

# Ashdod in the Assyrian Period: Territorial Extent and Political History

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## Introduction

This article will survey the political history of the city of Ashdod in the Assyrian period, based on the textual evidence from both royal inscriptions and Assyrian administrative correspondence. Its aims are three: to survey all of the Assyrian texts mentioning Ashdod; to extract historical data from them and place them in a chronological framework; to reconstruct the changes in the political status of Ashdod and in the area it controlled throughout the hundred or so years of the “Assyrian century” (c. 740–630 BCE).

These changes were the result of complex interactions among Ashdod’s leadership, its political elite, and the officials of the Assyrian empire, as well as interactions with other polities in the region. During this period, Ashdod moved from being one of the most powerful polities in Philistia to an Assyrian province, and then to an apparently unique status of both province and kingdom.

\* Thanks to Avraham Faust for his insights and to Alexander Fantalkin and Dan’el Kahn for reading an earlier draft of the essay and making helpful comments. The views presented are mine alone. Abbreviations used in citation below include RINAP 1 (=Tadmor and Yamada [2011]), 2 (=Frame [2021]), 4 (=Leichty [2011]), and 5/1 (=Novotny and Jeffers [2018]).

The unique status Ashdod achieved cannot be separated from the geographic niche it occupied. As the northernmost (and arguably the largest) of the Philistine coastal ports, Ashdod was the first polity of this culture encountered by the Assyrians in their southward expansion (see Figure 1, a map which includes all geographic locations mentioned in this article). Furthermore, Ashdod bordered directly on territory annexed by the Assyrian empire after the destruction of the kingdom of Israel in the years 733–720 BCE.<sup>1</sup> Ashdod’s position on the frontier of empire (until its annexation as a province around 711 BCE) provides an opportunity to examine the relevance of Bradley Parker’s theory of frontiers as “a dynamic transition zone of interaction” to the Assyrian west.<sup>2</sup> Its position on the coast also offers an opportunity to examine Yifat Tharhani’s view that the Assyrians saw the coast as a distinct

<sup>1</sup> On the stages of the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, see Becking, *Fall of Samaria* (1992), 1–20; more recent studies focusing on the events between 725 and 720 include Park, “Historical Reconstruction” (2012). We do not know whether the coast fell under Assyrian control in 733–32 or in a later campaign.

<sup>2</sup> Bradley J. Parker’s theory, formulated in reference to the frontier between Assyria and its Anatolian neighbors, was discussed in his *Mechanics of Empire* (2001), 11.



Figure 1—Map locating Ashdod and sites mentioned in the article. Map prepared by James Mclellan, Bar-Ilan University.

geographical subregion.<sup>3</sup> As will become clear, the Assyrian treatment of Ashdod was indeed characterized by the flexible strategies Parker describes; furthermore, I find a clear distinction between treatment of those elements in Ashdod relevant to its maritime trade and those relevant to its significant land-based trade. Understanding this distinction requires considering the relationship between the economic power of Ashdod's land-based trade and the economic power of its port or ports.<sup>4</sup> The relationship of land-power and sea-power in the case of nearby Ashkelon in the Assyrian period

has been studied,<sup>5</sup> and the present article aims to consider this relationship based on the texts mentioning Ashdod. As we will see, this relationship decisively influenced the treatment the city received from Assyria.

Therefore, in surveying the events reflected in the Assyrian texts, four key questions will be addressed. First, what was the territorial extent of Ashdod at the beginning of the Assyrian period? Since, as Parker demonstrated, "borders" have different meanings in different periods, our question focuses on the extent of the territory over which Ashdod's economic influence

<sup>3</sup> Thareani, "Empire and the 'Upper Sea'" (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Barako et al., *Tel Mor* (2007) located the main port of Ashdod at Tel Mor, approximately 8km northwest of the main tell; Fantalkin, "Ashdod Yam" (2014), discussed the replacement of that port by the one at Ashdod-yam (about 5km south of Tel Mor) in the Assyrian period.

<sup>5</sup> On the archaeological evidence, see Master, "Trade and Politics" (2003), and with regard to some of the relevant texts, see Na'aman, "Ashkelon" (2009) and Fantalkin, "Neo-Assyrian Involvement" (2018).

allowed it to tax land-based trade.<sup>6</sup> Second, what was the territorial extent of the Assyrian province of Ashdod? Here too, taxation rights are key in understanding territorial extent, as will be discussed below. Third, how did Assyria address the relationship between Ashdod's land-based trade and the economic power of its port(s)? Fourth and finally, what was the relationship between the kingdom and province of Ashdod, both of which seem to exist simultaneously, based on the Assyrian texts?

Thareani has noted the “special importance” of Ashdod indicated by the 712 BCE campaign against it.<sup>7</sup> After this campaign, Ashdod occupied a unique place among the polities of the southern Levant in this period, since it became both a vassal kingdom and a province. As the discussion will make clear, this unique status resulted from Ashdod's former importance as a kingdom and from the sources of its economic power.

Three stages can be identified. First is the initial vassalage to Assyria under the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727 BCE, with vassalage beginning c. 734 BCE). A document from this period shows the extent of Ashdod's territorial claims and lays the groundwork for Ashdod's self-perception as a powerful kingdom. Second is the first part of the reign of Sargon II (r. 720–705 BCE) when Ashdod revolted repeatedly against Assyria; these revolts were fomented by Ashdod's self-perception as a powerful kingdom, as well as by Assyrian exploitation of its resources. Third is the stage after the destruction of Ashdod in 712 BCE, during which Ashdod functioned first successively and then concurrently as Assyrian province and vassal kingdom.

The interactions between Ashdod and Assyria, therefore, are worthy of attention as one model of power-jockeying between empires and their client states, and a way of understanding Assyrian treatment of the southern Levant. By examining the treatment Assyria accorded to a single city, much can be learned about the practice and principles governing Assyrian domination. As we shall see, Assyria demonstrated flexibility in its policy towards Ashdod and prioritized achieving maximum profit for Assyria over following set practices.

This study focusses on the textual evidence, aiming at historical reconstruction. A full historical reconstruction also requires use of archaeological evidence. Many studies have addressed the archaeology of Ash-

dod in the Assyrian period.<sup>8</sup> Since several ongoing excavations explore Ashdod (as well as the site of Hadid, discussed below), the present article can help create a clear historical framework into which future data from these excavations can be placed.<sup>9</sup> It fills a lacuna in scholarship, which has seen many studies of the Assyrian period in the southern Levant, articles focused on the history of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron during this period, and discussions by archaeologists of the question of Ashdod's boundaries and fate after the Assyrian campaign in c. 711 BCE.<sup>10</sup> But no study integrating the data from the royal inscriptions with the administrative correspondence concerning Ashdod has appeared.

### Ashdod in the Reign of Tiglath-pileser III: A Strong Kingdom Currying Favour?

Ashdod is not mentioned in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. Therefore, scholars have not discussed the city's fate in this period, and the archaeological discussion of Ashdod ignores textual evidence from it.<sup>11</sup>

From one of these royal inscriptions, a clay tablet from Calah, now published as RINAP 1, as Inscription 47, lines 10'–12', we know that most of the kingdoms in the region submitted to Assyria by the time

<sup>8</sup> The major studies are Dothan and Freedman, *Ashdod I* (1967); Dothan, *Ashdod II–III* (1971); Dothan and Porath, *Ashdod IV* (1982); Ben-Shlomo, “Iron Age Sequence” (2003) and *Ashdod VI* (2005).

<sup>9</sup> Ongoing projects near Ashdod include those described in Kogan-Zehavi, “An Assyrian Building” (2005); Fantalkin, “Ashdod Yam” (2014); at Hadid, we have the projects described in Nagorsky and Yannai, “Late Bronze Pottery” (2016) and Koch et al., “Forced Resettlement” (2020).

<sup>10</sup> Studies of the Assyrian period in the southern Levant include Bagg, *Die Assyrer* (2011) and “Palestine under Assyrian Rule” (2013); Faust, “Settlement, Economy and Demography” (2015); Younger, “Assyrian Economic Impact” (2015); Kertai, “Assyrian Influence” (2018); and Zilberg, “Assyrian Provinces” (2018). Na'aman, “Boundary System” (2004) studied the political history of Gaza in this period; Na'aman, “Two Notes” (1998) and “Ashkelon” (2009) studied that of Ashkelon; and Na'aman, “Ekron” (2003) that of Ekron. Ashdod's boundaries and fate based on the archaeological data have been considered by Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, “Ashdod” (2001), Ben-Shlomo, “Iron Age Sequence” (2003), and Shavit, “Settlement Patterns” (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Dothan and Freedman, *Ashdod I* (1967), 8–13; Dothan, *Ashdod II–III* (1971), 17–23; Dothan and Porath, *Ashdod IV* (1982), 52–58; Dothan, “Ashdod” (1993): 93–102; Ben-Shlomo, *Ashdod VI* (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Parker, *Mechanics of Empire* (2001), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Thareani, “Empire and the ‘Upper Sea’” (2016): 85.

Tiglath-pileser III undertook his campaign against Philistia in 734.<sup>12</sup> The tablet informs us about the vassal status of Judah, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Ashkelon, and Gaza.<sup>13</sup> Note that the absence of Ashdod from this list tells us nothing, since the relevant lines are broken and may have contained the name of Ashdod.

That Ashdod became a vassal state in this period is clear from a letter that was sent by Ullulayu, the son of Tiglath-pileser III, who later reigned as Shalmaneser V.<sup>14</sup> The text (published as SAA 19 text 8) mentions that the emissaries of Ashdod, Moab, and other kingdoms of the Assyrian west passed through Gozan (Assyrian Guzana, modern Tel Halaf) on their way to the Assyrian capital. This text clearly refers to the organized trip of tribute-bearing ambassadors of client kingdoms on their way to their annual visit to the Assyrian palace, and it shows that Ashdod was tributary to Tiglath-pileser III.<sup>15</sup>

A different letter, SAA 19 text 28, was long thought to refer to Arvad, but has now been shown to refer to Ashdod.<sup>16</sup> This interesting but badly-damaged text was written by Qurdi-Aššur-Lamur, an Assyrian offi-

cial during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, who clearly had responsibilities for overseeing Assyrian interests through much of the southern Levant in this period.<sup>17</sup> In the text, Qurdi-Aššur-lamur reports on a complaint he received from the king of Ashdod, which Qurdi-Aššur-lamur refers to the king of Assyria for adjudication. An Assyrian loyalty-oath was imposed on the king of Ashdod by Assyria, apparently formalized by a treaty. Such an oath would clearly have been imposed on all client kingdoms. The specific complaint of the king of Ashdod recounts the inclusion of three specific cities in this oath: Gederoth (Akk. *Qa-da-ru-a*, modern Tel Qatara near Gedera), Lod (Akk. *Li-i-du*), and Hadid (Akk. [*h*]a-di-du). The complaint recounts that an unknown neighboring king (evidently either of Ekron or Judah) challenged Ashdod's control over these cities. By complaining to Qurdi-Aššur-lamur, the Ashdodite king attempted to obtain Assyrian confirmation of his control over these cities.

We know that each of the Philistine city-states controlled territory beyond the city that gave each kingdom its name. The whole region (i.e., from Hadid to Gaza) is only 70 km in length, and there are no natural borders in the region. It is reasonable to expect some disputes about which territory could be exploited by which city-state, or, to use modern language, about where the borders ran.

From this document, two important and related aspects of Ashdod's political culture emerge. In the first place, Ashdod's king felt that his polity could rightfully exercise dominance over a fairly wide geographical area: Hadid is nearly 40 km north of Ashdod. The claim for the three cities noted is related to their position along a travelled road, at each end of which were Ashdod and Hadid. The route, identified by D. A. Dorsey, ran from Tel Ashdod east to Tel Qatara and then north to Lod, connecting to the main international highway north of Hadid. Hadid was also the point at which the road leading to Gezer branched off the main international route.<sup>18</sup> Thus, control of these three towns (viz.,

<sup>12</sup> Tadmor and Yamada, *Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V* (2011).

<sup>13</sup> On the date of 734 BCE for the submission of the kingdoms mentioned in this text, see Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (1994), 268.

<sup>14</sup> Luukko, *Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II* (2012).

<sup>15</sup> High-ranking emissaries (Akk. *šērāni*) of client states were required to make annual visits to the Assyrian capital both in order to present tribute and to be inculcated with Assyrian propaganda. On these visits, see Postgate, *Taxation* (1974), 122–26; Porter, “Intimidation” (2003).

<sup>16</sup> See the arguments in Aster, “Assyrian Loyalty-Oath” (2018), *pace* Na’aman, “Qurdi-Aššur-Lamur” (2018). As discussed there, the three cities mentioned in the text cannot be located in the area of Arvad, but are clearly identified along a road joining Ashdod to the international highway (Dorsey, *Roads and Highways* [1991], 64). The argument that documents related to Qurdi-Aššur-Lamur relate only to Phoenicia and Syria is undermined by the letters SAA 19 nos. 27 and 29. Yamada, “Qurdi-Assur-Lamur” (2008): 303, suggests reading Arvad. Luukko, *Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II* (2012), 35, reads Ashdod, with the reading “Arwad” as an alternative in the notes. The reading “Ashdod” appears in the online version of the state archives of Assyria, edited by Mikko Luukko, <http://oracc.org/saao/P224451/> (accessed July 22, 2020). The reading “Hadid” also appears there, although the printed version of SAA 19 has only [*x x*]a-di-du. However, the drawing of the text by Saggs, available in CDLI, allows us to read [URU.h]a-di-du at the beginning of line 4, and [*x* URU.h]a-di-d[*u*] at the beginning of line 6, by comparison with the intact *ha* sign in line 5. I am grateful to Mikko Luukko for kindly commenting on this point.

<sup>17</sup> Yamada, “Qurdi-Assur-Lamur” (2008), 310, argues that Qurdi-Aššur-lamur was *rab kāri*, “chief of trade,” at the same time as he was governor, while Luukko, *Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II* (2012), xlix, notes his activity throughout the southern Levant at this period.

<sup>18</sup> Dorsey, *Roads and Highways* (1991), 64–66. For more on the Assyrian-period remains near Tel Hadid, see Brand, *Exploratory Excavations* (1996) and *Salvage Excavations* (1998), Na’aman and Zadok, “Assyrian Deportations” (2000), and Aster, “Assyrian Bit Martite” (2015).

Tel Qatara [probably ancient Gederoth], Lod, and Hadid) offered control of the trade between Ashdod and the main international highway, with the added bonus of controlling a point along a route leading to Gezer, the importance of which is well-known for this period. Whoever controlled these three towns could fairly easily impose customs duties on lucrative passing trade.<sup>19</sup> Ashdod thus emerges as a polity with claims to land-power, in addition to its well-known sea power.

In the second place, SAA 19 28 reveals an apparently naïve belief: that the acceptance of vassalhood to Assyria carried not only obligations for Ashdod and benefits to Assyria, but also obligations for Assyria and benefits to Ashdod. The king of Ashdod clearly argued that the vassal-oath implied an Assyrian promise to affirm Ashdodite dominance of the cities mentioned, and to rebuff rival claims to dominance over those cities. Thus, he complained:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 3 | [ <i>ma-a</i> T]A* URU. <i>ga-da-ru</i> URU. <i>li-i-du</i>   | “With (the city) Qadarua, (the city) Lidu            |
| 4 | [URU. <i>b</i> ]a- <i>di-du</i> LU-GAL [ <i>i</i> ]na šà a- <i>de-e</i> i-s[ <i>a</i> ]- <i>kan</i> | (and) [H]adidu in the treaty the king contracted.    |
| 5 | [ <i>x</i> <i>x</i> ] <i>x-par</i> ma a-na L[UG]AL at- <i>ta-ḥa-ra</i>                              | I have [se]nt [ . . . ] and appealed to the k[in]g.” |

The complaint referred to the establishment of an *adē*, a loyalty oath, which included the cities mentioned in the text.<sup>20</sup> The complainant (i.e., the Ashdodite king and, by implication, some of his elite) believed Assyria would favour Ashdod’s claim to economic dominance over these cities. Despite rival claims to these cities, the Ashdodites felt Assyria “needed” or had an interest in Ashdod’s goodwill and would not ignore its plea. Apparently, they believed that Ashdod’s tribute was more highly valued by Assyria than that of the unknown

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Gibbethon is not claimed in this document. Mazar (*Cities and Regions* [1975], 98) identified Gibbethon with Tel Malot, about 4 km east of the route described here. If Gibbethon is indeed at Tel Malot, as seems likely, then it was likely not claimed because it was close to Ekron (Tel Miqne), and Ashdod could not claim a city so close to its rival. The idea that Gibbethon was part of Ekron’s territory is supported by the appearance of both cities in Sargon’s reliefs, described below.

<sup>20</sup> On the expression *adē šakānu* for contracting a loyalty oath, see SAA 2 6: 12, 41–42, 105, and 154. As in those passages, the king of Assyria is the subject of the phrase *adē isakan*, and the Ashdodite king here references the oath he has sworn to the Assyrian king, which in his view, placed Qadarua, Lidu, and Hadidu in his economic sphere.

neighbouring king. The clear advantage Ashdod had over other kingdoms limitrophic to the route mentioned was that Ashdod had a port, which Ekron and Judah lacked. Ashdod’s belief in its utility to Assyria seems related to its port, which generated income for the local king, which could in turn serve as a basis for a realistic but high tribute payment. Assyria was certainly more concerned about the tribute of wealthier states than of those which could remit less.

These two points support each other: the territorial claim makes sense if Ashdod was a relatively strong kingdom, and Ashdod’s wealth derived from the extent of territory it controlled and its ability to demand customs payments (Akk. *miksu*) from lucrative land-based trade routes, as well as the exploitation of its well-known port. It appears that in this period, Ashdod’s leaders tried to harness its port-power to strengthen its land-power.

But as we see below, Ashdod’s wealth certainly made it attractive for Assyrian exploitation. Ashdod’s tribute was certainly of great interest to Assyria in the reign of Sargon II (720–705), as we see from documents discussed below.

### Ashdod in the Reign of Sargon II: Background to Revolt

No further documents from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III or his successor, Shalmaneser V (726–722) mention Ashdod; we may assume that Ashdod continued to pay tribute during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. Shalmaneser V encountered opposition to his reign in the Assyrian heartland.<sup>21</sup> At some point during his reign, much of the Levant ceased paying tribute. He died and was supplanted by Sargon II c. 722 BCE. The inscriptions of Sargon II describe how he re-asserted Assyrian sovereignty throughout the region c. 720, in a series of campaigns which included the

<sup>21</sup> On political turmoil in the reign of Shalmaneser V, which continued until the campaign of Sargon II in 720 BCE, see Park, “Historical Reconstruction” (2012): 102, and Elayi, *Sargon II* (2017), 25–32, especially 29–30, including a discussion of the Assur charter. Tadmor, “Campaigns of Sargon II” (1958): 31, and more recently Radner, “Assur-Nineveh-Arbela Triangle” (2011), 323, support the view that Sargon II usurped the position of Shalmaneser V after a revolt of some sort. Vera Chamaza, “Sargon II’s Ascent” (1992) notes that Sargon II may have been the son of Tiglath-pileser III (as is claimed in a single inscription), and therefore the legitimate heir rather than a usurper, but agrees that the reign of Shalmaneser V was beset by opposition in the Assyrian heartland, based on K 1349.

reconquest of Damascus and Samaria.<sup>22</sup> Sargon also fought a large-scale battle at Rafiah against Egyptian forces, who came to the aid of Hanun of Gaza. Hanun of Gaza seems to have interpreted the events preceding 720 as a sign of Assyrian weakness, and therefore rebelled with the aid of the Egyptians.<sup>23</sup>

Sargon's reliefs also show campaigns against Ekron and Gibbethon, in northern Philistia.<sup>24</sup> Despite the revolt in Gaza, and the possible participation of the city-state of Ekron (and of Gibbethon, which was probably a possession of Ekron) in this revolt, we hear nothing of any participation by Ashdod. Neither Ashdod nor Ashkelon are mentioned in Sargon's account of these revolts and his restoration of order. This leads us to assume that while Ashdod, like other kingdoms of the area, may have been lax in payments before 720, it resumed such payments in 720, when Sargon appeared in the area.

The administrative letter published as SAA I 34 seems to record such payments. This is a letter to Sargon II from Sennacherib the crown prince, listing taxes paid to the palace at Nineveh by two kings, the second of whom seems to be Azu[ri].<sup>25</sup> The letter is unusual since it lists payments made not only to the king, but

also to the queen, the crown-prince, and other high officials. Furthermore, the payments are divided into *madattu* (tribute payments usually made annually) and *nāmurtu*-payments, whose timing depended on "the particular circumstances of the giver," as "a payment made by the king's subjects whenever they came to him for a favour."<sup>26</sup> The quantities of silver paid by the tributary (who seems to be Azuri) are double those paid by the other tributary in the tablet. "The size of the gift may have depended on the nature of the favour requested (or even the enormity of the crime to be excused)."<sup>27</sup> Given this understanding of *nāmurtu*, it seems most reasonable to place this text shortly after 720, and to reconstruct the events as follows: Azuri, king of Ashdod from before 720, was lax in payments before 720, resumed such payments in or very shortly after 720, and craved Sargon's pardon for the years of missed payments.

Ashdod reappears in the royal inscriptions from later in Sargon's reign as a less loyal vassal. As I will show below, Ashdod repeatedly revolted in the years 717–711. The revolt, which was expressed by refusal to submit tribute, was wide-ranging in two respects. These two aspects bear examination, since they correlate with the picture of Ashdod's power in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III detailed above.

The first respect in which the revolt was so extensive is the clear evidence for an anti-Assyrian element in the Ashdodite elite. Although Assyria succeeded in removing the Ashdodite king who first revolted (Azuri) and installing a pro-Assyrian king (Aḫimti), elements in Ashdod deposed the pro-Assyrian king and found a different king to again lead a revolt. There was clearly an active element in the Ashdodite elite that opposed submission to Assyria. While this element did not drag Ashdod to revolt before 720, it resolved to revolt only a few years later. This suggests that the anti-Assyrian element was motivated by the exaction of tribute in the years immediately following 720.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The campaigns against Samaria and Damascus have been discussed extensively; see Tadmor, "Campaigns of Sargon II" (1958), Younger, "Fall of Samaria" (1999), Park, "Historical Reconstruction" (2012), and Cogan, "Restoring the Empire" (2017). Park, "Historical Reconstruction" (2012) dates these to 722, not 720. The difference of two years does not materially change my argument. For convenience, I use the date 720 below.

<sup>23</sup> The battle at Rafiah is narrated in Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II* (1994), 90, lines 53–57, now RINAP 2 inscription 1, lines 53–57. See also discussion in Cogan, "Restoring the Empire" (2017): 183.

<sup>24</sup> El-Amin, "Reliefsmit Beischriften" (1953): 35–40, and Reade, "Sargon's Campaigns" (1976) date these to 720. Franklin ("Room V Reliefs" [1994]) argues that the reliefs in Room V do not necessarily represent a single campaign and therefore the reliefs of Ekron and Gibbethon may reflect the 712 campaign (now often dated to 711). Tadmor ("Campaigns of Sargon II" [1958]: 83 n. 243) argues that the conquest of these cities took place during the 712/711 campaign. The close association between Ekron and Gibbethon is important to our geographic discussion, but the date of this campaign is not material to it.

<sup>25</sup> The name Azu[ri] is read in reverse line 1' of the tablet by Postgate, *Taxation* (1974), 283. If we accept this reading, then the letter can be assigned to Azuri of Ashdod, as in Eph'al, "Significance of Assyrian Imperial Rule" (2010) and Zilberg, "Assyrian Provinces" (2018), 62, since no other personage with a similar name is known from Assyrian documents of this period. In SAA I, letter 34, the line is transcribed as illegible. However, it would appear from the CDLI image that Postgate's reading is plausible. I make no claim to have collated the text.

<sup>26</sup> Postgate, *Taxation* (1974), 158–59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>28</sup> Notably, the rebellion of Ashdod several years after an Assyrian campaign has an obvious parallel in the rebellion of Ashkelon after the 734 campaign (mentioned in the annal published in RINAP 1, Inscription 22). Apparently, the tribute imposed in each case, after the initial Assyrian victory, caused the revolt. A further parallel may be found in the case of Rezin of Damascus, who paid tribute in approximately 739 BCE (as recorded in RINAP 1, Inscription 35), but ceased doing so before 733 BCE, when a campaign against him was launched.

The second relevant aspect of the revolt was Ashdod's success in eliciting support from the surrounding kingdoms. As I discuss below, each of the Ashdodite kings who revolted against Assyria sent emissaries to surrounding kingdoms to garner support. Clearly, these kings thought that Ashdod was a regional leader, whose proposals would be taken seriously by other regional potentates. Each of these points can best be understood against the background of Ashdod as a relatively strong kingdom in Philistia, as was illustrated in the analysis above of the texts from the period of Tiglath-pileser III.

To these points should be added a third one: the willingness of the supporters of revolt to run the risk of Assyrian retribution. After 720, they were certainly aware of how Assyria had treated the kingdom of Israel, and how it had destroyed Rafiah. But they felt the risk worthwhile, knowing that Assyria had, since 734, invariably refrained from destroying port cities in Philistia. They were certainly aware that other coastal cities in Philistia had revolted and escaped destruction; Gaza had revolted twice. Before the 734 campaign, Hanun of Gaza incurred Assyrian wrath and fled to Egypt, yet Tiglath-pileser III "returned him to his position."<sup>29</sup> Rather than destroying the city, other means were found of pressuring Gaza: the placing of a statue bearing Tiglath-pileser's image and those of his gods in the palace of Gaza, the Assyrian "emporium," and the stele at the "city of the brook of Egypt."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, when Gaza revolted before 720, Rafiah, rather than Gaza, was destroyed as a means of pressuring the king of Gaza.<sup>31</sup> Ashkelon also revolted, and its king was replaced; the city was not destroyed.<sup>32</sup> Based on these precedents, some in the Ashdodite elite felt that Ashdod could risk a revolt, because its status as a port

city would also grant it immunity from severe Assyrian retaliation.

### Ashdod in the Reign of Sargon II: Revolt and Reduction to Province

I now survey the events of Ashdod's revolts, which took place between 717 and 711, showing how the events demonstrate the three points noted above. These revolts involved three different kings, two of whom were anti-Assyrian and one pro-Assyrian. The passage of time involved in appointing and dethroning each suggests that the events did not take place in the space of a few months. Our only fixed chronological point in the whole series of episodes concerning Ashdod is the end point, 712/711, for which year the annals record all the revolts and reactions, ending with Ashdod's destruction.<sup>33</sup> The chronology I propose below fits the Ashdod kings and their revolts into the larger historical context in the region.

While the precise dates are not critical to our discussion, there are good reasons to reconstruct this drama as having already begun in 718 or 717. In 717, Sargon II was occupied by a campaign against Carchemish, and in the previous year, by a campaign against Tabal.<sup>34</sup> It appears reasonable that the initial acts of revolt would take place when the Assyrian army was far from the Levant. (The subsequent subduing of these acts of revolt fits best in 716/715, as I discuss below.) The initial act of revolt is described as follows in the Khorsabad display inscription:

Azuri, king of Ashdod, whose heart planned not to bring tribute, therefore sent (messages containing) hostility about Assyria to the kings surrounding him. Because of the crimes he committed, I changed his rule over the people of his land. I established Ahimti, his beloved brother, over them.<sup>35</sup>

It is important to note that this rebellion was not limited to Ashdod but included "the kings surrounding him." We do not know the identity of these kings,

<sup>29</sup> Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (1994), 140–41, Summ. Insc. 4, line 13' and notes on Summ. Insc. 4. The inscription corresponds to RINAP 1, inscription 42.

<sup>30</sup> See Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (1994), 222–25, for a composite of the relevant inscriptions.

<sup>31</sup> Rafiah was part of Gaza's territory. On the destruction of Rafiah by fire, see Sargon's inscription, Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II* (1994), 90, lines 53–57, now RINAP 2 inscription 1, lines 53–57.

<sup>32</sup> The relevant inscriptions are Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (1994), 82–83, annal 18, lines 8'–12' (|| RINAP 1, Inscription 22) and 82–83, annal 24, lines 12'–15' (|| RINAP 1, Inscription 21). The reconstruction offered here follows Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (1994), 268, and Ehrlich, *Philistines* (1996), 176–80. A different understanding is proffered in Na'aman, "Two Notes" (1998): 222, which does not materially affect the argument here.

<sup>33</sup> Although the date 712 is often used, Tadmor ("Sargon's Campaigns" [1954]) already showed that the correct date is 711. This was shown in detail by Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres 711* (1998), 124–31, and this is accepted in Elayi, *Sargon II* (2017), 58.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 100, with further details at 222–26.

<sup>35</sup> The translation is mine; the text appears in Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II* (1994), 219–21, Prunkinschrift, lines 90–95 and now in RINAP 2, inscription 7.

but Ashdod bordered Judah as well as Ashkelon and Ekron, and it would seem probable that Azuri invited some or all of these to participate in the revolt. Despite leading a revolt, Ashdod appears not to have been punished; there is no record of any Assyrian action against Ashdod after Azuri's revolt, other than the removal of its king. Initially, the wager of the anti-Assyrian elements seemed justified. Sargon contented himself with removing Azuri, substituting the pro-Assyrian Aḫimti, and hoping for the best.

When did this removal take place? To the above conjecture placing Azuri's decision in 718–717 can be added our knowledge about a possible Assyrian force which removed him and replaced him with Aḫimti. It does not appear that the removal of Azuri was effected by the small imperial garrisons (*qurbu*) stationed at provincial capitals and other points in the region, but by a larger Assyrian force. As we will see below, the removal of Azuri and his replacement by Aḫimti was unpopular. Therefore, it is unlikely that it could have been accomplished by small Assyrian garrisons.

We know that larger Assyrian forces arrived in the region in 716–715 to engage in actions on the border of Egypt, south of Philistia. Younger suggested that these forces were active in removing Azuri, and therefore dates his removal to 716 or 715.<sup>36</sup> The Assyrian actions in these years were fairly extensive and included interactions with client kings in the area around Rafiah and with Egyptian kings, as well attempts to re-settle deportees from Arabia in Samaria.<sup>37</sup> This would mean that Aḫimti's reign began in 716 or 715.

<sup>36</sup> The removal of Azuri during this campaign was suggested by Younger, "Assyrian Involvement" (2003), 240. On this campaign, see Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres 711* (1998), 28–29, labelled IIIe, Ass. 5–11, now in RINAP 2, inscription 63, ii' lines 1'–7'. The passage describes some interaction with the *nāsiku* (usually translated "sheikh") of Laban, an apparently pro-Assyrian potentate near the border (see discussion in Eph'al, *Ancient Arabs* [1982], 104), and the receipt of tribute from an Egyptian leader. The subsequent passage refers to his sixth campaign according to the Calah count, which would place this in 716 BCE. Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II* (1994), 110, annal lines 123–24, now RINAP 2, inscription 1 (discussed in Tadmor, "Campaigns of Sargon II" [1958]: 78) records the receipt of tribute from "Pir'u" (apparently Pharaoh), apparently in 715. At the same time, Sargon claims to have settled Arab nomads in Samaria. Kahn (cited in Bányai, "Reihenfolge" [2015]: 134) suggests that the events attributed to 716 and those attributed to 715 represent a single campaign.

<sup>37</sup> See summary in Elayi, *Sargon II* (2017), 226–27, and Eph'al, *Ancient Arabs* (1982), 104–107.

Hayim Tadmor, followed by Josette Elayi, dates the removal of Azuri and his replacement by Aḫimti to approximately 713 BCE, and posits a very short reign for Aḫimti, who was almost immediately removed by the population of Ashdod.<sup>38</sup> But there is no clear evidence for this suggestion.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, it appears from SAA 1, letter 29 lines r22–25, that Aḫimti remitted tribute in 714, which militates in favour of his having been on the throne from 716 or 715 BCE, as Lawson Younger suggested. This letter clearly mentions tribute from Ashdod, but does not contain the name of Ashdod's king. Since other Ashdodite kings in this period were anti-Assyrian, it makes sense that this letter was written when Aḫimti ruled in Ashdod. The letter was written by Sennacherib, at the time crown prince, to his father Sargon. Most of the letter concerns tensions between Urartu and Assyria. At the end of the letter, a small space remained, and for this reason information about Ashdod was included.<sup>40</sup> "The tribute of the Ashdodites was brought to Calah; I have received it, sealed it, and deposited it . . . I am sending this letter to the king, my lord, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Elul." Given that most of the letter concerns tension between Urartu and Assyria, and specific discussion of forts in Kumme, it makes most sense to understand this letter as pre-dating the main Assyrian campaign against Urartu. Parker dates it to 714, as the campaign progressed; a date of 715, before the campaign began, is also possible.<sup>41</sup> Tribute was usually brought before Nisan, and the bringing of tribute at a less-usual time would fit well with the leadership transitions in Ashdod in these years.<sup>42</sup> The best explanation for the arrival of tribute at this time of year is that Aḫimti, having recently become king, needed to assure Assyria of his loyalty.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> There is no clear evidence for this date, which was originally proposed by Tadmor in "Sargon's Campaigns" (1954), based on the statement of a campaign to Ashdod in Sargon's ninth year in Nineveh prism fragment S2022, now published in RINAP 2, inscription 82, vii 1'–16'. However, Tadmor ("Campaigns of Sargon II" [1958]: 79 and 83) understood that prism fragment to refer to the main campaign against Ashdod in 712, and assumed "a preliminary campaign . . . against Ashdod" in 713 (at p. 79). Elayi, *Sargon II* (2017), 58, follows Tadmor in proposing 713.

<sup>39</sup> See previous note and note 47 below.

<sup>40</sup> Noted by Radner, "Royal Pen Pals" (2015), 70.

<sup>41</sup> See Parker, "Bemerkungen" (1995): 18.

<sup>42</sup> On the standard practice of bringing tribute in Nisan, see Postgate, *Taxation* (1974), 121.

<sup>43</sup> Ashdod's tribute is also recorded in a wine-list from Calah known as CTN III 135 (Dalley and Postgate, *Tablets* [1984], 246–47). The other foreign envoys in the list are those of Edom and



Despite this show of loyalty, Ahimti reigned for only a few years in Ashdod. The anti-Assyrian elements in the population were clearly powerful, and took the first opportunity to remove Ahimti. In 714, Sargon was occupied with his important and complex eighth campaign in Mannea against Urartu. This campaign ended with Sargon's famous "letter to the gods" which declared to the population of Aššur his glorious victory.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the campaign was far from a complete Assyrian success; Sargon failed to capture the king of Urartu, who remained on the throne, and Urartu was not devastated. Certainly the results of this campaign were communicated to the kingdoms of the southern Levant, both by official Assyrian propaganda and by other, less official channels.

The gap between the stunning victory claimed by Sargon and the reality of his failure to eliminate Urartu may have given the anti-Assyrian elements in Ashdod a realistic basis for fomenting revolt and removing Ahimti. Sometime later in 714 or (more probably) in 713, the Ashdodites removed Ahimti.<sup>45</sup> The Khorsabad display inscription) gives a very brief summary of Ahimti's replacement:

The people of Hatti, speakers of lies, hated his kingship. They elevated above them Yamani, who had no right to the throne, and like them did not know how to fear sovereignty [that is, did not acknowledge Assyrian sovereignty].<sup>46</sup>

A more detailed (although broken) description of this rebellion appears in the Nineveh annals:

They appointed Yamani, a *ḥupšū* soldier, who was not a master of the throne, to the kingship over them, and seated him in the throne of his lordship . . . To the kings of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab, who live by the sea, who bear tribute and audience gifts to the god Ashur my lord, (they sent) words of lies and words of treachery, to make them hostile to me. To Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who will not save, they car-

ried gifts, seeking help, and asked repeatedly for auxiliaries.<sup>47</sup>

This began a full-scale revolt, in which Judah, other kingdoms in Philistia, and some of the Transjordanian kingdoms were active participants and not just passive recipients of messages. Support was expected from "Pharaoh."<sup>48</sup>

It is important to note that the sending of payments was not done only by the king of Ashdod, but by all the kings mentioned, including Judah.<sup>49</sup> A further Assyrian administrative letter may possibly belong to this point in time. SAA 1 letter number 110 (previously published as NL 16 and now published online as SAA 19 letter 159) states that emissaries from "Egypt, Gaza, Judah, Moab, and Ammon entered Calah on the 12<sup>th</sup> with their tribute." Since a group of countries brought tribute together, it makes sense to understand this as representing the annual bringing of tribute before Nisan. Line 12 contains a broken reference to Ashdod: "The Edomite, Ashdodite and Ekronite . . ." <sup>50</sup> We do not know what was reported about emissaries of these three states; Gershon Galil suggests that they

<sup>47</sup> Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres 711* (1998): 44–46, lines 15–33, now RINAP 2, inscription 82, vii 15'–33'. The translation presented here differs slightly from that in RINAP 2. Note that Nineveh prism fragment S2022, now in RINAP 2 inscription 82, vii 1'–16' refers in lines 13'–16' to a campaign against Ashdod in the ninth year. This was understood by Tadmor ("Campaigns of Sargon II" [1958]: 79) to refer to 712, but is understood by Fuchs (*Die Annalen Des Jahres 711* [1998]: 86) to refer to 711. Both agree that this refers to the main campaign against Ashdod, and not to an earlier campaign. Elayi (*Sargon II* [2017], 58) understands this to refer to an earlier campaign in 713. The placement of this fragment in RINAP 2 inscription 82, where it directly precedes discussion of the main campaign, follows the understanding advanced by both Tadmor and Fuchs. Given the broken state of the text, no certainty on this point can be expected.

<sup>48</sup> On the identity of this pharaoh, see Bányai, "Vorschlag zur Chronologie" (2013) and "Reihenfolge" (2015). For earlier views, see Kahn, "Inscription" (2001).

<sup>49</sup> The Akkadian verb from line 32, here translated "sent," is in the plural (*iššūma*, written *iš-šu-u-ma*), and its subject is the kings of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab. It is difficult to argue that this verb, which appears in line 32, refers to the "people of Ashdod," who are the subject of the verb *iškunū*, which is completed in line 16. Lines 18–23 are badly broken and narrate the construction of a moat and possibly other subjects. Furthermore, and more importantly, diplomatic messages are usually sent by kings, as was the case in the message sent by Azuri (and not by the people of Ashdod). It would thus be strange to interpret the sending of payments as done by the people of Ashdod, rather than by the kings mentioned.

<sup>50</sup> Although SAA 1 110 reads [Ashdo]dite, the collation in SAA 19 shows that the full name of the city can be read.

Gaza. It is impossible to determine the date of this list, which may date to the period of Tiglath-pileser III or of Sargon.

<sup>44</sup> Oppenheim, "City of Assur" (1960), and Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu I* (2013), with literature.

<sup>45</sup> In "Historical Background" (2018), I argued for 714, but this ignores Parker's date for SAA I 29.

<sup>46</sup> Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II* (1994), 219, lines 253–55, now in RINAP 2, inscription 1 (my translation).

were dilatory in payment.<sup>51</sup> He notes that the letter, sent by Marduk-remanni in his capacity as governor of Calah, must pre-date 713, when a different official occupied this position. This letter indicates that in 714 Ashdod did not remit its tribute on time, while Judah and Moab, and possibly Gaza, remitted tribute to Assyria. Judah and Moab were hardly wholehearted in their loyalty to Assyria: within the year, they joined Yamani in sending requests to Egypt to see if Egyptian aid could be obtained.

The revolt of Ashdod was extremely serious, as can be judged from the scale of the Assyrian response. The response was swift, as may be expected. From the Khorsabad display inscription:

Because of my angry heart, I did not gather the mass of my army nor did I summon my camp. With the heroes who do not leave my side, whether in hostile or in friendly territory,<sup>52</sup> I went to the city of Ashdod. That Yamani from afar heard the movement of my campaign. Into the territory of Egypt near the border of Meluhḥa [Nubia] he fled, such that his place is not clear. I surrounded and conquered Ashdod, Gath, and Ashdod-yam. I considered as spoil his gods, wife, sons, daughters, property, goods, the wealth of his palace, and the people of his land. I reorganized these cities. I settled there people from the lands I had conquered in the East [lit., from the lands of the rising of the sun]. I placed over them my official as district governor. I counted them as people of Assyria.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Galil, *Israel and Assyria* (2001), 98.

<sup>52</sup> For *ašar salme*, see CAD S s.v. *salmu* adj. a.

<sup>53</sup> Fuchs, *Inscripfen Sargons II* (1994), 219–22, lines 97–109, my translation. Now in RINAP 2, inscription 7, lines 97–109. For the sake of completeness, I cite here the passage from the Khorsabad annals describing this incident, prepared near the end of Sargon's reign in 708 (RINAP 2, p. 44): "Azuri, king of Ashdod, plotted not to deliver tribute . . . and sent . . . to the kings of his neighborhood . . . of Assyria. Because of the crimes he committed against the people of his land, I changed his rule. I appointed Ahimti, his beloved brother, to the kingship. The people of Hatti, speakers of lies, hated his kingship. They elevated above them Yadani, who had no right to the throne, and like them, did not know how to fear sovereignty. In my rage, with my personal chariot and horsemen—who do not leave my side whether in hostile or in friendly territory—I quickly marched to Ashdod, his royal city. I surrounded and conquered Ashdod, Gath, and Ash[dod-yam]. I counted as spoil the gods who dwell in their midst, with the people of his land, gold, silver, and the property of his palace. I settled there people from the lands I had conquered. I placed upon them my official as district governor. I counted them

In this inscription, Sargon claims to have conquered and destroyed not only Ashdod, but also maritime Ashdod as well as Gath. Archaeological evidence from Ashdod shows massive destruction, including thousands of bodies in mass burials.<sup>54</sup> A victory stele was established at Ashdod, mentioning Sargon's campaigns in Elam, Šurda, and Media.<sup>55</sup> Evidence for this destruction was also located at Gath, which appears to have been under Judahite control at this time; if so, its conquest by Assyria was a punishment for Judah's role in the revolt against Assyria.<sup>56</sup> No clear evidence for destruction at Ashdod-yam has yet been located.<sup>57</sup>

At least at Ashdod, the scale of the destruction was clearly intended as a deterrent to other local kingdoms which might rebel. Ashdod had rebelled twice, both under Azuri and under Yamani, and ignoring Ashdod's rebellions, for the sake of its tribute, would have resulted in other polities believing that they could defy Assyria. Even its port-power was not worth the loss of Assyrian deterrence.

Assyria continued to attempt to settle accounts with Yamani even after the destruction of Ashdod. Sargon demanded the extradition of Yamani, who had fled to Egypt, and this was achieved c. 706 BCE, a fact Sargon boasted of in his Tang-i-Var inscription.<sup>58</sup> That it was considered important to make an example of Yamani attests to the importance of Ashdod.

Archaeologists have debated whether Tel Ashdod itself was resettled shortly after this destruction. Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz have argued that the site was abandoned and that activity continued only at Ashdod-yam, while David Ben-Shlomo, Alon Shavit, and Alexander Fantalkin have argued (separately) that

as people of Assyria. They bore my yoke." (Fuchs, *Inscripfen Sargons II* [1994], 132–35 [annals, lines 241–55; my translation], now in RINAP 2, inscription 1, lines 249–62).

<sup>54</sup> Dothan, *Ashdod II–III* (1971), plate 39. Dothan and Porath, *Ashdod IV* (1982), 28–33, 56–7.

<sup>55</sup> Tadmor, "Fragments" (1967). On the battle against Elam in 720, see Tadmor, "Campaigns of Sargon II" (1958): 25; on the 716 campaign against Šurda, see Elayi, *Sargon II* (2017), 159; on the 716–713 campaigns against Media, see *ibid.*, 167–68.

<sup>56</sup> On the political affiliation of Gath in this period, and archaeological evidence for the 712 destruction, see Maier, "Philistia" (2012), 246–47; on this destruction as punishment to Judah, see Aster, "Historical Background" (2018).

<sup>57</sup> Fantalkin, "Ashdod Yam" (2014).

<sup>58</sup> Frame, "Inscription of Sargon II" (1999), Redford, "Note on the Chronology" (1999), and discussion in Kahn, "Inscription of Sargon II" 2001.

the evidence does not attest any long-term gap in settlement after 711.<sup>59</sup> From the textual record, it is clear that a polity called Ashdod continued after 711; its political development and connection to the archaeological sites are discussed below.

### Ashdod as an Assyrian Province: Boundaries and Function

After 711, Ashdod became an Assyrian province, and the governor may have used the Assyrian-style palace north of Tel Ashdod, which was excavated and identified as a governor's residence by Kogan-Zehavi.<sup>60</sup> The province was very swiftly established and the Assyrians, as a means of repressing further rebellions, began deportations. This is clear from a letter which reached Sargon II, and may have been written by Ana-Nabû-taklak, the commander of Borsippa in southern Babylon.<sup>61</sup> Published as SAA 17, letter 82, it mentions that certain rebellious people (line 5') and their brothers had been deported to Ashdod (line 6'). Line 7' mentions settling people in Tabal, but since the beginning of each of these lines is broken, it is difficult to know how the deportation to Ashdod is related to Tabal.<sup>62</sup> What is clear is that an Assyrian official, presumably resident in Borsippa, wrote to Sargon about deportations to Ashdod. The only reasonable explanation for this official's interest in deportees to Ashdod is that the deportees were coming from the territory under his control. Dietrich understands this and other related letters as having been written in the period 710–709, during Sargon's Babylonian campaign.<sup>63</sup> The letter presumably refers to deportations from the Borsippa region in Babylonia to Ashdod immediately after this campaign.

What were the boundaries of this province of Ashdod? There is good reason to believe that the inland boundaries of the province mapped closely to those

of the former kingdom of Ashdod, which extended, at least by the city's claims, northeast to Hadid, including that site. This may give pause, in light of the well-known statement in Esarhaddon's inscriptions (published in RINAP 4, inscription 34, line 15') to the effect that Aphek, only 20 km north of Hadid, was in the province of Samaria. But the assignment of these two sites to two different provinces makes eminent sense if we consider three separate lines of argument. As we will see below, Assyria had a clear interest in maintaining the inland parts of the kingdom of Ashdod as part of the new province, while re-allocating the port-based parts of the kingdom.

The first relates to the function of a province in Assyrian administration. Numerous Assyrian administrative letters show that a key responsibility of each provincial governor was to provide grain for the passage of Assyrian troops and messengers through his province. Such grain was harvested from the territory in their provinces, which they collected through taxation. The governors' responsibilities and their attempts to finagle more towns to tax are detailed in SAA I, letters 172, 176, and 177, from Syria. SAA I 172 is particularly instructive in this regard: in it, the governor of Damascus complains that the harvest of certain villages belongs to other governors, and that he is in charge of taking care of three sections of the road while the other governors take care of only two each. It was therefore in Assyria's best interest for the ratio of arable territory to sections of road in each province be as high as possible. This was especially true in the area between Aphek and Hadid. Both were on the main international route, through which Assyrian troops and messengers would travel. At Hadid, the road branched south into one branch headed for Ashdod and one for Gezer.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the area between Hadid and Aphek would sustain the highest amount of traffic. It made sense to divide responsibility for these two sites between two governors. Each could then tax their own province's grain harvest to establish grain depots at the points needed along the main international route. Having a high ratio of governor's territory to the number of points along the road for which the governor was responsible would make more grain available for Assyrian messengers and troops. This would help mitigate the sorts of complaints seen in SAA I 172 in which a governor complained about many sections of road to maintain and insufficient area from which to harvest.

<sup>59</sup> See Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Ashdod" (2001), Ben-Shlomo, "Iron Age Sequence" (2003), and Shavit, "Settlement Patterns" (2008); Fantalkin ("Ashdod Yam" [2014]: 47–49) summarizes the debate.

<sup>60</sup> Kogan-Zehavi, "Assyrian Building North of Tel Ashdod" (2005) and *Neo-Assyrian Administrative Architecture* (2018).

<sup>61</sup> See discussion in Dietrich, *Babylonian Correspondence* (2003), xxv.

<sup>62</sup> Dietrich (*ibid.*, 73) understands that Ashdodeans were then resettled in Tabal. This is possible, but it is clear that the discussion begins with a deportation to Ashdod, and how Tabal relates to these people remains unclear.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>64</sup> See map in Dorsey, *Roads and Highways* (1991), 58.

The second point is the geographic distribution of farmhouses established in the Assyrian period in the area of Aphek-Hadid.<sup>65</sup> Gilad Itach notes the uneven geographic distribution of these farmhouses. About thirty sites are identified in a small region of 4×10 km, just south of the Aphek pass and east of the international road, in the western slopes of the Samaria hills. Because these are very close to Aphek, they must have been located in the province of Samaria. Another six were sites surveyed between Tel Hadid and Tel Gezer (i.e., south of Hadid). These seem to be associated with Hadid, apparently in the province of Ashdod. The area between Hadid and a point 10km south of Aphek is almost bereft of such sites; this may represent the border between provinces.<sup>66</sup>

The third line of argument showing that Hadid was in the province of Ashdod comes from SAA 17, letter 82, noted above. It indicates deportations from Borsippa in Babylonia to Ashdod. We have yet to find any archaeological evidence of deportees from Babylonia to the city of Ashdod; neither does that evidence indicate any great increase in settlement at Tel Ashdod in this period. However, well-known documents from Hadid detail individuals with Babylonian names there by 698 BCE.<sup>67</sup> It seems probable to understand the Hadid documents as attesting Babylonians who were deported around 710 BCE, as mentioned in SAA 17 no. 82. These Babylonians were deported to Hadid *in the province of Ashdod* shortly after 710 BCE. Understood in this way, the reference to deportations to Ashdod in SAA 17 no. 82 becomes clear.

Each of the points noted are independent of each other. We thus have three separate lines of argument, each of which suggests independently that Hadid formed part of the province of Ashdod. No single argument is decisive on its own, but the cumulative weight is convincing, and shows that the territorial extent claimed by the kingdom in SAA 19 no. 28 (viz., including the territory up to Hadid) corresponded to the territorial extent of the province of Ashdod after 711.

One specific group of towns, however, seems to have been excluded from the province of Ashdod. These are the four towns mentioned in Sennacherib's inscriptions (RINAP 3/1, Inscription 4, line 41, with many parallels), as belonging to Ashkelon: Bit-Daganna

(now Beth-dagan), Joppa, Banayabarqa (biblical Beneberaq), and Azuru (now Azor). The location of each of these towns is well known because each of the names was preserved into the modern period: on the PEF map of 1880, Beit Dejan, Ibn Ibraq, and Yazur all appear within 9km southeast of Joppa, along the wadi now called Nahal Ayyalon. The port of Joppa was clearly the most important town, and the other three formed part of its hinterland.

In light of the discussion above of Ashdod in the Assyrian documents that pre-date 711, we must reject the tentative suggestion of Yuval Gadot that Ashkelon's domination of this enclave was the outcome of a process that began 400 years earlier, and that of Na'aman suggesting that Ashkelon's domination began in 732 BCE.<sup>68</sup> It makes very little geographic sense that these towns belonged to Ashkelon throughout the late eighth century. Beth-dagan is only about 12 km from Lod and about 15 km from Hadid; it seems very difficult to draw boundaries of Ashdod which would include Hadid and Lod but exclude Beth-dagan, Azor, and the wadi now called Nahal Ayyalon. Ashdod's territory was limitrophic with the Beth-dagan/Azor/Beneberaq region both to the east of this region (where Lod and Hadid are located) and to its south (where Ashdod's port lay 30 km away). Control of the port of Joppa would certainly have been highly desired by Ashdod, especially if it controlled the towns of Lod and Hadid which were also in the area drained by Nahal Ayyalon. If Ashdod was a powerful kingdom before the Assyrian campaign of 712/711, as emerges from SAA 19 letter 28 cited above, it makes much more sense for Joppa and the other towns along Nahal Ayyalon to have belonged to Ashdod.

Why then are these towns recorded in Sennacherib's inscriptions as belonging to Ashkelon? As Fantalkin and Oren Tal suggested, the answer seems to lie in the events of 711 BCE.<sup>69</sup> When Ashdod became an Assyrian province, Assyria used its boundary-changing power to allocate Joppa and the three towns in its hinterland to Ashdod's rival, Ashkelon, a situation which persisted until 701.<sup>70</sup> As a coastal city with a port, Ashkelon could effectively operate the port of Joppa. Assyria's

<sup>65</sup> On this phenomenon, see Faust, "Farmsteads" (2006), with literature.

<sup>66</sup> Itach, "Assyrian Interests" (forthcoming).

<sup>67</sup> Na'aman and Zadok, "Deportations" (2000).

<sup>68</sup> Gadot, "Aphek" (2006): 31; Na'aman, "Ashkelon under the Assyrian Empire" (2009), 352.

<sup>69</sup> Fantalkin and Tal, "Navigating Between the Powers" (2008): 242.

<sup>70</sup> On Assyrian power to move borders, see Wazana, "Boundaries of Nations" (2003).

provincial governors had no experience or interest in operating a port and could not exploit it in such a way as to maximize their and Assyria's incomes. It was much more profitable for Assyria to allocate the port to a king with experience in this area, and to derive benefit from increased tribute demands.

### The Re-emergence of the Ashdod Kingdom After 705

By 701, the re-emergence of an Ashdodite king, Mittinti, is detailed in Sennacherib's inscriptions narrating his third campaign in 701 (RINAP 3/1 inscription 4, line 37 and elsewhere). This does not indicate that no province was established. Instead, it indicates that Ashdod's local identity was not eliminated in the last six years of Sargon's reign (711–705), when the kingdom was replaced by a province. When Sargon died ignominiously in 705, and the empire was leaderless, most of the polities in the Assyrian west shook off the Assyrian yoke. The west effectively revolted, as we see in Sennacherib's inscriptions, and an Ashdodite king re-emerged. When Sennacherib arrived in 701 to restore Assyrian dominion, he dealt with Mittinti, who was the effective power-holder. Preferring *realpolitik*, Sennacherib saw no point in clinging to the legal nicety of a provincial administration, which no longer had effective control over Ashdod by 701. Along with the kings of Ammon, Moab, Edom, and other kings of the Levant, Mittinti paid tribute to Sennacherib somewhere in Phoenicia, as indicated in the inscription noted above.

Whether this Ashdodite king ruled at Ashdod-yam (as Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz imply) or whether he ruled at Tel Ashdod (as Ben-Shlomo, Shavit, and Fantalkin have argued) cannot be determined based on the textual evidence. But regardless of where his regnal seat was located, the kingdom continued to exist for some time.

Sennacherib did not hurry to rid himself of Mittinti, or of the kingship in Ashdod. We see this from Sennacherib's actions following the conclusion of his 701 campaign. Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, persisted in rebelling, territory belonging to Judah in the Shephelah region was given to Mittinti of Ashdod and to the kings of Gaza and Ekron (RINAP 3/1 inscription 4 lines 52–54).<sup>71</sup> This shows that Sennacherib recognized the king-

<sup>71</sup> Fantalkin ("Neo-Assyrian Involvement" [2018], 164) has shown that such territory was also given to Ashkelon, but only later in the game, after 694.

dom of Ashdod as legitimate. Moving into the reigns of Sennacherib's successors, it is clear that the kingdom of Ashdod continued to exist. Both the inscriptions of Esarhaddon (r. 680–669) and those of Assurbanipal (r. 668–631) refer to Ahi-milki, king of Ashdod.<sup>72</sup> In both cases, Ahi-milki appears in a list of kings loyal to Assyria: in the case of Assurbanipal, Ahi-milki was one of the local kings of the Levant whose loyalty was needed in the Assyrian campaign against Egypt.

At the same time, Ashdod was clearly an Assyrian province: a provincial governor of Ashdod figures in the eponym list as governor for 669.<sup>73</sup> It is clearly impossible to separate the period in which the kingdom operated from the period in which the province operated; both seem to have operated simultaneously. This seems an anomalous situation until one considers the different economic exploitation possibilities in the area under the political dominance of Ashdod. To exploit the port itself, which clearly continued to operate in the early seventh century, a local king was required.<sup>74</sup> As noted above, there is no case of the ports of Ashkelon or Gaza coming under the control of an Assyrian governor, and it seems unreasonable to assume that Ashdod would be an exception. Nor did the Assyrians operate ports in Phoenicia, as is clear from the Qurdi-Aššur-lāmur letter (SAA I 22) and from Esarhaddon's treaty with Baal king of Tyre (SAA 2 text 5). It is unreasonable to expect that they would directly manage Ashdod's port.

On the other hand, to control and provide for Assyrian forces and messengers passing through Hadid and points south on the international route, a provincial governor was a necessity. As noted above, the provincial governor was responsible for provisioning troops and messengers; without the aid of a provincial governor, their passage would be delayed by their need to forage. Passage of such forces and messengers became increasingly important in the seventh century, as Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal conducted their ill-fated campaigns to Egypt. The need to effectively control this route is clear from the way Esarhaddon treated one rebel whose kingdom lay along the southern portion of this route:

<sup>72</sup> For Esarhaddon, see RINAP 4, Inscription 1, col. v, line 54, and Inscription 5, col. viii, line 7b'. For Assurbanipal, see RINAP 5/1, Inscription 6, col. ii, line 25', and Inscription 7, col. ii, 1'.

<sup>73</sup> Millard, *Eponyms* (1994), 52. The preserved text reads only *as-du*, but this is convincingly restored as indicating Ashdod, since no other suitable city matches the preserved signs.

<sup>74</sup> On the duration of the port's operation, see Fantalkin, "Ashdod Yam" (2014): 45–47 and "Neo-Assyrian Involvement" (2018): 172.

the king of the otherwise unimportant city of Arza, located in southern Philistia, rebelled and was captured and presented as an example and deterrent to others.<sup>75</sup> Rebellion in Philistia could not be tolerated, given Esarhaddon's desire to march against Egypt.<sup>76</sup>

Proper provisions along the parts of the road in the territory of Ashdod would have been the responsibility of the Assyrian governor; he controlled Hadid and the points to its south on the main international road. This specific part of the road was particularly important because it was the northernmost part of the road into Philistia. It was therefore the first part of the road traversed by Assyrian soldiers moving southward from areas that had only governors (such as Samaria), and were far less likely to rebel. Assyria knew that royal cities in Philistia might make common cause with Egypt and rebel. The rebellion of Arza in the days of Esarhaddon was noted above. A further example of a rebellion in southern Philistia may come from Ashkelon, which seems to have made common cause with Tirhaqa of Egypt in the period after Esarhaddon's failed campaign, rebelling against Assyria.<sup>77</sup>

In light of these rebellions, and the damage rebellions or potential rebellions could do to Assyrian plans to conquer Egypt, control of the part of the road from Hadid southward was absolutely necessary. Without it, it would be more difficult to put down rebellions farther south in Philistia. The presence of a governor and his control of the portion of the main road leading south from Hadid was therefore a bulwark against the potentially debilitating effects for Assyrian power arising from rebellions in Philistia. Rebellions might happen, but Assyria could effectively crush them if it assured its control of as much of the main international road as possible. The first stretch of that road, leading south of Hadid, was critical to Assyrian suppression of such rebellions.

Thus, both a governor and a king were needed to exploit the different parts of Ashdod's territory for the best benefit of the empire. The king would exploit the port and coastal areas and remit tribute to Assyria,

while the governor would tax the inland territory and maintain provisions at Hadid and along the road. Although the situation of a governor and king co-existing is anomalous, the Assyrian empire was not in the business of "following the rules." It was in the business of exploiting conquered territory to the maximum extent possible. The diarchy of a governor and king, each having a defined role, was the best arrangement for exploiting Ashdod.

### The End of Assyrian Ashdod

The textual evidence cannot tell us how long Ashdod continued to have a governor while remaining a monarchy. However, the archaeological evidence for a governor's residence (discussed above) suggests that the arrangement lasted until the end of the Assyrian period. The residence appears to have been destroyed violently only in the last half of the seventh century.<sup>78</sup>

The textual evidence cited above shows that this diarchy of Assyrian governor and local king continued at least to the end of Esarhaddon's reign (c. 668 BCE). In other vassal states, an Assyrian "delegate" (*qēpu*) ensured the vassal king's loyalty; at Ashdod, the governor would presumably have ensured this, alongside the other roles discussed above.<sup>79</sup> The loyalty of Ashdod was a bulwark of Assyria's control of the southern Levant, and this can be seen from the manner in which that control ended.

The date when Assyria's control ended has been extensively discussed in scholarship.<sup>80</sup> One important step in ending this control seems to have been the attack on Ashdod by Psammetichus of Egypt in 636 BCE.<sup>81</sup> Elena Kogan-Zehavi argued, based on the archaeological data, that Psammetichus' attack was directed not at the main tell of Ashdod, but at the Assyrian-style building which housed the governor's residence.<sup>82</sup> A former Assyrian vassal, Psammetichus rebelled against Assyria, a rebellion culminating in his entering the vacuum created by Assyrian weakness in this period. That he chose to enter this vacuum by attacking Ashdod signals the

<sup>75</sup> As a deterrent to future rebels, Esarhaddon embarrassed the king of Arza by placing him at the gate of Nineveh along with a bear, a dog, and a pig. The conquest of Arza is recorded in many of Esarhaddon's inscriptions, including the Nineveh A prism (RINAP 4, Inscription 1, col. iii, lines 39–42).

<sup>76</sup> On the campaign against Arza as a preparation for the campaign against Egypt, see Eph'al, *Ancient Arabs* (1982): 52–54.

<sup>77</sup> Tadmor, "Philistia" (1966): 98, and see discussion in Kogan-Zehavi, *Administrative Architecture* (2018): 16–31.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>79</sup> On the use of such delegates throughout the empire see Dubovský, "King's Direct Control" (2012).

<sup>80</sup> See *inter alia*, Eph'al, "Assyrian Dominion" (1979), 281–82; Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur* (1982), 376; Na'aman, "Kingdom of Judah" (1991): 38.

<sup>81</sup> Tadmor, "Philistia" (1966): 101–102; Kahn, "Necho II" (2015): 511–12.

<sup>82</sup> Kogan-Zehavi, *Administrative Architecture* (2018), 215.

importance all international players attached to Ashdod in this period. That a successful attack on Ashdod dovetailed with the end of Assyrian control of the region is hardly accidental; the discussion above shows the importance Assyria attached to its control of Ashdod.

### Summary and Conclusions

In reconstructing the history of Ashdod during the period of Assyrian control, I began by showing its territorial extent, based on the textual evidence. As an important kingdom on what became the southwestern frontier of Assyria, Ashdod can serve as a location in which Parker's idea of frontiers as dynamic zones can be examined. Assyria's behaviour towards Ashdod indeed dovetails with Parker's idea: Assyria deployed a range of changing strategies to ensure its dominance. These begin with attempts at indirect control, when Tiglath-pileser III attempted to reduce Ashdod to impose vassal status on it. Ashdod's leaders were secure enough in their power to expect that this status would confer benefits on Ashdod and not only obligations. Assyria, predictably, did not see Ashdod's vassal status in quite the same way, and it made repeated attempts to co-opt its leadership, including the attempt by Sargon II to install a puppet king. When it became clear that no amount of co-optation could deliver effective control of Ashdod's resources, Assyria undertook a military campaign in 712/711 BCE, destroying the city, as seen from the archeological evidence at Tel Ashdod.

Ashdod emerged from the 712/711 BCE destruction both as an Assyrian province and as a kingdom. The province's function in the Assyrian imperial system was to provide resources for Assyria's further expansion southward, towards Gaza and Egypt, while the remaining kingdom operated the port of Ashdod and its trade. This bifurcated political arrangement demonstrates Thareani's argument that the Assyrians saw the seacoast, with its ports and shipping, as a distinct subregion. Assyrian officials recognized that the port and its maritime trade would run most smoothly under local traders. The port, therefore, was under the nominal authority of the king of Ashdod and was exploited by Assyria as a *kārum*. This meant that Assyria taxed its trade and might deny trading privileges to any elements seen as challenging Assyria.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, the road and fields between Ashdod and Hadid were under the au-

thority of a provincial governor, who ensured that the central Assyrian administration's need for proper provisions along the road was met. Thus, both the kingdom and province of Ashdod contributed to Assyrian power, albeit in different ways: the kingdom provided income from the *kārum*, in addition to possible tribute, while the province ensured that Assyrian forces and officials could travel efficiently along the roads. Assyrian control of Ashdod—the bulwark of its authority in the region—finally ended around 636 BCE, when Egypt's Psammetichus replaced Assyria as its foreign suzerain.

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<sup>83</sup> See the discussion of the *kāru* system in Radner, "Abgaben an dem König" (2007) and Yamada "Kārus on the Frontiers" (2006).

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