FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD SEREN’S CHEST:
YO HO HO AND A KRATER OF WINE

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ABSTRACT
Recent research by the authors, using accounts of pirate culture in historical times and studies of pirate geography, proposed an interpretive framework for understanding the Sea Peoples as pirates who plundered some of the great centres of the Bronze Age before settling in various parts of the Mediterranean. Furthermore, we have suggested that at least some of their leaders assumed the title seren, derived from the Indo-European title tarwanis, meaning warlord or military leader. As in historical eras, we suggested that the tribes of the Sea Peoples were made up of individuals from ethnically and culturally mixed backgrounds that coalesced around particular Aegean symbols in order to form a cohesive identity. Here, we build on that research to further elaborate the role of the tarwanis as military leader of the Sea Peoples and practices of feasting and social drinking to solidify their identity.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we argue that the social characteristics of leadership and commensality that bound pirate cultures together in both recent and ancient times (e.g., classical and Roman) also did so at the end of the Bronze Age and provide a means of further understanding the culture of the Sea Peoples. The Sea Peoples are widely believed to have contributed to the collapse of numerous Late Bronze Age polities.\(^1\) The best known among the differently named groups of Sea Peoples were the Peleset who are traditionally associated with the biblical Philistines.\(^2\) Using historical piracy as a model, we elsewhere have proposed that the Sea Peoples were multiple groups whose activities were likely of a piratical nature.\(^3\)

\(^*\) We are pleased to elaborate here on some of the Anatolian characteristics of the Sea People and of the Philistines in honour of our colleague Antonio Sagona. We thank the editors for inviting us to contribute to this volume and to the anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions. Any errors remain our own. We would also like to acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council (DP1095713 [to L.A.H.]), the Israel Science Foundation (grant number 100/13 [to A.M.M.]), the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens (L.A.H.), the University of Melbourne, Bar-Ilan University, and the staff and team of the Ackerman Family Bar-Ilan University Expedition to Gath.

\(^1\) For example, Cline 2014; Killebrew and Lehmann 2013.

\(^2\) Schneider (2012, p. 570) tantalisingly associates the ethnonym ‘Philistine’ with Mycenaean Greek po-ro-wi-to(s)-jo (Greek πλῆθος ἥττος), interpreted as the “month for sailing again” in tablet Kn02 (see also Ventris and Chadwick 1956, pp. 284–287). From here it is a short leap for Schneider to associate the term with seafarers or sailors (πλῆθος ἥττος). For our purposes it makes a much more attractive reading than Jones’ (1972) translation of plšt as Phyle-Histie (tribe of the hearth). However, such widely divergent readings demonstrate that caution is warranted.

\(^3\) Hitchcock and Maeir 2014.
Pirate society in historical times was characterised by largely egalitarian and multi-ethnic tribal cultures. Such societies often included individuals from multiple geographic origins and religious backgrounds who frequently intermingled with indigenous populations.\(^4\) The multi-ethnic character of pirate cultures is exemplified by the well-known Barbary Pirates, who operated under the sanction of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. They spoke and sometimes wrote a creole that was dominated by Italian but also incorporated several other languages, becoming the elusive Mediterranean lingua franca that remains poorly understood.\(^5\) As a multi-ethnic tribal entity, pirates selected particular symbols that they rallied around and they engaged in what today might be considered ritualistic drinking. These symbols and activities served to bind them together as a group. In modern piracy, such a symbol was the infamous Jolly Roger, which had a variable iconography, yet remained recognisable and commanded the allegiance of at least 2500 Caribbean pirates.\(^6\) We have suggested elsewhere,\(^7\) and we consider further here, that at the end of the Bronze Age (c. 1180 BCE), Mycenaean-style ceramics used in drinking and feasting activities assumed a similar function, serving as a shared symbolism around which the multi-ethnic identities of the Sea Peoples coalesced. The continued preference for Aegean-style ceramics among the Sea Peoples and the later Philistines and other Mycenaean IIIc-producing cultures of the Mediterranean can account for the widespread popularity of drinking sets and cooking jugs without linking all of the Sea Peoples to an Aegean origin. A second aspect of the forging of the multi-ethnic identity of the Sea People that we elaborate on here is that their leaders assumed the Indo-European (e.g., Luwian) title of tarwanis (warlord), which was better suited to their activities of desolating and plundering cities than the Greek title of wanax (king).

THE TARWANIS AND PIRATE LEADERSHIP

After the tribe of Sea Peoples known from Egyptian texts as the Peleset settled in the eastern Mediterranean, later becoming identified with the Philistines, their kings became known by the biblical title (1 Sam. 5–6; Judg.), seren (pl. serenim).\(^8\) The term seren seems to be later equated with the Greek title tyrannos (tyrant, ruler, lord, governor). Although some believe that the term arrived in Philistia with Aegean migrants,\(^9\) this title is not attested in the Mycenaean Greek (Linear B) texts, which are few and terse. However, these texts are very clear on the subject of royal titles: the Mycenaean polity was ruled by the wanax (king), followed by the lawagetas, and then the basileos (a type of provincial governor; this term later comes to mean king). As these terms date from the final period of Mycenaean palatial culture, they represent the fully developed palatial system of Late Bronze Age Greece.\(^10\) Also, the place of the wanax in Mycenaean society is clearly symbolised by the wanakteron—the palace—which was frequently situated on an acropolis and dominated the Mycenaean landscape. Given that the Mycenaean Greek evidence is very clear on this matter, the biblical title of seren is even more curious. Finkelstein promoted the view that

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\(^4\) Pennell 1994a, p. 273.
\(^5\) Tinniswood 2010, p. 105.
\(^6\) Rediker 2004, p. 98.
\(^7\) Hitchcock and Maier 2014.
\(^8\) The Egyptian title for leaders of the Sea Peoples is translated by O’Connor (2000, p. 97) as ‘leader’ or ‘great one’.
the term arrived in the Levant in the late Iron II with Ionian and Carian mercenaries serving on behalf of Psammetichus I. Singer argued for an Anatolian origin for this term and for the Philistines as well, noting that the term seren originates from Luwian tarwanis, a title commonly used by Neo-Hittite rulers, and rendered biblically as seren, the title of the rulers of the Philistine pentapolis cities. An Anatolian origin for the term seren does not explain the widespread popularity or the production of Mycenaean-style pottery in Philistia and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, while the proposal of either a Greek or an Anatolian origin does not account for Canaanite (e.g., chalices, certain pottery motifs), Cypriot (notched animal scapulae, hearth styles) and Italic (handmade burnished ware) cultural features found in the settlements of the so-called Sea Peoples. Thus, both our previous study and this study argue for a multi-ethnic origin for the Sea Peoples as tribes of pirates that coalesced around Aegean and maritime symbols. Furthermore, we argue that they used the Anatolian leadership title tarwanis as more appropriate to their social structure.

The present authors and Davis argue elsewhere that it cannot be assumed that the term trn or seren was ever a Mycenaean Greek title of leadership, even though it appears in later Greek as tyrannos. Rather, we believe that the Anatolian origin of this term (Luwian tarwanis) should be stressed. Giusfredi has recently pointed out that the title tarwanis, meaning ‘military leader’ or ‘warlord’, appears in Luwian inscriptions in Anatolia as early as the 10th century BCE, including, most importantly, at the site of Tell Tayinat. Hawkins connects this site to the so-called northern Sea Peoples/Philistines, as indicated by inscriptions referring to Tayinat as the land of Palasatin and by the occurrence of Mycenaean-style pottery and other characteristics at Tell Tayinat. As Giusfredi has stressed, it is most likely that the Luwian term tarwanis was borrowed by the later Greeks. We suggest that it was also adopted much earlier by the tribes of the Sea Peoples, some of whom settled along the coastal regions of Anatolia and in the Southern Levant.

In light of the long history of tumultuous cultural interactions between the people of Ahhiyawa (now accepted by most scholars to be Mycenaeans) and the Hittites and other Anatolian cultures during the Late Bronze Age, we would like to suggest that the title seren could have been adopted by other post-collapse elements of the Aegean-style pottery-producing cultures of the Mediterranean, particularly the various tribes of Sea Peoples. It could possibly have been in use earlier than the 10th century BCE, when inscriptions by communities made up of migrants and local groups were few. Thus, there is no justification in retaining the view that seren is in any way connected to the Mycenaean culture of the Greek mainland. And we propose that rather than indicating an Anatolian origin for significant parts of either the Sea Peoples or the Philistines, the title seren was adopted as a more

13 Aegean scholarship uses the following terms to designate ceramic horizons in the different geographic regions of the Aegean: Early, Middle, and Late Helladic for the Mainland; Early, Middle, and Late Cycladic for the Cyclades; and Early, Middle, and Late Minoan for Crete. Thus, the terms Mycenaean-style or Mycenaean IIIC refer to Aegean style pottery produced outside the Aegean, unless more specific terms are used, such as White Painted Wheelmade Ware for Cyprus, and Philistine I and Philistine II for monochrome and bichrome Mycenaean-style pottery made in Philistia; see also, D’Agata et al. 2005 and Van Wijngaarden 2005.
14 Davis et al. forthcoming; Maeir et al. submitted.
15 Giusfredi 2009.
16 Hawkins 2009; also Singer 2012.
17 Harrison 2008; Janeway 2013.
18 Giusfredi 2009. And, interestingly, also used by the leaders of the Cilician pirates; e.g., Rauh 1997, p. 269.
19 Cesaranu 2008, pp. 41–46; Beckman et al. 2011; Cline 2014.
20 Davis et al. forthcoming; Middleton 2015.
appropriate title than ‘king’ to designate a pirate leader or warlord leading the multi-ethnic tribes of Sea People sailing under different tribal names and settling throughout the Mediterranean as Hittite and Egyptian control was loosened in the region.\footnote{For example, Gilan 2013. Significantly, the leaders of the later Cilician pirates retained the title \textit{tyrannos} (Rauh 1997, p. 269). For the warlord nature of pirate leaders in the Hellenistic period, see Gabbert 1986.}

While such an explanation does not account for the kingdom of ‘Palastin’ in the north—now associated with Tell Tayinat, and \textit{Peleset} or Philistines in the south, as well as other Mycenaean IIIC producing cultures such as the \textit{Tjekker} at Dor in between, we may again turn to historical accounts of piracy for elucidation. A phenomenon that is well known in the historical era of piracy is that of ‘splitting’. Rediker has established ‘genealogical’ links for 3600 pirates splitting off over a period of time from just two original ships in the 18th century CE Atlantic as a result of overcrowding or conflict.\footnote{Rediker 2004, pp. 80–81, esp. fig. 4.} As splitting occurred, new leaders may have been selected, taking command of captured ships that would sail in small groupings or consorts. A similar method of splitting characterises hunter-gatherer groups as they increase in size or engage in conflict. The concept of splitting may account for the different tribal identities of Sea Peoples, and it may also explain why there were northern and southern groups of Palastin and \textit{Peleset}. As the sources of plunder diminished, the loosening grip of the Hittites on Anatolia and of the Egyptians on Canaan may have rendered settlement in these areas a more attractive possibility to the Sea Peoples there.\footnote{For example, Gilan 2013.}

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Excessive social drinking among pirates served as a major organising principle within their culture. Historical data suggest that crews aboard pirate ships might be larger than institutionalised or state supported navies, with opportunities for increased sharing of plunder arising and larger numbers of crewmembers resulting in less work per person. The sharing of plunder and the accompanying increase of food and alcohol consumption are among the features that made piracy attractive in the 18th century CE to overworked and underfed seamen, with historical sources citing ill use as a factor that motivated seamen to turn to piracy.\footnote{Rediker 2004, pp. 28, 57.} Peasants excluded from the lifestyle of fortified centres might also turn to piracy to improve their economic situation.\footnote{For example, Pennell 1994b, p. 57.} Similar motivations also existed for piracy in the Roman era.\footnote{Braund 1993, p. 206.}

The themes of the \textit{Iliad} and the \textit{Odyssey} yield insights into similar behaviour amongst the Homeric heroes at the end of the Bronze Age,\footnote{The relevance of the Homeric poems to understanding events at the end of the Bronze Age continues to be debated; see papers in Morris and Laffineur 2007. On linguistic continuities between the Homeric poems and the Bronze Age, see Puhvel 1983, 1988.} and they have the potential to serve as models that vividly illustrate the activities of ancient pirates: sacking cities, carrying off women, and particularly, the undertaking of feasts that include the slaughter of sheep and drinking of wine on the shore following a successful raid.\footnote{Hom. \textit{Od.} 9.39–52; Ormerod 1997, pp. 49–50.} This last is significant, as in the Late Bronze Age feasts that included meat and wine were provisioned by the palaces on special occasions,
while workers normally received rations of grain for their daily sustenance. Thus, feasting
as sponsored by the Mycenaean palaces may be characterised as diacritical, that is, with
differentiated cuisine, styles of consumption, and segmented social space used to reify and
naturalise status differences. In contrast, feasting from plunder may represent an activity that
pirates could undertake regularly and enjoy freely, without being dependent on a palatial or
any other authority for the provision of a feast.

As noted above, an egalitarian sharing of spoils, as well as a sharing of food and wine,
through feasting, characterises historical piracy. Pirates of the 18th century CE were well
known to engage in excessive drinking and eating to extents bordering on the carnivalesque,
while maintaining sobriety could arouse suspicion regarding loyalty. An egalitarian style
of leadership, as well as nautical and fighting skills, were also necessary for the pirate
leader or captain to maintain his position of limited power, which correlates well with the
use of the term tarwas. Thus it is interesting that the Homeric word for feasting, dais, is
literally translated as ‘share’, referring to the hosts’ distribution of food to invited partici-
pants at sacrifices, weddings, and funerals.

The practice of a more egalitarian sharing of food and drink by the Homeric era stands in contrast to the provision of diacritical feasts
provisioned by the Mycenaean palaces, as noted above, and fits well with what we know
about the excesses of piratical feasting in more modern times. Sherratt notes that feasting
in the Homeric poems was an activity that took second place only to fighting, suggesting a
greater scale, frequency, and widespread practice of feasting among pirates and perhaps
among their descendants. She regards the term dais as implying sharing and equality,
features that characterised feasting among pirates in the historical era. It may be telling that
the term dais is rarely used in later periods. Sherratt observes that the word ‘soused’
appears twice in the Iliad (as μεθυ) and 15 times in the Odyssey (as μεθουσαν), while the
phrase “feasting on unlimited meat and sweet wine,” appears repeatedly, suggesting the
excessive consumption that characterises piratical activity. Thus, as drinking served as an
organising principle around which pirate society was, it seems likely that ancient pirate
societies were similarly organised. The changing preference for drinking out of deep bowls
in the Late III B2 Aegean and in their increasing popularity in the IIC (12th century BCE)
Mediterranean, over the more showy kylix, which was meant to be raised and had a ten-
dency to spillage, may have promoted a more communal spirit that was compatible with the
egalitarian aspect of pirate culture. A vessel rarely used, but widely attested in the IIC
period was the tankard (examples were found at Tiryns, in coastal Anatolia at Miletus, and

\[\text{99222_Batmaz_08_Hitchcock-Maeir.indd 151}\]
at Maa-Palaeokastro in Cyprus.\textsuperscript{40} It is unusual for its significant volume, as it could hold up to three litres, and Stockhammer associates it with communal alcohol-drinking rituals because of its large capacity.\textsuperscript{41} Although he specifically associates tankard use with communal drinking rituals presided over by the heads of elite families, such rituals could have been similarly undertaken by pirate tribes.

It is interesting that by the Archaic period in Greece, ship-carts were associated with the cult of Dionysos.\textsuperscript{42} The name of Dionysos (\textit{di-wo-nu-so-jo}) is attested in the genitive case in a fragmentary Mycenaean Greek text (Xa06) from Pylos.\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, Wachsmann suggests that Dionysos, ship-carts as represented by the Mycenaean galley ship model on wheels from Abu Gurob, and bringing the cult of Dionysos to Egypt may have been linked to the Sea Peoples phenomenon. More specifically, Emanuel links the ship-model specifically with the tribe of Sea Peoples known as the Sherden, based on their presence in the Egyptian military and society, and on the provenience of the model in Egypt.\textsuperscript{44} These connections might not be coincidental given that Dionysos was a deity of wine-consumption and wine-making, a social and ritual practice connected with historical piracy, Homeric poetry, and establishing social networks. These suggestions indicate that Aegean-style feasting and celebrating a wine deity were connected to the activities of Sea Peoples' tribes under the command of warlords who attained their leadership through personal achievement.

Feasting was attested at sites connected with the inhabitants of 12th century BCE refuge settlements in Crete, as at Late Minoan IIIC Thronos-Kephala, where the urban landscape is dominated by open areas with pits containing feasting debris,\textsuperscript{45} in possible Sea Peoples settlements in Late Cypriot IIIA Cyprus as at Maa-Palaeokastro,\textsuperscript{46} and in Mycenaean IIIC (e.g., Philistine I and II) Philistia, through the use of Aegean-style drinking and pouring vessels, the consumption of meat, and the deposition of exotic items.\textsuperscript{47} Although Mycenaean IIIC pottery was locally made in many areas, put to slightly different uses, and incorporates different decorative elements,\textsuperscript{48} the preference for Aegean-style drinking sets had a lengthy history in the Mediterranean. It began in the Late Bronze Age, when such items were imported from Greece to Cyprus and the Levant. It then continued into the Bronze to Iron Age transition after the distribution networks of the Mycenaean palaces collapsed, requiring different areas of the Mediterranean to develop their own regional production centres.

Several such deposits of feasting ware and of faunal remains at the Philistine site at Tell es-Safi/Gath were associated with symbolic items including a burnt animal figurine fragment, a broken iron blade, and a fragmentary terracotta mould for making plaques of a Canaanite goddess—signifying the entangled nature of the Philistines. Feasting ware included cup and krater fragments of Mycenaean IIIC (Philistine I) and Philistine II or bichrome pottery. Studies of the concept of ‘enchainment’ and symbolic aspects of discard activities suggest that the fragmentary nature of symbolic objects deposited within

\textsuperscript{40} We suggest elsewhere (Hitchcock and Maeir 2014) that Maa-Palaeokastro was a pirate enclave based on its 12th century foundation, defensible location on a promontory, and on the culturally mixed character of its ceramics and architecture.

\textsuperscript{41} Stockhammer 2009.

\textsuperscript{42} Wachsmann 2013, p. 204.

\textsuperscript{43} Ventris and Chadwick 1956, p. 127.

\textsuperscript{44} Emanuel 2014, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{45} For example, D’Agata 1997–2000.

\textsuperscript{46} Hitchcock et al. 2015.

\textsuperscript{47} See, for example, Gilboa 2005; Killebrew 2005; Meiberg 2011; Janeway 2013.
pits and dumps points to their deliberate deposition, whereby joining pieces might be kept as a token of the event to evoke memory, the way we might keep a book of matches today from a special occasion. Commensal activities that preceded these depositions took place in large, outdoor areas where hearths served as focal points for the promotion of corporate identity. The social networks formed at such events and the heightened emotions produced through the consumption of meat and intensive alcohol consumption based on drinking sets may have evoked feelings of nostalgia heightened by taste and smell as well as by shared symbolism displayed on Aegean-style pottery. Regular renewal of hearths and the addition of new ones may have represented sites of competition for status among different clan or tribal-based factions, each jockeying for status through the provision of feasts. The idea of social alliances being built in the context of feasting activity resonates with what we know of 18th century CE pirates conducting business over a large bowl of punch mixed with sugar—a vessel not unlike a Mycenaean krater, where wine might be sweetened with honey and diluted with water. Kraters served as a focal point of drinking activities. Drinking and feasting activities also served as rituals of integration for new pirate volunteers, which bound the tribe together and established loyalty.

Other items symbolic of Sea Peoples identity are the feathered and horned helmets and the bird-head devices on their ships, as depicted on the Medinet Habu reliefs and in other media. Ships with bird-head devices and birds continued to be frequently depicted on Mycenaean IIIC and later Philistine pottery, where other notable emblems such as the spiral occurred on drinking ware with even more frequency (Fig. 1). Like the Jolly Roger, we suggest that these served as rallying symbols around which collective identity (or 'social identity') coalesced during piratical activity. This process continued through the display of Aegean-style pottery in drinking and feasting rituals after a limited migration and integration with known local groups throughout the Mediterranean—where use of Mycenaean pottery had already enjoyed a long tradition. We are not alone in suggesting that the adoption of unifying symbols was a cross-cultural phenomenon among pirates, as Rauh suggests that the ethnonym Kilix (Cilician) served the same role as a unifying symbol like the Jolly Roger in the era of the Cilician pirates during Roman times. He further suggests that the term functioned more as a tribal name than as a designation of ethnic identity, as we do here for the names of various tribes of Sea People.
Fig. 1. Mycenaean-style deep or bell-shaped bowl with spiral decoration, transition from Philistine I–II, 12th century BCE, Tell es-Safi/Gath, Israel (photo courtesy of the Ackerman Family Bar-Ilan Excavation to Gath).
CONCLUSIONS

It has been suggested that the collapse of Mycenaean (and other) polities in the 12th-century BCE would have led to a fragmentation of collective identity. As the disenfranchised joined those with seafaring skills, the Mediterranean seascape no doubt contributed to the formation and transformation of new tribal entities sailing under the various tribal names of the era. Further, we suggest that the social display of Sea Peoples regalia as well as Aegean-style pottery in the context of drinking and feasting activity contributed to maintaining group cohesion within their pirate tribes, led by warlords adopting the title tarwanis or seren, and that such performances of sociality would continue to strengthen social bonds in the context of drinking ceremonies after their limited migration and settlement in various parts of the Mediterranean. With the discovery of new inscriptions identifying Tell Tayinat as the ‘land of Palastin’, an additional hint of the complex nature of the group name ‘Philistines’ has now emerged, with the new evidence of the name ‘Palistin’—very similar to ‘Philistine’—in use in early Iron Age Syria and Anatolia—by other groups with Aegean connections as noted above. If this is the case, then the very definition of what it means to be a Philistine, or to be called a Philistine, becomes even more multifaceted.

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58 For example, Leriou 2011, p. 264.
59 As no doubt, feasting activity contributed to group cohesion throughout human history, e.g., Hitchcock et al. 2015; Maeir 2015.
60 For example, Harrison 2008; Singer 2012; Weeden 2013; see though Schneider 2012.
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