

VARIA

The Date of the Ekron Temple Inscription: A Note

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TEL MIQNE-EKRON has been fairly described as ‘a type-site for the inner Palestinian coastal plain in the Iron II period’ (Gitin 1989: 23). As such, its importance has only increased with the discovery of the now famous inscription commemorating the founding of the temple of levels IC–IB (Gitin *et al.* 1997). As it names two Ekronite kings identifiable in Assyrian records, the dating of the late Iron II levels can now be linked to fixed points within firmly-dated Assyrian historical chronology.

Before the discovery of the inscription, a rough chronology for strata IC–IB was arrived at through the associated Iron IIC pottery, and given more concrete dates through reasonable historical guesswork (Gitin 1989: 46):

... the chronology of the Strata IB–C cities of Ekron can be structured according to the historical documents of this period. Stratum IC belonged to the Assyrian period, approximately 700 to 630 B.C. Stratum IB belonged to the final period of semi-independent status under the influence of Egypt, 630–603 B.C. The 602 B.C. destruction of Stratum IB can be ascribed to the Babylonian conquest of Philistia. On the basis of the ceramic evidence, the unfortified settlement of Stratum IA in the partially abandoned lower tell was built soon after the destruction of Stratum IB and existed for only a short period of time.

This dating scheme seems to have been dramatically confirmed by the discovery of the inscription, which records the building of the IC–IB temple (Temple Complex 650 350). The stone itself was found among the destruction debris of Stratum IB (Gitin *et al.* 1997: 7) but was clearly not carved during that phase — as the temple was constructed near the beginning of Stratum IC (Gitin *et al.* 1997: 16). It names the builder as the Ekronite ruler ³kyš, vocalised as Achish or Ikausu (for the name, see Naveh 1998): ‘The temple (which) he built, ³kyš son of Padi, son of Ada, son of Ysd, son of Ya’ir, ruler of Ekron’ (Gitin *et al.* 1997: 9). The first two individuals named (last chronologically) can fortunately be identified in dated Assyrian records. Padi is referred to in the years 701 and 699 BCE, Ikausu in 673 BCE and 667 BCE.¹ Thus,

1 For Padi, see Ambos and Baker 2002. On his third campaign (701 BCE) Sennacherib rescued Padi from imprisonment in Jerusalem and restored him to the throne of Ekron,

the dating of the temple's construction to the seventh century BCE seems assured, and likewise the dating of Stratum IC.

The question remains, however, to which part of the seventh century it should be attributed. More precision could be attained if we could safely estimate parameters for Ikausu's reign. Gitin and Cogan provisionally date the reign of his predecessor Padi 'from c. 700 B.C.E. until approximately 675 B.C.E. when his son Ikausu is first mentioned as king of Ekron in the Assyrian annals' (Gitin and Cogan 1999: 199). Again: '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' (Gitin *et al.* 1997: 16).

Determining the end of Ikausu's reign is necessarily more speculative, but the excavators suggest a date close to 650 BCE: 'the list of the rulers from Ekron from Ya'ar to Ikausu suggests a dynastic period that most probably lasted from the eighth through most of the first half of the seventh century' (Gitin *et al.* 1997: 16; cf. Gitin 1998: 174). That Ikausu may have had a stable reign of, say, 20–25 years is supported by the impression given in the Assyrian records. The references to Ikausu suggest only complete loyalty to Assyria. His name appears in a list of 22 western vassals who in 673 BCE provided Esarhaddon with building materials for the renewal of the palace at Nineveh and later in 667 BCE provided logistical support for Assurbanipal's first campaign against Egypt.² No revolt of Philistine cities is recorded in the later records of Assurbanipal. Therefore, there is no cause to suggest that Ikausu was removed from office before his life ended through natural causes or local problems.

The excavators' historical estimates for the reign of Ikausu, placing him in the second quarter of the seventh century, are thus eminently reasonable. The temple and its inscription should be dated accordingly, but curiously this is not the deduction offered. Having placed the start of Ikausu's reign c. 675 BCE, they

see Luckenbill 1927: 118–120, 142–143; *ANET*: 287–288. An Assyrian docket records the receipt of silver from 'Pidi, ruler of Anqaruna' in 699 BCE (eponymy of Bel-šarrani), see Fales and Postgate 1995: 42.

For Ikausu, see Frahm 2000. The name Ikausu appears in a list of Esarhaddon from the eponymy of Atar-ilu (673 BCE), see Luckenbill 1927: 265, 267; *ANET*: 291. It occurs again in a list drawn up for Assurbanipal's first campaign (667 BCE) against Egypt, see Luckenbill 1927: 340–341 (cf. 293); *ANET*: 294.

2 For references, see above, n. 1. Frahm (2000) states with respect to Ikausu's appearance in the second list that 'The historical reliability of Assurbanipal's statement is not beyond doubt as the list of kings he presents is completely identical with the older list of Esarhaddon and may have been mechanically reproduced from it'. This judgement is based on a false premise. The two lists are far from 'completely identical' and reflect two local successions. Under Esarhaddon Matanba'al and Pudu-il appear as the kings of Arvad and Beth-Ammon respectively. In Assurbanipal's list they are replaced by Iakinlu and Ammi-nadbi (Ammi-nadab). This is proof that Assurbanipal's list was not 'mechanically reproduced' from Esarhaddon's.

conclude that this ‘would support a date for the construction of Temple Complex 650 no later than the first quarter of the seventh century, which is consistent with the stratigraphic data’ (Gitin *et al.* 1997: 16; repeated in Gitin *et al.* 1998: 31). Here an error has crept into the calculations. Following the excavators’ dates for the reign of Ikausu, the temple must have been built in the *second* quarter of the seventh century, rather than the first.

What are the possible resolutions to this dilemma? One possibility might be to raise the estimated historical dates for Ikausu. Hypothetically, of course, his reign may have begun not *c.* 675 BCE, but as early as 698 BCE (the year following the last attestation of his father Padi). Even so, there would be no corollary that the temple was built ‘no later’ than the first quarter of the seventh century — because the Assyrian records show its builder thriving in the second quarter. Further, while the excavators state that a date in the first quarter is ‘consistent with the stratigraphic data’, the stratigraphy in itself cannot, of course, provide dates. A date of *c.* 700 BCE was given to the beginning of Stratum IC on the assumption that it represents the start of the ‘Assyrian period’, more specifically the restoration of Padi of Ekron (who had been captured by Hezekiah) in 701 BCE.³ But a historical guess of this sort, made before the discovery of the inscription, should not influence the dating.

The alternative is to follow the Assyrian evidence closely and to date the temple inscription to the second quarter of the seventh century BCE, rather than the first. In the absence of other evidence, this is clearly preferable — the inscription should date the stratigraphy, and not the converse.

While this may seem a relatively minor correction, involving a shift from one quarter of a century to another for the temple inscription, it bears implications for the dating of Stratum IC as a whole. As noted, the excavators state that the temple was built early in Stratum IC. Indeed, the large Temple Complex ~~350~~ 650 is one of the most important defining structures for this stratum, hence the remark that a putative date in the first quarter of the seventh century would be ‘consistent with the stratigraphic data’. The new evidence of the inscription was thus construed as supporting a date for the beginning of this stratum to *c.* 700 BCE. However, as the evidence prefers a date after *c.* 675 BCE (when we know Ikausu was active), the assumed starting point of Stratum IC will have to be reconsidered. If, as it seems, the temple was built near the beginning of IC, then the starting date for that stratum might be lowered, from *c.* 700 to a point between 675–650 BCE.

I hope to be able to discuss further possible ramifications elsewhere. In the meantime, the small refinement in chronology suggested here reinforces the value of the Ekron temple inscription as a fixed point in late Iron Age chronology.

3 The date of *c.* 700 BCE is only offered as a *terminus post quem*, see Gitin *et al.* 1997: 8. That Padi was the ‘first king of Stratum I’ (Gitin 1989: 49) is, of course, merely an assumption.

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