THE PUBLIC SACRED IDENTITY OF ROMAN ASCALON

Robyn Le Blanc

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Approved by:

Jodi Magness

Jennifer Gates-Foster

James B. Rives

Monika Trūmper

Luca Grillo

ABSTRACT

Robyn Le Blanc, The Public Sacred Identity of Roman Ascalon
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Memory, a shared sense of the past, and public institutions were three important cultural processes that articulated and perpetuated the collective identity of ancient communities. Civic and cultural institutions in the Roman Empire, particularly those related to civic cults and mythology, often provided the context for the articulation of collective identities within a community, and a negotiation of the community's identity in a larger regional and imperial context. Ascalon, the best documented city on the southern coast, is an ideal case study for an exploration of the role of memory, mythology, cults, and images of the gods in local discourses surrounding collective identity.

I explore how Ascalon's past as a Canaanite, Philistine, Phoenician, and independent Hellenistic polis influenced the community's cults, mythology, and the deployment of its deities in public media. I frame a discussion of the late Hellenistic and Roman period cults within their historical contexts, pointing toward the continued association of Ascalon with the Philistines and Phoenicians as a key element influencing the city's later identity. I provide an overview of the evidence for civic cult at Ascalon, and establish key trends in their presentation that I explore more fully in case studies. In the first case study I discuss how the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was used to express changing notions about the identity of the city and its connections to the Hellenistic and Greek world. Next, I provide an overview of the different mythological

stories concerning Ascalon, arguing that the Lydian heroes Mopsos and Ascalus, and the local

goddess Derceto, reflected the local cultural memory of ancient migrations and connections

between the Greek world and the coast of Palestine. I conclude that the ways that the community

remembered its past and expressed its public sacred identity were similar to the methods

employed by other cities in the Roman Empire. I argue that images of gods and references to

local cults were used deliberately in certain significant moments to emphasize the community's

connections to the Mediterranean world, or to emphasize Ascalon's importance and antiquity

within the region.

For Nathan.
For all the things.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANET   J.B. Prichard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, 1969).

ANS   *American Numismatic Society* collection number.

BAPD   *Beazley Archive Pottery Database*, www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/pottery/

BM   British Museum archival number.

CIJ   J.-B. Frey, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* (1936-1952).

CIJP III   *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaeae/Palaestinae* (2010-).

CIL   Königlich Preussiche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum* (1893-).

CIS   *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* (1881-).

DCPP   *Dictionnaire de la civilization phénicienne et punique* (1992).

EA   *Epigraphica Anatolica.*

EAD   *Exploration Archéologique de Délos* (1914-).

FGrH   F. Jacoby, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (1923–).

GD   P. Bruneau and J. Ducat , eds., *Guide de Délos*, (Paris, 1966).

ID   F. Dürrbach et al., *Inscriptions de Délos* (1926–).

IG II^2 *Inscriptiones Graecae* (1873-).

IGROM   *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes* (1906-)

IGUR   L. Moretti, ed., *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae* (1968-1990).

KAI   *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (1966-).

KTU   Dietrich, Manfried, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin, eds. *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Second edition. (Münster, 1995).

LIMC   J. Boardman, *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* (1981–2009).

LSJ   H.G. Liddell et al., *Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. (Oxford, 1940)

PMGF   *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (1991)

RIC   H. Mattingly et al., *The Roman Imperial Coinage* (1923–)

RPC   *Roman Provincial Coinage* (1992-)

TrGF   B. Snell, R. Kannicht, S. Radt, eds., *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 6
              vols (1971-2004), vol 1^2 (1986)

Ancient texts follow the standard abbreviation practices from the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*,
Third Revised Edition.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This project explores the ways that public sacred identity was expressed in cult and mythology in communities in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Ascalon, a city on the southern coast of Palestine (Fig.1.1 & 1.2), serves as a case study to investigate the material expressions and strategies used by local elites to articulate and perpetuate the sacred identity of the city. Ascalon is an ideal case study because it is an example of a "Hellenized" coastal community embedded in several different cultural, religious and political spheres throughout the period under study. A community's cultural memory, the way the past is remembered and articulated in ritual, myths and civic institutions, is one of the bases for a group's collective identity. Ascalon's pre-Greek history is well-documented, and the community's past as a Philistine and Phoenician city serves as a case study of how non-Greek pasts influenced the collective identity of communities in Roman Palestine. Different ways of remembering and forgetting this past were used by the elites in Ascalon to circumscribe the community's public sacred identity for a variety of reasons: to gain prestige for the city; to position the city as a member of the Greco-Roman world; to explain the origins of practices; and, to reinforced regional and Mediterranean relationships.

In this chapter I first provide an overview of the theoretical framework and terminology adopted in this study. I show that cultural memory, polis-religion, and globalization are interconnected and all three processes impact the creation and cultivation of the public sacred

identity of a Roman city. Next, I discuss the nature of the literary, epigraphic, architectural, numismatic, and sculptural evidence used to trace public sacred identity. I give an overview of each collection of material, including information about problems and lacunae in the evidence. Finally, I identify the research questions and goals of this dissertation and discuss how each material group was collected and categorized in order to address these questions and goals. Finally, as a guide to the reader, I summarize the contents and arguments in each chapter.

I have identified three main processes that influenced the creation of public sacred identity in the Roman world: cultural memory, polis-religion, and globalization. These three cultural processes worked together to influence and structure the performance and material production of Ascalon's identity. Cultural memory, the community's shared sense of the past embodied in myths, traditions, and rituals, is one of the strongest factors influencing a community's collective identity. Cultural memory is embodied and maintained through civic institutions, including religious institutions. These institutions themselves derive from and are legitimized by cultural memory as well. The community institution and processes that preserve cultural memory in the religious sphere is called polis-religion. Polis-religion, civic institutions, and cultural memory are all internal forces, working within the community to define the group's identity. The community is also influenced by external sources, including the formal and informal political, economic, religious, and social institutions of a region, kingdom, or empire. These influences, which I explore through the modern globalization theoretical framework, change the community and produce new global practices and trends. I explore cultural memory, polis-religion, and globalization in the next section, and provide examples of these processes. Then, I define the terms "public" and "public sacred identity."

Cultural Memory

Cultural memory is the collective memory of a group of people that is externalized and
embedded in socio-cultural institutions. It is perpetuated in myth, traditions, and rituals
performed by or for the community.[1] Jan and Aleida Assmann use this phrase to differentiate the
memory experienced by a community and preserved in civic institutions and tradition from the
social memory studied by Halbwachs.[2] According to Jan Assmann:

> the concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals
> specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' seems to stabilize and convey
> that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not
> exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.[3]

Unlike social memory, cultural memory is long-lasting and is passed down through many
generations.   This tenacity derives from the fact that cultural memory is perpetuated by civic,
social, and political institutions.[4] Cultural memory is manifested in myths, traditions, rituals, and
symbols which "may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which
we have invested into them."[5] Performing religious rituals, participating in festivals and

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[1] Assmann 2006, 1-30; Halbwachs 1975.

[2] Assmann 2006, 3. Assmann defines social memory in the following way: "non-institutional; it is not supported by
any institutions of learning, transmission, and interpretation; it is not cultivated by specialists and it is not summoned
or celebrated on special occasions; it is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives
in everyday interaction and communication, and for this very reason, has only a limited time depth which normally
reaches no farther back than eighty years" (2008, 111).

[3] Assmann, as quoted by Bommas (2011, 3).

[4] Assmann 2006, 6-8; 2008, 110-111.

[5] Assmann 2008, 111.

processions, telling myths and religious stories, and representing deities in art are all what Assmann calls "procedures of culturally formed memory" related to religion.[6] They make aspects of memory and culture visible within a framework that enables these memories to endure and be preserved.[7] Each of these acts is a way of recalling the past in a public context. Remembering involves the implicit consent of the community to the particular details, events and structure of that retelling. Multiple retellings, depictions or performances give the memory a ritual or formulaic quality that reinforces the sense that the memory is traditional and significant.[8]

Cultural memory is just as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. According to Assmann, the act of remembering "means pushing other things into the background, making distinctions, obliterating many things in order to shed light on others."[9] Remembering implies also forgetting certain events, perspectives, and choices. The act of remembering invites changes and modifications to the memory. Cultural memory is expressive, and performance of the memory occurs in a temporal context that is influenced by political and social institutions and situations. Different perspectives, changes in local priorities, and outside influences impact a cultural memory, how it is expressed and whether or not it is understood.[10] For example, the

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[6] Assmann 2006, 18.

[7] Without these frameworks, memory is not preserved in the types of meaningful ways that make it essential for a group' understanding of themselves and the past. Memory and culture are constantly fighting against forgetting, or "oblivion." Assmann (2006, 81) summarizes and expands on Thomas Macho's description of "cultures as islands in the ocean of oblivion." He writes: "All culture is a struggle with oblivion…. Can we not regard this entire unceasing labor on forms of culture, this constant process of making visible and articulating, of presentation and preservation, as one long mnemotechnical project in which memory creates markers in the struggle against the furies of disappearance and forgetting, and builds stopping places in the river of chance and disintegration?"

[8] Assmann 2008, 115.

[9] Assmann 2006, 3.

[10] See the example discussed by Connerton (1989, 3-16).

influx of a new population or demographic changes may trigger changes in cultural memory to erase or obscure events or details that isolate or oppose new groups. Forgetting becomes a way of maintaining unity within the community by providing new narratives and details that normalize contemporary situations with explanations from the past.[11] The traditional, institutional quality of cultural memory may prevent constant dynamic changes to it, but neither is it a static, monolithic entity. As Assmann asserts, "cultural memory is complex, pluralistic, and labyrinthine; it encompasses a quantity of… group identities that differ in time and place and draws its dynamism from these tensions and contradictions."[12]

Cultural memory involves the community as a group, and is concerned with connecting and unifying them through a shared identity.[13] A community's cultural memory emphasizes a shared sense of the past, and provides origins for practices and beliefs that frame the community's daily life. These aspects, in turn, form collective identity by circumscribing features that are shared and symbolically remembered by the community together.[14] Alcock sums this up: "People derive identity from shared remembrance…which in turn provides them with an image of their past and a design for their future."[15] Identity and cultural memory are linked and mutually reinforcing.

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[11] Assmann 2008, 114.

[12] Assmann 2006, 29.

[13] Assmann 2006, 6-11.

[14] Assmann 2011, 111-119.

[15] Alcock 2002, 1.

The potency of cultural memory and its close connection to civic institutions results in the use of memory to express and perpetuate power structures.[16] The community as a whole remembers, but elites control the contexts, institutions, expressions, and storage of memory.[17] As Alcock notes, "elite commemorative choices are ultimately—inevitably—going to prove most visible and effective; it is their version of the past that, most frequently, will be 'recorded and preserved.'"[18] An obvious example is the variety of ways that Augustus invoked Aeneas and Romulus, the two ancient heroes of the Roman people, to produce opportunities and contexts for gaining and wielding political and social power.[19] Other leaders have manipulated the past in similar ways. For example, Tlacaelel, an early leader of the Aztec Triple Alliance, obscured the impoverished history of the Mexica by modifying the foundation story of Tenochtitlan, promoting the Mexica patron deity Huitzilopochtli as an essential god in the Nahua pantheon, and arguing for ancient connections between the Mexica and the now-defunct empires of the Toltecs and Teotihuacan.[20] These connections were expressed in monumental art, architecture, religious rituals, literature, and clothing.

Recent debates over Mount Denali in Alaska highlight how tensions over different perspectives and versions of the past can result in accusations of elite politicization. A gold prospector from Ohio called the mountain McKinley during a visit to Alaska in 1896. The name was in honor of then-presidential candidate William McKinley, intended to promote McKinley's

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[16] Alcock 2002, 17-18. As Assmann (2011, 53) writes, "one strong incentive for memory is power." Memory legitimizes power, and power perpetuates different memory narratives. See below.

[17] The role of archives discussed by Assmann (2011, 327-332) is a good example of elite control over the preservation, storage and access to objects of cultural memory.

[18] Alcock 2002, 18.

[19] Zanker 1988.

[20] The role of Huitzilopochtli: Carrasco 1999, 32-37. Appropriation of the past: Umberger 1996.

support of the gold standard.[21] McKinley had no ties to the mountain, or to Alaska. In 1917 the Federal government officially recognized Mount McKinley, despite the use of the name Denali for the mountain by the native Athabascan people and those living in Alaska. In 1975 the Alaska State Legislature requested the name of the mountain be changed to Denali, but the Federal Government did not order the change until August 28, 2015.[22]

Debate over the name focused on the lack of ties between McKinley and Alaska, the politicized nature of the original naming process, and the idea that changing the name from McKinley was disrespectful to the deceased president.[23] This last point was strongly articulated by congressional representatives from Ohio, the birthplace of McKinley. President Obama's 2015 decision to approve the use of the name Denali in federal publications was criticized by Ohio Republicans and primary candidates for forgetting the mountain's recent history.[24] In 2001 Ohio Representative Ralph Regula invoked tradition and the past, saying that McKinley "was a martyred president, and a good one, I might add. In any event, the mountain was named after him many, many years ago."[25] Alaska Governor Bill Walker invoked local tradition in favor of Denali, saying, "Alaska's place names should reflect and respect the rich cultural history of our state."[26] This example highlights the intersection between different cultural memory communities and perspectives. The significance of Alaska's local identity and cultural memory

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[21] Kaplan, 2015 (August).

[22] The US Department of the Interior, Order 3337.

[23] Ibid.

[24] The mountain was called Denali in Alaska after the 1975 resolution.

[25] Kaplan 2015 (August). Additional responses echoed this line of thinking. Ohio governor John Kasich argued against the change to Denali: "You just don't go and do something like that. In Ohio, we felt it was appropriate. A guy saw that mountain when he was one of the first up there… named it after the president. No reason to change it." (Associated Press Sep 1 2015).

[26] Memoli 2015 (August).

is set against the desire of Ohioans to memorialize a local figure of significance to the cultural memory of the United States.[27] The adoption of the name McKinley for the mountain and its use for a century, demonstrates how elite monopolization of the past prevented the articulation of cultural memory by local Alaskans because this type of cultural memory was not considered essential to the cultural identity and priorities of non-Alaskan politicians.

Cultural Memory and Material Culture

Cultural memory can be studied by archaeologists because, as Alcock notes, memory is "embedded and supported within a material framework."[28] Cultural memory is preserved in civic institutions and traditions, both of which are supported by material culture. Urban layout, political and religious buildings, statues of founders, and memorials are all examples of material expressions of a city's cultural memory. Festivals and public gatherings are set in a physical context and include objects that aid in remembrance and the performance of ritual. The cultural and social memory in the Roman world has been successfully studied by several scholars over the last decade, particularly in literature and material culture of the Eastern empire.[29]

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[27] The desire to avoid elite and institutionalized politicization of cultural memory objects has led to the democratization the process of designing and selecting memorials and material objects that represent national or cultural identities. Both the designs for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the World War II Memorial were selected after open national competitions, as was the design for the first generation Euro bills. The US Department of the Treasury announced in 2013 that the US $10 note will be redesigned before 2020 to feature a woman. Although the designs of past US notes have been decided by the Secretary of the Treasure, and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the Department of the Treasury launched a public initiate to solicit opinions and views from the public on the redesign, including a website called "TheNew10" and a social media campaign which asks people to post ideas and opinions with #TheNew10 for the Treasury Department to view. The redesign's website (https://thenew10.treasury.gov/faqs) also notes that "various Treasury officials will be conducting roundtables, town halls, and other meetings to collect input."

[28] Ibid. 2.

[29] Alcock 1993, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; van Dyke and Alcock 2003. Braund, Gill, and Wiseman 2003; Bommas, Harrisson and Roy 2012; Galinsky 2014. See now Galinsky and Lapatin 2016.

Elites and people in power are important catalysts for the articulation of cultural memory because it is embedded in and perpetuated by community institutions.[30] Inhabitants who perform services on behalf of the community typically do so in the context of a civic or social institution in the Roman world. If a religious festival or local myth is an expression and perpetuation of the community's cultural memory, it is the local elites who are primarily involved in selecting the medium for the expression, the way the memory is expressed, and the actual expression itself.[31] The existence of the institution itself is a manifestation of a community's cultural memory; an expression of how civic life should be, rooted in beliefs about the past.[32] In turn, civic institutions in the Roman world gave order to the community by organizing daily life, and preventing large-scale change and innovations that might subvert the community's cultural memory and way of doing things.

The introduction of the Euro currency is an example of how cultural memory is embedded in a material framework produced by civic institutions. In 1992 the European Central Bank began working on an international banknote series for the newly established European Union.[33] An advisory committee for the European Central Bank considered 18 different themes for the first generation of notes. These themes included "maps of Europe through the ages," "myths and legends," and "Great European figures associated with a single discipline." The commission was conscious of avoiding "gender or national bias" and used those criteria to

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[30] They are not the only actors in the expression of cultural memory. Elites and related expressions of cultural memory is easier to trace in the archaeological and literary record because of the abundance of evidence.

[31] Many of these aspects are themselves embedded in institutions and traditional practices (e.g. local patrons donating funds for buildings).

[32] Institutions were underpinned and recognized with commemorative ceremonies, which recalled the significance of the practiced and linked new office-holders to the history of the institution (Connerton 1989, 6-13; 41-71).

[33] Heinonen 2015, 32-35.

narrow the list of design themes to three: "ages and styles of Europe," "heritage of Europe," and "abstract theme and security."[34] "Ages and styles of Europe" as represented by architectural styles European architectural styles was selected for the first generation Euro notes. [35] The notes were decorated with windows and bridges reflecting seven European architectural styles. between the eighth century BCE and the 20th century CE.[36] Those who liked the design saw the bridges and windows "as a fitting metaphor for the project of 'building' Europe" and saw the chronological span of the designs as an attempt to "establish links to a common European tradition" by referring "back to the classical ancestry of Europe" to construct "a common European historical memory."[37] In his study of contemporary European identity, Formäs focused on the symbolism offered by the use of bridges and windows: "the very wish to mediate, link and communicate may… itself be interpreted as typically European."[38] These positives responses emphasize how the Euro materially reinforced the notion of a common European identity by anchoring it to a shared past.

Not everyone was satisfied. A ten year retrospective of the design, published in The Guardian, focused on criticism for the Euro notes, quoting a Swiss art historian who called the Euro "ugly," and a Dutch designer who called the Euro a "missed emotional opportunity."[39] The same popular article cited French ethnologist Patrick Prado's critique: the Euro is "ghost money" and has "no reference, no country, no past, no roots, no memory…" Critics viewed the

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[34] Ibid. 57.

[35] Ibid. 58.

[36] Ibid. 58-68.

[37] Kaelberer 2004, 170.

[38] Fornäs 2012, 219.

[39] Chrisafis 2011 (December).

designs as empty symbols devoid of cultural memory. The negative responses demonstrate that

the cultural memory behind a collective European identity is still in its formative stages. To the

EU commission and proponents of the design, in contrast, the lack of symbols underpinned by

nationally-specific cultural memory, was the whole idea. According to Kaelberer, the Euro "has

to be understood as part of [the] realignment process" from national to international identities.[40]

Cultural Memory and Polis-Religion

Cultural memory plays an important role in religion, and religion gives structure and

expression to cultural memory. Polis-religion is one of the ways that communities remember the

past, and particularly past relationships with their gods. This remembering helps organize the

present by using festivals, rituals, and depictions of the gods to explain the past and the nature of

the community. Polis-religion is a model according to which the "polis provided the fundamental

framework in which Greek religion operated."[41] In this model, religious practice and expression

were primarily (although not exclusively) embedded within the social and political framework of

the Greek polis.[42] The appeal of this model for Roman scholars lies in potential to insert it into

the preexisting narrative of power in Roman cities.[43] This narrative sees cities as the primary

political and social unit in the Roman world, and posits the indivisibility of politics and religion

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[40] Kaelberer 2004, 177. See also Fornäs 2012, 205-250.

[41] Sourvinou-Inwood 1990, 295. See also Sourvinou-Inwood's (1988) chapter expanding on these ideas, and Rives'(2010) discussion of the polis-religion model in the context of approaches to Greco-Roman religion under the Roman Empire. In the Roman world, this is sometimes called the "civil model of religion" (for example, Rives 1995).

[42] Kindt 2009, 13-14.

[43] Belayche 2001, 70-76.

within the structure of the city.[44] Critics of polis-religion model focused have on its inability to

address categories of personal practice of belief (for example, Christianity), and its

oversimplification of the complex practices of ancient religion.[45]

Despite these criticisms, the polis-religion model is adopted here because it explains and

emphasizes connectivity between religion, the past, identity, community and power hierarchies

in the city.[46] The focus of this study is on the expression of a collective identity in public spaces,

much of the evidence for which is embedded in the elite social and political structures of the

city.[47]

Polis-religion includes a variety of the "procedures of culturally formed memory"

identified by Assmann that act a way of communicating ideas about identity and values to the

community.[48] Civic gods are worshipped through rituals, prayers, festivals, stories, and the

creations of images. All of these acts involve remembrance in several different ways. The

community's sense of the past is preserved in these elements because sacred activities are

connected to some event in the past, or because they are simply "the way things are done." Civic

cults are connected to the community's past because the cults were founded in the past and their

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[44] A relationship problematized by Dignas (2002) and traced as it gradually declined in the third century CE by Rives (1995). Gordon (1990) sees this lack of separation as a domination strategy employed by Roman elites; he calls the connection between religious and political positions the 'civic compromise.'

[45] Woolf's discussion (1997) of polis-religion outlined these critiques (and others), but he ultimately concluded that it was still a useful perspective (if applied thoughtfully). Bendlin (2000) and Rüpke (1999), find the model too rigid and constricting, and supply instead a "market place" model that posits the existence of a wide-range of choices for worshippers in urban religious life. Kindt (2009, 2012) also criticizes the restrictive focus "on the polis as the primary discourse of power relevant for the study of ancient Greek religion" (2009, 30).

[46] It should be noted that other theories and perspectives suggested in place of polis-religion also emphasize connectivity and embeddedness as key features in the relationship between cities and public cult (Eidinow 2011).

[47] The boundary between public and private cult sometimes overlaps, as in the case of the inclusion of the *genius* of the empire in *lararia*, or the existence of Isiac worship in both public and more exclusive (or private) settings. The worship in public, in these cases, can inspire, reinforce or supplement the utility of cult practice in private. However, this category of evidence is not considered in this study.

[48] Assmann 2006, 18; 2011, 120.

origins were often explained by myths and origin stories. The origin of a cult is further anchored

to the past through real or imagined links to a historical event in the community. Additionally,

rituals involved the renewal of a past and continuing relationship to a deity.

Identity

In this study I define identity as a convenient label for a process or discourse about an

actual or perceived state of being. Identities circumscribe people based on the perception (real or

not) of "sameness."[49] Any and all identities are not static but depend on the performance and

acknowledgement of those identities. For this reason, an identity is a dynamic discourse. People

may have multiple, sometimes overlapping, identities, which are manifested in different contexts

or for different reasons. Identities, by their very nature here are mutable, multiple and

multifaceted.[50]

Another key aspect of identity is that it is created and perpetuated through performance

and action, which themselves reflect cultural memory. Phenomenological approaches suggest

that the cityscape and the experience of living in this landscape help produce and structure

identities.[51] Identities are acted out, on an individual, group or community level, and this social

practice reinforces identities.[52] Performance is structured by the material world, and produces

material evidence in the form of objects, architecture and art. This link between performance

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[49] Handler 1994, 28-30. Millar (1993, 226-227) and Assmann (2011, 111) note that identities are situated in the self-perception of a person or group in a moment, even if this identity is not recognized as "true" by observers.

[50] Past identities are still fluid today, because, as Handler (1994, 30) points out, that for modern scholars "to talk about identity is to change or construct it, despite the dominant epistemology of identity, which specifies immutability."

[51] Bourdieu 2012 [1977], 78-95.

[52] Mac Sweeney 2011, 37.

and materiality means that identities can be observed, measured and characterized through the study of the material traces of that evidence.[53] For example, the first generation Euro design attempted to materially ground a sense of pan-European identity in the past by using architecture as symbols of the past.

Studies on identity have formed a crucial component of Roman archaeology since the 1980's, emerging out of studies on Romanization, cultural change, and the lived experiences of ancient peoples. The original Romanization paradigm was exemplified by the top-down model of cultural change found in the provincial studies of Mommsen and Haverfield.[54] In this model, identity was tied up in binary constructions of "imperial" vs. "provincial" and "Roman" vs. "native"; what Bhaba terms "fixity."[55] In the second half of the twentieth century Romanization was problematized, and heavily revised, before being largely discarded by modern scholars in favor of other, more critical and dynamic perspectives. [56] Influenced by post-colonial and subaltern studies, new approaches emerged to order and understand cultural formation and change: resistance, creolization, syncretism, discrepant identity, hybridity, and elite negotiation are just a few of the new frameworks applied to the study of the Roman provinces by scholars in the past twenty years.[57] All attempt to move away from the binary systems reinforced by the

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[53] E.g. Alcock 1997, 109-111; Rogers 1991, 80-82; Hingley 2005, 72-74; Mac Sweeney 2011, 42-44.

[54] Mommsen 1886; Haverfield 1912.

[55] Bhaba (2010 [1994], 94-95) notes that fixity refers to the emphasis on differences in colonial discourses, and "connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition."

[56] The problems with the term "Romanization", and the concept of a unidirectional, top-down approach to cultural change, are summarized by Barrett (1997). The bibliography is immense, but fairly homogenous in the standard critiques of the term. Hingley (2005, 14-48) discusses the development of Romanization, and reflects on the connection between modern worldviews and how we view the past. Mattingly (2011, 38-41) includes a succinct appraisal of the rise and fall of Romanization.

[57] Among the most influential of these works: Bénabou 1976; Millett 1990; Woolf 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998; Alcock 1993; Webster 1997, 2001, 2003; Keay and Terrenato 2001; Terrenato 1998; Hingley 2005; van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007; Mattingly 2007, 2011; Revell 2009; and the papers in edited volumes by Webster and Cooper 1996

dichotomy between 'Roman' and 'provincial' in early Romanization-centric theories. These frameworks also take into account the existence of multiple overlapping experiences, reactions and agency enjoyed by peoples in the Roman Empire.

In this study I focus on the public sacred identity of a community influenced in part through cultural memory and expressed in polis-religion. I define public sacred identity as a form of collective identity that includes the totality of religious and sacred acts occurring public contexts on behalf of or with the community. Community identities, like other forms of identity, emphasize "what is shared, so that social differences are played down and temporarily pushed aside."[58] Community identities are embedded in a particular connection to the past, location, and space. Here, the space that circumscribes the collective identity of the people under discussion is the geographic and abstract bounds of the city of Ascalon, and the past is the sense of a depth of time stretching back at least to the Bronze Age.

'Public'

By "public" I mean spaces, complexes, buildings and contexts that were highly visible and usually accessible either physically or symbolically by the community as a whole. Nearly all of the known contexts for the physical evidence discussed here were wholly public, available for interaction by all members of the community, and any visitors. The images and spaces under study structured the community's relationship with its gods, and expressed this identity to local

and Mattingly 1997. Post-colonial works by Spivak (esp. 1988, and recently 2008), Said (1993), and Bhaba (1994) have been especially influential for Roman scholars, while resistance studies (Scott 1985, 1990) have also transformed the way we understand the agency of provincial peoples.

[58] Mac Sweeney 2011, 38.

residents as well as to visitors.[59] Locally minted city coins were available to anyone conducting business in the city.

Public and private spaces exist on a spectrum, and different spaces may have functioned in multiple ways. For example, Damon, son of Demetrios set up a dedicatory altar to Aphrodite Ourania and Zeus Ourios in thanksgiving for his deliverance from pirates on Delos in the late second century BCE. [60] We should read this as the expression of a private relationship made in a public setting. Damon, although identifying himself as an Ascalonian (*'Ασκαλωίτησ*), does not make his dedication on behalf of the community.

In contrast, an Ascalonian banker active on Delos during the late second century BCE, paid for and erected an altar to Poseidon and Aphrodite-Ourania on behalf of himself, his family and the Ascalonian people.[61] The banker, Philostratus, explicitly claims to represent the "city of the Ascalonians" ('Ασκαλωνιτων πόλεωσ). However, the altar on which this inscription appears was located in a small sanctuary on the slopes of the island's sacred Mount Kynthos, in an area dedicated to the gods of Ascalon. The space and the inscription are considered here to be public in nature. While the sanctuary was for Ascalonians, it was located in close proximity to the shrines of gods from other cities, and visitors to those spaces may have been part of the inscription's audience. There is no indication that access to the sanctuary was restricted in any way. Although this space might be considered more private due to its relatively isolated location, the sanctuary was still accessible to a wide group of people.

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[59] See Revell (2009, 110-149, 162-172) for an example of this phenomenon in the northwest provinces of the Roman Empire.

[60] *ID* 1754. The Greek inscription reads: "to Zeus Ourious and Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, to the gods who listen to prayers, Damon, son of Demetrios, the Ascalonian, rescued from pirates, a vow. It is not proper to give a goat, a pig or a heifer."

[61] *ID* 1719. The sanctuary and the altar are both discussed in Plassart's report (1928) on the cultic spaces on the slopes of Mount Kynthos. The inscription is considered further in Chapter 2.

Globalization

While cultural memory explains the role of the past in the community, and the polis-religion model deals with how civic institutions framed remembrance in a religious context, globalization models place these actions within large-scale networks that allow us to trace relationships between communities over a large geographical extent. These global relationships order the community within a complex power and cultural network in the Mediterranean.[62]

Globalization as an explanatory framework was developed in response to the increased interconnectivity of the modern world. Roland Robertson, a globalization theorist, has argued that "globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness about the world as a whole."[63] Globalization envisions the existence of world-wide networks in which local changes can effect structural changes, which then have an impact on the rest of the system. The influence of globalization as a theoretical framework through which to view the modern world in the 1990's cannot be overstated.[64] It gave scholars a way to understand and discuss both the positive and negative implications of an increasingly interconnected world.[65]

Globalization has become increasingly popular for Roman provincial archaeologists over the past decade because of the emphasis on connectivity between communities, and how symbols and practices travel between communities. Globalization is related to structuralism and world

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[62] Mann 2012 [1986].

[63] Robertson 1992, 8.

[64] It has also entered the popular consciousness through books (Ritzer 1993, Friedman 2005, Lovelock 2006) pondering the implications of increased connectivity.

[65] Many studies are concerned with the vulnerabilities and tensions that arise out of this interconnectedness, especially in the wake of the global recession in the late 2000's (Axford 2013, 1).

systems studies, which were fruitfully applied to the ancient world beginning in the 1970's.[66]

These larger systems and network perspectives allowed scholars to talk about formal (political, economic) and informal (cultural, social, ecological) facets of supralocal connectedness.

Despite the critique that the structures and networks of the ancient Mediterranean were regional but not global, globalization is well-suited as a heuristic framework for this region due to its emphasis on connectivity.[67] Where the origins of globalization studies focused on the transformative power of the internet and other technologies, interest in this paradigm has caused it to be applied to other areas of the modern world "that are highly relevant to the Roman world (as connectivity, identity, inequality and cultural imagination)."[68] In addition, with the growth of scholarly interest in middle-range global approaches, the paradigm of globalization has opened up to allow for definitions that treat "global" as a relative or ideological, rather than spatial, concept.

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[66] The two key works remain Braudel (1972) and Wallerstein (1974). World systems theory was a popular theoretical framework among archaeologists, especially those studying the economy, in the 1980's and 1990's (Rowlands, Larsen and Kristiansen 1987; Woolf 1990). Scholars have debated the applicability of the theory to pre-capitalist societies, and also rejected the binary dichotomies produced by an uncritical 'center vs. periphery' approach, but elements of the world-systems framework continue to be useful in understanding how different spaces and places in the empire were connected (Mattingly 2011, 16-18). Robertson (1992) and Axford (2013, 42-45) discuss the connections between world systems theory and globalization at length.

[67] See, for example, Appadurai's (1996, 27) assertion that "it takes only the merest acquaintance with the facts of the modern world to note that it is now an interactive system in a sense that is strikingly new". Giddens (1984, 238-239) aligns globalization with the modern world, arguing that modern technology brought about the starting point for the two key characteristics of a global world: compression of time and space brought about by long-distance communication, and the resulting uncoupling of relationships and local contexts. Hodos (2014, 240-252) provides an up-to-date discussion of the major critiques of applying globalization to the ancient world. In the same volume, Pitts and Versluys (2014b, 5-25) argue that globalizing studies in the Roman world can help push the field past area studies and binary paradigms. Hingley (2011) supports the use of globalization because the contemporary character of the framework makes our inability to approach the ancient world objectively and without anachronism, more obvious.

[68] Pitts and Versluys 2014b, 22. An emphasis on the world economy and technology (especially the internet) was popular in globalization theories in the 1990s. These features continue to be important in modern globalization studies. Thus, Schirato and Webb (2003, 46) assert "technology is one of the most prominent of the many areas used to characterize globalization." However, globalization studies have always been interested in the ways that technology and a global economy impact culture and local identities (Appadurai 1996).

In this vein, regionalism has become an important perspective. Regionalism is interested in how regions of different sizes and definitions interact with supraregional and global networks and systems. In the ancient Mediterranean, this had led to the discussion of "the Mediterranean" or "Mediterraneanism", a concept which has been intensely debated in the wake of the publication of *The Corrupting Sea*.[69]

For this project, I characterize the Late Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean as a dynamic global network made up of smaller, shifting sub-regions. This perspective is consistent with how the Greeks and Romans thought of their own places within the Mediterranean, and also allows us to foreground the processes through which these different scales of connectivity were created and negotiated. It is essential to understand the boundaries of this network as neither static nor necessarily tied to the institutions of the Hellenistic kingdoms and Roman state. I see the peoples of the Mediterranean as linked into this network in locally and regionally specific ways, and argue that the nature of their participation in the network was uneven and always in flux.[70]

The Hellenistic *koiné*, which Versluys has used to describe the range of socio-cultural practices, strategies and styles is embedded in this network;, it is the "common language used and supplied and *further developed* by all participants."[71] The elements that make up this language are not "blank" but are "imbued with a lot of cultural memory circling around concepts."[72] Cultural memory is embedded in the object as part of its biography, and helps give

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[69] Horden and Purcell 2000. For recent discussions of Mediterraneanism, see Purcell's attempt (2005) to problematize the definition of "Mediterranean" and various other papers in Malkin (2005), including a study by Morris (2005).

[70] A crucial point to Pitts and Versluys (2014b, 14).

[71] Versluys 2014, 153-156. Emphasis mine.

[72] Ibid. 166.

the object significance in its local context. Change occurs as part of a dynamic process in which images and practice enter the network, where they become part of the Hellenistic *koiné* and are adopted, adapted and reintegrated into the system with new elements and new constituent meanings. For this reason, it is important to understand two levels at which a practice or image are created. "Universal" or "global" is commonly used to refer to the "styles and elements that originally belonged to a specific culture and are detached from that specific culture in order to place a role in a larger system."[73] When these universal elements or practices become detached their object biographies and function changes, and their use in a new context gives them "localized" or "particular" meanings and uses. The "universal" and the "particular" are not diametric opposites, but are rather in constant dialogue, and in a constant state of being modified and reinterpreted.

Each stage of this analysis attempts to see how the Ascalonians created and curated their public sacred identity by engaging with the Hellenistic *koiné*, while also looking at the ways in which this engagement fostered important relationships with other regions.[74] Assmann notes that when memory is employed in forming identities, there is always "a notion of difference," which is challenged by globalization, which "works in the direction of diffusion, blurring all boundaries and bridging all differences."[75] The public sacred identity of Ascalon is the manifestation of the strategies and institutions employed by the elites of the community to stabilize this tension and to recognize the changes produced to cultural memory by outside influences. Increased

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[73] Ibid, 155.

[74] This approach is recently popular, and has been successfully employed by multiple scholars dealing with Greek and Roman East. Whitmarsh 2010; Mac Sweeney 2011; Pitts and Versluys 2014a.

[75] Assmann 2010, 123. He notes that syncretism between two different traditions, memories, or practices is one way to address the tension between cultural memory and globalization.

connectivity between Ascalon and Mediterranean networks impacted cultural memory through the introduction of new institutions and ways to articulate identity and the past.

Why study public sacred identity?

Public sacred identity is an important topic for Roman provincial archaeologists because of the interconnectedness between local, regional and imperial politics, society, religion and the past. Cultural memory influences the way a community defines itself, and is expressed by images and performances that helped perpetuate this identity. Cult brings together the main social, political, and religious institutions essential for life in a Hellenistic polis and Roman city. In order to maintain the civic religion of the city, local elites performed a range of actions that are reflected in the material record. The importance of civic cults in ordering daily life, their close connection to the city, and the visibility of the material traces of cults in the archaeological record make this type of study idea for understanding the role of cultural memory in Roman communities. Because cultural memory is supported by civic institutions, which are embedded in larger regional and global networks, it is important to consider the role of the past in establishing local identities and connections to the wider Mediterranean world. As a result of the interconnectedness of civic institutions, the performance of cultural memory, and the way the past is remembered (or forgotten) was influenced by the images and practices which make up the Hellenistic *koiné*. By adopting, adapting and particularizing these elements from the *koiné* for their own ends, Ascalonian elites functionally modified the constituent meanings of these elements, impacting their meaning within the global system.

Recent work on the provinces has emphasized the diversity of cultural memory and religious identities enjoyed by communities across the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic and

Roman worlds. However, most of these studies have focused on the western half of the empire or Greece and Asia Minor. In the Near East, recent work has sought to understand the sacred identities of communities in Roman Syria and Arabia.[76]

In Palestine, most studies have focused on individual leaders or dynasties (Herod, the Hasmoneans) or on the dynamics of Jewish and Christian communities.[77] The most important monograph to diverge from this trend is Nicole Belayche's study on the pagan cults of Roman Palestine in the second-fourth centuries CE. She notes that, before her study, "aside from archaeological publications and monographs about sites, the question [about the nature of pagan cults in Palestine] has been more or less ignored."[78] Belayche studied Greco-Roman religion within a fully formed Roman province, and she emphasizes the existence of cultural hybridity derived from the remembrance of a pre-Greek past in various forms in the region. This conclusion, which saw pre-Hellenistic practices persisting under a veneer or "varnish" of Hellenization, is consistent with shorter treatments of the nature of Greco-Roman religion in the region.[79] A 2008 article by Gideon Fuks on the cults of Ascalon assembles evidence for the range of deities worshipped at Ascalon in the Hellenistic and Roman period. Like Belayche, his conclusion sees the cults of Ascalon as essentially Hellenized Phoenician.[80]

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[76] A sample: Bruneau 1970 (Delos); Price 1984 (Asia Minor); Rogers 1991 (Ephesus); Alcock 1993 (Greece); Rives 1995 (Carthage); Woolf 1998 (Gaul); Derks 1998 (Gaul); Dirven 1999 (Dura-Europos); Healey 2001 (Nabataea); Kaizer 2002 (Palmyra); van Andringa 2002 (Gaul); Schowalter and Friesen 2005 (Corinth); van Nijf 2000 (Asia Minor); Alcock 2002 (Greece); Kaizer 2006, 2008 (Near East); Eliav, Friedland and Herbert 2008 (Near East); Raja 2012 (Asia Minor and Syria); Mairs 2013 (Bactria); Smith 2013 (Palmyra); Bonnet 2015 (Phoenicia).

[77] Belayche 2001, 2-6. See, for example, Weiss' study (2014) of Roman entertainment and spectacle in Roman Palestine in the context of Jewish reactions to these games.

[78] Ibid. 4.

[79] Millar 1993, 228; see also Fuks (2008), discussed below. Belayche argues (2001, 224) that "under a heavy varnish of Hellenization, Ascalon remained a Phoenician town".

[80] Fuks 2008, 1; ibid. 42.

I build on Belayche's and Fuks' studies by emphasizing the influence of cultural memory and global networks in creating, perpetuating, and modifying public sacred identity at Ascalon. I also consider the role of elites in performing the community's public sacred identity, and identify diachronic changes in how this identity was constructed and modified over time.

Sources and Methodology

Public sacred identity was created in a variety of ways. Public festivals and spectacles invited citizens to participate in the worship or recognition of a god or goddess explicitly selected as important or significant by the community, and whose foundation and ties made reference to the longevity of the cult.[81] Temples and statues of deities and heroes set up in civic spaces became landmarks in the city, and represented the financial and cultic priorities of elite patrons and local political officials.[82] Images of deities, myths and heroes appeared on the obverse and reverse of coins in the Hellenistic and Roman period, accompanied by the name of the city.[83] Although coins were produced by a group of elites or a minting official acting alone, the images represented a view of the community as a whole.[84]

There is very little evidence for the actual performance of cult at Ascalon, how public cult was structured and managed, or how deities were worshipped and celebrated through festivals and public sacrifices. For this reason, I focus on the images that were a material product of polis-religion.

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[81] van Nijf 2001; van Nijf and Williamson 2014; Klose 2005.

[82] For example, see Rogers' (1991, 80-126) analysis of statues erected along the major thoroughfares of Roman Ephesus.

[83] Price 2005.

[84] Howgego 2005; Williamson 2005; Butcher 2005.

The Collection

This study is based on historical and published archaeological material from Ascalon. The collection includes literary sources, numismatics, public architecture, public sculpture and monuments, and epigraphic evidence.[85] These categories were selected first because they represent the largest and best published collections of literary and material culture from the Hellenistic and Roman periods at Ascalon. Second, all of these material groups are inherently public, displayed in public, for public view, and appear to communicate the values and priorities of the community as a whole. The focus of the best published material, and of nearly all the literary evidence, is on the city or community of Ascalon as a whole, rather than the experience of individuals from the community. If we are interested in understanding how cult, myth, and gods were used to express notions about a community's identity, these types of materials best reflect the physical manifestation of those strategies. In addition, many of these sources are drawn from or influenced by the visual vocabulary and practices of the Hellenistic *koiné*, and are thus embedded in the networks constituting that world. We are able to read this material as evidence for how the Ascalonians adopted elements of this koine, how they employed these elements, and what function these practices served locally and globally.

Some Problems

The nature of the collection as a whole is varied, but the majority of evidence dates between the late first century BCE and the mid-third century CE. Although Ascalon was an

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[85] I do not include unpublished evidence from the current excavations at Ascalon due to the division of the material awaiting publication. The unpublished material would refine a discussion of the socio-political and spatial context of public sacred identity, but would not substantially modify the conclusions or collection of evidence under study in this project.

important port city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods it does not appear frequently in most of the preserved histories of these periods, especially after the second century CE.[86] On the other hand, the archaeological record of the city is richest in the later periods, with major entertainment and civic complexes from the second and third centuries CE that have been excavated and published, and a wealth of inscriptions, sculpture, and coins from the same period.

Aside from the uneven distribution of material groups across all periods, another problem with the collection is the lack of well-documented and excavated sacred space and sculpture at Ascalon. Literary, epigraphic, and numismatic sources suggest there was a large number of temples and public spaces including images of deities, but very few of these spaces have been discovered and excavated at the site. Excavations by Lady Hester Stanhope in the 19th century may have exposed a large colonnaded temple of Roman date, but the location of the building, its architecture, plan and identification are unknown today.[87] In addition, we can only place a handful of the sculptural fragments identified as deities into their ancient spatial contexts; for the rest, we can only make assumptions or suggestions based on size, quality, finishing and material.

The third problem is the relatively limited Roman-period archaeological material that has been excavated and published at Ascalon. The current American excavations, run jointly with the Leon Levy Foundation and the Harvard Semitic Museum, have operated at the tel site nearly every summer from 1985 until today. The focus of these excavations has been on elucidating the extent and nature of earlier periods (specifically the Bronze and Iron Age cities), and the

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[86] This is due both to the overall lack of historical sources concerning the second and third centuries CE, and to a focus on areas outside or beyond Palestine in those periods. The growth of Gaza and its role in tensions between pagans and Christians in the third-fourth centuries CE eclipsed Ascalon in sources and in scholarship.

[87] Stanhope ostensibly buried the remains of the temple after her excavations, which were interrupted by the accusation that she was attempting to remove what she had found from the area. (Meryon 1846, 161-170). A painting by David Roberts may show the colonnaded building mentioned by Stanhope's biographers, but there remains today no physical evidence for Stanhope's excavations.

Hellenistic-Roman period material has been unevenly published.[88] A volume on the material from the Hellenistic period is forthcoming by Kathleen Birney, and the previously published and currently unpublished Roman layers are planned for inclusion in a future volume. The Roman-period horizon at the site, although encountered in nearly every excavation area, is often muddled by reuse of spaces and architecture in the Byzantine period, and sometimes disturbed by extensive Fatimid/Crusader period reuse and pitting.[89]

Despite the limitations imposed on the ancient material from the site as outlined above, there remain several categories of published evidence that can be gathered and studied as a starting point for research about cultural memory and cult. This body of evidence usually originated as publications of specific types of evidence—inscriptions, numismatics, sculpture, architecture—and I have initially considered each material type as its own assemblage. The ancient literary sources were much more diffuse, and therefore require a different methodology. In what follows, I outline the size and variety of each category of evidence, beginning with the most disparate (the ancient literary sources) and ending with what I consider to be the most cohesive collection (the numismatics). I also discuss how examples were selected, what material was excluded (and why), and how the evidence was categorized.

Ancient Literary Sources

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[88] A portion of the Roman period imported pottery was published by Johnson (2008) and additional publications on the Roman pottery and lamps are in progress. Several Roman-period buildings were published summarily in the expedition's introductory volume (Stager et al. 2008) but are the subject of renewed study.

[89] This is certainly the case for the multi-period bouleuterion, the one Roman building that has been thoroughly excavated and most recently published (Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016). The second phase of the bouleuterion went out of use in the late third century CE, and the seats and substructure fill removed. Massive walls were erected between the cavea walls in the 5th-7th centuries CE, and the eastern area of the old bouleuterion was subdivided into courtyards for houses in the 7th-11th centuries.

I have tried to gather evidence about Ascalon from diverse literary records of the Hellenistic and Roman periods up to the sixth century CE. Sometimes, I have utilized literary evidence from before the Hellenistic period or after the Roman period, especially when discussing history, mythology and foundation myths. For example, the history of Ascalon in Chapter 2 is based upon such diverse works as rabbinical sources, Homeric scholiastes, Stephen of Byzantium, pseudo-Scylax and Cicero's *Academica*. I consider papyrological evidence, such as material from the Oxyrrhyncus Papyri, with the literary sources because I consider the audience of the papyrological material to be similar to the intended audience of other types of literary evidence.

There were many famous philosophers, writers and intellectuals from Ascalon who produced written works.[90] Unfortunately, most of these works do not survive. In any case, many of the works produced by Ascalonians do not appear to provide direct insight about their home city. The sole exception is the architect Julian of Ascalon, who wrote a treatise on construction and design rules in the fifth or sixth century CE.[91] Ascalon appears frequently as a case study in the work, but the late date of the work and the focus on building codes and construction make it only marginally useful for this study.

Literary works by non-Ascalonians describe the city from an outsider's perspective. Sometimes the perspective adopted is geographically, culturally and religiously "outside," as in the case of rabbinic writings in which Ascalon is mentioned. We can assume that some authors (for example, Josephus or pseudo-Lucian) had either visited Ascalon, or knew people from

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[90] Geiger (2014) provides a list, bibliography, and thorough discussion of intellectuals from Ascalon between the Hellenistic and Late Roman periods. He lists 23 philosophers, historians and writers known in antiquity to have been from Ascalon or active there between the late second century BCE and the sixth century CE (12-41).

[91] Julian's treatise outlines his thoughts about ideal urban planning, and he uses Ascalon as both a positive and negative example of city layout and building codes (Saliou 1996; Hakim 2001).

Ascalon upon which their information is based; other authors (Ovid, Diodorus Siculus) mention Ascalon as part of established myth, history, or tradition. These perspectives are important to keep in mind, especially when attempting to parse Greek, Roman, Syrian, Phoenician, Christian, and Jewish interpretations of Ascalonian traditions or symbols. We can, perhaps, recover one possible interpretation of a practice or story, but we cannot know if this interpretation was the only response, the predominant response, or the intended response.

I have used the ancient literary sources in a variety of ways. In Chapter 2, I rely extensively, but not exclusively, on literary sources to construct a historical context for the material discussed in the following chapters. Ascalon fades in and out of the literary record of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, and so literary sources alone cannot be used to shape a good diachronic picture of the city's political, religious, and social history. In certain cases, the literary evidence plays a leading role in establishing the existence or popularity of a cult or sanctuary, or helps reinforce or explain trends, images, and symbols from the material groups.

In order to study the mythological stories about Ascalon I created a Filemaker database to collect and organize the ancient sources. Mythological stories about Ascalon (which are the focus of Chapter 5), testify to Ascalon's presence in Greco-Roman myth, and the existence of different, competing or alternate traditions of particular myths. It is apparent that the myth of the Ascalonian goddess Derceto, was the most popular story related to the city in the ancient world, but exists in multiple versions. Other Ascalonian myths exhibit less variety, but several stories appear to have been popular or well-known only in certain periods. To investigate whether there was a meaningful diachronic pattern of change to Ascalonian myths, I collected each reference to these myths or mythological figures, summarizes their details, and then ordered them chronologically. In cases where a Roman author was quoting an earlier source (for example,

Strabo explicitly cites Ctesias as his source for Derceto as an alternate name for Atargatis), the story and its salient details are included twice in the list according to the date of each author.[92] This reflects the continuation of tradition or, at the very least, a continued interest in the story.

Inscriptions

There are approximately 121 Hellenistic and Roman inscriptions from Ascalon or that mention the city or one of its inhabitants. This number includes all Ascalonian evidence between the 4th c. BCE-4th c. CE found in the Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaea/Palaestinae (*CIJP*), the Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum (*SEG*), the Inscriptions de Délos (*ID*), the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (*CIL*), the funerary monuments from Rhenea published in the Exploration archéologique de Délos (*EAD XXX*), and other major collections of ancient inscriptions. Of these, 27 are from contexts outside Palestine, usually Delos, Attica or Italy. Two inscriptions are in Latin, one is bilingual (Latin and Greek) and the rest are in Greek. Of the 121 inscriptions described above,13 are related to cult. Additional inscriptions provide evidence for civic institutions and the elite population of Ascalon, and are included in the analysis of Chapters 2 through 4.

I collected all 121 inscriptions in a Filemaker Database. Each entry in the database include the following information: original inscription transcription, original language, an English translation of the inscription, a photograph, the findspot, the date of discovery, the original location, the donor or dedicant, the names and titles included, the deity or deities mentioned and modern bibliography. With the data organized in this way, it is possible to view

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[92] Strabo.*Geog*.16.4.785. Strabo wrote his *Geographica* in the first quarter of the first century CE. Ctesias, one of his sources, was an historian from the fifth century BCE.

the inscriptional evidence according to different criteria and see what values or categories help

elucidate patterns in the ancient evidence.

Architecture

Although it is apparent from literary, numismatic, and epigraphic sources that Ascalon

had a number of temples inside and outside the city, no temples or sanctuaries have been

uncovered in modern excavations at Ascalon. One exception is the large colonnaded building

excavated by Lady Hester Stanhope in the 19th century.[93] Her traveling companion identified the

building as a temple, reused in late antiquity as first a church and then as a mosque.[94] Nothing

today remains of this purported temple, nor is the location of Stanhope's excavations known.[95]

Images of the gods and references to local cults appeared in a variety of public contexts

in the Roman world, not just in temples. Three such contexts have been discovered at Ascalon:

Roman bath buildings, a multi-period Roman bouleuterion and the city's theater. Unfortunately,

only the imprint of the theater exists today, and perhaps a single marble seat from the original

structure.[96] Two Roman-period baths have been excavated, but they are poorly preserved and

their exact function (public or private) is uncertain.[97] The most famous bathhouse, located west

of the ancient city center in the current excavation's Grid 38 and known to be associated with a

drain in which the remains of nearly 100 infants were found, was surely a private bath. Although

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[93] Meryon 1846.

[94] Ibid. 161-162.

[95] Schloen (2008, 144) hypothesizes that Stanhope's building should be identified as the large colonnaded structure painted by David Roberts when he visits Ascalon in 1839, and that the foundations and marble material was removed from the site in the half century before the survey of the by Conder and Kitchener.

[96] Stager 1993.

[97] One bath building is very poorly preserved, but dated to sometime before the fourth century CE (Stager et al. 2008, 242-244).

heavily disturbed by later reuse and reoccupation, the bath contains only a single small immersion tub, with very little of the hypocaust system preserved.[98] The best preserved and most thoroughly studied Roman-period building from Ascalon is the multi-phase bouleuterion. Roman-period statues and architectural sculpture depicting deities were found associated with this building, and is thus of great interest for this study.[99]

No other public buildings of the Roman period have been excavated at Ascalon. Other areas which may have originally contained statues or housed aedicular shrines, e.g., the Roman gates, colonnaded streets, additional bath buildings, other temple, are no longer preserved.[100] In lieu of extensive architectural remains, I have relied on literary sources and depictions of Ascalonian buildings on other media (coins, mosaics) for information concerning sacred spaces in the city. This presents a problem in trying to reconstruct the sacred topography of Ascalon, as it is usually not clear when the buildings in these depictions were constructed or how they functioned. Some authors include references to temples which appear in no other sources; others mention a building or a temple but do not provide information about location or date.[101] I do not assume that every deity who appears in Hellenistic or Roman sculpture or on coins from the city likewise had a cult or sacred center in the city.

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[98] Stager et al. 2008, 293-297.

[99] Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016.

[100] The city wall was rebuilt in the Hellenistic period and remodeled or updated in the first century CE, but add no information to our understanding of the city's public sacred identity.

[101] E.g. the late Christian tradition that discusses the existence of a temple of Apollo near the walls of the first century BCE city, in which Herod's father supposedly served as a servant. Nowhere else do we find a temple of Apollo mentioned at Ascalon, and that god is known only from a single sculpture found in the Roman bouleuterion of the first century BCE/CE, never on coins. It is impossible to know if the temple at Ascalon was actually dedicated to Apollo, or whether the reference to this god is a Hellenized version of a local deity, for example Phanebalos.

Coins

The numismatic evidence from Hellenistic and Roman Ascalon is the largest category of material studied in this project. The city began minting its own coins in the fifth century BCE, and after the conquests of Alexander the city mint produced Hellenistic-style coins immediately.[102] The mint of Ascalon continuously issued coins until the reign of Maximinius (238 CE), including silver coins for the Ptolemies and local coins of two denominations.

It is impossible to estimate the number of coins from Ascalon that survive today. They are always found in major museum collections because of the sheer number minted. These large numbers, and the inherent civic nature of coinage in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, means that the numismatics from Ascalon are uniquely poised to shed light on the city's sacred public identity and changes that occurred over time in the construction of this identity.

Amassing all published examples of coins from the Hellenistic and Roman periods was unnecessary for the present study; instead, the goal is to represent all issues, all designs and all types in the collection database. To this end, major museum collections (the British Museum, the American Numismatic Society, the Israel Museum) and the publications of several private collections (Yashin, Rosenberger) were consulted in their entirety. Additional collections were consulted to supplement these main sources if they contained coin types or issues that were not present in other collections.[103]

I entered the numismatic evidence from the main collections into a Filemaker Database. This database includes a large number of criteria, with the ability to input a range of unique symbols and designs as they appear on each coin. Editable criteria included: a coin photograph

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[102] Gitler 1996; Gitler and Tal 2009; Gitler and Tal 2012.

[103] This was fairly rare; Ascalonian coins appear in great numbers in the primary collections considered, and most "gaps" in the records are the same types and designs minted in different years not covered in the primary collection.

or drawing, the museum collection and reference number, the obverse inscription(s), reverse inscription (s), weight, size, denomination, mint mark and mint official. A set of check boxes is included for entering the appearance of images, attributes, symbols, and figures. Images could be read as one constituent type (for example, seated Zeus) and as a series of symbols and attributes (seated male, throne, scepter, thunderbolt, facing left). Cataloging the coins this way makes it possible to trace recurrent symbols or designs, while also quantifying the long-lasting (and thus popular) designs or issues. Select coin designs are included, listed by issue between the first century BCE and the early third century CE, as a table in Appendix 1.

Sculpture

Sculptural evidence for deities from Ascalon is on the one hand large and varied, and on the other nearly always frustratingly removed from any sense of the piece's original context. There are 32 free-standing sculptural or figured architectural fragments from the Hellenistic and Roman periods found at Ascalon.[104] Of these, 22 have been identified as images of gods or from Greco-Roman mythology, two are understood as statues of local or imperial figures, and the subject of the remaining eight is unknown due to the fragmentary nature of these pieces.

Six sculptures of deities--two free-standing sculptures and four architectural sculptures-- belonged originally to one of two phases of the Roman period bouleuterion (1st c. BCE-3rd c. CE). The free-standing sculptures from the bouleuterion include a crouching Aphrodite and the legs and torso of a nude man, identified as either Apollo or Dionysos. The architectural

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[104] This number does not include two marble sarcophagi from Ascalon, one decorated with an Amazonomachy and another decorated with the rape of Persephone. I also do not include sculptural fragments from underwater excavations of shipwrecks, given the uncertainty regarding the origin and intended destination of these sculptures.

sculptures are all pilasters displayed on the façade of the third century CE bouleuterion, and include depictions of Nikai, a Nike with Atlas, and Isis.[105]

The remaining sculptures and architectural decoration depicting gods are generally from unknown contexts; size, finishing and subject are helpful in determining whether they belonged to private or public contexts, and sometimes where they were originally located. For the majority of these sculptural fragments, however, we can only acknowledge that they were set up in the city or in a household in Ascalon, and are datable only via stylistic considerations. [106]

The sculptural evidence was also entered into a Filemaker database to collect and organize the material. The entries include the following criteria: the findspot of sculpture, the identification of the sculptural subject, the material, material origin, size, original context, context date, stylistic date, notes on finishing, sculptural type or parallels (for example, "Crouching Aphrodite" type).

The sculptural evidence does not consider or include small-scale figurines or funerary sculpture with the understanding that the original contexts for these categories was not primarily civic in nature.

Other Media: gems and inscribed weights

Two other material groups include important supplementary evidence for this study. The first, gemstones, are not civic in nature but do contain distinctive images of figures based on

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[105] See discussion of this decoration, listed by deity, in Chapter 3.

[106] There is no way definitive way to determine whether or not a free-standing sculpture was displayed in public or in private. I have attempted to use free-standing sculptural evidence without clear contexts as a supplement to analyses of other media, rather than as sole evidence for a trend or the existence of a public cult to that deity. In the case of figured architectural fragments, determining the civic nature of the building's context is more straightforward. However, in nearly all cases the function of the public building is unknown. When a figured architectural fragment exists and is not clearly associated with its original context I have included it when discussing images of deities in the urban cityscape generally.

Ascalonian coins which reinforce the importance of these deities in the city. One figure, an Egyptianizing deity associated with three lions, appears exclusively on Ascalonian coins of the second-third centuries CE and on six gems alongside other deities from Ascalonian coins.[107] The gems, which originally belonged to personal rings, are the only examples in which several Ascalonian deities appear in this way, and thus the gems constitute an important type of evidence. Furthermore, because the gems were probably owned by Ascalonian elites, it is likely that the designs intentionally reflected contemporary coin issues.

Inscribed and decorated weights, roughly 30 in number, have been uncovered in excavations at Ascalon and at cities nearby. The weights are inscribed with many of the same images as the coins of Ascalon, and also bear a mark identifying their origin. The weights sometimes include the name of the agoranomos of the city (the elected official in charge of the markets) and are useful for understanding the political institutions of the city. Furthermore, these weights are also inherently civic in nature, in that an elected official of the city approved, produced, and distributed them for use in a public, civic context.

Research Questions and Methodology

This study focuses on the ways the public sacred identity of Ascalon was created and perpetuated in which literary sources, mythology, numismatics, architecture and sculpture.. In particular, this project answers the following questions. First, how was the public sacred identity of Ascalon expressed?   Second, what does Ascalon's public sacred identity tell us about the nature of the community's cultural memory? Third, how can we characterize Ascalon's cultural memory and identity in terms of its engagement and interaction with the Hellenistic *koiné* and

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[107] See the discussion in Chapter 4.

global systems? Fourth, how did this public sacred identity and cultural memory develop and change over during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and why did these processes change? Fifth, what do changes in identity and narratives about the past mean for our understanding of how elite Ascalonians conceived of themselves and their community?

To address these research questions I used several Filemaker Databases to curate each material group. Key details concerning the context, date and images of each individual piece were recorded. Once all of the information was entered into each database it was possible to organize each entry according to different criteria to observe, define, and quantify patterns of production and consumption. For example, the coins might be organized according to denomination, date, figure, symbol, or inscription. Patterns might emerge in one or all of these organizational categories.

It was then possible to trace and contrast patterns between and within different categories of evidence. Although a number of interesting patterns emerged in each material group and when comparing material groups, only a few were selected for study at length. Patterns highlighted by a number of material groups, or which demonstrated major periods of convergence or divergence between material groups, were selected for further study.

Ultimately, the number and iconographical variety of the coins made this material group the most provocative in terms of establishing trends and patterns in the sacred identity of the community. Other types of evidence echoed, sometimes only slightly, these conclusions, but nothing was found to fundamentally contradict the patterns and diachronic changes established by the numismatic evidence.

By understanding Ascalonian practices on their own terms and then within the context of regional and global systems, it was possible to see how public sacred identity served to define the city in relation to its neighbors.

Overview of the Project

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into two case studies on the cult of Aphrodite Ourania, and mythological stories about Ascalon. These case studies reflect the complex interplay between cultural memory, identity, polis-religion, and the Hellenistic *koiné* manifested materially within the community. The case studies are contextualized by a chapter on the history of Ascalon, and on one chapter that lays out the range of cults and material evidence for the cults. A concluding chapter summarizes the major findings of the work, and points to applications for other studies.

In Chapter 2 I provide an overview of the history of Ascalon from the Late Bronze Age to the Roman period. The community's Philistine and Phoenician pasts were preserved in its cultural memory, and continued to be relevant to the community's identity and expression of its past in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The city's political development, and relationship to other powers in the region and Mediterranean frames the historical overview of the city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. These two issues--the nature of the city's Philistine and Phoenician past, and Ascalon's relationship with other regional powers—work together to influence the material manifestation of Ascalon's cultural memory in the context of cult.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the cults of Hellenistic and Roman Ascalon. I survey the material and literary evidence for the gods as articulated in polis-religion at Ascalon, and identify several

important trends in the deployment of material evidence in reference to cult. These themes are explored in-depth in the two chapters that follow.

Chapter 4 is a case study on the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, the most famous goddess from Ascalon. I explore the ancient evidence for the cult, and suggest that the goddess was depicted in four different guises on Roman period coins. Each of these appearances was part of a larger, elite-driven strategy to deploy the community's cultural memory to emphasize its antiquity and connections to other areas of the Roman world.

In Chapter 5 I look at the mythological stories involving Ascalon in the Mediterranean world. We have no written evidence from the city itself detailing local beliefs about the inhabitants own mythology, but Ascalon does appear in Greek myth. The Ascalonian goddess Derceto is the primary node through which the history of Ascalon intersects with the mytho-history of the Greco-Roman world. Ascalus and Mopsus, two founders from Asia Minor, are significant because they may reflect the cultural memory of Philistine migration to Ascalon from Greece. These founders also helped explain to Greeks and Romans the mix of Hellenized and Eastern elements in Ascalon in a historical context that they were familiar with.

I conclude in Chapter 6 by summarizing the major themes arising out of the study, and discussing how the public sacred identity and cultural memory of Ascalon as embedded in cult can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of the past in forming connections and identities in the Roman world.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

The nature of civic religion in Ascalon was influenced by the city's past as a Philistine center and later, a Phoenician trading hub and Hellenistic polis. This past had a direct impact on the ethnic and cultural make-up of the city and the gods the community worshipped, as well as on Ascalon's relationship with other peoples and cities in the region. As a result, the political, socio-cultural and religious character of the people of Ascalon in the Hellenistic and Roman periods was oriented toward the Mediterranean, with Phoenician and Egyptian elements representing the Near Eastern origins of the city. As I explore in detail in the next chapters, Ascalon's public sacred identity was consciously bound up in its past. The past was kept alive and relevant through traditional stories and practices, histories, physical remains, and language. The tensions, problems, and questions produced by different aspects of this history within the city and with outside groups were partially managed through the promotion of different gods and myths in the community.

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize the character of Ascalon's public sacred identity by exploring the historical background of the city between the Bronze Age and the mid-third century CE. This historical survey provides a context for the formation and later articulation and perpetuation of an Ascalonian collective memory that remembered the community's past in specific ways and for specific goals in later periods.

This chapter is divided into six periods defined by which group was in control of Ascalon (Philistine Ascalon, Phoenician Ascalon, Ptolemaic Ascalon, Late Hellenistic Ascalon, independent Ascalon and Roman Ascalon). Each section provides an overview of the major historical developments of each period, and then treats one or more major themes which helped define life in Ascalon at that time. For example, when looking at Philistine Ascalon, the city's relationship with the Israelites is a crucial component to understanding Ascalon's relationship with the Jews in later periods. When discussing Ascalon as an *oppidum liberum*, it is important to consider how the city asserted itself as a "Hellenized" polis through numismatics and architecture. The themes discussed in each section are selected to provide context for the succeeding arguments about the development of the city's public sacred identity in Chapters 3 through 5.

The end of the chapter includes a discussion about elites in Ascalon in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. As the group responsible for the expression of the community's public sacred identity, it is important to address the evidence for the nature of the elite community within the city.

Philistine Ascalon

Historical Overview

The Philistines controlled Ascalon from c.1200 BCE until the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 BCE, but they were not the first to settle on the tel. The earliest archaeological evidence in the area around Ascalon dates to the Neolithic period, with sizable settlement on the tel first appearing in the Middle Bronze Age (MBA). From the MBA to the Late Bronze Age (LBA) the site was settled by Canaanites, who built up the city with a massive

mudbrick glacis, moat, and large city gate.[108] Also dating to this period is a small shrine located

near the city gate containing a small silver and copper calf.[109] The imported ceramic material

from the city in this period indicates that Ashkelon was engaged in trade networks moving from

the Levant to Lebanon, Egypt, and the Greek islands.[110] The exact nature of the earliest

Philistine settlement at Ascalon, and the relationship of these new inhabitants with the Canaanite

population of Ascalon, is still unknown, but there is evidence that Canaanite Ascalon was in

decline before the arrival of the Philistines in the early twelfth century BCE.[111]

The origin of the Philistines is unknown, but current research suggests that they were

originally from the Aegean. They probably arrived in the region as one of the "Sea Peoples," a

conglomeration of foreign groups responsible for a series of invasions in Egypt and the Near

East in the twelfth century BCE.[112] Egyptian papyri indicate that after their defeat, some of the

Sea Peoples were settled by the Egyptians in the southern Levant by the mid-eleventh century

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[108] Stager et al. 2008, 218-234. The Middle Bronze Age city will be published fully in a forthcoming *Ashkelon Expedition Volume*.

[109] Ibid. 235-236.

[110] Ibid. 231. There is ample evidence for trade (Martin 2009) and correspondence between Ascalon and its neighbors in this period, particularly with the Egyptians. Ascalon was conquered by Egypt in the sixteenth century BCE (*ANET* 1955, 256), and several of the Amarna Letters (*EA* 320-326, 287) include references to trade products sent to the pharaoh, and outline a series of shifting alliances and intrigues among the local dynasts of the southern Levant. Ascalon and several other cities revolted against the Pharaoh in the late thirteenth century BCE, and their defeat was celebrated on the Merneptah Stele (*ANET* 1955, 376-378) and reinforced by the installation of a short-lived Egyptian garrison at Ascalon (Stager et. al. 2008, 256; Master, Stager and Yasur-Landau 2011). The nature of Merneptah's campaign continues to be controversial, cf. Cline 2009.

[111] Yasur-Landau (2010, 288) proposes "that the foundation of Philistine sties was a cooperative effort of both migrants and local Canaanite populations who allied themselves with the newcomers, perhaps as a buffer against the unstable security and economic conditions that accompanied the end of Canaanite urban culture." See also: Yasur-Landau 2010, 216-227; Master, Stager, and Yasur-Landau 2011, 276-277. There is no evidence for a destruction event in this period from the modern excavations (Stager et al. 2008, 257, 306) despite Phythian-Adams' report in 1923 (63-64) of a thick ashy layer dated to this transition.

[112] The names of the different groups that made up the "Sea Peoples" are listed in several different Egyptian sources. See: *ANET* 1955, 262-263; Yasur-Landau 2010, 164-180.

BCE, specifically mentioning Ascalon, Ashdod, and Gaza as among these places.[113] The Peleset

are among the Sea Peoples listed by Egyptian sources and modern scholars identify this group

with the biblical Philistines who lived in Ascalon and four other cities in the southern coastal

plain.[114] The original home of the Peleset has been greatly debated, but the ceramics produced

by the Philistines in their new Levantine homes indicate a familiarity with Aegean traditions and

iconographic styles. Biblical accounts place the origin of the Philistines as "Caphtor," a

toponym that scholars have connected to Crete via Egyptian terminology for that island.[115]

Philistine-controlled Ascalon was one of five Philistine cities ("Pentapolis") in the

southern coastal plain, which in this period was given the regional name "Philistia." The city

was ruled independently, although it often acted in concert with the other Pentapolis cities.[116]

During this period the Canaanite fortifications of Ascalon were rebuilt, and the city prospered as

a result of local and regional trade.[117]

The best published archaeological evidence for Philistine Ascalon dates to the seventh

century BCE. By this time the Philistine cities had come under the control of the Neo-Assyrian

kings. [118] Despite the financial obligations of tribute, this was a period of economic prosperity

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[113] These sources include Harris Papyrus I and the Onomasticon of Amenemope (Grandet 1994).

[114] Josh. 13: 3; 1 Sam 6:17-18; Jer. 25:20, Amos 1:8.

[115] Biblical accounts of the Philistines' origins point to Egypt (Gen 10:14) or "Caphtor" (Jer.47:4, Amos 9:7), a toponym associated by some with Crete via the Egyptian term *Keftiu* (Killebrew 2005, 231). Killebrew (2005, 230-231) provides a good overview of the main theories about the Philistines' geographic origin, although she favors an origin in southern Anatolia or Cyprus. Cf. Yasur-Landau (2010) on the Sea Peoples and the extensive evidence he provides for a more general Aegean origin. For differences in the material culture and architecture of the Philistines and the previous inhabitants of Ascalon and the other cities of the southern coastal plain, see: Aja 2009; Faust and Lev-Tov 2011.

[116] E.g. 1 Sam 4-6.

[117] Stager et al. 2008, 236.

[118] 2 Kings 15:19. Tiglah-Pileser III's campaign against the Levant in 734/3 BCE included exacting tribute from Ascalon after a revolt (*ANET* 1955, 282-283). During Hezekiah's revolt against the Neo-Assyrians, he is said to have defeated the Philistines and captured Gaza and the surrounding territory (2 Kings 18:5-8; *ANET* 1955, 287-

for Ascalon. As the main port of Philistia, Ascalon was closely integrated into maritime and land

trade.[119] The city exported locally produced wine and olive oil to Egypt, and ceramic vessels

provide evidence of trade with the Shephelah and, especially, Phoenicia.[120] Ceramic vessels

from Greece also appear in large numbers at Ascalon in this period. The collection has been

called "one of the largest, and certainly the most varied...found thus far in the southern

Levant."[121]

Ascalon and the other cities in Philistia also served as a buffer between the Neo-Assyrian

Empire and Egypt, although the southern coastal plain was always more closely tied politically

and culturally to Egypt than Assyria.[122] Although Ascalon participated in at least two revolts

against the Neo-Assyrians, the city was not destroyed nor its population deported, as happened

elsewhere. Instead, the king was replaced, and the city continued to prosper.[123] The material

culture at Ascalon speaks to an economic relationship with Phoenicia, but in the seventh century

BCE there is a marked influx of Egyptian material culture and influence.[124] Weakening of the

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288). Several years earlier, Sargon II had attacked Ashdod, just north of Ascalon (Is 20:1; *ANET* 1955, 284-286).
There is no archaeological or direct literary evidence that Ascalon was attacked or affected on either occasion,
although Hezekiah would have passed through or by the city en-route to Gaza. Tell Jemmeh, located near Gaza, has
been proposed as the site of local Assyrian administration for the coastal plain, although recent excavations have
problematized the role of the Neo-Assyrian presence there (Ben-Shlomo 2014). For Assyrian texts detailing
Ascalonian tribute and obligations to the Neo-Assyrian kings, see: *ANET* 1955: 282, 291, 294.

[119] Evidence for the wide variety of trade partners includes ceramic evidence (see below) and the presence of
weights in three different measures (Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Judahite) in the seventh century marketplace
(Birney and Levine 2011, 483).

[120] Master 2003, 47-56; Stager 2011a: 53-69. Stager (2011b) notes that "more pottery came from Phoenicia to
Ashkelon than from any foreign source" (97). Biblical accounts (Joel 3:4-6) also note the close connections
between Phoenicia and Philistia, including the trade of slaves from Judah.

[121] Waldbaum 2011, 127. Whether or not the Philistines themselves engaged in direct trade with the Greeks has
been debated (ibid., 140-141). See also: Waldbaum and Magness 1997.

[122] Ibid., 50-51.

[123] Master 2003, 49-50; Gitin 2010, 315-317.

[124] Including Egyptian scarabs (Keel 2011), amulets (Herrmann 2011) and Egyptian cultic implements (Bell 2011).

Assyrian Empire in the mid-seventh century BCE allowed Egypt to take control of the southern

coastal plain in the 620's BCE, and ultimately lead to the defeat of the Assyrians by the

Babylonians under Nabopolassar in 609 BCE.[125]

Ascalon was destroyed by the Babylonian king in 604 BCE, likely a result of the

Ascalonian king's continued close ties with Egypt.[126] Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king,

moved to consolidate his control over the region, and attacked both Ascalon and Ekron in 604

BCE. According to the *Babylonian Chronicle* the Babylonian army destroyed Ascalon, turning

it "into a mound and heaps of ruins."[127] The extent of the destruction is characterized in the

Hebrew Bible as total: "Ashkelon is silenced."[128] Excavations in the Iron Age marketplace and

along the western edge of the tel confirm the extent of the destruction and provide evidence that

the city endured a siege.[129]

The events of 604 BCE had two important outcomes. The first was the forced

deportation of at least a portion of the population of the city to Babylon. This was a common

Babylonian practice, and there is evidence for the presence of Ascalonians in Babylon

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[125] *ANET* 1955: 302-304; Gitin 2010, 318.

[126] These ties included the location of an Egyptian garrison comprised of Greek mercenaries within the city. See the discussion by Fantalkin (2011) for a full exploration of the evidence for this argument.   In this same period, united forces of Egypt and Assyria had failed to prevent Babylonian expansion into Syria in 605 BCE at the Battle of Carchemish (2 Chron 35:20; BM 21946, 18-20).

[127] *BM* 21946, 18-20; Stager 2011c, 3.

[128] Jer 47:3-5.

[129] Stager 2011c, 11; Stager 2011b, 13-29; Stager 2011c, 31-49; Weiss, Kislev and Mahler -Slasky 2011, 607. The 604 BCE destruction horizon is currently under investigation in Grid 51, directly to the east of the destroyed marketplace discussed by Stager. The remains of a woman killed during the destruction of the marketplace are examined and discussed by Smith (2008, 533-535). Cf. Barstad (2012), who takes issue with the reading of BM 21946, and suggests that the destruction layers documented at Ascalon may instead be related to Assyrian retaliation for Ascalon's participation in one of several revolts in the mid-eighth century BCE (350-353).

afterwards.[130] The extent to which cities were depopulated by the Babylonians in these cases is a

matter of great controversy, but building at Ascalon appears to have ceased until the sixth

century BCE.[131] The second outcome is the disappearance of the Philistine cities as distinct

political entities. Ascalon, Ashdod and Ekron were destroyed by the Babylonians, and there was

an overall "decrease in the remains in most sites" in Philistia in this period.[132] New settlements

such as Ashdod-Yam were founded near the older Philistine cities, and new settlers took

advantage of the destruction and depopulations of cities such as Ascalon to found new

communities.[133]

The Philistines and the Israelites

The long-lived enmity between the Philistines and the Israelites living to the north and

east is one of the most significant trends in this period. The negative relationship between the

two groups was preserved in biblical accounts and cultural memory, and continued to plague

relationships between Ascalon and its Jewish neighbors for centuries afterward.[134] During the

period of the Judges and the United Monarchy, the Philistines and Israelites are portrayed as

coming into constant conflict over control of land and regional hegemony.[135] Other factors

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[130] One tablet dating to the early sixth century BCE refers to rations for the "son of Aga, the king of Ascalon", as well as for singers and sailors from Ascalon (Weidner 1939, 928). See also: Zadok 1978, 61.

[131] Stager et al. 2008, 283 (Grid 38), 313-314 (Grid 50). Stager 2011c, 11.

[132] Ben-Shlomo 2013, 722.

[133] Fantalkin 2014, 47-49.

[134] E.g.: "These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced the wars in Canaan…: the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites…" (Jud 3: 1-3); "throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines" (1 Sam 7: 13; NIV trans).
[135] Samson's exploits among the Philistines (Jud 14-116) were explicitly set into motion by "the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines, for at that time they were ruling over Israel" (Jud 14: 4).   1 Samuel details several battles between the Israelites and Philistines. In this account, the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam 4) but returned it to Beth Shemesh seven months later after ominous happenings wherever the Ark

underlying the divide between the Philistines and Israelites were cultural and religious practices. The tension expressed in biblical sources over the Israelites' inconsistent practice of monotheism in this period is reinforced by the biblical condemnation of the polytheistic practices of their enemies, the Philistines.[136] The Philistines are characterized as barbarous, uncircumcised, and treacherous and violent in many accounts.[137]

The biblical perspective casting the Philistines as the persistent enemies of the Israelites played an important role in contextualizing the later relationship between the former Philistine city of Ascalon and Jewish communities in the region, especially during the period of the Hasmonean kingdom and the First Jewish Revolt.[138] As we will see in Chapter 5, Philistine

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was stored (1 Sam 6). In 1 Samuel 5 the Ark was stored first at Ashdod, and then at Ekron; in Josephus' retelling (*Ant.*6.1.1-6), the Ark was moved from Ashdod to Ascalon. Later, the Philistines moved to attack the Israelites at Mizpah, but retreated (1 Sam 7: 1-13) and eventually lost some of their territory. Wars over territory continued during the reign of Saul (1 Sam 13-14:22; 14:46-47; 14:52), including the famous battle between David and the Philistine Goliath (1 Sam 17). David battled the Philistines before he became king (1 Sam 18:-23), hid from Saul among the Philistines at Gath (1 Sam 27) and fought in their army (1 Sam 28-30). After the death of Saul, the Philistines took over the settlements around Mount Gilboa (1 Sam 31: 1-9; 1 Chron 10) and David's lament for Saul and Jonathan includes a reference to the celebrations in the Philistine cities of Ashkelon and Gath over the defeat of the Israelites (2 Sam 1:19-20). David and the Philistines were continuously at odds over control of land (2 Sam 5:17-25; 8:1; 21:15-22; 23:8-17; 1 Chron 11:12-19, 13:8-16, 20:4-8). Nadab was killed in a conspiracy while besieging Philistine-controlled Gibbethon (1 Kings 15:27), where Omri was later proclaimed king (1 Kings 16:15-16). The Philistines were accused of raiding Israelite settlements in the Negev during the reign of Ahaz (2 Chron 28:18), while his successor Hezekiah is said to have conquered Gaza (2 Kings 18:5-8). Gitin (2010) discusses how the Philistines are presented in the book of Kings.

[136] Instances of Israelites worshiping other deities: Judges 2:10-14; Judges 6-7; 1 Kings 14:6-11; 1 Kings 14:22-24; 1 Kings 16:33; 1 Kings 18: 16-45. See especially Jehu's destruction of the temple of Baal and its priests (2 Kings 10:18-28), and the Assyrian conquest as a punishment for the Israelites for covertly worshiping other deities (2 Kings 17:7-23). The main Philistine god who appears in the Bible is Dagon (1 Sam 5: 1-7; Judges 16: 23-29; 1 Chron 10:10), but the centrality of Dagon is not confirmed by archaeological evidence, which instead suggests that female goddesses such as Astarte and Ptygh were more prominent. Only a single Philistine temple has been excavated (Gitin 2003, 284-289), and the primary evidence for the practice of Philistine religion in the Pentapolis appears to be figurines, of which large numbers of female figurines probably representing deities have been discovered (Press 2013, 156, 164-165; 180-183).

[137] All three themes appear in Samson's dealings with the Philistines. Their lack of circumcision is used twice to highlight their otherness (Judges 14:3, 15:18), and Samson was betrayed twice by Philistine women (Judges 14:12-19, 16:4-18). When Samson arrived in Gaza there were immediate plans to kill him (Judges 16:1-3), and the Philistines there were later able to capture and nearly kill him (Judges 16:21-30). Among many other examples, see also the blasphemous treatment of Saul's body by the Philistines (1 Sam 31:6-13).

[138] Gitin (2010, 306-307) compiled 1,163 "biblical references to ancient Israel's primary foes", 36% mention the Philistines. The next highest percentages relate to the Moabites (16%) and Egyptians (15%).

Ascalon may have been remembered locally in the form of mythological stories about Ascalon's foundations, but the emphasis was on connections to the Aegean world via ancient migrations. However, while Ascalonians in later periods did not share any obvious cultural ties to the Philistines, the preserved history of the city marked its population as different from its Jewish neighbors. This caused Ascalon to orient itself towards supra-local powers and networks in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Furthermore, the problems this history caused with the Jewish communities within and outside the city meant that Ascalonians consistently promoted other portions of its history. The city's Phoenician past was the way in which this manifested.

Phoenician Ascalon

Historical Overview

Excavations at Ascalon have shown that the site lay largely unoccupied after its 604 destruction until the last quarter of the sixth century BCE. After his conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, the Persian king Cyrus allowed subject populations removed from their homelands by the Babylonians to return; the recipients of this grant included the exiled Jews, but there is no evidence for a return of Philistine Ascalonians.[139] Instead, the city was resettled c.525 BCE in the wake of Persian conquests in Egypt, probably in order to secure the main north-south route between Egypt and Syria.[140] Rather than controlling the region directly, the Persian rulers divided up the coastal plain of Palestine from Dor to Ascalon, and control over the major cities

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[139] 2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-8; Ezra 3:7; Ezra 4:3-5; Ezra 5:13-17; Ezra 6:3; Isaiah 44:28; Isaiah 45:15; Jos.*Ant*.11.1). The policy of returning peoples and rebuilding temples in lines 31-34 (Finkel 2013, 6-7) of the Cyrus Cylinder (*BM* 90920) shows that this policy extended to peoples in Mesopotamia as well.

[140] Her.*Hist*.1.1-66; 4.166-167, 200-203.

was given to the Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre.[141] Augmenting the power and economy of

Phoenician cities was important to the Persians because the Phoenician navy was essentially to

the military power of the empire. Under Persian control the southern Levantine coast was an

important land bridge between Egypt and the rest of the empire. Control of this passage and a

monopoly on its ports was crucial to ensuring Persian control of Egypt, which was frequently

threatened by revolts.[142]

According to the fourth century BCE writer Pseudo-Scylax, Ascalon was controlled by

Tyre.[143] Archaeological evidence confirms new settlement on the tel by the late fifth century

BCE. At this point, the buildings destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar were harvested for building

material and covered over by new structures built according to a new plan and with different

spatial divisions.[144] A warehouse consisting of adjoining regularly sized rectangular rooms was

built over the destroyed remains of the Philistine marketplace, which was leveled and used for

building the new phase.[145]

Despite the importance of the southern coastal plain in this period, there is little literary

evidence concerning the Phoenicians in Ascalon, and the archaeological evidence is not yet fully

published.[146] For example, we know very little about the political organization of the city under

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[141] *ANET* 1955: 662; Pseudo-Scylax.*Periplus*. See also: Tal 2005.

[142]484 BCE: Her.*Hist.*7.1-8. c.460 BCE: Her.*Hist.*3.15. 404 BCE: Dio.Sic.14.35. 387 BCE: Dio.Sic.15.2-4. 359 BCE: Dio.Sic.15.92. There are several instances in which a Phoenician fleet was sent by the Persians to Egypt, which likely stopped at or were supplied by the Phoenician cities along the southern Levantine coast, e.g., during the Egyptian revolt of c.460 BCE (*FGrH* 666 F14, 36-9; Thuc.1.104; 109-110; Dio.Sic.11.75).

[143] Pseudo-Scylax.*Periplus*; Lipinski 2004, 331-334.

[144] Stager et al. 2008, 283.

[145] Stager et al. 2008, 313-314.

[146] The architecture and associated finds are scheduled to be published in a forthcoming *Ashkelon Expedition* volume.

the Phoenicians, or the city's responsibilities to the Tyrians and Persians. We know that the Phoenician cities enjoyed a privileged status under Persian rule, in which they were allowed a great deal of economic and political autonomy.[147] The cities of Phoenicia were ruled by hereditary kings, but these monarchs were still beholden to the Persian king, and were required to pay taxes and provide military assistance to the empire.[148] Presumably Ascalon also paid taxes and tribute to Tyre, and was controlled by a Tyrian appointed official. The city, with Ashdod and Gaza, began minting sheqels ("Philisto-Arabian" coins) following Attic designs in the fifth century BCE, which attests to a certain amount of economic autonomy (Fig.2.1).[149]

There is evidence of an influx of Phoenician culture at Ascalon in this period, although there is nothing particularly Tyrian about the material. Although portions of the earlier Philistine population probably remained in the city, archaeological evidence points to the dominance of Phoenician practices. Evidence from ostraca dating to the sixth-fourth centuries BCE shows that Phoenician script was used, with evidence also for the use of Greek.[150] Many of the names preserved on these ostraca, and on later inscriptions, are Phoenician.[151] Egyptian influence can be traced via a hoard of Egyptian bronze figurines.[152] A tendency towards Egyptianizing styles

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[147] Briant 1996, 55-60; Jigoulov 2009, 138-146; Elayi 2013, 113-115.

[148] Her.3.91; Jigoulov 2009, 146-147. Elayi 1980, 25-27.

[149] Gitler and Tal 2006; Gitler and Tal 2009; Gitler and Tal 2012.

[150] Cross 2008, 350-366.

[151] Ibid., 350-361, n.2.4, 2.6, 2.18, 2.24, 2.25; *IG* II 2836.

[152] Schloen (2008, 160-161) and Stager et al. (2008), contra Iliffe (1936), who dates the hoard some time after the fifth century BCE.

is well-documented at other Phoenician-controlled sites in the Levant in this period.[153] The

material from the Persian-period levels at the site is awaiting full publication, so it is difficult to

situate the Ascalonian evidence in light of trends and practices elsewhere. What is evident,

however, is that the fifth century BCE witnessed an intensification of contact between the Greek

world and the southern Levant.

Ascalon and the Greek world in the Persian Period

Connections between the Greek world and Ascalon increased during the Persian period.

Attic imported pottery and Aegean amphorae appear in the earliest Phoenician levels, and Greek

and Cypro-Minoan script can be found on ostraca.[154] Precious metals were brought into Ascalon

from Greece. A recent study of the Philisto-Arabian coins shows that the majority of silver used

for these coins came from Attica, although whether they were imported from Attica as bullion or

made from Attic silver coins which were melted in the Levant is unknown.[155] The local designs

at Ascalon featured typical Athenian symbols, including an owl and the helmeted bust of Athena.

The Phoenicians and Ascalonian Memory

The extension of Phoenician control over Ascalon had a significant impact on the city.

Ascalon's role as a port continued to make the city important and cosmopolitan, as goods and

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[153] Cf. the Tyrian influence at Philadelphia (Kasher 1990, 25), which included the institution of cults to Herakles-Melqart and Asteria-Astarte, the city gods of Tyre. For evidence of Egyptianizing styles under Tyrian control and among the other Phoenicians states, see Aliquot (2004) and Peckham (2014).

[154] Stager et al. 2008, 283, 314; Cross 2008, 366-368. The Persian period Attic pottery is currently being studied by Rebecca Martin.

[155] Gitler, Ponting and Tal 2008, 20-21. Although the design of Philisto-Arabian coins was usually based on Athenian issues, they included mint marks unique to the minting cities and followed a different weight, i.e. the 14.32g shekel rather than the 17g tetradrachm. The silver content of the coins was not entirely Attic; other sources include Lydia, Siphnos and silver from the Persian Empire (ibid. 21).

peoples from many parts of the Eastern Mediterranean passed through. The people who made up

the Phoenician administration and merchants would have brought with them a range of new

traditions and practices, including new cults and gods. It is in this period that later historians

identify the roots of Ascalonian cults that continued into the Roman period. The lack of evidence

for the religious life of the peoples of Ascalon during the period of Phoenician control is

frustrating, but the cults of the city were evidently vibrant and sufficiently appealing to be

worthy of reference by Herodotus.[156] The publication of the Persian-period material at Ascalon is

currently underway, and will help to provide a better framework for understanding the city in this

period.

Although we cannot come to any conclusions about the cults of Phoenician Ascalon, the

fact that the city was controlled by the Phoenicians and forged close connections to the Greek

world in this period is significant in formulating later Ascalonian perceptions of their past. The

Phoenician past was the one that was most physically evident to the peoples of Ascalon in the

Hellenistic and Roman periods, a history that had obvious links to their contemporary times via

language, cultural practices, and the cults of the city. The Philistines were not forgotten, but the

Phoenician past was both more immediate and preferred by the Ascalonians in later times.

Ptolemaic Ascalon

Historical Overview

Phoenician control over Ascalon ceased in 332 BCE, when Alexander the Great passed

through the southern Levant during his conquest of the Persian Empire. His army had already

captured Tyre in the summer of 332 BCE after a seven-month long siege and according to

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[156] See Chapter 4.

Arrian, all of Palestine had surrendered to Alexander by the time he left Phoenicia.[157] The defeat

of its mother city and the lack of a Persian force in Ascalon to check Alexander's advance south

probably inspired the city to come to terms with the Macedonians.[158] After the death of

Alexander the empire was split among his generals, and the southern Levant was included within

the boundaries of the new Ptolemaic kingdom centered in Egypt. The Ptolemies ruled Ascalon

until the early second century BCE.

There are few literary references to Ascalon under Ptolemaic rule, although the picture is

augmented by archaeological evidence for a series of warehouses and domestic complexes at the

site.[159] A destruction event uncovered during excavation of these areas from the late fourth

century BCE likely dates to the years around the Battle of Gaza in 312 BCE. [160] Ascalon is not

specifically mentioned in conjunction with the battle between Ptolemaic and Antiogonid forces

outside Gaza, but the southern coastal plain was a zone of contention between these two

kingdoms from 315-312 BCE.[161] After his victory in the Battle of Gaza, Ptolemy retook several

cities seized by Demetrius and Antigonus in Phoenicia, but withdrew again to Egypt when

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[157] Arr.*Anab.*2.25.4.
[158] Arr.*Anab.*2.18-2.24; Plut.*Alex.*24.4-25.3. Although some scholars argue that Gaza, which did resist Alexander, was controlled by Tyre along with Ascalon there is no evidence that this was the case. The evidence for Tyrian control of Gaza is also circumstantial. It is not described as a Phoenician city by Pseudo-Scylax. Gaza's defiance of Alexander is connected by Arrian and other ancient sources to the installation of a Persian governor and a Persian military force in the city (Arr.*Anab.*2.25.4; Curtius 4.6.7.) See Elayi and Sapin (1998, 154-156) and Tal (2005, 8, n.20; 2009, 2011) for a discussion and relevant bibliography about the status of Gaza in the Persian period.
[159] Stager et al. 2008, 287, 321-322 (domestic structures); ibid. 316-317 (a warehouse).

[160] App.*Syr.*54; Dio.Sic.19.80-85; Plut.*Demet.*5; Jos.*Ap.*1.22.184-186. Justin (15.1.6-9) incorrectly locates the battle at Gamala.

[161] Although Ascalon and the other cities in this area were under the control of the Ptolemies, Antigonus and his son, Demetrios Poliorcetes ("the besieger") attempted to extend their power south from their holdings in Asia Minor. In the summer of 315 Antigonus entered Phoenicia and moved down the coast to capture Joppa and Gaza (App.*Syr.*53; Dio.Sic.19.59). In response, Ptolemy captured Cyprus in that same year and then launched attacks on Greece and southern Asia Minor (Dio.Sic.19.75.4-7).

Antigonus arrived to reinforce his son's army.[162] Ptolemy destroyed several cities (not named)

on his way back to Egypt.[163]

Although Ascalon does not appear in literary accounts of these campaigns, and the

evidence for the Battle of Gaza itself is slight, it is possible that Ascalon resisted conquest by the

Antigonids, resulting in the use of military force to subdue the city (at least temporarily). Or,

Ascalon was among the cities that Diodorus Siculus claims were "razed" by Ptolemy during his

tactical retreat to Egypt.[164] Archaeological evidence of a destruction event from this period at

Ascalon—burnt floors covered in ash, roof and wall collapse, carbonized wood beams, smashed

vessels, and the discovery of two spear points from a room—suggests a quick and intense

event.[165] The destruction was originally dated to the first decade of the third century BCE based

on the discovery of a coin hoard containing silver tetradrachmas of Alexander the Great and

Philip Arrhidaeus.[166] However, Philip Arrhidaeus was killed in 317 BCE and coinage bearing

his image ceased that year. Therefore, identifying this destruction with the activities of the

Ptolemies and Antigonids between 315-312 BCE is consistent with both the numismatic

evidence and literary accounts of attacks on the coastal cities.

Ascalon and Egypt

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[162] Dio.Sic.19.85; 19.93.

[163] Ibid. 19.93.7.

[164] Ibid. 19.93.7.

[165] Stager *et al.* 2008, 287, 297, 322.

[166] Ibid. 287, 322.

Ascalon enjoyed a close relationship to the Ptolemies throughout the Hellenistic period.[167] Ptolemaic silver tetradrachms minted at Ascalon in the last quarter of the third century BCE reflect this allegiance (Fig.2.2). This was the first coin series produced by Ascalon since the Philisto-Arabian issues of the fifth-fourth centuries BCE. The earliest tetradrachm series minted at Ascalon dates to the reign of Ptolemy IV (221-205 BCE), and features the busts of Isis and Serapis on the obverse, and an eagle standing on a thunderbolt with a cornucopia on the reverse.[168] The iconography on these coins is typical of Ptolemaic coins in this period. They were the only city in the region to mint these coins, but for good reason. The Ptolemaic tetradrachm standard by 290 BCE was 14.3g compared to the 17.2g Attic standard.[169] Assuming an exchange rate of 1 Attic to 1 Ptolemaic tetradrachm, the exchequer in Ptolemaic cities earned a full 2.9g of silver per coin.[170] As a major port city, it makes sense that Ascalon minted these tetradrachms, as it increased the overall profitability of the port. It may also be that the Ptolemies adopted the local standard of the southern coastal plain, given the similarities in

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[167] This connection was especially important to the Ptolemies, as southern Palestine was a flashpoint between the Hellenistic kings in the third century BCE. Vying for control of Syria, Ptolemy IV and Antiochus III fought a battle in 217 BCE at Raphia, a town south of Gaza and on the border between southern Palestine and Egypt. Ptolemy IV won decisively and Antiochus III retreated to Gaza and then to Antioch (Pol.*Hist.*5.80-87). Paneas, north of the Golan Heights, was also a battleground in which the Seleucids won control of Syria and Palestine from the Ptolemies in the early second century BCE. Kasher (1990, 20) notes the impact that the wars of the Diadochi had on the people of Phoenicia and Syria (including the southern coastal plain): "the War of the Diadochi was characterized by wide-spread destruction, slaughter of local residents, capture of prisoners and their sale into slavery, and massive, more or less voluntary emigration."

[168] Meshorer et al. 2013, 96, n.4-5 (219-218 BCE).

[169] Morkhom 1991, 10. He notes that the weight of Ptolemy I's silver tetradrachm was first reduced from the Attic standard to 15.8g, then to 14.9g and finally a standard of 14.4-14.2g was adopted in the early third century BCE.

[170] Meadows 2014, 186. However, Meadows notes (186) that we do not know if the exchange rate was indeed 1:1. He suggests that another advantage to the introduction of the Ptolemaic drachma was to keep silver within the Ptolemaic kingdom, which did not have a local silver supply. Foreign coins which entered the Ptolemaic kingdom were melted down and the metal was reused (Morkholm 1991, 20).

weight standards between the Philisto-Arabian issues (14.32g) and the later Ptolemaic tetradrachm.[171]

Late Hellenistic Ascalon (to 104/3 BCE)

Historical Overview

Ascalon was transferred to Seleucid control in 198 BCE, following Antiochus III's victory over the Ptolemy V near Panias in northern Palestine.[172] This political change is demonstrated by a shift to minting Seleucid coins at Ascalon. The earliest Seleucid issues produced at Ascalon date to the reign of Antiochus IV (175-164 BCE) and are small bronze coins depicting the Seleucid king on the obverse.[173] Ascalon also continued to mint silver royal tetradrachms (Fig.2.3). Apollo, the patron deity of the Seleucids, appears on Seleucid coins frequently.[174] More exotic symbols, such as Macedonian-style spiked helmets appear on coins of Tryphon, the Seleucid general turned short-reigning usurper in 141 BCE.[175] Greek legends were used to name the kings and to communicate their status as 'basileus' and, in the case of Tryphon, 'autokrator'.

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[171] This argument is championed by Gitler and Tal (2006, 305), but Morkholm (1991, 10) raised questions about this connection, noting that "it is hard to see why local conditions" in the Phoenician-controlled cities from the fourth century BCE "should have exerted a strong influence on Ptolemy I. The development in Egypt was probably governed by the wish to retain a workable ration between gold and silver."

[172] Poly.*Hist*.16.18-19; 1 Macc 1:16-20.

[173] E.g. Meshorer et al. 2013: 96, n.6.

[174] Erickson 2009.

[175] 1 Macc 11-14; Jos.*Ant*.13.5.1, 13.6-7; Newel 1918, 77-78. Coins of Tryphon were minted only at Antioch, Ptolemais, Dor and Ascalon. The use of the Macedonian helmet casts the usurper in the guise of a conquering Macedonian general, reinforcing the fact that his army had acclaimed him king.   It is unclear if the Ascalonians identified the helmet as Macedonian.

Ascalon's relationships with the Greek world and the Hasmoneans dominated the history of the city in this period. Ascalon drew closer to the Greek world, and the community began to use elements of Greek culture in Greek ways. Ascalon's close connections with the Greeks, and its past as a Philistine city had the potential to cause conflict with the Hasmoneans. However, the city's relationship with the Hasmoneans was positive, despite the anti-Hellenizing and anti-Philistine rhetoric of some Hasmonean sympathizers and sources.

Ascalon and the Greek World

Greek cultural and political influence is more evident than ever before at Ascalon by the second century BCE. The material traces from Ascalon and produced by Ascalonians abroad testify to the increased adoption of Greek political institutions, the Greek language, Greek names and the adoption of Greek cultural practices. Although the architectural and ceramic evidence from this period has only been studied preliminarily, a new monograph on the topic is due shortly and will address this issue in depth.[176]

The best evidence for the increased interaction between the Hellenistic world and Ascalon comes from major Greek cities in the Mediterranean. For example, epitaphs of Ascalonians appear at Athens and Demetrias in Thessaly around the third century BCE.[177] An Ascalonian family and an Ascalonian woman were buried on Rhenea in the funerary enclosure of Delos, an international trading depot.[178] Two Ascalonians dedicated altars to gods from their

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[176] This volume, authored by K. Birney, is scheduled for publication in the *Ashkelon Expedition* series.

[177] Antipatros, son of Aphrodisios, buried in Athens: *IG II*[2] 8388; Barbanera 1992; Stager 2005; Tribulato 2013. Mettounmikim of Ascalon: Sznycer 1979.

[178] Dionysos of Ascalon and his son, Nikandros: *EAD* 30, n.228-229; Couilloud 1974, n.140; Artemisia, daughter of Philos, of Ascalon: *EAD* 30, n.21; Couilloud 1974, n.68.

home city.[179] Four other inscriptions from Delos partially preserve references to Ascalonians in

the same period.[180] The Ascalonian banker Philostratus was one of the most prominent patrons

on Delos, dedicating funds to build the Agora of the Italians and a sanctuary to the gods of

Ascalon on Delos' Mount Kynthos.[181] All of these inscriptions were written in Greek, and all

the individuals except for one had Greek names and Greek patronyms. The funerary epitaph

from Athens of the Ascalonian Antipatros, son of Aphrodisios, is written in both Greek and

Phoenician, and Antipatros' Phoenician name (Shem) and patronym (Abdashtart) is included.

The epigram accompanying the stele is in Greek, but the dedicant, a friend of the deceased, bears

a Phoenician name in both the Greek and Phoenician inscriptions.[182]

Although we might expect Ascalonians to highlight their "Greekness" while in Greek

contexts, the evidence described above demonstrates that they did so in ways that signaled a real,

rather than superficial, knowledge of Greek socio-cultural practices. Greek cultural elements

sometimes appear alongside Phoenician ones, as on a bilingual epitaph of Shem/Antipatros from

Athens. Philostratus, the Ascalonian banker on Delos, fully participated in the quintessentially

Hellenistic practice of euergestism while paying homage to the gods of his homeland. It appears

[179] Damon, son of Demetrios: *GD* 57; *ID* 2305. For Philostratus' dedications, see note in detail below. For the sanctuary, see Plassart (1928) and Baslez's (1977) work on foreign cults on Delos.

[180] *ID* 2033; *ID* 2593, line 20 (144/3 BCE); *ID* 2599, lines 7-8 (105/4-103/2 BCE); *EAD* 30.284.

[181] *ID* 2549, *ID* 1717-1718 (the Agora of the Italians dedication); *ID* 1722 (base from a statue of Philostratus in the Agora of the Italians); *ID* 2529b, *ID* 2549 (epigrams celebrating Philostratus' patronage); *ID* 1724 (a statue dedicated by the Romans to Philostratus as benefactor); *ID* 19 (Theophilus, the son of Philostratus, as ephebos); *ID* 2253-2254 (dedication by Midas to his friend Philostratus); *ID* 1769 (mentions the slave of Philostratus); *ID* 1719-1721 (dedications on Mount Kynthos to gods of Ascalon); *ID* 1723 (dedication by Diodotus the Ascalonian, to Athena and Zeus of Mount Kynthios, for Philostratus). For commentary on Philostratus' career and his grant of Napolitan citizenship see Leiwo (1989) and Mancinetti-Santamaria (1983).

[182] Stager (2005, 439-443) argues that the lion depicted attacking the corpse on the stele is a personification of Astarte. This idea, and the theophoric names of Shem and his father when translated into Greek, are considered more fully in Chapter 4.

that when Ascalonians expressed their identity abroad, the two dominant elements are Greek and

local/regional, rather than Greek and Phoenician.[183]

Ascalon and the Hasmonaeans

Hellenistic influence on Ascalon, and its history as a Canaanite and Philistine city are

often thought to be key structuring elements in the relationship between the city and its Jewish

neighbors in the second century BCE.[184] Ancient sources frame the events of the Maccabean

revolt and the establishment of Hasmonean control over Palestine as a conflict between the Jews

and their Hellenized Gentile neighbors. However, the rhetoric employed in the literary evidence

is at odds with the relationship between Ascalon and the Hasmoneans.

1 Maccabees, one of the Late Hellenistic deuterocanonical texts providing an account of

this period in Palestine, specifically identifies the Philistines as members of the Hellenistic

Gentile coalition against whom the Maccabees waged war. These ancient enemies of the

Israelites are first invoked in 1 Maccabees, where the Seleucid army flees "to the land of the

Philistines" and is later aided by allies "from Philistia."[185] A later attack on Ashdod by Jonathan

is intended to uproot an invading army sent by a claimant to the Seleucid throne, but the

centerpiece of the victory is the destruction of Ashdod's Temple of Dagon. This is the same

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[183] For example, Philostratus dedicated an altar to the Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania on Delos, a goddess whose name indicates a regional rather than Phoenician context.

[184] The bibliography of work dealing with relationships between the Jews and their Gentile neighbors and the impact of these interactions on Jewish society is immense. A few key works include: Tcherikover 1959; Goodenough 1965; Hengel 1980; Schürer 1986; Kasher 1988; Hengel 1989; Kasher 1990; Feldman 1993; Gruen 1998; Levine 1998; Rajak 2001; Schwartz 2001.

[185] 1 Macc 3:24; 3:41.

temple in which the Ark of the Covenant was stored when the Philistines captured it from the Israelites. [186]

The origin and purpose of the rhetoric employed by the writers of 1 and 2 Maccabees and the question of whether this rhetoric accurately reflects the policies undertaken by the Hasmoneans themselves is outside the scope of this work.[187] However, the examples listed above illustrates the point that in these two texts the history of the Philistines and their relationship to the Israelites was present in the social and cultural memories of peoples living in the Hellenistic period. At the very least, the sources for 1 and 2 Maccabees found the ancient conflict between the Israelites and Philistines to be an important component in circumscribing the Hasmonean position relative to the cities of the southern coastal plain. Despite the demographic and socio-cultural changes which had taken place since the seventh century BCE, the cities of the former Philistine pentapolis were still Philistine, defined by the ethnic, political and religious identity attached to them by local memory and Jewish scriptural traditions.

Despite this rhetoric, Ascalon enjoyed friendly relationships with the Hasmonean leaders beginning with Jonathan, escaping conquest and destruction through diplomacy. Ascalon was still under the control of the Seleucids throughout the second century BCE, but that kingdom was beset with civil war and succession issues. The Hasmonean leaders and the Ptolemaic kings supported one and then another of the Seleucid claimants to the throne. In 147/6 BCE Jonathan allied with the Ptolemaic king, and Alexander Balas, a claimant to the Seleucid throne.[188] As part of this alliance, Jonathan led a campaign against the general of a rival Seleucid who was

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[186] 1 Macc 10:83-84; 1 Sam 4-6.

[187] See discussions by Schwartz (2001, 33-42), Trampedach (2012), and Eyal (2013).

[188] 1 Macc 10:1-66.

encamped in the cities of the southern coastal plain. Jonathan seized Iamnia and destroyed

Ashdod, including the temple of Dagon.[189] When his army arrived at Ascalon, however, the

people of the city met him at his camp, brought him gifts and offered him hospitality.[190]

Jonathan then returned "from there to Jerusalem with a great deal of plunder," sparing the city

from destruction and capture.[191] The implication from the ancient sources is that the city bribed

Jonathan to leave them alone. Kasher argues instead that Ascalon stayed loyal to Alexander

Balas, and was spared by Jonathan for the city's loyalty to his ally.[192]

Ascalon was frequently caught up in the shifting alliances between the Seleucids,

Ptolemies, and Hasmoneans. In 145 BCE Ptolemy VI betrayed Alexander Balas and made an

alliance with Alexander's enemy Demetrius II. According to 1 Maccabees, Ptolemy invaded

southern Palestine, seizing the coastal cities "as far as Seleucia by the sea," and installing

Ptolemaic garrisons in each.[193] If true, Ascalon was probably among the cities captured by

Ptolemaic forces. Alexander Balas attempted to defeat Ptolemy in Syria, but was unsuccessful

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[189] Kasher (1990, 93) characterizes this as "a typical act of Hasmonean zealotry." However, 1 Maccabees (11:82-84) says that members of the Seleucid commander's cavalry had taken refuge in the temple, and the implication is that this is the initial reason for the temple's destruction. There is still a sense among the Ashdodites that Jonathan's attack had gone too far, as they later complain about their treatment to Jonathan's Ptolemaic ally, Ptolemy VI (11:4-5).

[190] 1 Macc 10:86-87; Jos.*Ant.*13.4.4.101.

[191] Jos.*Ant.*13.4.4.101.

[192] Kasher (1990, 94) also asserts that Ascalon's loyalty to Alexander Balas was motivated by the city's economic, cultural, and religious connections to the Ptolemaic kingdom. In my opinion this solution is unnecessary. Iamnia, Joppa, and Ashdod were occupied by Apollonius (the general of Demetrius II Nicator) and his army, and thus attacked by Jonathan. Jonathan's visit to the city is inexplicable if Ascalon was not somehow embroiled in Apollonius' campaign. Kasher argues that Jonathan was "impelled by the momentum of his military campaign." It seems more likely that Jonathan advanced to Ascalon to determine its loyalty. It may be that the city was actually inclined toward Demetrius II or had outwardly supported him, but then switched sides after Apollonius' defeat. This would explain the need to bribe Jonathan to return to Jerusalem. Alternately, the city may have continued to support Alexander Balas, and instead showered him with gifts for this victory.

[193] 1 Macc 11:8-13. Josephus (*Ant.*13.4.5-7) claims that Ptolemy VI turned against Alexander Balas after discovering that the Seleucid king had plotted to murder him. In the chronology presented by Josephus, Ptolemy VI comes to Syria to help Alexander Balas and is welcomed into the coastal cities warmly because of his relationship to Alexander.

and both men died soon after.[194] According to 1 Maccabees, the soldiers in the garrisons placed

in the coastal cities by Ptolemy were murdered by the inhabitants after his death.[195] If Ascalon

had even briefly come under Ptolemaic control in 145 BCE, it was soon restored to the

Seleucids.

Jonathan returned to Ascalon in 144 BCE to recruit troops for his new ally, the Seleucid

king Antiochus VI.[196] Upon Jonathan's arrival at Ascalon, the inhabitants again"came and

brought him presents and met him in a splendid manner."[197] He successfully secured Ascalon's

support for Antiochus VI, and perhaps also a promise of troops from the city. Josephus writes

that Jonathan departed for Gaza "when he had persuaded those cities to promise their assistance

to Antiochus."[198] Antiochus VI appointed Jonathan's brother, Simon, as *strategos* of the coast of

Palestine, and so this area was technically under the power of the Hasmoneans. It was perhaps in

his role as strategos that Simon visited Ascalon, fortified nearby strongholds, and installed in

them garrisons.[199]

Throughout this period, Ascalon successfully avoided destruction or long-term conquest

by the Hasmoneans, despite the expansion of their territory over other cities in the region.

Kasher has championed Ascalon's connection to the Ptolemies as the reason for its continued

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[194] 1 Macc 11:14-19; Jos.*Ant.*13.4.8.

[195] 1 Macc 11:18. Josephus does not mention that garrisons were installed in the city nor does he note their removal or murder.

[196] Jos.*Ant.*13.5.5.

[197] Jos.*Ant.*13.5.5.149.

[198] Ibid. 150.

[199] 1 Macc 11:59; Jos.*Ant.*13.5.4.146; Jos.*Ant.*13.5.10.180. Josephus says that Simon visited parts of Judea and Palestine as far as (ἕως) Ascalon, indicating that the city or its hinterland was included among the places at which Simon stopped. Cf. 1 Maccabees (12:33), which says that Simon traveled south to Ascalon but did not fortify any citadels and installed a garrison only in Joppa.

independence. The evidence for this connection is circumstantial at best, and depends on the assumption that Ascalon's proximity to Egypt protected it. Other cities (e.g. Gaza) even closer to the Ptolemaic kingdom were not spared, so it seems that if Ascalon had a particularly close relationship with the Ptolemies it was a product of the city's own diplomatic priorities and local conditions. More likely the Ascalonians sought to preserve their status and economic prosperity through negotiation with the Hasmoneans.

Ascalon's dual role as both ally and ancient enemy to the nascent Jewish Hasmonean kingdom emphasizes the burden of the city's history, and the challenges faced by the community in attempting to articulate their identity and past. In the next chapters, we will see that Ascalon chose to mediate their Philistine past by using their more recent Phoenician history to argue for an identity which reinforced their connections to the social and political spheres of the Greek world.

An Independent Ascalon?

The first centuries BCE/CE mark a period of great change for Ascalon and its region. In these two hundred years the power of the Hellenistic and Hasmonean rulers was broken, and Rome annexed Egypt and the Levant. Before turning to an overview of Ascalon's historical fortunes in this period we will first look at the ways in which Ascalon articulated its political status and cultural identity as a "polis". Ascalon's expression of its identity as a Hellenistic polis was crucial in structuring the city's relationship to other powers, and laid the groundwork for other ways that the city situated itself within the Greco-Roman world.

Ascalon as a 'polis'

In 104/3 BCE the city began to mint a series of autonomous bronze coins, so-called because they are dated to a local era rather than the Seleucid era.   Ascalon was one of the first cities in the southern Levant to mint autonomous coins, although such coins had already appeared in Phoenician cities by the last quarter of the second century BCE.[200] Instead of simply featuring the Seleucid king, the new civic coins featured images of the turret-crowned city goddess Tyche on the obverse.[201] Accompanying this design was a series of new Greek labels applied to both sides of the coins, proclaiming the city's autonomy (*autonomia*), its sacredness (*ieras*), and the inviolable status (*asylos*) of the city's space.[202] The DHMOS ASKALWNITWN replaced the ethnic "ASKALWNITWN" on some issues.[203]

Scholars have questioned the degree to which cities that proclaimed their "autonomy" on coins were, in fact, politically autonomous. The image of the Seleucid king still appears on some autonomous issues, although it has been suggested that this was a way of honoring the king who gave the city independence (Fig.2.4).[204] For our purposes, it is more significant that these new autonomous issues expressed the city's political and cultural status in Greek terms associated with the world of the Hellenistic polis. The royal portraits on earlier Ascalonian coins served to express the city's obedience and participation in the political Hellenistic royal system, acting in a

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[200] For example Ascalon's former parent city, Tyre, began minting autonomous coins in 125 BCE (Syon 2008). Gazan coins from 95/4 BCE indicate that its new civic era began in 108/7 BCE (Kushnir-Stern 1995; Kushnir-Stein 2005).

[201] The appearance of the local city goddess on the coins is discussed further in Chapter 5.

[202] *Asylia* appears c.112 BCE. *Autonomia* appears c.104/3 BCE. The "demos" of Ascalon and the title *ieras* appears on coins slightly later, c.105/6 BCE.

[203] E.g. Yashin 2007, 38, n.12.

[204] Spaer 1984, 239 (with parallels of the same phenomenon elsewhere). See also Gitler and Master (2010) for a recent discussion which takes into account the appearance of the Ptolemaic kings on some Ascalonian autonomous mints of the mid-first century BCE.

way consistent with a subject city. In the late second/early first centuries BCE. Ascalon and

other cities of the Near East began to frame their identities on coins in a Hellenizing rather than

royal manner. The title "basileus" and the image of the Seleucid king were replaced by the

"demos of Ascalon" and the image of the patron city goddess. The titles *ieras* and *asylia* are

found on other civic coins from Asia Minor in this period, and do not appear to reflect any real

policy or enforceable status.[205] Rather, the adoption of these titles expressed cultural identity as a

member of the Greek world, defined by the promotion of a particular cult or temple which

afforded the city some symbolic protection or fame. This practice is discussed in more depth in

Chapter 4.

There is further evidence that Greek political and cultural institutions had taken hold in

Ascalon. The boule of Ascalon was constructed some time between the first centuries BCE/CE,

and Greek inscriptions dating to the first century CE attest to honors voted by the *boule* and

demos.[206] The theater at Ascalon might likewise date to this period.[207] Evidence for the

existence of an *agoranamos,* an official in charge of the local markets, comes from inscribed

weights of the first centuries BCE/CE (Fig.2.5).[208]

Historical Overview

Ascalon's self-proclaimed identity as a *polis* appears in a period when many of the

Hellenized cities nearby were losing their autonomy through conquest by the Hasmonean king

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[205] Riggsby 1996, 16-17.

[206] Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016; Hogarth 1922.

[207] When the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon arrived at the site in the 1980's, only the impression of the theater and one lone marble block from the cavea were preserved.

[208] *CIJP* III n.2358.

Alexander Jannaeus. During his nearly thirty year-long reign, Jannaeus conducted numerous

campaigns along the coast of Palestine, conquering Strato's Tower, Dor, Raphia, Anthedon and

Gaza. He also maintained control over Apollonia, Joppa, Iamnia and Azotus.[209] Although

Jannaeus' conquests brought him into Ascalon's region, that city is not listed as having been

captured and is not among the cities listed by Josephus as held by the Jews at the death of

Jannaeus.[210] Kasher has argued that the city's "close political connections with the Ptolemies"

saved it from Hasmonean conquest once again, but there is little evidence to support this

conclusion before 65 BCE.[211]

Regional politics were impacted profoundly in 63 BCE when Pompey Magnus annexed

Syria for Rome and asserted Roman hegemony over the coast of Palestine. Josephus provides a

list of cities that were removed from Hasmonean control, "restored...to their own inhabitants,"

"left in a state of freedom" and then added to the new province of Syria.[212] Josephus does not

mention Ascalon in this list, further indicating that Ascalon was never controlled by the

Hasmoneans and so had to reason to be liberated by the Romans. Given what we know about

Ascalon's status as an *oppidum liberum* in the first century CE, it is likely that the city was

attached temporarily to the Roman province of Syria like the other "Hellenized" cities of the

coast, or was allowed its independence. The disappearance of the autonomous title on coins in

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[209] Jos.*Ant.*13.15.4.395. Gaza's capture was motivated at least partially by that city's earlier alliance with Ptolemy Lathyrus, the Ptolemaic king who had been dethroned by his mother (Jos.*Ant.*13.10.4.285; 13.12.4.334-337; 13.13.2-3).

[210] Jos.*Ant.*13.15.4.395. Ascalon is not numbered among the cities later rebuilt by Gabinius (14.5.3.88).

[211] Ascalon minted silver tetradrachms for the Ptolemies again in this period. This new series of silver coins, while depicting the Ptolemaic king on the obverse and the eagle and thunderbolt design typical of Ptolemaic designs on the reverse also included the legend: ΑΣΚΑΛΩΝΙΤΩΝ ΙΕΡΑΣ ΑΣΥΛΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΝ (Yashin 2007, 39, n.22; 65/4 BCE). Spaer (1984, 239) argued that this does not indicate that the city was controlled by the Ptolemies, and that the designs on the obverse and reverse should be read as honorific depictions of "its royal protectors" which the city sought "against the increasing threat posed by the Hasmonean kings."

[212] Jos.*Ant.*14.4.75-76. See also his account in *BJ* 1.7.7.156-157.

the mid-first century BCE suggests that the city was either not independent in that period (and then, perhaps part of Syria), or was not interested in promoting its special status by that time.

Entangling Alliances

Ascalon's positive relationship with the ruling dynasties of the Jewish state continued in the first century BCE. The family of the Hasmonean Aristobulus II found refuge at Ascalon in 55 BCE after Aristobulus attempted to revolt against the Roman procurator Gabinius.[213] Kasher argued that Gabinius settled the family in Ascalon because it was a "neutral city" located outside of Judaea, thus preventing the presence of the family from fanning the flames of revolt.[214] A least part of this family relocated to Chalcis in 49 BCE, but they maintained connections with people at Ascalon. Evidence for a continued connection appears in a story related by Josephus, who asserts that Alexander IV, Herod the Great's son, was accused of formulating a plot to poison the king at Ascalon.[215] Alexander IV was the son of Mariamne, the granddaughter of Aristobulus II, and one of the family members who went into exile at Ascalon in 55 BCE. She may have maintained connections with people in the city, or have introduced her son to friends there. In any case, Herod's search for the poison in Ascalon was in vain.[216]

Ascalon also enjoyed friendly relations with Antipater, the general of Aristobulus II's brother, Hyrcanus II. While strategos of Idumaea, Antipater is said to have cultivated close ties with *ethne* living nearby, including the Arabians, Gazites and Ashkelonians.[217] Ascalon renewed

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[213] Jos.*Ant.*14.1.97; 14.7.4.126.

[214] Kasher 1990, 181-182.

[215] Jos.*Ant.*14.7.4.126;16.8.253-254; Jos.*BJ.*1.9.2.

[216] This may simply be an apocryphal story highlighting the bad relationship between Herod and his children.

[217] Jos.*Ant.*14.1.10.

its friendship with Antipater's family when the city provided help to his son (also named Antipater), in 47 BCE. Antipater and Mithridates of Pergamon stopped at the city while bringing reinforcements to Julius Caesar during his Alexandrian war. With Pelusium refusing to admit him, Mithridates camped instead at Ascalon, and awaited the arrival of Antipater with an auxiliary force.[218]

During this period Ascalon also sought to demonstrate its loyalty to Rome and the Ptolemies through aid to Caesar and honors granted to Cleopatra VII. The Egyptian queen appears on the obverse of silver tetradrachm minted at Ascalon between 50-38 BCE.[219] The design seems to be honorific rather than an acknowledgement of her direct control of the city.[220] With Sidon and Tyre, Ascalon received copies of Caesar's confirmation of Hyrcanus' rule over Judaea.[221] All three cities were important ports, and copies of the order were probably posted there because they would reach a large number of people, and the information could be disseminated along major trade routes.

Ascalon's special status on the southern coast was reaffirmed after 31 BCE, when the city was the only polis in the south not awarded to Herod by Octavian. Octavian confirmed the territory given to Herod by Antony, and added to Herod's kingdom the cities of Gadara, Hippos, Samaria, Gaza, Anthedon, Joppa and Strato's Tower.[222] Ascalon does not appear in this list. The fact that the city lay outside Herod's realm is reaffirmed by Josephus' description of Herod's

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[218] Jos.*Ant.*14.8.1.127-130; Jos.*BJ.*1.9.3.187-188.

[219] Brett 1937; Gitler and Master 2010.

[220] Ascalon is usually not counted among the cities given Antony to Cleopatra in Josephus (*BJ.*1.18.5.361; *Ant.*15.4.1.).

[221] Jos.*Ant.*14.10.3.197.

[222] Jos.*Ant.*15.7.3.217; Jos.*BJ.*1.20.3.396.

building projects at Ascalon. Josephus claims that Herod built "baths and costly fountains, as also passages round a court that were remarkable both for their worksmanship and size," listing these constructions among the projects funded *outside* Herod's realm.[223] Furthermore, Ascalon was not among the areas parceled out to Herod's sister and sons after the king's death, nor is it listed among the cities attached to Syria at that time.[224] Despite later traditions claiming that Herod's family originated in Ascalon, there is no evidence for this in earlier sources.[225]

Roman Ascalon

Historical Overview

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[223] Jos.*BJ*.1.21.11.422-423.

[224] Jos.*Ant*.17.11.4-5; Jos.*BJ*.2.6.3.

[225] Justin Martyr.*Dial.c.Tryph.*52.3. Eusebius (*Hist.Eccl.*1.6.2-3) also makes this claim, attributing the information to the second century CE historian Sextus Julius Africanus, who lived in southern Palestine. A Christian tradition from the second century CE claims that Herod's family originated in Ascalon. According to this tradition, Herod's father served in the temple of Apollo at Ascalon, but was abducted and brought to Idumaea while still a youth. No hint of an Ascalonian origin appears in Josephus, who only notes that Antipater's father was on friendly terms with the Ascalonians while strategos (Jos.*Ant*.14.1.10). Recent attempts by Kokkinos to reassert the Ascalonian origin story as correct are interesting, but evidence connecting the Herodian family to Ascalon is slight. The most compelling argument in favor of a Herodian link to Ascalon is the presence of a royal palace at the city (Kokkinos 1998, 113; 133-136). The only evidence for this structure comes from Josephus' account of the division of the Herodian kingdom after the king's death. Augustus gave Herod's sister, Salome, Jamnia, Ashdod, Phaselis, and the royal palace (βασίλεια or βασίλειον οἴκησιν) at Ascalon (βασίλεια: *BJ*.2.6.3.98; βασίλειον οἴκησιν: Jos.*Ant*.17.11.5.321). As Kokkinos (1998, 112-113) notes, the only other βασίλεια known from ancient Ascalon is the Phoenician palace mentioned by Pseudo-Scylax. Kokkinos suggests that the Herodians refurbished the Persian-period palace, although there is no evidence that this palace still existed in the first century BCE. Schalit (1969, 403) argued that the palace was in fact built by Herod himself, and Fuks (2000, 48) recently proposed that the Herodian palace may have served as a residence for the king when he traveled through the port at Ascalon. Herod's ownership of a palace at Ascalon is certainly unusual because the city was located outside his control. If true, it would demonstrate that the king had some connection to the city, but not that his family originated there. Additional evidence against a Herodian connection: Herod funded buildings in a number of cities outside his realm, so his building projects in Ascalon should not be considered evidence for Herodian favoritism of that city (Kokkinos 1998, 113). Herodian constructions and dedications to Apollo or which integrate symbols of Apollo do not connect them to Ascalon (ibid. 120-122). Kokkinos' identification of the obverse portraits on several Ascalonian coins as Antipater or Herod has been challenged by Kushnir-Stern (1999, 194-198). Kokkinos (1998, 133-136) and Rappaport (1981, 356-362) both suggested that Ascalon's mint produced coins for Herod but cf. a recent reappraisal of theses coins by Ariel and Fontanille (2012, 93).

In the first century CE, Ascalon retained its independence from both Herodian and Roman rule. Ascalon is sometimes referred to in modern scholarship as a *civitas libera* in the first century. This erroneous designation is based on Pliny's description of the city as a "free town" (*oppidum Ascalo liberum*).[226] However, Pliny distinguishes between an *oppidum liberum* and a *civitatem liberum*, and he includes Ascalon in the former grouping.[227] It is unclear what the title of *oppidum liberum* meant for a city in the Roman world; it may have been an administrative title that carried with it a specific legal standing and obligations (as in the case of *civitas libera*).[228] Ascalon housed a small Roman auxiliary garrison in the first century CE, indicating perhaps that this was one of its responsibilities as an *oppidum liberum*.[229]

While Pliny's description implies that Ascalon was politically important, there is some question about the size of the city in the first centuries BCE/CE. According to Pomponius Mela, in the mid-first century CE Ascalon was a large fortified city.[230] In contrast, Strabo calls first

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[226] Pliny.*NH*.5.14.68. Kasher (1990, 182-183) argues that the title was given to Ascalon because of its history as an important Phoenician port-city.

[227] Pliny refers to the following cities as *oppida libera*: Astigi Vetus (3.12), Delphi (4.7), Thespiae (4.25), Amphipolis (4.38), Aenos (4.43), Bulla Regia (5.22), Ascalon (5.68), Aegae (5.91), Caunos (5.104), Mylasa (5.108), Chios (5.136) and 30 unnamed cities in North Africa (5.30). He explicitly calls these cities *civitate liberum*: Nicopolitania (4.5), Pharsalus (4.29), Abdera (4.42), Athens (4.24), Corcyra (4.52) and Astypalaea (4.71). About twice as many sites are referred to simply with the adjective "free" (*libera/liberum*): Clypea (4.24), Curubis (4.24), Cephallania (4.54), Zacynthus (4.54), Samothrace (4.73), Thasos (4.73), Myrinam (4.73), Seleucia Pieria (5.79), Antioch (5.79), Laodicea (5.79), Mopsos (5.91), Hephaestia (5.91), Cnidos (5.104), Triopia (5.104), Pegusa (5.104), Stadia (5.104), Termera (5.107), Alabanda (5.109), Stratonicea (5.109), Rhodes (5.132), Samon (5.135), Mytiline (5.139), Chalchadon (5.149), Amisum (6.7), Pharnacea (6.11). Two cities (Aegina and Byzantium) are described as *liberae condicionis* (4.46, 4.57) and one city (Tarsum) is called a *liberum urbem*.

[228] Bernhardt (1971, 108-113) suggested that the Roman definition of *oppidum liberum* in the Greek East was not established, and changed over time. Cities with this designation are usually understood to be obligated to pay tribute. In contrast, a *civitas libera and immunis* would have been exempt from this burden.

[229] Jos.*BJ*.3.2.1.

[230] Pomp.Mel.*Ceterum*.1.11.64.

century BCE/CE Ascalon "small" (πόλισμα… μικρόν") and says only that it was a good source for local onions.[231]

However, over the course of the second-third centuries CE, Ascalon grew size and continued to demonstrate a clear engagement with Roman socio-cultural practices. Ammianus Marcellinus numbered it among the five most important cities in Palestine by the fourth century CE, and landscape surveys indicate that in this period the population of the city and its hinterland grew by more than 50%.[232] Part of the expansion and prosperity can be linked to the city's continued involvement in trade, as well as to the production of local wine. Ascalon exported the wine, which was believed to possess medicinal properties, to centers throughout the Mediterranean and.[233]

This prosperity is evident in the adoption of urban amenities typical of Greco-Roman cities in the imperial period. The city's bouleuterion was enlarged in the late second-early third century CE, and imported marble columns, Corinthian capitals and sculpture were used to decorate the building's façade.[234] Two Roman-period phases of renovations were made to the Hellenistic-period walls, but the work seems to be a response to weathering and general maintenance rather than substantial repairs.[235] The city's theater, although not preserved today,

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[231] Strab.16.2.29. Pliny (*NH*.4.32) also discusses the onion crop native to Ascalon.

[232] Allen 2008: 37-49. See now: Huster 2015.

[233] Mayerson 2008; Johnson and Stager 2008.

[234] Garstang 1924; Fischer 1995; Fischer 1998; Fischer 2008; Boehm, Master, and Le Blanc 2016.

[235] Kedar and Mook 1978, 175. It is tempting to associate the first century CE repairs to damage sustained during the Jewish rebels' attack on the city, but there is not enough evidence to support this claim. The second round of repairs, dated to some time between 270-400 CE based on the organic materials in mortar used during this repair, occured during the same period as the remodeling of the bouleuterion and may be connected to a larger program of refurbishments to civic constructions. The earthquake in May 363 CE may be to blame for some of these repairs, as we have some literary evidence that portions of Ascalon were destroyed (Russel 1980; Russel 1985, 42). There is no archaeological evidence from the wall circuit to suggest that the repairs were related to earthquake damage.

was likely in use by the second century CE.[236] The traveler Theophanes, who visited Ascalon in the fourth century CE, reported visiting the city's theater and a "golden" basilica.[237] The sixth century CE Madaba map depicts the colonnaded streets of Ascalon, a tetrapylon and an apsidal building near the eastern gate.[238]

Ascalon's engagement with the larger Mediterranean extended beyond the transformation of the city's topography. Although Latin was never widely used in the city for public dedications, there is limited evidence for its use in private contexts.[239] Local patrons helped fund major constructions, and dated their works to the reign of the emperors in the Roman way.[240] Geiger's recent study on the intellectuals of Roman period Ascalon collected evidence of 23 famous Ascalonian historians, philosophers, grammarians, and writers who were active in the Mediterranean.[241] Ascalonians are attested in the empire in other contexts as well, as a result of their participation in the Roman military. The *Cohors I Ascalonitanorum* (sometimes *Ascalonita*), an auxiliary force bearing the city's name, appears on 15 preserved military diplomas between the mid-first to mid-second centuries CE.[242] One diploma from 156/7 CE notes that the unit was comprised of bowmen.[243] The ethnic appellations of members of this unit

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[236] Few theaters were built after the third century CE in Roman Palestine (Retzleff 2003; Sear 2006). No portions of the theater's architecture remains today, but based on the construction dates of other theaters in southern Israel it is likely that the theater at Ascalon was already in use by the second century CE at the latest.

[237] See discussion and translation in Matthews (2006, 50-65).

[238] Donner 1992.

[239] E.g. *CIJP* III 2342 (bilingual funerary inscription of Gaius Comisius Memor); ibid.2345 (a funerary inscription?).

[240] E.g. *CIJP* III 2337-2238 (columns with dedicatory inscriptions).

[241] Geiger 2014.

[242] *CIL* 16.35. *CIJP* III (252) includes a complete list of these references.

[243] *CIL* XVI.106.

by indicates that by the second century the soldiers in this cohorts came from many parts of the Roman world and were not drawn specifically from Ascalon.[244] Outside of this cohort there is some inscriptional evidence for Ascalonians serving in Roman legionary and praetorian units abroad.[245]

Roman Ascalon and its Philistine Past

Although Ascalon forged alliances with the Hasmonean and Herodian kings in the first century BCE, ancient enmity, and divergent religious and socio-cultural practices placed tension on Ascalon's relationship with the Jews during the Roman period. For example, Apelles, an Ascalonian and counselor to Caligula, supported the emperor in his decision to convert the Jerusalem Temple into a site for the Roman imperial cult.[246] Philo describes Apelles' scorn for the Jews as "poison" because "he came from Ascalon, and its inhabitants cherish an implacable and irreconcilable hatred for the Jews who live in the Holy Land and with whom they have a common frontier."[247] Although the Philistines are not invoked directly in Philo's report about Apelles, the centrality of the Philistines in biblical texts and their inclusion in secular histories of the region kept alive the memory of Ascalon's past.[248]

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[244] E.g. The inscription of a standard bearer from the unit published by Gatier (1994). The soldier is from Emesa and the unit was serving along the Euphrates River in Syria.

[245] Legio II Traiana: see commentary and references from *CIJP* (246); Praetorian guard: *IGUR* 590.

[246] Phil.*Legat.ad.Gaium.*203-205. Apelles began his career in Rome as an actor, but became a counselor to Caligula in his old age (ibid.,204). Apelles was horribly treated by Caligula, being tortured by him (Suet.*Cal.*33) on more than one occasion (Phil.*Legat.ad.Gaium.*206). He is known by both Suetonius and Dio Cassius as among the most famous actors of his age (Suet.*Div.Vesp.*19; Dio.Cass.59.5.2).

[247] Ibid. 205.

[248] See, for example, Josephus' speech to the Jews in Jerusalem (*BJ*.5.9.4.384-385) in which he reminds his listeners of the Philistines' theft of the Ark.

This historically motivated tension was at the root of Ascalon's role in the First Jewish

Revolt. According to Josephus, Ascalon was one of the Hellenized cities in which violence

erupted between gentile and Jewish communities preceding the outbreak of the rebellion.[249]

2500 Jews were reportedly killed at Ascalon.[250] After a Jewish force defeated Cestius Gallus and

the Twelfth Legion *Fuliminata* outside Jersualem in 66 CE, the rebels "were so elated with their

unexpected success, that they could not govern their zeal… [they] got together a great multitude

of all their most hardy soldiers and marched for Ascalon."[251] The rebels were defeated and

driven off on two separate occasions by a garrison of Roman soldiers.[252] Several scholars have

suggested that Ascalon was attacked not because of the city's Philistine heritage, but because a

Roman auxiliary force was housed in the city.[253] There is unfortunately no archaeological

evidence for any of the events of this year at Ascalon, and Josephus' description of the

widespread destruction wrought by the Jews at Ascalon is surely incorrect. Titus stopped at

Ascalon en route to Caesarea during his campaigns in Judaea, but otherwise Ascalon is absent

from our sources after the initial stages of the war.[254]

Ascalon was involved in the early stages of the First Revolt, but there is no evidence that

the city was engaged in the Bar Kohkba revolt in the 130's CE. The geographic scope of the

Second Revolt was limited compared to the First Revolt, and Ascalon lay to the south of the

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[249] Jos.*BJ*.2.18.1.460.

[250] Ibid., 477.

[251] Ibid, 3.2.1.9-10.

[252] Ibid., 3.2.2.-3.2.3.27.

[253] Applebaum 1989, 162; Smallwood 2001, 301. Cf. Rosenfeld's (2000, 168) argument that the attack was an attempt to extend Jewish dominion over lands which they believed rightfully belonged to them.

[254] Jos.*BJ*.4.11.5.662-663.

main areas of conflict.[255] However, the city's Philistine past was recalled in the reorganization of Judaea into the new province of Syria Palaestina. The name Palaestina is thought to derive from Philistine.[256] This was part of a larger attempt by Hadrian to punish the Jews for the Bar Kokhba Revolt.[257] Although there is no evidence for any sort of fall-out at Ascalon or for its relationship with its local or neighboring Jewish communities, the city had not benefitted historically from being reminded of their Philistine past. The emphasis placed on the Philistine past of the coastal plain appears in the same period in which the communities of the Roman Empire, and especially in the Greek East, were becoming increasingly interest in their past. The Second Sophistic movement included the publication of numerous travelogues and histories concerning the peoples and practices of the Roman Empire. It is significant that the past promoted by Ascalon was not that of the Philistines, newly made relevant by Hadrian, but of the Phoenicians. This idea is explored further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Ascalon's Elites

The role of elites and the community in creating and perpetuating local cultural memory and identity was introduced in Chapter 1. It is necessary to discuss what we know about Ascalonian elites in order to understand the role of the material culture they produced in articulating the community's cultural memory. In this section I will provide an overview of elites in the city from the second century BCE-third century CE. This time span deviates from the chronological narrative adopted in this chapter for two reasons. First, there is little evidence

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[255] Mor (2003) surveys major arguments on this point, but cf. Eck (1999), who provides evidence for the spread of hostilities to Arabia and Syria. Ascalon's coins were among those countermarked by the rebels (Fuks 2008).

[256] Feldman 1990, Jacobson 1999.

[257] Feldman 1990.

of the identity, professions and origins of elites at Ascalon. Second, most of our evidence for the

political institutions and offices held by elites dates to the second century BCE-first century CE,

although those offices and political bodies continued through the Roman period.

Professions

Epigraphic and literary records preserve the names of many Ascalonian intellectuals,

writers, and a handful of merchants and politicians. The best-documented Ascalonian is

Antiochus, a Stoic philosopher and head of the Academy in Athens in the mid-first century

BCE.[258] He was a friend and teacher to Cicero and the Roman general Lucius Licinius Lucullus.

Antiochus accompanied Lucullus on campaign in Armenia and Mesopotamia, spent time in

Alexandria, and acted as an advisor to Roman politicians.[259] Geiger's study of intellectuals in

Hellenistic and Roman Palestine includes evidence of five additional philosophers, three

historians, one grammarian, and one mythographer from Ascalon between the first century BCE-

third century CE.[260] Two actors active in Rome and Italy are also known from ancient sources.

Apelles was a famous actor and advisor to Caligula in the first century CE, and Philo criticized

him for poisoning the emperor against the Jews.[261] Antiochus and Apelles are good examples of

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[258] Cic.*Ep.ad.Att.*8.16-19; Cic.*Acad*.1.4-5; ibid. 2.2-22; Cic.Fin.5.1; Cic.ND.1.3; Cic.*Brut.* 315; Cic.*Tusc.*5.37; Plut.*Cic.*4.1-4; Plut.*Luc.28.7;* ibid. 42.2-3; *PHerc* 1021.34-35. Modern scholarship: Glucker 1978; Sedley 2012; Geiger 2014, 14; ibid. 76-78.

[259] Cic.*Acad*.2.19-22; Cic.*Fin*.5.1; Plut.*Luc.*28.7.

[260]Geiger 2014. Many of these figures are mentioned by Stephan of Byzantium or are known from brief citations by later authors.

[261] Phi.*Leg*.203-205; Pet.*Satyr.*64. This may be the same Apelles who performed for Vespasian (Suet.*Vesp.*19), but cf. Geiger 2014, 15.

how intellectuals and artists influenced civic and imperial politics, despite not holding office themselves.[262]

Although most of Ascalon's wealth and importance probably derived from its port, we do not know much about merchants and businessmen in the city. Philostratus of Ascalon was a banker on Delos, and probably also in his hometown before he became a citizen of Naples.[263] He was a prominent patron on Delos, and perhaps in Ascalon, although there is no evidence for him there. The second merchant who is named in preserved sources is Caius Comisius Memor, a shipowner in a local *oikos*, or guild.[264] His bilingual Latin and Greek funerary epitaph was made of marble and dated by letter-forms to the second century CE (Fig.2.6).[265] Eck and Zissou argued that Comisius Memor was from Italy and spoke primarily Latin.[266] His guild was probably involved with shipping Ascalonian wines to other places in the Roman Empire.[267] Aside from these two figures we do not know the names of any other merchants or professionals from Ascalon, although there must have been a large population of local and transient merchants.

Civic Institutions

Evidence for civic institutions comes from archaeological and epigraphic evidence. The city's Roman bouleuterion was constructed in the first centuries BCE/CE but the boule was

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[262] He encouraged Cicero to enter politics (Plut.*Cic*.4.4) and was an advisor to Lucullus while the general was on campaign (Plut.*Luc*.28.7). Plutarch calls Antiochus a "persuasive man and powerful speaker."

[263] *ID* 1717. He calls himself a "τραπε]ζιτε[ύων]" which is usually translated as banker or money-changer (LSJ s.v. τρᾰπεζῖτ-εία) See Mancinetti-Santamaria (1983) and Leiwo (1989).

[264] Possibly a *collegium* (*CIJP III* 2342 commentary) but see Eck (2014, 118-122) for a discussion of the terminology used in the inscription.

[265] *CIJP* III 2342.

[266] Eck and Zissou 2001.

[267] Eck 2014, 118-122.

probably already in existence. The city coinage mentions the demos of Ascalon, and includes

Greek titles for Hellenistic cities, in the late second century BCE.[268] This evidence suggests that

the boule was in existence by that date. Ascalonian Tiberius Julius Mikkion (Fig.2.7), and Aulus

Instuleius Tenax (Fig.2.8), a centurion of the Tenth Legion Fretensis, were honored by the boule

for their patronage in the first century CE.[269] Two marbles column dated to 187/188 CE were

erected by Apollodotus, the son of Miltiades, while serving as the *prohedros* of Ascalon.[270] The

prohedros was the magistrate in charge of the boule. Aside from their role during sessions of the

boule, they often served as civic patrons and religious leaders. [271] Marcus Aurelius Pylades, a

third century CE tragic actor from Scythopolis, served as a member of the boules of Ascalon and

Damascus.[272] A second administrative post known from Ascalon is the *agoranamos*, an official

who was in charge of markets, weights, and measures. A lead weight engraved in Greek

identifies Nicander as the agoranamos of Ascalon in 122/121 BCE.[273]

Ascalonian elites would have served different roles in the administration of the city,

including as the mint official. This official was in charge of minting the city's coins. He

probably chose or helped choose the designs, and ensured that weight of the coin issues was

correct. City coins sometimes include unique monograms of the mint official who oversaw the

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[268] See Chapter 4.

[269] Hogarth 1922; *CIJP* III 2335-2336.

[270] *CIJP* III 2337-2338; Boehm and Eck 2012.

[271] Ibid. See also the discussion in Chapter 3 of an inscription attributed to Ascalon from 177/178 CE describing the role of the prohedros in an annual festival to the god Melqart.

[272] *CIJ* I2 534a; Noy 2005, 28-29, but cf. Potter and Mattingly1999, 274, n.42.

[273] *CIJP* III 2358. The office is known also from other Levantine cities; see below, chapter 4, as well as Sperber (1977), Finkielsztejn (2010) and Rozenfeld and Menirav (2005, 19-20).

minting.[274] Ideally, we would be able to connect the unique monogram of a mint official to a

design or changes in minting practices. Voulgaridis notes that we are unable to do this at

Ascalon because the monograms on Hellenistic silver coins indicate that there were a large

number of mint officials who usually held the post for only one year.[275] Additionally,

monograms appear infrequently on Ascalonian bronzes in the Roman period, and it is not

possible to match an official to the introduction or re-introduction of a coin design.

Material Culture

Additional evidence for the lives and identities of Ascalonian elites comes from

archaeological excavations in the city. Excavations in Grid 38, near the center of the tel,

exposed a series of domestic structures from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The buildings

were not well-preserved, but the excavators interpreted the neighborhood as "relatively affluent"

based on the character of the small-finds discovered in layers dating to the first century BCE to

the third century CE.[276] The small finds from the buildings in the Roman period include ivory

inlays, fragments of glass vessels, and beads, in addition to items typical of household

assemblages (e.g. spindle whorls, stone weights). A small bathhouse with a plastered immersion

pool and a hypocaust system was added to one of the buildings in the third century CE.   It is not

clear from the poorly preserved remains if the bathhouse was public or private.[277] We do not

know how the domestic structures in Grid 38 were decorated or furnished. Houses from the

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[274] Monograms are more frequent on silver coins because minting these "involved a great outlay to buy bullion and despite the absence of written testimonies, it is obvious that the mints would have closely controlled the final product to ensure production quality and the honest of their officials" (Voulgaridis 2008, 76-77).

[275] Voulgaridis 2008, 69-71.

[276] Stager et al. 2008, 293. These layers were heavily disturbed by the construction of the later bathhouse
[277] Ibid. 293-297. A second bathhouse, probably public, was excavated near the city walls and dated to the first to early fourth centuries CE (242-244).

same area in earlier periods had painted red and yellow plaster walls, and fragments of painted plaster were found in the Roman period houses.[278] In the fourth century CE a large apsidal building was constructed over the bathhouse. A large number of unused Roman discus oil lamp fragments were found in the subfloor fill for the apsidal building, and excavators have argued that the lamps were "used originally with the late Roman bathhouses."[279] The excavators estimated that more than one hundred unused lamps were found in the fill.[280] If the fill for the apsidal building contained material from the Roman house and bathhouse, the lamps may indicate that a shop was located nearby. Stores in Roman cities were often located facing the streets in front of homes.

Many elites in the city would probably have been involved in trade. Literary evidence, a large numbers of used amphorae, and wasters indicate that Ascalon's wine industry and those involved in it, were thriving by the second century CE.[281] The epitaph of C. Comisius Memor provides evidence for the existence of a collegium of shippers made up of merchants from outside Ascalon. Roman-period painted tombs uncovered north of the tel were decorated with vines and youths holding wine jugs, perhaps indicating a connection between the owners of the tombs and the local wine industry.[282]

Elites at Ascalon imported and commissioned marble statues for display in public and private places. The dedicatory inscriptions to Tiberius Julius Mikkion and Aulus Instuleius Tenax were originally displayed with a bust or statue of both patrons. A bust of a woman in the

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[278] Stager et al. 2008, 289-290.

[279] Ibid. 297.

[280] Ibid.

[281] Mayerson 2008; Johnson and Stager 2008; Stager *et al.* 2008, 240.

[282] Ory 1939; Michaeli 2010.

Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem may depict a local elite woman, although Iliffe suggested that it was the wife of a fourth century CE emperor.[283] A statue of a man wearing a himation was identified by Vermeule as an elite Ascalonian man in the guise of Asklepios.[284] Two under-life-sized sculptures of women, now headless, may also have depicted local women in the guise of a Muse or goddess.[285] Two sculpted marble sarcophagi from tombs outside Ascalon depict scenes from Greek mythology, including the Rape of Persephone and a scene from the Trojan War.[286] The marble sculptures and sarcophagi from Ascalon show that elites had the money and motivation to import marble statuary from abroad. The marble decoration and the practice of erecting dedicatory marble sculptures and sarcophagi are consistent with practices in the Greco-Roman world.

Analysis

Ascalonian elites are important to our discussion of cultural memory and how it was articulated through the community's cults. Elites had the power, money, and opportunity to take images from the community's past and promote them in public institutions and material culture. The preserved material culture and literary accounts suggest that Ascalonian elites were embedded in the practices of the Greco-Roman *koiné*, and that they had many economic, personal, and political connections to communities abroad. Our evidence indicates that the political and cultural institutions that structured elite social life in Ascalon were the same as those in other Greco-Roman cities.

[283] Iliffe 1933.

[284] Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 5. See also Chapter 3.

[285] One is now in the Rockefellar Museum in Jerusalem. The other is in IAA storage.

[286] Schloen 2008, 160.

Conclusions

The purpose of this section was to trace the historical and socio-cultural background of Ascalon in order to establish several important points relevant to the development of Ascalon's public sacred identity. The first theme is Ascalon's close connection to centers, cultures, and peoples outside the southern Levant through its history. From the Bronze Age to the Late Roman period, Ascalon was integrated into the economic, cultural and political systems of other regions, ranging from Egypt in the south to the Roman imperial power in the west. Second, Ascalon's history as a non-Jewish city was kept alive by important historical and religious texts which sometimes circumscribed the people of Ascalon as hostile "others" to the Jewish communities living in Palestine. Although the people of Roman Ascalon were unlikely to have identified much with the Philistines who controlled the city at the end of the Bronze Age, they were linked to that group through cultural memory. Ascalon's Phoenician heritage, more than its Philistine history, ultimately had a more profound impact on the cults of the city. Third, Ascalon is often though to be closely linked culturally and politically to Egypt, and certainly it came under the sway of that state in multiple periods. However, there is insufficient archaeological evidence to demonstrate how much influence Egypt exerted on the city, and if Egyptians made up a sizeable portion of the population. Fourth, there is ample evidence that Greek cultural practices were present in Ascalon from at least the Iron Age and continued to strengthen through the Hellenistic period. This may be due to the origin of the Philistines in Asia Minor or the Greek world, or was perhaps a result of trade with those regions. In the Hellenistic period elements of this Greek culture were used to articulate the city's political and cultural status as a polis. Fifth, evidence for Ascalonian elites demonstrates that they were connected to the people

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and practices of the Greco-Roman world through trade, the adoption of Greco-Roman cultural and political practices, and through travel and work abroad. Elites participated in socio-political institutions where they acted on behalf of the community. Their roles in the boule, as priests, mint officials, and city leaders gave them the opportunity, position and money to create objects and spaces that represented the community. When we talk about the choices of the community, we are really considering the choices that elites made on behalf of the community. Elites had the opportunity and means to represent the community, but they also had the power to remember the past in ways that would benefit both themselves and the community.

In the following chapters the historical background contextualizes the creation and use of images of deities by the community. The problems inherent in Ascalon's past as a Philistine city, and then as a liminal member of the Greco-Roman world, were addressed through the city's public cults and mythologies. Aspects of the community's Philistine and Phoenician past were used in order to create relationships with the Greco-Roman world, or to highlight the antiquity and importance of their cults.

CHAPTER 3: THE CIVIC CULTS OF ASCALON: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

This chapter takes the four central themes introduced in Chapter 2 and traces how they impacted or motivated the expression of the community's public sacred identity. The ultimate goal is to provide an historical and religious context for in-depth studies and establish the multiple intersections between remembrance as religious performance and the socio-political history of the community. For example, Ascalon's Philistine, Phoenician, and Hellenized background, described in Chapter 2, impacted its Roman period cults. These elements of the community's cultural past were preserved in cult through images, ritual performance, and festivals. The way cultural memory was expressed, and the priorities and goals of the elites who did the expressing, were influenced by Ascalon's embedded position within a global Greco-Roman network of institutions and iconography.

The range of the deities identified in visual and literary records from the city is used to develop some general conclusions about the role of the past and of cultural memory in cult. Alcock writes that we should consider memory "as a dynamic expression of collective experience, as a point of likely internal contestation, [and] as consequential element in decisions about present and future."[287] This chapter begins an investigation of these matters by showing how each of these functions was present or absent in the materiality of cult in Ascalon. Case studies in Chapter 4 and 5 arise from the intersection of themes and trends in the historical

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[287] Alcock 2002, 23.

background, and in the expression of cultural memory via cult discussed in this chapter. As we will see, periods of social and political change identified in Chapter 2 correspond to changes in the way that material objects related to cult were used by elites to express the cultural memory of the community.[288]

There is literary and archaeological evidence for the worship of at least twenty different gods in public contexts at Ascalon between the third century BCE-mid-fourth century CE. The majority of this evidence is art historical, consisting of sculptural and numismatic depictions of deities. The figures are identified by their attributes and iconography. Literary evidence, epigraphy, and architecture provide evidence for the worship of gods in public spaces, although we do not have enough evidence to discuss the role of sacred topography and monuments in the preservation and exploration of cultural memory at Ascalon.[289] Almost nothing is known about local festivals, priesthoods, and religious activities associated with public religion at Ascalon, and the existence of temples is provided only by literary and numismatic evidence.

The evidence studied in this chapter is the material manifestation of choices made by elite Ascalonians about the expression of cult and religion on behalf of the community. These choices are dictated by the needs, duties, and expectations of particular civic institutions. These civic institutions originate in a common way of structuring the community created in the past, and are influenced by the larger cultural and political networks within which the community exists. The expression of remembrance through cult also represents an individual or group of elites personal priorities and strategies for the identity of the community. The different media investigated in this chapter—numismatics, inscriptions, mythological stories, foundation stories, sculptures,

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[288] A trend noted by Alcock (2002, 32), who writes that "while social memory is *never* inert or static, manipulation of the past is most pronounced at times of marked social, religious, or political change."

[289] For the role of monuments and commemorative spaces, see: Connerton 1989; Alcock 2002, 28-32.

temples—are ways of preserving cultural memory and performing public sacred identity. They are embedded in a temporal and social context that we refer to as polis-religion.

I do not intend to come to definitive conclusions about the nature of each deity, or to identify conclusively their "origins" in other regions and earlier cultural contexts. Studies of this kind have already been attempted. including two important English studies that collected much of the Ascalonian material on civic cult.[290] Fuks' 2008 article gathered evidence for the variety of gods worshipped in Ascalon.[291] Ovadiah and Mucznik's 2009 monograph on art and cult in Roman Israel studied the visual depictions of gods in the region, comparing evidence from Ascalon and other cities.[292] This chapter updates those studies with additional evidence, and comes to different conclusions, particularly regarding the nature of public sacred identity in the city.

This chapter is divided into subsections on each deity, ordered by the earliest date of evidence for the worship of that deity in Ascalon. The categories of evidence include sculpture set up in non-private contexts, coins, weights, architecture, and literary accounts testifying to the existence of a cult. Sacred spaces related to unknown or multiple deities are discussed in their appropriate chronological place within the diachronic sketch. In some cases the discussion of a particular myth or the iconography of a deity is truncated to prevent redundancy with material dealt with in depth in the following chapters.[293] I am first interested in establishing the range of gods in Ascalonian civic cult. Second, I will identify the types of media used to recall Ascalon's

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[290] In Hebrew, see Fuks (2001) and papers in Sasson (2001), particularly by Friedheim (2001).

[291] Fuks 2008.

[292] Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009.

[293] In particular, Aphrodite Ourania, Tyche and Phanebalos are discussed more fully in Chapter 4. The mythology of Derceto and Semiramis are discussed in Chapter 4.

gods by the community. Third, I will use this evidence to identify major trends or periods of change in expression of gods and the role of cult in articulating the community's past.

Aphrodite Ourania

According to Herodotus and Pausanias, the temple of Aphrodite Ourania was the oldest of all the temples to this goddess, pre-dating even the sanctuaries to Aphrodite on Cyprus and Cythera.[294] From this evidence, we know that the temple was in existence by the sixth century BCE, and was founded by the Phoenicians. The temple's location in Ascalon is unknown. The early date of the temple and the identification of the goddess as Aphrodite Ourania indicate that the goddess was probably identified locally as Astarte. The equation between the two goddesses has been widely noted by scholars of Near Eastern and Greek religion. [295] That this correspondence was recognized by Ascalonians is indicated by three dedicatory inscriptions set up by Ascalonians on the Greek island of Delos in the late second century BCE, which refer to the goddess as Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania ("Ἀστάρτηι/ Παλαιστινῆι/Ἀφροδίτηι Οὐρανίαι").[296]

Aphrodite Ourania is considered in-depth as a case study in Chapter 4.

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[294] Her.1.105.3; Paus.1.14.6. A sanctuary to Aphrodite Ourania was also constructed in Athens in the fifth century BCE (Paus.1.14.6). Wachsmuth (1874, 410-414) and Rosenzweig (2004, 59-60) have explored the possible links between the worship of Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon and Athens.

[295] For the relationship between Astarte and Aphrodite see the discussions and bibliography in: Boedecker 1974; Bonnet and Pirenne-Delforge 1999; Bonnet 1996.

[296] *ID* 2305, 1719-20.

Derceto

The story of the local Ascalonian goddess Derceto appears for the first time in the writings of the fifth century BCE, but the most thorough account comes from Diodorus Siculus.[297] Diodorus is the only preserved source to describe a sanctuary of Derceto at Ascalon, although he provides few details.[298] He writes that a *temenos* lay not far from the city, near a deep lake filled with fish (καὶ ταύτης οὐκ ἄπωθεν λίμνη μεγάλη καὶ βαθεῖα πλήρης ἰχθύων).[299] It is unclear whether this space included a temple, altar, simple shrine, or any architecturally defined cultic space at all. There is no evidence for either this temenos or sacred pool.[300] Fish-filled pools are a feature of other sanctuaries, including the temple of Atargatis in Heliopolis.[301] In fact, the myth of Derceto and many features of her appearance and cultic practices overlap with those of Atargatis, including the treatment of doves as sacred animals. Pliny and Strabo claim that Derceto was an alternate or Hellenized name for Atargatis.[302] Lucian, however, denied the connection, noting differences in the depiction and worship of the two goddesses.[303] There is no evidence, from an Ascalonian perspective.

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[297] Nichols (2011) assembles all the known fragments of Ctesias, and also discusses the use of this historian by other Greek and Roman writers, even if not directly attributed. Dio.Sic.2.4.1-3.

[298] Ovid.*Met*.4.31-54; Lucian.*SyrD*.14.25-29; Eratosth.*Catast*.38; Athenag.*Pro Christ*.F130; Herod.*De Prosodia Catholica* 21-24; Tzetz.*Chil*.9.502; L.Ampelius.*Liber Memorialis*.11.3.24.16; *Etymologicum Gudianum* s.v. *Kaystrios; Scholia in Aratum* 23.

[299] Dio.Sic.2.4.1.

[300] Several pools or small lakes of water in the hinterland of Ascalon were noted by early explorers, but their descriptions of these features are too vague to connect them with the pool of Derceto (Guerin 1869; Conder and Kitchener 1882, 410-11).

[301] Drijvers 1980.

[302] Plin.*NH*.5.23; Strabo.16.4.27.

[303] Lucian.*SyrD*.14.23-29.

Diodorus informs us about cult practice at Ascalon based on elements of the Derceto myth. The first is the abstention from consuming fish, because Derceto was turned into a fish.[304] Derceto appeared in quasi-piscine form, composed of the upper body of a woman and the lower body of a fish, a description confirmed by pseudo-Lucian in *De Dea Syria*.[305] Greek and Roman authors frequently mention that Syrians abstained from fish on account of regional deities including Derceto and the Syrian goddess.[306]

The second cultic feature mentioned by Diodorus is a reverence for doves in honor of Semiramis, the daughter of Derceto who was fed by doves after being abandoned by her mother out of shame.[307] The dove appears frequently on Ascalonian coins in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, acting as a type of 'mint mark' to identify the coin as belonging to that city.[308] According to Philo, Ascalon was home to many flocks of doves which were protected from consumption by local laws and considered sacred.[309] The faunal evidence for the Hellenistic and

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[304] Lucian.*SyrD*.14.27-29; Eratosth.*Catast*.38.

[305] Lucian.*SyrD*.14.25.

[306] Meleager of Gadara, writing in the first century BCE, asserts that Homer was Syrian because he depicted the Achaeans as abstaining from fish (Ath.*Deino*.4.157B). Xenophon (*Anab*.1.4.9) reports a similar respect for fish and doves ("περιστεράς"). Menander (ap. Porphyr.*DeAbstin*.4.15) connects Syrian abstention from fish with worship of the great Syrian goddess, as does Plutarch (*De.Superst*.7) and Hyginus (*Astron*.2.41). Hyginus (ibid.) says that Ctesias made the same claim. Cicero (*De Nat Deor*. 3.15) states that the Syrians worshipped fish. His connection to Antiochus of Ascalon (Cic.*Acad*.1.4, 1.12; Cic.*De Nat Deor*.1.3; Cic.*Brut*.315; Plut.*Cic*.4.1-3) may have exposed him to the cult of Derceto and her depiction as part-fish.

[307] It is worth noting here that Diodorus Siculus (2.4.6) and Lucian *SyrD*.14.6 give the type of bird as "περιστερά," which can be translated as pigeon or dove (LSJ). Pigeons and doves are closely related biologically, and the two are often confused (Allen 2009, 17-56). See also: Lucian.*SyrD*.14.27-29; Eratosth.*Catast*.38.

[308] Voulgaridis 2008.

[309] Phil.*De.Provid*.2.64.

Roman periods at Ascalon has not been published, so it is unclear if there is any archaeological evidence to corroborate either of Diodorus' claims.[310]

Although there is no archaeological evidence for the temple of Derceto at Ascalon, the goddess appears on city coins beginning in the mid-second century CE (Fig.3-1). She wears a crescent moon diadem on her brow, stands on a Triton blowing a horn, and holds a dove aloft in her hand.[311] Although many elements of this iconography are related to attributes of Aphrodite and Astarte in the ancient world, the fishy imagery of the triton and the tactile relationship between the female figure and the dove she holds imply that the figure is intended to depict Derceto. However, the universal nature of the attributes, and the decision to depict the goddess as completely anthropomorphic, indicate that the creators of the design were mindful of their global influences and setting. These issues are discussed in Chapter 5.

Athena

Athena appears on Ascalonian city coins modeled after Athenian styles between the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. The only evidence for Athena at Ascalon after this comes from a poorly preserved lead disc of unknown date. Decloedt tentatively identified as Athena the helmeted goddess standing on a platform within a distyle temple holding a spear in one hand and

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[310] Ascalonians were certainly consuming fish in the seventh century BCE (Lernau 2011, 645-657), although it is unclear if the cult of Derceto existed in that period. A dove or pigeon was found among the grave offerings of a Late Bronze age grave from Ascalon (Brody 2008, 520). A "substantial collection of bird bones" was recovered from seventh century BCE context at Ascalon, with most of a size between a pigeon and duck (Hesse, Fulton and Wapnish 2011, 623). Eggshells with thicknesses "close to the upper range of pigeon eggshells" were found in seventh century buildup in a street (Lass 2011, 696) and within the matrix of a beaten-earth from in Grid 50 (ibid., 698).

[311] E.g. numerous issues between Antoninus Pius (Yashin 2007 n.206, 212, 213, 216, 223, 224, 226; Rosenberger 1972 n.175, 177, 178, 183, 184, 186, 188) and Severus Alexander (Yashin 2007 n.260; Rosenberger 1972 n.225).

a circular object in the other.[312] The image from Decloedt's publication seems to confirm this

description, although the design is poorly preserved.

Athena was not worshiped widely in the Near East, although she was sometimes

associated with the Arabic goddess Allat.[313] Her depiction on Ascalon coins, and possibly on the

lead disc, emphasize her martial quality. In light of the iconography associated with the deity

Phanebalos at Ascalon, it may be that Ascalonians saw in the helmeted goddess an aspect of their

own, similarly outfitted deity.

Tyche

Tyche, the Hellenistic city goddess, appears on Ascalonian coins beginning in the second

century BCE.[314] She is depicted on the reverse and obverse of coin issues throughout the

Hellenistic and Roman period and is identifiable by her turreted crown (Fig.3.2).[315] Ascalonian

Tyche designs are especially popular up to the mid-second century CE.[316] As we will see in

Chapter 4, Tyche begins to appear first on Ascalonian coins during the period when the city first

expressed its public sacred identity in quintessentially Greek terms (*demos*, *asylia*, *ieras)*. The

decline in the popularity of this goddess on coins in the late second century CE may indicate that

the motivations underpinning the design were increasingly irrelevant as Ascalon and other cities

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[312] Decloedt 1914: 444.

[313] Friedland 2008.

[314] She appears on silver hemidrachmas and bronze coins in the last quarter of the second century BCE, e.g.
Meshorer et al. 2013: 97, n.20 (silver hemidrachm; 114/3 BCE), n.24 (bronze; undated).

[315] Obverse: op cit. n.67; Reverse: Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.54 (bronze, 5/6 CE).

[316] The use of Tyche on Ascalonian coinage declines after the reign of Antoninus Pius. Only a handful of issues date
after this period: Rosenberger 1972, 61, n.193 (177 CE); Yashin 2007, 60, n.234 (178/9 CE); Rosenberger 1972, 62,
n.201 (198/9 CE).

in the Roman East used different visual strategies to situate themselves within the Roman

Empire. Tyche is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Apollo

Apollo first appears at Ascalon on locally minted Seleucid coins of the second century

BCE. He is depicted in two different obverse designs. The first features the head of Apollo, and

the second is a typical Seleucid composition featuring the god seated on an omphalos and

holding a bow.[317] Only a handful of these designs are preserved today.[318] Both compositions

are clearly drawn from Seleucid depictions of Apollo on coins from other cities in the kingdom,

but we should not assume that the design was dictated by the Seleucid minting officials and had

no local resonance. There is later evidence of a temple to Apollo at Ascalon, and one example of

the Apollo issues is an Ascalonian bronze. This smaller denomination tended toward diverse and

local designs, and was probably not closely monitored by Seleucid officials as these coins

circulated mainly within the city.

A temple dedicated to Apollo located near the city wall at Ascalon is described by

Eusebius, who says that the grandfather of Herod the Great served the god there.[319] The

specifics of the Herodian connections have been debated, but Eusebius' source for this

information was the third century CE historian Julius Africanus, who lived in

Emmaus/Nicopolis, 20 miles west of Jerusalem.[320] A small shrine excavated by John Garstang

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[317] Wace 1902; Zahle 1990.

[318] Undated Head of Apollo: De Saulcy 1874, 180, n.80 (no plate). Apollo-on-omphalos: Matsson 1969, n.8b.

[319] Eus.*Ecc.Hist*.I.6,3; I.7.9-11.

[320] On Africanus' date: *Suda* T11 *Photius.* It is not unreasonable to assume that Africanus had some knowledge of the major cults at Ascalon, and preserved fragments of his work indicate a personal familiarity with the socio-

and located in the western aisle of the colonnaded attached to the Roman bouleuterion, should

not be associated with this temple to Apollo as Garstang proposed.[321] The shrine takes up the

entire aisle between the interior and exterior lines of columns, and opens to the south, blocking

traffic through the ambulatory. For these reasons, the shrine likely belongs to later phases in the

bouleuterion.[322]

Some scholars argue that the Hellenistic cult to Apollo represents the Hellenization of a

Near Eastern god. For example, the Persian period dog burials at Ascalon are by some scholars

as evidence of a temple to the Near Eastern god Reshef-Mukal, who was later identified as

Apollo at Ascalon.[323] Unfortunately, there is no evidence besides the enigmatic dog burials for a

cult of Reshef-Mukal at Ascalon, and no clear connection at Ascalon between the Greco-Roman

cult of Apollo and the cult of an earlier Phoenician deity. Teixidor proposed that Apollo was

worshipped at Ascalon in a local form as Phanebalos, a figure who appears frequently on Roman

coinage from that city.[324] There is little evidence for this association. In contrast, there is at

least one identified Roman period statue of Apollo depicted in a form consistent with Greco-

Roman iconography elsewhere in the city.[325]

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cultural geography of Palestine. On Herod's connection to Ascalon see the discussion and bibliography in Chapter 2.

[321] Garstang 1924, 29.

[322] Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016.

[323] Stager 2008a.

[324] Teixidor 1972, 423; ibid. 1977, 96-97.

[325] Reinach 1888, 96. Ovadiah and Mucznik (2009, 20, n.10) have suggested that this was a portrait statue of a figure in the guise of Apollo. Two additional marble nude male sculptures have been identified tentatively as Apollo, but both are fragmentary and lack additional attributes. Garstang (1924, 117) discovered one sculpture in his excavation of the Roman bouleuterion. Unpublished photographs from the archives at the Palestine Exploration Fund show that the statue depicts a nude man, and is only preserved from the navel to the statue plinth. The figure leans against a support draped with a cloth. The other example of a statue of Apollo was identified by Thiersch (1914, 1-2) but is now lost. Fuks (2008, 140) suggests Dionysos as an alternate interpretation.

Combined with the consistent depictions of Apollo in Greco-Roman iconography

outlined above, we may suggest that the cult of Apollo was introduced to Ascalon in the

Hellenistic period. This cult would intensify the city's connection to the Seleucid dynasty.

Alternately, Apollo may be a Hellenized rendering of a Phoenician or Egyptian deity for whom

no clear earlier evidence exists at Ascalon. In this case, it is significant that the non-Greek origin

of the deity was obscured in the way in which he was presented within the city. As we will see in

Chapter 4, the Ascalonians were aware of their past as a Phoenician city, and deliberately

employed attributes and poses to underscore a god's Phoenician origins and antiquity.

Zeus

Zeus is not well attested in the archaeological or literary record of Ascalon, either in

public or private contexts.[326] Yashin has identified a bearded male bust on the obverse of

Ascalonian coins in the second century BCE as Zeus. The figure has thick curly hair and a thick

beard and always appears on the obverse of bronze coins bearing an eagle standing over a palm-

branch on the reverse.[327] The association with the eagle and the lack of a diadem seems to

indicate that this figure is a deity rather than a Seleucid or Ptolemaic king.[328] A colossal marble

foot uncovered in excavations of the Roman-period bouleuterion by John Garstang may have

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[326] Private contexts: a third century CE magical gem (Michel 2001, n.261) and a bronze figurine from underwater excavations off the coast of Ascalon (Galilli et al. 2010, 129-145). See also the dedication to Zeus Ourious by an Ascalonian on Delos, which was likely motivated by the god's control of the winds rather than the existence of a cult to the god at Ascalon.

[327] Yashin 2007, 39-40, n.25 (60/59 BCE), n.27 (56/5 BCE), n.32 (31/30 BCE).

[328] Yashin (2007, 40, n.39-40) identified other bronze coins from the first century with doves on the obverse as a "bearded male head," indicating that the association with the eagle influenced his interpretation of the "Zeus" coins.

belonged to a monumental statue of the god.[329] A few examples from private contexts round out

this picture, consisting of a third century CE magical gem on which Zeus appears on a throne,

and a bronze figurine from a shipwreck off the coast of Ascalon. It does not appear that he was

ever directly associated or syncretized with another deity at Ascalon, as is the case at other

Levantine cities.[330] This may indicate that there was no pre-existing cult or deity to whom

Zeus/Jupiter might have been attached in the Roman period. It is more likely that the Greco-

Roman god Poseidon was a preferable Hellenized identity for the main pre-Hellenistic

Phoenician god of a port city. This interpretation is consistent with the larger collection of

evidence for Poseidon at Ascalon, and his appearance alongside Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as a

prominent Ascalonian god in dedications on Delos.

Hermes

Despite Ascalon's position as an important port city, references to Hermes, the god

associated with commerce, are rare on public media. The caduceus, a symbol of Hermes, is

featured on small bronze coin designs beginning in the first century BCE, sometimes winged and

flanked by cornucopiae.[331] The god himself is never depicted, and both designs are relatively

short-lived, disappearing by 37 CE. The caduceus was a popular symbol on Hellenistic coinage,

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[329] Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 11. A similar monumental foot was discovered at Mt. Carmel. The statue is not preserved, but the plinth upon which it stood included a dedicatory inscription to Zeus Heliopolitanus in the second-third c. CE (Fischer 1998, 150).

[330] For a collection of all relevant evidence see Ovadiah and Mucznik (2009, 201-218).

[331] The earliest dated coins are Augustan (Meshorer et al. 2013, 98), but Rosenberger (1972, 39) and Yashin (2007, 41) include examples in undated late first century BCE bronzes. Cornucopiae and caduceus: Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.48 (Augustan); Rosenberger 1972, 39, n.40 (undated). Winged caduceus: Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.50 (Augustan); Rosenberger 1972, 39, n.41-42 (undated); Yashin 2007, 41, n.49-53 (undated).

used also on Hasmonean and Herodian designs to represent goodwill and prosperity.[332] At

Ascalon, perhaps the caduceus expressed *both* a connection to Hermes and reflected Hellenistic

influence. Viewers might have recognized the logic of including symbols of the god of

merchants on the coinage of a port city. Likewise, the use of the caduceus as a symbol of

prosperity and goodwill was appropriate for a busy port.

The limited span in which the caduceus is represented suggests that Hermes or the

Hellenistic symbolism embedded in his attribute, was not a significant long-term component in

expressing the sacred or cultural identity of the community. The elites of Ascalon used different

gods and strategies to express ties to the Greco-Roman *koine*, and the abandonment of the

caduceus suggests that other designs were more appealing.

Non-numismatic evidence of Hermes is confined largely to more private contexts. A

statue in Attic marble of Hermes wearing his winged sandals and holding a caduceus was found

at Ascalon in the mid-20th century and has been dated to the first century CE.[333] Vermeule and

Anderson proposed that the under life-sized statue was displayed in the house of a merchant, but

Ovadiah and Mucznik's recent suggestion that the piece was set up in an association meeting

place is intriguing.[334] The use of marble in Palestine was still limited in the first century CE, and

most of the pieces preserved today from the coastal cities were originally displayed in public

contexts. A bilingual Latin-Greek epitaph of the second century CE testifies to the existence of

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[332] Ariel and Fontanille 2012, 111.

[333] Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 11; Fischer 1998, 137-138; followed by: Fuks 2008, 39.

[334] Ibid.; Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009, 121.

local associations at Ascalon (in this case, shippers).[335] Attic marble is not typically found at Ascalon and may point to its purchase by a member of a mercantile association.[336]

A lead sarcophagus found east of Ascalon and dated to the late third century CE includes the depiction of a temple colonnade with statues of Hermes placed between the intercolumnar spaces.[337] Although Hermes is suited for the decoration of a sarcophagus in his role as Psychopomp, the design might reflect or refer to a temple or public building from Ascalon that included a statue of the god.

Poseidon

The earliest evidence of the worship of Poseidon at Ascalon comes from a late second century BCE inscription on an altar dedicated to the "Poseidon of Ascalon" (Ποσειδῶνι Ἀσκαλωνίτῃ) by the Philostratus of Ascalon on Delos.[338] The altar was set up in the same Ascalonian sanctuary in which the dedication to Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was discovered. As in the example to Astarte Aphrodite, Philostratus' dedication to Poseidon was made on behalf of his family and the city, implying that the god was among the important deities worshipped at Ascalon.

However, the importance of the cult of Poseidon does not become obvious in the material culture of Ascalon until the second century CE, nearly 300 years after the erection of Philo's

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[335] Eck and Zissou 2001; Eck 2014, 118-122; *CIJP* III, n.2342. For associations in the Hellenistic and Roman world see: Kloppenborg and Wilson (eds.) 1996; van Nijf 1997; Harland 2003. For parallels in the existence of associations among Phoenicians in the Hellenistic period see especially the publications on the association of the Poseidoniastes from Delos (Picard 1921; Trümper 2006; Trümper 2011).

[336] Studies on the origins and style of the marble sculpture and architecture from Ascalon include Freyberger (1990) and Fischer (1998, 2008).

[337] Avi-Yonah 1930, 94-95.

[338] *ID* 1721.

altar. Poseidon may appear on civic coins in the first century CE as a bearded man with no

attributes but the series is short-lived and a similar figure on silver hemidrachmas of the same

period is identified by numismatists as Zeus.[339]

Poseidon more obviously appears on local coins in the mid-second century CE, where he is

clearly identifiable by his attributes, a trident and dolphin.[340] The design was popular in the

second-third centuries CE on coinage. Some scholars have identified issues in which Poseidon

appears to be standing on a pedestal, perhaps indicating that the figure was based on a local cult

statue.[341] Poseidon appears in three designs with different attire (Fig.3.3). He wears a chlamys

in one, a himation in a second, and is nude in a third. These three designs have prompted some

scholars to argue that three different cult statues of the god existed in the city.[342]

The sudden reappearance of Poseidon in Ascalon in the second century CE has been

interpreted as part of a renewed interest in traditional cults. This trend is attested by the

introduction of a series of new gods on Ascalonian coins, of which Poseidon is but one example.

Poseidon's appearance, in fact, serves as the basis for the suggestion that these new gods were

Phoenician deities beneath a Hellenized veneer. Teixidor argues that Poseidon was the

Hellenized name for the Semitic storm god Baal Saphon.[343] However, there is no evidence of

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[339] Yashin 2007, 40, n.39-40.

[340] E.g. wearing a chlamys with a dolphin and trident: Yashin 2007, 59, n.229 (157/8 CE); wearing a himation: Ibid., 61, n.239 (197/8 CE). The earliest Poseidon coins (Meshorer et al. 2013, 102, n.142), from the reign of Antoninus Pius depict the god nude.

[341] Fuks (2008b, 36) cites two coins with this design published by Rosenberger (1972 62-63, n.206, n.208) and dated to the third century CE, but in an inspection of that publication I was unable to see the pedestal.

[342] Meshorer (1985, 27) thought that the coin designs reflected the existence of multiple statues of Poseidon at Ascalon, but did not identify any bases in coins he published (1985, 2013).

[343] Teixidor 1977, 43-44.

the worship of Baal Saphon at Ascalon.[344]   At other sites associated with the worship of Baal

Saphon, the god was associated with Zeus Kasios in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[345]   At

Sidon, the god Baal-Berit was depicted with the Greco-Roman attributes of Poseidon as early as

the second-first centuries BCE.[346]   The Phoenician association of the Poseidoniastes from

Berytus also presented their patron deity according to the conventions associated with Poseidon

in the Hellenistic world.[347]   Teixidor's suggestion is thus unlikely given the dearth of evidence

for the cult at Ascalon before the Hellenistic period and the lack of parallels for this association.

In the inscription set up by Philostratus on Delos, Poseidon is called "Poseidon of

Ascalon," implying that this was a local variant of the god.[348]   However, in the epigraphic and

numismatic record he is depicted according to Greco-Roman conventions as early as the late

second century BCE. If "Poseidon of Ascalon" did mask a Phoenician or Near Eastern deity,

Ascalonians did not emphasize that connection in material culture. Instead, the emphasis is on

recognizing a special relationship between Poseidon and the city of Ascalon, as the deity

"belonged" to them. If Ascalonians of the second century CE saw in Poseidon a Phoenician

deity, they likewise chose not to acknowledge it in a meaningful way on their coins. Instead,

Poseidon is depicted in the costume of a hero when cloaked in a chlamys. In other issues, he

wears the himation, a symbol of the Greek citizen in the world of the polis. Therefore, the

emphasis is on recognizing a special relationship between a Greco-Roman deity and the local

city of Ascalon.

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[344] Although Brody (1998, 56-57) discusses evidence of local dedications by Ascalonian sailors to an unknown deity.

[345] Eissfeldt 1932; Bonnet 1987, 101-143; Brody 1998, 10-11, 13-19; Rowan 2007; Fox 2008, 258-272.
[346] Hoover 2010, n.105-109, 111-112.
[347] Op cit. n.335.
[348] An idea already suggested by Fuks (2008, 37).

Phanebalos

The deity called Phanebalos first appears on coins, gems, and a lead disc of Ascalon in

the mid-first century BCE (Fig.3.4).[349] He usually wears armor and a crested helmet, and holds a

circular shield in front of a palm branch in one hand.[350] Phanebalos stands in a pose typical of

Near Eastern smiting gods, and wields a curved *harpe* sword in one lifted hand.[351] The figure is

identified by scholars as Phanebalos because this name is inscribed on several coin issues

depicting the armored figure in the second century CE.[352] An Egyptianizing temple depicted on

coins (Fig. 3.5) of Ascalon in the late second-early third centuries CE has been associated with

Phanebalos since the publication of a rare issue depicting the deity within the temple's naos.[353]

The nature of Phanebalos and a discussion of the deity's attributes are presented in Chapter 4.

Asklepios

There is evidence for the acknowledgment of Asklepios throughout the Roman period,

unlike a number of other gods enumerated in this chapter. The god and his daughter Hygieia

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[349] He appears on the obverse of Ascalonian coins under Augustus. The earliest in issues in major collections include: Rosenberger 1972, 44, n.80 (6/7 CE); Yashin 2007, 43, n. 72-75 (Augustan); *RPC* n.80-82 (Augustan); Meshorer et al. 2013, 99, n.62 (Caligula) Meshorer et al. (2013, 98, n.51-52) includes an early design depicting a god he identifies possibly as Phanebalos but who carries a sword and is nude. The god appears on the reverse of an Ascalonian tesserae depicting Asklepios and Hygeia (Decleodt 1914, 422-423, n.16). Phanebalos also appears alongside Derceto, Poseidon and an Ascalonian Egyptianizing deity on several gems from unknown proveniences now found in collections in Verona (Gagetti 2003, 440, n. 335), Paris (Delatte and Derchain 1964, n. 458), and London (Michel 2001, n.261).

[350] In some issues of the mid-second century CE Phanebalos appears with a Phyrgian hat instead of a helmet (cf. Meshorer 2013, 102, n.139), and wears a long skirt instead of a short military dress (Hill 1912, 421).

[351] The *harpe* is a sword with a curved hook attached to the blade. See Chapter 4.

[352] Hill 1965, n. 188, 217, 218 ("ΑΣ ΦΑΝΗΒΑΛ"); Ibid., n.216 ("ΦΑΝΗΒΑΛΟΣ"); Meshorer et al. 2013, 102, n.139 ("ΑΣ ΘΑΝ…Λ"; 146/7 CE).

[353] The temple appears in two designs on coins minted between the reigns of Antoninus Pius (Rosenberger 1972, 57,n.169) and Maximius (ibid., 67, n.237).

appear first at Ascalon on a lead tessera from sometime after the first century CE.[354] Asklepios is

identified by his himation and staff entwined by a serpent, which Hygieia feeds from a patera.[355]

A Roman period headless marble statue of an older man wearing a himation was discovered at

Ascalon and also has been identified as Asklepios, or as a man in the guise of Asklepios.[356] In

both cases the depiction of Asklepios is informed entirely by Greco-Roman iconographic

traditions. It is possible that this Asklepios was syncretized with the Phoenician deity Eshmun,

as was the case at Sidon, Berytos and other Phoenician cities.[357] However, there is no evidence

for a cult to Eshmun at Ascalon before the appearance of Asklepios in material culture of the

Roman period.

Asklepios is one of the few gods at Ascalon for whom there is some external literary

evidence, albeit late in date. According to a hymn by the fifth century CE Neoplatonist Proclus,

a cult to "Asklepios Leontouchos" existed at Ascalon. The epithet Leontouchos, "holder of

lions" or "lion-headed" is unique in Greek, and only used in this instance.[358] The close

relationship between Asklepios and lions implied by this title has puzzled many scholars. To

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[354] Decloedt 1914, 442, n.16. Decloedt does not date the tessera, but the reverse design depicts Phanebalos, who only appears on Ascalonian coins after the mid-first century BCE.

[355] Numerous other examples of a similar design appear in Roman Palestine (Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009, 48-59).
[356] Vermeule and Anderson 1981: 5.

[357] E.g., Damascius.*VitaIsidori.*302 (Sidon), Strab.16.2.22 (Carthage), *CIS* 1.143.1 (Sardinia). Although many of the arguments are now outdated, McCasland (1939) pulled together much of the evidence concerning the worship of Asklepios in Israel, and supplemented by the survey of Ovadiah and Mucznik (2009, 40-59). Riethmüller's (2005) second volume provides a catalog of evidence for over 900 cult sites dedicated to Asklepios, but the non-Greek material (317-361) is not dealt with in any depth.

[358] LSJ s.v. *leontouchos*. In his commentary of Marinus' work on Proclus (in which this reference to Asklepios Leontouchos appears) Edwards interprets the title as "lion-headed" (2000, 87). Finkielsztejn (1986) has argued that Asklepios Leontouchos was worshipped at Caesarea Maritima based on his interpretation of a scene on a Roman period mythological cup from the site. The cup depicts Asklepios looking onto a scene which includes a man wrestling with a lion. Coins of Caesarea Maritima in the mid-second century include a design in which a lion appears above a serpent, which Finkielsztejn claims is further evidence for the association between Asklepios and lions at Caesarea (425-426). The evidence, although suggestive, does not offer definitive proof of a cult of Asklepios Leontouchos at Caesarea.

address this unparalleled connection, J. Geiger suggested that λέων refers to a kind of spotted snake rather than a lion.[359] The title is more likely a reference to Asklepios Leontouchos' relationship to lions, perhaps indicating that he controlled or was associated with the animal. This suggests a connection to other gods who are identified with lions—Herakles or Eshmun, both of whom are connected in some way to Asklepios in Phoenicia. The consensus is that Asklepios Leontouchos was related in some way to the Phoenician god Eshmun, who was often depicted with lions.[360]

Proclus' hymn to Asklepios Leontouchos appears in a list of hymns dedicated to prominent deities in their cities. This implies that the cult of Asklepios Leontouchos was important at Ascalon, and that knowledge of the cult was widespread by the fifth century CE. In light of these assumptions, scholars expect Asklepios Leontouchos to appear on Ascalonian coins, alongside other notable gods of the community.

The best candidate for identification with Asklepios Leontouchos on Ascalonian coins is the Egyptianizing deity accompanied by three lions who appears on the obverse of local coins beginning in the mid-second century CE (Fig.3.6).[361] The same figure appears on gems of a similar date, including one found in a tomb in Ascalon. [362] The deity is never identified by an inscription, and his attributes and pose are not drawn from the repertoire of a known god. The iconography of the Egyptianizing god has been parsed at length by multiple scholars to reveal the deity's "true" identity and nature. The figure is clothed in a short skirt, and wears a *hemhem*

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[359]Geiger 2012, 315-218; 2014, 127.

[360] The association is found as early as Hill's (1965, 11) publication on Ascalonian cults. See also: Belayche 2001.

[361] The design begins under Marcus Aurelius (Meshorer 1985, 28, n.52), and appears on coins minted under every emperor until the mid-third century CE (Meshorer et al. 2013, 105, n.200).

[362] Ben-Dor 1947; Delatte and Derchain 1964, 297-298, n.423; Rahmani 1981; Zwierlein-Diehl 2002, 50-51, 95, n.114, plate 15ab; Gagetti 2003, 440; Chiesa 2009, n.332-333.

crown, and holds a scepter and flail. The deity stands behind or on top of three lions. Based on

these attributes the Egyptianizing figure has alternately been identified as Magna Mater, Horus-

Helios, Horus-Harpocrates, Horus of Mount Kasion, Isis and/or Osiris, Asklepios Leontouchos,

Eshmun, and as an Egyptian or male deity. [363] There is no scholarly consensus.

Mastrocinque identified the god as Asklepios Leontouchos, and this interpretation fits

well with the evidence. The Egyptianizing figure is closely associated with lions, a relationship

implied in the epithet of Asklepios as discussed by Proclus. Second, the Egyptianizing god

appears on coins in the mid-second century CE, a period when deities with supposed links to the

city's Phoenician past were suddenly included on coins. These factors make the identification of

the god on coins with Asklepios Leontouchos likely, although it is unclear what the god was

called locally.

If this association is correct, the Egyptianizing features of the god beg an explanation.

The god may have originated during the Persian period, when there is a marked tendency

towards Egyptianizing styles in Phoenician art and material culture. Alternately, the Egyptian

style of the deity may reflect a larger trend toward incorporating these styles into the visual

iconography of the gods at Ascalon. The second-third centuries CE witnessed an intensification

of Egyptian elements in the public media of deities at Ascalon, including numismatics and

architectural decoration. This topic will be considered in Chapter 4 in connection with the cult

of Aphrodite Ourania.

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[363] Gagetti 2003, 440 (Magna Mater); Zweierlein-Diehl 2002, 50-51 (Horus-Helios); Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009, 128 and Shaick 2012 (Horus-Harpocrates); Bricault 2006, 131 (Horus of Mount Kasion); Meshorer 1985, n. 28, 52 and Rahmani 1981, 48 (Isis or Osiris); Hill 1965, Yashin 2007, Fuks 2008 (Osiris); Mastrocinque 2011 (Asklepios Leontouchos); Imhoof-Blumer 1884, Delatte and Derchain 1964, Rosenberger 1972 (Egyptian deity); Baramki 1974 (male deity).

Dioscouri

The Dioscouri, Greco-Roman twin gods associated with sailors and soldiers, were widely worshipped in the Levant in the Roman period.[364] Their worship in the coastal cities of Phoenicia and Palestine reflects the importance of seafaring and maritime trade. As in other cities, the Dioscouri are featured on coins from Ascalon (Fig.3.7).[365] The design features each cuirassed twin armed with spear and a Roman parazonium.[366] A multi-pointed star appears above their heads, and a crescent moon with horns pointed upward is included in the field between the two figures. This type appears on coins from Ascalon under in the mid-second century CE, and continues in use until the first quarter of the third century CE.

The iconography of the Dioscouri is consistent with their depiction on coins elsewhere in the Levant, suggesting that the officials in charge of the coin designs were drawing from a common visual repertoire. The Dioscouri appear infrequently in military garb in the east and are usually nude, so the inclusion of military dress on the images at Ascalon represent the only major departure from full-bodied depictions of Dioscouri elsewhere. However, examples of the Dioscouri in armor dating to the mid-second century CE can be found at Conana, Tripolis, and Alexandria.[367]

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[364] Homer.*Hymn.*27. In his *Phoenician History*, Philo of Byblos cites the Phoenician tradition that the Dioscouri descended from Suduk (a mythological figure who helped discover the use of salt), and were celebrated for the invention of ships (Eus.*PE.*1.10).

[365] Baramki 1974.

[366] E.g. Meshorer et al. 2013, 103, n.169 (158/9 CE).

[367] Conana (in Lycia): *RPC* IV, n.7749 (Marcus Aurelius). Tripolis: *RPC* IV, n.10138 (161-169 CE). Alexandria: *RPC* IV n.14542 (182/3 CE).

Isis

Isis was worshipped at Ascalon by the second century CE as Isis "Κρατίστη" ('the mightiest'), according to the list of Isiac cult sites included in Oxyrhyncus Papyrus n.1380.[368] The epithet implies that Isis' local nature was martial and related to the protection of the city. Despite the connotations of the title, Isis is not visible in the public sphere of the city until the late second century CE, when she is featured on a sculpted pilaster on the façade of the city's bouleuterion (Fig.3.8).[369] The figure wears a chiton with a himation tied in an Isiac knot. Her kalathos is decorated with a crescent moon, stars, and sheaves of wheat, all attributes associated with Isis in the Greco-Roman period.

Although Isis is prominently depicted on the bouleuterion, she does not appear unequivocally on the city's coinage in the Roman period. The bust of a deity wearing a hemhem crown and carrying a flail has been identified by some numismatists as Isis, but the inclusion of a series of lion's heads below the bust on some issues points to the identification of the deity as Asklepios Leontouchos.[370]

The sudden importance of Isis in the city in the late second century CE may indicate that she was associated or syncretized with another deity at Ascalon. This syncretism may have occurred as early as the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The crescent moon on the kalathos of

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[368] Pap.Oxy.XI.1380. The list dates to the second century CE or perhaps earlier, but the original composition of the list may be as early as the second century BCE (Fuks 2008, 41). Pindar (*Ol*.14.14) uses the epithet 'κράτιστος' to describe Zeus. The epithet appears to emphasize both the power and importance of the deity.

[369] There is some evidence for Isis in private contexts. These finds include a depiction of Isis in the cache of bronze figurines published by Iliffe (1936). Erlich (2009) provides an up-to-date discussion of these figurines, which have been dated by various scholars to the seventh-fifth centuries BCE. The single Roman-period figurine identified as Isis comes from a farmstead outside Ascalon and has been dated to the first-second centuries CE (Rapuano 2012, 24). The figure is identified as Isis based on parallels between the figure's "mourning" pose and knotted chiton with Isiac imagery elsewhere in the Roman world. For this pose see Bricault 1992. Parallel examples in the region come from Petra (Vaelske 2013, 355-357), dated to the first-second century CE.

[370] E.g. Meshorer 1985, n.28; n.52; Rahmani 1981, 48.

the Isis on the bouleuterion has prompted some scholars to argue for a syncretized cult of Aphrodite Ourania, Derceto, and Isis.[371] The crescent moon appears in the same period on the diadem of Derceto on Ascalonian coins, and would likely have been identified by locals as a symbol closely related to Derceto. Syncretism of Isis and one or both of the local goddesses is appealing, particularly because of her epithet "the mightiest."[372] If the crescent moon refers to Derceto in a local context, the epithet would surely have been connected locally to the martial goddess Aphrodite Ourania, as discussed in Chapter 4. The use of the crescent may have served to connect the goddess more closely to the local Ascalonian context by referencing Derceto, but as Belayche points out, "the Egyptian reference is dominant" in the sculpture's design. Why this is so is unclear, but as mentioned previously there is a marked reorientation in the presentation of the gods in public contexts towards Egyptian styles.

Pan and Dionysos

The gods Pan and Dionysos are among the best represented in the preserved sculptural collection at Ascalon, although there is no numismatic, epigraphic or literary evidence for the worship of either one in the city. At least five free-standing or architectural sculptures have been identified as Pan, but all appear to be decorative and are unlikely to have functioned as a cult statue. A grey-white marble roundel from the late second century CE is decorated with a bust of Pan and has been identified as a decorative element from a public fountain.[373] Two additional

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[371] For a range of interpretations, see: Garstang 1924; Diplock 1971; Fischer 1995; Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016.

[372] As Assmann (2010, 131) notes, in the Roman period Isis is a "truly global deity… all divine names are hers." Isis was associated with multiple other goddesses throughout the ancient world, including Aphrodite and Astarte (Pap.Oxy.XI.1380; Luc.*Apul.*11.2-5).

[373] Iliffe 1934, 165; Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 11. Three pegs located around the edges of the roundel were used to keep the piece in place. The marble piece was discovered at Bi res Summeil, a small settlement east of

marble fragments appear to be parts of statues of Pan, but both are very fragmentary. [374] One of

these is a poorly preserved head, and the other is the torso of a figure partially clothed in

goatskin. The torsion of the figure's torso may indicate that the figure was originally part of a

symplegmatic group. The find spots of these sculptural fragments do not allow us to reconstruct

where they were set up within the city.

A second architectural relief, possibly a lintel fragment, depicts a figure seated in a chair

and surrounded by ivy and other vegetation, while Pan appears in the mouth of a cave nearby

(Fig.3.9).[375] Iliffe identified the seated figure as "a bearded old man, possibly Dionysus."[376] This

identification seems unlikely as Dionysos is rarely depicted as an older man in this period and is

infrequently depicted in Roman art sitting without Ariadne by his side.[377] The seated figure wears

a long garment and the figure's hair appears to be pulled up. Neither of these features was

associated with Dionysos in this period, and the treatment of the hair suggests instead that the

seated figure is female. The image of the cave evokes the worship of Pan as well as in the myth

surrounding the birth and rearing of Dionysos by the nymph Nysa in a cave.[378] In depictions of

the myth two figures frequently appear seated: Nysa and Zeus. Pan is often included in the

scene. Many different regions claimed the cave of Dionysos' birth, and one of these traditions

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Ascalon. The use of marble and the well-executed carving place its origin more likely at Ascalon than at the smaller farmsteads and sites surrounding the city.

[374] Iliffe 1934, 165-166; Fischer 1998, 139; Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009, 167.

[375] Iliffe 1934, 165-166.

[376] Ibid., 166.

[377] *LIMC,* "Dionysos."

[378] *HHD* 26; Ovid.*Met.*3.304.

placed the location in the southern Levant.[379] Nysa was thought to be buried at Nysa-

Scythopolis, providing the city with its name.[380] In light of these considerations, I suggest that

the scene on the lintel from Ascalon depicts the delivery of Dionysos, who is not pictured, to the

sacred cave. Pan emerges from a cave, presiding over the scene, and the nymph Nysa is seated

and awaiting the baby, who presumably was depicted in another lost panel. In this case, the scene

reflects an interest in regional mythologies, reinforcing a relationship between the southern

Levant and the larger Greco-Roman world.

The architectural sculptures of Dionysos and Pan from Ascalon were primarily decorative

features on public buildings. Images of Dionysos and Pan at Ascalon as decoration for public

buildings is consistent with their depiction in other Roman cities.[381] By using Pan and images of

Dionysiac myth to decorate their buildings, Ascalonian patrons reflect an engagement with the

larger Mediterranean *koine*. At the same time, elements drawn from this global visual language

tapped into important local traditions and practices, as in the case of the worship of Pan in nearby

cities in Palestine.

Herakles

Herakles is one of the deities who appears for the first time on Ascalonian coins in the

second century CE. The heavily muscled nude male holds a club, and sometimes a small Nike in

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[379] *HHD* 1; Dio.Sic.4.2.3. Other traditions includes Boeotia (Plut.*Lys.*28.4), Naxos (HHD 1; Hyg.*Fab.*192), and India (Plin.*NH.*6.78). The existence of a Nysa in Asia Minor was used by cities to tie Dionysos to the region is attested by reliefs from several cities in the Roman period (Price 2005, 119; Smith 2013).

[380] Plin.*NH.*5.74.

[381] Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009, 84-93; 163-172.

one palm (Fig.3.10). He is identified as Herakles by the club and musculature.[382] However, this depiction of Herakles lacks the traditional lion skin cape, which appears only on a single Ascalonian lead tesserae of unknown date.[383] Two marble heads of unknown date and provenience have been identified as Herakles at Ascalon, although the identification is not based on any particularly Heraklean attributes.[384]

The inclusion of Nike on coins with Herakles connects this design to the god Herakles Belos Aniketos, who is mentioned as a god of Ascalon in a mid-third century CE inscription from Canopus in Egypt.[385] The inscription recounts the dedication of a statue of Herakles Belos Aniketos ("Θεὸν/πάτρι[όν] μου Ἡρ[ακ]λῆ Βῆλον ἀνείκητον") to Zeus-Helios-Sarapis by Marcus Aurelius Maximus, a Syrian of Ascalon ("Σύρος] Ἀσκαλωνείτη[ς]…"). Herakles Aniketos was worshipped in some parts of the eastern Mediterranean, although in the Roman period the cult does not appear to have been particularly popular.[386] The epithet Aniketos ("invincible") and the association between Herakles and Nike on coins calls to mind the popular

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[382] Examples appear in issues under Macrinus (217/8 CE: Yashin 2007, 62, n.242), Elagabalus (218/9 CE: Hill 1965: 138, n.244), and in multiple years under Severus Alexander (230/1 CE, Yashin 2007: 65, n.261; 234/5 CE: Meshorer et al. 2013, 105, n.202) and Maximinius (234/5 CE: Yashin 2007, 65, n.266). Nike: e.g. Yashin 2007, 62, n.242 (217/8 CE).

[383] Decloedt 1914, 444, n.18.

[384] Thiersch 1914, 4-5; Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009, 114. The first head is tentatively identified as Herakles, and if this identification is correct it would be of a type similar to the beardless Youthful Herakles type e.g. the Landsdown Herakles (Howard 1978). The second head is identified as Herakles because of the thick curly hair and beard. The lack of drilling in the hair probably indicates a pre-third century CE date (Ridgway 1997, 251-257). Fuks (2008) does not discuss either marble head in his discussion of cults at Ascalon. Fischer (1998, 140) only briefly considers the second, poorly preserved head, which he also identifies as Herakles, calling it "obviously one of the many imitations of the Herakles Farnese."

[385] *IGRom I*, 1911 (1964), n.1092.

[386] Orlin 2010, 62. Evidence: cf. Tyrtaeus F.8.1; Paus. 4.16.6.; see also the inscriptions from Priene (*IP* 194) and Phyrgia (Ramsay 1882: 124-125). The title 'Aniketos' is used to describe Herakles in the context of a cult only in the Hellenistic period (Weinstock 1957, 214). Two dedications to Herakles Aniketos appear alongside dedications to Egyptian deities

Roman god Hercules Invictus.[387] Hekster has demonstrated that Hercules Invictus was particularly associated with the emperor in the second and third centuries CE on coins, sculpture, and even in oratory.[388] According to Hekster, in the third century CE "there was a discernible trend to compare rulers to Hercules, assimilating their actions on the throne to the latter's appropriate heroic deeds," and notes that Nike often accompanies Hercules in these depictions.[389] On the other hand, the title "Belos" has been interpreted as a reference to Herakles as the "Baal" of the city, a title held also by Herakles at Tyre.[390] This title, coupled with the date when Herakles appears on coins, may indicate that the origins of this god's cult extends back into the city's Phoenician past.

The gods most frequently identified with Herakles in the Phoenician world were Eshmun, and especially Melqart at Tyre and its Tyrian colonies.[391] There is no evidence for Eshmun at Ascalon, but a Greek inscription from 177/8 CE attributed to Ascalon may provide evidence for rituals associated with Melqart. The inscription is fragmentary, but preserves "ἐγερσ[" followed by "προέδρου" (from προέδρος, *proedros,* the chairman of the local boule).[392] The fragmentary

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[387] According to Apollodorus (*Bib*.2.158) an Aniketos was the son of Herakles and Hebe after the demigod joined the ranks of the immortals. "Aniketos" was also an epithet for Helios, used in the Roman period as a Hellenized name for Sol Invictus (*IGUR* 124).

[388] Hekster 2005; Hekster 2015. See also Manders (2012, 108-114) on the rise and fall of imperial associations with Hercules on coinage.

[389] Hekster 2015, 257.

[390] Drijvers 1980, 53; Bonnet 1988, 131-2. On Malta, for example, a bilingual Greek and Phoenician inscription refers to Herakles-Melqart as the "Baal of Tyre" (KAI 47).

[391] Ancient sources frequently make the association, e.g. Herod.2.44, Philo.Byb.811.10-11. Epigraphic evidence associates the two deities, for example at Carthage (*KAI* 47). For a discussion of the worship of Melqart in Tyre and his association with Herakles see: Bonnet 1986: 209-222; Bonnet 1988; Lipinski 1995: 226-244. Melqart frequently appears on coins of Phoenician cities (especially Tyre) with the attributes of Heracles (cf. Baramki 1974, 221-266). Nitschke (2013, 258-279) explores the Melqart-Herakles syncretism at length.

[392] Euting 1885, n.81.

"ἐγερσ-" has been reconstructed by C. Bonnet as 'ἐγερσείτης' (*egerseites*).[393] Melqart's worship

included an annual festival in February or March in which the god died and was resurrected.[394]

This festival included a presiding official called the *egerseites*, who was in charge of the

'resurrection' of the god after his symbolic death. Based on this, Bonnet argued that the

Ascalonian inscription provided evidence for the cult of Melqart at Ascalon, and that the head of

the Ascalonian *boule* was responsible for performing the duties of the *egerseites*.

As a former Tyrian city the presence of a cult to Melqart at Ascalon is not be surprising,

but the second century CE inscription is the earliest evidence for this worship. Bonnet suggested

that the name Mettounmikim, found on a tombstone of an Ascalonian buried in Demetrias

(Greece) in the third century BCE may provide earlier evidence for the worship of Melqart at

Ascalon.[395] In 1979, Sznycer suggested that the ending "-mikim" be identified as a theophoric

element or with the title *mekim elim* ("raiser of the gods").[396] The *mekim elim* has been

interpreted as an official involved in the rites of the cult of Melqart.[397] However, even if the

name Mettounmikim provides evidence for the worship of Melqart at Ascalon, we are left with a

gap of some five hundred years between Mettounmikim and the inscription of the *egersites*.

Bonnet has argued that the lack of evidence of a cult of Melqart before the second

century CE can be attributed to the worship of Melqart as Herakles at Ascalon, an association

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[393] Bonnet 1988, 100-107.

[394] Bonnet 1988, 104-105. The ceremony was popularly known in the ancient world, enough for Menander to comment on it (*FGrH* 783 F1). See also Lipinski (1995, 61; 238).

[395] Masson 1969, 693-694; Teixidor 1970, 361; Sznycer 1979, 46-50.

[396] Sznycer 1979, 48-50. Teixidor (1970, 361) had already identified the theophoric connotations of "mettoun" which is related to the Phoenician 'MTN' meaning "gift." If –"mikim" was in fact also a theophoric element, Sznycer suggested it constituted an epithet for a god, translating "Mettounmikim" as "Gift of Mikim."

[397] Sznycer 1979, 49 (with parallels); Bonnet 1988, 131-132.

which also existed at Tyre and on Cyprus.[398] However there is likewise little evidence for a cult

of Herakles at Ascalon before the second century CE. As Fuks rightly points out. "it is hard to

explain where Heracles/Melqart had been 'hiding' during the hundreds of years between the

Persian period, in which there was a strong Tyrian influence upon Ashkelon, and the second

century CE."[399] Moreover, as Fuks has already noted, the provenience of the *egersites*

inscription is suspect, with Clermont-Ganneau already arguing against its Ascalonian origin in

1885.[400] Finally, it is not clear that Herakles Aniketos was associated with Melqart at Ascalon,

particularly because the depictions of Herakles omit the lion skin, which is an important attribute

of the Phoenician god.

The visual imagery employed in depictions of Herakles on coins instead suggests a close

connection with Hercules Invictus. This god was popular in the second-third centuries CE, and

if Herakles was originally associated with Melqart, that reference is not made clear on the coin

designs. Instead, the design conveys messages of victory and power, which is underscored by

the use of Nikai sculptures on the façade of the bouleuterion at this time.   The importance of

symbols of victory are discussed below.

Nike

Nike's appearance in a variety of media at Ascalon is dated narrowly to the late second-

early third centuries CE. She appears on coin issues in this period with Herakles, displayed in

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[398] Bonnet 1988, 131-132; Lipinski 1995, 226-242; ibid. 289-291. There is epigraphic evidence that demonstrates the existence of an *egersites* belonging to the cult of Herakles from Amman (Teixidor 1975, 269).

[399] Fuks 2008, 32.

[400] The inscription was on a column held in a private collection in Jaffa. Local peoples quested by Clermon-Ganneau (1885, 199) about its origin indicated that "le monument proviendrait en réalité de Ramlé." Since there was no Roman settlement at Ramla, and the column may have come from the nearby cities of Lydda, Jamnia, Joppa or, even, Ascalon.

miniature on the hero's outstretched hand holding a wreath in one hand.[401] In some issues she

crowns the god with this wreath. Nike also appears prominently in the sculptural decoration of

the remodeled bouleuterion of Ascalon in the early third century CE.[402] The façade of the

bouleuterion was decorated with a series of finely carved pilasters, of which four are at least

partially preserved. Of these four, three depict images of Nike. The best preserved pilaster

depicts Nike alighting on a globe supported by a crouching Atlas.[403] She likely held a wreath in

one hand, wearing a *polos* on her head. The second Nike holds a palm branch in her right hand

and a laurel wreath in her left and also wears plain polos. The laurel wreath and palm are typical

attributes of Nike in the Greco-Roman world.

Nike's very public presence on the bouleuterion, coupled with the popularity of Herakles

Aniketos on Ascalonian coins in the third century CE, suggests that elites in the city were

concerned with promoting the city's its strength and power. It is unclear if this preoccupation

with victory refers to a historical event. We have no evidence of military campaigns around

Ascalon this period. It is more likely that Ascalon was tapping into the popularity of Herakles in

this period, and that the emphasis on victory was a result of the popularity of his Roman Invictus

personality and connection to the emperor. Nike was an essential part of this message, and when

appearing by herself she serves a shorthand for references to the unconquerable nature of the

Roman empire.

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[401] E.g. Rosenberger 1972, n.202; Yashin 2007, n.242, 261-262.

[402] Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016.

[403] Vermeule and Anderson (1981, 15) called these pilasters "the most splendid Roman imperial architectural sculpture to be found east of Ephesus and Corinth."   For a discussion of these pilasters and parallels to these depictions of Nikai, see Boehm, Master and Le Blanc (2016).

The Tserifa

The Babylonian Talmud lists the "Tserifa" at Ascalon among "five appointed temples of idol worship" in the Near East.[404] One reading of Tserifa identifies the label as a corruption of the name of the Greco-Egyptian god, Sarapis.[405] Multiple scholars have criticized this interpretation, pointing out that there is very little evidence for the worship of Sarapis in any period at Ascalon.[406] An alternate interpretation of Tserifa is the Aramaic "el mezoraf", which is "a syncretic deity composed of a number of deities."[407] Shaick has argued that Tserifa in this case refers to Horus-Harpocrates, while Dvorjetski suggested that Tserifa referred to the temple of Phanebalos.[408] Geiger recently noted that 'tserifa' can mean "cone or pyramid," and argued that the description was of a temple in Egyptianizing style.[409] Geiger and Dvorjetski's arguments are compatible, as the temple of Phanebalos depicted on Roman coins is Egyptianizing in style. As I will argue in Chapter 4, the deity of the temple was actually Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, the great goddess of the city. This interpretation would explain why the Tserifa is described as an important temple.

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[404] *TB Av. Zar* 11b; Jacobs 2000,139-159; Belayche 2001, 226; Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009, 178-179.

[405] Shaick 2012, 139 (with Hebrew source bibliography).

[406] E.g. Bricault's (2006, 130-132) argument that there is overall a lack of evidence for the "Hellenized Isiatic cults of Sarapis and Harpocrates" in this area of the Levant, and that the more "traditional Egyptian cults of Isis with Osiris and Horus" were more popular. Fuks (2008, 41-42) is also skeptical about the identification, concluding that the association between the Tserifa and Sarapis "requires further study" (42).

[407] Shaick 2012, 139.

[408] Ibid.; Dvorjetski 1994, 5-37.

[409] Geiger 2014, 128-129 but cf. Roullet 1973.

Lady Hester Stanhope's Temple

The British noblewoman Lady Hester Stanhope uncovered our only architectural

evidence of a temple in Ascalon in the early 19th century. Her excavations uncovered a large

temple somewhere to the north/north-east of the Roman period bouleuterion and theater.[410] The

building is now known only from the writings of Stanhope's biographer Lord Meryon, a painting

made in the 19th century by David Roberts, and descriptions of the remains of the building before

it was looted for material prior to the turn of the 20th century.[411] From Roberts' painting of the

temple and Meryon's field notes, it appears that the building was decorated with marble

Corinthian capitals and grey granite columns, and was oriented east-west. Very little of the

Roman period architecture remained, and Meryon thought the building had been converted into a

temple and then a mosque in antiquity. In the excavations, a number of sculptural fragments

were discovered, including an over-lifesized statue of a cuirassed emperor. Meryon included a

drawing of the statue in his diary (Fig.3.11), but the sculpture was ordered destroyed by Lady

Hester out of fear that she might be accused of attempting to loot antiquities.[412] The torso is

stylistically dated to the second century CE.[413] A second statue was discovered near the

cuirassed emperor, mentioned by Meryon only in passing. The *modius* or headdress

reconstructed by Meryon with the cuirassed statue likely belonged to the second statue or to a

third, partially preserved sculpture. There are no parallels for the sculptural depiction of a

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[410] Meryon 1846, 160-164.

[411] Ibid.; Michaud and Poujoulat 1834, 384; Guerin 1869, 146.

[412] Although Lady Hester originally ordered Meryon to "break the statue and have it thrown into the sea," her later comments about the sculpture mention breaking it "into a thousand pieces" and omit the location of their disposal (Meryon 1846, 166, 168). In 1834, Michaud and Poujoulat (384) published an account of a visit to the site, and in their inspection of Stanhope's excavations they imply that they had actually seen pieces of the broken statue there.

[413] Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 12.

cuirassed emperor with a modius or kalathos, and the size of the modius as depicted in Meryon's

drawing is proportionally too small to belong to the statue. Sarapis was often depicted wearing a

modius or kalathos, but the line drawing of the modius as discovered by Stanhope's team is

without parallel in typologies of such headdresses from depictions of Sarapis or in priestly

headdresses.[414]

In light of the available evidence, it is not possible to identify the deity to whom

Stanhope's temple was dedicated. Later travelers identified Stanhope's temple as dedicated to

Venus Astarte, but this association was based on the prominence of the cult at Ascalon rather

than any real evidence.[415] However, its central location and lavish marble decoration suggest it

was one of the main temples of the city.

Conclusions

The preceding sketch introduces several important themes in the creation and

presentation of Ascalon's cultural memory as manifested in polis-religion. First, the range of

architectural, epigraphic, and sculptural evidence for civic cult in Ascalon is fairly limited. The

numismatic evidence is the most cohesive and robust type medium through which to study the

gods of Ascalon, but this material comes with its own set of limitations. All of the evidence

considered in this chapter was produced by elites, and privilege the prospective and priorities of

elites within Ascalon, and those viewing the city as visitors or from afar. Elites themselves were

part of different, sometimes overlapping, "memory communities," that maintained different

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[414] Kater-Sibbes 1973; Tran 1983; Rumscheid 2000.

[415] Michaud and Poujolat 1834, 383-384; Guerin 1869, 147. The temple identified as the Temple of Venus by Le Comte de Forbin during his visit in 1817-1818 was not the same building exposed by Lady Hester Stanhope, and was probably the remains of a temple on the north tel (Schloen 2008, 148).

traditions and memories about the past. With the available evidence it is difficult to circumscribe these different memory communities. Coin designs were produced by elites on behalf of the community, but we do not really understand the local design and minting process. Who was in charge of coming up with the designs for coins? Was it one minting official, or many? What types of formal and informal rules and guidelines existed to constrain or guide the introduction of new designs and the perpetuation of long-lived ones? We do not know if certain Ascalonian families or groups were associated with particular deities, and if they promoted those deities because of that connection. The longevity of most of the coin designs suggests that this is not the case, but we cannot rule a familial connection out in the introduction of a group of new deities on coins in the second century CE.

The second trend is the role of the past in civic cult. Worshipping the gods involved a variety of remembrances, from the use of communicative memory used to remember the steps of a ritual, to the cultural memory made visible and reaffirmed through renewing the community's connection to a god. In the Hellenistic and Roman period, non-Greco-Roman elements of civic cults must have reminded the community about the origins of those gods in the city's past. The Phoenician origins of some Ascalonian gods may have been recognized by the community in the Roman period, but only a handful of gods were depicted in ways that overtly referred to their Eastern origin. Seven gods (Aphrodite, Derceto, Poseidon, the Dioscouri, Herakles, Phanebalos and Asklepios Leontouchos) have been identified by scholars as likely being Phoenician in origin, although that fact is not obvious in the iconography of the deities except for Phanebalos, and perhaps Asklepios Leontouchos. The lack of obvious Phoenician elements in most of the Ascalonian cults, including those that scholars identify as Phoenician in origin, is significant. This does not mean that Ascalonians denied their Phoenician past, but that their interactions with

the Greek world was also a significant way of framing the past. This topic is the focus of

Chapter 5, which looks at the use of mythological stories to articulate Ascalon's membership in

the Greek mythological past.

The use of Greek and Roman attributes and iconography is the third theme identified in

this chapter.   It is clear that the iconography of the Greco-Roman world was deliberately

employed in particular contexts and for particular deities at Ascalon. For example, depictions of

the god Apollo are confined to the period of Seleucid control, a time when that god enjoyed great

popularity god because of his ties to the royal family. Herakles' popularity in the second-third

centuries CE may be related to an interest in traditional Phoenician cults, but his depiction with

symbols of victory tie him closely to the Heracles Invictus popular with the Roman emperors.

This presentation is one many ways in which the Ascalonians situated their polis-religion within

a Greco-Roman framework, drawing symbols and ideas from practices in the Mediterranean to

express local and global ideas at the same time.

Fourth, it is clear that the polis-religion of Ascalon was fluid, and deities and their

depictions were modified to suit the changing needs and priorities of the community. For

example, although it is has been argued that Ascalon enjoyed a close political and cultural

relationship with Egypt, there is little evidence of Egyptian influence on Ascalonian public cults

until the mid-second century CE. Beginning in the mid-second century CE a number of

Egyptianizing deities appear on coins, and the temple of Phanebalos is shown with Egyptianizing

elements. This trend, coupled with the introduction of deities with supposed origins in the city's

Phoenician past, highlights how the community's public sacred identity shifted over time. If

polis-religion is the institutionalized articulation of aspects of cultural memory that defines and

stabilizes the community, then changes indicate systemic shifts in civic institutions, priorities of

the elites, or needs of the community. Chapters 4 and 5 are case studies dealing with this kind of articulation and change in a historical context.

The following chapters explore the trends outlined above in depth, looking specifically at the ways in which the cults of these gods were used to articulate the community's past and socio-cultural orientation. Two case studies dealing with Aphrodite Ourania, and evidence for Ascalonian deities in Greco-Roman myths, show the spectrum of strategies and goals which structured the presentation of gods in the public sphere.

CHAPTER 4: ASTARTE APHRODITE OURANIA

Introduction

This chapter explores the themes and trends laid out in Chapter 3 in the context of the cult of Aphrodite Ourania, considered by ancient sources as the most important in Ascalon. I provide an overview of evidence for the cult and the ancient temple of the goddess, who was probably known locally as Astarte or Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. I argue that this goddess was depicted on Roman period civic coinage, despite the common perception that she was not. I argue that she was depicted in four different guises: as Aphrodite; as Tyche; as a goddess with attributes similar to the Roman Venus Victrix; and, as the armed figure identified by numismatists as Phanebalos. Although this last identification was first noted by Finkielsztejn, I point to additional pieces of evidence to strengthen the case, emphasizing the use of the *harpe* sword, the pose of the deity, and the continuation of Phoenician elements original to the deity's introduction in the sixth century BCE.[416] I conclude by arguing that the promotion of the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania reflects changing priorities and versions of the past as articulated by local elites on behalf of the community.

A Survey of the "Accepted" Evidence

According to both Herodotus and Pausanias, the temple of Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon was one of the oldest temples of that goddess in the Mediterranean.[417] Herodotus' comments

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[416] Finkielsztejn 1992.

[417] Her.1.105.3; Paus.1.14.6.

demonstrate that the temple existed by the fifth century BCE, during the period of Phoenician control of the city.[418] Herodotus and Pausanias attribute the foundation of this cult and temple at Ascalon to the Phoenicians, prompting most scholars to identify the Ascalonian goddess as Astarte, given a Hellenized name by Herodotus.[419] However, neither author provides a description of the temple, the cult statue or the rituals involved in the goddess' worship.

Ancient authors note an association between Aphrodite Ourania and Astarte in the Mediterranean at several different sites and in a variety of contexts.[420] Astarte is often discussed in reference to her role in the celestial sphere, sometimes called "the Mistress of Heaven." This epithet is appropriately translated to Aphrodite in the Greek world with the title 'Ourania,' which also references Aphrodite's birth from the castration of Ouranos.[421] In the second millennium BCE Astarte was a Near Eastern goddess with ties to war, healing and sexuality, although this last aspect has been overemphasized by Greco-Roman writers and modern scholars. The goddess gained prominence in Phoenicia by the seventh century BCE.[422] Astarte's function and identity overlapped with those of other Near Eastern goddesses, including Ishtar, Anat, Asherah, Tanit

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[418] Herodotus supplies incompatible details concerning the origin of the temple. He emphasizes the role of the Phoenicians in the foundation of sanctuaries to Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon and in the Eastern Mediterranean, but then writes of the sacking of the temple of Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon by the Scythians during the late-seventh century BCE reign of the Pharaoh Psammeticus. The Philistines, not the Phoenicians, were in control of Ascalon in the late seventh century BCE, and archaeological evidence demonstrates that Phoenician rule of Ascalon dates at the earliest to the late sixth century BCE. The temple, therefore, could not be founded by the Phoenicians in the seventh century BCE, unless we presume the foundation was the work of a group of Phoenician merchants living in Ascalon. It may be that the sack of Ascalon by Nebuchadnezzar was Herodotus' inspiration, albeit confused, for the Scythian sack of the temple at Ascalon, and that the Phoenicians refounded the temple after they moved into the city.

[419] Boedecker 1974; Bonnet and Pirenne-Delforge 1999; Bonnet 1996; Budin 2004: 125-128.

[420] Her.3.8; Cicero.*De.Nat.Deo.*3.21-23; Suidas s.v. *Astarte*.

[421] For "Ourania" as an epithet of Aphrodite in Greek cults in 10 cities see Budin (2003, 22). Astarte is called "queen of the heavens" in Egypt (ibid. 228) and in the Bible (Jer 7:18, 44:18-19).

[422] Huidberg-Hansen 1986, 170-176; Lipinski 1995, 128-153; Bonnet 1996; Budin 2004, 104-108, Schmitt 2013, 216-21; Peckham 2014, 372-383, 403-435.

and Isis, and in some cases one of these goddesses may be permutations of each other.[423] Some cults of Aphrodite in both the Near East and Greece may have developed out of cults of Astarte as early as the seventh century BCE.[424]

The association between Astarte and Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon is demonstrated by three dedicatory inscriptions from the Greek island Delos in the late second century BCE. In these inscriptions, self-identified Ascalonians make vows to "Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania" (Ἀστάρτηι/ Παλαιστινῆι/Ἀφροδίτηι Οὐρανίαι).[425] One of the Delian inscriptions is dedicated to the goddess on behalf of the dedicant, his family, and the entire city of Ascalon (Φιλόστρατος Φιλοστράτυ/Ἀσκαλωνίτης τραπεζιτεὺω[ν]/ἐν Δήλωι, ὑπερ τῆς Ἀσκαλωνι-/τῶν πόλεως καὶ ἐατοῦ καὶ/ Γυναικὸς τέ[κνων). A bilingual Phoenician-Greek epitaph of an Ascalonian from Athens places the correspondence between Astarte and Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon back to at least the third-fourth century BCE.[426] In the Phoenician text of the inscription, the deceased man, Shem, is identified as the son of Abdashtart, a theophoric 'Astarte' name.[427] The accompanying Greek text identifies Shem as Antipatros and his father as Aphrodisios, providing an equivalent between Astarte and Aphrodite in theophoric names.[428]

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[423] E.g. Huidberg-Hansen 1986, Christian 2013, Schmitt 2014.

[424] See discussion in Budin 2003, 70-91.

[425] *ID* 2305. In early publications of this inscription by Clermont-Ganneau (1909, 308) a "καὶ" was added between Ἀστάρτηι Παλαιστινῆι and Ἀφροδίτηι Οὐρανίαι. This had the effect of downplaying the connection between Astarte and Aphrodite. It is not possible to see this portion of the inscription in the photograph of the altar provided by Clermont-Ganneau in his article but the original publication of the inscription and subsequent transcriptions do not include the καὶ. See also below.

[426] Barbanera 1992; Bonnet 1998; Stager 2005; Hölscher and von Möllendorff 2008; Tribulato 2013.

[427] Aside from the 'Astarte' element in the name of Abdashtart, the name itself is translated as "servant of Astarte", emphasizing the existence of a cult to the goddess in Abdashtart's home city (Stager 2005, 430).

[428] Bonnet (1998, 42-44) argues that Antipatros is the Hellenized version of 'Shem,' and that the names are semantically connected but cf. Stager (2005, 431).

Aside from literary accounts, there is little unequivocal evidence for the worship of

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania from Ascalon between the sixth century BCE and the Roman

period.[429] Cross identified a Persian period bowl labeled "cookies" in Phoenician as evidence

for the dedication of sweet cakes to Astarte. This identification is based on offerings of cookies

to the goddess in biblical texts.[430] Some scholars have connected the famous dog burials of

Ascalon with the local cult of Astarte because of some evidence for sacred dogs kept at

Aphrodite's sanctuary on Cyprus.[431] Aphrodite appears on the obverse of Ascalonian bronze

coins from the second century BCE (Fig.4.1). Her hair is bound up, she wears a stephane and in

some examples a scepter is included behind her shoulder.[432] This design is limited in use and

only a handful of examples are published.[433] Additionally, an under-life-sized marble statue of a

Crouching Aphrodite was found during the excavation of the Roman bouleuterion (Fig.4.2).[434]

The ubiquitous dove found on the reverse of Ascalonian coins in the late Hellenistic-Roman

periods may be a symbol of this goddess. Philo reports that a large number of doves lived in the

city in the Roman period, perhaps testifying to their existence in conjunction with this cult.[435]

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[429] Female terracotta figurines, perhaps of the Philistine goddess Ashtoreth, from the seventh century BCE and earlier at Ascalon may indicate that the cult of Astarte was a continuation of an earlier Philistine cult (Cohen 2011, Press 2013).

[430] Cross 2008, 354; Jer 7:18, 44:18-19.

[431] Wapnish and Hesse 2008. The connection to Astarte is explored by Stager (2008a, 565-566) and Edrey 2008, 273-274. Cf. Halpern's (2000) suggestion that the dog burials were related to the Mesopotamian goddess Gula, associated in the fifth century with Asklepios and Edrey's second hypothesis that the practice of burying dogs was a local phenomenon (2008, 276-276). Wapnish and Hesse (2008, 542-547) questioned connections to cult practice, and Miller (2008, 493-494) interpreted the dog burials as evidence only for an emotional attachment between Ascalonians and their pets.

[432] Meshorer et al. 2013: 97, n.26-27 (n.d.).

[433] Similar compositions from cities with cults to Astarte appear on first century BCE coins from Thaena (*RPC* I n.80-807), Tingri (*RPC* I n.859-60, with a laurel wreath), Cartenna (*RPC* I n.884-885).

[434] Garstang 1924.

[435] Finkielsztejn 1992; Philo.*de Provid.* 2.64. The faunal evidence from this period is not yet published.

However, the association between the dove and another prominent Ascalonian goddess, Derceto, has complicated the reading of that symbol.[436]

Added to these examples is evidence at Ascalon of Near Eastern goddesses related to Astarte. Figurines, amulets and bullae depicting the Egyptian goddess Isis appear at Ascalon by at least the seventh century BCE. [437] Her cult at Ascalon is attested in the Oxyrhyncus Papyrus, and she appears in the architectural decoration from the third century CE bouleuterion.[438] The symbol of the Puno-Phoenician goddess Tanit appears on some weights found at Ascalon in the Persian through Roman periods, and perhaps also on some Roman period coins (Fig.4.3).[439]

In sum, the accepted evidence for the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania suggests the following. First, that the cult was among the earliest dedicated to Aphrodite Ourania, and that this fact made the temple and cult notable in the Mediterranean world between the fifth century BCE-second century CE. Second, the cult's antiquity was rooted in its close relationship to the Phoenicians during their control of the city. Third, the goddess was referred to by Greco-Romans as Aphrodite Ourania, while at least some Ascalonians referred to the goddess as "Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania," perhaps indicating that by the second century BCE the cult had undergone some form of Hellenization acknowledged by the Ascalonians themselves.

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[436] See Chapter 5.

[437] On Egyptian amulets from the seventh century BCE: Herrmann 2011. On Egyptian situlae from the same period: Bell 2012. A horde of Egyptian bronzes first published by Iliffe (1936) and dated to the Hellenistic period is probably earlier. See also discussion in Ch.3.

[438] Pap.Oxy.XI.1380; Fischer 1995; Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016.

[439] See Stager 1991; Lipinski 1995, 200-201; Elayi and Elayi 1997; *CIJP* III n.2359; Shenkar 2009. Note the Tyrian origin for the Tanit weight at Ascalon. Such weights have been found in other Phoenician coastal sites from the same period (Stern 2006; Wolff and Finkielsztejn 2009). The appearance of the Tanit symbol on the coins is noted by many scholars (E.g. Stager 1991, 108-109; Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.32; 64/3 BCE) but it may simply be a monogram used for dating (Gitler and Master 2010, 79, fn.14).

Fourth, the goddess was important in the city, acting as a kind of *thea patria* who received honors from prominent citizens on behalf of the community even outside of Ascalon.

It is surprising that, at first glance, Astarte Aphrodite Ourania does not appear frequently on Hellenistic and Roman period local coins at Ascalon. As previously noted, a bust of Aphrodite appears on the obverse of only a few bronze coins from the Late Hellenistic period. Some scholars identify Tyche as a syncretized version of Tyche Astarte Aphrodite, but the famous Ascalonian goddess was probably not worshipped in that form in her temple. The main deities of most Roman cities appear on their civic coinage, and so the absence of a deity conclusively identified as Astarte Aphrodite Ourania is troubling.

Using the major points indicated by the literary and epigraphic evidence as a guide, I believe we can identify no fewer than three depictions of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania on the local coinage of Ascalon in the Hellenistic and Roman period aside from the bust of Aphrodite. The date of these depictions overlap, but as we will see, differences in design are used consciously to emphasize different and sometimes competing aspects of Ascalon's public sacred identity and socio-political orientation.

I will argue that the Astarte Aphrodite Ourania worshipped at Ascalon was essentially a bellicose goddess, retaining her function as a powerful war-goddess connected to the ruling power that characterized Astarte in the Phoenician world. In order to situate an analysis of images of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania in Ascalon, I will first give an overview of Aphrodite, Astarte, and Venus in their roles as goddesses of warfare. Then I will turn to an analysis of three different depictions of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. Each depiction engages differently with elements of the Hellenistic *koiné*, but all three do not waver in their depiction of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as a powerful protector deity for Ascalon.

The Goddess of Love as a War Deity

Aphrodite

Although Aphrodite is popularly thought of as a goddess of love and fertility, multiple

studies have demonstrated that Aphrodite had martial aspects to her personality from her origin.

These features are linked in ancient scholarly literature to Aphrodite's connections to Near

Eastern belligerent goddesses, or to the violence of passion and emotions inherent in the larger

sphere of "love."[440] In the Greek world, depictions of Aphrodite with arms and armor are not

common, but they do appear frequently enough that some scholars suggest that Aphrodite was a

goddess associated with war early on in her appearance in the Greek world (Fig.4.4-4.7).[441]

Aphrodite appears named and armed with a circular shield and spear on a sixth century BCE

black-figure dinos depicting the gigantomachy.[442] According to Pausanias, cult statues of

Aphrodite at Corinth and Sparta depicted the goddess armed.[443] He reports that the wooden cult

statue in the sanctuary of Aphrodite Ourania on Cythera, the origin of which he links to the

Phoenicians of Palestine and Ascalon, was also depicted armed.[444] Representations of Aphrodite

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[440] Argued by Flemberg (1991, 1995) and Pironti (2007, 2010), respectively. Generally, see Bonnet (1996), Schmitt (2013), and Cornelius (2004). Maclachlan (2002) argues that, on Cyprus, Aphrodite was deliberately "ungendered" to reflect the totality of the power of the goddess.

[441] As noted by Budin (2010, 82-112), Aphrodite's martial quality was emphasized primarily in Sparta and in areas with links to Sparta before the Hellensitic period. After this point most of the evidence is Roman in date, even when the perception of writers and peoples in the Roman period dated the martial elements of Aphrodite to pre-Roman periods. See the recent collection of Greco-Roman evidence analyzed by Budin (2010) and Flemberg's (1991, 29-42; 1995 *passim*) earlier studies.

[442] Discussed by Budin (2003, 27). As she notes, the context of the scene (a fight against the giants) is likely the occasion for Aphrodite's martial aspect, but her participation in the fight demonstrates that she is not wholly adverse or incompetent in the realm of warfare, as implied by her brief intervention in the battle at Troy (Hom.*Il.*5.330-430).
[443] Paus.2.5.1; 3.15.10.

[444] Paus.3.23.1. Origin of the cult: Paus.1.14.6 and also: Her.1.105.

with arms and armor, or in the process of arming herself, are found on coins, mirrors, statues and

gems from the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[445]

Astarte

Astarte is associated with arms and warfare in Ugaritic literature and in Phoenician

inscriptions (particularly from Tyre) from the seventh-fifth centuries BCE.[446] She is invoked as

the protectress of a treaty between the kings of Assyria and Tyre in the seventh century BCE, and

the text of the treaty states that Astarte herself will punish transgressors in battle, causing them to

cower.[447] One Ugaritic text describes Astarte wearing wooden armor over her clothing, and

hunting with a spear and club.[448] Although inscribed depictions of Astarte from the Near East

tend to depict the goddess nude and accompanied by lions or horses, numerous depictions of

belligerent goddesses adopting the 'Smiting God' pose have been identified as Astarte in

Phoenicia and Egypt (Fig.4.8-4.9).[449] Despite the nudity that marks most of the inscribed

depictions of Astarte in these periods, inscriptions and mythological texts do not emphasize the

role of the goddess as only a goddess of fertility.[450]

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[445] Discussed by Flemberg (1995, 116-120), Serwint (2002, 341-342), and Michaelides (2002).

[446] Huidberg-Hansen 1986; Schmitt 2013; Abousamra and Lemaire 2013.

[447] See translation of text and discussion by Budin (2003, 248).

[448] *KTU* 1.92; see translation and discussion in Budin (2003, 226). Bloch-Smith (2014) studies the archaeological and inscriptional evidence for cultic spaces of Astarte in Phoenicia in the 10th-2nd c. BCE and also discusses the nudity of inscribed Astarte plaques and figurines.

[449] Bonnet 1996, 62-67, 150-153; Cornelius 2004; Budin for a succinct summary of this evidence (2003, 251-264) and commentary (2006, 164-165) on the methodological issues with Cornelius' identification (2004) of goddesses. Bonnet (1996, 17) notes that the specific iconography of Astarte is notoriously difficult to sort out independent of her association with other goddesses.

[450] As noted by Budin (2003, 250) and Schmitt (2013, 213-218). See also Cornelius (2004) and Serwint (2002). Schmitt (2013, 218) and Serwint (2002, 341) suggest that Astarte was identified by the Philistines as a war goddess because they placed Saul's arms in her temple in Beth Shean (1 Sam 31:10).

Astarte was also associated or syncretized with other Near Eastern goddesses with connections to war and kingship.[451] Although Astarte was associated with the Greek fertility goddess Aphrodite on Cyprus, Schmitt argues "one should not however misinterpret" that identification "as a radical change in Astarte's character, since the Cypriote goddess has many aspects…which makes her compatible with Astarte's aspects of a goddess of kingship and war."[452] In the first millennium, Astarte probably took over many functions of her war-like sister, the goddess Anat (Fig.4.9).[453] There is ample literary and epigraphic evidence that Astarte was associated with Ishtar, Isis, Tanit, and other Near Eastern goddesses.[454]

Venus

In Rome, Venus was associated with war and victory by the late second century BCE. Venus Victrix, a goddess explicitly connected to military victory, was popular among generals of the Late Republic and was frequently invoked in Augustan visual imagery (Fig.4.10). [455] She is often depicted with arms and armor, ostensibly those belonging to her lover, Mars. As the purported ancestress of Julius Caesar and Augustus, the goddess also served an important dynastic function, connecting Augustus to founders of Rome and to popular myths from the Greek past. She appears on many prominent Augustan monuments, including on Augustan

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[451] See also Brody's (2001) analysis of connections between Aphrodite of Aphrodisias and various Anatolian and Near Eastern goddesses.

[452] Schmitt 2013, 219.

[453] Christian and Schmitt 2013. Huidberg-Hansen (1986, 176) identifies Phanebalos as an aspect of Anat connected to Astarte at Ascalon.

[454] Cross 1973, 311; Huidberg-Hansen 1986; Budin 2003, 199-241; Christian 2013; Bloch-Smith 2014.
[455] Indeed, the Romans "were used to thinking of Venus as a goddess of victory by virtue of her status as consort to Mars" (Kuttner 1995, 23). For Aphrodite in Late Roman and Augustan visual culture see Kousser 2010.

coins, on the pediment of the temple of Mars Ultor and perhaps on the Ara Pacis.[456] If later

sculptural depictions of Venus, Julius Caesar and Mars are considered true reflections of the

schema of the pediment of the Temple of Mars Ultor, then Venus was depicted on that

monument receiving the sword of Mars from Eros, another indication of Venus in a more martial

role.[457]

Conclusions

Although Astarte, Aphrodite, and Venus were all goddesses of love and fertility in the

ancient world, there is sufficient evidence to identify a strong and persistent connection to

warfare in the depictions and functions of all three goddesses. There is no external description of

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania's role at Ascalon. Herodotus and Pausanias connect the cult of the

goddess at Ascalon to the Phoenicians, and to the Phoenician cults of that goddess on Kythera

and Cyprus. As discussed above, the Cypriot Aphrodite was warlike in nature, and the cult

statue of Aphrodite on Kythera was armed. Astarte was a goddess of war and kings in Tyre, and

invoked as a protector deity. All of this evidence suggests that the Astarte Aphrodite Ourania

worshipped at Ascalon retained some of these same belligerent characteristics, and also the role

of a powerful protector goddess. Although I will argue that different elements of this role were

emphasized in different periods, my analysis will demonstrate that the goddess' warlike nature

persisted at Ascalon.

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[456] Some scholars have identified the central figure on the Tellus panel of the Ara Pacis as Venus/Aphrodite, but the issue is debated (Galinsky 1992).

[457] Zanker 1988, 195-198; Kuttner 1995, 22-25, 29-32.

Ascalon *asylia* and *ieras*

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania first appears on Ascalonian coinage syncretized with the

Hellenistic city goddess Tyche in order to promote Ascalon's status as a Hellenistic polis. In the

second century BCE Ascalon and its citizens were increasingly demonstrating an active and

interested engagement with the Hellenistic political, social and cultural worlds. As discussed in

Chapter 2, the city had been under the control of Hellenistic kings since the time of Alexander,

but it is only in the second century BCE that there is ample evidence that the city clearly

conceived of itself as sharing in the cultural and political life of the Hellenistic oikoumene.

References to Ascalon as a polis on inscriptions and to the people as the demos on Ascalonian

coins were not simply empty rhetoric. A lead weight from Ascalon dated to 122/1 BCE was

inscribed with the name Nicander, who is called the "agoranomos," a Greek-styled official in

charge of weights, measures and the local market.[458] The area became the forum in the Roman

period was occupied at this time by a massive building of unknown, although probably civic,

function.[459] By the first centuries BCE/CE, the Hellenistic monumental building was covered

over by the city's bouleuterion complex.

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the primary ways that the community promoted itself

as a Hellenized city was through locally minted coins. A bust of the Hellenistic city goddess

Tyche appears on Ascalonian silver and bronze coins in the second century BCE, and the

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[458] *CIJP* III, n.2358. Similar tiles from the same period bearing the name and title of a local agoranomos were found at Maresha (Finkielsztejn 2010) and attributed to Azotus (*CIJP* III n.2298). See also *CIJP* III (n.2634) for a lead weight from 122/1 BCE of unknown provenience, but attributed by the authors to the southern coast. For the role of the agoranomos, see Sperber (1977; 1998, 32-47) and Rozenfeld and Menirav (2005) for sources and the job in Palestine, and de Ligt (1993) on the office in the Roman empire in general.

[459] Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016.

popularity of this design increases significantly in the first century BCE.[460] Full-length

depictions of that goddess with her turreted crown appear on bronzes in the late first century

BCE and continue until the third century CE (Fig.4.11).[461]

This trend towards emphasizing the Hellenistic city goddess coincides with the

appearance of Greek titles on Ascalonian silver coins (Fig.4.12). The ethnic markers "ASK" or

"AK" identified coins as Ascalonian in origin since the third century BCE, but by the last quarter

of the second century BCE Greek civic titles appear on the larger silver denominations. As

discussed in Chapter 2, these titles include: *ieras* (holy) and *asylia* (inviolable), and they appear

sometimes alongside references to the *autonomia (*autonomy) and *demos* (the people) of

Ascalon.[462]

The titles *asylia* and *ieras* appear on Greek coinage in the 260's BCE, and imply that a

city and its territory were sacred, inviolable, and worthy of protection from outside threats. It is

unlikely that these titles afforded the city any actual protection, as there is no evidence for any

invocation of this status to spare a city from invading armies or pirates.[463] In other words, the

titles were essentially honorific. By the time the practice spread to Asia Minor and the Levant in

the mid-second century BCE the use of the titles might be considered "a step toward civic

autonomy and liberty."[464] In nearly every case this is precisely how the titles proceed

chronologically, with *asylia* and *ieras* appearing on civic coinage before any claim of autonomy.

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[460] Head of Tyche on obverse: Meshorer et al. 2013, 97, n.20 (114/3 BCE; silver hemidrachm); ibid., 98, n.138 (56 BCE; bronze).

[461] Full-length Tyche on reverse, all bronzes: *RPC* I, n. 4871 (26/5 BCE); Meshorer et al. 2013, 98-99, n. 55-61 (Tiberius-Caligula). Late issues of this design date to the last quarter of the second century CE (Meshorer 2013, 103, n.172; 178/9 CE).

[462] Yashin 2007, n.13 (n.d); Meshorer et al. 2013, 97, n.19 (n.d.).

[463] Riggsby 1996, 16-17.

[464] Ibid., 21.

Furthermore, *ieras* and *asylia* were typically left off coins entirely in favor of *autonomia* if there was not enough space to accommodate all the titles.[465]

The promotion of a city's *asylia* and *ieras* were ostensibly rooted in the existence of a famous temple or sanctuary within the city and its hinterland. This is the assertion of Tacitus, who argued that *asylia* was a title that could only be obtained through a royal grant, and was not one that a city might claim of its own accord.[466] Riggsby notes that "these declarations were first and foremost a religious gesture, increasing the honor of the god."[467] We have no information regarding any royal grant of *asylia* to Ascalon, but Riggsby argues that Ptolemy Lathyrus granted Gaza and a number of other cities this title in an "effort to keep the support of the cities of Palestine."[468] The grant might originate with Antiochus VIII, for whom the city minted coins.

Regardless of the identity of the grantor, we should assume that the famous Ascalonian temple of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania justified the grant.[469] The inscriptions from Delos highlight the importance of this goddess in the late second century BCE, and accounts by Herodotus and Pausanias demonstrate that the fame of the sanctuary was known outside the Levant. If any cult connected Ascalon to the world of the Hellenistic polis, it was Astarte Aphrodite Ourania.

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[465] Ibid., 28.

[466] Tac.*Ann.*3.60-63, 4.14.

[467] Riggsby 1996, 14.

[468] Ibid., 522.

[469] Riggsby (1996, 519) argues that the sanctuary of Derceto was instead the basis for the grant. This is possible, but there is overall much more evidence asserting the special status of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania by Ascalonians in this period. Derceto does not seem to play as substantial a role in the city in this period. Although absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, it is peculiar that no Ascalonians are closely connected to the sanctuary of the Syrian goddess on Delos, a cult to the Near Eastern goddess Atargatis and a more universal variant of the local goddess Derceto.

The use of *ieras, asylia,* and *demos* at Ascalon belong to the late Hellenistic period only, and disappear alongside *autonomia* by the mid-first century BE.[470] In particular, the practice begins to decline around the same time as Pompey's settlement in the east in 64 BCE. *Autonomia* disappears after 64/3 BCE, and *asylia* and *ieras* appear on silver coins of Cleopatra up to 39/8 BCE.[471] The disappearance of these last two titles correspond to the decline in minting high denomination silver coins at Ascalon, but the abandonment of the title of *autonomia* is surely a response to the expansion of Roman hegemony into the Near East in this period.

After the Augustan period the city's numismatic expression of its role as a Hellenistic *polis* is expressed not by Greek titles, but by full-length depictions of Tyche. The goddess is identified by her attributes, including a turreted crown, a standard, and an aphlaston. In some issues she stands on the prow of a ship.[472] Several scholars identify this figure as Tyche Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. This interpretation interprets the goddess as the symbolic representation of the same identity projected on the Late Hellenistic *ieras* and *demos* coins. The Greek titles *ieras* and *asylia* on Ascalonian coins implied a connection to Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, and Tyche Astarte Aphrodite Ourania stood as a visible manifestation of the city's identity as a polis protected by their famous goddess. After dispensing with Greek titles, the burden of representing Ascalon's identity as a polis was totally embedded in this poliadic version of the city's goddesss.

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[470] Latest issues: Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.32 (64/3 BCE).

[471] *RPC* I n.4868.

[472] Hill 1965, 410; *RPC* I n.4877-4879 (Augustus), n.4880-4881 (Tiberius), n.4882-4883 (Caligula), n.4885, 4887 (Claudius), n.4888, 4890-4892 (Nero). Allowed by Yahsin (2007, 31) but cf. Meshorer et al. 2013.

Tyche is a goddess who frequently assimilates aspects and attributes of other goddesses in the Near East, functioning as a polyvalent deity in whom viewers might see a number of simultaneous identities.[473] The appearance of the dove in the field beside the figure is the closest the image comes to specifying a particular connection to Astarte Aphrodite at Ascalon (Fig.4.13). The image's iconography is primarily global, situating the goddess as a symbol of the larger Hellenistic world. There is little about the figure's iconography that is particular to Ascalon, and the antiquity and fame of the cult is nowhere acknowledged. However, while Tyche was a goddess worshipped throughout the Hellenistic world, her function was inherently local, protecting each community individually. As the Hellenistic symbol of a civic protector goddess, Tyche was easily identified with Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, who performed this function in the religious life of the city. In defining the city's political role, which was ultimately the function of this series of coins, elites used *koiné* symbols for local goals. The Tyche iconography signaled an engagement and knowledge of the socio-political practices of the Hellensitic world, but the goddess resonated locally through syncretism with Astarte Aphrodite Ourania.

The use of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as the protector of the city corresponds to the nature of Astarte from Tyre. Astarte is referred to as a protectress, and even as a goddess of Fortune, on funerary stelae from Tyre in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE.[474] Her ability to protect, rooted in her power and belligerent nature, is emphasized in her depiction on other coin designs from Ascalon (see below).

The use of *asylia, ieras, demos,* and *autonomia* on coins alongside the goddess Tyche Astarte Aphrodite is an assertion by the Ascalonian elite that the city could and should express

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[473] See especially the detailed study by Belayche 2003.

[474] Noted by Abousamra and Lemaire (2013, 154-155), but cf. Schmitts (2013, 217).

their political and cultural status in the epigraphic and visual manner of the Hellenistic *oikoumene*. If the use of these titles was to promote a city's status, the trend also served as a way for cities to compete for prestige. The cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania helped structure this expression first through her fame and antiquity, and then by her ability to merge with the characteristic Hellenistic city goddess Tyche.

The Armed Goddess under Augustus

A handful of coins minted under Augustus feature an armed nude figure, identified by numismatists as an early version of the cuirassed deity Phanebalos. As we will see, Phanebalos is a depiction of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. For this reason, I will refer to Phanebalos as female, rather than male. The issue of the figure's sex will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. I will also use the name Phanebalos (rather than Astarte Aphrodite Ourania) to refer to the deity when depicted on coins with the attributes found on coins labeled with that name in the second century CE, although I will argue that Phanebalos is the same deity as the goddess referred to as Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. The nude figure symbolizes a short period of indecision about how to depict Astarte Aphrodite Ourania in visual media at Ascalon, and reflects a desire to use the cult of the goddess to connect Ascalon to the new Roman ruling power and the larger Greek world.

The nude Phanebalos is represented on a few poorly preserved Augustan issues, limiting our ability to fully appreciate the details of the image and its chronological span (Fig.4.14).[475] In this design Phanbalos faces right, wears a crested helmet, and holds a small round shield in one hand. Drapery is wrapped around the shield-bearing arm, and her knees are slightly bent, as if

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[475] De Saulcy 1874, 188 (Augustan); Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.51 ("Augustus?"), n.52.

walking or perhaps crouching. This nude figure is identified with Phanebalos because both wear crested helmets, hold swords, and carry round shields with a raised central boss. Both the nude and armored designs appear on undated coinage under Augustus. For this reason it is not possible to determine if the two issues were contemporary, or if one version succeeded the other.[476] The differences between the nude and armored Phanebalos coins are striking, as is the limited period in which the nude design was used. The nude design's lack of longevity suggests that this was not based on the cult statue of the deity.

The nude design has several elements in common with Roman depictions of the warlike goddess Venus Victrix, who was very popular during the same period as the first Phanebalos issues.[477] For example, a Roman silver denarius design from 32-29 BCE Venus appears standing right, nude except for a drapery hanging loosely around the thighs. [478] She leans against a column, and her knees are slightly bent. She holds a crested helmet in her right hand and a tall scepter in her left. A circular shield is propped against the column at the left. The iconography of the nude figure on Ascalonian coins of Augustus corresponds closely to popular depictions of Venus and Aphrodite in their guise as goddesses associated with the sphere of war and martial pursuits.

The appearance of Phanebalos on local Ascalonian coins under Augustus should be understood in socio-political context of the late first century BCE. The depiction of an armed love goddess was not introduced in the first century BCE, but Julius Caesar and Augustus

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[476] Augustan issues of the traditional Phanebalos type are all undated (e.g. Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.53), but dated examples appear under Tiberius (Yashin 2007, 44, n.81). Yashin (2007, 43, n.72-74) publishes at least three different Augustan issues based on the use of different monograms on the obverse.

[477] Speidel 1984; *LIMC* s.v. "Venus" (Schmidt).

[478] *RIC* I 250A-B. The type continues, with some changes (e.g. *RIC* II Titus 14, *RIC* II Hadrian 412, *RIC* III Marcus Aurelius 723, *RIC* IV Septimius Severus 890, *RIC* V Gallienus 298).

popularized it in that period. Julius Caesar's signet ring was decorated by the depiction of an armed Venus, and Augustus inherited the ring depicting his ancestral goddess. Augustus' relationship to Venus caused some cities in the empire to use their own connection to various incarnations of the goddess as a power strategy to stress their participation in the visual and mythological culture of the Augustan empire.[479] For example, the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias featured the city's eponymous goddess in her role as the progenitor of the Julio-Claudians, a presentation which also emphasized the city's ancient cult to the goddess.[480] While Astarte was identified in the form of Tyche already on Ascalonian coins, the rise of Augustus and the importance of his patron goddess afforded the city the opportunity to promote their local goddess, Astarte Aphrodite Ourania with Augustan iconography. The nude Phanebalos was recognized by Ascalonians as their local Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, but situated within a Roman iconographic context.

The audience for these depictions was surely not Augustus, nor imperial officials on a broader scale. The denominations on which the nude Phanebalos appears are small bronzes, which did not circulate widely far beyond the coastal plains.[481] Ascalon was a cosmopolitan port city, and so the iconography of Ascalon's civic coinage was appealing to a broader audience than in most cities, but those most frequently and intensely exposed to the message were the Ascalonians themselves. The audience and purpose of the message therefore also had a specifically local, dimension. The desired goal of introducing this design was likely to situate

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[479] Yildirim 2004.

[480] Brody 2001; Raja 2003; Smith 2014.

[481] Although, Ascalonian coins have been found abroad (for example, in Poland) they were probably brought there by travelers, sailors or merchants. There are several collections of local bronze coinages from around the Mediterranean found at Ascalon itself (Gitler and Kahanov 2008). The depositional processes behind the first century CE Ascalonian coin (featuring Tyche) found near Przemyśl, Poland are unclear (Bodzek and Madyda-Legutko 1999).

the city's identity and main cult in reference to the newly extended ruling power of Rome in the Near East. Elites saw the opportunity to promote the city's importance within the Roman world through the local goddess.

As we have seen, the elites of Ascalon promoted their connection to the Greco-Roman world and a specific Hellenized identity from at least the end of the second century BCE. Under Augustus, Ascalon's autonomy was maintained, a rare grant for a city in the region. Ascalon issued coins with the image of their protector afterwards, perhaps with the understanding that despite their independence they relied on the goodwill and protection of the Roman administration for protection against absorption into the nearby Herodian kingdom. The local Ascalonian goddess had a bellicose nature that was easily focused in her presentation as an armed Venus consistent with Roman imagery, and the minting elites at least temporarily quoted those Augustan depictions in order to highlight their participation in the Roman cultural system. At the same time, they selected a model that corresponded to the role Astarte Aphrodite Ourania played in local cultural memory, maintaining the goddesses bellicose character.

Phanebalos

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania is depicted in her local aspect on a series of Ascalonian bronzes beginning in the first century BCE. The deity on these coins is called "Phanebalos" by scholars because this title is included on a handful of local Hadrianic issues. Expanding on arguments by Finkielsztejn that Phanebalos is Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, I will provide additional evidence for this identification based on the deity's attributes. First, I will give an overview of previous analyses of Phanebalos. Next, I will add to the list of attributes identified by Finkielsztejn as evidence that the deity was Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, emphasizing elements

that are overlooked by scholars. My analysis will focus on the deity's *harpe* sword, her

archaizing smiting pose, the similarities between the long palm branch and a plant spear, and the

Egyptianizing design of the goddess' temple on coins. Finally, I will discuss the intended

meaning and message of this figure on coins in the Roman period.

An overview

Broadly speaking, the Ascalonian Phanebalos is a deity of unknown nature, character,

and sex known exclusively from tesserae, gems, and Ascalonian bronze coins in the Roman

period.[482] The armored form of the deity appears on undated Augustan coins and then on issues

under every emperor until the end of the local Roman coinage under Maximimius (Figs.4.15-

4.18).[483] The deity's typical garb includes a crested helmet, a short military chiton, and a

breastplate.[484] In some issues in the second-third centuries the crested helmet was perhaps

exchanged for a soft Phrygian cap.[485] In several instances the figure's attire is modified to

include soft *anaxyrides* pants or leggings, or a long skirt.[486] The goddess always holds the same

attributes. In her left hand she holds circular shield with a raised boss against her torso, with a

vertical palm branch of varying heights behind the shield. Her right arm is held aloft in front of

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[482] The coins are discussed at length below. Of the tesserae, the main example is published by Decloedt (1914,422-423, n.16) and depicts Phanebal on the reverse of a tessera whose obverse is decorated with Asklepios and Hygeia. The small gems are all from unknown proveniences, and come from collections in Verona (Gagetti 2003, 440, n. 335), Paris (Delatte and Derchain 1964, n. 458) and London (Michel 2001, n.261).

[483] The latest dated Phanebalos coin dates to the mid-third century CE (Yashin 2007, 65, n.266; 234/5 CE). Ascalon stops minting local coins in this same period.

[484] A well-preserved example of this design: Meshorer et al. 2013, 100, n.96 (105/6 CE).

[485] E.g. Yashin 2007, 51, n.158 (112/3 CE); Meshorer et al. 2013, 102, n.139 (146/7 CE). This appears, to me, to be a helmet, rendered schematically. Compare Fig.4.16 to 4.17-4.18.

[486] E.g. as identified on a Roman period gem (Michel 2001, n.261) and discussed by Hill (1912, 421), although the length of the skirt in these examples seems to me to be an issue of problems with proportion in design, not an intentionally different garment than in other examples.

the body, bent at the elbow. The goddess holds a curved *harpe* sword aloft in a menacing

position. In a handful of third century CE issues the figure has no weapon and is accompanied

by a thunderbolt bundle in the lower left field.[487] The omnipresent dove, which appears on

nearly all other Ascalonian coins of the late Hellenistic and Roman periods, never appears with

Phanebalos.[488]

The deity's temple appears on two Ascalonian coin designs in the mid-second century

CE. The first design provides a frontal view of the temple, depicting the interior courtyard.

(Fig.3.5) The second design provides a more schematic view focused on emphasizing the cult

statue of the deity within (Fig.4.20). The first of the two designs is the most popular and long-

lasting.[489] From published examples, the temple appears to be Egyptian in style, with lotus-form

columns and a flat, squared pediment.[490] The roof is lined with Egyptian uraei, the cornice is

decorated with inverted crescent moons, and beside the columns sit twin griffins. In the

simplified version, a cult statue adopting the same pose as Phanebalos is framed by the lotus-

columns and crescent-decorated cornice from the earlier temple design. This second design is

exceedingly rare and appears only under the Severans, but allows us to link the temple to

Phanebalos.[491]

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[487] Meshorer et al. 2013, 104, n.187 (217/8 CE); Yashin 2007, 64, n.255 (218/9 CE; with star above thunderbolt).
[488] Already recognized by Fuks (2008, 34). See below for the importance of the absence of a dove to interpretations of this deity.

[489] *RPC IV*, n. 6373 (Antoninus Pius); Meshorer et al. 2013, 102, n.143-144 (150-152 CE); ibid., 103, n.174-175 (Severan); ibid., 104, n.184 (217/8 CE); ibid., 104, n.186 (217/8 CE); ibid., 104, n.194-195 (218/9 CE).

[490] Tameanko (1999, 46) identifies these as lotus-form columns.

[491] Meshorer 1985, 27, n.49 (199 CE).

The deity is called Phanebalos after an inscription reading ΦΑΝΗΒΑΛ on the obverse of

several local coin issues dated between 128/9-152/3 CE.[492] Scholars interpret the inscription as

the name of the deity on the coin.[493] The word is a Hellenized rendering of the Semitic epithet

pn b'l i.e. "Face of Baal."[494] The Puno-Phoenician goddess Tanit, whose cult was particularly

prominent in North Africa, is frequently given this epithet in the Roman period.[495] Tanit was

depicted as an ideogram composed of a triangle topped by a horizontal bar and a circle, and this

symbol appears on Tyrian weights from the Persian and Hellenistic periods at Ascalon, and as a

monogram on some late Hellenistic coins.[496]

Much of the discussion concerning Phanebalos centers on the deity's sex, nature and

identity as a variant of a global deity. Although Hill argued that "the dressing of the hair, the

long skirt and broad hips give it an extraordinarily feminine appearance," it has been typically

argued that Phanebalos is male.[497] It is also traditionally accepted that the deity's attributes point

toward a connection to the sphere of war and military action. However, there are wildly

divergent opinions concerning the "true" identity of the deity. Multiple scholars have identified

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[492] E.g. Yashin 2007: 56, n.197-199 (Hadrianic, no date; "AC ΦANH BA Λ"); ibid., 57, n.207-210 (146/7 CE; "AC ΦANH BA Λ"): Meshorer et al. 2013: 102, n.139 (146/7 CE; "AC ΦAN...Λ").

[493] No one has considered at length that 'Phanebalos' is the name of a local or regional official. Theophoric Baal names are well-known in the Phoenician world (i.e. Hannibal, Hasdrubal; see Benz 1972, Cross 1973) but 'Phanebalos' is unlikely to be one such name because of its direct use as an epithet for other deities (see below).

[494] Noted, with confusion, by De Saulcy 1874 (200, 203) but understood and translated by Imhoof-Blumer 1908, 129.

[495] E.g. *KAI* 176, *CIS I* 4945, 4-6, and more generally, Lipinksi 1995. There is now a body of evidence that demonstrates that Tanit was worshipped in Phoenicia and in the coastal sites of Palestine, although she has traditionally been associated with Punic settlements in North Africa. See: Stern 2006.

[496] Stager (1991); Lipinski (1995, 200-201); Elayi and Elayi (1997); *CIJP* III (298-299 n.2359); Shenkar 2009. Note the Tyrian origin for the Tanit weight at Ascalon. Such weights have been found in other Phoenician coastal sites from the same period (Dothan 1964; Stern 2006; Wolff and Finkielsztejn 2009).

[497] Hill 1912, 421. Hill's ultimate conclusion that the deity was male despite these features is followed by most scholars, but cf. Cross (1973), Maier (1987), Stager (1991), Finkielsztejn (1992), Shenkar (2009). Tameanko (1999, 46) sees Phanebalos as a goddess in some, but not all, periods.

Phanebalos as a god of war, i.e. Mars, an Arabic war deity, or a militant Zeus-Baal hybrid.[498]

Dussaud suggested that the cult of Phanebalos grew out of the cult to the Philistine god Dagon, influenced by the Greco-Roman Hercules.[499] Serwint identified the figure as the Near Eastern war goddess Anat "with a physiognomy that is more male than female."[500] Additional suggestions include Apollo, a combination of the Orphic god Phanes and Baal, and the hero Perseus.[501] The use of the inscription Phanebalos, and some material evidence for Tanit at Ascalon before the Roman period have prompted several scholars to identify Phanebalos as the goddess Tanit or, because the figure is often identified as male, as a hybridized deity composed of Tanit and Baal.[502]

Is Phanebalos Astarte Aphrodite Ourania?

Finkielsztejn proposed that the deity on the Phanebalos coins should be identified with Astarte Aphrodite Ourania.[503] His argument focuses on the attributes and symbols common to Phanebalos and Astarte in the Phoenician world. He identifies the palm branch and lions flanking the temple of Phanebalos as attributes of Astarte in the Phoenician world.[504] Finkielsztejn also notes the existence of a poorly preserved weight depicting Phanebalos on a ship's prow, with a smoking altar and crescent moon before the figure. He identifies this as

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[498] De Saulcy 1974, 188-189 (Mars); Seyrig 1970, 96-97 (Arabic war deity); Hill 1912, 421-422 (Zeus-Baal).

[499] Dussaud 1905, 76-79.

[500] Serwint 2002, 341. Cross (1973, 31-35) connects Derceto, Astarte, Phanebalos, and Anat.

[501] Teixidor 1972, 423; ibid. 1977, 96-97. (Apollo); Ronzevalle 1930, 12-16 (Phanes-Baal); Mastrocinque 2011, 100-104 (Perseus).

[502] Stager 1991; Shenkar 2009. Also: Meshorer (1985, 27-28), but cf. Meshorer et al. (2013, 95).

[503] Finkielsztejn 1992. Followed by: Meshorer et al. 2013, 95.

[504] Finkielsztejn 1992, 54-55; cf. Fuks 2008: 34-35.

evidence connecting Tyche Astarte and Phanebalos. Taken with the title Phanebalos, the

existence of symbols of Tanit on weights and some coins from Ascalon and the belligerent

aspect of the goddess as emphasized by the arms and armor, Finkielsztejn proposes that the

goddess on the coin is Tanit-Astarte.

Fuks challenged Finkielsztejn, citing four details that make it difficult to identify

Phanebalos with Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. First, he argues that Phanebalos is usually

identified by scholars as male. [505] In 1912 Hill noted some "feminine" qualities about the deity,

but ultimately identified the figure as male.[506] This interpretation has largely been followed.[507]

In my view, the heavy armor and helmet, and the somewhat schematic quality of the design

makes it impossible to tell if the figure is male or female. In some cases, the roundness of the

cuirass seems to me to imply breasts. The uncertainty regarding the deity's sex is highlighted

even in the clearest depictions of the god on two gems of unknown provenience.[508] The long

skirt noted by Hill but not always clearly indicated on the coins, is present in both examples.

However, the sex of the deity is still unclear, even when compared to depictions of clearly male

and female deities appearing alongside. The sex of the deity is then not obvious on the coins or

on the gems preserved from Ascalon. This may be purposeful, given the androgynous nature of

some female deities, including Astarte, in Egypt, or the sex of the figure may simply not have

been an important identifying attribute.

Second, Fuks dismisses Finkielsztejn's argument concerning the depiction of Phanebalos

on the weight and on coins inside her temple because both images are poorly preserved and the

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[505] Fuks 2008, 34.

[506] Hill 1912, 421.

[507] See above for bibliography.

[508] Gagetti 2003, 440, n.335; Delatte and Derchain 1964, n.458.

details in each scene are difficult to make out.[509] His point about the quality of these images is well-taken, but the figure's pose and attributes on the weight and temple coins make it likely that the deity is Phanebalos. The combination of Tyche Astarte and Phanebalos attributes on the weight are not problematic because they are attributes of the same deity who is depicting differently according to her different functions.

The weight provides evidence against Fuks' third argument, that Tyche Astarte and Phanebalos cannot be the same deity because they do not share any common attributes. The different attributes of Tyche-Astarte and of Phanebalos Astarte Aprodite Ourania are based on decisions to emphasize different functions of the deity. Deities might be depicted in various ways and in various cities depending on local preferences and styles. [510]

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as Phanebalos

In this section I add to Finkelsztejn's identification by looking at the *harpe*, the palm branch, the pose of Phanebalos, and the style of the temple in reference to the origin of the cult and the nature of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania.   I discuss the evidence for the *harpe* and palm branch as symbols of Astarte Aphrodite's dual role as a goddess of fertility and war. I argue that the antiquity of the cult is emphasized by the archaizing features of the deity's pose and nature. I suggest that the Egyptianizng elements of the temple are related to the cultural context of the cult's origin, or that it reflects the increase in syncretism between Astarte Aphrodite Ourania and Isis in the mid-second century CE.

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[509] Fuks (2008, 35) on the lead disk: "Relating to the lead disc, there is much uncertainty regarding the details of the scenes, and it is best to leave it out of the argumentation altogether." On images of Phanebalos in a temple (ibid.): "Because of its dimunitiveness it is difficult to discern exact details, so we cannot accept this as an absolute identification."

[510] Consider the difference between depictions of Artemis on classical period Greek red-figure vases and the appearance of the Ephesian Artemis.

The Harpe

Phanebalos holds a curved and hooked sword, identified by Dussaud as a *harpe* (ἄρπη) sword.[511] In Greco-Roman art, this weapon is traditionally associated with Perseus, who wields it to behead Medusa.[512] A *harpe* of the type depicted with Phanebalos appears with Perseus in this context on painted vases from the Archaic and Classical period, and on Roman period paintings from Italy (Figs.4.21-4.24; Figs.5.1-5.2).[513] On coin designs featuring Perseus from Roman Asia Minor and the Near East he is typically shown nude and holding a *harpe* and the head of Medusa.[514] Based on the persistent use of the *harpe* as an attribute of Perseus in both the Greek and Roman worlds, Mastrocinque has proposed that Phanebalos was Perseus, and symbolized the union of the eastern and western portions of the Mediterranean.[515]

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[511] Dussaud identified it as a *harpe* (1905, 76-79). He is followed by Hill (1912, 421), Teixidor (1977, 96), Mastrocinque (2011, 100-104), the editors of *RPC* vol. I-IV. The weapon is identified by other numismatics differently: "sword" (Yashin 2007; Meshorer et al. 2013, 99. n.63; American Numismatic Society), "dagger" (Meshorer et al. 2013). ἄρπη is sometimes translated as "sickle" (*LSJ* s.v. ἄρπη) although there is an functional difference between a curved sickle and a sword with a hook on the shaft. Nilsson (1951) discusses the difference between a sickle and *harpe*.

[512] Sometimes Perseus uses a sickle (Fig.4.23), which is curved rather than a sword with a curved hook or tooth attached to the shaft, i.e. on a sixth/fifth century BCE Athenian red-figure vase from Vulci (Beazley 1963, n.1633), on an Athenian white-ground lekythos from the early fifth century BCE (ibid., n.1643) and on an Athenian red-figure hydria from Capua (ibid., n.1659). For examples from literature, see below.

[513] Vase decorations include several Athenian red-figure decorations from the sixth- fourth century BCE accessed through the Beazley online pottery archive (BAPD). Examples: mid-fifth century BCE Athenian red-figure volute krater from Italy (*BAPD* 14107); a late-fourth/early-3rd c. BCE Athenian red-figure calyx from Italy (*BAPD* 271501); a sixth century BCE black-figure oinochoe from Italy (*BAPD* 310459). Additional examples are listed in *BAPD* but are not accompanied by photographs. The hooked and curved *harpe* is held by Perseus in two first century CE wall-paintings from Italy; one from the House of the Diouscouri at Pompeii in the first century CE (*LIMC* 204a), and the second from the villa of San Marco at nearby Stabiae.

[514] Examples from Asia Minor: *RPC* III, n.1848 (n.d.), n.2958 (Hadrian); *RPC* IX, n.1392 (Gallus). Examples from the Levant include Roman period issues from Joppa (E.g. Meshorer et al. 2013, n.17; Caracalla) and Ptolemais (E.g. Meshorer et al. 2013, n.172; Caracalla). Perseus carries a *harpe* while rescuing Andromeda on coins from Alexandria (E.g. *RPC* IV, n.13952; 160/1 CE).

[515] Mastrocinque 2011, 100-104.

However, while Perseus is primarily associated with the *harpe*, he is not the only figure from myth to wield the *harpe*, or to appear with it in Greco-Roman art. In the *Bibliotheca* of Apollodorus, Zeus battles the snake-legged Typhoeus with a *harpe*, although there are no visual depictions of this version.[516] Herakles is shown with a *harpe* in some vase paintings depicting his battle against the Lernaean Hydra.[517] Ogden has argued that these three examples—Perseus and Medusa, Zeus and Typhoeus, Herakles and the Hydra—demonstrate that one use of the *harpe* in the ancient world was monster-slaying, particularly of anguiform monsters.[518]

Hephaestus, Athena, and Hermes supply Perseus with the harpe in different versions of the Medusa tradition.   The first mention of Perseus' harpe is from Aeschylus' *Phorcides*, where the adamantine weapon is a gift from Hephaestus.[519] As far as I am aware, Hephaestus does not appear with a *harpe* in artistic depictions. Aelian calls the *harpe* generally the "weapon of Athena," but this connection appears to be rooted in her delivery of the weapon to Perseus.[520] That scene is shown on an Apulian red-figure situla of the fourth century BCE (Fig.4.24).[521] According to Lucian and Ovid, Perseus' *harpe* was given to him by the god Hermes, who used it against the giant Argos.[522] Hermes' defeat of Argos may be a fourth example of the use of the

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[516] Apoll.*Bib.*1.6.3.

[517] Ogden 2008, 46.

[518] Ibid.

[519] *TrGF* 262 i-iv. Ogden (2008, 46) notes that this is the first time the *harpe* appears in the Perseus story in literature.

[520] Claud.Ael.*De.Nat.Animal.*12.4.

[521] BM 1836,0224.85.

[522] Perseus' *harpe* as the weapon of Hermes: Luc.*Phars.*9.659-670; Ov.*Met.*5.69-70. Hermes against Argos, without the use of the *harpe*: Bacchylides.19; Ov.*Met.*6.668-721; Apollod.*Bib.*2.1.3.

harpe to defeat serpentine enemies. According to Ogden, while Argos was "a humanoid monster

in the extant tradition" he was "almost certainly a dragon in origin."[523]

The *harpe* 's second famous use in antiquity was the castration of Ouranos, which led to

the birth of Aphrodite Ourania.[524] The Greek castration story is likely related to similar to tales

of Near Eastern divine progeneration.[525] Kronos appears on coins from the Roman period with a

harpe, although he usually carries a simple curved sickle.[526] Ouranos is not frequently depicted

in art, and does not appear with the *harpe*.

Aphrodite is associated with a *harpe* on a wall painting from Pompeii depicting her birth

from the sea.[527] The goddess is laying on a seashell emerging from the water, accompanied by

two erotes attendants, one holding a *harpe* (Fig.4.25). Further connections between Astarte

Aphrodite Ourania and the castration of Ouranos incude two coastal cult sites dedicated to the

goddess on Cyprus and Sicily, possibly associated in antiquity with the deposition of the *harpe*

after the castration event. Both are named Drepanon, after the Greek δρέπᾰνον for sickle.[528]

Sicilian Drepanon is a sickle-shaped harbor located on the western coast of the island, near the

Phoenician sanctuary of Astarte Aphrodite at Eryx.[529] Cypriot Drepanon is a sickle-shaped

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[523] Ogden 2008, 46
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[524] Hes.*Theo.* 175; also Strab.*Bib.*14.2.7. For Aphrodite's birth as a result: Hes.*Theo.*190-206;
Nonn.*Dionysiaca.*7.222-235; ibid., 13.435-440; ibid., 41.98-102. The *harpe* appears as the weapon of Kronos,
inspired by Athena and Hermes, in Philo of Byblos' second century CE Phoenician history (Eus.*Eccl.Hist.*1.10). It
is not specified as the implement used by Kronos to castrate his father. Astarte is both the daughter and lover of
Ouranos, but is not born from his castration.

[525] Fox 2008, 264-279. See also: Baumgarten 1984; West 2003, 290ff.

[526] E.g. *RPC* IV n.14807 (Alexandria; 140/1 CE). Curved sickle: *RPC* IV, n.7578 (Corinth; Antoninus Pius).

[527] From the Casa della Venere (PPM III 112-72).

[528] LSJ s.v. δρέπᾰνον. Fox 2008: 277-278.

[529] Strab.*Geo.*6.2.6; Paus.8.24.6; Ael.*de.Animal.*10.50; Fox 2009: 277-278.   It is notable that Aelian
(*de.Animal.*10.50; *Hist.Misc.*1.15) reports that pigeons were associated with the cult of Astarte-Aphrodite at Eryx, as
at Ascalon.

harbor north of Paphos, the spot at which Aphrodite was said to have emerged from the sea after her birth.[530] At least one Greek writer refers to Aphrodite at Paphos as "Ourania"; recall that Pausanias and Herodotus connected the cult of Aphrodite at Paphos and on Cyprus to Ascalon.[531]

The *harpe* is associated with Astarte Aphrodite Ourania through the castration of Ouranos.[532] The cult state of Aphrodite Ourania on Kythera, which according to Herodotus and Pausanias was founded by the same Phoenicians who founded the temple of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon, is said by Pausanias to be armed.[533] At Ascalon, the goddess was armed as well, but probably with a *harpe*.

What is the meaning of the *harpe* in this context? We have seen that Astarte and Aphrodite were both independently connected to the realms of fertility and war. An act of violence against Ouranos' sexual organs literally produces the goddess Aphrodite. The *harpe* is a symbol of the intersection between the two spheres. Using the *harpe*, Astarte Aphrodite claims the implement through which her birth was forced, and wields it at Ascalon as a symbol of her power.

The association between the *harpe* and monster-slaying described above also makes the weapon appropriate for Astarte Aphrodite Ourania in her role as the "face of Baal" in Ascalon. As a weapon associated with killing serpentine monsters, the *harpe* connects Astarte Aphrodite Ourania to Near Eastern deities battling snake-like monsters. Baal is depicted in Near Eastern mythological stories and art facing off against a serpent, as is Anat, the war-goddess who was

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[530] E.g., Philo.Elder.Imagines.2.1; Nonn.*Dionysiaca*.13.435-500.

[531] Orph.Hymn.56.

[532] A connection between the *harpe*, Ouranos, Aphrodite Ourania and Astarte is noted briefly by West (1997, 291-292), although in the context of Hesiod's *Theogony*.

[533] Paus.3.23.1; ibid., 1.14.6; Her.1.105.

closely associated with Astarte in some parts of the region.[534] Astarte Aphrodite Ourania at

Ascalon was a more warlike incarnation of the Near Eastern Astarte, similar in many respects to

Anat.[535]

'Archaizing' Elements

      Phanebalos' smiting or menancing pose has not been discussed in depth in studies of the

deity's iconography. This pose was used to depict protector deities in the Near East and Egypt

long before the Roman period.[536] Both gods and goddesses are shown in the pose, including

Reshef, Baal, Astarte, and other Near Eastern goddesses associated with war. The deity depicted

usually wields a club, sword or spear above their head, and sometimes holds a shield (more

typical of Reshef; Fig.4.26) or a plant-spear (typical of Baal; Fig.4.27).[537] The weapon in the

uplifted hand symbolically expresses the power of the deity and wards away evil, while the

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[534] Literary evidence: Green 2003; Smith and Pitard 2009. Art: Cornelius 2004.

[535] In his study of the overlapping characteristics and natures of Phoenician goddesses in the Greek and Roman world, Huidberg-Hansen's (1985, 176) notes the connection between Phanebalos, Aphrodite Ourania, Astarte and Anat at Ascalon based on the warlike nature of Phanebalos, but does not develop the argument at length. Serwint (2002) identified Phanebalos as Anat. Cross (1973, 31-35) identified Phanebalos with Astarte and Anat.

[536] See the collected examples in Cornelius (1994; 2004). He distinguishes helpfully between the "Smiting" and "Menacing" god poses by noting that the "smiting" position is typical of depictions of the Egyptian pharaoh and includes an enemy who is the implied receptor of the blow (1994, 255-259). A pose in which a pharaoh or deity wields a weapon overhead is called by him "menacing" and is implied to emphasize the warding off or away of enemies. He further notes (1994, 255) that Reshef is never shown with an enemy (RR1-27) and Ba'al only infrequently (usually a serpent; BM1a-16). For criticisms of Cornelius' approach and results, as well as additional work on the nature and iconography of Reshef, see Lipinski (2009, 139-160; *passim*) and Münnich (2013, 117-118; *passim*).

[537] The plant-spear (i.e. Cornelius 1994,137, fn.2), frequently shown with Baal and Near Eastern weather gods, is a spear driven into the earth and with this action the top of the spear is transformed partially into greenery, looking vaguely like the tendrils and stalks of a plant, or the fan of a palm branch. This is sometimes called a lightning bolt, but Cornelius draws a clear and persuasive distinction between the plant-spear and the lightning bolt, and includes bibliography. Münnich (2013, 201-203) notes a rare example of Reshef and a plant-spear , from a second millennium BCE seal attributed to Syria. Reshef is named on the seal.

shield protects against evil. Most discussions about the smiting or menacing god pose focus on

male deities, but goddesses were also depicted in this pose.[538]

Pose is as important as other attributes in evoking complex messages to viewers about the

nature of a deity, and the socio-cultural, political, and spatial context in which the deity

appears.[539] The menacing or smiting god pose is particularly related to the depiction of deities

and kings from the first and second millennium in the Near East. The pose falls out of favor in

artistic depictions of gods after the Persian period, but there is evidence for a later revival in

some parts of the Near East, particularly in Syria.[540] It is unclear if the use of Iron Age symbols

and poses by deities in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods represents the continuation of

practices from past, or if they reemerge for contemporary aims.[541]

The pose is distinctive of pre-Greco-Roman deities in the Near East, and its use in Roman

period depictions of Phanebalos can be explained in two complementary ways. First, the

consistency of the depictions of Phanebalos indicates that the pose was based on a cult statue of

the deity. In this case, the pose may date to the origin of the cult and twas retained in later

depictions. However, the Ascalonians had no compunctions about depicting Phoenician gods in

Greco-Roman visual terms before. Millar has argued that the pre-Roman history of the Near

East was the one that was most immediately visible and accessible to people in the eastern

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[538] Negbi 1976; Seeden 1980; Bisi 1980; Falsone 1986; Cornelius 1994; Cornelius 2004.

[539] The bibliography on pose, gesture and body language in the ancient world is massive. For the Hellenistic world, see the discussion and recent bibliography in Masseglia (2015). Brililant's work (1963) remains a standard work on gesture in Roman art. See also: Hallett 2005, Cairns 2005, Daehner 2007, Heyn 2010.

[540] Bunnens 2015. See also the relevant discussion concerning elements of Iron Age iconography found in depictions of Jupiter Dolichenus in the Roman period (including the menacing god pose): Butcher 2003, 335-337; Blömer 2015, 129-141.

[541] Butcher 2003, 335.

Mediterranean in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.[542] We do not know how much physical

evidence of Ascalon's pre-Roman past was extant in the Augustan period, but literary accounts

in the Roman period emphasize the community's Philistine and Phoenician history. Ascalon's

non-Greco-Roman past was maintained by different memory communities in the city and outside

the city. The temple of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania is defined its antiquity and pre-Greco-Roman

origins in preserved literary accounts, suggesting also that the cult's antiquity was one of the

sources of its fame. People living in the Near East were exposed to or familiar with the depiction

of kings and gods in the menacing god pose in the past via monumental art, sacred art, and

figurines, then the adoption of the same pose by the goddess at Ascalon tied the cult into those

powerful Near Eastern deities of the past. The pose is a symbol of the goddess' antiquity and

origins in a pre-Greco-Roman world.

A plan- spear?

Additional elements of the Phanebalos coin design parallel depictions of pre-Greco-

Roman deities. In some depictions of Near Eastern smiting gods (usually identified as the

weather deity Baal), the deity holds a plant-spear.[543] The end of the plant-spear is tipped like a

weapon, and the top of the shaft terminates in a plant, resembling a palm frond. Several

examples of the Phanebalos coins include an elongated palm branch with a pointed shaft that

reaches the basis on which the deity stands (Figs.4.15a & 4.28).[544] Finkielsztejn argues that the

palm frond on the Phanebalos design should be read as a symbol of Astarte in Phoenicia, but

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[542] Millar 1993.
[543] E.g., Cornelius 1994, BR1; BM7, 12, 14, 17.

[544] I.e. Meshorer et al. 2013, 99, n.62 (Caligula)=RPC I 4884; Meshorer et al. 2013, 99, n.72 (72/3 CE); *RPC III*, n.3985 (214 CE); ibid., n.4006 (119/20 CE)=Yashin 2007, n.179-181. But not, for example: Meshorer et al. 2013, 100, n.95 (107/8 CE); ibid., 104, n.187 (217/8 CE).

perhaps it was also a reference to the plant-spear of Baal. The plant spear symbolizes the ability

of the deity to bring life, an ability governed locally by Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. [545] If the

palm is a plant-spear (or was identified by some as a plant-spear), Astarte Aphrodite Ourania

may wield it at Ascalon as a fertility deity, or in her role as the face of Baal. The traditional

attribute of the rain god would devolve to Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as his representative in

Ascalon.

The temple coins

An interest in the pre-Greco-Roman origins of the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania is

reflected in the depiction of the goddess' temple on coins from the second century CE at

Ascalon. As discussed above, the temple is depicted in two different coin series belonging to the

mid-second to mid-third centuries CE. The Egyptianizing design of the temple originally

prompted scholars to identify the structure with an Egyptian deity.[546] However, the publication

of the simplified version of the temple from coins of Julia Domna complicate this interpretation,

as the deity from the Phanebalos coins is clearly seen within the shrine (Fig.4.20). The Egyptian

appearance of a temple to Astarte Aphrodite Ourania is initially puzzling. Below, I will outline

three possible interpretations, none of which are strictly mutually exclusive: first, that the

Egyptian elements date to the foundation of the cult at Ascalon by Phoenicians, who frequently

quoted Egyptian styles; second, that the Egyptian elements are an attempt to highlight the

antiquity of the cult in the Near Eastern past; third, that the Egyptian elements are part of a larger

trend towards the promotion of Egypt gods and cults in the city in this period.

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[545] Cornelius 1994, 259.

[546] Meshorer 1985, 27-28 (Sarapis); Fuks 2008, 35 (Isis); Shaick 2012, 139-140 (Horus-Harpocrates).

The first possibility is that the temple of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania is depicted in Egyptian style because the cult was founded by the Phoenicians at Ascalon in the sixth century BCE. As discussed in Chapter 2, Phoenician material cult in the Levant in this period is marked by a tendency towards Egyptianizing styles. There is evidence for Egyptianizing figurines and amulets at Ascalon in this period.[547] In Egypt, Astarte was frequently depicted as an armed goddess, consistent with her nature in Roman Ascalon.[548] The cult of Astarte founded in Ascalon may have been influenced by Egyptian practices,

including the nature of the goddess and the design of her temple. In her study of cult sites of Astarte, Bloch-Smith notesthat "we find significant numbers of Egyptian/Egyptianizing features in connection with Astarte worship," including amulets and situlae similar to those found in Philistine levels at Ascalon. [549] An Egyptian style temple at Ascalon might be considered within that context. However, the depiction of non-Greco-Roman style architecture on coins of the Roman period in the Levant is unusual.[550] Only the design of a portable shrine of Zeus Heliopolites on local coins from Akko-Ptolemais includes similar Egyptian decorative elements.[551]

A second possibility is that the use of Egyptian architectural elements for the temple was part of the city's emphasis on the antiquity of the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania and its relationship to the pre-Greco-Roman world. The cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was

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[547] See Chapter 2.

[548] Cornelius 1994.

[549] Bloch-Smith 2014, 193. Egyptian situlae (Bell 2011), scarabs (Keel 2011), bronze figurines (Schloen 2008, 160-161; cf. Iiffe 1936) and amulets (Herrmann 2011), have been found in seventh century BCE layers at Ascalon. The Persian period material is not yet fully published.

[550] Price 1977. Bricault (2006) also discusses the lack of evidence for Egyptian gods in the southern Levant in this period more generally.

[551] E.g. Meshorer et al. 2013, 15, n.224 (Severus Alexander).

functionally a bricolage of religious and visual traditions drawn from the Near East and western Mediterranean, and Ascalon's close connection to Egypt would have played a role in this process as well. The depiction of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania's was modified to promote different versions of Ascalon's sacred identity and cultural memory. The cult's locally specific cosmopolitanism was as a veritable palimpsest of the many different ethnic and social stakeholders of Ascalon's communal past. The goddess' name preserved the city's Phoenician and Hellenized past, while her pose and attributes drew from visual traditions embedded in a specifically Near Eastern background. The use of Egyptian or Egyptianizing architectural features served a similar function, emphasizing the connections between Egypt and Ascalon, and perhaps also appealing to Egyptian merchants or inhabitants of the city. Significantly, the temple appears in the second century CE on coins, a period in which (as we saw in Chapter 3) a series of new coin designs were introduced which seem feature traditional local gods and goddesses drawn from the city's Phoenician and Egyptian past. This trend will be examined again in Chapter 5.

This leads to the third possibility, that the Egyptian-style temple reflects a reorientation in the community toward Egyptian cults. The popularity of Egyptian deities in the Roman empire, particularly Isis and Serapis, has been widely studied.[552] Ascalonian Isis is called "the mightiest" in the Oxyrhyncus Papyrus, a title that suggests the belligerent Astarte Aphrodite Ourania's function in the city.[553] Isis appears on the façade of Ascalon's bouleuterion in the early third century CE, in the same period in which deities with Egyptian attributes appear on coins. Isis was associated with Astarte and Aphrodite before the third century CE, and it may be that Isaic

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[552] Recently, see the papers in Bricault, Versluys and Meyboom (2007) and Sweetnam-Burland (2015).

[553] Pap.Oxy.XI.1380.

attributes were increasingly used to depict Astarte Aphrodite Ourania in this period as part of an interest in promoting Egyptian-style deities in the city.

Unfortunately, Ascalon's proximity to Egypt makes untangling evidence for Egyptian vs. Egyptianizing practices difficult.[554] On the one hand, the available evidence suggests that Egyptian deities were worshipped in the city since at least the seventh century BCE.[555] On the other, Aegyptica was a vital part of the Mediterranean *koine* of the imperial period, and might be used for a variety of purposes, including as exotica. As discussed in Chapter 3, most of the evidence for the worship of Egyptian and Egyptianizing deities belongs to the late second-third centuries CE at Ascalon, at least as reflected on civic coins.[556] It is unclear if this shift in emphasis toward Egyptian deities on coins reflects any economic, political or cultural shifts. The Severan dynasty (especially Caracalla's) connection to Egyptian cults may have influenced this trend.[557] The interest in local, pre-Roman pasts during the Second Sophistic may have also influenced the sudden emphasis on Egyptian-style deities on Ascalonian coins. Interest in Egyptian styles may reflect a demographic or economic shift. Ascalon was growing quickly in this period, but we do not yet have enough evidence to understand its economic or social connections to Egypt in this period.[558]

An Egyptian-style temple is not incompatible with the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. I have outlined three possible overlapping explanations for the use of Egyptian architectural

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[554] See discussion in Versluys (2014), although he argues against the division between Egyptian and Egyptianizing.

[555] There is some evidence for a temple of Ptah at Ascalon (Herrmann 2011, 359). See also the discussion on Isis and Serapis in Chapter 3.

[556] See also the summary in Bricault (2006, 130-132).

[557] Manders 2012, 225-251.

[558] This will change with the publication of the Roman period material from Ascalon.

styles for the goddesses' temple. The depiction of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania on the Phanebalos

coins emphasize the deity's antiquity and connection to the pre-Greco-Roman world, and the

existence of an Egyptian style temple functioned in the same way.

Analysis

Taken together, the iconographic elements suggested by Finkielsztejn and those outlined

in the proceeding sections demonstrate that the deity labeled on Ascalonian coins as Phanebalos

is Astarte Aphrodite Ourania in her Ascalonian form. The goddess has attributes typical of war

deities, emphasizing how Astarte Aphrodite Ourania appears in Ascalon in her belligerent form.

The smiting god pose of the deity connects the goddess to Bronze and Iron Age depictions of

protector gods, signifying her goddess' role as the protectress of Ascalon and evoking her pre-

Greco-Roman history. This was a way of preserving the traditional elements of the cult of

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, but of way of highlighting the importance of the goddess through the

use of ancient iconographic elements. Archaizing elements were an attribute designed to

increase the importance of the cult by reference to the past. The Egyptian elements of the

goddess' temple on coins, which have so perplexed scholars, also serves this same function.

They may indicate the existence of an Egyptian-style temple from the foundation of the cult in

the Persian period. Employing the temple's design on coins in the second-third centuries CE is

consistent with the promotion of local deities whose attributes indicate diverse cultural

biographies, highlighting Ascalon's past. As the city grew larger, it may also have grown more

diverse, and the local goddess was employed to mediate the demographic changes in the city

within the context of the community's public sacred identity.

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Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was the most important goddess of Ascalon, and that she appears frequently on coinage in at least four different guises (as Aphrodite, Tyche Astarte, nude Phanebalos, Phanebalos). Earlier studies of the numismatic material did not identify the goddess on coins because Astarte Aphrodite Ourania's major function at Ascalon was not as a fertility goddess, but as a protecting, warlike deity. Literary evidence about Astarte and Aphrodite Ourania from contexts outside Ascalon demonstrates that both goddesses did function in belligerent guises throughout the Aegean and Near East. Furthermore, the Ascalonian cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania is connected by Pausanias to other Aegean cult sites, including Kythera and Paphos. The cult statue of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania on Kythera was armed, and depictions of Aphrodite on Cyprus include a Roman period marble statues from Paphos and Soloi of the goddess nude and armed.[559] The warlike Ascalonian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was not inconsistent with the nature of Astarte or Aphrodite from other Near Eastern sites in the Hellenistic and Roman period.

Promotion of the goddess' cult on coinage demonstrates how the expression of cultural memory was molded by local elites for contemporary goals. Her antiquity and fame in the past was remembered both by people within the community and outside. The importance of the temple allowed the Ascalonians to frame the cult in Hellenistic socio-cultural terms on locally minted coins in the second century BCE. The cult was the basis of the city's proclamation of inviolability, and her function as a protector deity of the city made her fusion with Tyche a natural syncretism. This is only one example of how the antiquity and importance of the cult was used by Ascalonian elites to participate in the larger Greco-Roman world. Under Augustus,

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[559] See discussion and bibliography in Serwint (2002, 342-343).

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was briefly depicted on coins adopting nudity and a pose similar to

Venus Victrix, while also emphasizing the iconographic attributes the two goddesses had in

common (helmet, weapons, shield). For the community, this was an expression of the local

goddess according to Greco-Roman practices, indicating that the cult and the community were

part of the Augustan period socio-cultural and political network. This image also demonstrated

the close association between the Ascalonian goddess and Augustus' ancestress. Perhaps this

was also an attempt to create closer connections to the city's new benefactor, the *princeps* who

had guaranteed Ascalon's autonomy.

Antiquity and a connection to the Phoenicians are the defining qualities of the temple of

Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as discussed by ancient authors. The depiction of the goddess on

coins in her role as Phanebalos, the face of Baal and warlike protectress of the city, also

emphasizes the antiquity of the cult through the goddesses attributes and temple. The *harpe*,

palm branch/plant spear, and menacing god pose were attributes of Near Eastern deities for

several millennia, and were perhaps original elements of the goddess depiction in the city in the

sixth century BCE (or before). Other deities were depicted on local coins with Greco-Roman

iconography, and the deviation from this practice on the Phanebalos coins would have been

noticeable and intentional. This goddess was distinctly not Greco-Roman in her guise as

Phanebalos. Her depiction as a Near Eastern deity emphasized the antiquity of the goddess, and

increased the prestige of the temple, the goddess' priests, and the community.

The fluid depiction of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as both a Greco-Roman deity and a

Near Eastern goddess expressed the city's hybrid Greco-Levantine culture and past through the

community's public sacred identity. As we will see in Chapter 5, local foundation myths were

also used to situate and explain Ascalon's role within the Greco-Roman world and landscape of the past.

CHAPTER 5: ASCALON'S MYTHIC PAST

Introduction

Mythology was an important way for a community to articulate its relationship to the landscape, gods and other peoples.[560] Myths, and the ways that mythological stories are told are procedures for sustaining cultural memory as identified in Chapter 1.[561] Mythological stories decorated the pediments and metopes of temples, served as aetiologies for cult practice, and communicated notions about a city's history and relationship with the past.[562] Local heroes were celebrated on architecture, coins, vase painting, and through sculpture, festivals, and cult. For example, the Athenian hero Theseus had his own sanctuary by the Agora in Athens; his adventures were depicted on the metopes and pediments of the Hephaestion; an annual festival was celebrated in his honor, including sacrifices made to the hero.[563] Sometimes, mythological

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[560] For example, the Athenians boasted of being autochthonous, asserting a unique and uninterrupted relationship to their region (Loraux 2000, Blok 2009). Scholars debate how foundation myths expressed relationships and identity in the ancient world, e.g. Zanker 1988, Rogers 1991, Scheer 1993, Malkin 1994, Malkin 1996, Hall 1997, Malkin 1998, Sartre 2002, Braund, Gill and Wiseman 2003, Price 2005, Gehrke 2005, Erskine 2005, Kühr 2006, Belayche 2009, Barringer 2008, Finkelberg 2009, Patterson 2010, Scheer 2011, de Bellefonds 2011, Mac Sweeney 2014, Mac Sweeney 2015.

[561] Alcock 2002, 3.

[562] The decorative scheme of the Parthenon is the exemplum par excellence, and the rich visual imagery employed there included panhellenic and local myths. The bibliography on this subject is immense. See Neils (2005) and Connelly (2014) for recent developments and bibliography.

[563] Paus.1.17; Barringer 2008, 109-143; Calame 1990; von den Hoff 2010. Christensen (1984) discusses the cult of Theseus more generally. Turner (2015,71-93) argues that different mythological traditions concerning the father of Theseus in Athenian myth allowed the city to emphasize Athenian exceptionalism in their relationship to their territory and their success on the sea.

stories changed, were forgotten, or were adapted to fit new priorities and needs within the community. [564]

In this chapter, I survey the traditions connecting Ascalon to the mythological past in literary sources and on coins. I am careful to acknowledge the difference between external sources commenting on Ascalon's past (mostly literary), and the Ascalonian community's own promotion of their mythology (as displayed on local coins). Even if a tradition is known only from Greco-Roman literary sources, it provides evidence of Ascalon's integration into the memory landscape of Greek myths by peoples in the Mediterranean. The goal of this chapter is to study how mythological stories about Ascalon's past framed the relationship between Ascalon and the Greco-Roman world.

Greek mythology included a diverse cast of characters drawn from many parts of the Greek-speaking world and peoples beyond. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, arguably the most famous and influential Greek mythological texts, depict their protagonists not in Greece, but abroad, from north-western Asia Minor, to (perhaps) the straits of Gibralter.[565] Although the land and people of Palestine did not play a central role in the important and popular myths of Greece, they are still present in a handful of stories and traditions.[566]

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[564] Perhaps the most obvious example of the appropriation of Greek mythology in the construction of Roman identity is the use of Aeneas in the Augustan building program (Zanker 1988) and in Vergil's epic retelling of Aeneas' escape from Troy, an event presaged in the *Iliad* and connected to a settlement in Latium perhaps as early as the sixth century BCE (see discussion in Mountford 2011).

[565] Ancient authors and modern scholars have argued that Odysseus' fantastical journeys outlined primarily in Books 8-12 of the *Odyssey* can be mapped out against real locations in the Mediterranean world. Herodotus (4.177) for example, locates in western Africa a group called the Lotus Eaters who, like their counterparts in the *Odyssey* (9.82-104), lived on the lotus (Λωτοφάγοι, οἳ τὸν χαρπὸν μοῦνον τοῦ λωτοῦ τρώγοντεσ ζώουσαι). Thucydides (6.2) numbers the Cyclopes (*Ody*.9.105-555) and Laestrygonians (*Ody*.10.80-133) among the original inhabitants of Sicily. Modern scholars have continued the search, but cf. Knox's assertion (1996, 23) that all attempts to identify Odysseus' journey with real geographic locations is a "wild-goose chase."

[566] For example, Ovid (*Fasti* 2.458-474) has Venus reach the rivers of the Euphrates during her flight from Typhoeus; in another myth, the Euphrates is claimed as her birthplace (Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 197). According to some Roman versions of the myth, Andromeda was saved by Perseus from a sea-monster at Joppa (modern-day

In the parts of the Mediterranean that Greeks colonized, conquered or visited, the exploits and foundations of Greek mythological figures were invoked to highlight a shared past and cultural background.[567] In Asia Minor and the Near East, Greek myths became prominent in the literary and archaeological record beginning in the Hellenistic period, with a notable intensification in the first and second centuries CE.[568] This trend reflects a desire to highlight or refashion a city's relationship to the Greek past, or to use a community's participation in the Greek mythological past as a way of situating themselves in the present.[569] Especially common was the discovery or promotion of Greek city-founders (even from obscure mythological traditions), and tales concerning the *origines gentium*, which emphasized the connection between a people and their land.[570]

In the Near East, evidence of these strategies comes from Greek and Roman authors describing the history of different peoples and communities, as well as the display of mythological figures in prominent civic contexts (coins, public statues, architectural sculpture, etc).[571] Much less evidence exists in the Near East for this use of Greek mythology than in Asia Minor and Greece, perhaps a result of the strength of Semitic, Phoenician, and other pre-Greek

Jaffa) (Plin.*NH*.5.69; Paus.4.35.9; Kaizer 2011). According Pliny (*NH*.5.74), Nysa-Scythopolis was named after the nurse of the god Dionysos, who was buried there, and Dor is said by Servius (*Ad. Aen*. 2.27) to have been named for a son of Neptune.

[567] In general: Woolf 1994, 125-130; Williamson 2005; Heuchert 2005, 51-52; Howgego 2005, 5-7; Patterson 2010, 12-13 and *passim*.

[568] Southern Italy and Asia Minor: Erskine 2005, 121-136; Asia Minor and the Greek East: Price 2005; Stavrianopoulou 2013; Mac Sweeney 2014; Syria and Palestine: Sartre 2002, 93-105; Butcher 2003, 280, 336; Butcher 2005; Sartre 2005, 161-162; Belayche 2009. For an example of this phenomenon expressed in art and architecture from a single site, see Rogers' work on Ephesus (1991) and the studies on the Flavian basilica and Julio-Claudian Sebasteion reliefs from Aphrodisias: Smith 1987, Smith 1990, Yildirim 2008, de Bellefonds 2011, Smith 2013.

[569] Woolf 1994, 125.

[570] Scheer 2011.

[571] Price 2005, Butcher 2005, Belayche 2009.

traditions.[572] However, it is clear that cultural memory remembered or invented ties to the Greco-Roman past and mythology alongside local, non-Greco-Roman narratives. Evidence of the interplay between diverse traditions is found in Hierapolis, Gaza, Neapolis, Ascalon, and in Phoenician coastal cities.[573]

It is important to note from the outset that there are multiple traditions concerning the foundation of Ascalon. At least three figures (Derceto, Mopsus, and Ascalus) are treated as foundation or quasi-foundation heroes in the mythology of the city, with no real diachronic separation or distinction. Although I consider each tradition separately, I am not interested in identifying a canonical version of any one myth, or in denying the importance of anything but the most popular foundation story. The existence of multiple foundation myths and traditions highlights the existence of a significant group discourse concerning the city's identity and place in the past.[574]

Foundation Myths

Foundation myths are stories, legends, and traditions concerning the origin of a city, group of people, place, or a practice. In the Greek and Roman worlds, foundation myths featured gods or heroes who had some kind of physical interaction with a specific place in the past. From this interaction, a practice, people or community came into being. Wandering heroes like

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[572] Price 2005, 120; Belayche 2009; Butcher 2005, 151-152. However, the relationship between "local" cultures and traditions and the Hellenistic *koiné* was complicated and regionally diverse (Millar 1993, 264-270; Sartre 2005, 274-296).

[573] Belayche 2001, 227-231 (Ascalon), 232-249 (Gaza); Butcher 2005, 150 (Heliopolis); Belayche 2009, 172-173 (Neapolis).

[574] Mac Sweeney 2015, 1-15.

Herakles, Odysseus, Dionysos, Bellerophon, and Mopsus were said to have founded cities, built

sanctuaries, and fathered children during their travels.[575]

Foundation myths served a variety of functions, but in this chapter I am concerned with

their ability to preserve and perpetuate elements of a community's cultural memory. The

articulation of myths in a public context bridged the gap between the past and the present.   City

foundation myths functioned as a way to understand the origins of a people, and explained the

nature of that people and their relationships to the larger world. As a result, foundation myths

frequently symbolized the city and its place in its regional and global context. This took place

primarily in civic contexts and in media that reached multiple audiences within the city.

Changes in the articulation of mythological stories, and to the stories themselves, were the result

of outside influences and changes in the priorities and perspectives of the community. It is then

useful to view foundation myths as part of a civic dialogue that shifted and evolved over time.[576]

A key component of this discourse is the lack of a single, canonical version of most

foundation myths. Foundation myths changed over time, as a result of the popularity of a

particular historical or contemporary figure connected to the myth, or because other myths

expressed concepts that became more important. Some myths varied only slightly, while others

reflected little overlap in the major actors and traditions, producing significant differences in the

relationships created between a putative founder and people. For example, Pseudo-Lucian's

account of the sanctuary of the Syrian goddess at Hierapolis lists four different myths related to

the foundation of the temple. In the first tradition, the Greek Deucalion founded a temple to

Juno near a great chasm, which drained the great flood from the earth. According to other

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[575] Rogers 1991, Malkin 1998; Beekes 2002; Fox 2008; Stafford 2012. Montiglio (2005) discusses wandering heroes from a philosophical and psychological perspective.

[576] Alcock 2002; Mac Sweeney 2015, 7.

stories, the sanctuary was founded by the Babylonian queen Semiramis for her mother, or by

Attes for Rhea, or by Dionysos for Hera.[577]   None of these myths identifies the central goddess

as Atargatis, or names the Syrian deity to whom the temple was dedicated.[578]

We study the issue of founders and myths from both emic and etic perspectives, drawing

on a range of literary and material sources *by* and *about* the community. Multiple perspectives

are available for a few cities--the most obvious from this period being Rome--but not at

Ascalon.[579]

External sources for Ascalon in mythology

The etic perspective places Ascalon within the mytho-history of the Mediterranean in

literary sources beginning in the fifth century BCE. The material is drawn from a variety of

genres, including histories, epic poetry, didactic works, scholiae, astrological treatises,

collections of fables, biographies, encyclopediae, travelogues, lexica, religious treatises, and

rabbinic literature. These works were composed in Rome, Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Persia,

and Palestine. The fifth and fourth century BCE histories of Xanthus the Lydian and Ctesias

served as the basis for most of the subsequent material, but their original texts are lost, and

known only through quotes and references in works from the Hellenistic through Byzantine

periods. For example, Diodorus Siculus recounts the myth of Derceto at great length and is the

earliest extant source (first century BCE) for the goddess.[580] However, Diodorus uses Ctesias'

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[577] Pseudo-Lucian.*De Dea Syria*.11-16.

[578] For a discussion of Lucian's perspective and complex motives in his identification see Dirven (1997), Elsner (2001) and Andrade (2013, 288-313).

[579] And, in fact, not at most cities in the Levant.

[580] Dio.Sic.2.4.2-6.

fourth century BCE history of Persia as the source for some (if not all) of his information.[581]

The myth of Ascalus, eponymous founder of Ascalon, is preserved in the sixth century CE

Ethnica encyclopedia by Stephanus of Byzantium, who cites Xanthus' fifth century BCE

Lydiaca, and the first century BCE historian Nicolaus of Damascus as sources.[582]

Ascalonian evidence

Ascalon's treatment of local mythology is more difficult to define and analyze than

descriptions from external sources. There are no inscriptions celebrating a city-founder, no

sculptures of figures from Ascalonian myths, and no literary accounts by Ascalonians about their

myths.[583] Two figures found locally minted Late Hellenistic and Roman coins are often

identified with mythological narratives from Ascalon's past, an appealing suggestion given the

popularity of this strategy elsewhere in Palestine and the Near East.[584] The depiction of figures

from local myths is common on the coinage of the Roman provinces, but often relies on a clear

understanding of the attributes and iconography of these figures in order to identify the

composition. In some cases the connection between literary sources and numismatic designs is

clear. For example, multiple literary sources identify Joppa as the location of Andromeda's

exposure to the sea monster and rescue by Perseus.[585] This hero subsequently appears on coins

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[581] Ibid. 2.2.2.

[582] Steph.Byz. s.v. *ASKALON.*

[583] E.g. the dedicatory inscription from an altar to Dionysos at Scythopolis, (Di Segni, Foerster, Tsafrir 1996) hailing the god as the city's founder ('κτίστη τῷ κυρίῳ') or the widespread use.

 of the hero Androklos in public statuary and coins in Ephesus in the second century CE (Rogers 1991, 107-110).
[584] Belayche (2009), Butcher (2005), Price (2005), and Hirt (2015) provide examples and discuss these issues at length.

[585] Plin.*NH*.5.69; Strab.16.2.28; Paus.4.35.9.

from Joppa beginning in the early third century CE (Fig.5.1).[586] The figure is recognizable as Perseus because he clutches a harpe sword in one hand, wears winged shoes, and holds the head of Medusa outstretched. In other instances mythological figures appear on coins without extant evidence for a literary tradition tying them directly to a city. For example, Perseus appears on the local coins of Acco-Ptolemais in the mid-first century CE but no corresponding literary evidence is preserved to tie Perseus to that city (Fig.5.2). [587]

In order to fully understand and analyze the depictions of Ascalonian myths on local coins, we must also consider the historical and socio-cultural contexts in which they were produced. We do not have any evidence for the administration of the local mint at Ascalon, and no good contemporary models from other cities in the region. As discussed in previous chapters, local elites were in charge of Ascalon's mint, but we do not know their identities. Voulgaridis' study on monograms suggests that a new official was elected or appointed for year-long terms in the Late Hellenistic period, but such monograms are not typically included on Ascalonian coins after the first century BCE.[588] The longevity of each obverse design means that they were not likely to tied to an individual, but they may have been associated with particular families who were connected to the deity as priests or through familial ties.

Although we cannot recover the identities of mint officials, we should keep in mind that elites were the ones who chose the imagery for the local coinage. They may have had personal motivations for doing so, but those are difficult to identify without more information about coin production in Ascalon. The public nature of coinage means that the coin designs represent the

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[586] Meshorer et al. 2013, n.17-18, 20.

[587] Claudian: *ANS* 2012.71.33; Caracalla: Meshorer 2013, n.172.

[588] Voulgaridis 2008. An exception may be the triangle topped with a horizontal bar that is included on some Hadrianic issues. This monogram is identified by Meshorer et al. (2013, 102, n.135) as a way of indicating the years since Hadrian's visit to Judaea.

types of gods and imagery that the Ascalonian elite considered to be important for establish the

community's public sacred identity. We do not know how or why these designs were chosen,

but the consistency in use of designs over several hundred years suggests that the deities on the

coins continued to be important for articulating the community's public sacred identity. The way

that people within Ascalon, and visitors to the city, responded to these images changed over time

and according to different contexts. Changes in design may reflect changes in local priorities or

practices, or the desire to express different aspects of the community's identity.

Derceto

The goddess Derceto is by far the most popular mythological figure connected to

Ascalon. Xanthus' fifth century BCE history of Lydia is our earliest source for the myth, but

Derceto appears in a variety of different genres throughout antiquity. The fullest version of the

tale is told by Diodorus Siculus, who likely draws upon Xanthus and Ctesias for the

information.[589] As discussed in Chapter 3, Diodorus gives a brief description of the goddess'

sacred lake, and the temenos at Ascalon, and provides an account of her history. According to

Diodorus, Aphrodite punished Derceto for offending her, although he does not say how the

offense occurred.[590] The goddess of love sought vengeance by making Derceto fall in love with

an attendant in the local goddess' temple, a youth who is implied to be too young for the union.

Derceto bore a child by the attendant, but ashamed of her actions, she kills the youth, exposes her

infant child, and throws herself into a nearby lake. Derceto does not die, but is instead changed

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[589] Xanthus appears to tell a version of this story in his account of Mopsus (FGrH 765 F18; Xanthus *ap.* Ath.*Deip.*8.346E) but the preserved tale calls the goddess Atargatis. According to Strabo (16.4.27) Ctesias calls Atargatis by the name Derceto. Diodorus' account is likely based on Ctesias, and perhaps Xanthus, because he cites Ctesias as his source for information 14 different times in the book in which he tells the tale of Derceto (e.g. 2.2,2, 2.5.4, 2.7.1, 2.7.3., etc.).

[590] Dio.Sic.2.4.1-6.

either wholly or partially into a fish. [591] Her infant daughter is cared for by a flock of doves until

a shepherd discovered the babe, adopts her, and names her Semiramis. Derceto's daughter grew

up to become queen of Assyria, and perhaps turned into a dove at the end of her reign. [592]

According to Late Roman and Byzantine sources, the father of Semiramis and the lover of

Derceto was Kaystros, the son of the Amazon Penthesilea. [593]

Several Greek and Roman sources repeat the tale of Derceto, although sometimes placing

the setting outside the southern Levant, or identifying the goddess as Atargatis. [594] Pseudo-

Lucian connects Derceto to Phoenicia generally, but does not mention Ascalon. [595] Ovid places

Derceto near Babylon, and his later description of Venus' transformation into a fish to escape the

monster Typhoeus contains elements of the same story. [596] Eratosthenes locates the story of

Derceto near Bambyce and makes Derceto's fall into the lake an accident, and her savior a giant

fish which became a constellation. [597] Hyginus' discussion of the fish constellation is

accompanied by a note that this same fish saved Isis, making no mention of Derceto. [598] John

Tzetzes, writing much later, conflates Semiramis and Derceto. He calls the goddess an Assyrian

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[591] There is some discrepancy over Diodorus' description of Derceto's form. In 2.4.2 he clearly describes the goddess as half-woman, half-fish, but by 2.4.3 "the form of her body changed into a fish" after diving into the sacred pool by her sanctuary. Pseudo-Lucian (*De. Dea.Syr.*14) reports that Derceto's head and torso were human and her legs and feet in the form of a fish's body.

[592] Dio.Sic. 2.5.1; ibid. 2.20.1.

[593] Herodian.*De.Pros.Cath.*3.1.21; Etym.Magnum.s.v.*Kaystros*; Etym.Gud.s.v.*Kaystros*; Epim.Hom.B461; Schol.*Hom.Il.*461d; Schol.*in.Aratum.*241.

[594] Strab.16.4.27. Modern studies include: Hörig 1984; Bilde 1990, and Egea 2015 (with recent bibliography).

[595] Pseudo-Lucian.*De.Dea.Syr.*14.

[596] Ovid.*Met.*4.43-48; 5.324-331.

[597] ; Erat.*Kat.*38

[598] Hyg.*Astr.*2.41. Nichols (2008, 147) argues that the version of the myth presented by Eratosthenes (and picked up later by Hyginus) was modified from the original to explain the origin of the constellation Icthys.

queen who bore a son to a youth. She later killed the young man and threw herself into the lake of Myris.[599]

Two points are clear from this review. The first is that Derceto was well known in the Greek and Roman worlds, her myth of interest in a variety of different written genres, and relevant to different audiences in different periods. The second point is that the main elements of the myth—Derceto's relationship with the young man, her pregnancy, her fall into the lake, and exposure of the child--were retained in different traditions, regardless of the location of the myth and the name of the goddess. The tradition connecting Derceto to Ascalon was apparently one of many placing the goddess and her story in various parts of the Near East. It is difficult to identify which was the most popular or main tradition, but she was connected to Ascalon at least by the time of Xanthus (fifth century BCE) and into late antiquity.

Part of Derceto's importance was her connection to Semiramis, the mythical queen of Assyria. Scholars today believe that the Semiramis who appears in literary accounts of the Greek and Roman worlds is a composite character, incorporating elements and exploits associated with several historical figures, and some invented by later writers.[600] Semiramis' birth, her rise to power and her accomplishments are outlined by Diodorus Siculus, but her story, like that of her mother, was popular in the ancient world.[601] Especially prominent in the Roman period was a novel about Ninus and Semiramis dating to the first or second century CE.[602] The

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[599] Tz.*H*.9.502-509.

[600] Cappomachia 1986; Gera 1997; Dalley 2005; ibid., 2013. Weinfeld (1991) suggests that Sammu-ramat, one of the historical Assyrian queens whose lives probably inspired the Semiramis legend, was a member of the Philistine ruling family at Ascalon in the ninth century BCE. He makes this argument based on his identification of the name Sammu-ramat as West Semitic.

[601] Dio.Sic.2.1-21.

[602] For the extant fragments, see Stephens and Winkler (1995) and commentary on the Near Eastern origins of the tale by Dalley (2013).

couple was also identified as the founders of cities in Asia Minor, including Aphrodisas, where they appear on panels from the first century CE Sebasteion, and on the Flavian period basilica.[603] We do not know if Semiramis was ever celebrated in Ascalon, or if the city acknowledged and promoted a connection to her.[604] The privileged position of doves in the city probably stems from the bird's connection to Semiramis and Derceto.[605]

Ascalonian Evidence

According to Diodorus Siculus, Derceto had a sanctuary and temple at Ascalon. As discussed in Chapter 3, there is no archaeological evidence corroborating Diodorus' account. The most persuasive pieces of evidence for the promotion of the Derceto myth at Ascalon are images and symbols related to the goddess on Ascalonian coins beginning in the second century BCE. Two designs in particular--a dove as a symbol for the city, and a full-length female figure--should be identified with the myth of Derceto.

A dove appears so frequently on Ascalonian coins of the Hellenistic and Roman period that it has been interpreted by some numismatists as the city's mint mark.[606] Doves are typically associated with Aphrodite in Greek art, and in the Near East they are connected to a series of closely related goddesses, including Astarte and Isis. The dove on Ascalonian coins is usually

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[603] Yilidirim 2004; de Bellefonds 2011; Smith 2013.

[604] Contra Lightfoot (1859, 33), who quotes a 17th century British traveler, George Sandys, as a source for the existence of an annual festival at Ascalon dedicated to Semiramis and held on her birthday. Lightfoot's quote mischaracterizes Sandys' comments about Ascalon. Sandys (1621, 118) notes only the presence of a Turkish garrison at Ascalon, the birth of Semiramis, information about Derceto based heavily on Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses*, and the relationship between Ninus and Semiramis.

[605] Philo of Alexandra (*Ap.*Eusebius *PE* 8.64.) reports seeing an "incredible number of doves at the crossroads and in each house" while passing through the city. Belayche (2009, 179) suggests that the birds were considered sacred and protected in the city.

[606] Voulgaridis 2008.

understood as representing the city's connection with Aphrodite, but I suggest that this is only one interpretation of what was probably an intentionally polyvalent image.[607] The dove on coins of the Hellenistic and early Roman period appears frequently on the obverse of a coin issue, somewhere in the field but rarely in direct association with the human figures it accompanies. The dove is a way of further specifying the coin's provenience as an accompaniment to the ethnic "ASK" legend. Ascalon's famous temple to Astarte Aphrodite Ourania prompted a viewer to connect the dove, a well-known symbol of Aphrodite, with that temple. To someone with a knowledge of the mytho-history specific to Ascalon, including the fate of Derceto and her daughter Semiramis, the dove signaled a connection to the city's history. The dove was thus a global symbol of Aphrodite, universally recognized, which was adopted and applied to serve local ends. The first was to highlight Ascalon's ancient cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. The second was to reinforce the city's connection to the popular myth of Derceto and Semiramis. The generic dove on the pre-Derceto coins allowed viewers to identify a connection with either or both goddesses, depending on the context and biases of the viewer.[608]

The dove's role as a symbol of the local goddess Derceto is demonstrated by depictions of this goddess on coins introduced under Antoninus Pius.[609] She stands on the back of a triton, holds a dove in one hand, and a scepter the other. She wears a diadem crowned with a crescent mood diadem (Fig.3.1). The triton holds a cornucopia or trident. The interpretation of this

[607] The vengeful Aphrodite implicated as the villain in the story of Derceto was perhaps identified with the local goddess Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, who would also be associated with doves. The dove on coins could be simultaneously connected with both the cults of Derceto and Astarte Aphrodite Ourania, exploiting the overlap in attributes of the two deities in a way that allowed the viewer to identify it in multiple ways.

[608] Butcher (2005, 149) cautions that "it would be unwise to assume that if *we* cannot see a more specific symbolism" in generic symbols on civic coins, "then neither could the audiences in antiquity." He identifies nondescript images as better signifiers of community identity than more unusual or specific images because of their universal quality and appeal.

[609] The same figure appears on at least one Roman period gem beside Phanebalos and Poseidon, probably originally from Ascalon (Gagetti 2003, 400, n.335; Chiesa 2009, n.332-333).

goddess as Derceto rather than Astarte Aphrodite Ourania or another goddess relies on the close

connection implied between Derceto and the water (via the triton) and the dove, which she holds.

On other coins the dove appears in the field beside Tyche Astarte but she does not interact with

the bird. Since Semiramis was nursed by doves (or transformed into one), the dove refers to the

story of Derceto and reminds viewers of her connection to Semiramis. The crescent moon

appears as an attribute associated with a host of other Greek and Near Eastern deities, including

Astarte. Some scholars have interpreted this figure as an image of a syncretized Astarte Derceto,

but symbols particular to Derceto predominate in this image.[610] The significance of attributes

related to Astarte Aphrodite Ourania used in depictions of Derceto is discussed more in-depth

below.

Interpretation

Belayche argues that the foundation myth of Derceto "did not primarily serve a political

assertion" and that it was, instead, "the pillar of one of the two great local cults."[611] While the

foundation myth did not primarily play a political role, it did establish the identity of the city and

its history in the Greco-Roman past. The political dimension to this role was the assertion that

the community shared in the cultural heritage of the larger Mediterranean *oikoumene*.

The myth of Derceto was culturally significant because it articulated the existence of

Ascalon's history and ancient connections to the Near East and to Greco-Roman myth. Although

closely connected to the Greek world by at least the Late Bronze Age, Ascalon was

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[610] Meshorer 1985, 27. Astarte is depicted with a crescent on Phoenician-period coins from Berytus (Baramki 1974, pg. 130, n.5, no date), but by the Roman period depictions of this goddess on coins from the city show her in a temple (cf. Baramaki 1974, pg.140, n.87, 91; both Severan).

[611] Belayche 2009, 179.

demonstrably not Greek in the same way as mainland Greek cities. Many of the elements of the myth confirm the city's hybrid identity. Derceto was not a Pan-Hellenic goddess, although she was a local version of the regional Syrian goddess Atargatis. Her connections to Penthesilea via Kaystros, and to Semiramis, are also representative of a claim to a hybrid identity. As an Amazon, Penthesilea was a part of the Greek world and past, but also outside the core of the Aegean world, both geographically and conceptually. Semiramis was a famous figure, but a Babylonian queen, at once part of the Greek world because her tales were known, but situated geographically on the edge of the world controlled by the Greeks. We should not understand the myth as establishing Ascalon as non-Greek, or part of the Greek periphery. The Greeks and Ascalonians recognized that there were some few elements of Ascalonian culture that were "other," and that these differences were represented in stories about Ascalon's past.

Derceto's tale helped explain differences in Ascalon's past and culture, but it also recognized the community's past as part of the larger Greco-Roman world. Aphrodite was the divine instigator in the myth of Derceto, and her vengeance on the local goddess easily recognized by Greeks as characteristic of the love goddess. Derceto's transformation into a fish identified her tale within the context of myths of metamorphoses well known in the Greco-Roman world. The story of Derceto was popular among ancient authors, and retold in multiple genres throughout antiquity. Ascalon was located as part of the conceptual map of the Greco-Roman past through Derceto. The stories of the goddess, although representing a local version of Atargatis, were closely bound up in the built and natural geography of Ascalon, made clear through references to landmarks such as her sanctuary, temenos, and sacred lake. Ascalon's Hellenized past was a vivid part of the Roman urban landscape, a way of bridging the city's history between the mythological past to the Roman present.

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Locally, Derceto appears with attributes typically connected to Aphrodite, Astarte, and Isis, including the crescent moon, scepter, and dove. It may be that Derceto was associated with or identified as one or all of these goddesses at various times and by various groups in Ascalon. In Chapter 4 I argued that the Ascalonian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was a goddess closely associated with protection and warfare. It is probably not a coincidence that the Aphrodite in the myth of Derceto is belligerent. Aphrodite is probably acting in a manner consistent with the local Ascalonian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. It may be that Derceto took on some of the functions or aspects of Astarte Aphrodite at Ascalon, particularly her connection to water, fish, and fertility. Derceto's myth focuses on fertility, and contains elements that correspond to other Near Eastern myths of goddesses who bear children to dead consorts.[612] The use of attributes in images of Derceto associated with Astarte, Aphrodite, and Isis in their role as goddesses related to fertility may indicate that she served that role in Ascalon.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Derceto designs appear in the mid-second century CE alongside several new images of gods on Ascalonian coins, including depictions of Poseidon, the Dioscouri, an Egyptianizing deity, and Herakles. Finkielsztejn has already argued that these new designs are evidence of the resurgence of local, particularly Phoenician, cults.[613] The depiction of Derceto as a fully anthropomorphized goddess is significant. It is clear from other coin designs that Ascalonian elites were comfortable with depicting their gods in unusual forms, and in non-Hellenized guises. Derceto, described in several stories as having been transformed into a fish, is not depicted that way on Ascalon's coins.[614] We know from Pseudo-Lucian that the

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[612] For example, Atargatis and Hadad, Isis and Osiris, Aphrodite and Adonis (Plut.*De.Iside.*1-19; Apoll.*Bib.*3.183 ; Ovid.*Met.*10.503-739; Nonn.*Dionysiaca.*42).

[613] Finkielsztejn 1992, 55-56.

[614] Compare to the depiction of the goddess Atargatis on the reverse of early first century BCE coins (Fig.5.3) minted in Damascus by the Seleucid king Demetrius III (Houghton 1998, n.861; 91 BCE).   The figure is identified

goddess was depicted as part-fish in at least some public depictions in Phoenicia. The

anthropomorphized depiction of the goddess downplays that aspect of the myth, emphasizing

iconographic elements and depictions more consistent with Greco-Roman practices. Here we

can perhaps identify elite discretion in the selection of attributes for the Derceto coins, preferring

a depiction of the goddess that appealed to a wider range of viewers and emphasized what the

community shared culturally with the Greco-Roman world rather than what was different.

A second example of this strategy is the depiction of the god Poseidon on Ascalonian

civic coins in the second century CE. The cult was probably Phoenician in origin, and while

Poseidon was invoked as an important Ascalonian deity in inscriptions from the second century

BCE, he is absent from public cult until the mid-second century CE. On several of the second-

third century CE designs featuring Poseidon at Ascalon, the god wears a himation rather than

appearing in his typical crouched nude pose. The himation identifies the wearer as a participant

in the Greek world, and thus shows Poseidon within a firmly established Hellenizing visual and

symbolic context.[615]

Lydian Heroes

By the fifth century BCE, traditions circulated connecting Ascalon's foundation to the

activities of one of two Lydian heroes, Mopsus and Ascalus. These traditions originated in

Xanthus' history of Lydia, and were repeated by later historians and writers, including Nicolaus

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as Atargatis by her scaly, fish-like tail and fins. She holds stalks of wheat in each hand and faces outward.
Demetrius III, the son of Antiochus VIII, was an enemy of Alexander Janneus (Jos.*Ant*.13.14). Antiochus may have
granted Ascalon the Greek titles included on the city's first century BCE coins, including its nominal autonomy. It
is unclear if any of Demetrius III's coins reached Ascalon, or if they were familiar with the design on them. We
cannot comment on the role that Demetrius' depiction of a fish-like Atargatis had on the depiction of Derceto in
Ascalon.

[615] Smith 1998.

of Damascus and Stephanus of Byzantium. Scholars have identified Mopsus with the traveling seer of Greek mythology, who was revered by several cities in southern Asia Minor as their city founder. Ascalus is not known from other sources.

Ascalus

Xanthus' history of Lydia provides few details about Ascalus. His comments concerning Ascalus are quoted by Stephanus of Byzantium, who relies upon Xanthus' account in Book 4 of his *Lydiaca* to describe the foundation of Ascalon.[616] Ascalus was a Lydian general, the brother of the Lydian Tantalus, and the son of Hymenaios.[617] The Lydian king Akiamos appointed Ascalus general of an army and sent him to invade Syria (for unknown reasons). Upon his arrival in Syria, Ascalus met and fell in love with a local woman, who is unnamed. The fate of their union and Ascalus' military activities in the Near East are not mentioned by Stephanus, who follows only with the note that Ascalus founded a city in southern Palestine, which he named after himself. Stephanus says the note that Nicolaus of Damascus, a historian of the first centuries BCE/CE also included this story in his *Histories*.

Ascalus does not appear elsewhere in the histories of Lydia, but his brother, Tantalus, recalls other Lydian figures with the same name from Greek myth. The first is the infamous Lydian king Tantalus, the son of Zeus.[618] Tantalus' mother was a nymph, Plouto, the daughter of Himantes.[619] Tantalus was punished in the Underworld for killing and feeding his son at a

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[616] Steph.Byz. s.v. *ASKALON*, A476, 1-10.

[617] The connection between this Tantalus and the Tantalus of Greek myth is discussed below.

[618] Eurip.*IA*.505; Eur.*Orest*.1-5; Plat.*Crat*.395e; Iso.1.50; Dio.Sic.4.74.1; Tac.*Ann*.4.56; Paus.2.22.3; Hyg.*Fabulae*.82

[619] Hyg.*Fabulae*.155.

feast of the Olympian gods.[620] Tantalus was the namesake for two grandchildren, the sons of his children Broteas and Niobe.[621] Neither of these Tantalids was prominent in Greek or Roman mytho-history, and Niobe's child was among those killed by Artemis and Apollo in punishment for her hubris. A fourth Tantalus was the son of Tmolus, the king of Lydia and the husband of Omphale.[622] This figure is relatively unknown, but a first century BCE source claims that this is the famous Tantalus (the son of Zeus), whose stepfather was Tmolus.[623] A fifth Tantalus was the son of Thyestes and the great-grandson of the first Tantalus.[624] This Tantalus was the first husband of Clytemnestra, and was murdered by Agamemnon.[625] According to Pausanias, his ashes were buried in a bronze urn in Argos.[626]

All of the Tantalids mentioned here, except for the son of Thyestes, had close ties to Asia Minor, particularly Lydia.[627] There are no traditions that match the evidence presented by Xanthus. Elements from various sources recall information given in Xanthus' account. For example: Hymenaios sounds similar to Himantes, the grandfather of Tantalus according to

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[620] Pindar.*Olymp.*1.

[621] Paus.2.22.3; Ovid.*Met.*6.239.

[622] Apollod.2.6.3.

[623] Nic. Damascus *ap.*Ex.De.insid.7.24; FGrH 90 F10.

[624] See Seneca's *Thyestes*; Paus.2.18.2, 2.22.3.

[625] Apoll.*Bibl.*E2.15-2.16. Pausanias (2.22.3) implies that Tantalus, the son of Boreas, was thought to be the first husband of Clytemnestra.

[626] Paus.2.22.2. There were apparently two traditions. The second identified Tantalus, the son of Boreas, with the ashes in the vase at Argos. Considering that Thyestes was active in the Peloponnese and Agamemnon must have slain Tantalus in the region, the former tradition is more attractive.

[627] Pausanias (2.22.3) places the original Tantalus' grave on Mount Sipylus in Lydia and claims that Amphion, the husband of Niobe, played Lydian music in honor of his father-in-law Tantalus (9.5.7). Local legends collected by Pausanias (3.22.4) connect Broteas also to Mount Sipylus, near which he was supposed to have carved images of the Magna Mater. Niobe is also associated with this mountain (Hom.*Il.*721-727; Pseudo-Apoll.*Bib.*3.46). Diodorus Siculus places the home of the original Tantalus in Paphlagonia (4.74.1). Strabo (12.8.2), the *Suida* s (T147) and Nonnus (*Dion.*48.395) associate Tantalus and his offspring with Phrygia.

Hyginus. Various scholars have suggested that Ascalus, Tantalus, and Hymenaios are different names of kings and elites from the quasi-mythological periods of Lydian history.[628] This is an interesting suggestion, but the relationships are difficult to trace. Hymenaios' name may sound like Manes, the founder of the Lydian dynasty as given by Herodotus, but Hymenaios does not appear to be a king in Xanthus' version.[629] The best that can be said is that Xanthus' Ascalus, Tantalus, and Hymenaios are featured in a Lydian mytho-historical tradition associated with the descendants of the famous Tantalus, with whom Xanthus' Tantalus may share an identity or a name. If the connection between the names Hymenaios and Manes was known in antiquity, the resulting link may have associated Ascalus' family with the early history of Lydia and its royal family. Omphale, the wife of Tmolus, who is sometimes called the step-father of Tantalus, was hailed as the ancestress of the Heraclid dynasty in Lydia. A descendant of the Heraclids married a child of Ninus and Semiramis, a figure also connected mythologically to Ascalon.

To summarize, Ascalus, Tantalus and Hymenaios may have been members of the royal houses of Lydia. If so, Ascalus' family was related to several Greek figures due to Tantalus' role as the ancestor of the House of Atreus. Even if the original story was modified, corrupted, or confused by Xanthus or Stephanus of Byzantium, the tradition connects Ascalon to the Lydian kings and some of the ancient houses of Greece. Hymenaios and Tantalus thus connected Ascalus to Greece and Lydia, and as we shall see, provided a mythical explanation for Ascalon's mix of eastern and Greek cultural elements.

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[628] Alexander 1913; Hanfmann 1958.

[629] Her.1.94.3; 4.45.4; Dion.Hal.*Ant.*1.27.1-3.

Ascalonian evidence

Numismatists have identified a bearded man on the obverse of Ascalonian coins in the late second-first century BCE as Ascalus (Fig.5.4).[630] If correct, this would be the only preserved example of an Ascalonian tradition connecting Ascalus to their city. The figure has a mass of curly hair, a beard, and no fillet or diadem, unlike the Hellenistic kings of the period. The profile differs from the portraits of contemporary rulers and there are no other attributes associated with this figure. He is identified as Ascalus by numismatists because he lacks the attributes of gods or kings, and because the introduction of designs celebrating local city founders on coins date to the first century BCE in the Near East. However, most of these coins are very poorly preserved, with few examples from published collections. The design is relatively short-lived, appearing only on undated autonomous bronzes of the first century BCE.

Other locally minted coin designs at Ascalon from the Late Hellenistic and Roman periods demonstrate that the officials from the city mint understood and felt comfortable using attributes typical of Hellenistic kings and Greco-Roman gods. The lack of specific attributes suggests that two strategies were at work. First, local Ascalonians would recognize the figure without attributes. Martin has suggested this interpretation for similarly generic depictions of Doros on early Roman period coins from Dor.[631] Second, the lack of attributes gave the figure a universal quality that appealed to a wider range of viewers, who could identify Ascalus as Poseidon, Zeus, or different deity altogether. Butcher argues that generic depictions were an inclusive strategy, and that "people can find identity in common forms as much as in what is

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[630] I list here only the examples in which an image is explicitly identified as Ascalus by numismatists, with dated examples first: Yashin 2007, 38, n.12 (106/5 BCE); Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n. 33 (31/30 BCE)=Rosenberger 1972, 35, n.8 (dated there 24 BCE); Rosenberger 1972, 35, n.9 (22 BCE). Undated examples: Rosenberger 1972, 35, n.6-7; Yashin 2007, 38, n.13; Meshorer et al. 2013, 98, n.34.

[631] Martin 2007: 19-20. See Motta (2011) for the argument that the figure represents Zeus of Doros.

singular."[632] The image of the bearded man reflects the simultaneous identity of Ascalonians as a circumscribed community with its own local identity, and a part of the larger Greco-Roman world.

Interpretation

Xanthus associates Ascalus with the foundation of Ascalon in Palestine by the fifth century BCE. This tradition persisted into the first century BCE, and is preserved in sources available to Stephanus of Byzantium in the sixth century CE. From a Greek perspective, the foundation of Ascalon by a Lydian general situated the city's history within the Greek world and explained the non-Hellenized elements of Ascalonian culture.   To the Ascalonians, the Lydian hero may have preserved local memories of the Philistine migration to the southern Levantine coastal plain from the Aegean world. Ascalus' union with a local woman may reflect Philistine settlement among the pre-existing Canaanite population in Ascalon at the end of the Bronze Age. A connection to the Lydian Tantalids situated the origin of Ascalon in the period before the Trojan War, establishing the antiquity of the community and its engagement in the Greek world.

Mopsus

According to Xanthus, a Lydian general named Moxos captured the goddess Atargatis and her son, Icthys, and drowned them in a lake near Ascalon on account of the goddess' hubris.[633] Atargatis and Icthys were eaten by the fish in the lake. This story is preserved in a

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[632] Butcher 2005: 149.

[633] Xanthus FGrH 765 F 17 *ap.* Ath.*Deino*.8.37.

fragment attributed to Xanthus by Athenaeus, who quotes the Hellenistic writer Mnaseas.[634]

Xanthus' account of Moxos' further adventures is preserved by Nicolaus of Damascus, who

details how Moxos overthrew a Lydian tyrant named Meles, and then traveled to the town of

Krabos where he threw all of its inhabitants into a nearby lake because of their religious

practices.[635] It is unclear what issues Moxos had with the gods worshipped by the people of

Krabos, the identity of those deities, or if Moxos had any authority to punish the Krabians in this

manner. At some time before or after this, Moxos traveled with some companions to southern

Asia Minor, Phoenicia, and to Palestine as far as Ascalon.[636]

Xanthus' Moxos has long been identified with a figure from Greek myth named Mopsus.

The Greeks had multiple traditions about a seer named Mopsus, likely reflecting several

independent traditions which were conflated in antiquity.[637] The first Mopsus was the son of

Rhacius (of Crete) or Apollo and Manto, the daughter of the famous seer Tiresias.[638] This

Mopsus was known for his abilities in bird augury and cleromancy.[639] He appears in myth

primarily in Asia Minor in the period after the Trojan War, and is most famous for defeating the

seer Calchas in a divination battle at Clarus or in Cilicia, and for founding various cities in

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[634] Ibid.

[635] FGrH 90 F16.

[636] FGrH 765 F17.

[637] Hanfmann 1958: 72-76; Vanschoon-winkel 1990; Baldriga 1994; Bremmer 2008, 50-60; Lopez-Ruiz 2009.

[638] Strab.9.5.22 (identifies two different Mopsoi); 14.1.27; 14.5.16-19; Plut.*de.Def.Orac*.45; Paus.9.33.2; 7.3.1-3 (Rhacius the Cretan as the father of Mopsus). Bremmer (2008, 57) notes that the first mention of Manto as the mother of Mopsus is by the third century BCE writer Philostephanus (*OCD2* 'Philostephanus'), whose information about Mopsus and Manto is cited by Athenaeus (*Deipno*.27). Strabo (14.5.16) is our earliest source for Apollo and Pausanias (7.3.1-3) for Rhacius as Mopsus' father.

[639] Bremmer (2008, 56) suggests that Mopsus' skill in cleromancy derived from his connection to the oracle at Clarus, whose Greek name, Klaros, is a Doric variant for the Greek κλῆρος, or "lot" (LSJ κλῆρος).

Lydia, Pamphylia and Cilicia.[640] This Mopsus also founded an oracular shrine at Mallus in

Cilicia with Amphilocus, a hero with whom Mopsus or Calchas had left the war at Troy.[641] The

two men had a falling-out and killed each other in a duel near Magarsa.[642] This is perhaps the

same Mopsus who is placed in Thebes by Statius and described by the poet as a capable seer.[643]

A second Mopsus was an Argonaut from Titaeron in Thessaly, a diviner who specialized in bird

augury, and the son of the seer Ampyx.[644] This Mopsus participated in the Calydonian Boar

Hunt and fought alongside the Lapiths against the Centaurs.[645]

In addition to these mythological figures, there is epigraphic evidence of one or more

political leaders with names similar to Mopsus from the Bronze and Iron Age in Greece and Asia

Minor. King Azitawad of the Iron Age city of Karatepe claimed in a Luwian-Phoenician

inscription from eighth-seventh centuries BCE to be descended from the "House of MPŠ" or "the

House of Mopsus."[646] A similar name was discovered in Hittite cuneiform records, detailing the

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[640] Hesiod F 278 MW; FGrH F 142. Strabo (14.1.27) attributes the tradition that Calchas died in Cilicia to Sophocles' *Helen Claimed*, now lost. See also in this tradition: Apoll.Rhod.*Bib*.E.6.2-4, 6.19. See also: Pomp.Mel.1.78-88.

[641] Strab.14.1.27 (Amphilochus and Calchas as companions) contra 14.5.16 (Mopsus and Amphilochus as companions). Plutarch (*Mor*.434D) has Mopsus and Amphilochus as half-brothers.

[642] Strab. 14.5.16. An earlier Hesiodic tradition had Apollo kill Amphilochus (Hesiod F 279 MW). Bremmer (2008, 57) dates the origin of the duel between Amphilochus and Mopsus to the second century BCE pseudo-Lycophron treatise *Alexandra*.

[643] Stat.*Theb*.3.521.

[644] Hes.*Scut.Here*.178-191; Pind.*Pyth*.4.190-191; Apoll.*Agro*.1.65, 3.917-918 (origin and augury); 1.77-85, 4.1502-1536 (fated to die in Libya); 1.1080-1105, 2.925-928, 3.540-554, 3.938-946(prophecies; parentage); Val.Flac.*Argo*.1.205-240, 1.383, 2.362-415; 4.546, 5.90-100, 8.243-258, (prophecies to the Argonauts; Mopsus as the son of Apollo); 2.95-96, 5.1-12 (among the Argonauts); Hyg.*Fab*.14; Strab.9.5.22.

[645] Ov.*Met*.8.260-328, 8.329-375 (Calydonian Boar); 12.429-535 (Lapiths); Paus.5.17.10 (participation in funeral games for Pelias).

[646] Dupont-Sommer (1948) includes the original text and translations (French) for the inscription from the wall of Karatepe and a statue base set up by this king, Azitawadda. He notes his descent from the House of MPŠ" four times between the two inscriptions. See also: *KAI* 26 and early commentary by Barnett, Leeven and Moss (1948, 1953).

actions of a figure from western Asia Minor named Muksas.[647]   A bilingual Luwian-Phoenician

inscription from Çineköy in the 8th century BCE refers to the king, Urikki, as a descendent of

Mopsus in Phoenician, and of Muksas in Luwian.[648]   Mo-qo-so appears in at least two Linear B

tablets from Knossos and Pylos, although it is unclear whether this is a title, person or

toponym.[649]   As Bremmer points out, the bilingual inscription of Urikki demonstrates the

transformation of the spelling of the Luwian Muksas to the Phoenician Mopsus in the 8th c.

BCE.[650] The alternate spelling of Moxos was used by the Lydian historian Xanthus in the fifth

century BCE, probably to emphasize the antiquity of the figure.[651]

The first Mopsus, the seer son of Apollo and Manto, was connected to various regions of

Asia Minor, the same area where Muksas and the House of Mopsus were located. The exploits of

the founder of the House of Mopsus were perhaps the basis for the stories of the Eastern

Mopsus/Moxos, or else the names Muksas and Mopsus were similar enough to cause the two

figures to be conflated in the history of Asia Minor.[652]

The Eastern Mopsus was closely connected to Asia Minor, and so the appearance of

Ascalon, in traditions associated with him has perplexed many scholars. Several authors have

argued that this Xanthian tradition is a corrupted version of the story which was originally

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[647] *DCPP* 300; Barnett 1953, 142.

[648] Tekoglu and Lemaire 2000; Lafranchi 2005.

[649] See Vanschoon-winkel (1990, 193-194) for a summary of this evidence as it relates to the Greek hero Mopsus.

[650] Bremmer (2008, 58-59) argues that the name Mopsus was borrowed from the Phoenicians by Greeks living in Cilicia, contra Finkelberg (2005, 150-153), who argues that the Phoenicians took Mopsus from the Greeks in Asia Minor. See also Lopez-Ruiz (2009, 494-497).

[651] Apparently, Moxos was also a very popular name in Asia Minor; 10% of the names on a list of 40 people from Ephesus in the fourth century BCE were Moxus (Bremmer 2008, 59).

[652] Vanschoon-winkel (1990, 193) favors the second suggestion, which seems most likely. Hanfmann (1958, 74) earlier argued that the Hittite Muksas was the basis for the Eastern Mopsus because both figures belong to Bronze Age traditions. Alexander (1913, 43-53) identifies both Ascalus and Moxos as the Lydian nobleman Daskylos I.

centered in Syria or Asia Minor. This assumption is based on the fact that "it is a far cry from Lydia to As[c]alon in Philistia" and that the name of the goddess who Mopsus encounters is Atargatis, the Syrian goddess closely associated with sanctuaries and temples in northern Syria and southern Asia Minor.[653] Hanfmann argued that Koloe, the lake site of a later sanctuary of Artemis, should be identified with this Ascalon, suggesting that the earliest name of the town and sanctuary "bore some name including the syllables 'Kolo'—sufficiently suggestive to the ear of 'as-kolo'—to produce the association" with Ascalon.[654] Others have argued that Ascalon and Krabos, the city whose inhabitants Mopsus attacked and drowned, should be identified with a town named Daskylon in Lydia.[655] Alexander argued that Ascalon replaced Daskylon in the fifth century BCE because the Phoenician settlement was larger and more important at that time.[656] Apparently, however, Ascalon was identified with this myth by the fifth century BCE, and the tradition was still circulating at the time of Nicolaus of Damascus in the first century BCE.[657] Even if Mopsus was originally thought to have been active in northern Syria and not the southern coastal plain by the fifth century BCE his exploits had become associated with Ascalon. By this time Ascalon's connections to the Greek world and southern Asia Minor were especially strong due to the control of the city by the Phoenicians.

In contrast, several scholars argue that the Ascalon identified by Xanthus with Moxos is the Ascalon in Palestine, and that the story of Mopsus reflects the memory of Bronze Age

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[653] Hanfmann 1958, 73.

[654] Ibid. Followed by: Baldriga 1994: 66.

[655] Alexander 1913: 47-50. He also argues that Mopsus and Ascalus are the same figure, and based on the Lydian noble Daskylos I (46-53).

[656] Alexander 1913, 50-51. Followed by Hanfmann (1958, 73-74).

[657] Steph.Byz. s.v. *ASKALON*, A476, 5.

migrations from the Aegean world to the Levant. [658] As Finkielstein points out, Biblical sources

identify the Philistines' origins in Crete, and Mopsus' father Rhacius was originally from

Crete.[659] Rhacius led a group of Cretans to Asia Minor before the birth of Mopsus. Bremmer has

suggested that mythological stories of Mopsus reflects interactions between different cultural

groups, although he places these interactions in Cilicia and in a later period (the 8th-7th c.

BCE).[660] The migration suggestion is attractive as it explains Callisthenes' assertion that

Mopsus and his companions left northern Asia Minor and traveled to Pamphylia, Cilica,

Phoenicia, and Syria.[661] Recent evidence that shows that the migrations of the Sea Peoples in the

Bronze Age may have followed a similar route, and perhaps the story of Mopsus' activities in

Asia Minor and abroad reflect, for example, the foundation of Ascalon as a settlement of the Sea

Peoples.[662]

Ascalonian evidence

Mopsus is connected to Ascalon only through the writings of Xanthus of Lydia, which

were preserved by Roman and Byzantine writers. He does not appear clearly in the

archaeological or epigraphic evidence of Ascalon, nor is there any evidence that the city honored

him as a founder. Nicolaus of Damascus, writing in Palestine in the first century BCE, used

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[658] Finkelberg 2005: 150-152; Finkelberg 2009: 31-44; Fox 2008: 225-226; Lopez-Ruiz 2009, 494-498; Gur 2013. For the routes of the Sea Peoples see, Sweeney and Yasur-Landau (1999) and Yasur-Landau (2010, 162-163).

[659] Finkielstein 2002: 151. Biblical sources: Jer.47:4; Amos 9:7. Rhacius' migration to Asia Minor: Paus.7.3.

[660] Bremmer 2008: 58-60.

[661] Callisthenes, *ap.* Strab.14.4.3.

[662] See Yasur-Landau 2010.

Xanthus as a source, suggesting that Mopsus' connection to Ascalon as known in the Roman period, even if the story was of limited interest in the preserved source material.

The bearded figure identified by numismatists as Ascalus may instead be Mopsus (Fig.5.4). Mopsus' connection to Ascalon does not appear to be less popular or significant than Ascalus', and Mopsus was a well-known hero in the Greco-Roman world. The lack of attributes precludes a secure identification of the bearded figure. It may be that the bearded figure was identified as both Ascalus and Mopsus (among other possible divine identifications). Mopsus' ability to symbolize and tap into Ascalon's Philistine, Phoenician, and Greek past perhaps makes him a more attractive choice for identification as city founder by local elites. Ascalonian leaders consistently used the same strategies for properly contextualizing and promoting a Hellenized identity as elites of Phoenicia and Asia Minor. The use of Hellenized titles on coins in this period, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, is one example of a Greek practice that was adopted first by elites in Asia Minor, and then Phoenicia before spreading to Syria and Palestine. The Ascalonian elites were tapping into a network of practices that were successfully employed also by cities in Phoenicia and Asia Minor. The promotion of local heroes, including Mopsus, by cities in Asia Minor strengthened the position of those cities within the shared Greco-Roman past. By identifying Mopsus as the founder of the city Ascalon created additional connections to the Greco-Roman past, and to other communities who claimed him as founder.

Interpretation

The tradition connecting Mopsus to Ascalon provides circumstantial evidence for how foundation myths and figures were used to explain the history of the city. Although there is no preserved evidence that the Ascalonians identified Mopsus as a founder, the mythological

tradition linking the community the wandering seer is significant. Mopsus was an itinerant hero, identified as a founder of several cities in Cilicia and Lydia in the Roman period. Stories of Mopsus are frequently centered in areas where Greek and Near Eastern populations mingled. In the course of his wanderings through Asia Minor, Cilicia and Syria he is credited with founding new Greek cities. Mopsus symbolizes the spread of Greek people into the Eastern Mediterranean, and Greek socio-cultural practices. Although his connection to Ascalon does not appear to be popular within the city itself, his travels from Asia Minor to the southern Levantine coastal plain provide a context and origin for the Hellenized community at Ascalon.

The Mopsus story also contained elements that addressed Ascalon's history as a Philistine and Phoenician city. The story of Rhacius' journey from Crete to Asia Minor, and the subsequent wanderings of his son, Mopsus, may preserve the memory of the Philistine Bronze Age migrations from Crete to the eastern Aegean. The conflation of Mopsus and Muksas in Phoenicia made the Greek seer an important mythological hero in the Phoenician past. The myth of the Greek Mopsus, traveling from Asia Minor to Ascalon, combined these elements into a Hellenized mythological story.

Conclusions

An assessment of the three preserved mythical traditions involving Ascalon has highlighted three main points. First, Ascalon's appearance in three different mythical traditions with origins in Asia Minor integrated the city's past firmly within the mytho-history of the Greco-Roman world. Palestine was geographically a peripheral location in Greek myth, but Ascalon was connected to the major heroes and mythological stories through Ascalus, Mopsus, and Derceto. These three figures established Ascalon connections with the Greek and Near

Eastern world through Asia Minor, the homeland of Ascalus and Mopsus, and an area where Semiramis and her descendants were active.

Second, the connections between Ascalon and Asia Minor may preserve the memory of actual historical situations. However, it also helped explain the cultural memory and traditions of Ascalon, which included Phoenician and Near Eastern practices alongside Greek ones from an early period. The persistence of these elements made sense when put into a context in which the city was founded by Lydian Greeks alongside a pre-existing population.

The second point is that the mythology of Ascalon was deployed by the Ascalonians at two key points in its history: the Late Hellenistic period and the second century CE. The tradition of claiming and promoting Greek ancestors and founders by cities in Asia Minor and the Near East in the Hellenistic period has been widely studied, and it is in this period that Ascalon may have minted coins claiming a connection to one of its heroic founders, Mopsus or Ascalus, for the first time. These coins were minted in the same period when Ascalon claimed status as a Greek *polis*, using Greek political and religious titles to situate itself within the Hellenistic world.[663] The discovery and use of an eponymous or famous hero with connections to the Greek world would have served a similar purpose in reinforcing Ascalon's connection to the Greek world.

In the second century CE, the communities of the Roman Empire were engaged in a dialogue about the past, a trend articulated in the works of the artists of the Second Sophistic. The publication of a key work on Phoenician history by Philo of Byblos also dates to this period. Leaving aside the many lacunae in the preserved narrative of Philo's *Historia*, and the methodological problems inherent in Philo's approach and the use of the source by modern

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[663] As discussed in Chapter 4.

scholars, the work appears to have been popular in presenting the mythology and religion of the Phoenician world to a Greco-Roman audience.[664] The shift of emphasis on the coinage of Ascalon towards local founders and Phoenician cults thus coincides with a more general interest in the East in these same subjects. This does not mean that elements and attributes of Greco-Roman culture were abandoned, and that Archaizing styles predominated. In fact, our identification of the cults on this second century CE series of coins as "traditional" or "Phoenician" is based primarily on the fact that there is evidence of some of these deities (e.g. Poseidon) in the Hellenistic period, and because gods like Herakles were frequently syncretized with Phoenician deities. Despite the emphasis on local cults and founders, they are situated in the larger cultural and institutional structures of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, as indicated by the Greco-Roman iconography used in the designs.

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[664] Baumgarten 1981; Johnson 2013, 232-235 (with recent bibliography).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has considered the cults of Roman Ascalon and their use to articulate the city's sacred identity and explain its role in the Greco-Roman past and present. This argument was explored in case studies featuring the most important cult of the city (Astarte Aphrodite Ourania), and the mythology of local founding deities and heroes (Derceto, Ascalus, Mopsus). In this section I consider the major themes elucidated in these case studies, and discuss how evidence of cults in the city complement the literary information. I acknowledge some of the major issues which the dissertation does not address, and the limitations of the evidence. Finally, I highlight how the current project contributes to our understanding of cult, cultural memory, and the Roman Levant, and identify some areas of future research.

Questions and outcomes

This project demonstrated that the cults at Ascalon were used to circumscribe Ascalon's political, cultural and social identity in reference to the larger Mediterranean world and Ascalon's own history within that world. The cults of Roman Ascalon were embedded in the history of the city, and especially its role as a port city. The depiction of deities in various media reflected a consciousness about Ascalon's history as a Philistine and Phoenician city, and a desire to situate that history within the framework of the Hellenized world. Our discussion of the cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania and the foundation myths of Ascalon highlighted the different

ways that the community at Ascalon used the gods and heroes of Ascalon to articulate notions about the city's past and identity. Sacred identity became a way to acknowledge the city's cultural memory, past, and diverse populations.

Chapter 1 laid out a series of research questions and goals to frame the core chapters of the dissertation. The first aim focused on identifying the range of deities present at Ascalon between the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and providing an overview of the ways they were depicted and in what types of media. The second aim was to embed these depictions and deities within the socio-political history of Ascalon from the Bronze Age to the third century CE in order to understand how historical circumstances impacted the formulation of the city's sacred identity. Third, I attempted to trace trends and themes in the depiction of deities through the late Hellenistic to Roman periods through patterning within and across different types of evidence. Fourth, I endeavored to characterize the ways in which the cults of Ascalon were used to construct the city's public sacred identity, and to what ends this public sacred identity was used. Finally, I aimed to see how Ascalon's public sacred identity drew from aspects of the Mediterranean *koiné* in order to create and perpetuate connections and relationships.

This study demonstrates that the Ascalonian elites were conscious of the city's non-Greek past and used the cults to obscure or promote this past as necessary. Ascalonian cults became one way in which different versions of the city's past were articulated. The combination of Near Eastern and Hellenistic practices and styles was explained by the nature of the gods, and through the foundation myths of the city. Although at least three different foundation myths exist concerning the city, none is mutually exclusive. While Astarte Aphrodite Ourania bears both the name of a Phoenician and Greek goddess, the deity is neither fully one nor the other. Ascalon's location and historical situation caused the city to look outside Palestine for connections,

eschewing a close relationship with the other cities of the southern coastal plain in favor of relationships with Phoenicia, Asia Minor and, especially, Egypt. Multiple traditions, practices, languages and histories overlapped at Ascalon, and the polyglot nature of the community is reflected in the cults of the city in the Roman period. Cults expressed different aspects of the city's cultural memory, and the names of the deities and they ways and manner in which they were presented in the city allowed elites to emphasize different aspects of the gods at different times and for different reasons.

The sacred identity of Ascalon changed over time according to priorities, local situations and the needs of the community. In light of the available evidence, it is easiest for us to track the relationship between socio-political priorities and cult. From the second century BCE to the mid-first century BCE, the community emphasized its Hellenism. The ancient cult of Astarte, called Aphrodite Ourania by the Greeks, was hybridized by the Ascalonians, who called the goddess by both names. The sanctuary was already famous in this period, and its role as an early temple to the goddess Aphrodite likely afforded the Ascalonians a way to present themselves as members in the Hellenistic world of the polis. Astarte Aphrodite Ourania appears with the attributes of Tyche on late Hellenistic and early Roman coinage. The figure could be identified as either goddess independently, or as both goddesses at once, giving her a universal appeal. At the same time, Ascalonians began to articulate the political nature of the community in a Hellensitic architectural and epigraphic manner—using legends on coins identifying the city as a Hellenistic polis, and building a bouleuterion.

In the early Roman period the deities and myths of Ascalon expressed the city's identity and participation in the Mediterranean world, and framed its history in reference to the Greco-Roman world. Ascalonian foundation myths in which figures from Asia Minor traveled to

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Ascalon or founded the city, were already in circulation, and the heroes of these myths were depicted on city coins. An eponymous hero from Asia Minor provided a means of understanding the combination of Greek and Levantine elements of Ascalonian culture in mytho-historical terms, while placing Ascalon's past in the context of the known Greek mythological world. Astarte Aphrodite Ourania appears on coin designs similar to those of Venus Victrix, connecting the Ascalonian goddess with the patron deity of Augustus and his family. Astarte Aphrodite Ourania as Tyche continued to represent the city's past as a Hellenistic polis on coins. In this period a second new coin of Astarte Aphordite Ourania was introduced, depicting the goddess armed and wielding a harpe. This image of the goddess emphasized the antiquity of the cult, and the belligerent nature of the goddess. The co-existence of three different depictions of Astarte Aphrodite on coins of the city highlights how flexible depictions of deities on coins could be, and how important they were in explaining the priorities of the city.

In the second-third centuries CE interest in local histories and pre-Greco-Roman identities in the Greek East was reflected by the promotion of traditional cults and deities in a variety of media at Ascalon. Most visible was the introduction of a series of new coin designs, featuring gods for whom there is evidence of worship in the Hellenistic period (Poseidon) and deities whose nature may indicate a Phoenician origin (the Egyptianizing deity, Herakles). The cosmopolitan nature of the city is manifested by the influx of Egyptian or Egyptian-styled deities on coins and celebrated on the late second century CE reliefs of the city bouleuterion. The growth of the community as demonstrated in the archaeological remains coincides with changes in the expression of the city's public sacred identity toward a more inclusive dialogue. Alongside the emphasis on local deities are depictions of Greco-Roman deities, including Nike, Pan and Dionysos on architectural reliefs throughout the city, which identified Ascalon as a

member of the Greco-Roman world. The theater and preserved architectural decoration from the bouleuterion highlight how deeply embedded in Greco-Roman architectural and economic systems the had become.

Alcock argues that "manipulation of the past is most pronounced at times of marked social, religious or political change."[665] This is precisely what the evidence for public sacred identity at Ascalon suggests. The arrival of Roman power structures and the breakdown of the Hellenistic kingdoms fundamentally changed the political and social structures of the southern Levant in the first centuries BCE/CE. The Ascalonian elites promoted their community's ancient ties to the Greek world through the use of Greek political titles, Tyche, and the city's Hellenized founder, on local coinage. This was a strategy they employed throughout the Hellenistic period to emphasize what they had in common with the other Hellenized cities of the Near East, and with the rulers of the Hellenistic kingdoms. The Ascalonian elites responded to the expansion of Roman power in the first century BCE through similar strategies that emphasized a common past and cultural identity. The Romans traced their origins through a wandering hero from Asia Minor. According to Greek mythological stories, the Ascalonians also traced their origins to Asia Minor through one of two wandering heroes. The promotion of Ascalus or Mopsus on local coinage may have been a strategy undertaken by Ascalonian elites to capitalize on an origin story similar in structure to the Romans.

Ascalon's public sacred identity shifted again in the mid-second century CE. After the Bar Kokhba rebellion, the provincial structure of Palestine changed. At the same time, communities in the East were increasingly interested in their pre-Roman pasts. Ascalon's Philistine history was recalled in the adoption of the name Palestine for the new southern

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[665] Alcock 2002: 32.

Levantine province. At the same time, Ascalon's Phoenician past was remembered within the city through the promotion of cults that were Phoenician in origin and Hellenized at some time before the Roman period. The Ascalonian cult of Poseidon was perhaps originally Phoenician, but his appearance in a himation on Roman period civic coins with an image of the Roman emperor on the obverse communicated a hybrid Greco-Roman-Phoenician identity. The antiquity and pre-Greek history of the local cult of Astarte Aphrodite Ourania was emphasized by the attributes of that goddess on Roman period coins, and through the Egyptianizing design of her temple as depicted on civic coins. Derceto's story was included in collections of mythological tales alongside tales that established a communal Mediterranean mythological past.

Implications, limits, and future research

The preceding chapters highlighted the ways in which Ascalon's past was a key component in structuring its public sacred identity. The Philistine and Phoenician histories of the city were emphasized by Jewish and Greco-Roman authors. Although there is no comparable literary accounts by Ascalonians, they apparently were conscious of their past and how it structured their relationships with their neighbors. This interest in the past predates the period of the Second Sophistic, and is first identifiable through the use of the temple of Astate Aphrodite Ourania to display the city's status as a Hellenistic polis. The city's foundation myths also situated Ascalon within the world of the Greek past.

Ascalon was politically and culturally outward looking throughout the second and first millennia, looking to connections with Egypt, Asia Minor and Greece over the cities of the Levant. This was not necessarily a product of lingering animosity against the Jews, but rather a reflection of Ascalon's role as a port city and the cultural memory of the inhabitants' origins

outside the region. In Chapter 2 we saw that Ascalon was a cosmopolitan port city throughout the first and second millennium. The local mythology and the range of cults in the Roman period supports the notion that the sacred identity of Ascalon was likewise cosmopolitan, drawing from multiple traditions. Cults of Phoenician origin predominate, but with clear Greco-Roman elements.   By the second century CE, and perhaps earlier, the role of Egypt began to loom larger, playing an important role in identifying a major group of stakeholders in the city as people interested in Aegyptica or Egyptians themselves.

The Ascalonians drew some elements and practices from the Mediterranean *koiné*, adopting and adapting these features to fit local priorities and preferences. Interestingly, both local and global symbols and stories were used to draw the city into the world and history of the Mediterranean world. Local mythology asserted a place for Ascalon in the history and mythology of the Greco-Roman world, while also promoting the importance of the city and its cults.

The limitations of the evidence and what this evidence is able to tell us were discussed at length in Chapter 1. The outcomes of the dissertation, however, have their limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the themes and trends identified in Chapter 3 are based on cults for which we have evidence, and on our understanding of the nature of religion in the ancient world, particularly as viewed through the lens of polis-religion. These themes were traced in two case studies, which focused on the deities and mythological figures for which a variety of evidence exists. Similar analyses of additional cults could modify the outcome of the analysis, in particular the conclusion that Phoenician cults continued to be important to Ascalonians. The role of the city's relationship to Egypt is more nebulous, but there clearly was a connection between Ascalon and Egypt, which was manifested in Egyptianizing gods and styles. It remains

to be seen whether Egyptian gods and practices should be seen primarily within the context of Aegyptica and exoticism, which was common in the Roman world in the second-third centuries CE, or if the impession behind the expression of Egyptianizing culture was more locally determined. Future publication of the recently excavated architecture and material remains from the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman period levels at Ascalon will increase our understanding of the nature of the city's contact with Egypt.

Second, the analysis is limited by the reliance on local coins as the primary visual evidence. Although Herakles appears on coins only after the second century CE, there is evidence that sculptures of the hero existed elsewhere in the city and perhaps earlier. The numismatic evidence represents the choices of a select group of the Ascalonian elite in one type of media, even if that material circulated among a broad swath of the population. Additional evidence, including sculptures which might be associated with temples or public buildings, dedicatory inscriptions and evidence of public festivals or priesthoods might alter our understanding of the experiences of the Ascalonian community.

New work in and around Ascalon and the forthcoming publication of the latest phase of excavations by the Leon Levy Expedition will certainly enhance our understanding of the cults of the city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Kathleen Birney's forthcoming monograph on the Hellenistic city will refine our understanding of the urban space in Ascalon during that period, and include new analyses of Ascalon's economic, political and cultural connections to the Mediterranean world. New discoveries and publications of Ascalonian coinage, sculptural finds, inscriptions and architecture will likewise change or challenge the interpretations outlined here as they contribute to our understanding of how depictions of gods and myth were used by the Ascalonians to create their communal sacred identity.

Future work should focus on adding to the evidence from Ascalon, and studying the depictions of deities within the city. Many questions still remain concerning the nature of the gods identified in Chapter 3, especially the Egyptianizing deity, Poseidon and Herakles. Future studies of these deities may refine the trends identified here, or perhaps overturn some of the conclusions. Comparisons to similar studies of cult at nearby cities such as Gaza, Ptolemais, Joppa, and Dor will help elucidate whether Ascalon's use of cult, myth, memory, and the nature of the city's communal sacred identity were unique.

This dissertation has sought to address a major lacuna in our understanding of cult in the coastal cities in the Roman Levant, and how local myths and cults in those cities reflected the community's cultural memory and created ties to the rest of the Greco-Roman world. Although locally and regionally specific priorities meant that cities throughout the Roman East articulate identity as part of an empire differently, this dissertation has emphasized how local cultural memory, preserved in polis-religion and mythological stories, was the basis for circumscribing both local and global identities. These ways of remembering the past locally were embedded in global social and political networks which influenced and changed the articulation of local identities in different ways.

TABLE 1: Selected Coin Designs by Issue

Design	2nd c. BCE auton. (n.d.)	"First century" (n.d.)	68/67 BCE	60/59	56/55	55/54	52/51	38/37	"Augustus" (n.d.)	31/30	26/25	2/1 BCE	6/5 BCE	4/3 CE	5/6	6/7	7/8	8/9	"Tiberius" (n.d.)	15/16	22/23	23/24	26/27	31/32	"Caligula" (n.d.)
Herakles + Nike																									
Herakles																									
Dioscouri																									
Egyptianizing deity (bust)																									
Egyptianizing deity (full length, no lions)																									
Egyptianizing deity (full length, with lions)																									
Egyptianizing temple, w/ Phanebal inside																									
Egyptianizing Temple																									
Phanebal, labeled																									
Phanebal, not smiting																									
Armored Phanebal									×							×				×				×	×
Nude Phanebal									×																
Poseidon (himation)																									
Poseidon (foot on prow)																									
Poseidon (foot on rock)																									
Winged Caduceus + Cornucopiae									×																
Caduceus		×							×																
Derceto																									
Aphrodite (head on obv)	×	×									×														
(Tyche & Derceto shaking hands)																									
Tyche on prow w/ altar																									×
Tyche on prow										×			×					×		×	×	×	×	×	
Tyche standing															×		×								
Tyche Bust (Rev & Obv)	×	×	×	×	×	×		×		×			×												
Bearded Man (Obv)		×		×	×	×	×	×		×															
Dove (alone on rev or obv)	×	×										×													

*Chart based on issues published in: RPC, BMC (online collection), Meshorer 1985, Meshorer et al. 2013, Yashin 2007, Gitler and Master 2010, the Israel Museum (online numismatics collection), and ANS (online collection). (x)=questionable date or attribution

	38/39	39/40	"Claudius" (n.d.)	41/42	42/43	52/53	"Nero" (n.d.)	58/59	66/67	67/68	"Vespasian" (n.d.)	72/73	76/77	77/78	78/79	80/81	"Domitian" (n.d.)	84/85	85/86	86/87	87/88	94/95	97/98	"Trajan" (n.d.)
Herakles + Nike																								
Herakles																								
Dioscouri																								
Egyptianizing deity (bust)																								
Egyptianizing deity (full length, no lions)																								
Egyptianizing deity (full length, with lions)																								
Egyptianizing temple, w/ Phanebal inside																								
Egyptianizing Temple																								
Phanebal, labeled																								
Phanebal, not smiting																								
Armored Phanebal		×					×		×	×		×						×		×		×		×
Nude Phanebal		(×)																						
Poseidon (himation)																								
Poseidon (foot on prow)																								
Poseidon (foot on rock)																								
Winged Caduceus + Cornucopiae																								
Caduceus																								
Derceto																								
Aphrodite (head on obv)																								
(Tyche & Derceto shaking hands)																								
Tyche on prow w/ altar	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×			×
Tyche on prow																								
Tyche standing																								
Tyche Bust (Rev & Obv)											×	×	×						×			×	×	×
Bearded Man (Obv)																								
Dove (alone on rev or obv)																								

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	99/100	104/105	105/106	106/107	107/108	109/110	110/111	111/112	112/113	113/114	116/117	"Hadrian" (n.d.)	117/118	118/119	119/120	120/121	121/122	122/123	131/132	132/133	133/134	137/138	"Antoninus Pius" (n.d.)
Herakles + Nike																							
Herakles																							
Dioscouri																							×
Egyptianizing deity (bust)																							
Egyptianizing deity (full length, no lions)																							
Egyptianizing deity (full length, with lions)																							×
Egyptianizing temple, w/ Phanebal inside																							
Egyptianizing Temple																							×
Phanebal, labeled											×									×			
Phanebal, not smiting																							
Armored Phanebal	×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×		×	×	×	×	×	×			×	×			×
Nude Phanebal																							
Poseidon (himation)																							×
Poseidon (foot on prow)																							
Poseidon (foot on rock)																							×
Winged Caduceus + Cornucopiae																							
Caduceus																							
Derceto																							×
Aphrodite (head on obv)																							
(Tyche & Derceto shaking hands)																							
Tyche on prow w/ altar			×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		×
Tyche on prow																							
Tyche standing																							×
Tyche Bust (Rev & Obv)		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		×	×					×	×		×	×
Bearded Man (Obv)																							
Dove (alone on rev or obv)																							

	141/142	142/143	143/144	146/147	149/150	150/151	151/152	152/153	154/155	155/156	156/157	157/158	158/159	159/160	"Marcus Aurelius" (n.d.)	177/178	178/179	"Commodus" (n.d.)	180/181	"Septimius Severus" (n.d.)	197/198	198/199
Herakles + Nike																		×				
Herakles																						
Dioscouri											×		×				×	×			×	
Egyptianizing deity (bust)																						
Egyptianizing deity (full length, no lions)																	×					
Egyptianizing deity (full length, with lions)				×			×	×			×		×									
Egyptianizing temple, w/ Phanebal inside																						
Egyptianizing Temple						×	×											(×)		×	×	×
Phanebal, labeled			×																			
Phanebal, not smiting																						
Armored Phanebal							×				×		×	×								
Nude Phanebal																						
Poseidon (himation)							×														×	
Poseidon (foot on prow)												×					×					
Poseidon (foot on rock)							×			×	×		×	×					×			
Winged Caduceus + Cornucopiae																						
Caduceus																						
Derceto				×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×								×	
Aphrodite (head on obv)																						
(Tyche & Derceto shaking hands)							(×)															
Tyche on prow w/ altar	×																					
Tyche on prow	×										×	×	×	×								×
Tyche standing							×										×					×
Tyche Bust (Rev & Obv)	×	×	×				×															
Bearded Man (Obv)																						
Dove (alone on rev or obv)																						

	199/200	200/201	205/206	217/218 (Macrinus)	217/218 (Diadumenian)	"Elagabalus" (n.d.)	217/218	218/219	"Severus Alexander" (n.d.)	222/223	224/225	226/227	227/228	230/231	234/235	"Maximinus" (n.d.)	Dated issues catalogued
Herakles + Nike			×				×							×	×		5
Herakles					×										×		2
Dioscouri		×															6
Egyptianizing deity (bust)					×		×							×	×	×	4
Egyptianizing deity (full length, no lions)												×					2
Egyptianizing deity (full length, with lions)			×	×			×	×					×		×		10
Egyptianizing temple, w/ Phanebal inside	×	×															1
Egyptianizing Temple			×	×	×	×	×	×									*11
Phanebal, labeled																	3
Phanebal, not smiting							×	×					×				3
Armored Phanebal														×			29
Nude Phanebal																	*2
Poseidon (himation)				×	×			×						×	×		7
Poseidon (foot on prow)																	2
Poseidon (foot on rock)																	5
Winged Caduceus + Cornucopiae																	1
Caduceus																	2
Derceto				×	×	×	×	×	×			×					16
Aphrodite (head on obv)																	3
(Tyche & Derceto shaking hands)																	*1
Tyche on prow w/ altar																	35
Tyche on prow																	14
Tyche standing				×													6
Tyche Bust (Rev & Obv)																	32
Bearded Man (Obv)																	6
Dove (alone on rev or obv)										×	×				×		6

*=number includes one or more issues of questionable design or date
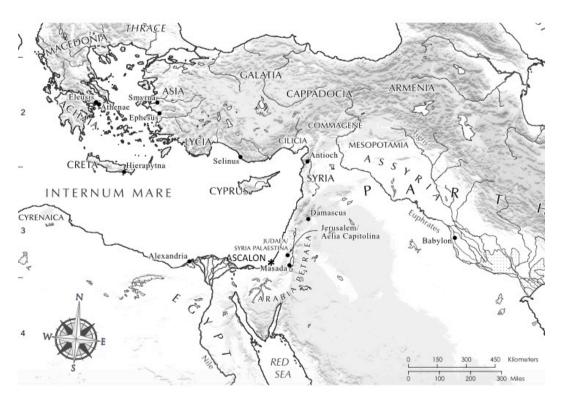
FIGURES

FIGURE 1.1. Map of Ascalon and its region (IMAGE: *Ancient World Mapping Center* "Eastern Expansion of the Roman Empire in the Second Century A.D.")

FIGURE 1.2.   Aerial view of the tel at Ascalon, looking north. (IMAGE: Stager et al. 2008, Fig 1.3).

A.   B.

FIGURE 2.1. Philisto-Arabian silver obols, attributed to Ascalon, 5th-mid-4th century BCE.
Obv: Athena, wearing helmet. Rev: Owl, standing, with head facing. (IMAGES: A- Meshorer
et al. 2013, n.3; B- Gitler 2008, n.1.)

FIGURE 2.2. Silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy IV, 218 BCE. Obv: Jugate busts of Isis and
Serapis, facing right. Rev: Eagle looking back, standing over a thunderbolt. Cornucopia above.
Reverse inscriptions: ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ; ΑΣ (ethnic); date=218 BCE. (IMAGE:
Meshorer et al. 2013, n.4).

FIGURE 2.3. Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII, 122/1 BCE. Obv: Jugate busts of Cleopatra
Thea and Antiochus VIII. Rev: Eagle looking back, standing over a thunderbolt. Palm branch
above. Reverse inscriptions: ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ/ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ/ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ/ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ; ΑΣ
(ethnic) left, with dove above; date=122/1 BCE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.11).

FIGURE 2.4. Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus VIII, 99/8 BCE (local era). Obv: Bust of Antiochus VIII, with diadem. Rev: Eagle looking back, standing over a thunderbolt. Palm branch above. Reverse inscriptions: ΑΣΚΑΛΩΝΙΤΩΝ ΙΕΡΑΣ ΑΣΥ ΑΥΤΟ; to left, dove and monogram; ocal era date=99/8 BCE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.28).

FIGURE 2.5. Square lead weight, attribued to Ascalon, 122/1 BCE. Obv: Raised border with impressed net pattern and Greek inscription ("Year 191, Nicander being agoranomos"). Rev (not pictured): undecorated. (IMAGE: *CIJP* III, n.2358).
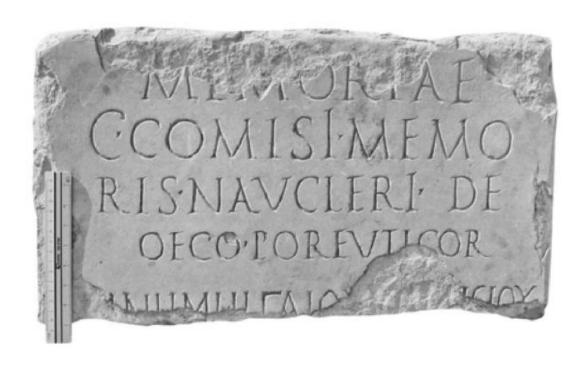
FIGURE 2.6. Bilingual Latin and Greek marble funerary inscription of Gaius Comisius Memor. Latin text fully preserved: "Memoriae | G(a) Comisi(i) Memo|ris naucleri de | oeco poreuticor(um) |." Greek text partially preserved: "ΜΝΗΜΗΙ ΓΑΙΟΥ ΚΟΜΙΣΙΟΥ." Translation: "To the memory of Gaius Comisius Memor, a shipowener in the guild for regular port of goods." (IMAGE: *CIJP* III, n.2342).

FIGURE 2.7. Greek limestone dedicatory inscription for Tiberius Iulius Mikkion from the bouleuterion at Ascalon, first century CE. Greek inscription: "ΗΒΟΥΛΗΚΑΙ | ΟΔΗΜΟΣ | ΤΙΒΕΡΙΟΝΙΟΥΛΙΟΝ | ΜΙΚΚΙΩΝΑΤΟΝΕΑ | ΤΩΝΠΟΛΕΙΤΗΝ | ΕΥΝΟΙΑΣΕΝΕΚΑ." Translation: "The boule and demos honor Tiberius Julius Mikkion, their own citizen, for his goodwill (towards the city)." (IMAGE: *CIJP* III, n.2336).

FIGURE 2.8. Marble dedicatory inscription for Aulus Instuleius Tenax, first century CE. Greek inscription: "ΗΒΟΥΛΗΙ | ΚΑΙΟΔΗΜΟΣΩΛΟΝ | ΙΝΣΤΟΛΗΙΟΝΤΕΝΑΚΑ | ΕΚΑΤΟΝΤΑΡΧΗΝ | ΛΕΓΙΩΝΟΣΔΕΚΑΤΗΣ | ΦΠΕΤΗΝΣΙΑΣΕΥΝΟΙΑΣ | ΕΝΕΚΑ". Translation: "The boule and demos honor Aulus Instuleius Tenax, a centurion of the tenth legion Fretensis, for his goodwill (towards the city)." (IMAGE: *CIJP* III, n.2335).

FIGURE 3.1. Local bronze coin of Ascalon. Obv: Antoninus Pius, laureate. Greek inscription: ΑΝωΝΙΝΟΣ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ. Rev: Derceto, with a crescent diadem, holding a scepter and dove. The goddess stands on a Triton, who holds a cornucopia. Greek inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛωΝ ΓΝΣ. (IMAGE: *RPC* IV, n.6274).

FIGURE 3.2. Local bronze coin of Ascalon, undated by likely first century BCE. Obv: Tyche, with turreted crown and veil. Rev: Galley, with aphlaston. Greek inscription: ΑΣ (ethnic), above galley. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.39).

a.

b.

c.

FIGURE 3.3. Reverse designs of three local bronze coins of Ascalon depicting Poseidon.

A-Poseidon standing, wearing a himation, holding trident and dolphin; 151/2 CE ; Greek
inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩ. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.142).

B-Poseidon standing with one foot on a rock, holding a dolphin and trident; 151/2 CE; Greek
inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩΝ. (IMAGE: RPC IV, n.9064).

C-Poseidon standing with one foot on a galley, holding a dolphin and trident; 158/9 CE; Greek
inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩΝ. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.167).

FIGURE 3.4. Local bronze coin of Ascalon depicting Phanebalos. Obv: Laureate bust of Domitian. Greek inscription: ΣΕΒΑΣ. Rev: Phanebalos in military dress, holding a harpe sword aloft, circular shield and palm branch. Greek inscription: ΑΣ (ethnic); date=94/5 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.85).

FIGURE 3.5. Local bronze coin of Ascalon with Egyptianizing temple. Obv: Laureate bust of Septimius Severus. Greek inscription: AV KA Σ ΣEOVHP[...]ΣEB. Rev: Temple with Egyptian columns and multiple doorways (?). Greek inscription: ΑΣΚ (left), ΑΛΩ(right); date=197/8 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.173).

FIGURE 3.6. Local bronze coin of Ascalon with Egyptianizing deity. Obv: Macrinus, laureate, with cuirass. Greek inscription: ΑΥΤ Κ Μ ΟΠ ΣΕ ΜΑΚΡΙΝΟΣ ΣΕΒ. Rev: Deity standing on three lions, wearing an atef crown, holding flail, raising hand. Greek inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩ(right); date=217/8 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.180).

FIGURE 3.7. Local bronze coin of Ascalon with the Dioscouri. Obv: Faustina II. Greek inscription: ΦΑΟΥΣΤΕΙΝΑ ΑΥΓΟΥΣΤΑ. Rev: Dioscouri, facing outward, with stars over their heads and a crescent moon in between. The gods wear military dress, holding spears and swords. (IMAGE: *RPC* IV, n.6394).
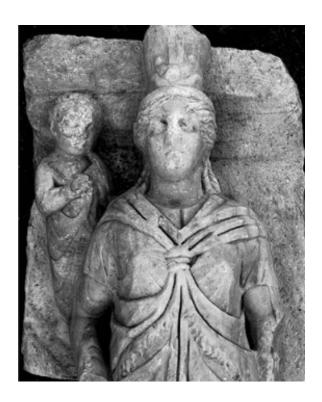
FIGURE 3.8. Marble sculpted pilaster decorated with Isis from the Severan bouleuterion at Ascalon. Accompanied by a smaller figure, perhaps Horus-Harpocrates, or a priest of Serapis. (IMAGE: Boehm, Master and Le Blanc 2016, fig.26).

FIGURE 3.9. Marble architectural fragment with sculpted decoration from Ascalon, late second-early third century CE. Depicts Pan inside a cave, with vegetation and a seated figure outside. (IMAGE: Iliffe 1934, fig. 3).

FIGURE 3.10. Local bronze coin of Ascalon. Obv: Laureate bust of Severus Alexander, in cuirass. Greek inscription: Α ΚΑ Μ ΑΥ ΣΕΥΗ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ. Rev: Herakles standing, holding a Victory out in one palm, with a club in the other hand. Greek inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩ; date=230/1 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.198).

FIGURE 3.11. Drawing of a cuirassed statue and modius discovered during the excavations of Lady Hester Stanhope in the 19th century at Ascalon. (IMAGE: Meryon 1846, 162).

FIGURE 4.1. Local bronze coin of Ascalon depicting Aphrodite, undated but probably first century BCE. Obv: Aphrodite, wearing a stephane, with a scepter at the left. Rev: Dove, facing left. Greek inscription: ΑΣ (ethnic). (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.27).

FIGURE 4.2. Marble Crouching Aphrodite statue from the first century BCE/CE bouleuterion at Ascalon. View of the front. (IMAGE: Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Reg. IAA S.896).

FIGURE 4.3. Silver "autonomous" tetradrachm , minted at Ascalon. Obv: Male head with diadem and chlamys. Rev: Eagle standing over a thunderbolt. Palm branch above. Reverse inscriptions: ΑΣΚΑΛΩΝΙ]ΤΩΝ ΑΣΥΛΟΥΑΥ[Τ] ΙΕΡΑΣ; to left, dove; below eagle, mongram with triangle topped with a horizontal bar and circule; local era date=64/3 BCE. (IMAGE: Gitler and Master 2010, n.81).

FIGURE 4.4. Bronze figurine of an armed goddess from Italy, identified as Aphrodite. (IMAGE: Tarquinia Archaeological Museum).

FIGURE 4.5. Marble statue of Aphrodite with arms from Epidauros. Roman copy of Greek original from c.380 BCE. (IMAGE: Athens, National Archaeological Museum).

FIGURE 4.6. Marble statue of Aphrodite arming from Cyprus. Roman. (IMAGE: Pafos District Museum, FR 67/73).

FIGURE 4.7. The Gelon Gem, depicting Aphrodite with arms, c.200 BCE. (IMAGE: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 21.1.1213).

FIGURE 4.8. Cylinder seal from Beth-Shean. To left, a god in a smiting pose (Baal or Reshef), to the right, Astarte spear. Between the figures is the name "Astarte" in hieroglyphics. (IMAGE: Cornelius 2004, N.1.10).

FIGURE 4.9. Lower register of Nineteenth Dynasty limestone stele of Qeh, found at Deir el-Medina, depicting the worship of Anat, who is seated and brandishing a mace and shield (at right). (IMAGE: British Museum, EA191).

FIGURE 4.10. Roman silver denarius of Octavian, 32-29 BCE. Obv: Octavian, facing right. Rev: Venus, draped around the hips, holding a long scepter and helmet. To the left, a circular shield with a star decoration or boss leans against a column. Latin inscription: CA DIVI F. (IMAGE: *RIC* I, 250a).

FIGURE 4.11. Local bronze coin of Ascalon. Obv: Laureate bust of Domitian. Greek inscription: ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ. Rev: Tyche Astarte, facing left, wearing a turreted crown, holding a long scepter and aphlaston, and standing on the prow of a galley. To the right, a small dove; at left, a small altar. Greek inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩ; date=84/5 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.79).

a.

b.

c.

FIGURE 4.12. Obverse designs of local Ascalonian coins with Greek legends.

A-Seleucid silver tetradrachm. Obv: Antiochus VIII, with diadem. Rev: Eagle standing on thunderbolt, with palm branch behind; to left, a dove; below, an aphlaston. Greek inscriptions: Above eagle: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ. Below eagle: ΑΣ ΙΕΡ ΑΣΥ; date=107/8 BCE (Seleucid era). (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.16).

B-Local bronze coin, undated. Obv: Laureate male head. Rev: Galley prow, with dove above. Greek inscriptions: ΑΣΚΑΛΩΝΙΤΩΝ ΔΗΜΟΥ; below prow, perhaps ΙΕΡΑΣ or date. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.19).

C-"Autonomous" silver tetradrachm. Obv: Antiochus VIII, wearing diadem. Obv: Eagle standing on thunderbolt, with palm branch behind; to left, a dove. Greek inscriptions: ΑΣΚΑΛΩΝΙΩΝ ΙΕΡΑΣ ΑΣΥ ΑΥΤΟ; date=65/4 BCE (local era). (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.31).

FIGURE 4.13. Local bronze coin of Ascalon. Obv: Laureate bust of Antoninus Pius. Greek inscription: ΑΝΤΩΝΙΝΟΣ. Rev: Tyche Astarte standing, wearing turreted crown, holding long scepter and aphlaston; to right, dove. Greek inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩ; date=151/2 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.148).

FIGURE 4.14. Obverse designs of local bronze coins of Ascalon, Augustan. Obv: Bust of Augustus, laureate. Rev: Nude figure, facing left, wearing helmet, holding a sword and circular shield. Greek inscription: ΑΣ. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.51-52).

a.

b.

c.

FIGURE 4.15. Reverse of bronze coins of Ascalon with Phanebalos.

A-Obv: Laureate bust of Domitian. Greek inscription: ΣΕ. Rev: Phanebal in short military dress, holding *harpe* loft, with circular shield and palm branch behind; date 85/6 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.82).

B-Obv: Laureate head of Trajan. Greek inscription: ΣΕΒΑ. Rev: Phanebal in long military dress, holding *harpe* aloft, with circular shield and palm branch behind; date=106/7 CE.

C- Obv: Laureate head of Trajan. Greek inscription: ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ. Rev: Phanebal in short military dress, holding *harpe* aloft, with circular shield and palm branch behind. Greek inscription: ΑΣΚΑ; date=111/2 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.106).

FIGURE 4.16. Local bronze coin of Ascalon. Obv: Laureate bust of Elagabalus, with cuirass. Greek inscription: ΣΕ Α Κ Μ ΑΥ ΑΝΩΝΕΙΝΟΣ. Rev: Phanebalos in long chiton, with one hand raised, and a circular shield and short palm branch in the other. Wearing either a soft Phrygian cap or helmet. At bottom left, a thunderbolt bundle. Greek inscription: ΑΣΚΑΛΩ; date=217/8 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.187).

FIGURE 4.17. Jasper gem depicting three gods of Ascalon (Egyptianizing deity, Derceto, and Phanebalos). (IMAGE: Mastrocinque 2011, Fig.4.2).

FIGURE 4.18. Jasper gem depicting Phanebalos and Poseidon from the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris. (IMAGE: Mastrocinque 2011, Fig.4.8a).

FIGURE 4.19. Local bronze coin of Ascalon featuring Phanebalos within a temple. (IMAGE: Meshorer 1985, n.49).

FIGURE 4.20. Local bronze coin of Ascalon. Obv: Laureate head of Hadrian. Greek inscription: ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ. Rev: Phanebalos in long military dress, holding *harpe* aloft, and a circular shield with long palm branch behind. Greek inscription: ΑΣ ΦΑΝΗΒΑΛ (at left); triangular monogram with horizontal bar to left of figure; date=132/3 CE. (IMAGE: *RPC III* n.4017).

FIGURE 4.21. Boeotian black figure bowl decorated with Perseus, holding a *harpe*, feels Medusa, while Athena watches. Late fifth century BCE. (IMAGE: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Accesssion number 01.8070).
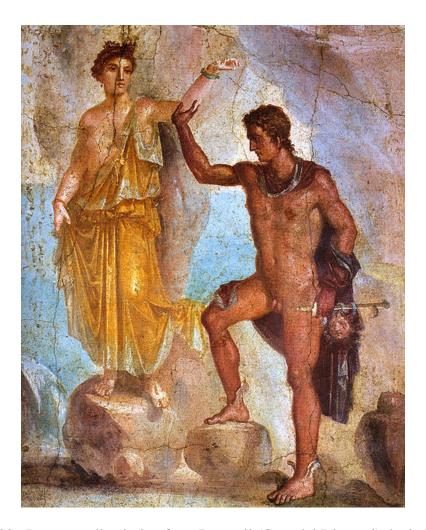
FIGURE 4.22. Roman wall painting from Pompeii (Casa dei Dioscuri) depicting Perseus, holding a *harpe* and Medusa's head, with Andromeda. (IMAGE: Museo archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Inventory number 9889).
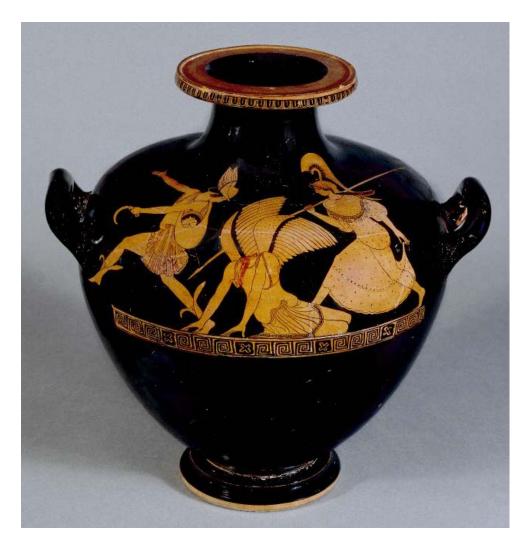
FIGURE 4.23. Athenian red-figure hydria depicting Perseus, with sickle (rather than a *harpe*), fleeing Medusa. (IMAGE: British Museum, Number 1873, 0820, 352).

FIGURE 4.24. Apulian red-figure situla depicting Athena handing the *harpe* to Perseus. (IMAGE: British Museum, London, Museum Number 1836,0224.85).

FIGURE 4.25. Roman wall painting from Pompeii of Venus on a seashell, accompanied by erotes holding. One rides a dolphin and holds a *harpe*. (IMAGE: Etienne 1987, 128).

FIGURE 4.26. Limestone statue of Reshef from Egypt, c.12th-mid-7th c. BCE. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Accession Number 89.2.215).
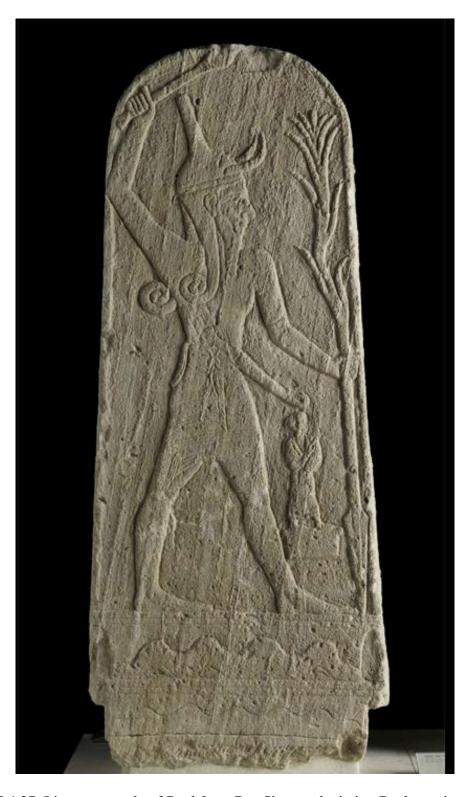
FIGURE 4.27. Limestone stele of Baal from Ras Shamra depicting Baal wearing a horned helmet, holding and club and a plant spear. (The Louvre, Paris).

FIGURE 4.28. Reverse designs of local bronze coin at Ascalon depicting Phanebalos and an elongated palm branch (or plant spear?). Obv: Laureate bust of Antonius Pius (Rev: Phanebalos in long military dress, holding a harpe aloft, and a circular shield with a long palm branch behind. Greek inscription: ΑΣ ΦΑΝΗΒΑΛΟΣ; date=146/7 CE. (IMAGE: *RPC* IV, n.10142).

FIGURE 5.1. Local bronze coin of Joppa. Obv: Laureate bust of Caracalla, 198-217 CE. Rev: Perseus, nude, wearing chlamys, Phrygian cap and winged shoes, holding *harpe* and the head of Medusa. (IMAGE: Meshorer et al. 2013, n.17).

FIGURE 5.2. Reverse of local bronze coin of Akko-Ptolemais. Obv: Perseus, nude, holding the head of Medusa and a harpe. Date=198-217 CE. (IMAGE: Meshorer 2013 et al. 2013, n.172).

FIGURE 5.3. Silver tetradrachm of Demetrius III from Damascus. Obv: Demetrius III, with diadem. Rev: Atargatis, depicted with the legs and torso of a fish, holding grain (barley?) stalks in each hand. Greek inscription: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΔΗΜΤΡΙΟΥ ΞΕΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ; date=91/0 BCE. (IMAGE: Houghton 1988, n.861).

FIGURE 5.4. 2 examples of local bronze coins of Ascalon, perhaps depicting Ascalus or Mopsus. Obv: Bearded male head, no attributes. Rev: Eagle standing over thunderbolt with palm branch behind, and dove to left. Greek inscription: ΑΣ (ethnic); date=31/30 BCE. (IMAGES: A-Meshorer et al. 2013, n.33; B-Meshorer et al. 2013, n.34).

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