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## **THE PHILISTINES: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF TRANSFORMATION IN AN IMMIGRANT CULTURE**

**Prof. Aren Maeir, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan**

*"The uniqueness of this joint GIF research project is the attempt to grapple with the developmental dynamics of the Philistine culture from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, including archaeology, history and philology, based on new archaeological data spanning the entire sequence of the Philistine culture.*

*During the 1980's, Stefan Jakob Wimmer (Senior Research Assistant to Prof. Goerg) and myself studied archaeology and Egyptology at the Hebrew University together. Over the years, we had been in contact, which we renewed more intensively when an Egyptian inscription was found at Tell es-Safi/Gath, on which we subsequently published an article. Following this, we thought of applying for a joint GIF research grant. In view of Dr. Wimmer's close connections with Prof. Goerg, the joint grant was submitted by myself and Prof. Goerg, with Dr. Wimmer serving as Prof. Goerg's Senior Assistant.*

*The grant and the work that it generated was an enormous success! In addition to enabling collaboration on this very interesting project, which led to several publications, it led to a truly fascinating inter-cultural interaction, both on the professional and personal levels. Dr. Wimmer, who joined us for all three excavation seasons, became a central and integral part of the team, bringing with him not only his professional expertise, but his warm personality and personal charm.*

*In addition to the research aspects of this project which have already been published, with more papers to come in the future, the joint grant rekindled an old friendship between Stefan and myself, and has opened up a broad range of personal interactions between the German and Israeli team members."*

**Prof. Manfred Görg, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich**

*"Prof. Maeir proposed the idea of applying for a GIF project, which was realized by Dr. Stefan Jakob Wimmer, an Egyptologist who had also been my assistant in my position as Chair for Old Testament Studies for many years. Dr. Wimmer a long-time friend of Prof. Maeir since they together studied at the Hebrew University, given a half-time position as Senior Research Assistant under the framework of the GIF project, was*

*an active partner in the excavations, and maintained close personal ties with the Israeli team.*

*Beyond the narrow scientific level, together with him I run "The Friends of Abraham Society", which promotes interreligious and intercultural research. Dr. Wimmer, whose wife is a Palestinian from Nablus, is familiar with both sides in the conflict and is involved in building bridges on a personal level. It was very fitting that he should play a major part in a research project by an Israeli academic institution on the culture of the Philistines, who were foreigners in ancient times, with whom some modern Palestinians (justifiably or not) claim ancestry.*

*As a German, who used to live for several years in Israel and speaks fluent Hebrew, it was a most moving experience for Dr. Wimmer to meet the President of the State of Israel, together with the German Ambassador, when they both came to see the excavations in the summer of 2005. I hope that Prof. Maeir will somehow find a way to extend Dr. Wimmer's involvement in the Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project in the future."*

The study of changes in culture is among the most fascinating aspects of human society. Processes related to migration are of particular interest in both ancient and modern societies. Archaeological evidence offers a long-term perspective and new insights into these and other societal processes. To date, there has been minimal interaction among theologians, historians, archaeologists, and philologists (who study ancient texts) conducting research on the Ancient Near East. This GIF project adopted a new integrative approach, based on both archaeological and historical aspects of the Philistine cultural transformation.

Prof. Aren Maeir at Bar Ilan University's Martin Szusz Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology is Director of the archaeological excavations at Gath (Tell es-Safi), which began in 1996. This site identified as Canaanite and Philistine Gath (where Goliath came from, one of the five Philistine cities mentioned in the Bible). The rich material found at this site offered, for the first time, an opportunity to study the entire developmental sequence of Philistine culture. It indicates that they arrived in the southern Levant around 1200 BC with a predominantly Aegean foreign culture, and were slowly transformed over the course of next six centuries, during the Iron Age, becoming more and more like their Levantine neighbors, whilst retaining a unique cultural identity.

Prof. Maeir collaborated with Prof. Dr. Goerg from the Department of Catholic Theology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, with Dr. Wimmer as Senior Research Assistant, who analyzed and evaluated

historical and Biblical evidence relating to the transformation of Philistine culture, including archaeological finds from the site. Joint excavations were carried out by the Israeli and German teams at Gath in the summers of 2005 ,2006 and 2007, focussing in particular on finds from the Iron Age. In parallel, Prof. Goerg and Dr. Wimmer re-examined all the historical (Biblical and extra-Biblical) sources on the Philistines, paying attention to aspects relevant for understanding the transformation processes. The German team also studied all the data suggesting that there was a Philistine language, including epigraphic (inscriptions on buildings or monuments) evidence from this and other excavations, an area in which very little work has previously been done.

There was constant e-mail exchange between the German and Israeli teams to discuss methodology and results, culminating each summer with participation in the excavations..

The archaeological finds helped to identify the critical developments of Philistine culture – aspects they brought with them when they arrived, those that disappeared or changed with time, and new features they took on. This covered areas such as architecture, cult, pottery, and even writing and language. One of the most important finds was a small inscription found during the excavations, written in a very archaic alphabetic. It included two apparently Philistine names, which were non-Semitic This served as an excellent example of the merging of various cultures by the Philistines, on the one hand, names of non-Semitic origin (somewhat similar to the name Goliath), and on the other hand, the use of the Levantine alphabetic writing system. This find was a perfect example of the fascinating, but complex cultural interactions in the Philistine society.

While this research project was of important for the study of these ancient societies, these researchers believe that it is also pertinent to modern societies, in which migration is even more widespread than in ancient times. The Philistines serve as an "archaeological laboratory" for studying the transformation of an immigrant society, which can provide important insights on how contemporary immigrant cultures are both influenced by and at the same time, also influence their surroundings.