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INTRODUCTION

THE Ekron inscription (Fig. 1) was found in the summer of 1996 during the final season of the current phase of excavations at Tel Miqne–Ekron (grid. ref. 135–136 131–132).[1] The tel, located on the border between the Philistine coastal plain and the low hills of the Judaean Shephelah, lies 3 km. north-east of modern-day Kibbutz Revadim.[2] It was identified as Ekron in 1957 by Joseph Naveh, based on his survey for the Israel Department of Antiquities.[3] Ekron is known from the Bible as one of the five Philistine capital cities and is mentioned in the annals of the Neo-Assyrian kings as one of their vassal city-states.[4]

1 The incisions on the stone were first noted on 2 July by Steven M. Ortiz, the field archaeologist in charge of Field IV. Figs. 1, 2 and 4 were photographed by I. Sztulman and E. Kessel; Figs. 5, 7 and 8 by Z. Radovan. Fig. 3 was drawn by J. Rosenberg; and Fig. 6 by A. Yardeni.

2 For the significance of its location as a border site, see S. Gitin: Tel Miqne-Ekron: A Type-Site for the Inner Coastal Plain in the Iron Age II Period, in S. Gitin and W.G. Dever (eds.): *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology* (*AASOR* XLIX), New Haven, 1989, pp. 23–58.

3 J. Naveh: Khirbet al-Muqanna' — Ekron, *IEJ* 8 (1958), pp. 87–100, 165–170; S. Gitin and T. Dothan: The Rise and Fall of Ekron of the Philistines, *BA* 50 (1987), p. 198.

4 Gitin (above, n. 2), pp. 41–46.

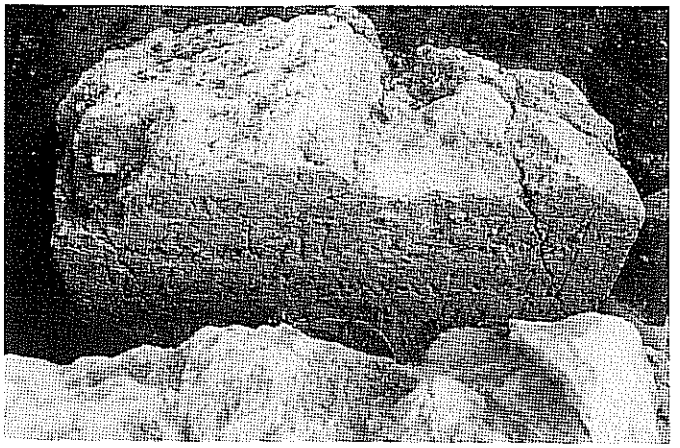

Fig. 1. Ekron inscription *in situ* (see Figs. 5, 6 on p. 10).

There have been thirteen seasons of excavation since 1981, directed by Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin and sponsored by the W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. These have shown that Tel Miqne–Ekron had nine main periods of occupation from the Middle Bronze Age II through the Iron Age II, *c.* 1700–600 B.C.E.[5] During the Iron Age, the period on which the project's research focuses, Ekron had three distinct cities. The first, a major Philistine urban centre (Strata VII–IV; twelfth–eleventh/tenth centuries), occupied the fifty acres of the upper and lower tels. This city produced evidence of a material culture that exhibits Aegaean traditions in its early stages and was later influenced by neighbouring societies.[6] Following the destruction of the first city, a smaller second city (Strata III–II; early tenth–eighth centuries) occupied only the 10 acres of the upper tel, producing evidence of a material culture that combined new local Philistine coastal plain traditions with pronounced Judaean and Phoenician

5 For the most recent summary of the results of the excavations, see T. Dothan and S. Gitin: Miqne, in *NEAEHL* 1, pp. 249–253.

6 T. Dothan: Tel Miqne-Ekron: The Aegean Affinities of the Sea Peoples' (Philistines') Settlement in Canaan in Iron Age I, in S. Gitin (ed.): *Recent Excavations in Israel: A View to the West* (*Archaeological Institute of America Colloquia and Conference Papers* I), Dubuque, Iowa, 1995, pp. 41–59.

influences.[7] The third city (Strata IC–IB; seventh century) occupied an extended area of more than 85 acres on the upper and lower tels. This city had a highly acculturated society and, under the economic impact of the Neo-Assyrian empire, developed the largest olive-oil production centre yet uncovered in the ancient world.[8] It was in this last city of Ekron, in the destruction debris of the sanctuary of Temple Complex 650, that the inscription was found.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT: TEMPLE COMPLEX 650

Temple Complex 650, located in the elite zone in the centre of the lower tel (Field IV), is a monumental structure (57 × 38 m.), one of the largest buildings of its kind ever to have been excavated in Israel or Jordan (Figs. 2, 3).[9] Its architectural plan — based on the design concept of Neo-Assyrian royal palaces, residences and temples known from the heartland of Assyria, its provinces and vassal kingdoms — had two primary elements.[10] The first was the courtyard (Fig. 3: j), around which a number of rooms (Fig. 3: c–i) was grouped. The courtyard entrance—the main entry to the building — had a threshold with a pair of door-post sockets for heavy double doors (Fig. 3: a). The second element was the great hall: the throne room or reception hall (Fig. 3: m). Long, narrow and rectangular, it was

7 S. Gitin: Philistia in Transition: The Tenth Century and Beyond, in S. Gitin, A. Mazar and E. Stern (eds.): *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries B.C.E.*, Jerusalem (in press).

8 S. Gitin: Tel Miqne in the 7th Century BCE: The Impact of Economic Innovation and Foreign Cultural Influences on a Neo-Assyrian Vassal City State, in Gitin (above, n. 6), pp. 61–79; *idem*, The Neo-Assyrian Empire and its Western Periphery: The Levant, with a Focus on Philistine Ekron, in S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting (eds.): *State Archives of Assyria* VI, Helsinki (in press). For another view on the effect of the process of acculturation, see B. Stone: The Philistines and Acculturation: Culture, Change and Ethnic Continuity in the Iron Age, *BASOR* 298 (1995), pp. 22–25.

9 Cf. corpus of monumental Assyrian royal buildings, R. Reich: Palaces and Residences in the Iron Age, in A. Kempinski and R. Reich (eds.): *The Architecture of Ancient Israel*, Jerusalem, 1992, pp. 214–222.

10 For an analysis of this design concept as expressed in Assyria at Khorsabad, see G. Loud: An Architectural Formula for Assyrian Planning, *Revue d'Assyriologie* (1936), pp. 153–160; G. Loud and C.B. Altman: *Khorsabad II*, Chicago, 1938, pp. 10–13; at Nineveh and Nimrud, see M. Roaf: The Diffusion of the 'Salles à quatre saillants', *Iraq* 35 (1973), pp. 83–91. For a discussion of examples from Assyrian provinces and vassal kingdoms, see G. Turner: The Palace and Bâtiment aux Ivoires at Arslan Tash: A Reappraisal, *Iraq* 30 (1968), pp. 62–68; G. Bunnens: Ahmar (Til Barsip), in H. Weiss (ed.): Archaeology in Syria Newsletter, *AJA* 98 (1994), pp. 149–151; R. Reich: The Persian Building at Ayyelet ha-Shaḥar: The Assyrian Palace of Hazor? *IEJ* 25 (1975), pp. 233–237; *idem* (above, n. 9).

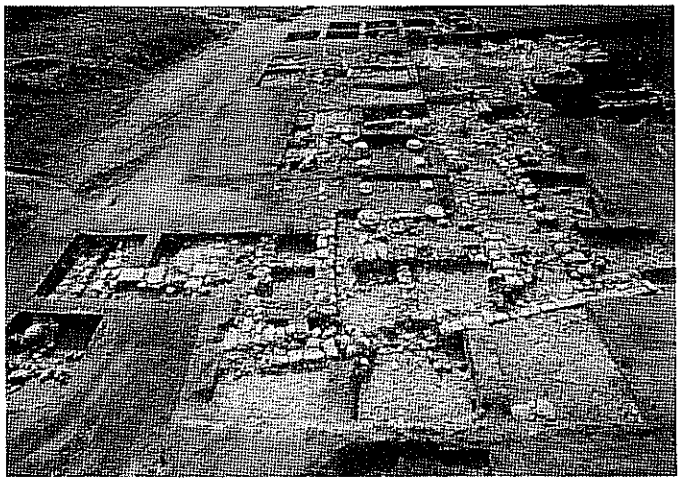

Fig. 2. Tel Miqne-Ekron: Temple Complex 650 (view to the east). In centre: columned hall sanctuary.

the largest room in the building. At its southern end, to the left of the entrance from the courtyard, a separate room (Fig. 3: k) contained a raised mudbrick platform or throne, with steps leading up to it. Although in most Neo-Assyrian-type monumental buildings, such a reception hall usually served as a buffer separating two large courtyards,[11] in Temple Complex 650 it separated the courtyard from a large cultic area, at the centre of which there was a sanctuary.[12]

The sanctuary (Fig. 3: u; Fig. 4), which had a hall with two parallel rows of four column bases[13] each, was rectangular in shape and was built on an east–west axis. Its main entrance, which was from the great hall, had a stepped-stone threshold

11 G. Turner: The State Apartments of Late Assyrian Palaces, *Iraq* 32 (1970), pp. 178–213.

12 For what may be the only other example of such an Assyrian-type building with a cultic component in Israel, at Tell Abu Salima, see R. Reich: The Identification of the 'Sealed *karu* of Egypt', *IEJ* 34 (1984), pp. 32–38; *idem* (above, n. 9), pp. 221–222; and in Jordan, at Buseirah, *ibid.*, pp. 219–220.

13 For discussion of columned halls, see M. Roaf: Media and Mesopotamia: History and Architecture, in J. Curtis (ed.): *Later Mesopotamia and Iran, Tribes and Empire 1600–539 BC*, London, 1995, pp. 63–66; for columned temples, see R.H. Dyson, Jr.: The Iron Age Architecture at Hasanlu: An Essay, *Expedition* 31 (1989), pp. 115–119.

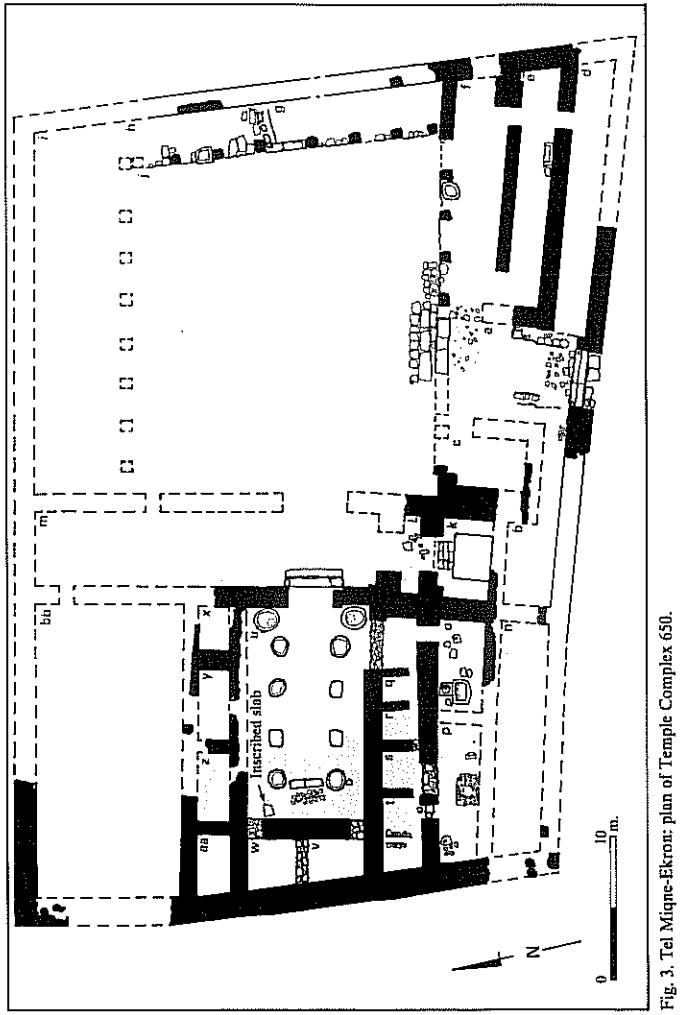

Fig. 3. Tel Miqne-Ekron: plan of Temple Complex 650.

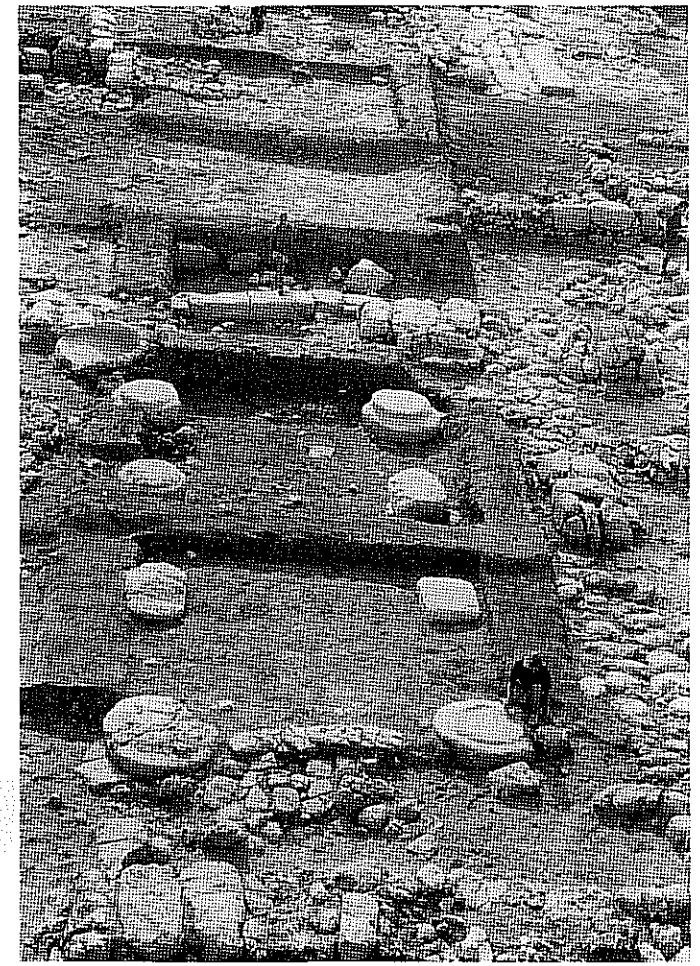

Fig. 4. Columned hall sanctuary in Temple Complex 650 (view to the east). Lower centre: stone-paved cella where inscription was found.

similar to the one of the main entrance to the building, but without the door sockets. Immediately inside the sanctuary, flanking the entrance, there were two large stone vats, possibly used for ritual ablutions. At the western end of the sanctuary, opposite the entrance, there was a raised stone threshold and a partially stone-paved cella. The find-spot, shape, size and condition of the inscription stone (Object No. 7310) strongly suggest that it had originally been part of the western wall of the sanctuary — and perhaps its focal point. It was found upside-down in the north-west corner of the cella, *c.* 20 cm. from the cella's western wall, with the inscription facing the wall (Fig. 1, above, p. 2; note bowl, centre, and other vessel, right — part of Stratum IB destruction debris). The rectangular limestone block (*c.* 100 kg; 60 × 39 × 26 cm.) is similar to those used in the construction of monumental buildings at Ekron during the Iron Age II.[14] Its front, top and two sides are smooth-finished; its roughly-finished back and bottom are partially broken. The body of a bell-shaped cultic figurine was found next to the inscription stone, to its south.[15]

Although the sanctuary's main hall produced no special finds, a large stone block incised with graffiti and a rosette, which appears to have fallen from the south wall of the building, was found just inside the main entrance to the sanctuary. Silver and gold earrings were found at the side entrance on the south. The cella, however, in addition to the inscription and cultic figurine, produced ceramic vessels and a bronze sceptre, as well as iron and ivory objects. Two of the sanctuary's side rooms contained installations which may be cult-related. Room p contained a pebbled platform, a stone with a double sump and a huge multi-handled krater with rope moulding, in addition to a ceramic statuette with a baboon figure and hundreds of restorable ovoid storage jars.[16] Room o contained an olive-oil installation with a crushing basin, a press, one perforated stone weight and the partial remains of a burnt wooden beam/lever. This is the only example of an olive-oil installation found *in situ* outside the industrial zone at Ekron; it may have been used to produce oil for ritual ceremonies.[17] In addition, Room o and the two auxiliary rooms behind the cella (v and w) contained hundreds of whole and restorable ceramic vessels, gold, silver and bronze objects, and a large number of ivory fragments. The largest concentration of ivory was in Rooms v and w, including, *inter alia*, an ivory female figurine and an ivory knob with the cartouche of Ramses VIII in Room w and an ivory cylinder seal with an Egyptian horus motif in Room v. In addition, a carved ivory statuette head, the largest object of its kind found to date in Israel, an ivory wheel with a bronze stem, and an ivory tusk, probably a body of a statuette, were found in Room p. Other

14 Gitin (above, n. 2), p. 25, Fig. 2.1.
15 Its head was found at the entrance to the sanctuary.
16 Installations IVNW L.76012, L.76017 and L.76005.
17 Installation IVNW L.60003.

unique finds included a 23 cm. long Egyptian gold cobra, a uraeus, in Room q,[18] and a Ptah-patecus amulet in Room y.[19]

Temple Complex 650 also contained other special finds. The great hall near the entrance to the sanctuary (Fig. 3: m) produced heavily burnt remains of a unique carved ivory tusk of a large male figure with a relief of a princess or goddess on its side and a cartouche of Mernephtah on its back. Room k yielded a platform and Assyrian- and Phoenician-type vessels, votive vessels, small bowls with burnt bones, a ceramic figurine, a silver bracelet and an Egyptian-style wig fabricated from chalk plaster. Rooms g and h contained hundreds of restorable ridged-rim holemouth storage jars. The Egyptian objects from Temple Complex 650, including, *inter alia*, the ivories, cobra and wig, which most likely were curated, belong to the final phase of the city, when Egypt controlled Philistia.[20]

Most of Temple Complex 650, like other areas of the Stratum IB city, was covered by a massive destruction debris which marked the end of the last city of Philistine Ekron. The *terminus ante quem* for the destruction of Stratum IB is provided by the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to Philistia in 603 B.C.E. The *terminus post quem* of 700 B.C.E. for the founding of this city, marking the beginning of Stratum IC, is based on the historical documents which describe the establishment of Assyrian control over Philistia, including Ekron, during Sennacherib's 701 B.C.E. campaign. The division between Stratum IC and Stratum IB is dated to *c.* 630–623 B.C.E., when Assyria withdrew from the Levant and Egypt established hegemony over Philistia.[21] As for Temple Complex 650, a closer dating within the seventh century B.C.E. may be provided by the newly discovered Ekron inscription.

THE INSCRIPTION

The inscription from Ekron is complete and is composed of five lines, containing 72 letters. Incised dots serve as word dividers, except between the words שר עקרן, a

18 Unsigned report, Prize Find: Golden Cobra from Ekron's Last Days, in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22/1 (1996), p. 28.

19 See S. Gitin: New Philistine Finds at Tel Miqne-Ekron, *BA* 59 (1996), p. 70.

20 For the heirloom phenomenon, see Dyson (above, n. 13), p. 123; for curated Egyptian objects from the sixteenth to ninth centuries B.C.E. appearing in the eighth-/seventh-century Phoenician context in Spain, see M.E. Aubet: *The Phoenicians and the West*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 175.

21 Gitin (above, n. 2), pp. 43–48. Note that the post-destruction Stratum IA was of short duration, extending into the sixth century B.C.E., *ibid.*, p. 48. For an alternative *terminus ante quem* of 601 B.C.E., see N. Na'aman: Nebuchadrezzar's Campaign in Year 603 B.C.E., *Biblische Notizen* 62 (1992), pp. 41–44; for the 623 B.C.E. date of the Assyrian withdrawal from the Levant, see *idem*, The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah, *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991), pp. 34–41, and *idem*, Chronology and History in the Late Assyrian Empire (631–619 BCE), *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 81 (1991), pp. 243–267.

construct compound. The inscription is enclosed by an incised border, except at the bottom, where the line is broken. The lines of text are separated by a horizontal incised line. The inscription reads as follows (Figs. 5, 6):[22]

1. בת.בן.אכיש.בן.פדי.בן.
2. יסד.בן.אדא.בן.יער.שר עק
3. רן.לפתגיה.אדתה.תברכה.ות
4. שמן[ר]ה.ותארך.ימה.ותברך.
5. [א]רצה[23]

Translation

1. The temple (which) he built, *'kyś* son of Padi, son of
2. *Ysd*, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron,
3. for *Ptgyh* his lady. May she bless him, and
4. prote[ct] him, and prolong his days, and bless
5. his [l]and.

This is a dedication of Ikausu son of Padi, both of whom are known from the Assyrian records as kings of Ekron. Padi is mentioned in the annals of Sennacherib, in the context of his third campaign in 701 B.C.E., during which Sennacherib marched against the rebellious kings of Phoenicia and Palestine (*ANET*, pp. 287–288). Padi appears again in a docket recording that in 699 B.C.E. 'Pidi of Anqaruna' delivered a light talent of silver.[24] Ikausu is listed among the twelve kings of the seashore who carried to Nineveh building material for the palace of Esarhaddon, 680–669 B.C.E. (*ANET*, p. 291), and in the list of kings who participated in Ashurbanipal's first campaign to Egypt, in 667 B.C.E. (*ANET*, p. 294).

The names of the forefathers of Ikausu — *Ysd*, Ada,[25] and Ya'ir — appear here for the first time; these Semitic names, as well as Padi, occur in Ugaritic and Phoenician texts.[26] Ikausu is the only non-Semitic name among those of the eighth–

22 Thanks are due to Prof. Israel Eph'al for his valuable remarks and to Dr. Ada Yardeni for the facsimile drawing (Fig. 6) and for discussing the reading of some letters.

23 The *gimmel* of פתגיה and the *ṣade* of [א]רצה are somewhat defective, but their identification is certain.

24 A.R. Millard: The Assyrian Royal Seal Type Again, *Iraq* 27 (1965), p. 16, No. 21; J.N. Postgate: *Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire*, Rome, 1974, p. 21.

25 It seems likely that the final *'alef* of אדא was inserted after the following words had already been inscribed.

26 See F. Gröndahl: *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit* (*Studia Pohl* 1), Rome, 1967, pp. 16, 30, 88–89, 102, 133, 142, 146, 171, 346, 361, 390, 393; F.L. Benz: *Personal Names in Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions* (*Studia Pohl* 8), Rome, 1972, pp. 55, 128, 323–325, 259–260. For Ya'ir, see also 1 Chron. 20:5 and 2 Sam. 21:19.

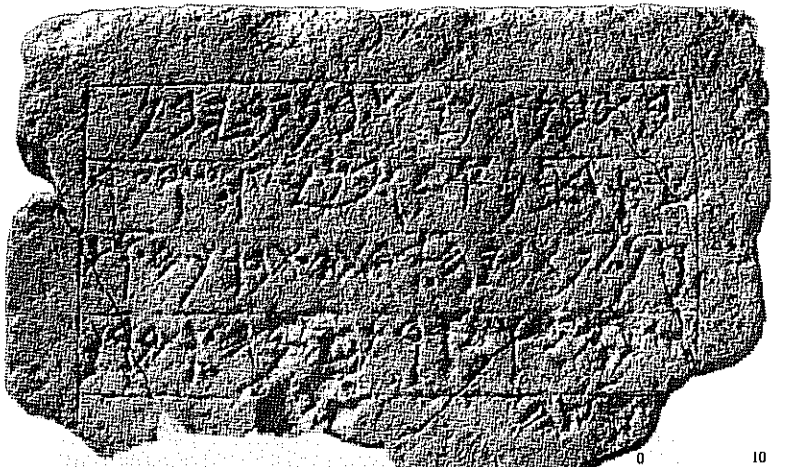

Fig. 5. Ekron inscription.

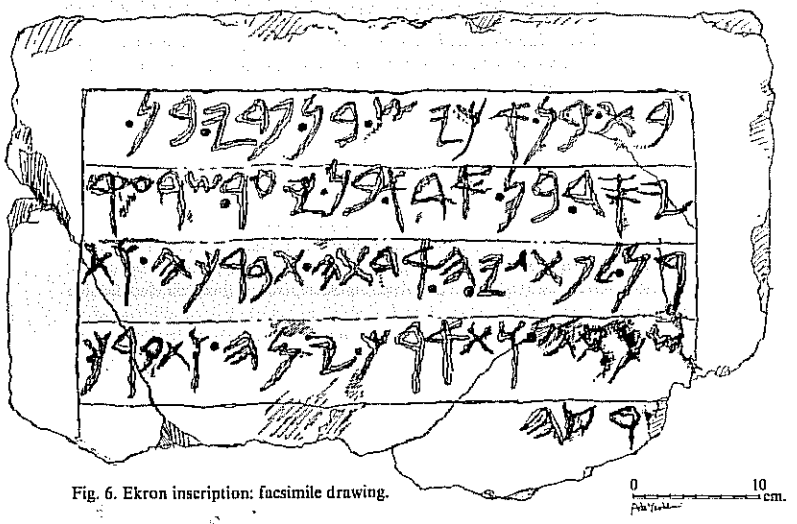

Fig. 6. Ekron inscription: facsimile drawing.

seventh-century B.C.E. Philistine kings mentioned in the Assyrian records. Names ending with *šin* are very common in the seventh-century B.C.E. name-lists appearing on two ostraca from Tell Jemmeh.[27]

The name Ikausu has been generally associated with the name of biblical אָכִישׁ, Achish, the Philistine king(s) of Gath in the times of Saul and of Solomon (1 Sam. 21:11–16; Chapters 27–29; 1 Kings 2:39–40). Our inscription now confirms that in the West-Semitic transcription of the name of the seventh-century B.C.E. king of Ekron, Ikausu was indeed אכיש. It has been argued that biblical אָכִישׁ, Septuagint Ἀγχούς and Ikausu 'can hardly be other than forms of Anchises, the name famous at Troy as that of the father of Aeneas' (Iliad, II, 819; XX, 215).[28] However, the equation Ikausu = אכיש indicates that the vocalization should rather be *Ikayus*, which eventually leads us to *Akhayus*, i.e. Ἀχαιός or 'Achaean', meaning 'Greek'.[29] The assumption that Padi king of Ekron called his son 'Achaean' (or that Ikausu himself adopted the name) may be of great importance in the discussion of the origin of the Philistines.[30]

In the Assyrian records, the title of both Padi and Ikausu is 'king of Ekron'. Why, then, is Akhayus called here שר עקרן, 'the ruler of Ekron'? Is this an expression of the vassal's loyalty to the Assyrian king, or does שר mean 'king' in the Philistine–Canaanite dialect?[31]

פתגיה was surely the name of a goddess of non-Semitic origin, perhaps some unknown Philistine or Indo-European female deity. The *-yh* ending occurs in two, presumably feminine, personal names in one of the two 'Philistine name-lists' from

27 J. Naveh: Writing and Scripts in Seventh-Century BCE Philistia: The New Evidence from Tell Jemmeh, *IEJ* 35 (1985), pp. 11–14.

28 See G.A. Wainwright: Some Early Philistine History, *VT* 9 (1959), p. 77.

29 One may associate the name Ἀχαιός with Yamani ('a Greek'), the usurper in Ashdod at the time of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.; *ANET*, pp. 285, 286), but one should bear in mind that the former was the name of the king and the latter — a nickname. For the personal name Ἀχαιός, see W. Pape and G.E. Benseler: *Wörterbuch der griechischen Eigennamen*, Braunschweig, 1911, p. 184. In the Punic inscription, *CIS*, I, No. 5984, this name was written אכיס. Masoretic אָכִישׁ does not seem to represent the true vocalization of the name of the Philistine king of Gath at the time of Saul and Solomon. One may conjecture that the biblical name אכיש may be a reflection of Akhayus king of Ekron in the seventh century B.C.E.

30 See A. Mazar: The Emergence of the Philistine Material Culture, *IEJ* 35 (1985), pp. 95–107, esp. pp. 105–106; B. Mazar: *Biblical Israel: State and People*, Jerusalem, 1992, pp. 13–14. The Achaean equation is supported by the evidence of strong Aegaean affinities in the material culture of the Early Iron Age city at Ekron; see Dothan (above, n. 6).

31 Cf. Judges 9:6: וילכו וימליכו את אבימלך למלך 'And (the men of Shechem) went and made Abimelech king', as against v. 22: וישר אבימלך על ישראל שלש שנים 'And Abimelech had reigned/ruled three years over Israel'.

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Tell Jemmeh: קסריה and ברציה.[32] Although unknown to us, פתגיה must have been a deity of considerable power to safeguard the well-being of the dynasty and the city. Was she identified with the local Semitic deity Asherah, which appears on a jar inscription from Tel Miqne (see below)?

The formula of the inscription is reminiscent of that of the tenth-century B.C.E. Phoenician inscriptions from Byblos. The opening, בת בנ אכיש בנ פדי, is known from the Yeḥimilk inscription: בת ז בני יחמלך מלך גבל 'The temple which Yeḥimilk king of Byblos built' (*KAI*, No. 4).[33] Since our text has no relative pronoun, one may also translate: 'Akhayus son of Padi ... built (this) temple ...'.

The contraction of the diphthong in בת (*bēt* < *bayt*; although known in Moab and Northern Israel) and mainly the defective spelling of the verb בנ (*bana*) are characteristic of Phoenician. The final *he* in אדתה, תברכה, תשמנ[ר]ה and א[ר]צה, indicating the third person sing. masc. suffix, may stand for *-ihu* or *-ahu*, as in the Old Byblian dialect, or for *-ō*, as in the seventh- and early sixth-century B.C.E. Hebrew inscriptions.

The word אדתה is known from the tenth-century B.C.E. Byblian inscriptions of Elibaal and Shiptibaal (*KAI*, Nos. 6, 7) as אדתו (presumably *pluralis majestatis* + third person sing. suffix, lit. 'his ladies'), and from the seventh-century B.C.E. Phoenician inscription from Ur, which appears on an ivory box dedicated by a female person 'to Astarte her lady' לעשתרת אדתי (*KAI*, No. 29). Although the root שמר is common in Hebrew and occurs in Punic, it is not known in Phoenician.

As for ותארך ימה 'and may she (the goddess) prolong his days', the formula may be compared to the tenth-century Byblian Shiptibaal inscription: תארך בעלת גבל ימת שפטבעל ושנתו על גבל 'May Baalat-Gebal prolong the days and years of Shiptibaal over Byblos' (*KAI*, No. 7). It also occurs in the fifth-century B.C.E. Yeḥawmilk inscription from Byblos: תברך בעלת גבל אית יחומלך מלך גבל ותחוו ותארך ימו ושנתו על גבל 'May Baalat-Gebal bless Yeḥawmilk, king of Byblos, and give life to him and prolong his days and his years over Byblos' (*KAI*, No. 10, ll. 8–9). Thus 'his days' should have been ימו. The spelling ימה, in our inscription presumably representing *yamēhu*, occurs in the Moabite Mesha inscription, line 8.[34]

Even if one assumes that the Ekron dedication follows the defective spelling characteristic of Phoenician, one may surmise that the non-Phoenician proper names in our inscription, such as פדי (in the Assyrian records transliterated 'Padī' or 'Pidī') and פתגיה, the name of the goddess, are written in plene spelling, at least at the end of the words. This phenomenon is well known in the Phoenician inscription of Kilamu from Sam'al (*KAI*, No. 24).

32 See Naveh (above, n. 27), p. 11.

33 *KAI* = H. Donner and W. Röllig: *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* I–III, Wiesbaden, 1962–1964.

34 Since ימה means 'his days', the literal translation of אדתה may be 'his ladies', like that of אדתו.

The script of the Ekron dedication deserves special attention. In 1985, with the publication of three seventh-century B.C.E. ostraca from Tell Jemmeh, contemporary epigraphic finds from Philistine sites were also discussed. It was demonstrated that in the seventh century B.C.E. the Philistines wrote in a script that they adopted from Judah, but into which they introduced local cursive elements. Some of these elements differ among the various Philistine centres; Gaza, therefore, might have developed a cursive writing tradition different from Ashdod or Ashkelon.[35] This assumption seems to be corroborated by later finds. At Tel Haror, a short text inscribed on a jar reads *lhgd*;[36] the *lamed* and *gimmel* are identical in shape with those on the jar inscription *ldggrt* from Ashdod.[37] The script of an ostracon recently found at Ashkelon was termed by Cross 'Hebreo-Philistine to underline its affinities with Hebrew', but eventually labelled 'Neo-Philistine'.[38]

The script of the Ekron dedication does not seem to belong to the cursive Hebreo-Philistine branch. Some letters are clearly Hebrew in shape (mainly *waw* and *taw*), whereas others are reminiscent of Phoenician (*bet*, mainly in the word *tbrkh* in line 3); nonetheless, most of the letters could be either Phoenician or Hebrew. However, since one would expect a more developed Hebrew or Phoenician script in the first half of the seventh century B.C.E., it seems likely that the script belongs neither to the Phoenician nor the Hebrew series, but rather to some peculiar local script.

In 1988, several brief inscriptions were found on store jars from Tel Miqne, in the process of restoring ceramic vessels from the seventh-century destruction of the building immediately south of Temple Complex 650. They read as follows: *šmn* 'oil', *dbl* 'fig-cake', *qdš* 'holy', *l'šrt* 'to Asherat', *lmqm* 'for the shrine' and *qdš lḥq qdš* 'holy according to the prescription of Qudšu'.[39] The script of these jar inscriptions cannot be classified as Phoenician, Hebrew, or (cursive) Hebreo-Philistine, but may be the same as that of the Ekron dedication. If so, one wonders whether this script is the lapidary style developed at Ekron.

We may also have a representative of the cursive Hebreo-Philistine script used at Ekron: an inscription inscribed on the rim of a bowl before firing, reading *bn'nt* 'Ben'anat' (Fig. 7).[40] Here the *bet* and *'ayin* are open at their heads and the *taw* is not Hebrew; however, the curved downstrokes of *bet* and *nun* are reminiscent

35 Naveh (above, n. 27), pp. 8–21.

36 E.D. Oren *et al.*: Tell Haror — After Six Seasons, *Qadmoniot* 24 (1991), p. 18 (Hebrew).

37 Naveh (above, n. 27), pp. 16–17, Pl. 2:D.

38 F.M. Cross: A Philistine Ostracon from Ashkelon, *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22/1 (1996), pp. 64–65.

39 S. Gitin: Seventh Century B.C.E. Cultic Elements at Ekron, *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990*, Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 248–258. The reading and translation of קדש לחק קדש are by Cross, in Gitin, *ibid.*, p. 256, n. 24.

40 A surface find (1990), Field I, upper tell.

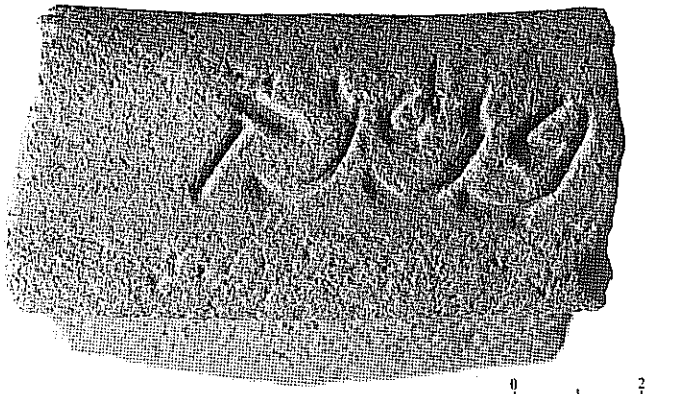

Fig. 7. *bn'nt* inscription from Ekron: cursive Hebreo-Philistine script.

of the Hebrew script. The script of the Ben'anat inscription seems to represent the seventh-century cursive script of Ekron, while that of the Ekron dedication and of the jar inscriptions from Tel Miqne — the contemporary lapidary script. Whereas the cursive style developed local characteristics specific to each city, the lapidary style may have been shared by the four Philistine centres. One cannot clearly distinguish between the script of the Ekron dedication and the previously found jar inscriptions, on the one hand, and the scripts of three seals from other Philistine sites, on the other: the seal of "Abd'eliab son of Šib'at servant of Mititt(i) son of Ṣidqa', who was an official of Mitinti king of Ashkelon (contemporary of Ikausu king of Ekron), the seal reading *ddymš / 'lyqm* from Tell Jemmeh, and the one reading *lḥym* from Tell el-Far'ah.[41]

The Philistines might have joined the Hebrew scribal tradition in the period of the United Monarchy of David and Solomon,[42] when the Hebrews still wrote in the Phoenician script. However, in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E., when the Hebrew national tradition was developing, the Philistine cursive script was still influenced by the Hebrew one. Whereas the lapidary Philistine script conserved the state of *c.* 800 B.C.E., the cursive traditions of the various city-states in the eighth and seventh centuries continued to absorb Hebrew elements and at the same time introduced new elements of their own.

41 See Naveh (above, n. 27), pp. 9, 18–19.
42 See Cross (above, n. 38), p. 65.

At Ekron, an Aramaic inscription was found as well, reading *ḥmlk* '(A)ḥimelek' (Fig. 8).[43] Seventh-century B.C.E. Aramaic inscriptions have been found at the southern peripheral sites of Philistia, at Tell Jemmeh, Tell el-Far'ah and Tel Sera', and attributed to the Assyrian garrisons stationed there.[44]

Until now, the inscriptions found in Philistia have contained mainly proper names; hence, the Ekron dedication is the first fluent text containing two whole phrases. However, it is still doubtful whether its language is Phoenician — as the formula of the dedication, and the defective spelling of בנ (*bana*) and perhaps of other words may indicate — or, preferably, that it represents the local West-Semitic dialect, spoken at Ekron and perhaps in the other Philistine states as well.

Fig. 8. *ḥmlk* inscription from Ekron: Aramaic script.

If so, one may ask why should a seventh-century B.C.E. inscription be written at Ekron in a language close to Phoenician and reminiscent of Old Byblian. Phoenician was the prestige language in the tenth and ninth centuries B.C.E.[45] To find such an inscription, however, in seventh-century B.C.E. Philistia, where a script derived from the Hebrew tradition was used, is something of an enigma.

43 Gitin (above, n. 39), pp. 251–252.
44 Naveh (above, n. 27), pp. 19–20.
45 Cf. the ninth-century B.C.E. Kilamu inscription from Sam'al (*KAI*, No. 24). The eighth-century B.C.E. Karatepe inscription, beside a Hittite pictographic, also has a Phoenician version (*KAI*, No. 26).

CONCLUSIONS

The Ekron inscription is unique in that it contains the name of a biblical city and its rulers, two of whom are documented as kings of Ekron in extra-biblical texts. Moreover, it is the only such inscription found *in situ* in a securely defined archaeological context within a datable destruction level. This discovery has far-reaching implications for the understanding of the history of Ekron, Philistia and its neighbouring states.

First and foremost, the inscription proves the identification of Tel Miqne as Ekron of the Philistines. It also strengthens the identification of Philistine Ekron with *'amqar(r)üna*, mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian texts as an Assyrian vassal state during the seventh century B.C.E., when the Bible is relatively silent on Assyria's domination of Philistia and Judah.[46]

Chronologically, the list of the rulers of Ekron from Ya'ar to Ikausu suggests a dynastic period that most probably lasted from the eighth through most of the first half of the seventh century. This provides the historical context for the archaeological record which indicates that there was continuous occupation from Stratum II to Stratum IC on the upper tel, the north-east acropolis. The inscription also provides a basis for establishing the *terminus post quem* of Temple Complex 650. It is reasonable to assume that the reign of Ikausu began at or around the time that he is first mentioned in the annals of Esarhaddon. This would support a date for the construction of Temple Complex 650 no later than the first quarter of the seventh century B.C.E., which is consistent with the stratigraphic and textual data that suggest that it was built early in Stratum IC (see above).

The cultic information contained in the inscription and the large body of evidence previously known from Ekron greatly add to our knowledge of religious practice at this Philistine site. These data will also help to establish the *Sitz im Leben* of Ekron's cult within the tradition of the ancient Near East. As for the writing system used in Philistia in the late Iron Age, the inscription has already made an important contribution in furthering our knowledge of the local scripts used by the Philistines. Its specific affinities to Phoenician could perhaps be explained by the close trade connections that must have existed between Ekron, the major oil-producing centre in the seventh century, and Tyre and Sidon, two of the great commercial Phoenician sea ports.[47] In addition, the inscription, together with its architectural context and associated material culture finds, offers new possibilities for analyzing the impact of the Neo-Assyrian empire and the period of the *pax Assyriaca* on the Levant. Finally, the inscription, found in the last city of Ekron, not only helps to define the final chapter of the city's history, but also provides the identification of its first city founded by the Sea Peoples in the twelfth century B.C.E.

46 Gitin, (above, n. 8, The Impact), p. 62.

47 *Idem* (above, n. 8, Neo-Assyrian Empire).

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