eventually comprise 17,000 tablets, of which 9,000 have been published. The collection covers about half a century of rule, the largest portion (about 80%) datable to the reign of Zimri-Lim, a contemporary of Hammurabi of Babylon and the city’s ruler for its final 15 years (1775-1761 BCE). The language is primarily Semitic Akkadian, with a handful of stray Hurrian and Sumerian documents. These archives provide a unique perspective on the life and politics of a Near Eastern kingdom.
The Archives
As befitting their origins in palatial stock rooms, the documents largely tell of those dwelling there--royalties, bureaucrats, guards, artisans, cooks, entertainers. They also preserve the correspondence of foreign kings, diplomats on missions, and travelling merchants. A large cache of tablets is administrative: minutia on the production, disbursement, and reception of raw material and products, ingredients dispensed daily for preparation of royal meals, conscripting soldiers and workers, and registering the loyalty of oath-takers. A few tablets were juridical, and even fewer were “literary.” The last includes prayers, incantations, a chronicle of a king’s deed, and a highfaluting poem about Zimri-Lim’s heroics, the first of its kind.

A steady flow of publications has revealed these tablets and since the early 1980’s there has been a flood of copies, translations, and commentaries. Today, relatively few scholars beyond the Mari team have participated in the major reassessments of the archives. The richest harvests of information about Mari are in French, with few major assessments in other languages.
The Letters
While a large administrative corpus uncovers the nuts and bolts of Mari society, a number of letters access the pulse of a multi-ethnic community that was both urban as well as tribal. Its rulers were metaphorically linked by kinship terminology (“father,” “brother,” “son” reflect political status); its courtiers displayed raw senses of (dis)honor (invasive fear of scandal and humiliation); its leadership was anchored in piety (constant quizzing of the gods for their intentions), but was also prone to war to access or consolidate power.
The letters vary from a dozen lines to over a hundred, covering a multitude of subjects, from bureaucratic reports to soul-searching reflections. Their prose style matches what we find in Biblical narratives, attesting to an innate gift of gab drawn from popular culture, featuring sharp characterization, lively phrasing, and assured trajectory. Yet the miracle is that letters were drafted at short notice, hardly improved by later editors, and were meant for storage after inspection.

**Diplomacy** [see texts in *From the Mari Archives* (FMA) 82-92]

The storehouse of subjects in the letters is vast. To share its flavor, I offer snippets from just one topic: The world of diplomacy. Zimri-Lim kept an enormous stable of messengers, couriers, diplomats. When he travelled abroad (in one case toward Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast), he took 100 messengers and 64 runners, undoubtedly using every one of them to keep track of affairs back home and among slippery allies or fractious vassals. (In comparison, the king of 14th century England had about 12).

In Zimri-Lim’s days, one governor estimated that, “No king is truly powerful just on his own: 10 to 15 kings follow Hammurabi of Babylon, as many follow Rim- Sin of Larsa, as many follows Ibal-pi-El of Eshnunna, and as many follows Amut-pi-El of Qatna; but 20 kings follow Yarim-Lim of Yamḫad.” [FMA 82] (The writer took it for granted that Zimri-Lim belonged in that group.) As measure of how volatile conditions were, within a decade half of these states would absorb the vassals of the others.

The game was brutal; allies schemed against each other and vassals double-crossed their protectors. [FMA 83] One vassal snitched on another, “Why does my lord not write to Kaḫat about Akin-amar? Is this man, Akin-amar, just my enemy but not also my lord’s enemy? Why does he remain in good terms with my lord? Once, this man sat by my lord and drank a cup (of friendship). Having elevated him, my lord reckoned him among worthy men, clothing him in garment and supplying him with a headdress. Yet, turning around, (Akin-Amar) dropped excrement into the cup he used, becoming hostile to my lord.” [FMA 78] We also have this grisly report about the fate of one vassal who chose wrongly, “The Turukku (ruler) captured the town he was besieging. He beheaded its king and had it taken to Išme-Dagan, saying, ‘Here is the head of someone who relied on you.’” [FMA 78, n. 142]
Treaties [FMA 92-103]
Compacts between and among rulers followed painstaking diplomatic exchanges. A tablet recovered outside of Mari puts it this way, “God knows that since we have come to know each other I have trusted in you as one would trust in Ishtar and my head has rested on your very own lap. For these reasons, for us to be in harmony, my opinion and yours should be the same. You must certainly know that before there could be peace and good-will, a sacred oath must be taken, that until there is commitment (“touching of the throat”), there can be no mutual trust, and that any sacred oath must be renewed yearly.” [FMA 92 n.173]

Treaties from the Mari era follow two modes. When it concerned tribal units, leaders (or their representatives) met, immolated a donkey-foal, sat for a meal, and shared a drink before parting company. No written formulation accompanied the ritual. Concerning major powers, rulers needed not meet; rather, their representatives negotiated terms of a treaty by shuttling between the pertinent courts, producing a “small tablet,” a protocol for terms, that was linked to a ritual by the draftee (“touching the throat,” metaphoric for “committing oneself”).

If approved, the terms were set on a “large tablet,” a treaty, that was witnessed by city and personal gods conveyed for the occasion. Their format included: (a) a list of gods invoked for the oath, (b) terms for the treaty, including stipulations and pledges, (c) fearsome curses to frighten potential offenders. A subscript may have included a date. With treaties in hand, at each court there is repeat of the commitment ritual, followed by washing of hands, pronouncement of a sacred oath, meal-taking with drinks, and exchanges of gifts.

Banquets and Exchanges of Goods [FMA 306-17]
All this shuttling back and forth was accompanied by meals. Sharing a king’s table was a major sign of favor among allies. The host would offer his guests fine garments and jewelry, their value equivalent to their status. Seating was highly formalized, decided by rank and with the most honored closest to the king. Some guests were given seats while others crouched. Feeding was also by rank, with the number of courses each received set by convention. Musicians (including bands of songstressesses and blinded instrumentalists), declaimers of royal deeds, and acrobats entertained.
Exchanges of gifts went both ways: to and from rulers, representatives, and administrators. The thought behind a gift mattered less than a prompt and commensurate response. Worth was judged by the gift’s precious contents rather than its artistic merits. Heaven forbid should the barter prove to be unequal. Too little would mean scorn; too much might open a bidding war that could bankrupt. One king writes the sharpest rebuke in our archives, excoriating another for responding with a measly amount of tin when he had conveyed two horses, then still rarities.

The offense was personal, but with ambassadors floating in and out of capitals, its sting was carried far and wide. “What will anyone hearing this think? Would he not mock us?” [FMA 313] A vassal writes, “I am famished these days and do not live in a home... In the future, whenever I meet my lord, there will be no gifts with which to approach my lord. If it suits my lord, he should not give my servant any gift. Just now, I have had to borrow 2 shekels to give to my lord’s messengers, but they did not accept it, saying, ‘too little!’.” [FMA 25 n. 11]

Dynastic Marriages [FMA 103-18]
Marriage arrangements were intrinsic to diplomacy, with ambassadors, messengers and couriers carrying out the negotiations. The norm was that the daughter of a ruler with high prestige marries the ruler (or the crown prince) of a state with lesser prestige, the birth of a son solidifying her status in the king’s harem. The exchange of presents included the bridewealth (*terḫatum*, from groom to bride’s family), the dowry (*nidittum*, from father to daughter, the bride), plus assorted items (*biblum*) exchanged between the families and among involved parties.

We are lucky to have a series of letters pertaining to interdynastic marriages involving succeeding Mari kings. The first brought a Qatna princess, so unappreciated by her husband (Yasmaḫ-Addu) that out of boredom she became ill when, accompanied by her maidservants, she exercised under a merciless sun in an open courtyard of the Mari palace. [FMA 103-107]

The other marriage was happier, involving an Aleppo princess and Zimri-Lim. [FMA 107-110] How this queen, Shiptu, achieved star ranking by earning the confidence of
her husband is traceable in a large number of letters exchanged between the two of them. One is especially significant as it has her developing a method to quiz the gods that has little parallel elsewhere. [FMA 283]

Smaller dossiers reveal the marriages of Mari princess to vassals and ranking administrators. We have an accounting of the bridewealth given to one that lists jewelry, scullery, clothing, furniture, and attendants that included a woman scribe. Particularly touching is the correspondence of two sisters married to the same vassal, resulting in the mental breakdown of one of them. [FMA 111-115]

Mari vanished centuries ago, but its archives provide evidence for constant themes of human politics and behavior.

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For Further Reading
Chapter Five

Training “Monuments Men” for Libya
Today the cultural heritage of Libya faces significant threats and damage due to unmanaged, unregulated development and civil disorder. Since the February 2011 revolution, Libya has struggled with the challenge of building a new country. There are currently three rival governments, no constitution, no clearly operating legal system, no defined property rights, no organized police force, and too many independently operating militias. A major land-grab is underway that is causing more damage to archaeological sites than all the events of the 2011 revolution and its aftermath.

Libya’s vast landscape contains impressive cultural heritage, including five UNESCO World Heritage sites. The coastline features three Greco-Roman archaeological sites—Cyrene in the east and Sabratha and Leptis Magna in the west. Further inland, nearly 500 km to the southwest of Tripoli, is the World Heritage site of Ghadamès with its distinctive vernacular architecture. The World Heritage site of Tadrart Acacus, a massif located in the far southwest of the country, features thousands of rock-art sites, some dating as early as 12,000 BC. During the Gaddafi regime, Libya’s pre-Arab cultural heritage was not a priority. And in the context of the challenges facing post-revolution Libya, it is not surprising that cultural heritage struggles for recognition and support from both the government and the populace at large.

As Libya strives to reunify and to shed the vestiges of the former regime, the international community has been eager to provide assistance. A series of international meetings on Libya’s cultural heritage have been held since the 2011 revolution—most recently in June 2016 when UNESCO, with the support of the US Embassy Tripoli, convened a meeting in Tunis of all foreign archaeological missions working in Libya and a group of Libyan archaeologists and community leaders to discuss the current state of affairs in the country. All participants expressed their concern about the fragility of Libyan cultural heritage and final recommendations focused on securing heritage sites and collections, strengthening the legal and institutional framework for the
Security is a major issue for the country’s cultural heritage. Without a strong police force, regional controllers are hesitant to have their archaeologists conduct fieldwork or site inspections in areas deemed to be unsafe. Clandestine excavations and the export and sale of illicitly obtained antiquities from Libya has skyrocketed since the 2011 revolution.

It was within this context of political uncertainty that the American Mission to Libya held a workshop: “Illicit Trafficking of Antiquities” in Rome (29 February – 02 March 2016) funded by the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State grant: “Libyan Heritage in Times of Crisis: Five Mitigation Workshops.” At this workshop, nine archaeologists from Libya’s Department of Antiquities (DoA) and four instructors from the FBI Art Crime Team, the US National Parks Service, and the Italian Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale (TPC) discussed ways to prevent illicit trafficking of antiquities in Libya. During the workshop, the DoA requested help in creating a special police force who could both protect cultural heritage and respond to incidents of illicit trafficking. In the absence of rule of law in Libya, this force would in essence be a group of volunteer “Monuments Men.”

The instructors at the Rome workshop recommended that the Libyan delegation return to their respective cities and begin to identify local police who were interested
in archaeology and willing to work with the DoA to prevent illicit looting and trafficking. They also recommended that similarly sympathetic lawyers and judges be identified who could work with the DoA to develop new legislation for the protection of cultural heritage to be included in the next constitution. These multi-disciplinary teams would form the core of the next training workshop on introductory cultural resource protection.

In May 2016, members of the DoA began to build professional bridges with the Tourist Police and Customs and Border Control agencies. From these meetings, a group of archaeologists and police were identified who were willing to work together to form multi-disciplinary teams. A follow-up workshop to the one in Rome was designed for this group that would focus on practical training exercises such as how to document a cultural property crime scene and how to prepare reports for the repatriation of antiquities illicitly exported from Libya.

This second workshop, “Introductory Cultural Resource Protection Training Course,” was also funded by the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State grant. Participants included eight of the archaeologists who attended the Rome workshop and an equal number of Tourist Police and Customs and Border Control Officials, as well as a lawyer and former judge from Tripoli. The three instructors were from the FBI Art Crime Team, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Italian Carabinieri TPC. This workshop marked the first time that Libyan archaeologists, police, and customs agents had ever participated in a joint training exercise.

The workshop included a series of practical exercises on crime scene documentation and the various techniques of evidence
collection, including fingerprint lifting and DNA sample collection. After participating in these basic exercises, the group was split into two teams, each composed of equal numbers of archaeologists and police officers. Each group then completed two more complex exercises. The first was a mock illicit excavation that was laid out on the hotel grounds. Participants had to identify, flag and number the core elements of the crime scene; sketch and photograph the scene; collect any relevant evidence; and write a report.

The second scenario was a border crossing exercise that involved a car carrying stolen antiquities. As part of the exercise, participants needed to search the car, collect any relevant evidence (including evidence stored on a mobile phone), and interview the driver. One group searched the car so thoroughly that they produced multiple examples of “evidence” that had not been planted by the instructors.

These practical exercises provided an opportunity for the police instructors to work directly with their Libyan counterparts in order to build their investigative skills. The workshop also provided an opportunity for extended discussion about the difficult situation in Libya. Many of these conversations could provide no easy answers for productive action at a time when Libya is still gripped with profound instability. However, the FBI Art Crime Team agent took the opportunity to describe his previous work in Cambodia, where he had helped train and establish police forces focused on cultural heritage in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime. The progress was slow, but momentum grew with the direct collaboration between international law enforcement officers. Ultimately, the trainers stressed that the most important and immediate action for DoA archaeologists and Libyan law enforcement personnel to undertake is to a) document cultural property so that there is a solid record in case of a) damage/theft and b) document any damage/theft scrupulously and collect any evidence for eventual prosecution.

The Libyan contingent left with a new sense of resolve and a coordinated plan of action that includes organizing follow up training workshops within Libya to recruit new groups of archaeologists and police willing to work on cultural resource protection.
These workshops will conduct exercises similar to those used at the Tunis workshop and also offer basic training in recognizing common Libyan cultural artifacts as well as familiarizing participants with ICOM’s “Emergency Red List of Libyan Cultural Objects At Risk.” The first of these in-country training workshops was held on December 28, 2016 at Omar al-Mukhtar University’s Centre for Archaeological Research and Studies (C.A.R.S) in the northeastern city of al-Bayda.

From this expanded pool of workshop participants, a select group of law enforcement individuals will be identified who have a strong capacity for this type of work and the suitable professional responsibilities to benefit from further training at another workshop, planned to be held in Tunis in 2017.

These ongoing initiatives hopefully will produce a group of “Monuments Men” for Libya who can protect the country’s cultural heritage in these challenging times.

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