Prof. Scott B. Noegel
Chair, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
University of Washington

"The Ekron Inscription."

With Ashur-resh-ishi and Tiglath-pileser I a temporary renaissance was launched in Assyria. After Tiglath-pileser died in 1076, however, instability resumed and the Aramean threat that he had so adeptly controlled and defeated became an ever-present and encroaching nuisance. The omitted lines (iv)1–9 round out the kings of the Middle Assyrian period.

(iv)10–27 Ashur-dan II inherited a kingdom in disarray. When he assumed power in 934 BCE he set about shoring up the national economy, which had taken a beating under the exploits of his predecessors. Rather than attempting to emulate the grandiose military visions of Tiglath-pileser I, he constructed administrative buildings and provided ploughs for agricultural productivity, although his inscriptions do mention at least one campaign. Under his rule Assyria re-emerged as a world power, giving rise to what is called the Neo-Assyrian period.

This new empire really began to flourish with Ashur-dan's great-grandson, Ashur-nasirpal II (883–859), whose military successes rivaled those of Tiglath-pileser I.

By 853 BCE Assyria's strength became such a concern for Syria-Palestine that Adad-idri (biblical Ben-Hadad) of Damascus, Ahab of Israel, and "the 12 kings of the west (Hatti) and the seashore" joined forces against Shalmaneser III at the Battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River. Although the outcome of the battle can be debated, within 13 years Shalmaneser had defeated Hazael of Damascus and subjugated Jehu of Israel, as depicted in the famous Black Obelisk.

Once again, Assyria fell into a period of decline until Tiglath-pileser II (744–727) raised her up into an international superpower, receiving tribute from the Taurus Mountains to the border of Egypt. The final king in the king list, Shalmaneser IV, is credited with besieging Samaria in an effort to put down a Phoenico-Palestinian revolt, although his son Sargon II takes personal credit for its fall.

SDAS Colophon (2)

The colophon provides insightful information on the transmission process of the list, indicating that the text had a particular *Vorlage* from which the scribe worked. This particular colophon comes at the end of the reign of Shalmaneser IV, whereas the colophon from the Khorsabad List appears after Ashur-nirari V, demonstrating that it is older than the SDAS List. The Nassouhi List does not contain a colophon, but its registry stops with the reign of Tiglath-pileser II, thus being the oldest of the three major copies.

II.   Syro-Palestinian Texts II (Noegel)

142.   Ekron inscription

The Ekron dedicatory Inscription was discovered at Tel Miqne (ancient Ekron) in 1996. It was discovered *in situ* in the cella of a sanctuary firmly dated

to ca. 680–655 BCE. Though it contains only five lines, it holds a singular importance since it represents the most complete Philistine text in existence.

The Philistines are perhaps best known as the arch-enemies of Israel's early kings. However, archaeological remains at Ekron and other Philistine sites reveal that they were hardly the one dimensional warrior people portrayed in the Bible, much less "Philistine" in the modern sense of the term. Instead, nearly everything they have left behind suggests that they were also extremely adept at farming, building, metallurgy, and the production of olive oil. Situated on the western flank of the coastal plain that divided Philistia from Judah, Ekron also played an important commercial, and thus, political role in the region. According to the Bible, Ekron was one of five capital cities belonging to the Philistines, along with Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Gaza. Hence, the importance of this brief inscription.

The script used to record the dedication at Ekron contains a mixture of Phoenician and Hebrew features, suggesting that it was a local development (Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh, 1997: 13), but the inscription's format follows a Phoenician model. The inscription's contents recognize the piety of Ekron's ruler for building the sanctuary and dedicating it to his goddess.

The temple that he built, Akhayus, son of Padi, son of Yasad, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron, for Ptgyh his Lady. May she bless him, and protect him, and lengthen his days, and bless his [l]and.

Assyrian records from the time of kings Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) and Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) inform us that Akhayus (called Ikausu in these texts) was a ruler of Ekron, as was Padi, his father. Unlike the name Padi, however, and the other names in this inscription, all of which are Semitic, Akhayus appears to be an Aegean name. This has led some to read Akhayus as equivalent to the Greek word *Axaios* meaning "Achaean" or "Greek" (Gitin, Dothan, and Naveh 1997: 11; Naveh 1998: 35–337). The name is related to that of Akish, the Philistine king of Gath in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 21: 11–16; 1 Sam 27: 1–29: 9; 1 Kgs 2: 39–40), though the two figures cannot be identical because the biblical Akish ruled during the early tenth century BCE.

Assyrian records characterize Ekron as a vassal of Assyria. An inscribed prism of Esarhaddon lists Akhayus as one of 12 rulers from the seacoast who provided him with the raw materials for building his palace at Nineveh. In 667 BCE, Assurbanipal ordered Akhayus to support his military campaign to Egypt and Cush.

Akhayus' father Padi appears in another brief dedicatory inscription from Ekron that reads "for Baal and for Padi," and in a monumental inscription of Sennacherib (704–681 BCE). According to the latter text, when Phoenicia and Israel refused to pay tribute in 701 BCE, Sennacherib brought his armies to their gates. When confronted with the Assyrian threat, some kings fought and were defeated, and others fled or recapitulated. It is in this context that Sennacherib tells us about Padi.

The officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron who had thrown Padi, their king, (at that time) under oath and allegiance to Assyria, into iron fetters, and handed him violently to Hezekiah, the Judean, became afraid (of me) because of the treason they committed.

The people of Ekron then called upon the Egyptians for help, but Sennacherib intercepted the Egyptian army and defeated them at Timnah and Eltekeh. Sennacherib then attacked Ekron and executed the culprits behind the rebellion, hanging their corpses on the city's towers. Sennacherib ordered Padi released from Jerusalem and installed him once again as ruler of Ekron. He also put him in charge of lands formerly belonging to Hezekiah of Judah (715–687 BCE). Shortly afterwards, in 699 BCE, Padi is again delivering tribute to Assyria. The other royal names in the inscription (i.e., Yasad, Ada, and Ya'ir) are not known from other sources.

It is unclear to what extent peoples outside of Assyria viewed Akhayus and his line as kings in their own right, or whether the rulers of Ekron considered themselves at times autonomous from Assyria, though the latter is doubtful. The word translated "ruler" in the Ekron inscription, while equivalent to a Hebrew word meaning "ruler" (i.e., non-king) in the Bible (e.g., Judg 3: 3; 1 Sam 29: 1),[35] may have meant "king" to the Philistines. Alternatively, the term could have signified rulers under the suzerainty of Assyria or under another Philistine "king," like the biblical Akish of Gath in 1 Sam 21: 11.

The goddess named Ptgyh has proven difficult to identify. Some view Ptgyh as a local name for the Semitic goddess Asherah (Gitin et al. 1997: 12), who is referenced elsewhere, albeit briefly, in other inscriptional remains at Ekron. Others propose to read it as the Greek title *potnia* meaning "lady," and equate it with the Greek Artemis or Athena, or the Semitic goddess Asherah (Demsky 1997: 1–5; 1998: 53–8). However, this reading poses two problems. First, it requires that we read the inscription as containing an "n" and not a "g," which now appears unlikely. Second, it would suggest that the inscription contains a Semitic gloss on the foreign term, meaning something like, "*potnia* (that is to say in the Semitic tongue), his lady." The reasons for such a gloss would be difficult to explain. Complicating this reading also is the fact that in antiquity the title *potnia* was associated with many other goddesses besides Artemis or Athena, making any certain identification impossible (Thomas and Wedde 2001). Others suggest that we read the name as Ptryh, a goddess known from Ugaritic texts (Görg 1998), but the match is not exact, and in any event, it again seems clear that the name contains the letter "g" (and not "n" or "r"). Perhaps the most tantalizing suggestion has been to read Ptgyh as Pythogaia. This would connect the goddess to the Delphic sanctuary of Pytho, where the earth-goddess Gaia was worshiped (Schäfer-Lichtenberger 1998: 64–76).

The Aegean origin of the goddess and the identification of Akhayus as "Achaean" or "Greek" support the already considerable evidence for the Aegean origins of the Philistines. A relief at Medinet Habu in Egypt, depicts

Ramses III (1187–1156 BCE) in a sea battle against the Sea Peoples, among whom are the Philistines (Sandars 1978). The evidence also correlates with what we know from the material remains of Philistine settlements at Ekron and elsewhere in the Levant, especially their megaron-type structures with circular hearths, and their pottery.

It is difficult to know to what extent the Aegean elements in the Ekron inscription represent an ethnic continuity reaching back to the twelfth century BCE. Indeed, according to the archaeological record, Ekron appears to have been a multicultural city in the seventh century BCE with a highly hybrid urban culture. This can be seen in the inscription itself, which employs a hybrid script, and in Ekron's material, especially cultic remains, which demonstrate Egyptian, Israelite, and Mediterranean influences. Moreover, biblical narratives about Philistines nowhere record a need for an interpreter, demonstrating again, that whatever their origins, they adapted quite easily to their new environment. The Aegean elements in the inscription, therefore, might be less of an indicator of ethnic continuity than of the preservation of the Philistines' Aegean origins in the collective memory of the Ekronites. After all, according to the inscription, the earliest rulers of Ekron bore Semitic names.

Bibliography (I A)

ANET, 282–4.

Becking, Bob. *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.

Black, Jeremy and Anthony Green. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.

Brinkman, J. A. *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia 1158–722 B.C.* Analecta orientalia 43. Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968.

DOTT, 53–8.

Kuhrt, Amélie. *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC*. 2 vols. Routledge History of the Ancient World. London: Routledge, 1995.

Leick, Gwendolyn. *Who's Who in the Ancient Near East*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Luckenbill, Daniel David. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*. 2 vols. London: Histories and Mysteries of Man, 1989, esp. 1: 269–96.

Millard, Alan R. "Tiglath-pileser." In *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East*. Ed. Piotr Bienkowski and Alan Millard. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, 289–91.

Na'aman, N. "Sennacherib's 'Letter to God' on his Campaign to Judah." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 214 (1974): 25–39.

——— . "Tiglath-Pileser III's Campaigns Against Tyre and Israel (734–732 BCE)." *Tel Aviv* 22 (1995): 268–78.

RANE, 145.

Tadmor, Hayim. *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III King of Assyria: Critical Edition, with Introductions, Translations and Commentary*. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994.

Younger, K. Lawson, Jr. "Tiglath-Pileser III (2.117)." In COS 2: 284–92.