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5 The Philistines: Neighbors of the Canaanites, Phoenicians and Israelites

SEYMOUR GITIN

Three thousand years ago, in the tenth century B.C.E., two major events occurred in the ancient Near East that were to have a profound impact on western civilization. The first was the establishment of the nation-state of ancient Israel, formed out of a loose confederation of twelve Hebrew tribes (Finkelstein 1995: 361–62). This new Israelite nation would become the vehicle for advancing monotheism and for producing one of the world's most influential and enduring religious and literary works, the Hebrew Bible. The second event occurred on the Coastal Plain of present-day Lebanon, where the Phoenicians, the ethnic and cultural successors of the Canaanites, began the westward expansion of an international commercial empire that was to last for almost one thousand years (Bondi 1988: 41–44). In the process of establishing trading centers, cities and colonies across the Mediterranean, the Phoenicians introduced much of the then known world to the alphabet, one of the most revolutionary of human inventions (Garbini 1988: 86).

Both the Israelites and the Phoenicians also had a profound effect on one of their neighbors, the Philistines, who, in the twelfth and eleventh centuries, had been the chief adversary of biblical Israel and the conquerors of the Canaanite cities of the Coastal Plain (T. Dothan 1982: 15–18). At the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E., however, the Philistine cities were destroyed, and the Philistines themselves seem to have become a casualty of history, as they apparently disappeared from the archaeological and historical record. This was the conclusion held by most historians and archaeologists (e.g., Oded 1979: 236; T. Dothan 1982: 30) until one of ASOR's affiliated excavations, the Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavation and Publications Project, produced dramatic new evidence that radically altered our understanding of Philistine history.

Prior to the Miqne-Ekron excavations, only one Philistine capital city—Ashdod—had been excavated extensively (M. Dothan 1993: 96–100). The interpretation of the results, however, had little impact in terms of altering the perception of the supposed disappearance of the Philistines at the beginning of the Iron Age II. On the other hand, the past century of archaeological research produced an abundance of evidence that formed the basis for writing a comprehensive, if not complete, history of the neighbors of the Philistines, the Canaanites (Tubb 1998: 1–94), the Phoenicians (Moscati, et al. 1988) and the Israelites (Isserlin 1998). Extensive excavations of what had been the land of Canaan, including present-day Israel, Jordan, southern Lebanon and Syria, demonstrated that the Canaanites dominated Syria-Palestine during the third and second millennia B.C.E. In advancing the process of urbanism, they built the great Bronze Age fortified city-states of Acco, Ashkelon, Dan, Dor, Gezer, Hazor, Lachish, Jericho and Megiddo (Hackett 1997: 410). During the first third of the twelfth century B.C.E., however, a major crisis erupted in the eastern Mediterranean Basin, which brought Bronze Age Canaanite civilization to an abrupt end. The Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, attacked the coastal areas of Canaan, the land of the Hittites (Turkey) and Egypt, leaving complete destruction in their wake (Burdajewicz 1990: 1–23). This marked the transition from the well-developed Late Bronze Age Aegean palace economies with their centralized politico-economic orders to the more provincial state-oriented, decentralized economic system of the Iron Age nation-states of Philistia, Phoenicia and Israel, among others (Sherratt 1998: 293, 307).

In the aftermath of this upheaval, a new set of geopolitical relationships emerged in the land of Canaan as the defeated Canaanites, with one major exception, were integrated into the life of the Philistine and Israelite settlements and cities, where they were gradually assimilated. The situation was different along the coast of what today is Lebanon. There the Canaanites were able to maintain control of a number of port cities, including Tyre and Sidon, and in the course of time, they became known as Phoenicians, which means “purple-dye people,” deriving from the fact that they were a major producer of this product (Moscati 1968: 3–7). Yet, St. Augustine mentions that in his day, that is, as late as the fifth century C.E., the citizens of Carthage still referred to themselves as Canaanites (*Ep. Ad Rom.* 13). Carthage, located in the suburbs of the North African city of Tunis, was the largest Phoenician colony in the west. We shall return to the Phoenicians later, when we examine the period of their greatest impact on the Philistines in the seventh century B.C.E.

As for the Israelites, their presence in the land of Canaan is attested as early as the thirteenth century B.C.E. by the appearance of the term for “the people of Israel” on the stela of the Egyptian Pharaoh Merneptah (Hasel 1998: 178–81). Although the questions of where the Israelites came from and

how they came to settle in the land of Canaan still generate considerable discussion, the archaeological record of the twelfth and eleventh centuries is unambiguous. It documents the presence of a large population in the previously unsettled highlands of Judah and Ephraim (Finkelstein 1988: 352–56). These new settlers are considered the early Israelites and their land comprised most of what would become the land of biblical Israel two centuries later.¹ The political and cultural impact of the emerging Israelite nation on the growth and decline of the Philistines varied at different stages of their six hundred-year history. It was however the Israelite technological contribution to the economy of Philistine Ekron in the seventh century B.C.E. that ultimately had the greatest effect on the survival of the Philistines of Ekron. This and other critical factors are explored in the following discussion of the results of the Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavations, which have shed new light on the history, culture and fate of the Philistines.

The Tel Miqne-Ekron excavations are a joint project of the Albright Institute and the Hebrew University, and are directed by Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin. Fourteen excavation seasons (between 1981 and 1996) were conducted at the site identified as Ekron, one of the five Philistine capital cities (Gitin 1989: 24).² The excavations have produced evidence that indicates where the Philistines came from, what kind of people they were and the impact they had on the Canaanite cities they conquered (Dothan and Gitin 1993: 1053–56). The excavations also provided data that demonstrate that the Philistines, contrary to the assumptions of some scholars, were not mere pirates who plundered and destroyed, but in fact built great cities and developed a distinctive material culture of their own (Barako 2000: 526). The new evidence from Miqne-Ekron greatly increases our knowledge of the Philistines in the Iron Age I, ca. 1200–1000 B.C.E., expanding on the earlier work at Tell Qasile and Ashdod and the research of Moshe and Trude Dothan and Benjamin and Amihai Mazar (Gitin 1993: 255, n. 7). Thus, on the basis of the archaeological record, we can conclude that the Philistines, who came from the Aegean, were not the barbarians portrayed in the Bible, but rather the founders of a highly sophisticated society. Their unique material culture including imported architectural, ceramic and religious traditions, exhibits both Aegean affinities and advanced technology (T. Dothan 1998a: 148–49, 154–59).

What the Philistines found at Tel Miqne was a small, unwalled Canaanite settlement on the ten-acre acropolis of the upper tell, which they proceeded to destroy. In the remains of what previously had been storage buildings were jars filled with wheat and barley seeds and figs. The Philistines rebuilt the acropolis, as well as the long-abandoned lower tell, which had been destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age in the sixteenth century. The result was a fifty-acre urban center with massive fortifications, an industrial zone for pottery production and monumental buildings with cultic areas (T. Dothan

1998a: 150–51). In imposing their urban culture on the local Canaanite society, the Philistines drastically altered the landscape and settlement pattern of the Coastal Plain, to the extent that it became known as Philistia, the land of the Philistines. Ekron, like the other Philistine cities, for example Ashdod, prospered for two hundred years, until around 1000 B.C.E., when it was destroyed either by the Egyptian pharaoh Siamon or perhaps as a result of the conflict with its Israelite neighbors (T. Dothan 1990: 36).

What happened to the Philistines? According to scholarly speculation, they were overwhelmed by and eventually assimilated into the major population groups of Israelites or Phoenicians (e.g., Oded 1979: 237–38; B. Mazar 1986: 75–82). Scholars had two reasons for reaching this conclusion. The first is based on the fact that the Philistines had brought their own traditions or cultural markers from their Aegean homeland by which they are identified in the archaeological record (Gitin 1998a: 163, n. 3). At Ekron, these include cultic features like hearths, the Mycenaean IIIC:1 tradition of monochrome pottery and megaron-type monumental architecture. Thus, when the last traces of these cultural markers indicating Aegean affinities disappeared around 1000 B.C.E., it was assumed that the Philistines had disappeared with them. The second reason is that prior to the Tel Miqne-Ekron excavations, there was little evidence to suggest an alternative explanation. These excavations have provided concrete evidence that shows that the Philistines did not disappear, but in fact continued to live and eventually prosper again at Ekron, where their history can be documented for four hundred more years, until the end of the seventh century (Gitin 1998a: 167).

The archaeological data indicate that during the tenth, ninth and eighth centuries, the lower city of Ekron was abandoned, and whatever was left of the Philistine population after the tenth-century destruction withdrew to the upper tell (fig. 5.1). For the following 250 years, Philistine Ekron remained a small, fortified town, and its alternating independent or semi-independent status depended on its relations with Judah and other local nation-states. At the very beginning of the seventh century, however, under the influence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the entire tell, including the upper and lower cities, was resettled, as the site grew from ten to almost eighty-five acres in size. With the capacity of housing more than six thousand persons, Ekron became one of the largest biblical cities, achieving the zenith of its economic and physical growth (Gitin 1987: 206). This period of great prosperity, however, was not to last, due in part to the effect of an almost six hundred-year process of acculturation, during which a number of foreign cultures had a critical impact on the Philistines' way of life.

The earliest traces of this process can be detected in the last phase of the Iron Age I occupation, Stratum IV, dating from the second half of the eleventh through the first quarter of the tenth centuries B.C.E. In this Stratum,

Phoenician influence can be seen in the appearance of typical Phoenician red-slipped and burnished pottery (T. Dothan 1998b: 261, 266–67). This tradition continues in Iron Age II Stratum III, during the last three-quarters of the tenth century. Phoenician-style architecture is also attested in the typical Phoenician ashlar stone facing used in the header-and-stretcher construction of a fifteen-foot-thick mudbrick tower attached to a new city wall in the upper city (fig. 5.1; Gitin 1989: 25). Phoenician pottery also occurs in Stratum II, during the ninth and eighth centuries, at the same time that Judean influence is indicated by the appearance of Judean ceramic forms in ever increasing quantities (Gitin 1998a: 167). The process of acculturation seems to have been part of a gradual development until the seventh century, when it was greatly accelerated with the advance of the Neo-Assyrian Empire into the Levant. As a result, the influence of the Assyrian, Egyptian, Phoenician and Judean cultures was intensified, as can be seen in the ceramic repertoire, architecture, cultic practices, economic development, and the use of new technologies, as well as in the evidence of written documents.

Although the Philistines of Ekron adopted and adapted features from other cultures, it is important to recognize that throughout this period, Ekron remained Philistine. This is attested by the continuity of one of the main features of Ekron's material culture, the dominant Philistine Coastal Plain ceramic traditions of the Iron Age II, which in part had antecedents in the last phase of the Iron Age I, that is, Stratum IV. These forms are best represented in their final development within the large corpus of Stratum I, seventh-century whole forms (Gitin 1998a: 167). Most significantly, that Ekron remained Philistine as late as the seventh century, even though its culture and economy had undergone dramatic changes, is attested by the historical evidence in the Neo-Assyrian texts, which detail specific vassal relationships of the Philistine city-states (Pečirková 1987: 166–68). In referring to Assyria's relations with *Palaštu* (Philistia), these texts mention its city-states of *Amqarrūna* (Ekron), *Asdūdu* (Ashdod), *Hāzāt* (Gaza) and *Isqalūna* (Ashkelon) (Pritchard 1969: 281–88, 291, 293–94, 534; Parpola 1970: 16, 39–40, 159, 177, 272). They also refer to *te-ne-šit...Pi-lis-ti ū* (the people of Philistia) (Luckenbill 1924: 104: 52–53). Thus the Philistines, albeit greatly acculturated, as shown by the archaeological evidence (Gitin 1992: 30–31; Stone 1995: 24–25), were still recognized as a distinct group with their own land and cities, that is as a definable political and ethnic entity, as late as the seventh century (Eph'al 1997: 32–33). As we shall see below, it was the written data excavated at Ekron that provided the decisive evidence.

The key factor in Ekron's survival as a Philistine city in the seventh century, as well as in its eventual demise, was the Assyrian conquest. Assyria provided the impetus for Ekron's regeneration as a city-state and its transformation into an international economic power, surpassing in size and importance

the city founded by the Sea Peoples in the twelfth century. Assyria, however, also created the conditions that greatly increased Ekron's exposure to other cultures, which ultimately had a crucial impact on the Philistines and their way of life.

How did this come about? For several centuries, the Assyrians had tried with little success to conquer and control the western part of Asia Minor, in particular the countries of the eastern Mediterranean Basin. Eventually, in the third quarter of the seventh century, the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III succeeded in incorporating into the Neo-Assyrian Empire most of the countries known today as Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. In the process, the Assyrians accomplished something that no other nation had done before: they integrated the newly conquered territories into their political and economic system (Gitin 1997: 77–78). This was facilitated by three revolutionary innovations that provided the means to conduct the business of government and commerce over long distances, especially with conquered lands on the periphery of the empire. The Assyrians created an efficient bureaucracy for administering their newly created provinces and vassal city-states (Pečirková 1987: 175).³ They also replaced the antiquated and cumbersome cuneiform syllabic writing system with the simplified alphabetic Aramaic language, which soon became the new *lingua franca* of communication and economic transactions (Tadmor 1975: 42).⁴ In addition, they established silver as the standard currency, in effect creating the use of money (Postgate 1973: 25; Frankenstein 1979: 287), thereby facilitating international trade and the collection of taxes from the corners of the far-flung empire (Postgate 1979: 201–5).⁵ Thus, by establishing a pragmatic imperial infrastructure, Assyria became the first classic empire in history, which would later be emulated by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans.

As the political and economic superpower of its day, Assyria was the major influence in shaping the development of the nation-states of the eastern Mediterranean Basin, including Philistia.⁶ While Ekron is first mentioned in the Assyrian records in 712 B.C.E.,⁷ it was only after 701 B.C.E., when Sennacherib took the towns of Hezekiah, King of Judah, and gave them to Padi, King of Ekron (Pritchard 1969: 288), among others, that Assyria became the force that generated Ekron's re-urbanization. As an Assyrian vassal city-state in the first quarter of the seventh century, Ekron grew to eight times the size of the previous eighth-century city, and became the largest olive oil production center yet discovered in antiquity. The 115 olive oil installations thus far found at Ekron dwarf the number of 25 such installations dating from the eighth century found at nearby Judean Shephelah sites. These include 7 from Gezer, 12 from Beth Shemesh and 6 from Beit Mirsim. The eighth-century cottage industry in the Shephelah, with its small-scale production of olive oil for local consumption, was thus replaced in the seventh century by

Ekron's mass production of olive oil for export (Gitin 1997: 84). This was the direct result of the Assyrian King Sennacherib's destruction of the cities of the Judean Shephelah, which for the most part were not resettled in the seventh century, and Ekron's incorporation into Assyria's international commercial empire (Gitin 1997: 85). Thus, under Assyrian influence, seventh-century Ekron became one of the great industrial production centers of antiquity, and it was this city that produced the data demonstrating both the process of acculturation and the continuity of Philistine occupation.

The olive oil industry, which dominated the life of seventh-century Ekron, was not only the stimulus for the city's growth, but also represents an example of the effect of economic acculturation through the adoption of borrowed new technologies.⁸ There is no evidence that olive oil had been produced at Ekron prior to the seventh century, indicating that the industrial know-how had to be imported. The most obvious source was Ekron's neighbor Judah, where the technology for producing olive oil had been well known for many centuries (Frankel 1994: 36–40). In adapting the methods of olive oil production to their own needs, the Ekronites developed a new economic culture that radically altered their way of life. A small town dependent on an agrarian economy gave way to an industrialized urban center that was heavily impacted by foreign political entities and diverse ethnic groups. Thus, a direct consequence of Ekron's new economic order was the heightening of the process of acculturation. The best evidence of this, as well as of Philistine continuity, comes from Ekron's industrial and elite zones.

Ekron's industrial zone with its olive oil factories was located in a belt that extended around the inner face of the city wall (Fields II and III), one of four occupation zones in a well-designed city plan with designated areas for fortifications, industry and domestic and elite activities. The fortifications included a large city wall with a three-entryway gate (Field III). On the southern slope, an outer wall ran parallel to the city wall and between these two walls was an 80 m long row of storerooms or stables (Field II). The domestic zone was located behind the industrial area, well inside the lower city (Field IV), and the elite zone was in the center of the lower city (Field IV) (Fig. 5.1).

The industrial zone consisted of a series of olive oil factory buildings. The outline of a number of these structures was exposed on the surface of the tell, while the tops of others were discovered after brushing away only 10–20 cm of topsoil. Still others were covered by a thick layer of up to 1.5 m of mudbrick destruction debris, as were most of the remains of the seventh-century city, left, as it were, as though sealed in a time capsule. For the most part, the oil factories had a rectangular tripartite plan composed of three rooms connected along a single axis. Generally, the back room contained an olive oil installation composed of a large stone basin flanked on each side by

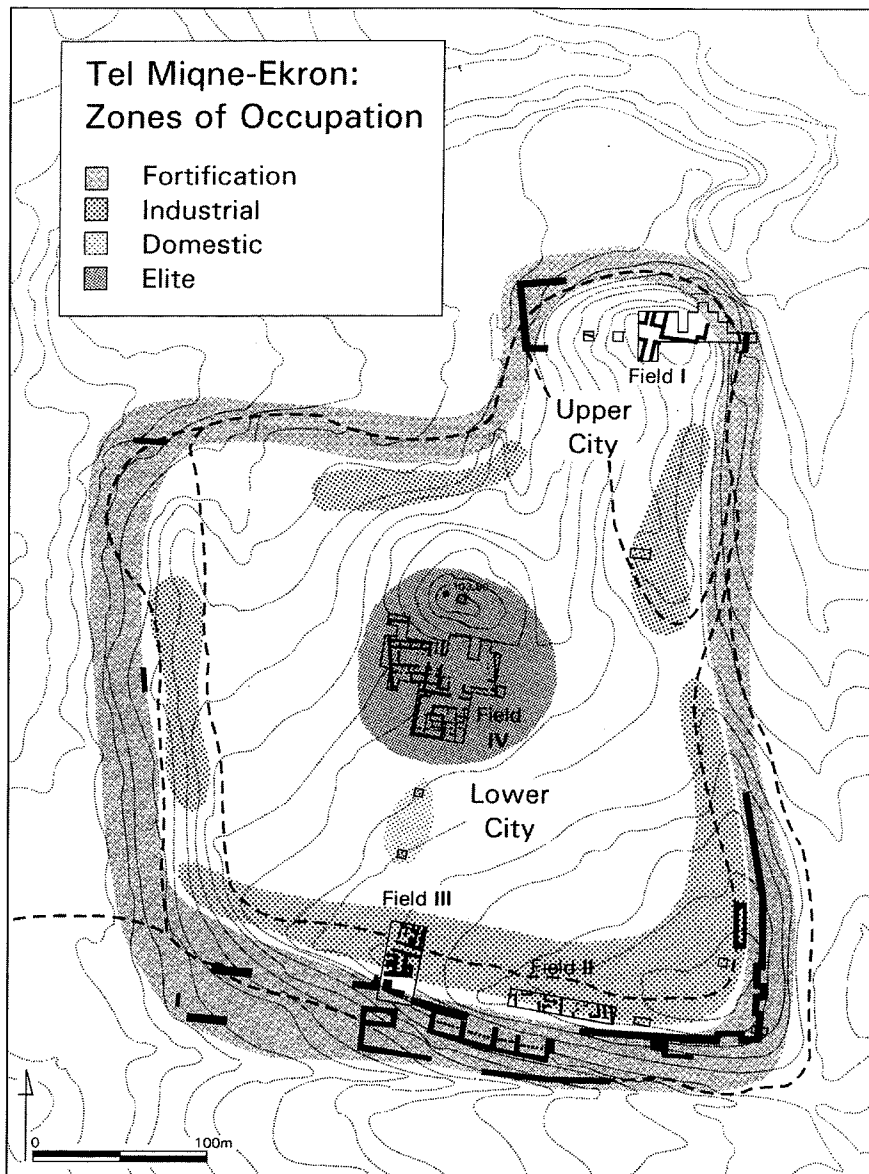


Fig. 5.1 Top Plan of Tel Miqne-Ekron Iron Age II: Field I, tenth–seventh centuries B.C.E.; Fields II, III, IV, seventh century B.C.E.

a stone press. The olives were first crushed in the basin with a stone roller, producing the first or finest oil. Straw baskets were then filled with the pulp that remained in the crushing basin and stacked on top of the presses. A wooden lever secured at one end in a niche in the back wall of the room and

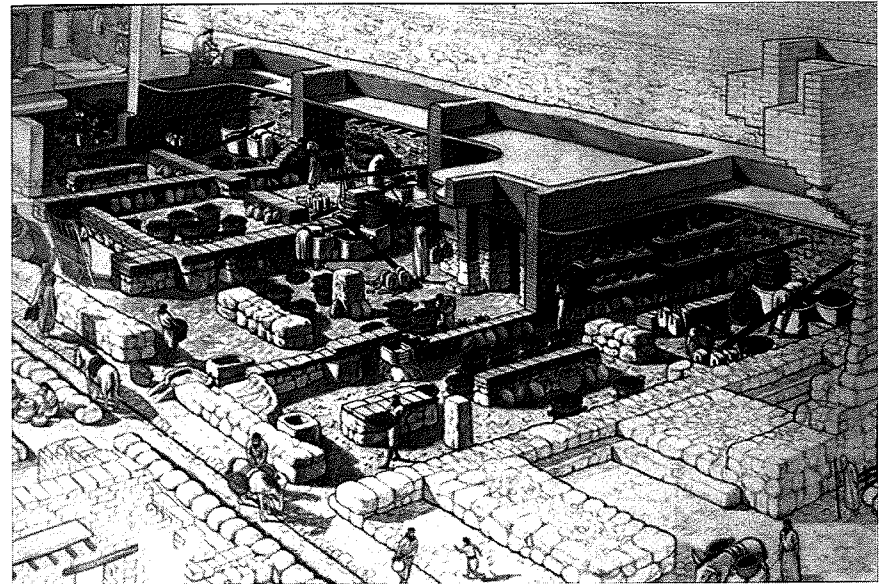


Fig. 5.2 Artist's rendering of olive oil industrial zone with secondary industrial textile production immediately adjacent to city gate in foreground, Field III.

weighted down at its other end with four 90 kg stone weights was used to press the pulp. The oily substance that was produced was scooped up from the sump of the presses and poured into large storejars that were left standing in the middle room, allowing the oil and water to separate (fig. 5.2; Gitin 1997: 87).

Based on the 115 olive oil installations thus far identified at Ekron, with only four percent of the site excavated, it is estimated that 500–1000 tons of oil could be produced annually. The maximum tonnage would equal 1,100,000 liters of oil per year (Gitin 1997: 87), an amount that obviously far exceeded the needs of local consumption, and therefore, must have been for export. The oil most probably was sent westward to Egypt and other parts of North Africa.⁹

The pottery from the factories included various types ranging from small bowls to large storejars. The breakdown between local and other types was consistent with the general pattern of the ceramic assemblage found throughout the site. Of the thousands of restorable and whole vessels and tens of thousands of diagnostic sherds, eighty-three percent were in the Philistine Coastal Plain tradition, with the remainder divided between southern Judean and imported forms (fig. 5.3; Gitin 1997: 90–91). One of the most significant artifacts found in the factories as well as in buildings in other occupation zones is the four-horned incense altar, seventeen of which were found at



Fig. 5.3 Typical assemblage of ceramic vessels from oil separation room in olive oil factory building. Back row left to right: storejar with lid, *lmk*-type storejar, eleven-handled krater for oil separation, large holemouth jar, four "Ekron-type" storejars, sausage-type storejar. Center: small ridged-rim holemouth jars, kraters, coastal cooking pots, balloon bottles, decanter, juglets and bowls. In the right corner: four-horned altar and cache of eight iron agricultural tools, Field IIISE.14.

Ekron. These represent fifty-one percent of the thirty-three four-horned altars that constitute the entire assemblage from sites in Israel, Judah and Philistia, together with one from Nineveh (Gitin 2002: 109). The altars were probably fashioned at Ekron by craftsmen who came or were brought there by the Assyrians from the Northern Kingdom of Israel, where such altars had been made for centuries. Since the altars were not part of an earlier local Philistine tradition, but were adopted in the seventh century as an important element of Philistine cultic or religious practice, they provide an example of the impact of Israelite religious practice and of the process of religious acculturation.¹⁰

Additional evidence of the two phenomena of acculturation and continuity comes from two monumental buildings in the elite zone: the Temple Auxiliary Complex and Temple Complex 650. The temple auxiliary building, consisting of five units, produced two extraordinary categories of finds—three silver hoards (Gitin and Golani 2001: 30–33) and sixteen short inscriptions on ceramic vessels.¹¹ Hoards 2 and 3, for example, contained nineteen silver ingots and sixty-six pieces of cut silver (fig. 5.4; Gitin and Golani 2001: 32, 33, 37), the presence of which supports its use as money by the Assyrians,

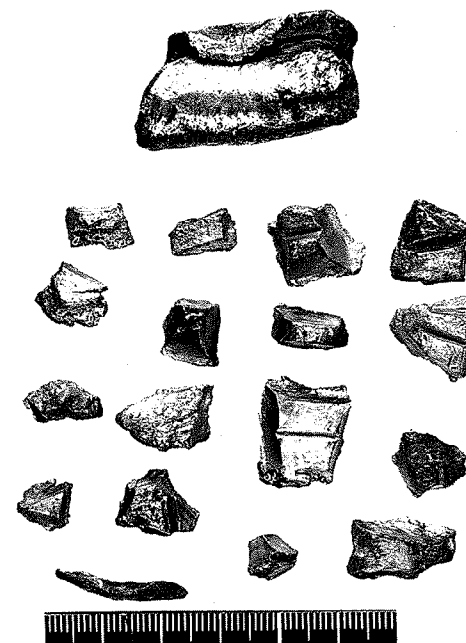


Fig. 5.4a Silver hoard 2, with one ingot and thirty-three pieces of cut silver (hacksilber), Field IVNE.8.64.



Fig. 5.4b Silver hoard 3, with nineteen ingots and sixty-six pieces of cut silver (hacksilber), Field IVNE.8.167.

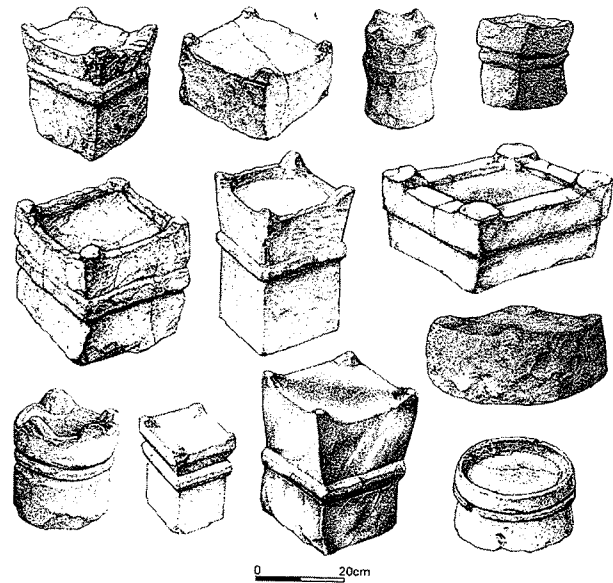


Fig. 5.5 Assemblage of twelve portable stone four-horned incense altars.

as noted above, and provides another example of economic acculturation.¹² One of the storejar inscriptions was composed of the two words, *qds l'šrt*, i.e., “dedicated to Asherat.” This inscription reveals that the West Semitic or Canaanite goddess Asherat was worshipped at Ekron. Of special significance is the spelling of the goddess’ name and the way in which the letters were written (Gitin 1993: 250, 257, n. 37). Both are Phoenician, providing yet another example of cultic adaptation by the Ekronites and of the process of acculturation. Another inscription includes the word *lmkm*, which in Phoenician and occasionally in biblical Hebrew means “for the shrine.” The same vessel bears a sign that may indicate that the contents of the jar were set aside as a tithe. Under the sign are three horizontal lines, representing thirty units in the Phoenician numbering system (Gitin 1993: 251).¹³ This, like the other inscriptions, reflects the Phoenician influence on religious practice, and indicates that there was a shrine or temple at Ekron to which offerings were brought, suggesting the existence of a priesthood. This implication of centralized worship stands in contrast to the decentralized worship system indicated by the disparate locations of the seventeen four-horned incense altars, which were found in all the occupation zones, including the Temple Auxiliary Complex (Gitin 2002: 114). Thus, in whatever religious ritual these altars were used, it could have been performed virtually anywhere—at home, at work,

or in any type of sacred space. The fact that twelve of these altars were portable further supports their function as an appurtenance of decentralized worship (fig. 5.5; Gitin 2002: 113–14). No doubt, this dual worship system was a result of Ekron’s exposure to multiple ethnic cultic traditions, a phenomenon that is even more dramatically demonstrated by Temple Complex 650.

The monumental structure of Temple Complex 650, ca. 57 × 43 m, situated just north of the Temple Auxiliary Complex, is one of the largest buildings excavated in modern-day Israel (fig. 5.6). Its architectural plan, while unique to the region, is based on the design concept and relationship of three primary components of Neo-Assyrian royal palaces, residences and temples known from the heartland of Assyria, its provinces and vassal kingdoms. The first is a large square-shaped open courtyard with rooms built around it (fig. 5.6, Room j). The second is a long, narrow rectangular-shaped throne room or reception hall (fig. 5.6, Rooms m, l, k), which at one end had a raised mudbrick platform or throne with steps leading up to it (fig. 5.6, Room k). As in Neo-Assyrian-type monumental buildings, this room served as a buffer between the large courtyard and another large building (fig. 5.6, Rooms n–bb; Gitin, Dothan and Naveh 1997: 3–4). The latter contained a rectangular-shaped sanctuary, with a monumental stepped-stone threshold similar to the one that served as the main entrance to Temple Complex 650, but without the pair of door-sockets for heavy double doors found in the latter. The

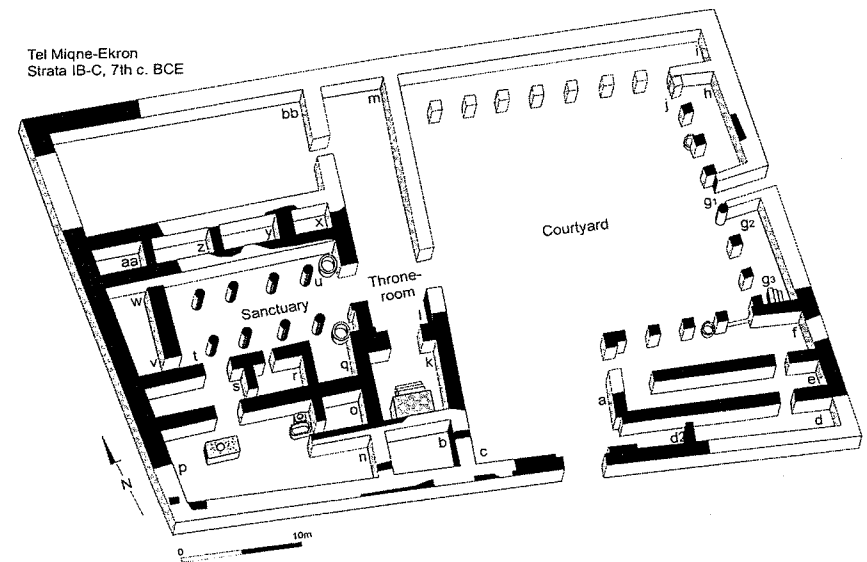


Fig. 5.6 Plan of Temple Complex 650, Field IV.

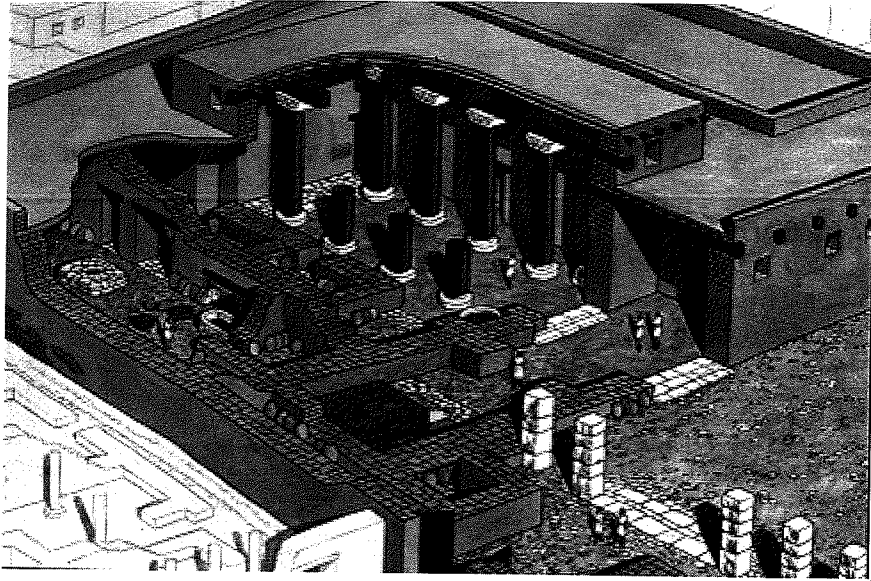


Fig. 5.7 Artist's rendering of pillared sanctuary in Temple Complex 650.

main hall of the sanctuary was lined with two parallel rows of four column bases (fig. 5.6, Room u). A raised cella stood at the far end (fig. 5.6, Room t), behind which were two rooms (fig. 5.6, Rooms v, w; Gitin, Dothan and Naveh 1997: 4–8). The plan of the pillared sanctuary reflects a Phoenician design, paralleled, for example, by a similar plan of the Astarte temple at Kition on Cyprus (Karageorghis 1974: 24–25). On the other hand, the reuse of the round pillar bases from Ekron's Iron Age I buildings with cultic functions shows the continuity of local tradition in the architectural features of cultic buildings (Gitin 2002: 115). Thus, Temple Complex 650 with its sanctuary (fig. 5.7) represents hybrid architectural and construction traditions, again attesting to the impact of foreign cultures on Ekron and the dual processes of continuity and acculturation. The artifacts from the sanctuary itself, however, provide the broadest range of evidence of Phoenician and Assyrian influences, as well as an unequivocal confirmation of Philistine cultural continuity.

The artifacts that reflect Phoenician material culture include a ceramic female figurine found in the temple cella, that is, the temple's "Holy of Holies" (Gitin 2002: 116). Its form is typical of Phoenician figurines found throughout the Mediterranean Basin, for example, on Cyprus and at Carthage (Gjerstad 1937: pl. 203:3; Acquaro 1988: 623). While figurines of all types are frequently found at most Iron Age sites throughout the region, it is rare, if not unparalleled, to find one *in situ*, that is, in a temple or cultic context. Another example

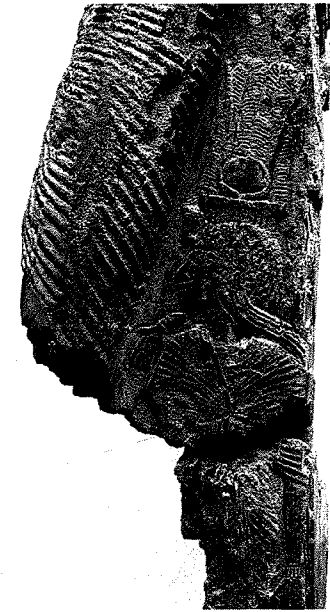


Fig. 5.8 Part of a carved ivory elephant tusk with a figure of an Egyptian goddess or princess, Field IVNW.46.

of Phoenician influence is the dedicatory inscription incised on a storejar sherd that reads *bl wlpdy* "for Ba'al and for Padi," that is, "for god and king." Ba'al, known as the chief adversary of Yahweh, the god of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, was the fertility and storm god in the Canaanite and Phoenician pantheons (Gitin and Cogan 1999: 196–97). As for Padi, as discussed below, he is mentioned as a king of Ekron in the Royal Assyrian Annals and is also described as such in another inscription from Ekron. The formula "for god and king" itself emulates the Assyrian phraseology, "to revere god and king," indicating the responsibility of a citizen to pay cultic taxes and to perform crown services. We have here the first occurrence of this Assyrian formula in a West Semitic inscription, and it represents an unparalleled example of cultural infiltration into the linguistic sphere, that is, into the Canaanite dialect spoken at Philistine Ekron (Gitin and Cogan 1999: 197–98).

Among the artifacts reflecting Assyrian influence are a wall-stone incised with a rosette, the symbol of Ishtar, the Assyrian goddess of love and war (Gitin 1998a: 173), and two ivory objects considered to be Assyrian booty plundered from temples or mortuary temples in Egypt. One is a large tusk carved in the shape of a male figure with the relief of a princess or goddess on its side (fig. 5.8), and the cartouche of Pharaoh Merneptah on its back, dated to the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. The second object is a knob bearing the cartouche of Pharaoh Ramses VIII, dated to the late twelfth century. Other such booty may include the carved ivory head of an Egyptian

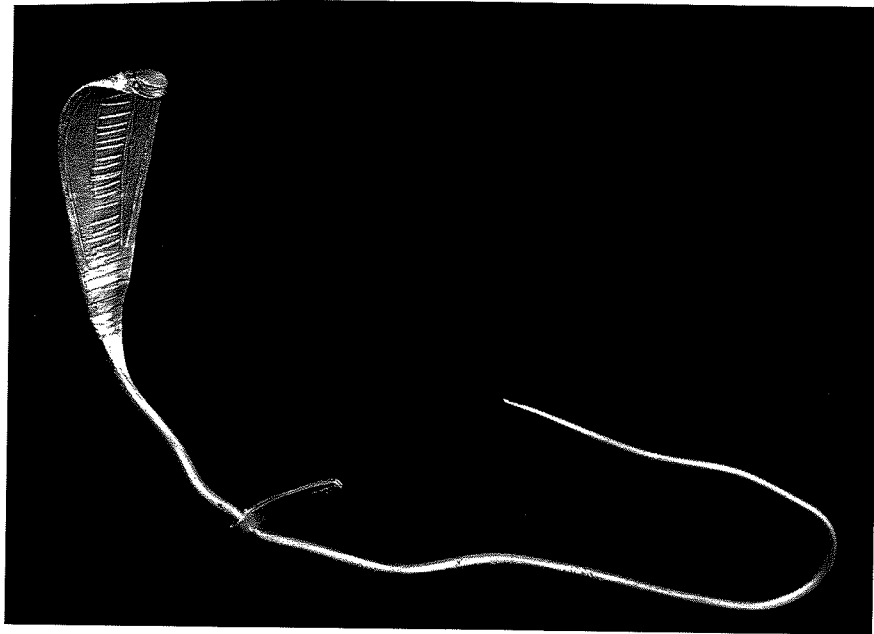


Fig. 5.9 Golden cobra, a uraeus, part of the headdress of a statuette of Egyptian royalty or a deity, Field IVNW.61.

woman, the largest object of its kind ever excavated in Israel (Gitin 2003: 59, n. 6), an amulet bearing the image of Ptah-patecus, the Egyptian god of craftsmen, and a gold cobra—a uraeus—that may have been part of the crown of an Egyptian ruler (fig. 5.9; Gitin 1997: 101–3).¹⁴ While these artifacts, together with the earlier evidence cited above, make a strong case for the process of acculturation, only the inscription found in the cella of the sanctuary provides definitive and incontrovertible proof of both the process of acculturation and of Philistine continuity.

The Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription (fig. 5.10), one of the most important artifacts excavated in Israel in the twentieth century, was found in the cella of the sanctuary in the summer of 1996, during the final season of the project's first phase of excavations (Gitin, Dothan and Naveh 1997: 1). The cella was sealed by the massive destruction layer that covered most of the Stratum IB city, marking the end of Philistine Ekron. The date of this destruction is provided by the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to Philistia in 604 B.C.E. (Gitin 1998b: 276, n. 2). The date of the sanctuary's construction in Stratum IC during the first quarter of the seventh century is based, as we shall see below, on a correlation between the inscription and historical documents describing the establishment of Assyrian control over Philistia, including Ekron.

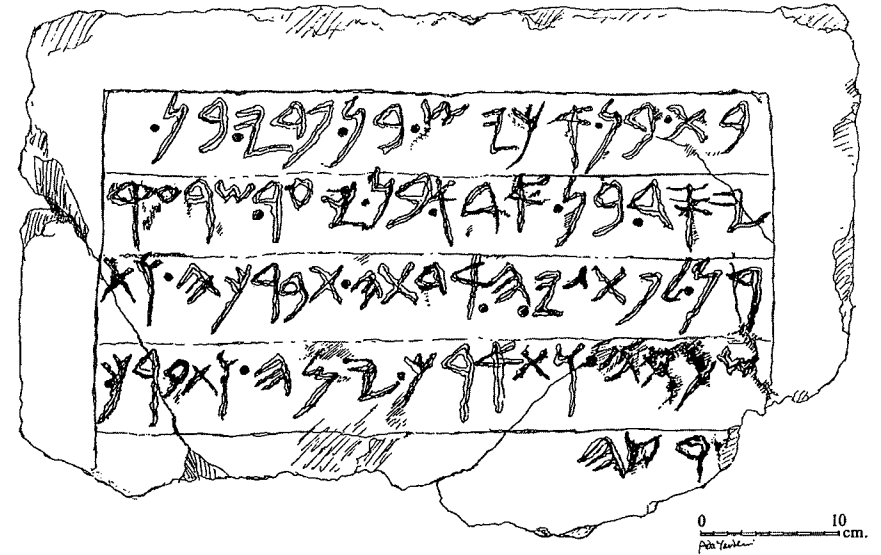
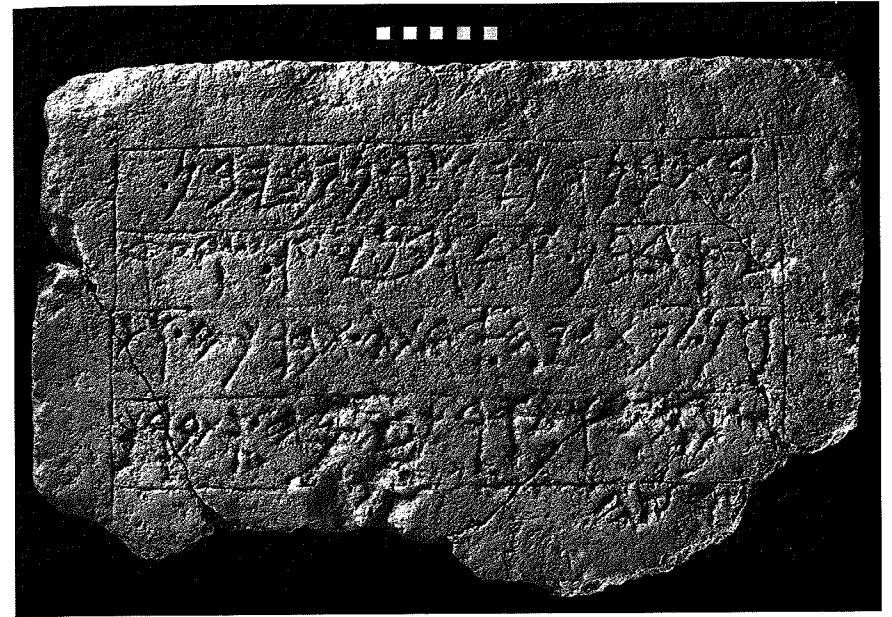


Fig. 5.10 Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription, Field IVNW.94.

The inscription, which is complete, contains five lines and seventy-two letters. It reads: "The temple which he built, 'kys (Achish, Ikausu) son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron, for Ptg'yb his lady. May she bless him, and protect him and prolong his days, and bless his land" (Gitin, Dothan and Naveh 1997: 9–10).¹⁵

The inscription records the dedication of the sanctuary by Ikausu, son of Padi, both of whom are referred to in Assyrian documents as kings of Ekron. Padi is mentioned in the Annals of Sennacherib in the context of the Assyrian king's 701 B.C.E. campaign, at the end of which he gave the towns of the defeated Judean King Hezekiah to Padi and others (Pritchard 1969: 287–88). Padi is also mentioned in a royal clay sealing of a cloth sack, recording that in 699 B.C.E. he delivered a light talent (ca. 30.3 kgs) of silver to Sennacherib, possibly as a tax payment (Postgate 1973: 21). Ikausu is listed as one of the twelve coastal kings who transported building materials to Nineveh for the palace of Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.) and in a list of kings who participated in Ashurbanipal's first campaign against Egypt in 667 B.C.E. (Pritchard 1969: 291, 294).

The kings *Ysd*, *Ada*, and *Ya'ir*, mentioned as the forefathers of Ikausu in the inscription, are otherwise unknown, but these, like Padi, are West Semitic names. Ikausu is the only non-Semitic name among the eighth- and seventh-century Philistine kings mentioned in the Assyrian records, and it may be related to the word Achaean, meaning Greek (Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh 1997: 11). The fact that Padi gave this name to his son, or that his son adopted the name, may be further evidence of the Philistines' Early Iron Age I Aegean ethnic origins and of the continuity of Philistine culture. Further support may be seen in the name of the non-Semitic goddess, *Ptgyb*, referred to in the inscription as the patron of the dynasty and of Ekron. The name *Ptgyb* has been associated with the sanctuary at Delphi known as Pytho, the shrine of Gaia, the Mycenaean mother-goddess (Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2000: 89–91).

The inscription also furthers our knowledge of Philistine writing. We know from other sites that in the seventh century the Philistines wrote in a script adopted from Judah in which they introduced local cursive elements. The writing of the Ekron dedication, however, does not seem to belong to the cursive Hebreo-Philistine script; most letters could be Hebrew or Phoenician, but apparently are in a local script (Gitin, Dothan and Naveh 1997: 13–14).

What makes this inscription so unique is that it contains the names of a biblical city and its rulers, two of whom are documented as kings of Ekron also 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 understanding the history of Ekron, Philistia and its neighboring nation-states. First and foremost, the inscription confirms the identification of Tel Miqne as Ekron of the Philistines. It also strengthens the identification of Philistine Ekron with *'amqar(r)ūna*, mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian texts as an Assyrian vassal city-state in the seventh century B.C.E. (Gitin 1995: 62), a period on which the Hebrew Bible is relatively silent about Assyria's domination of Philistia and

Judah. Chronologically, the list of the rulers of Ekron from *Ya'ir* 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 at Ekron, which indicates that there was continuous occupation from Stratum II through Stratum IC on the upper tell, the Northeast Acropolis. The inscription also provides a basis for determining the date of the construction 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 (Pritchard 1969: 291). This would support a date no later than the first quarter of the seventh century B.C.E., which is consistent with the stratigraphic data.

The cultic information contained in the inscription and the large body of evidence previously recovered from Ekron greatly add to our knowledge of religious practices at this Philistine site. 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 script 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 olive oil-producing center in the seventh century, and Tyre and Sidon, two of the great Phoenician commercial seaports. 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. This is especially true with regard to the historical correlation between the inscription and the Neo-Assyrian Annals, making it the primary document for establishing the chronology of events that occurred in the later part of the biblical period. What is crucial, however, for the current discussion is that it represents the "smoking gun," the clinching piece of evidence of the acculturation as well as the continuity of Philistine society.

The period covered by the text of the inscription, when the kings of Ekron were vassals of Assyria, represents the height of Ekron's growth as an international entrepôt. At the beginning of the last third of the seventh century, however, the Assyrians retreated to their homeland to defend themselves against the onslaught of the Babylonians (Gitin, Dothan and Naveh 1997: 8). It was at this time that Philistia came under Egyptian hegemony, and olive oil production at Ekron declined (Gitin 2003: 57–58). This marked the beginning of the final chapter in the history of Ekron and of the Philistines, which ended in 604 B.C.E. It was in that year that the Babylonians, in the course of preparing to conquer Egypt, burned the Egyptian-allied cities of Philistia to the ground (Gitin 1998b: 276, n. 2). In addition to the physical evidence of the destroyed cities of Ashkelon (Stager 1996: 62–69) and Ekron (Gitin 1989: 30–39), the Babylonian Chronicles provide documentation of the 604 B.C.E.

campaign (Wiseman 1956: 28, 85). The Babylonian attack on Ekron is also the focus of the Saqqara papyrus or Adon Letter. Sent to the Egyptian pharaoh by his loyal vassal Adon, who we now know was the king of Ekron, the letter requested that a force be dispatched to rescue the king from the Babylonians, who had already reached Aphek, about a day's march from Ekron (Porten 1981: 36–37, 41–45). We know from the archaeological record, however, that Ekron was destroyed without a fight; there were no signs of a battle, no weapons or human remains were found in the destroyed buildings. It must therefore be assumed that the pharaoh did not send help. Following the destruction of Ekron, the site was never again reoccupied on a large scale. The subsequent occupation was a small, unwalled settlement that lasted briefly, possibly through the first quarter of the sixth century (Gitin 1989: 48). The large population of the great seventh-century industrial center was apparently carried off into captivity, as were the inhabitants of the other destroyed Philistine cities.

The ultimate fate of the inhabitants of Philistia is hinted at in the Babylonian ration texts of the first quarter of the sixth century, in which the sons of Aga, the last king of Ashkelon, are mentioned (Wiseman 1985: 25). The final echo of the Philistines can be heard in the place names mentioned in the Murashu archives of Nippur, dating to the second half of the fifth century B.C.E., which may point to ethnic self-identification among the exiles in Babylonia. The archives refer to two suburbs of Nippur with which the Murashu family had business dealings—*Iš-qal-lu-nu*, that is Ashkelon, and *Ha-za-tu*, Gaza (Eph'al 1978: 80–83; Zadok 1978: 61). The lack of any further reference to the Philistines and of any physical evidence of their material culture can be understood as the result of the cumulative effect of the process of acculturation and of the Babylonian conquest. The former was significantly intensified by the multiple cultural influences resulting from Ekron's integration within the Neo-Assyrian Empire during the first two-thirds of the seventh century. So overwhelming were the effects of Assyrian control of Philistia that by the time of the Babylonian conquest, the Ekronites no longer had a sufficiently strong core culture to maintain themselves in exile, and, therefore, they eventually disappeared from the pages of history.

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NOTES

1. W. F. Albright, ASOR's most distinguished and prodigious scholar and the father of Biblical Archaeology, provided the first scientifically based approach to formulating a paradigm for the establishment of the Israelite nation-state in the tenth century B.C.E. (Albright 1943: 1–38). While over the past fifty years a number of Albright's historical conclusions have undergone radical revision in light of new data, his dating of the Solomonic period to the tenth century, the basis for assigning the emergence of the Hebrew nation to around 1000 B.C.E., still retains the support of the majority of scholars (e.g., A. Mazar 1997: 157; Ben-Tor and Ben-Ami 1998: 33–36). This is the consensus, in spite of the illusion to the contrary created by the often one-sided views recently expressed in the media, based on the controversial positions of two peripheral groups. One of these consists of several archaeologists from Tel Aviv University who maintain that the great kingdom of Solomon did not exist and that all of the evidence traditionally dated to the tenth century should be re-dated to the ninth century B.C.E. (Finkelstein 1999: 39–42). While they have written extensively on this subject, they have, nevertheless, still to present any conclusive proof to support their claims. The second group, comprised of a small number of biblical scholars, mostly associated with the "Copenhagen School," holds the position that a true history of ancient Israel cannot be recovered at all, but only social constructs based on our own modern bias. These revisionists claim that the Hebrew Bible was written almost entirely in the Hellenistic period, at least six hundred to one thousand years after the events it describes occurred (Thompson 1997: 178–87). They all but ignore the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions that attest to the existence of Israelite and Judaeen kings in the ninth, eighth and seventh centuries, including the Black Obelisk that depicts the Israelite King Jehu bowing before the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III (Dever 2001: 160–72). In addition, they deny the validity of local documents, like the Siloam Tunnel inscription dated to the eighth century, during the reign of the Judean King Hezekiah. Some revisionists, with no supporting evidence at all, redate this document to the Hellenistic period, again rejecting the existence of testimony contemporary with the events it reflects (Rogerson and Davies 1996: 147). The revisionists have also claimed that the Tel Dan inscription, which refers to the dynasty of the "House of David," must be a forgery, because, since the history of ancient Israel is an invention, no such inscription could exist (Lemche and Thompson 1994). Lemche adopted a similar position regarding the royal dedicatory inscription excavated at Philistine Ekron, which mentions two Kings of Ekron also attested in the Neo-Assyrian Annals (Shanks 1997: 36–37). Thompson's current position on the Dan inscription is somewhat ambiguous (Thompson 1999: 205), while Lemche has reversed his opinion on the Ekron inscription, now stating that it is genuine (Lemche 1998). However, the revisionists, including Thompson and Lemche, fail to explain how, if the Hebrew Bible was written in the Hellenistic period, it accurately documents much of the history and the cultural environment of the Israelites and Philistines, which are substantiated by the archaeological record. Furthermore, they fail to explain why,

assuming the Bible was written in the Hellenistic period, it does not reflect the language or religious practices of the Classical period. Their position either completely ignores the archaeological record or grossly misrepresents it. It is also oblivious to modern biblical scholarship and philological studies that show ancient literary stratification within the biblical text and its development, which must have occurred over hundreds of years.

2. One of the questions frequently asked is why this site was chosen for excavation, and there are five very good reasons. First, Tel Miqne had been identified as Ekron, one of the five Philistine capital cities known from the Bible, the others being Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Gaza. Consequently, the already established historical and chronological benchmarks formed a basis for interpreting the archaeological data and for understanding the wider implications affecting the development of Philistine material culture. Second, the site is in the frontier zone that separates the Philistine Coastal Plain from the Judean Hill Country. As a border site, it was thought to be the best candidate for providing evidence of contact between the Philistine and Israelite cultures, whether in times of peace or war. This would help to define cultural affinities and differences, and the extent of the impact of one ethnic group on the other. Third, since the excavation had been designed as an interregional project, it was important to have data available from other sites representative of each region to serve as a reference group. Two sites in Philistia—Ashdod and Ashkelon—and five sites in Judah—Gezer, Tel Batash-Timnah, Beth Shemesh, Lachish and Beit Mirsim—had been, or were in the process of being excavated, thus providing the desired data. The fourth reason was that Tel Miqne was a virgin site that had not been excavated previously, and, therefore, there was no need to deal with “archaeological contamination,” a difficult and time-consuming circumstance often encountered at other sites. Fifth, Miqne lacked any appreciable overburden covering the site, offering immediate access to the Iron Age Philistine levels. As a result, on the very first day of excavation, only a trowel and brush were needed to remove the thin 20 cm layer of topsoil and expose the remains of the last Philistine city.
3. This precluded the need to maintain standing armies in the conquered territories.
4. An alphabetic language, which, like Hebrew and Phoenician, had twenty-two basic characters, Aramaic could be written on almost any type of material with a smooth surface such as parchment, papyrus and even pottery sherds, unlike the Cuneiform system, which had to be impressed on clay tablets.
5. This allowed the Assyrians to fund the expansion of the empire, and to convert the value of products and livestock into its equivalent in silver, which could easily be carried over hundreds of miles, providing huge savings in transportation costs and spoilage.
6. Other examples include Edom, Tyre, Sidon and Judah. Because Assyria needed to secure the route for transporting incense from Arabia, its vassal Edom, located in the southern half of modern-day Jordan, established fortified settlements in the seventh century where none had existed before along the incense-bearing caravan route (Gitin 1997: 81–82). Assyria also had to find new sources of silver to help

finance its economic policies. As the Classical texts inform us and archaeological evidence confirms, the Phoenician port cities of Tyre and Sidon were transformed under Assyrian influence into major international commercial centers, from which the Phoenicians moved westward across the Mediterranean. They reached as far west as Spain, where they developed new sources of silver from the mines in the Rio Tinto Valley (Diod. Sic. 35: 1, 4–5; Frankenstein 1979: 272–74, 278–79, 283–84). The impact of Assyria’s policies was also felt in the Shephelah, along the low western hills of Judah, where excavations and surveys have shown that, following the destruction of the major cities of this region, settlement decreased by eighty-three percent (Dagan 1992: 252–63). This was obviously not an area that was of interest to the Assyrians in terms of producing surplus goods or for taxation (for further details of Assyria’s effect on other areas of ancient Israel see Gitin 1997: 82–84).

7. In that year, the name of Ekron appears in its Neo-Assyrian form, ^ʾ*amqar(r)ūna*, on a wall relief in Sargon II’s palace at Khorsabad, as part of the description of a scene depicting Sargon’s siege of the city (Botta and Flandin 1849: Pls. 93, 99; Tadmor 1958: 83).
8. Another example of economic acculturation is the use at seventh-century Ekron of the Israelite inscribed shekel weights so common in Judah during the Iron Age II, which indicates a common system of weights and measures in Judah and Philistia (Gitin 1989: 51).
9. The author has identified a number of ovoid storejars, similar to those used as oil containers at Ekron, found in excavations at Buta in the western Delta of Egypt and at Carthage in Tunis. These will shortly be tested petrographically to determine whether they were locally made or, as I suspect, manufactured in Philistia, possibly at Ashdod, where there was a pottery production facility (M. Dothan 1971: 89–92).
10. Seventh-century Ekron produced many other examples of the presence of foreign religious traditions. One is a silver medallion with the Neo-Assyrian religious motif of the goddess Ishtar standing on a lion in front of a worshiper with outstretched hands, above which were the signs of the Pleiades, the moon and the sun (Gitin 1997: 93, 102). Another is a Hathor sistrum, an Egyptian musical instrument used in religious ceremonies (Gitin 1990: 41).
11. Nine of these have been published (Gitin 1993: 250–52), and the remainder will appear in a chapter on inscriptions in a forthcoming Ekron excavation report.
12. Ekron eventually produced six silver caches, thus becoming one of the key sites in an international study on the use of silver as money in the ancient Near East (Balmuth 2001). Lead isotope analysis being conducted in the physics laboratory at Oxford University to determine the provenance of the Ekron silver has shown that most of it came from Greece, with a few pieces originating from Spain and Iran (Stos-Gale 2001: 58, 61–62, 72). This supports the international exchange system involving Assyrians and Phoenicians that is indicated in the Classical texts.
13. Other inscriptions include additional occurrences of *qdš l’šrt* as well as *šmn*, meaning olive oil (Gitin 1993: 250, 252).
14. Apart from the Assyrian texts that provide the basis for interpreting such artifacts as booty, it is also highly improbable that the Egyptians themselves would have brought such sacred objects to Ekron, either in the seventh century or earlier.

15. Italics indicate that the pronunciation of a name is uncertain. The reading of the name Achish is based on its occurrence in the Hebrew Bible; Ikausu is based on Assyrian texts.

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