

Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavation and Publications Project

Jointly Sponsored by

The W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research

and

The Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Directed by Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin

TEL MIQNE-EKRON

Summary of

Fourteen Seasons of Excavation 1981–1996

and

Bibliography 1982–2005



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IDENTIFICATION. Tel Miqne (Khirbet el-Muqanna`), situated 22 miles southwest of Jerusalem (map reference 1356.1315), is identified with biblical Ekron, one of the capital cities of the Philistine Pentapolis. Located on the western edge of the Inner Coastal Plain—the frontier zone that separated Philistia and Judah—the tell overlooks the ancient network of highways leading northeast from Ashdod to Gezer. One of the largest Iron Age sites in Israel, Miqne is composed of a 40-acre lower tell (which expanded to 65 acres in the Iron Age II) and a 10-acre upper tell, the Northeast Acropolis. In 1924, W.F. Albright identified the site of Muqanna` with biblical Eltekeh, but J. Naveh, who surveyed it in 1957, identified it as Ekron. This conclusion has been confirmed by the current excavations (see the Ekron royal dedicatory inscription below under Iron Age II, Lower City [Field IV]).

RESEARCH FOCUS. The Tel Miqne-Ekron project is an interdisciplinary investigation of the interactions between Philistines, Israelites, Phoenicians, Assyrians and Egyptians during the Iron Age I and II. The research design for this site in the frontier zone separating Philistia and Judah focuses on periods of rapid occupational transition, when the border status of the site makes it an effective measure for identifying shifting political realities, drastic modifications in ethnic interaction and realignments of economic and cultural exchange systems. A major emphasis is on factors that affected the process of urbanization, including the political and commercial stimulus for local, regional and interregional exchange systems, and the on those that contributed to the process of acculturation.

EXCAVATIONS. Fourteen seasons of excavation were conducted during the years 1981–1996. The focus was on: (a) the process of the contraction of the site in the Late Bronze Age and its re-urbanization in the Iron Age I; (b) the founding of the first Sea Peoples/Philistine city in the 12th century BCE and its development throughout the Iron Age I; (c) the Iron Age IIA and IIB city (10th–8th centuries BCE) that was limited to the Northeast Acropolis; and (d) the re-urbanization and industrialization of Ekron during the Neo-Assyrian period in the 7th century, with an emphasis on the olive oil industry and the elite zone with its temple complex and auxiliary facilities.

CHRONOLOGICAL CHART

STRATUM	PERIOD	DATE
IA	Iron IIC	7th/6th centuries
IB	Iron IIC	4th quarter 7th century
IC	Iron IIC	1st–3rd quarter 7th century
IIA	Iron IIB	2nd half 8th century
IIB	Iron IIB	1st half 8th century
III	Iron IIA	2nd quarter 10th–9th centuries
IV	Iron IB/IIA	2nd half 11th–1st quarter 10th century
V	Iron IB	1st half 11th century
VI	Iron IB	4th quarter 12th/beginning 11th century
VII	Iron IA	2nd–3rd quarter 12th century
VIII	LB IIB	13th century–1st quarter 12th century
IX	LB IIA	14th century
X	LB I	2nd half 16th–15th centuries
XI	MB IIB	17th–1st half 16th centuries

CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT. Ceramic evidence indicates that there was a presence at the site from the Chalcolithic period through the Early Bronze Age. A continuous stratigraphic profile of the tell, however, is evident only in the upper city on the Northeast Acropolis (Field I), beginning in Stratum XI of the MB IIB and extending through the end of Stratum I of the Iron IIC. In the lower city (Fields II, III, IV, V, X), there was a 400-year occupational gap following Stratum XI of the 17th–1st half of the 16th century BCE, until its resettlement in Stratum VII at the beginning of the Iron I, ca. 1176 BCE. Following the end of Stratum IV in the Iron I, ca. 975 BCE, there was another occupational gap in the lower city (Fields II, III, V, VII, IX) that lasted approximately 270 years, until it was again resettled in Stratum I of the 7th century BCE. Both the Iron I and II cities were well designed, with four zones of occupation: fortifications, industry, domestic and elite.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE. The tell was apparently shaped by fortifications that encompassed both the upper and lower cities in the Middle Bronze Age. Monumental platforms, part of the fortification ramparts, were excavated in Fields III and X. MB II ceramic evidence was found throughout the tell, as well as fragmentary architectural remains, and three infant burials were excavated in Field IV.

LATE BRONZE AGE. This apparently unfortified settlement of Strata X–VIII was confined to the upper city Northeast Acropolis. It yielded Cypriote and Mycenaean imported pottery and Anatolian Grey burnished ware, attesting to international maritime trade. The Egyptian impact is evident, *inter alia*, in the burial containing a 19th Dynasty seal and scarab and a 14th century BCE scarab bearing the name of the Egyptian king Amenhotep III and dedicated to the "Lady of the Sycamore Tree," usually associated with the foundations of Egyptian shrines. The latter was an heirloom found in a later Iron I phase. The last Canaanite city of Stratum VIII was totally destroyed by fire; this destruction was dramatically illustrated by a severely-burnt storeroom complex that yielded jars containing carbonized grains, lentils and figs.

IRON AGE I. The fortified settlement of Strata VII–IV encompassed both the upper and lower cities. It is characterized by a new material culture with Aegean affinities that was introduced by the Philistines, one of the Sea Peoples. Its special features include megaron-type buildings, hearths and locally-made Mycenaean IIIC:1 pottery (fig.1), which predominates in the earliest phase of occupation, Stratum VII. Philistine Bichrome pottery with red and black decoration on white slip is the major ceramic type in the Strata VI–V city. In Stratum IV, the material culture reflects the influence of a new ceramic tradition, with its predominantly red-slipped and burnished pottery. The Iron I city was destroyed during the first quarter of the 10th century BCE, perhaps by Pharaoh Siamun or by the Israelites.

Upper City Field I. An industrial kiln area was found near the bottom of the eastern slope of the Northeast Acropolis adjacent to the Stratum VII mudbrick city wall. A cluster of large pits was the main feature on the top of the Northeast Acropolis. One of the dominant elements of Stratum VI was a large building complex with a cultic room located near the top of the slope, which became its most prominent feature in Stratum V. It yielded votive vessels and incised scapulae, similar to those found in the 12th and 11th century BCE shrines at Enkomi and Kition on Cyprus. Strata VI–V also yielded four infant jar burials, like those excavated in Fields III and IV in the lower city. Thirty circular pebbled hearths—16

belonging to Stratum VI, 10 to Stratum V, and four to Stratum IV—were concentrated in an open area on top of the Northeast Acropolis.

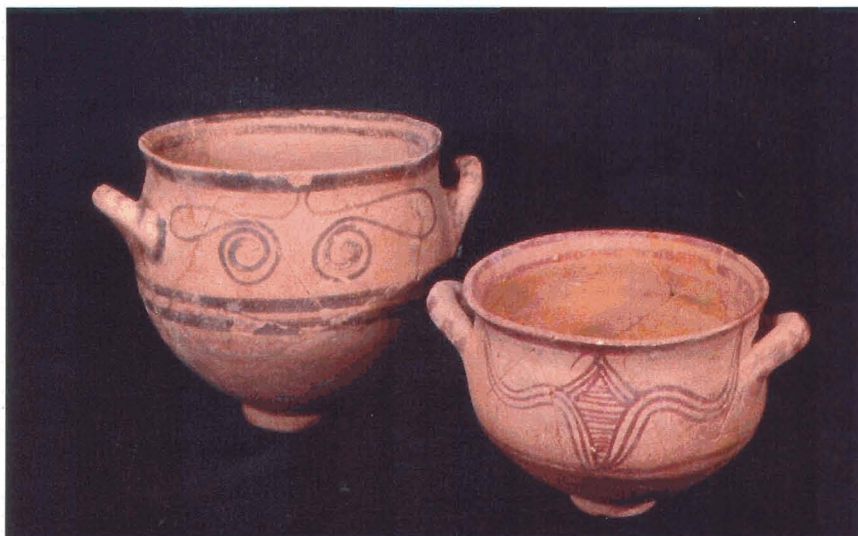


Fig. 1: Mycenaean III C:1 bell-shaped bowls with antithetic spirals (L) and antithetic tongues (R)

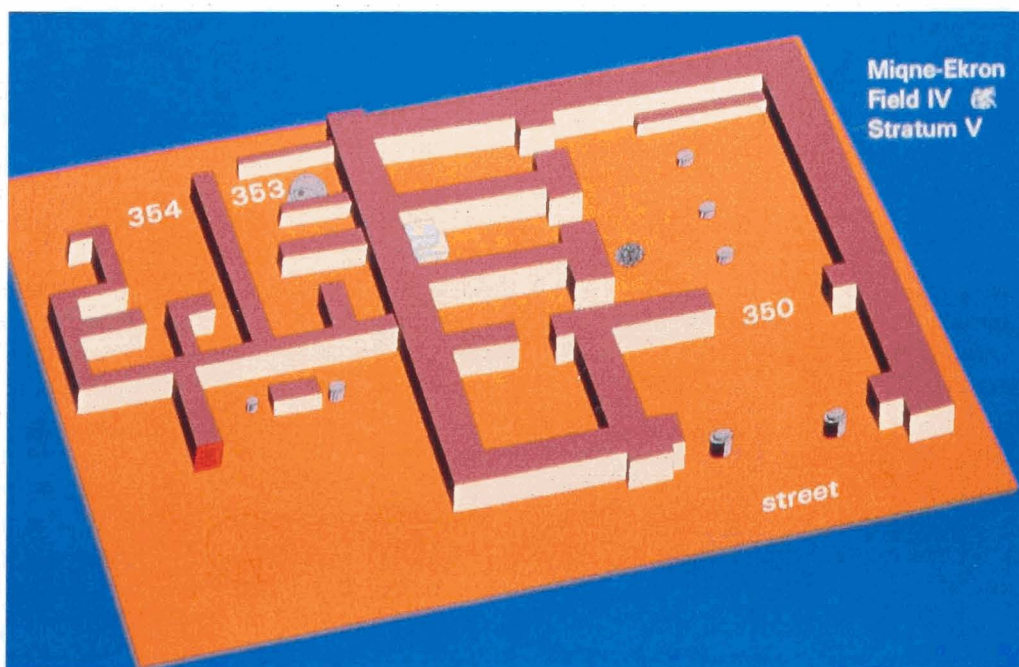


Fig. 2: Megaron-type Building 350

Stratum IV was only attested at the top of the Northeast Acropolis by the reuse of some Stratum V architectural elements and a pebbled hearth. The Stratum IV street, with two parallel stone walls, initiated a plan that continued into the Iron II.

Lower City Field III. Along the ridge of the southern slope of the tell, behind the Iron I mudbrick city wall founded in Stratum VI, were disparate architectural elements and an assemblage of Mycenaean IIC:1 pottery that attest to the possible existence of an earlier phase, Stratum VII, in this area. The Stratum VI architectural elements were obscured by the construction in Stratum V of a large structure built on massive mudbrick foundation walls, which destroyed much of the earlier architecture. The finds from Stratum VI include a bull-shaped zoomorphic vessel, an incised ivory tube, a conical stamp seal depicting two prancing gazelles, a bronze pin and needle and two goat skulls. Stratum VI also yielded six circular pebbled hearths similar to those found in Fields I and IV and one infant jar burial. In Stratum V, the large monumental building appears to have been built on a similar scale to Building 350 in Field IV. It has a broad flagstone pavement leading into a monumental entranceway with matched wall insets and a central pillar supported by a large mushroom-shaped pillar base. To the north of this large structure were the remains of smaller buildings that contained tabuns and other installations, suggesting that they were of a domestic nature. The artifacts, many of which represent a continuation of Aegean traditions, include a rectangular blue-painted bone plaque incised with the rear of a horse, a Mycenaean-type female figurine, a gold spiral hair-ring, an iron knife with an ivory handle and two small pebbled hearths. This large structure and its associated domestic buildings continued in use in Stratum IV without extensive changes, although the pebbled hearths were phased out. A large hamra installation and a crucible, suggesting metallurgical activity, were found closer to the mudbrick city wall. Special finds from Stratum IV include a gaming piece, copper pins and needles and an incised scapula, similar to those found in Field I.

Lower City Field IV. Located close to the center of the tell, this field is interpreted as the elite zone because of the special nature of its architecture and finds. Stratum VII was represented by a number of installations, including rectangular hearths, as well as an assemblage of Mycenaean IIC:1 pottery. Circular hearths appear in the Stratum VI western building complex, a temple/palace with a megaron plan; the origin of the hearth is well attested in megaron buildings of Mycenaean palaces in the Aegean. The western building complex in Stratum VI produced special finds, including a round ivory pyxis lid decorated with scenes of animals in battle—gryphons, lions and bulls—in a distinctly Aegean style. Stratum V Building 350 in the western complex also had a megaron-type plan (fig. 2). It contained a main hall with superimposed pebbled hearths, three rooms with benches and *bamot* and a monumental entrance hall with two mushroom-shaped stone pillar bases. One room yielded 20 spherical loomweights in the Aegean tradition. This building also produced three miniature bronze wheels from a cultic stand of a type known from Cyprus and reminiscent of the biblical description of the *mechonot* (laver stands) in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and a bronze Janus-faced linchpin of a chariot wheel, which can be associated with Cyprus and the Aegean. In addition, it yielded an iron knife with a pierced spool-shaped ivory handle attached by three bronze nails, one of four such handles found at Ekron, similar to cultic knife handles known, *inter alia*, from the sites of Tell Qasile and Tel Dor in Israel and from Cyprus and the Aegean. In Strata VI and V, the eastern building complex had extensive living quarters, in which a large stone bath, a monolith, two stone pillar bases and several hearths, some of which were pebbled, were found. In Stratum IV, the Stratum V temple/palace of the western building complex was backfilled, like the Stratum V building in Field III. Its plan was reused and its cultic functions continued. Finds

include a cache of ivory, faience and stone objects, among them decorated earplugs and a ring depicting the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet. The destruction and abandonment of the lower city of Stratum IV marked the end of the early Philistine city and the end of the Iron I at Ekron.

Lower City Field X. Located on the slope in the northwestern corner of the tell, all of the Iron II and some of the late Iron I strata had been eroded away in this area. Strata VII–V, however, were well represented by fortifications with attached rooms, one with a *bamah*, indicating a cultic function. Most importantly, like the earliest Iron I phases in Fields I and IV, they produced some of the earliest examples of Mycenaean III C:1 pottery, showing that the first Iron I city occupied all of the lower city.

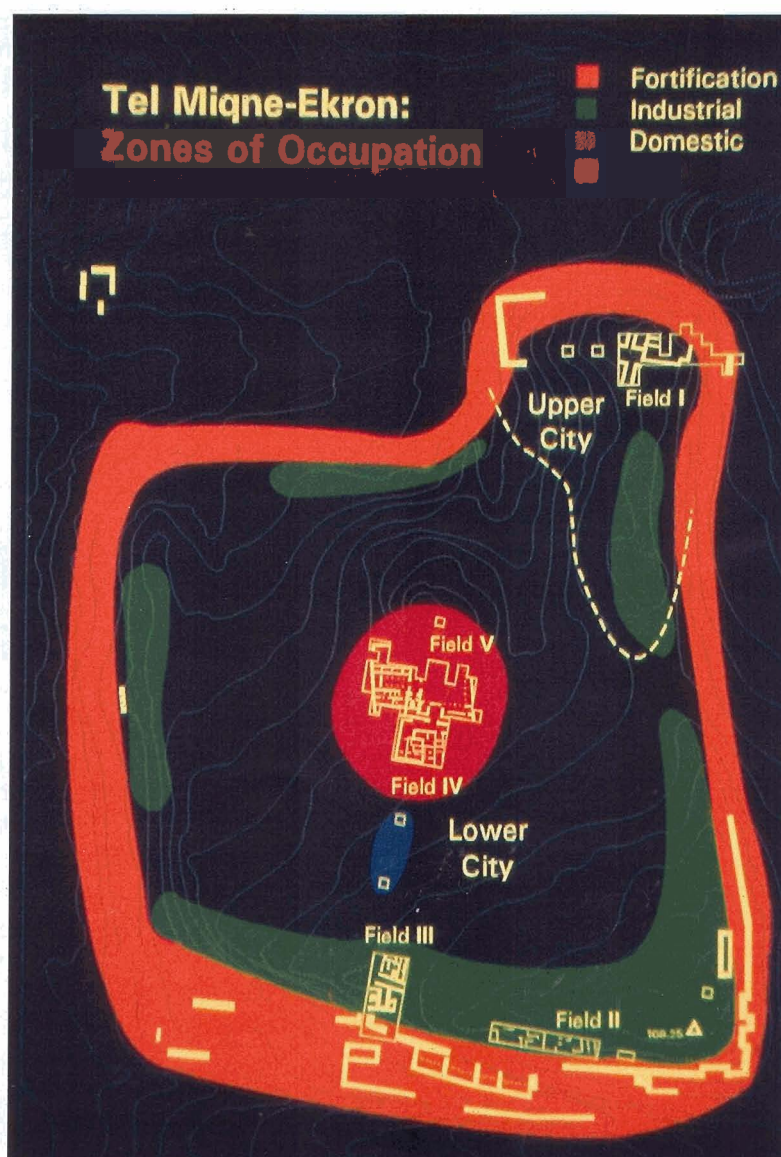


Fig. 3: Top plan showing occupation zones, Strata IC-IB, 7th c. BCE.

IRON AGE II. Following the destruction of Stratum IV during the first quarter of the 10th century, the lower city was abandoned, and in Strata III–II, only the upper city was occupied. With the Assyrian conquest at the end of the 8th century, Ekron became an Assyrian vassal city-state and in Stratum I was re-urbanized. One of its four zones of occupation (fig. 3) contained the largest olive oil production center in antiquity yet excavated. The Ekron royal dedicatory inscription, one of the most important finds in Israel in the 20th century, was also found in Stratum I. This and other evidence from the Stratum I city form the basis for tracing the continuity of Philistine occupation at Ekron and the process of acculturation. The entire city was destroyed in a violent conflagration during the 604 BCE campaign of the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and was only partially resettled for a short period in the first quarter of the 6th century. Thereafter, the city was abandoned until the Roman period. Fragmentary evidence from the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods was found only at the northern edge of the tell.

Upper City Field I. In Strata III–II, the upper city Northeast Acropolis was re-fortified with a new mudbrick city wall and a 7 m wide mudbrick tower faced with Phoenician-type ashlar masonry in header-and-stretcher construction. The new Iron II city was built over a series of monumental stone foundations that ran east–west up and across the top of the acropolis, forming part of a massive system of terraces and platforms. The central architectural feature of Stratum III was a re-paved Stratum IV street with flanking walls. The monumental architecture of Stratum II continued the general plan of Stratum III, with the addition of a series of rooms, probably shops or market stalls, that opened onto the re-paved Stratum III street, now with a stone-lined central drainage system. The ceramic evidence from Strata III–II includes a continuation of the Stratum IV red slip and burnished tradition and some forms that had developed from the late Iron I ceramic tradition. The majority, however, constitutes a corpus of new Philistine Coastal Plain pottery that is best represented by the end of its development in Stratum I of the 7th century. Stratum II also included Judean and Phoenician-type forms. Associated with the end of the 8th century BCE were three *lmlk* stamped jar handles. One four-winged example bears the inscription *lmlk hbrn* ("belonging to the King of Hebron"), dating to the brief period when Ekron was ruled by Hezekiah, King of Judah. In Stratum I, the upper city was totally rebuilt, its monumental architecture including an entranceway of royal proportions and a series of adjacent storerooms. Stratum I also produced hundreds of restorable vessels and a number of incised stone weights and female figurines.

Lower City Fields III and II. In Stratum I, following the 701 BCE conquest by Sennacherib, the lower city was reoccupied. The new fortifications included a city wall and, in Field III, a three-entryway gate protected by a gatehouse, similar to those at Batash, Gezer, Lachish and Ashdod. To the east of the gate, in Field II, an 80 m long row of stables or storehouses associated with a large public building was situated between the city-wall and an outer wall. The outstanding feature in Fields III and II was the olive oil industrial zone, laid out in a belt along the inner face of the city wall. It was composed of factory buildings with a tripartite division that created an oil production room, a room for processing and storage, and an anteroom opening onto the street. A number of these rooms produced around 140 whole and restorable ceramic vessels. Special finds include a cache of seven well-preserved large iron agricultural tools and nine four-horned limestone altars. In all, 17 altars of this type, defined as incense altars, were found at Ekron. Large numbers of loomweights and several installations not associated with the oil manufacturing process were found throughout the industrial zone, suggesting the existence of a secondary textile industry. The 115 oil

presses found at Ekron have a production capacity of from 500–1000 tons, making Ekron the largest industrial center for the production of olive oil in antiquity thus far excavated. This huge industry was stimulated by and flourished under the influence of the expanding commercial interests of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin. In the last third of the 7th century, in Stratum IB, a diminution in olive oil production is attested by the discarding of parts of oil installations and their reuse in the walls of Stratum IB buildings. This phenomenon is associated with the end of Assyrian domination in Stratum IC and the expansion of the Egyptian sphere of influence to Philistia ca. 630 BCE. Following the destruction of Stratum IB by the Babylonians in 604 BCE, a well-preserved Assyrian courtyard-type building in Field III was the only remaining architectural evidence for Stratum IA.

Lower City Field IV. In the elite zone, prior to the massive rebuilding that occurred at the beginning of the 7th century in Stratum IC, the long-abandoned area was used for a short time at the end of the 8th century during the final years of Stratum IIA, which is primarily attested on the Northeast Acropolis (Field I). This is indicated by the presence of a large number of ceramic scoops, most likely used for food distribution, perhaps related to the Judean King Hezekiah's strengthening of his western border and stockpiling supplies at the sites that he controlled, such as Ekron, in the face of the impending attack by the Neo-Assyrian King Sennacherib. Immediately thereafter, two monumental buildings separated by a street were constructed in the elite zone, the Temple Auxiliary Complex made up of five units (651–655) and Temple Complex 650. The former contained well over 7,000 identifiable ceramic vessels and the latter over 9,500. Together, they produced the largest percentage of fine and decorated wares found at the site, including local imitations of Assyrian pottery and imported East Greek vessels.

The Temple Auxiliary Complex produced concentrations of two unique categories of finds—inscriptions and silver hoards. The former are represented by 14 inscriptions on storejars, including, among others, *kdš l'šrt* ("dedicated to [the goddess] Asherat"), *lmkm* ("for the shrine") and the letter *tet* with three horizontal lines below it (probably indicating "30 units of untithed produce"). The word *bt* designating a capacity of ca. 33 liters also occurs, as well as inscriptions indicating storejar contents, such as *šmn* ("oil") and *dbl* ("a cluster of figs"). The three silver hoards found in the Temple Auxiliary Complex contained 220 pieces, including ingots, cut pieces and broken pieces of jewelry. A fourth hoard containing 12 pieces of silver came from Temple Complex 650 and a fifth hoard found on the Northeast Acropolis had 31 pieces, among which was a silver medallion depicting the goddess Ishtar standing on a lion. A sixth hoard with 31 silver pieces was found in Field III. Together, they contained 305 pieces of silver. This large amount reflects the use of silver as currency, an important element in the economy fostered by the Neo-Assyrian Empire in Phoenician maritime trade.

Temple Complex 650 is a monumental structure, 57 x 43 m. The focus of its architectural plan—based on a Neo-Assyrian design concept—is a long, narrow reception hall with a mudbrick platform at its southern end, which served as a buffer separating two larger courtyard areas: an open courtyard with adjoining rooms and a cultic area with a columned sanctuary. The sanctuary reflects a Phoenician design, paralleled in the Astarte Temple at Kition on Cyprus. The five-line royal dedicatory inscription incised on a rectangular-shaped limestone block (fig. 4) was found on the floor of the cella. The inscription specifically mentions Ekron, thus confirming the identification of the site, as well as five of its rulers, including Ikausu (Achish), son of Padi, who built the sanctuary to *ptgyh*, his lady. Padi and

Ikausu are known as kings of Ekron from the 7th century Neo-Assyrian Royal Annals. This correlation is the basis for dating the beginning of Stratum IC and the construction of Temple Complex 650 to the first quarter of the 7th century BCE. The inscription also offers an ethnic link with the Sea Peoples who founded Ekron in the 12th century, as the name Ikausu is understood as "the Achaean" or "the Greek" and the *ptgyh* has been interpreted as a Greek goddess. In addition, the language and form of writing show a significant Phoenician influence. The side-rooms of the sanctuary contained a treasure trove of gold, silver, bronze and ivory objects, including a gold cobra (a ureaus), an ivory knob with the cartouche of Ramses VIII and the head of a large carved ivory statuette. An ivory tusk carved in the form of a male figure with the relief of a princess or goddess on its side and a cartouche of Merneptah was found at the entrance to the sanctuary. In one of the side-rooms, an inscription was found that read *lb' l wlpdy*, "for Baal and for Padi," imitating the Neo-Assyrian formula indicating a citizen's responsibilities to god and king.

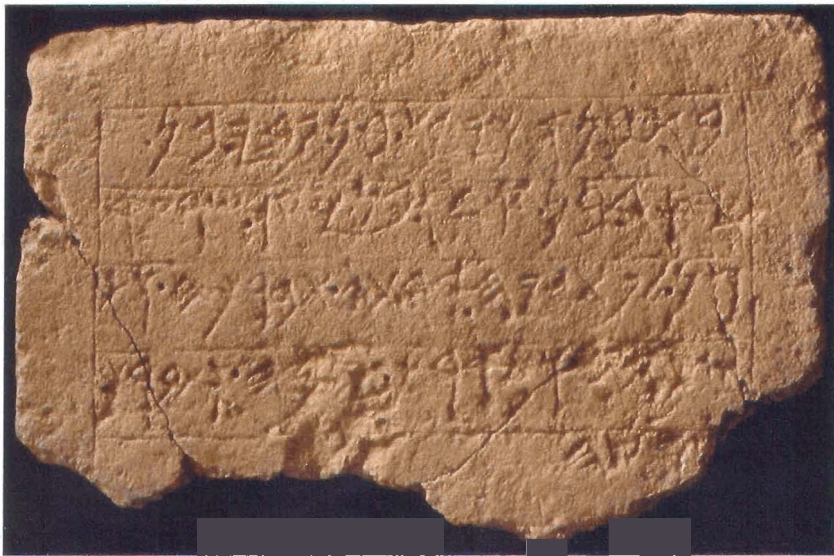


Fig. 4: Ekron royal dedicatory inscription

CONCLUSIONS. Ceramic data indicate that there was a presence at Tel Miqne from the fourth through the third millennium BCE, and the stratigraphic, architectural and artifactual evidence demonstrates continuous occupation from the 17th through the early 6th century BCE. Thereafter, there was sporadic occupation from the Roman through the Islamic period. The excavation results highlight the Aegean affinities of the Philistines who founded Ekron in the 12th century and the impact of their urban imposition on the local Canaanites. Documenting the rise and fall of Ekron as it went through a series of stages of depopulation and re-urbanization, the excavations have shown that the Philistines did not assimilate in the 10th century, as had previously been assumed. Rather, at Ekron (as well as at other sites), they survived through the 7th century, when Ekron achieved the zenith of its physical and economic growth under Assyrian influence. With the destruction of Ekron at the hands of the Babylonians in 604 BCE and the consequent deportations to Babylon, the Philistines seem gradually to disappear from the pages of history, in part due to the long-term process of acculturation influenced by Ekron's contacts with Assyria in particular, but also the Israelites and the Phoenicians.

TEXTUAL REFERENCES. Bible. Joshua 13:3—Ekron part of "the land that yet remains"; 15:11—the northern border of the tribe of Judah ran through "ketef Ekron northwards"; 15:45–46—Ekron in the list of the cities of Judah; 19:43—Ekron part of the territory of Dan; Judges 1:18—city conquered by tribe of Judah; I Samuel 5:10—Ark of the Covenant in the hands of the Philistines taken to Ekron; 17:52—in the story of David and Goliath, Philistines pursued to "the gates of Ekron"; 2 Kings 1:2—King Ahaziah of 9th century BCE Israel sent messengers to consult "Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron"; Amos 1:5—in the 8th century BCE, the prophet prophesized the destruction of Ekron; as did Jeremiah (25:20), Zephaniah (2:4) and Zechariah (9:5–6) in the second half of the 7th century BCE. **Assyrian Sources:** 712 BCE siege of 'amqar(r)ûna—Ekron—depicted on wall relief in Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad; 701 BCE conquest of Ekron described in Royal Annals of Sennacherib; in first half of 7th century BCE, Annals of Essarhadon report that Ikausu, king of Ekron, supplied materials for the construction of the palace at Nineveh; in 667 BCE, Ashurbanipal demanded that the vassal King Ikausu of Ekron support his military campaigns against Egypt and Cush; Babylonian chronicles describe Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against Philistia in 604 BCE. **Classical Period Sources.** I Maccabees 10:89 and Josephus *Antiquities* 13:4:4—in 147 BCE, Ekron given by Alexander Balas to Jonathan the Hasmonean; in 4th century CE, Eusebius mentions "a very large Jewish village called Accaron" (*Onomasticon*, ed. E. Klostermann, p. 2, lines 9–10).

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SENIOR EXCAVATION STAFF. Project Directors: Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin; Administrative Director for Volunteer Program and Consortium Relations: Ernest S. Frerichs; Assistant Administrative Director: Annette Boulay; Field Archaeologists: Yosef Garfinkel (Field IV Lower), Barry Gittlen (Fields II, III and V), Avner Goren (Fields I and II), Ann Killebrew (Fields I, II, VII and IX), Steven Ortiz (Field IV Upper); Associate Field Archaeologists: Neal Bierling (Field X), Michael Hasel (Field X), D. Bruce MacKay (Field I

Upper), Mark Meehl (Field I Lower); Architects: Erez Cohen, David Hully, J. Rosenberg, Stephen Rosenberg, Wolf Schleicher; Photographers: Douglas Guthrie, Eran Kessel, Ilan Sztulman; Coordinator, Environmental Research Program: Arlene M. Rosen; Zooarchaeologists: Brian Hesse, Justin Lev-Tov, Paula Wapnish; Director of Technological Research Development: Walter Aufrecht; Formatory: Moshe Ben-Ari; Kibbutz Revadim Liaison: Natan Aidlin; Major Domo: Said Freij.

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SENIOR PUBLICATIONS STAFF. Project Directors: Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin; Research Assistants: Jill Baker, David Ben-Shlomo, Alexandra Drenka, Nicole Engelman, Alison French, Garth Gilmour, Laura Mazow, Tanya McCullough, Tamar Nachmias, Benjamin Porter, Vikesh Singh, Danielle Steele, Anna de Vincenz, Alexander Zukerman; Technical Staff: Moshe Ben-Ari, Elena Bitan, Sarah Heilbrecht, J. Rosenberg, Ilan Sztulman, Rivi Uni, Marina Zeltzer.

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