Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires
Author(s): Nadav Na'aman
Reviewed work(s):
Source: Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, No. 332 (Nov., 2003), pp. 81-91
Published by: The American Schools of Oriental Research
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1357809
Accessed: 14/05/2012 10:10

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires

NADAV NA’AMAN
Department of Jewish Studies
Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv 69978, Israel
nnaaman@post.tau.ac.il

This article discusses four problems that are central to the history and archaeology of Ekron in the late eighth–seventh century B.C.E.: (1) The accession of the dynasty of Padi to the throne of Ekron; (2) Ekron in Assyrian letters and administrative documents; (3) the foundation of Stratum IC; and (4) the economic growth of Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian empires. It is suggested that Stratum IC at Ekron was found in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. and that the city was an important center in the time of Sargon II, and probably earlier. The available sources do not suggest that Ekron enjoyed preferred status among the western vassals of Assyria. Most of the artifacts unearthed at Stratum IB at Ekron should be assigned to the period in which it was a vassal of Egypt. The Tel Miqne publication team has not yet published data that enables scholars to establish the scope of the city’s flourishing in the first half of the seventh century, or estimate the extent of the city’s assumed decline in the late seventh century B.C.E. Ekron’s prosperity arose from the results of Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah in 701 B.C.E., from the stability produced by the pax Assyriaca, and from the new economic opportunities created by the empire—rather than the result of a deliberate imperial policy of economic development of its vassal.

BACKGROUND

The excavations conducted at Tel Miqne (Ekron) have shown that the city, covering a large area of some 20 ha, flourished during the seventh century B.C.E. (Gitin 1989; 1995; 1997; 2002; Gitin and Golani 2001). After a long period of decline, which had lasted about 200 years (ca. mid-tenth–mid-eighth century B.C.E.), the city (Strata IC–IB) grew in the seventh century to about eight times the size of the earlier city (Stratum II). Sennacherib’s campaign to Judah in 701 B.C.E., in the course of which most of the Shephelah towns were destroyed and a considerable portion of their inhabitants exiled to Assyria, played an important role in the city’s growth (Na’aman 1991: 49; Gitin 1997: 82–84). The destruction and deportation permitted Ekron to take the place of its stronger neighbor to the east in the northern Shephelah, to exploit some of its agricultural territories, to expand its area and population, and to develop its economy. The territory of the seventh-century kingdom of Ekron probably extended from near Beth-shemesh in the east to the coast of the Mediterranean in the west, and from Nahal Ayyalon (Wadi el-Kabir) in the north to the southern offshoots of Nahal Sorek (Wadi es-Sarar) in the south (Na’aman 1998: 223–25).

The main source of Ekron’s income was the production of olive oil. The seventh-century city became a major olive oil industrial center, as indicated by the large number of installations for olive oil production discovered at the site (Gitin 1989: 28–39; 1995: 63–69; 1997: 84–91). This is remarkable, since in the ninth–eighth century B.C.E. city (Strata III–II) there is no evidence of oil production. Numerous loom weights were found at the site, indicating that textile production was developed in the city (Gitin 1995: 67; 1997: 87, 90). Taking into consideration the location of Ekron in the northern Shephelah, not far from the hill country where olive trees grew and sheep grazed, the development of the two industries makes good economic sense.

Signs of prosperity were detected in all the excavated areas of seventh-century Ekron, and particularly in the elite zone in the center of the city (Gitin 1997: 92, 99; Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh 1997:...
3–8). A large temple complex, with a large courtyard, a broad hall, and a longitudinal sanctuary, stood in the center of this area. The building inscription discovered at the western end of the sanctuary’s hall revealed the identity of the temple’s goddess (Pythogaia). Gitin (1997: 92b; Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh 1997: 3, 8) identified the room on the southern side of the hall (Room K) as a throne room. However, some of the artifacts discovered in this room are cultic. On the basis of its Assyrian architectural features and cultic artifacts (votive vessels, small bowls with burnt bones, a ceramic figurine, and an Egyptian-style wig fabricated from chalk plaster), Ornan (1997: 274 n. 1050) and Kamlah (2003: 109) suggested that the room was a small shrine. Since the northern side of the temple is yet to be excavated and some other shrines could have stood in the sacred complex, the large building, which was the city’s main temple, was dedicated to at least two gods, probably more.

In what follows I discuss four problems—two historical and two historical-archaeological—that are central to the history and archaeology of Ekron in the late eighth–seventh century B.C.E.

THE ACCESSION OF THE DYNASTY OF PADI TO THE THRONE OF EKRON

The building inscription discovered in the temple of Ekron runs as follows (Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh 1997: 8–13):

The house (which) Akhayush (Ikausu/Achish), son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya’ir, ruler (šr) of Ekron, built for Pythogaia (Ptgyh), his lady. May she bless him, and protect him, and prolong his days, and bless his land.

The inscription has been discussed by scholars in great detail, in particular its mixed Phoenician and Hebrew dialect, its genre, and the identity of the goddess Ptgyh (Sasson 1997; Naveh 1998; Schäfer-Lichtenberger 1998; 2000; Lehmann 1999; Rainey 1998: 242–44). But the long list of Akhayush’s four ancestors has not so far attracted scholars’ attention (for the names, see Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh 1997: 9; Sasson 1997: 631–33; Lehmann 1999: 257–58).

Authors of royal Mesopotamian inscriptions usually mention the name of their father, but the listing of two ancestors is also common. The mention of three ancestors in the introduction of a Mesopotamian royal inscription is quite unusual but can be found in a few royal inscriptions (e.g., those of Ashur-nasirpal II in Assyria and Shamash-shum-ukin in Babylonia). Four and even five ancestors appear in the inscriptions of the governors of Suhu (Frame 1995: 275–323). Six ancestors are listed in some inscriptions of Ashur-uballit who ruled Assyria in the mid-14th century B.C.E. (Grayson 1972: 44–45).

One or two ancestors appear frequently in the hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions of northern Syria and southern Anatolia in the late second and early first millennia B.C.E. There is only one exception—an inscription of Halparuntiyas, ruler of Gurgum, which lists six ancestors (Hawkins 1969: 262). Two ancestors are known from some Phoenician inscriptions (e.g., Donner and Röllig 1967: nos. 7, 10, 11). A succession of four rulers is mentioned in Kilamuwa’s inscription, who emphasized the failure of his predecessors as compared with his own great achievements (Donner and Röllig 1967: no. 24).1 But a list of four ancestors is without parallel in the corpus of West Semitic royal inscriptions of the first half of the first millennium B.C.E. and requires an explanation.

Why did Akhayush enumerate so many of his ancestors? The only viable explanation is that he did it for the sake of legitimation. In other words, Padi, Akhayush’s father, had founded a new dynasty in Ekron, and his three predecessors (Ysd, Ada, and Ya’ir) were not rulers of Ekron, but ancestors of the reigning dynasty at Ekron in the late eighth–seventh centuries B.C.E.

What could have been the circumstances in which Padi became ruler of Ekron? A king of Ekron is not mentioned in the extant inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III but was probably included in the broken list of western vassals who paid tribute to the Assyrian king in 734 B.C.E. (Tadmor 1994: 170–71, lines 7–13). Ekron (Amgarruna) is mentioned for the first time on a relief from Room V of Sargon II’s palace at Khorsabad. The reliefs from this room depict episodes from Sargon II’s campaigns of 720 B.C.E. (El-Amin 1953: 35–39, 214–28; Reade 1976: 99–102; Na’aman 1994: 241–42; Uehlinger 1998: 744–71).

1The text runs as follows: “I am Kilamuwa, the son of Hayya. Gabbar became king over Y’DY, but he was ineffective. There was BMH, but he was ineffective. There was my father Hayya, but he was ineffective. There was my brother Sha’îl, but he was ineffective. But I, Kilamuwa, the son of TML, what I achieved, the former (kings) did not achieve.” (For the translation, see Rosenthal 1969: 654–55.)
Unfortunately, two plates, of 13 lines each, are missing from the royal annals of year 720, and only the beginning of the campaign (lines 23–24) and its end (lines 53–54) have survived (Fuchs 1994: 314–15). Some details of Sargon’s operations in Syria and Palestine in that year are known from non-annalistic sources (e.g., Fuchs 1994: 197–201, lines 25–26, 33–36; Gadd 1954: 179, lines 25–49), but many other details remain unknown. This is evident inter alia from the drawing of some cities, not mentioned in Sargon’s inscriptions, on the reliefs of Room V (i.e., Bailgazara, Sinu, Gabbutunu, and Amqarruna). The depiction of Ekron among the captured cities clearly indicates that it took part in the 720 B.C.E. rebellion against Assyria and that Sargon conquered it. I suggest that on this occasion Sargon deposed the reigning dynasty and made Padi king of Ekron (just as he replaced Hanunu, king of Gaza, by another ruler, whose name remains unknown).³

This reconstruction, admittedly uncertain, would explain the rebellion of the Ekronites after Sargon II’s death on the battlefield in 705 B.C.E. In his account of the 701 B.C.E. campaign, Sennacherib wrote of “the officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron (Amqarruna) who had thrown Padi, their king—(who was) under a treaty and loyalty oath (adê u mâmit) to Assyria—into iron fetters and handed him over in a hostile manner to Hezekiah, the Judahite” (Frahm 1997: 53, line 42, 59). Of all the western kings mentioned in the campaign, Padi alone is described as a king who had sworn a binding loyalty oath to Assyria, and the text must have referred to the oath he had sworn to Sargon, possibly in 720 B.C.E. Padi’s loyalty to Assyria, his deposition by the officers of Ekron, and his handing over to Hezekiah should be interpreted in light of Sargon’s installation of a new dynasty on the throne of Ekron.

Having defeated the Egyptian task force at Eltekeh, Sennacherib severely punished the Ekronite rebels. By putting great military pressure on Hezekiah, he released Padi from captivity in Jerusalem, restored him to his throne (“I freed Padi, their king, from Jerusalem and set him on the throne of Ekron as king over them and imposed tribute for my lordship over him”), and expanded his territory on the east (the area of Timnah) and west (the “Ashkelonite enclave,” including the harbor of Joppa) (Na’aman 1998: 223). The destruction of the Judahite settlements in the Shephelah and the expansion of Ekron’s territory—in particular the outlet to the Mediterranean—played an important role in its economic development in the seventh century. By his loyalty to Assyria Padi was able to secure his throne and pass it to his descendants. Ekron apparently remained a loyal vassal to Assyria until the latter’s withdrawal from Ebir nārī, possibly in the twenties of the seventh century B.C.E. (Na’aman 1991: 33–41).

**EKRON IN ASSYRIAN LETTERS AND ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS**

The contributions of Ekron to Assyria and related matters are mentioned six times in the Assyrian sources, most of them in documents written in the time of Sargon II. The following are the texts arranged according to subject matter.


I have received 45 horses of the [Ian]dû. The emissaries of Egypt, Gaza, Judah, Moab, and Ban-Åmmon entered Calah on the 12th, with their tribute in their hands. 24 horses of the (emissary) of Gaza in his hand. The (emissaries of) Edom, Ashdod, and Ekron [went out] of [them] (TA MUR)UB₄ ([u²-šu²]-u-ni). The emissary of [Zamu]∈ went [out] of Calah ([LÜ MAH za²-mu²-a-a TA T MURUB₄] urkal-ḫi u-sa-a) and is going [to] Zabban, and [the officer] of the turtānu is with him.

The governor of Calah reports to the king first that the emissaries of some western kingdoms, including Egypt, had arrived in Calah and brought horses as gifts to the Assyrian court.⁴ Secondly, he informs the king that the Gaza envoy had brought an

---


³Gaza’s new king is not named in Sargon’s inscriptions. Since Šilli-Bel, the king of Gaza, who is mentioned for the first time in Sennacherib’s 701 B.C.E. campaign, was still in power in 667 (Streck 1916: 140–42, line 28), it was probably his predecessor who took the place of Hanunu on the Gaza throne.

⁴For the delivery of horses from Ashkelon and Gaza to Assyria, see Postgate 1974: 388–89, lines 24–35.
extra delivery of 24 horses, either as a special gift or his deficit from the previous year.⁵ Thirdly, he mentions that the envoys of Edom, Ashdod, and Ekron, who must have arrived earlier at Calah, possibly with a gift of horses, had left the city. Finally, he reports that a certain emissary, possibly of Zamua, had left Calah, escorted by an Assyrian officer. The letter was sent to Marduk-remani, the provincial governor of Calah. Since another governor was in office in 712, it was written before this date (Deller 1985: 330; 1987: 219).

2. Two emissaries (širānī) of Ekron (Biniya and Sili[...]) brought to Calah, possibly in the time of Sargon, a heavy tribute of 9 talents and 34 minas of silver (Saggs 2001: 150–51 and pl. 30).

3. In 699 B.C.E., two years after Sennacherib’s campaign, Padi dispatched a tribute of 1 talent of silver (Fales and Postgate 1995: no. 50).

4. On an unknown occasion, the king of Ekron sent a tribute of an unknown quantity of silver (Fales and Postgate 1995: no 34, line 14).

5. A tablet from Fort Shalmaneser (ND 10078) records the distribution of wine (Dalley and Postgate 1984: no. 135; Deller 1985: 328–30; Weippert 1987: 100 n. 36). Among the recipients are delegates from Palestinian kingdoms, who received the wine on two occasions. The envoys of Ashdod, Edom, Gaza, and Judah received wine at an “early time” (pāniutu); and the envoys of Ashdod (KUR Sa-du-d[u-a-a]),⁶ Judah, Edom, Ekron, and Ban-Ammon (and possibly others; the tablet breaks at this place) received it on a “later” occasion (urkiutu). The tablet should be dated to the time of Sargon II (Deller 1985: 328–29), and it is possible that these delegations are referred to in tablet ND 2765.⁷

6. Like other emissaries who, in the time of Sargon II, brought the tribute to Assyria, Ekron’s envoys received precious gifts from the Assyrian treasury (Fales and Postgate 1992: no. 58, lines 1–3; see Postgate 1974: 127–28).

In his inscriptions Esarhaddon wrote that he had mobilized all his western vassals, including Ikausu, king of Ekron, to provide building materials and to transport them for the construction of his palace in Nineveh (Borger 1956: 60, line 58). On his first campaign to Egypt in 667 B.C.E., Ashurbanipal mobilized troops of all his western vassals, including Ikausu, and they participated in the campaign and served as auxiliary forces to his troops (Streck 1916: 140, line 30).

The documentary evidence shows the economic strength of Ekron in the time of Sargon II. It neither discloses close relations between Assyria and Ekron nor mentions a preferential status of Ekron among the western vassals of Assyria. What is remarkable is the relatively heavy tribute Ekron paid to Assyria in the time of Sargon II, possibly in return for Padi’s setting on the throne. The close relations of the ruler of Ekron with the ruler of an empire may be inferred only from an Egyptian source. According to the Saqqara papyrus, Adon, apparently the king of Ekron, had sent a letter in Aramaic to the Pharaoh asking him to send a task force to save him from the Babylonian threat (Porten 1981: 41–45). The personal letter, and the expressed hope that the Pharaoh will come to his aid, may indicate close relations between the two rulers.

In sum, the assumption of a preferred status of the king of Ekron among the Assyrian vassals in the west in the late eighth–seventh centuries B.C.E. rests entirely on conclusions drawn from the archaeological excavations at the site. We must look more closely into these findings to examine the extent to which Assyria was involved in the internal affairs of its vassal and the assumed favorite status of Ekron in the Assyrian Empire.

THE FOUNDATION OF STRATUM IC AT EKRON

On the basis of the material culture discovered in Stratum IC, Gitin (1989: 48–49; 1995: 63, 69; 1997: 86–91) suggested that Ekron expanded only after Sennacherib’s campaign to Palestine in 701 B.C.E. As noted above, the siege of Amqarruna is depicted on a relief from Sargon’s palace (El-Amin 1953: 37–40; Uehlinger 1998: 755, with earlier literature in n. 58). In the absence of the portion of the annals that described Sargon’s campaign of 720 B.C.E., it is impossible to determine Ekron’s dimensions and actual strength at that time. On the other hand, the reference to Ekron in Sennacherib’s inscriptions of his 701 B.C.E. campaign indicates that the city was an important center at that time.

---

⁵For the king of Ashkelon paying to Assyria the deficit of the former year, see Postgate 1974: 387, line 3.

⁶The name of Ashdod is written in two different forms in the Assyrian texts, i.e., Ashodu and Sadudu. See Weippert 1987: 100 n. 36; Eph’al 1999: 5–6.

⁷Of all the Palestinian vassal kingdoms of the time of Sargon II, only the envoys of Ashkelon are not mentioned in the two texts.
Ekron is described in Sennacherib’s annals as a royal city that had joined Hezekiah’s rebellion and was conquered during the campaign. Its political-strategic position on the western border of Judah suggests that it was the “royal city of the Philistines which Hezekiah had captured and strengthened for himself” mentioned in the “Azekah Inscription” (Na’am’an 1974: 26–27, line 11). Originally I identified the city whose name is broken as Gath of the Philistines (Na’am’an 1974: 34–35). However, in the late eighth century B.C.E. Gath was a secondary city in the kingdom of Ashdod that was conquered and possibly destroyed by Sargon II in his 711 B.C.E. campaign, ten years before Sennacherib’s campaign (for textual references, see Fuchs 1994: 435, s.v. Gimtu). It could not have been the “royal city of the Philistines” mentioned by Sennacherib. Mittmann (1990: 98–99) suggested identifying it with Ekron, and I accepted it (Na’am’an 1994: 245–46). In the Azekah Inscription the city is described as “surrounded with great towers and exceedingly difficult [its ascent]”. It had “a palace like a mountain,” probably a water tunnel (Na’am’an 1974: 29 ad line 15), and “a moat was dug around it.” Ekron’s centrality in the annalistic account of Sennacherib’s campaign, and its depiction in the Azekah Inscription, even taking into account the latter’s literary character, indicate that it was then a large, fortified city. Evidently, Ekron had begun expanding already in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. and was soon fortified, apparently by one of Padi’s predecessors. Whether the fortification system of the late eighth century included only the upper tell, or the upper and lower city, is not my concern and should be established in light of the excavations of the lower city.

The city’s growth in the second half of the eighth century fits its explicit mention—alongside Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod—as a royal Philistine city both in Amos 1:6–8 and Sennacherib’s inscription. We may conclude that Stratum IC at Ekron was founded in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. and that the documentary evidence contradicts the suggestion that the city began expanding only in the early seventh century B.C.E.

THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF
EKRON UNDER THE ASSYRIAN AND EGYPTIAN EMPIRES

Ekron was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II at the very end of the seventh century, most probably in 604 B.C.E., the same year the Babylonian king destroyed Ashkelon (Stager 1996: 61*-62*, 71*-72*; Gitin 1998: 276 n. 2). Therefore, it is missing from the list of Philistine and Phoenician kings and their kingdoms that appears in a broken prism written in Nebuchadnezzar II’s seventh year (598 B.C.E.). It is well known that material remains discovered in the destruction debris of a site are dated to its final phase of occupation. This is also true of Ekron, where luxury items of Egyptian origin were found in its destruction debris (Gitin 1997: 101). Dothan and Gitin (1993: 1057) associated Stratum IC with the time of the Assyrian Empire and dated the beginning of Stratum IB after the Assyrian withdrawal, when Egypt occupied the area. Thus, most of the artifacts unearthed at Stratum IB at Ekron should be assigned to the period in which it was a vassal of Egypt. Only a few isolated artifacts can be dated with certainty to the first half of the seventh century B.C.E. Among them is the building inscription of Akhayush cited above, and also the two body sherds that carry the broken inscription lb'l wlpdy [. . .] (“for Ba'al and for Padi [. . .]”) (Gitin and Cogan 1999).9

The late date of most of the artifacts unearthed at Ekron is not always taken into account in the site’s publication reports, where they are mainly discussed in the context of the Assyrian Empire. For example, Gitin and Golani (2001) recently published the six silver hoards discovered at Ekron. All the hoards were

---

9 Only Gaza and Ashdod are mentioned in Nebuchadnezzar II’s list of kings and their kingdoms written in his seventh year (598 B.C.E.) (Unger 1931: 286, lines 23–29; Oppenheim 1969: 287–88; Na’am’an 2000: 40–41, with early literature in n. 25). It is evident that Ashkelon and Ekron had been destroyed before 598 B.C.E.

9 The inscription is probably incomplete, as a word division appears after the second name and then the sherd is broken. The scribe used word division, so he was not Phoenician, as Phoenician scribes used continuous writing (Millard 1970; Naveh 1973). Gitin and Cogan (1999: 197) interpreted the inscription as “a dedicatory inscription that invokes blessing ‘for (the life of) Ba’al and (King) Padi’.” But blessing the life of a god is odd. Moreover, there is no parallel among the Assyrian royal inscriptions for a dedicatory inscription that links god and king, and the parallel cited by Gitin and Cogan (“to revere god and king”) has nothing to do with the dedication. Thus, the interpretation of the inscription as dedicatory is not convincing. Since the script differs from that of the other inscriptions discovered at Ekron, the jar possibly originated from a neighboring Philistine city and was dispatched to the temple and palace of Ekron. The missing word at the end of the inscription (“for Ba’al and for Padi [. . .]”) probably designated the jar’s contents.
sealed by the massive destruction of Stratum IB (Gitin and Golani 2001: 30). They were put in hiding places in the face of the Babylonian threat in 604 B.C.E. and reflect the wealth of well-to-do citizens who lived under the suzerainty of the Egyptian Empire. Indeed, Golani and Sass (1998: 74) noted the “modest Neo-Assyrian as compared to strong Phoenician influence in the silver jewelry items of the hoard.” It goes without saying that hoards might contain materials saved from earlier periods and that the date of destruction is the terminus ante quem for the artifacts they contain. Although the hoards belong to a post-Assyrian period and the manufacture of most of the silver jewelry might be dated to the last third of the seventh century B.C.E. (Golani and Sass 1998: 74), Gitin and Golani discussed them in the context of the economy of the Assyrian Empire.

Another example is the production of olive oil, which was the main source of Ekron’s wealth. On the basis of the 115 olive oil installations discovered at the site, Gitin (1989: 48; 1995: 69; 1997: 84, 87; Dothan and Gitin 1993: 1057–58) estimated that Ekron had the potential to produce about 1,000 tons of oil annually. He suggested that the oil production reached its zenith in Stratum IC, that some units of Stratum IC’s industrial equipment were discarded in Stratum IB, and that the discard indicates “some reduction in oil production in Stratum IB” (Dothan and Gitin 1993: 1057; see Gitin 1989: 48). In light of the centrality of Egypt in the import of olive oil, at least some of the installations were probably made after the Assyrian withdrawal, when Egypt occupied the area (Stager 1996: 70*). Gitin’s assumption that all these installations produced olive oil from the first half of the seventh century B.C.E. onward is arbitrary; moreover, it is not clear that all the installations discovered at the site produced olive oil at the same time.10 There is no doubt that while Ekron was subjugated to Assyria it produced large quantities of olive oil, but the number of presses producing olive oil at that time, and the quantity produced in a specific year, cannot be estimated with certainty since almost all the presses were discovered in late seventh-century contexts.

The gap of at least 20 years (some scholars suggest that it was more than 30 years) between the Assyrian withdrawal from Palestine and Ekron’s destruction has not escaped the attention of scholars. Stager (1996: 70*–71*) discussed briefly the material remains discovered at Ekron and emphasized that “the bulk of these artifacts date to the last half, if not the final quarter, of the seventh century B.C.E. So do also most of the 100 or more olive oil presses which mark the perimeter of that impressive Philistine city.” He then suggested that Ekron’s economic take-off “did not occur during the late 8th or early 7th centuries B.C.E., but later, in the second half of the 7th century B.C.E. . . . The expansion of Ekron and the development of its industry occurred after Assyrian interest and power in the West had begun to wane in the late 640s.”

The building inscription of Akhayush, discovered shortly after the publication of Stager’s article, indicates that the construction of the elite zone at Ekron, including the large temple, took place under the Assyrians in the first half of the seventh century B.C.E. Hence, the great flourishing of Ekron had already begun at this time. Moreover, the oil production reached its zenith in Stratum IC and declined in Stratum IB (see above), and Stager is wrong in assuming that the bulk of the olive presses date to the last half of the seventh century B.C.E. But the fundamental problem raised by Stager concerning the dating of the material culture discovered in the destruction debris of Ekron should not be dismissed (see Gitin 1997: 99–100 n. 65). On the basis of the published data it is not always possible to establish which buildings and installations belong to the early stage, when the city was under the yoke of the Assyria, and which must be attributed to the later stage, when the city was a vassal of Egypt. We can do no more than give a general estimate of the economic strength, the scope of building operations, and the prosperity of Ekron in the first half of the seventh century B.C.E.

---

10Gitin estimated an annual production of 1,000 tons of oil, which would have required 48,000 storage jars (Gitin 1997: 87). In light of the cost of the inland transport of goods, the exported jars were possibly produced near the coast and the oil extracted at Ekron was transported to the coast in skins (see Peacock and

Williams 1986: 9–19, 63–77). Taking into account the estimated amount of produced jars, we would expect that the jars would have been found all over the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. Surprisingly, ceramic types of jars produced at Ekron and the northern Philistine coast have not been found in large numbers outside Palestine (for Egypt, see recently Maeir 2002). The destination of the oil produced at Ekron remains a mystery and may be solved only when large numbers of jars are discovered in urban centers outside Palestine.
As noted above, the available sources do not suggest that Ekron enjoyed preferred status among the western vassals of Assyria, and all the conclusions to that effect rest on the archaeological evidence. In the excavation reports, Gitin described in detail the multicultural impact on Ekron in the seventh century, including Assyrian influence on the architecture and material culture of the city. This no doubt reflects a process of acculturation, the result of the Neo-Assyrian impact on its vassal kingdoms. However, evidence of cultural influence and acculturation do not demonstrate the assumed preferred status of the city among the western vassals of Assyria.

It must be emphasized that Assyria acted above all to advance its own economic interests, not to benefit its vassals. Indeed, there are many indications that it competed with its western vassals for the revenues of the maritime and continental commercial activities, and used all its power to obtain its share of the profits (Na’aman 2001, with earlier literature). Since Assyria was an empire and operated on a very large scale, making enormous changes in the external and internal conditions in the region and opening new markets for the local products, some kingdoms were able to use the new situation for their own interests. Moreover, the flourishing and economic success of its vassal states was in Assyria’s interest, since rich countries were able to pay heavier tributes. So Assyria might have encouraged the economic development of these states, provided it did not clash with its own interests. We may therefore conclude that the prosperity of certain western vassals arose from the stability produced by the pax Assyriaca and from the new economic opportunities created by the empire—rather than the result of a deliberate imperial policy of economic development of these states.

Ekron’s flourishing, as indicated by the building of the elite zone, in particular the construction of the great temple in the first half of the seventh century, indicates that the city benefited from the new conditions created in the region from the time of Sargon II (or even Tiglath-pileser III) on, and above all the results of Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah in 701 B.C.E. Ekron was probably supported by Sennacherib in his effort to weaken Judah and succeeded in taking the latter’s place in the northern Shephelah in the early seventh century (Na’aman 1991: 49; Gitin 1997: 82–84). However, the assumption that it enjoyed long-term Assyrian support is not corroborated by textual evidence. Gitin’s bold suggestions that “Ekron was apparently chosen as a focus of Assyrian economic activity” (Gitin 1995: 63), and that it achieved “a new status as an international industrial center within the Neo-Assyrian Empire” (Gitin 1997: 91), are too far-fetched.11 Corroborating them is not possible because the Assyrian sources do not single out Ekron from among the other western vassals, and because the city continued to flourish after the Assyrian withdrawal from the region. The Tel Miqne publication team has not yet published data that establishes the scope of the city’s flourishing in the first half of the seventh century, or allows them to estimate the extent of the city’s assumed decline in the late seventh century B.C.E.

As noted above, most of the artifacts discovered in Stratum IC at Ekron are dated to the 640s–630s, and the material remains discovered in the destruction debris of Stratum IB are dated to its final phase of occupation in the late seventh century. Only the documentary evidence, including the epigraphic material discovered at Ekron, enables us to establish that Stratum IC was founded in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. and that Strata IC–IB cover the entire seventh century B.C.E. These conclusions may serve as a model for the many Judahite sites founded at an unknown date in the course of the seventh century B.C.E. and destroyed by the Babylonians in the early sixth century B.C.E. (i.e., the Judahite settlements in the Shephelah, the Negev, the Buqi‘a, and the Jordan Valley). All the material remains discovered in the destruction debris of these sites are dated to their final phase of occupation. Establishing the date of their foundation on the basis of these artifacts might be misleading, and some considerations other than the artifacts must also be taken into account. Archaeologists must be aware of the limits of their data and avoid using it as a sole criterion for dating the foundation of the sites under consideration.

11Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz (2001: 253) suggested that “the decision to upgrade Ekron into an important regional centre was taken by Sargon. This decision could have irritated the Judahite interests in the Shephelah and brought about Hezekiah’s intervention in Ekron after the death of Sargon in 705 B.C.E.” However, the cooperation of Ekron’s elite with Hezekiah and the extradition of Padi to his hands do not fit the assumption that Sargon “upgraded” Ekron and turned it into an important regional center. Moreover, Assyria acted to advance its own interests; the flourishing of certain vassal states was the outcome of its activity rather than the result of a deliberate imperial policy of “upgrading” these states.
ADDENDUM

A rejoinder by Gitin (2003), in which he answered Stager’s challenging remarks on the history and archaeology of Ekrón (Stager 1996: 70*-71*), was published after my article was accepted for publication. At the request of this journal’s editor, I append a few remarks on Gitin’s article.

In his rejoinder Gitin restates his position that Stratum IC was built in the early seventh century, that Ekrón’s florescence overlaps the period of the Assyrian domination of Palestine, and that after the Assyrian withdrawal Ekrón declined as indicated by the reduction in the production of oil in Stratum IB. The latter stratum lasted for about 20 years (ca. 623–604) and was detected by two floor levels in a number of buildings and several blocked doorways, as well as, in some cases, a radical change in the architectural plan (Gitin 2003: 58*). The Stratum IC pottery assemblage is generally earlier than the ceramic corpus of Stratum IB. Finally, Gitin suggests that the two seventh-century phases uncovered in the excavations of Ekrón are paralleled by the data from other major (Ashkelon and Ashdod) and secondary (Tel Batash) Philistine sites. Hence there is a similarity in the history and economy of these cities (Gitin 2003: 59*).

Gitin neither published new data nor suggested new arguments in this article, and his conclusions do not affect my conclusions. I can only restate my position that the growth of Ekrón and the foundation of Stratum IC began already in the second half of the eighth century, that the available sources do not suggest that Ekrón enjoyed preferred status among the western vassals of Assyria, and that most of the artifacts unearthed at Stratum IB should be assigned to the period in which Ekrón was a vassal of Egypt. Two points raised by Gitin deserve further note.

1. On the one hand, Gitin dates Stratum IB to ca. 630/23–604 (2003: 55*, 58*), and on the other hand, he suggests that “the Stratum IC assemblage is generally typologically earlier than the larger ceramic corpus from the Stratum IB destruction phase” (2003: 58*). Development of typological differences usually takes some decades, so the end of Stratum IC is probably earlier than suggested by Gitin.

2. The lesson learned from the available sources (Assyrian and Babylonian royal inscriptions, the Bible, and some Greek historians) is that the history of each Philistine kingdom was different. Thus, Hazael, king of Aram, captured the city of Gath and destroyed it (2 Kgs 12:17). As a result Gath lost its power and political status and became a border town of Ashdod (Na’aman 2002: 210–12). Gaza was conquered by Tiglath-pileser III (734) and by Sargon II (720; see above). It was the only city in Palestine that opposed Alexander, and in 332 B.C.E. it was besieged, conquered, and severely punished (Kasher 1992: 915). Ashdod revolted against Sargon and was conquered, its inhabitants deported and the kingdom annexed to Assyria (711 B.C.E.) (Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2001: 244–54, with earlier literature). Ashkelon was conquered by Tiglath-pileser III in 734 (Na’aman 1998: 219–23) and by Sennacherib in 701, and was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 B.C.E. (Stager 1996). Ekrón was conquered by Sargon II in 720 B.C.E. and by Sennacherib in 701, and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, probably in 604 B.C.E. (see above). It is evident that the Philistine cities must be examined individually, and that Gitin’s scheme of two phases in each seventh-century Philistine city (Gitin 2003: 58*-59*) is superficial and does not do justice to the complexity of the problem.

REFERENCES


Dothan, T., and Gitin, S. 

El-Amin, M. 

Epḥal, I. 

Fales, F. M., and Postgate, J. N. 


Finkelstein, I., and Singer-Avitz, L. 

Frahm, E. 

Frame, G. 

Fuchs, A. 

Gadd, C. J. 

Gitin, S. 


Gitin, S., and Cogan, M. 

Gitin, S.; Dothan, T.; and Naveh, J. 

Gitin, S., and Golani, A. 

Golani, A., and Sass, B. 

Grayson, A. K. 

Hawkins, J. D. 

Kamlah, J. 
Kasher, A.

Lehmann, R. G.

Maeir, A. M.

Millard, A. R.

Mittmann, S.

Na’aman, N.


Naveh, J.


Oppenheim, A. L.

Ornan, T.
1997 Mesopotamian Influence on the Glyptic of Israel and Jordan in the First Millennium B.C. I–II. Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University (Hebrew).

Peacock, D. P. S., and Williams, D. F.

Porten, B.

Postgate, J. N.

Rainey, A. F.

Reade, J. E.

Rosenthal, F.

SAA I = Parpola, S.

Sagg, H. W. F., ed.

Sasson, V.

Schäfer-Lichtenberger, C.


Schmitt, G.

Stager, L. E.

Streck, M.
Tadmor, H.

Uehlinger, C.

Unger, E.

Weippert, M.