

THE SOUTHERN LEVANT
UNDER ASSYRIAN DOMINATION



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DOMINATION

Edited by Shawn Zelig Aster and Avraham Faust

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University Park, Pennsylvania



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List of Abbreviations

- CC Horowitz, W., and Oshima, T. 2006 *Cuneiform in Canaan: Cuneiform Sources from the Land of Israel in Ancient Times*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- CTN II Postgate, J. 1973. *The Governor's Palace Archive* (Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud II). London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
- CTN V Saggs, H. W. F. 2001. *The Nimrud Letters, 1952* (Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud V). London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
- PNAE Parpola, S., ed. 1998–2011. *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*. 6 volumes. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- RIMA 2 Grayson, A. K. 1991. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 2). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- RINAP 1 Tadmor, H., and Yamada, S. 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglah Pileser III and Shalmaneser V* (Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 1). Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- RINAP 3 Grayson, A., and Novotny, J. 2012. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- RINAP 4 Leichty, E. 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4). Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- SAA 1 Paropla, S. 1987. *The Correspondence of Sargon II. Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West*, State Archives of Assyria 1. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 2 Parpola, S., and Watanabe, K. 1988. *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, State Archives of Assyria 2. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 4 Starr, I. 1990. *Queries to the Sun God: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria*, State Archives of Assyria 4. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 5 Lanfranchi, G., and Parpola, S. 1990. *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I*, State Archives of Assyria 5. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 6 Kwasman, T., and Parpola, S. 1991. *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part I*, State Archives of Assyria 6. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.



- SAA 7 Fales, F. M., and Postgate, J. 1992. *Imperial Administrative Records, Part 1*, State Archives of Assyria 7. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 9 Parpola, S. 1997. *Assyrian Prophecies*, State Archives of Assyria 9. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 11 Fales, F. M., and Postgate, J. 1995. *Imperial Administrative Records, Part 2*, State Archives of Assyria 11. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 13 Cole, S. W., and Machinist, P. 1998. *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, State Archives of Assyria 13. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 14 Mattila, R. 2002. *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part 2*, State Archives of Assyria 14. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 15 Fuchs, A., and Parpola, S. 2001. *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III*, State Archives of Assyria 15. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 16 Luukko, M., and Van Buylaere, G. 2002. *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, State Archives of Assyria 16. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 17 Dietrich, M. 1998. *The Neo-Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*, State Archives of Assyria 17. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAA 19 Luukko, M. 2012. *The Correspondence of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud*, State Archives of Assyria 19. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAAS 2 Millard, A. 1994. *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 2. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAAS 5 Jas, R. 1996. *Neo-Assyrian Judicial Procedures*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 5. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAAS 6 Radner, K. 1997. *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 6. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- SAAS 8 Fuchs, A. 1998. *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr. nach Prismenfragmenten aus Ninive und Assur*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 8. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
- SAAS 11 Mattila, R. 2000. *The King's Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 11. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.

Neo-Assyrian Involvement in the Southern Coastal Plain of Israel: Old Concepts and New Interpretations

ALEXANDER FANTALKIN

The southern coastal plain of Israel, the “land of the Philistines,” played a significant role within the framework of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Various sites located in this sensitive border zone between Assyria and Egypt produced abundant archaeological evidence dated to advanced stages of the Iron Age. In this chapter, I wish to concentrate on the southern coastal sites—in particular, on the role of Ashkelon under the Neo-Assyrian Empire—as well as clarify certain aspects of imperial control over the region. Although both subjects have received considerable scholarly attention in the past, resulting in a number of widely accepted concepts, they deserve a reassessment in light of the ongoing publication of archaeological data from Ashkelon and other coastal sites as well as renewed excavations at the site of Ashdod-Yam.

ASHKELON DURING THE DAYS OF THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

In view of the modest size of the kingdom of Ashkelon in the seventh century BCE (Na’aman 2009), combined with the lack of developed rural hinterland around the city (Shavit 2008), its presumed prosperity and strength is explained by its favorable coastal location. According to Stager (2001), Ashkelon’s dominant role in local and international commercial activity through the centuries derived from its “port power” (see in more detail in the following paragraphs). Focusing on the seventh century, it is suggested that Ashkelon was an exceptionally wealthy city (Stager 1996, 2008; Master 2001, 2003) and

that the port of Ashkelon was at the heart of the local economic system (including Judah) during the days of the *pax Assyriaca* in the Levant and the period of Egyptian hegemony in the late seventh century BCE (Faust and Weiss 2005, 2011; Tappy 2008). In this spirit, Na’aman (2009: 356) suggests that the documentary sources also point to Ashkelon’s prosperity during the seventh century—that is to say, Ashkelon, despite its limited territory, “became one of the most important cities in Palestine in the first half of the first millennium BCE.”

I have elsewhere discussed in detail the nature and significance of the late seventh-century remains discovered at Ashkelon (Fantalkin 2011). A final report, dedicated to the Babylonian destruction of 604 BCE and published shortly thereafter (Stager, Master, and Schloen 2011),¹ reinforces my conclusions regarding the situation during Iron Age IIB–IIC. Indeed, contrary to the presumed prosperity and importance of Ashkelon during the Neo-Assyrian domination advocated by numerous scholars (including the excavators), the archaeological remains attesting to Ashkelon’s prosperity come solely from the level that should be dated to the late seventh century BCE—that is, from the period of Egyptian domination at the site.

The discovery of relatively large amounts of Greek pottery in the 604 BCE destruction layer has created the impression of flourishing maritime trade (Waldbaum 1997, 2011), which is then projected to the whole seventh century, including the period of the *pax Assyriaca* (e.g., Stager 1996, 2008: 1585; Master 2001, 2003; Faust and Weiss 2005, 2011). This Greek pottery, however, points to the presence of an Egyptian garrison, which included Greek mercenaries, stationed at Ashkelon on the eve of the Babylonian destruction of 604 BCE and cannot be considered proof of Ashkelon’s prosperity during the period of Neo-Assyrian domination (Fantalkin 2011, 2015).

Currently, it is safe to say that archaeological evidence for Ashkelon’s prosperity during the period of Neo-Assyrian domination is not yet attested. From a historical perspective, Ashkelon’s possessions were most probably reduced significantly as a result of Sennacherib’s offensive. Indeed, among the Philistine kingdoms, it was only Ashkelon that actually suffered from Sennacherib’s campaign in 701 BCE. Thus the Ashkelonite enclave in the area of Jaffa—consisting of Beth Dagon, Jaffa, Bene-Baraq, and Azur—was targeted and most probably confiscated.² Moreover, according to the Rassam cylinder (700 BCE),

1. According to the chronicle, “The first year (of the reign) of Nebuchadnezzar, in the month of Siwan, he mustered his troops and marched on Ḫatti. Until the month of Kislev he traveled through Ḫatti victoriously. All the kings of Ḫatti came into his presence, and he received their massive tribute. He marched on Aškelôn; he took it in the month of Kislev, seized its king, pillaged and [plu]ndered it. He reduced the city to a heap of rubble. In the month of Šebat, he set forth and [went back] to Bab[ylon]” (after Glassner 2004: 229). Based on both archaeological and historical data, Barstad’s (2012) recent speculations concerning the reliability of the Neo-Babylonian destruction of Ashkelon should be totally rejected (Fantalkin 2017).

2. For summaries concerning the appearance and disappearance of the Ashkelonite enclave east of Jaffa, see Na’aman (1998; 2009); Fantalkin and Tal (2008); Fantalkin (2011); and the following.



Sennacherib transferred the western districts of Judah to Mitinti, king of Ashdod; Padi, king of Ekron; and Silli-bel, king of Gaza. The king of Ashkelon, however, is not mentioned:

As for him (Hezekiah), I confined him inside the city Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage. I set up blockades against him and made him dread exiting his city gate. I detached from his land the cities of his that I had plundered and I gave (them) to Mitinti, the king of the city Ashdod, and Padi, the king of the city Ekron, (and) Ūili-Bēl, the king of the land Gaza, [and thereby] made his land smaller. To the former tribute, their annual giving, I added the payment (of) gifts (in recognition) of my overlordship and imposed (it) upon them. (Sennacherib 4, lines 52–54, after Grayson and Novotny 2014a: 65)

Only in Bull 4, dated to late 694–early 693 BCE (Frahm 1997: 118, 123), are Hezekiah's confiscated lands in the Shephelah mentioned as divided between four Philistine kingdoms instead of three. This time, Ashkelon received its share together with Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza (117–18): "As for him (Hezekiah), I confined him inside the city Jerusalem, his royal city, [like a bird in a cage]. I set up blockades against him. I detached from his land the cities of his that I had plundered and I gave (them) to the king[s of] the cities [Ashdo]d, Ashkelon, Ekron, (and) Gaza, and (thereby) made his land smaller. To the former tribute, their annual giving, I added the payment (of) gifts and imposed (it) upon them" (Sennacherib 46, lines 28b–30a, after Grayson and Novotny 2014b: 80).

There is no sufficient explanation as to why the account given in Bull 4 is different from the account in Rassam's cylinder (cf. Gallagher 1999: 135; Tappy 2008: 397n66; Knauf 2003: 148n20). In my opinion, it is possible to hypothesize that Ashkelon's reward only in late 694–early 693 BCE and not, as for the rest of the Philistine cities, in 700 BCE should be connected to Sennacherib's campaign of 694 BCE—aimed at destroying the Elamite base on the shores of the Persian Gulf. In order to accomplish this mission, the Syrian craftsmen were mobilized to build a large fleet of ships that were ferried down the Tigris, from Nineveh to Opis. From there, they were dragged overland to the Arah̄tu Canal and continued down the Euphrates to the mouth of the river. The relevant passage reads, "I settled in Nineveh the people of the land [Ḥa]tti plundered by my [bow(s)] and they skillfully built magnificent ships, a product characteristic of their land. I gave orders to sailors of the cities Tyre (and) Sidon, (and) the land *Io[n]ia*, whom I had captured. They (my troops) let (the sailors) sail down the Tigris River with them downstream to the city Opis" (Sennacherib 46, lines 57–62a, after Grayson and Novotny 2014b: 82).

Although the boats were manned by sailors from Tyre, Sidon, and Cyprus,³ it is plausible that Ashkelon's mariners and ship builders took an active part in the creation of the

3. Frahm (1997: 117), having collated the text anew, has offered the possibility (already considered) that the gentilic for the Cypriots, mentioned among the sailors, may be taken as the gentilic for the Ionians as well.

Assyrian fleet in Nineveh. If so, these services may have been rewarded by the Assyrians in late 694–early 693 BCE, either once again at Hezekiah’s expense or, more probably, by additional rearrangement between the Philistine cities of the territory already confiscated from Hezekiah at the end of Sennacherib’s 701 BCE campaign.⁴ Be that as it may, the loss of Ashkelonite possessions in the area of the Yarkon may have been a significant blow to the city’s abilities to sustain its population, not to mention the likely loss of status in the eyes of its neighbors.

Additional evidence comes from the tribute payments to the Assyrians. Rukibtu, who received Ashkelon’s throne most probably as a result of a coup d’état, paid to Tiglath-pileser III “500 [talents of silver]” (Eph’al 1982: 25–27, 83–84; Na’aman 2009: 352). According to Tadmor’s observation, enormous quantities of tribute were paid to Tiglath-pileser by a series of newly installed kings, most of them usurpers, in return for obtaining legitimacy (Tadmor 1994: 171n16, 276). Thus Rukibtu’s 500 talents of silver should be considered against similar “recognition” payments made by Hoshea of Israel (10 talents of gold and 1,000[?] talents of silver); Hulli of Tabal, who is explicitly called “a son of nobody” (10 talents of gold, 1,000 talents of silver, and 2,000 horses); or Metenna of Tyre (50 or 150 talents of gold and 2,000 talents of silver; Oded 1974). Menahem’s payment of 1,000 talents of silver to Tiglath-pileser, although reported only in 2 Kings 15:19–20, follows the same pattern. Against these sums, however, Rukibtu’s 500 talents of silver are rather modest.

Surviving documentation concerning the annual tribute of Ashkelon (Na’aman 2009, with further references) probably includes the amount of “x+100 talents of silver”⁵ received during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. Another Assyrian administrative document from Calah (ND 2672) describes the tribute sent by the ruler of Ashkelon during the reign of Sargon II. It consists of 2 talents of silver, 40 minas of silver instead of [ivory?], and 1 talent of silver, deficit of last year—in all, 3 talents, 40 minas. In addition to silver, which was paid as *madattu*, it included special cloths, containers of special kinds of fish, and horses, which were delivered as a gift (*nāmurtu*). Another list of contributions delivered from two cities during the reign of Sargon II is mentioned in a letter from Nineveh (ABL 568, SAA 1 34). In light of many similarities between ND 2672 and SAA 1 34, it is assumed that these contributions were delivered by two Philistine coastal cities—Gaza and Ashkelon (Na’aman 2009: 353).

For comparative purposes, we may use Elat’s analysis of the booty received by Tiglath-pileser III from Gaza (800 talents of silver). According to Elat (1978: 30n65), it is a relatively

Although Frahm left both options open, this view was adopted by several scholars. The reading, however, still remains unclear (Radner 2012: 476; Grayson and Novotny 2014a: 12).

4. Although Bull 4 is an abbreviated version of the earlier account, the older text seems to be updated in light of new realities (for additional arguments concerning the compilation of Bull 4 in general, see Russell 1999: 263–64).

5. According to Na’aman (2009: 352), “The use of the verb *nasāhu* probably indicates that the broken booty list included people as well as silver.”

minor sum compared to what Tiglath-pileser III and his successors took from other kingdoms. Elat's examples include (1) Tiglath-pileser III from Arpad: 30 talents of gold and 2,000 talents of silver; from Tabal: 1,000 talents of silver; from an unknown country: 2,000 talents of silver; (2) Sargon II from Charchemish: 2,100 talents, 34 minas of silver; from Musasir: 160 talents, 2½ minas of silver; and (3) Sennacherib from Judah: 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver. One may add even earlier examples, such as Shalmaneser III from Damascus: 100 talents of gold and 1,000 talents of silver; from Patin: 3 talents of gold, 100 talents of silver, 300 talents of bronze, and 300 talents of iron; and from Charchemish: 2 talents of gold, 70 talents of silver, 30 talents of bronze, and 100 talents of iron (Yamada 2000: 271n124). Or consider the enormous amount of booty taken by Adad-nirari III from Damascus.⁶

Elat (1978: 30–34), in his analysis of Philistine trade under Assyrian aegis, points out that Philistine *mandattu* and *nāmurtu*, “gifts,” presented to the Assyrians reflect the close economic ties between Egypt and the Philistine cities, which acted as mediators transmitting Egyptian goods to Assyria. Na’aman (2009: 353) assumes that “the Philistine rulers were directed to buy certain objects and the amounts they paid for these objects were deducted from their tribute.” Even if it is correct and even taking into consideration the fact that the evidence concerning tribute-related correspondence is admittedly sparse, it seems clear that Ashkelon did not feature prominently in this correspondence, and when documented, its contributions are rather modest compared to other localities in the southern Levant (cf. Holladay 2006).

In the context of this debate, a discovery from the 604 BCE destruction layer of Ashkelon is of interest. According to botanical analysis, a few piles of charred wheat at the marketplace of Ashkelon came from Judah and the Sharon Plain (Weiss and Kislev 2004). It stands to reason that already in the beginning of the Philistine phase in the history of the city, with a hinterland almost empty of rural settlements (Finkelstein 1996; Shavit 2008), Ashkelon was forced to initiate trade (in particular, the wheat trade) with more distant localities. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that already during the Iron Age I, Ashkelon significantly tightened its trade connection with the central part of the Israeli coastal plain (Gadot 2006, 2008).⁷ The appearance of an Ashkelonite enclave in the area of Jaffa in 701 BCE, which was discussed previously, may be therefore the outcome of a process that had already started some four hundred years earlier (Na’aman 1981: 180; Gadot 2006: 31).⁸ In accordance with this understanding, the pile of charred wheat that came

6. The amount of Mari's (Bar-Hadad) tribute to Adad-nirari III varies in different accounts (for comparative perspective, see Holladay 2006: 323). Whatever account is taken into consideration, it is obvious that he made an enormous payment, especially in light of the fact that another big payment was delivered during the days of Shalmaneser III.

7. Two individuals from Ashkelon, most probably merchants, are attested in Ugarit during the final phase of the Late Bronze Age (RS 19.42; RS 19.91; Vidal 2006).

8. Na’aman suggests that the appearance of the Ashkelonite enclave east of Jaffa in the time of Sennacherib's campaign to Palestine (during the days of Šidqa, king of Ashkelon) is the product of Tiglath-pileser



from the Sharon Plain (or perhaps from a more northern locality) discovered at Ashkelon's market, destroyed in 604 BCE, is hardly surprising. It is the Judahite wheat that is of particular interest. Although it can represent no more than limited or regular trade relations between Judah and Ashkelon under the Egyptian imperial umbrella of the late seventh century, Faust and Weiss (2005, 2011) took this chance evidence much further, suggesting that during the Neo-Assyrian period, Ashkelon was a huge port and served as the main hub of a well-integrated regional economic system, funneling local commodities into the wider Mediterranean market. In their reconstruction, with far-reaching implications for the seventh-century Mediterranean economic system, Assyria did not initiate the prosperous exchange of commodities but rather acted "like a bully who comes to prospering stores, demanding 'protection' money" (Faust and Weiss 2011: 198).

The role of Ashkelon as an important hub for a regional wheat trade is known from the Late Antiquity. However, even in these documented cases from a much later period,⁹ this regional trade activity does not necessarily signify any substantial implications for broader Mediterranean markets and trade. In the same vein, the discovery of a few piles of Judahite charred wheat in Ashkelon, wheat that arrived there some time prior to the Babylonian destruction of 604 BCE, does not necessarily signify any substantial implications for the broader Mediterranean economy during the period of Egyptian domination of the southern Levant,¹⁰ and it is certainly irrelevant for any far-reaching conclusions regarding the pan-Mediterranean economic system during the *pax Assyriaca*, which precedes the period of Egyptian domination. There are many plausible scenarios (see previous paragraphs) that may explain the presence of Judahite wheat in Ashkelon on the eve of Neo-Babylonian destruction. For instance, it may represent part of a levy sent by Judah at Egyptian request for the benefit of East Greek mercenaries stationed in the city, whose responsibilities included, inter alia, collecting and protecting supplies for passing Egyptian troops (Fantalkin 2011). One thinks of Jaffa, which during the Late Bronze Age served

III's policy, who transferred Jaffa and the surrounding towns to Rukibtu, king of Ashkelon, in 732 BCE (1998: 219–23, 2009: 352). This scenario is based on a hypothetical restoration of lines 12–13 in Ann. 18 (Tadmor 1994: 220–21; and see Wazana 2003).

9. According to Tosefta Ahihot 18:18, Ashkelonians "sell wheat in their basilicas" (617). In a version of Jerusalem Talmud—namely, in Shevi'it 6:I, 36c (see also Yevamot 7:2, 8a)—we hear the statement of Rabbi Pinchas, son of Ya'ir, who said, "We used to go down to the market (*sidki* = סִדְקִי) of Ashkelon and buy wheat and go back to our towns" (Goodblatt 1994: 268–69). For a possible meaning of *sidki* as a warehouse for grain, see Rosenfeld and Menirav (2005: 45–50).

10. Following the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian withdrawal from the Levant, around 640–635 BCE (Vanderhooff 1999: 64–68), the area came under direct control of Egypt. This Egyptian interlude in the history of Syria-Palestine has been treated at length and need not be detailed here (Miller and Hayes 1986: 388–89; Na'aman 1991; Fantalkin 2001, 2006, 2015; Schipper 2011). The available archaeological and historical sources strongly suggest that Egyptian rule over Palestine was well established in the late third of the seventh century BCE until the Babylonian conquest.

as an Egyptian administrative center with a garrison, possessing pharaonic royal granaries (*šunuti*; EA 294: 22; Na'aman 1981; Higginbotham 2000: 131; Goren, Finkelstein, and Na'aman 2004: 320–25). Therefore, it is the context and chronology of a given assemblage, be it a pile of wheat or imported pottery, that should dictate interpretation.

Many historical reconstructions that credit Ashkelon with a supraregional economic status in local and international commercial activities through the centuries, including the seventh century BCE, are based on Stager's (2001) idea of "port power," where the port is the core, while the inland areas serve as its periphery. According to Stager (2001: 635), who concentrated on the Early and Middle Bronze ages, port power "played a dominant role in the configuration of settlement patterns and economic networks from the lowlands to the uplands of Canaan." The model has been found to work for other periods and coastal regions of the southern Levant (e.g., Sugerman 2009; Pierce 2015) and has been applied extensively to the realities of seventh-century Ashkelon and its region (Master 2001, 2003; Faust and Weiss 2005, 2011).

Stager's model of "port power" regarding Ashkelon is heavily influenced by a theory developed by Bronson (1977; and see Hall 1985) for Southeast Asia. According to Bronson, who doubted that his "upstream-downstream model" could be applied cross-culturally, the model "involves the control of a drainage basin opening to the sea by a center located at or near the mouth of that basin's major river" (Bronson 1977: 43).

As Kletter (2010: 13) correctly observes in his insightful critique of "port model" theories regarding Ashkelon, however,

Palestine does not meet the conditions required by this model. The "rivers" are dry. The rare perennial rivers (none near Ashkelon) can be navigated only a short way inland. No river enables water transport from the Shephelah to the coast, not to mention the highlands. Applying this model to Palestine demands a shift to land transport—but the last is not limited to dry-river basins. Not only water transportation is lacking, but also steep mountains separating basins. The Judean highland plateau enables north-south transport; there is the entire open coastal plain and the Shephelah, where north-south routes are not strenuous. Only in the steep drop of the mountains to the Shephelah are the routes more limited. However, this area is very marginal and has very few sites/resources. Also, Palestine does not fit Bronson's requirement of a lack of agricultural land in the "basins"; they are not narrow, and agriculture (with variations in crops) was practiced in both the lowlands and the highlands.

Based on the available historical sources and on rather modest archaeological remains from the first half of the seventh century BCE discovered so far in Ashkelon, we can conclude that Ashkelon's assumed enormous prosperity during the period of Neo-Assyrian



domination is almost certainly exaggerated. There is no doubt that during the period of Neo-Assyrian domination, Ashkelon was an important coastal city, serving Phoenician trade and mediating in supplying Egyptian goods to the Assyrians. However, as Malkin (2009: 390), based on Braudel's concept of *réseau*, puts it, "A port city may be studied as such, but its very existence implies another port city somewhere else." Therefore, it seems that to single out Ashkelon as the major trading hub of the southern Levant during the Neo-Assyrian period does little justice to other contemporary coastal sites of the southern coast, such as Yavneh-Yam, Ashdod-Yam, and the harbor settlements in Gaza, such as Ruqeish and Blakhiya. Revealingly, in most of these harbor settlements—located along the coast with the distances of roughly 20 km between them (Morhange et al. 2005; Marriner et al. 2014)—one can observe the traces of deliberate Assyrian involvement.

YAVNEH-YAM, RUQEISH, BLAKHIYA, AND TELL ABU SALIMA

The modest Iron Age IIB remains discovered in Yavneh-Yam are attested so far only in the fills of what is termed Stratum X, and it seems that more significant remains of this phase still lie in the unexcavated portions of the mound. The most impressive Iron Age remains were exposed in Stratum IX, dated by its finds—which include scarabs, Greek pottery, and inscribed weights—to the last third of the seventh century BCE (Fantalkin forthcoming). That is to say, the general picture of the advanced stages of the Iron Age remains at Yavneh-Yam resembles the situation in Ashkelon. Still, the excellent natural anchorage of Yavneh-Yam should be taken into consideration, as it provides the only natural shelter for ships between Tel Ridan and Jaffa (Galili and Sharvit 1991, 2005: 312).¹¹

Several limited excavations were conducted at Ruqeish and Blakhiya, revealing the remains of well-planned and fortified settlements. Publication of the remains, however, has occurred only in a very preliminary form so far (Oren et al. 1986, for Ruqeish; Humbert and Sadeq 2000, 2007; Burdajewicz 2000, for Blakhiya). Despite these shortcomings, there is little doubt that the date of construction and operation of these harbor cities corresponds to the time of Assyrian rule in the region discussed. One can reasonably assume a deliberate Assyrian involvement, stemming from the desire to be actively involved in and obtaining their share of revenues from international trade among Phoenicia, Philistia, and Egypt (e.g., Na'aman 2001, 2004; Fales 2008; Fantalkin and Tal 2009, 2015; Berlejung 2012; Bagg 2013; Ben-Shlomo 2014; Younger 2015; Thareani 2016). The excavations at Tell Abu Salima that yielded the remains of a fortress with incorporated cultic structure, clearly showing Assyrian influence (Petrie and Ellis 1937; Reich 1984, 1993), reinforce this point.

11. For an attempt to detect the inner harbor in Ashkelon, see Raban and Tur-Caspa (2008: 88–89, esp. fig. 4.31) and Fantalkin (2011: 98).

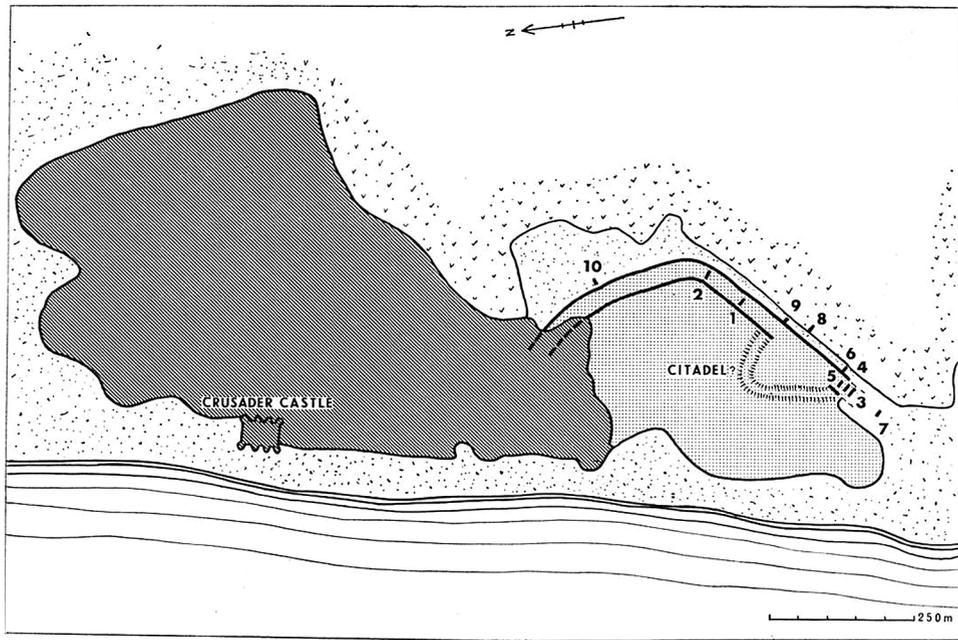


FIGURE 7.1. General plan of the site, showing the location of Kaplan's excavation (after Kaplan 1969: fig. 2)

ASHDOD-YAM AND ASHDOD

The site of Ashdod-Yam (Ashdod by the Sea; Asdudimmu in the Neo-Assyrian sources; Azotos Paralios in Byzantine times) is located on the coast, approximately 5 km northwest of Tel Ashdod. The fate of Ashdod-Yam was always related to the capital city of Ashdod.¹² In Byzantine period, the coastal city of Azotos Paralios became more important than its former capital (Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green 1994: 72). It seems, however, that this shifting of the region's center of gravity from Ashdod to Ashdod-Yam can be detected much earlier, perhaps already during the Iron Age.

The Iron Age enclosure of Ashdod-Yam, with a mound incorporated into its southern part (acropolis/citadel on Kaplan's plan), was excavated in intervals from November 1965 until March 1968 under the directorship of J. Kaplan (1969). This excavation, however, was quite limited, with the main aim to explore the Iron Age fortifications of the site. Ten cross sections were cut along the edges of the glacis and the segments of the city wall to explore the fortifications (fig. 7.1). The exposed fortification elements consisted of an approximately 3.0–4.5-m thick mud-brick city wall, which also served as a core for a large

12. The major part of this subchapter closely follows Fantalkin (2014), where preliminary results of the first season and further aims of renewed excavations at Ashdod-Yam were presented in more detail. For excavation reports of Tel Ashdod, see Dothan and Freedman (1967); Dothan (1971); Dothan and Porath (1982, 1993); and Dothan and Ben-Shlomo (2005).

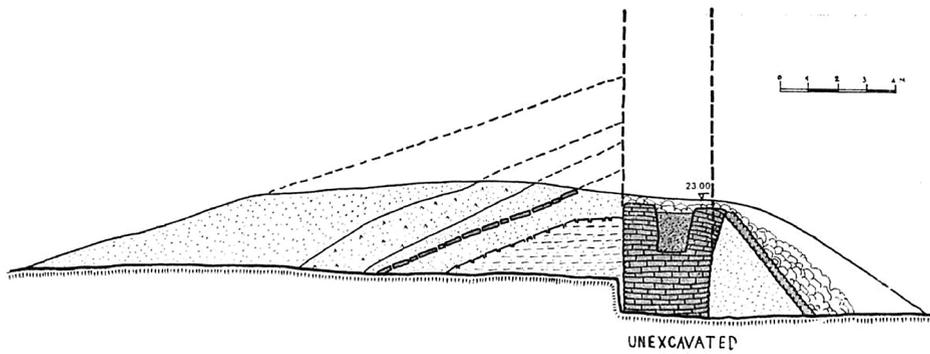


FIGURE 7.2. Kaplan's Section 1 within the system of fortifications (after Kaplan 1969: fig. 3)

earthen embankment laid on both sides (fig. 7.2). According to Kaplan, the western ends of the rampart were destroyed by erosion. The fortified enclosure could have been part of a much larger site, located to the north of the enclosure. Modest amounts of pottery sherds and vessels retrieved by Kaplan from the embankment and inside its perimeter allow the dating of the compound to the Iron Age IIB—that is, the eighth–early seventh centuries BCE.¹³ The site, therefore, was reasonably identified with Asdudimmu, mentioned as one of three cities (together with Ashdod and Gath) conquered by Sargon II following the uprising of Yamani in Ashdod. Due to surviving historical documentation, the course of events is well known and should not be repeated here (see, e.g., Tadmor 1958; Rollinger 2001; Fantalkin 2014). According to Kaplan (1969), the construction of the massive Iron Age fortifications at Ashdod-Yam belongs to Yamani's preparations for the rebellion against Assyria.

Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz (2001) have claimed that any significant activity at Tel Ashdod ceased immediately or a few years after the conquest of the city by Sargon's army. According to their reconstruction, Sargon moved the remaining population to the then small coastal settlement of Ashdod-Yam, together with deportees from northeastern parts of the empire. The newly established city at Ashdod-Yam was furnished with a massive brick-and-earth fortification. Ashdod, however, is mentioned as a major power on a number of occasions in seventh- and early sixth-century historical records.¹⁴ Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz

13. The terminology used here reflects my understanding of pottery development during different phases of the Iron Age.

14. Except for a mention in the late monarchic biblical prophecies (Jer 25:20; Zeph 2:4; Zech 9:6), Mitinti, king of Ashdod, appears in the annals of Sennacherib as a loyal vassal of Assyria, to whom Judean territories were transferred after the campaign of 701 BCE; Ahimilki, king of Ashdod, is mentioned as paying tribute to Assyria in the days of both Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal; a governor of Ashdod was the eponym of the year 669 BCE; and Herodotus (2.157) recounts how Psammetichus I laid siege for twenty-nine years to Ashdod and then took it. Likewise, Ashdod still possessed a king in 598 BCE, as the Istanbul prism of Nebuchadnezzar II indicates.

have suggested, therefore, that after the Assyrian destruction of Ashdod in 712–711 BCE, Ashdod-Yam took its place as the kingdom's capital—in other words, mentions of Ashdod in the historical sources of the seventh–sixth centuries BCE refer in fact to Ashdod-Yam.

Following this reconstruction, Na'aman (2001) has offered a slightly different view of events. According to him, Sargon founded the harbor at Ashdod-Yam after he crushed the anti-Assyrian rebellion that broke out upon the death of Shalmaneser V in 720 BCE. Before the Assyrian intervention, Ashdod-Yam was a small port of trade that served the capital city. Sargon's building operations at this site threatened to block Ashdod's access to the sea, depriving it of maritime trade revenues. Na'aman suggests that the revolt at Ashdod should be seen as a local event and as a direct outcome of this building project. In this scenario, the rebels probably seized and fortified the newly established Assyrian emporion at Ashdod-Yam. Sargon took advantage of the revolt, destroyed Ashdod, and brought his building activity at Ashdod-Yam to completion and made it the capital of the newly established province. The city of Ashdod remained devastated—although not entirely deserted—and Ashdod-Yam took its place as the kingdom's capital.

These reconstructions have been criticized by those who do not accept the existence of a chronological gap at Ashdod during the whole seventh century BCE (Ben-Shlomo 2003; Shavit 2008). I have argued elsewhere that there is indeed a chronological gap at Ashdod, but only during the last third of the seventh century—that is, during the period of Egyptian domination in the area, which starts after the Assyrian withdrawal from the southern Levant (Fantalkin 2001). This claim was based on archaeological grounds (such as the absence of late seventh-century East Greek pottery at Ashdod) and also took Herodotus's information about Psammetichus I's conquest of Ashdod as reliable (although the twenty-nine-year length of the siege is certainly an artificial construction). A few years ago, Kogan-Zahavi and Nahshoni from the Israel Antiquities Authority excavated the remains of what seems to be the administrative palace of the Assyrian representative (Kogan-Zahavi 2007). The building is located in the immediate vicinity of Tel Ashdod (Ashdod Ad Halom site), and its existence implies that the city of Ashdod continued to be the capital of the province during the better part of the seventh century BCE. The transfer of the capital to Ashdod-Yam (if it happened at all) could have occurred after Psammetichus's destruction of Ashdod, most probably in his twenty-ninth regnal year, which is around 635 BCE (Tadmor 1966: 102).

Starting in 2013, a new excavation project on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University and the Institut für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft of the University of Leipzig was launched, under the directorship of myself and Angelika Berlejung. Three excavation seasons have been conducted thus far (2013, 2015, and 2017), revealing impressive remains from the Iron Age IIB and Hellenistic period (Fantalkin 2014; Fantalkin et al. 2016; Berlejung and Fantalkin 2017).

During the renewed excavations, one of Kaplan's sections was reopened (figs. 7.3–7.5). In Kaplan's excavations, this section was created with mechanical tools, which removed the upper part of the fortification line, including the mud-brick wall. From the inner side of

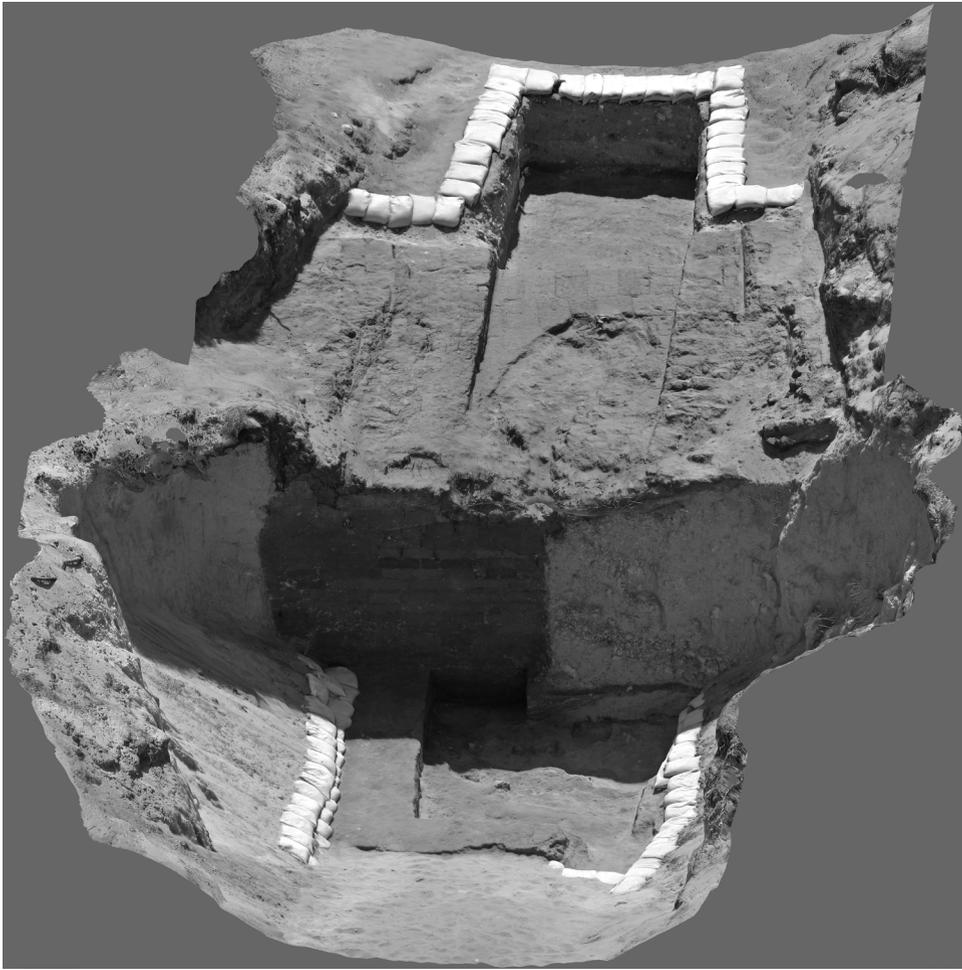


FIGURE 7.3. Iron IIB mud-brick fortification wall, reopened in Kaplan's Section 2, a view to the southeast (photo by Philip Sapirstein)

the fortification, we cleaned the retaining rampart down to the foundation of the massive wall—some 4 m in width and made of sunbaked *hamra* mud-bricks—that stood in the center of the fortification system to the height of some 5 m, with a massive glacis at its outer side. Quite a number of Iron Age IIB shards and some organic material exposed on the surfaces abutting the defensive wall as well as from the *favissa* with cultic objects (figs. 7.6–7.7), which was found in the upper part of the outer glacis, provide a good corroboration of Kaplan's dating of the fortification system to the Iron Age IIB.

The bricks of the fortification wall were tightly attached one to another, with very thin joints, while some gaps caused by a defective arrangement of the layers have been filled with mud material to assure uniformity. The measurements of these bricks broadly correspond to those reported by Kaplan for the bricks found in another section (55 × 35 × 15 cm). Both the measurements of the bricks and the construction techniques attested so

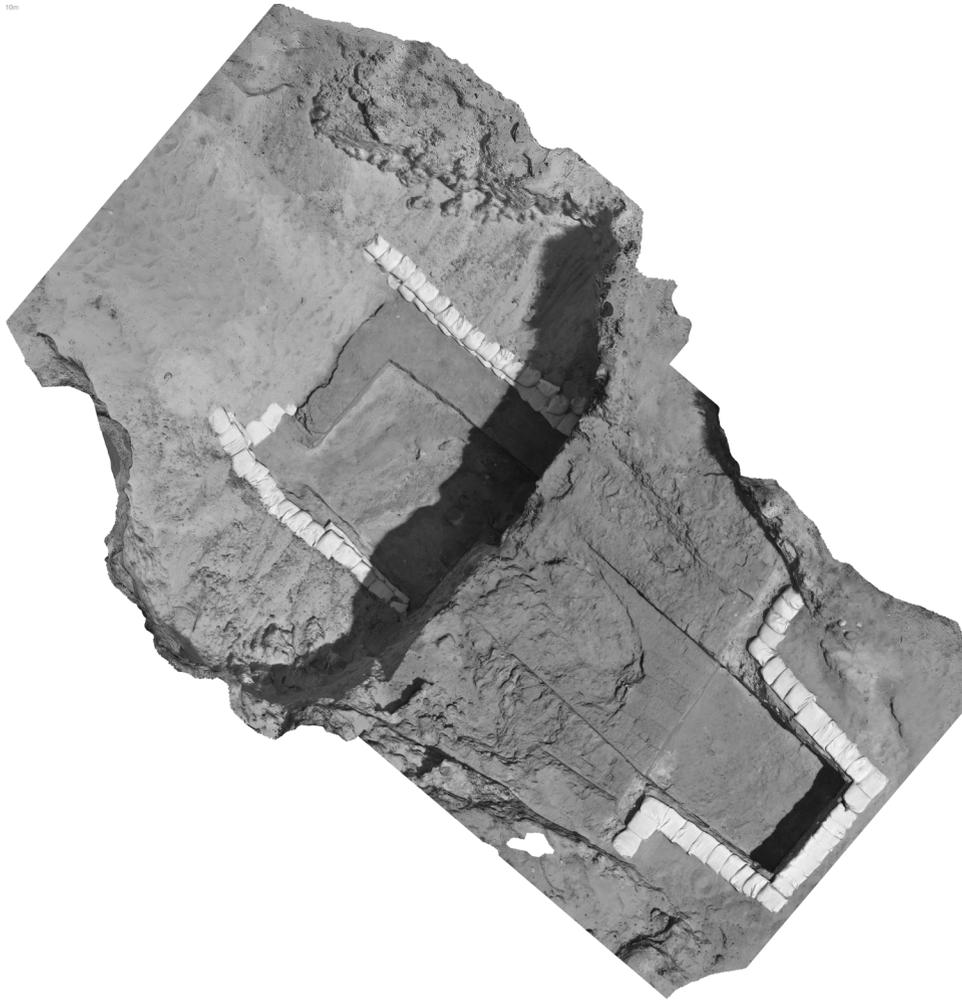


FIGURE 7.4. Iron IIB mud-brick fortification wall, a view from above; a *favissa* was located to the right of the wall (photo by Philip Sapirstein)

far support the notion that the defensive wall represents a local construction and not an Assyrian one.¹⁵ However, the absence of Assyrian architectural features does not necessarily exclude imperial intervention. Of course, the question of who is responsible for this construction remains. Was it commenced on behalf of the Assyrian ruling regime from the beginning and constructed by the locals or was it constructed first independently on behalf of the kingdom of Ashdod and enlarged and incorporated later into the Neo-Assyrian realm? Neither ceramic finds nor the radiocarbon results obtained from the organic material collected in the renewed excavations can provide a definitive answer.

15. For the dimensions of the sun-baked *hamra* mud-bricks from the Iron Age strata of Tel Ashdod, see Dothan and Porath (1982: 13, 19).



FIGURE 7.5. A close-up of the Iron IIB mud-brick fortification wall (photo by Philip Sapirstein)

Additional impressive seventh-century mud-brick architectural remains, accompanied by assemblages that included the Assyrian-style pottery, were attested in different parts of the acropolis during the excavations that took place in 2017. The dimensions of the bricks are slightly different than those attested for the fortification wall, and the use of orthostats has its parallels in Ashdod Ad Halom Assyrian administrative structure. The degree of direct Assyrian involvement in the site of Ashdod-Yam, however, remains to be clarified.

In any event, one of the major questions concerning the site's history should provide an explanation for the establishment of an impressive fortification system at Ashdod-Yam

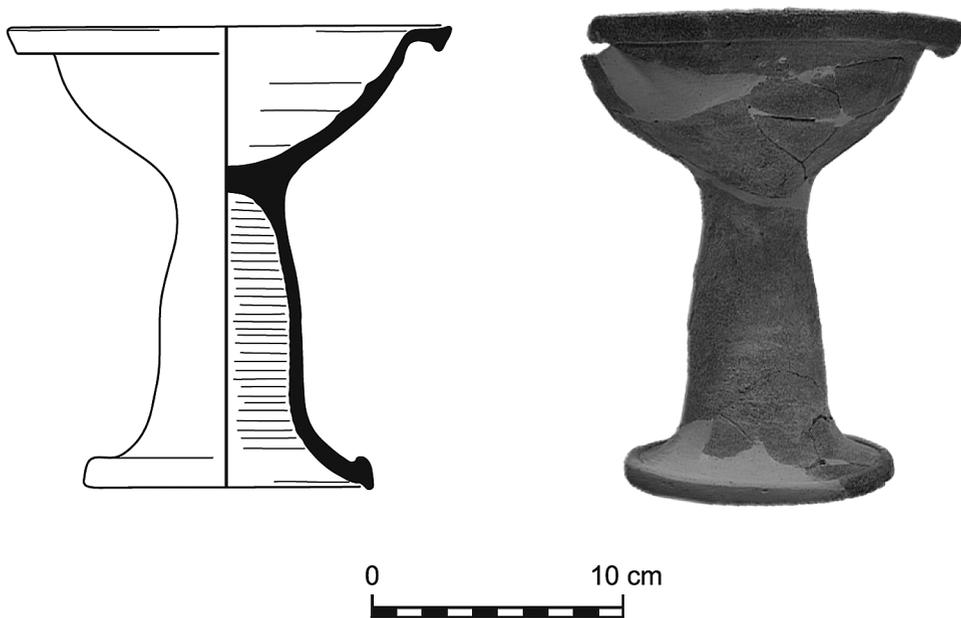


FIGURE 7.6. One of the chalices from the *favissa* (drawing by Yulia Gottlieb; photo by Pavel Shrago)



FIGURE 7.7. Vessels from the *favissa* (photo by Pavel Shrago)

in the first place. Kaplan's suggestion that the western end of the rampart and defensive wall were destroyed by erosion toward the sea appears to be inaccurate. The fortifications seem to be designed from the beginning in a crescent-shaped defensive form over an area of more than 15 acres, with a wide opening to the sea. It seems that the fortification system was erected on the highest natural spot in order to protect a man-made harbor created at Ashdod-Yam in the Iron Age IIB. The Mediterranean coastline of the southern part of Israel had almost no natural haven for building and operating suitable harbors during this period (see previous paragraphs). If an attempt to create a man-made harbor was indeed conducted in Ashdod-Yam¹⁶—as topography and remains suggest—this would be the first known harbor of its kind in the southern Levant, and the Assyrian imperial demands and design along the Levantine seacoast are of special importance here.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, mainly as a result of excavations conducted in Ashkelon, a new paradigm has started to emerge regarding the role of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the affairs of the “land of the Philistines” and in the southern Levant in general. Taking as a point of departure the idea of “port power,” which was developed originally for totally different localities and geopolitical configurations, some scholars argued that the Neo-Assyrian Empire exercised minimal influence over Ashkelon's booming Mediterranean economy during the seventh century BCE (e.g., Master 2003). In subsequent studies, Ashkelon is portrayed as a huge port that served as the main hub of a well-integrated regional economic system during the Neo-Assyrian period (e.g., Faust and Weiss 2005, 2011). This integration and cooperation, it is argued, was connected not to Assyrian policies but to independent processes of creating a single multilayered economic entity that connected Judah and Philistia to a wider Mediterranean world, with Phoenicia as the driving force behind these developments.

The problem with these interpretations—beyond the fact that the model of “port power” is not necessarily suitable for the southern Levant, especially during periods of foreign imperial domination—is that archaeological remains attesting to Ashkelon's prosperity come solely from levels that should be dated to the late seventh century BCE—that is, from the period of Egyptian domination at the site. The discovery of relatively large amounts of Greek pottery in the 604 BCE destruction layer has created the false impression of flourishing maritime trade, projected to the period of the *pax Assyriaca*. This Greek pottery, as well as a few piles of Judean wheat discovered in the same context, however, cannot be considered as any proof of Ashkelon's prosperity during the period of Neo-Assyrian domination. Quite to the contrary, Ashkelon did not feature prominently in Neo-Assyrian correspondence, and when documented, its contributions are rather modest compared to

16. Not necessarily successful in the long run because of the logistical problems of its maintenance.

other localities in the southern Levant. Despite this, Ashkelon was an important coastal city, serving Phoenician trade and mediating in supplying Egyptian goods to the Assyrians. However, to single out Ashkelon as the major trading hub of the southern Levant during the Neo-Assyrian period is unjustified, since although it was an important trade station, it was just one of many similar focal points along the southern coast, such as Yavneh-Yam, Ashdod-Yam, Ruqesh, and Blakhiya; it was no more and no less.

This network of communications (cf. Liverani 1988) extended to the north, and its emergence and maintenance during the period of Neo-Assyrian domination cannot be considered unrelated to imperial policies—especially the desire to be involved in, and obtain a share of, revenues from the trade among Phoenicia, Philistia, and Egypt (Thareani 2016). As Bagg (2013: 131) puts it, “The logic of Assyrian world domination was based on the principle of maximum profit with minimum infrastructural investments,” and for that purpose, two major strategies were developed: vassal relationship and annexation, often accompanied by population exchanges. The idea of minimal investment in infrastructure accords well with the fact that most construction projects within the framework of the Neo-Assyrian coastal network in the southern Levant were carried out by local vassals on orders from the sovereign, as had been common practice in the frontier zones of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (see, e.g., Parker 1997, 2002, 2003). This sort of a “commission policy” is evident in many sites in the Levant (e.g., Fantalkin and Tal 2009, 2015; Ben-Shlomo 2014; Thareani 2016; Morello forthcoming). The maximization of profits, however, was not accompanied by deliberate Assyrianization of the Levant (Bagg 2013). The empire—and this fact explains its success—“was a kind of mega-*kāru/m* network with a clear view towards the resources and the markets” (Berlejung 2012: 51), creating a geopolitical matrix and atmosphere suitable for the purposes of obtaining maximum profit.¹⁷ The preserved bits and pieces of information, such as Esarhaddon’s Treaty with Ba’al of Tyre (Yamada 2005), provide enough evidence to reconstruct an imperial landscape in which the Phoenicians enjoyed the stability produced by the *pax Assyriaca* and exclusive access to a network of trade routes and trade centers along the Levantine coast; however, their commerce was strictly regulated and taxed. The idea of Phoenicians being the sole driving force behind Mediterranean trade during the period of Assyrian domination, without considering the Assyrian imperial factor—which influenced to a great degree the magnitude of Phoenician expansion (Frankenstein 1979) and provided a protectionist umbrella for Phoenician trade across the Levantine coast at the expense of Greek trade (Fantalkin 2006)—cannot be maintained.¹⁸

17. In the same vein, Na’aman (2003: 87) points out, “The prosperity of certain western vassals arose from the stability produced by the *pax Assyriaca* and from the new economic opportunities created by the empire—rather than the result of a deliberate imperial policy of economic development of these state.”

18. For the most recent astute rebuttal of the theories that postulate that Assyrians had no interest in manipulating the economy of the southern Levant (e.g., Schloen 2001: 146–47; Faust 2011), see Younger (2015).



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