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CHAPTER 1

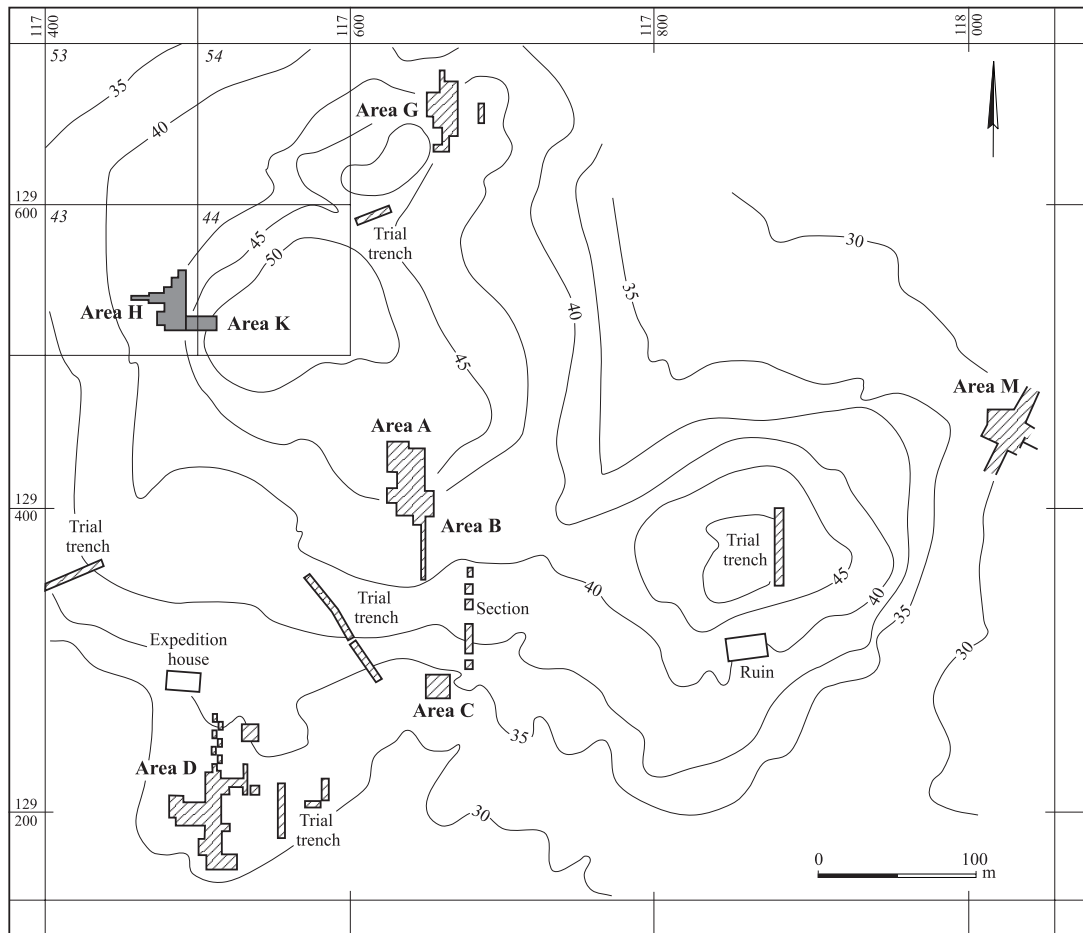
INTRODUCTION

DAVID BEN-SHLOMO

In light of the expansion of excavations at Tel Miqné-‘Eqron and Ashqelon since the publication of *Ashdod V* and the initiation of new excavations at Tell es-Safi/Gath, the Ashdod material to be presented here—from the first Philistine city modernly excavated—has attained special significance. We now have access to archaeological data from four of the five Philistine pentapolis sites, while the preparation of a report on the nearby site of Tel Mor is in progress. The present report has both benefited from and contributed to the

research and work on these sites. This is the sixth and final volume reporting on M. Dothan’s excavations at Tel Ashdod. It follows *Ashdod I–V*, describing the excavations of Areas A, B, C, D, G and M, as well as of Areas H and K during the first season of excavation in these areas.

The excavations of Areas H and K, located on the western slope of the acropolis of Tel Ashdod (Plan 1.1; Fig. 1.1), did not reveal new periods of settlement, but rather displayed a complete settlement sequence



Plan 1.1. Topography of Tel Ashdod and the lower city.



Fig. 1.1. Area H. A general view before excavations, looking east.

spanning the Late Bronze Age through the Hellenistic period, as reflected in a relatively large exposure. Though this continuity was also apparent in Areas A and G, the present volume is the first to include the complete sequence of these periods. The combined discussion of Areas H and K—separated in *Ashdod* II–III—is, no doubt, better understood across a broader sequence. Area H was largely expanded during the 1968 and 1969 seasons and provided much more data. Area K, excavated chiefly during the 1965 and 1968 seasons, was mostly published in *Ashdod* II–III.

The maximal sequence of Tel Ashdod comprises twenty-three strata, as attested in Area G. It ranges from the Middle Bronze Age IIC through the Hellenistic period. The foundations of the earliest settlement at Tel Ashdod (MB IIC) were reached only in Area G (*Ashdod* V:9, 19–26), indicating that the site was then settled only on the acropolis, occupying an area of eight hectares. The Late Bronze Age (especially the thirteenth century BCE) is represented in Areas A, B and H, as well as in Area G, Strata XX–XIV (*Ashdod* V:10–13, 27–49).

The exposure of Stratum XIV in Area H is very limited. However, the Late Bronze Age is attested by at least three strata in a nearby trench and by finds which include imported Mycenaean and Cypriot sherds. During Late Bronze Age II Ashdod was apparently a

large settlement, distinguished by several remarkable Egyptian artifacts (see Dothan 1992; *Ashdod* V:9–11, App. 1–3, 6). These are here supplemented by Egyptian finds of the thirteenth and the beginning of the twelfth centuries, which include an alabaster vessel bearing a fragmentary cartouche reading *ms*. The weight of this evidence may imply the presence of an Egyptian official during the reign of the XIXth Dynasty.

Nadav Na'aman recently suggested that the *Ashdadites* (*adddy*) of Late Bronze Age Ugaritic texts originated from Enkomi in Cyprus—known as *Ashdad* in the thirteenth century BCE—and not from Tel Ashdod (1997:610). This proposal draws on the conspicuous absence of Ashdod in Late Bronze Age Egyptian texts. Na'aman further posited that the Late Bronze Age city located at Tel Ashdod was *Tianna* of the El-Amarna letters. The Iron Age I Tel Ashdod of the twelfth century BCE was settled by Enkomites and was consequently named Ashdod.

Though this proposal would explain the absence of Ashdod from Egyptian texts and reflects an interesting link between the Philistines of Iron I and Enkomi, it is truly problematic. The absence of Ashdod from Egyptian texts can well be explained by the fact that it never revolted against Egypt (Dothan 1992; *Ashdod* V:10) or by a mere lack of textual evidence. Most of the *Ashdadite* names in the Ugaritic texts are West Semitic,

as is the name *Ashdad* itself. Na'aman's hypothesis that Enkomi was founded by West Semitic people is seemingly unsubstantiated. The name *Alashiya*, at times identified as Enkomi, also figures in the same texts but Na'aman explains it as denoting the island of Cyprus and not a specific city. Moreover, the biblical renaming of a site usually leaves reference to its earlier name as well (e.g., Laish-Dan). Though Na'aman's suggestions need not be ruled out, they do require further research and discussion.

A major impediment in understanding Areas H and K was the erosion of the upper strata relating to Iron Age II and later periods, particularly of the western, lower slope of Area H, while in the higher, eastern part some of these strata were preserved.

The earliest stratum significantly exposed in Area H—Stratum XIII—represents the beginning of Iron Age I (Iron IA). The exposure of the Iron I strata (XIII–XI) was considerably extended in the last two seasons of excavation (1968–1969). Iron I remains were evidenced in Areas A, C, G, H and possibly in Areas B and K, but with the exception of Areas G and H, these were merely fragmentary or unclear (*Ashdod* II–III:25–31). It is now apparent that the remains of Area H stand out as representing Tel Ashdod's most prosperous zone in Iron I. This emerges from both the architecture and the small finds recovered therein. Most of the settlement was located on the acropolis and its slopes, largely expanding eastward toward the end of the eleventh/beginning of the tenth century BCE: a massive wall and gate were then erected in Area M (Stratum Xb: *Ashdod* IV).

In Area G, the early (b) phases of Stratum XIII overlay the debris of Late Bronze Age Stratum XIV. In Area H, two distinct phases of Stratum XIII were detected only in limited areas, as the floor levels in most cases had not been reached (vs. the situation in Area G). Thus, the Late Bronze Age destruction was also barely in evidence in Area H. Nevertheless, Stratum XIII displays a well-planned city comprising two main blocks of structures facing a main street, which ran along the western slope of the tell. This general plan of Areas H and K is preserved throughout the Iron Age (Plans 1.2, 1.3). Stratum XII is the major Iron I stratum exposed in Area H, preserving complete buildings and floor levels, and representing two phases. The walls were preserved over one meter high in many places, the high accumulation probably reflecting a lengthy duration. This is therefore the

most significant stratum presented in this report, as the finds could clearly be assigned to discrete architectural units. The general layout of the buildings is similar to that of Stratum XIII. The main area excavated in the 1968–1969 seasons is to the north of the street and consists of two adjoining buildings: one comprises a large courtyard and a unique apsidal structure nestled within it; the other, a pillared hall flanked by rooms on either side. The sophisticated layout of the buildings and the rich finds therein allude to the prosperity of these Philistine dwellings. Ash layers detected in several of the rooms may suggest a localized violent destruction of Stratum XII. The building excavated to the south of the street is of similar plan though less affluently furnished.

The subsequent, latest Iron I settlement is that of Stratum XI, subdivided into XIb and XIa. Stratum XIb preserved more substantial remains than Stratum XIa, which represents a clear architectural decline. (A number of finds from this stratum were published in *Ashdod* II–III:159–162, Plan 21.) Stratum XI is more heavily disturbed than Strata XIII and XII and very few floor levels could be distinguished. The finds are rich and include several remarkable specimens, most of them originating from pits and fills. The western and northern parts of this stratum were largely eroded and therefore most of the buildings could only partly be recovered.

On the eroded western edge of the excavated area a fragment of a massive wall was uncovered, possibly part of a city wall that was put out of use in Stratum XIa. Iron II city walls were revealed both in Area G, Stratum X (*Ashdod* II–III:136; *Ashdod* V:92) and in Area M, Strata X–VII (*Ashdod* IV). Large buildings aligning both sides of the main street in Phase b of Stratum XI were altered and reduced in Phase a.

To the east of these buildings remains of two adjoining buildings were exposed. Though the levels of Stratum XI were not reached in Area K, Iron I sherds (including Mycenaean IIIc:1 and Philistine Bichrome wares) serve as evidence of Iron I settlement in Area K. Presumably, the architecture was in line with the Iron Age plan of Area K, namely of buildings aligning the street to north and south. No gap was discerned between Phases a and b of Stratum XI, though Stratum XIb shows signs of destruction. The accumulation of Stratum XI in Area H is thicker than in Area G, possibly reflecting a somewhat longer duration, analogous to Strata XIIa and XI in Area G.



Plan 1.2. Area H: superposition of the strata.



Plan 1.3. Area K: superposition of the strata.

Although the general plan of the remains, including the street, is retained, Stratum X marks a clear break in the material culture of Tel Ashdod, as red-slipped pottery almost totally replaces Philistine Bichrome pottery. Stratum X, representing the transition between Iron I and Iron IIA, is only fragmentarily represented in Areas H and K, as in other areas of Tel Ashdod. The western portion of the excavated area of Stratum X was completely eroded, whereas Stratum X levels were usually not reached in the east. Consequently, the remains of this stratum are supplemented only by fragmentary walls, a few installations and a pit grave.

The street, however, is retained, as is the general plan of the area. There was no evidence of a violent destruction of Stratum X in Area H. Fragmentary remains of Stratum X were preserved in Areas A, C, G (*Ashdod* II–III:31, 136, 181) and possibly in D; Area M revealed the only significant remains of this period, including a four-chambered gate (*Ashdod* IV:7–19).

Complete vessels and important and unique finds attributed to Stratum X include the ‘Musicians’ Stand’. In a pit and in several loci postdating Stratum X and predating Stratum IX–VIII many complete vessels and special finds came to light, probably dating to

an intermediary phase of late Iron IIA (designated as Stratum X–IX).

During Iron IIB (ninth–eighth centuries BCE) the settlement at Tel Ashdod probably reached its peak, as evidenced in Areas A, C, D, G, H, K and M. The city expanded toward the lower city, occupying at least 28 hectares. Stratum VIII remains in Area D are particularly noteworthy. This phase of the late Iron IIA and IIB, which by and large remains unattested at regional sites such as Tel Miqne-‘Eqron, Tell Qasile and Bet Shemesh, is very conspicuous at Tel Ashdod and recently at Tell es-Safi (Maier 2001) and Tel Zayit as well. At Ashdod, however, the dividing lines between the consecutive strata of this period (X–IX, IX–VIII, VIII–VII) have variable manifestations and are not always well synchronized between the different areas of the tell. The large size of the settlement was probably retained, with a possible gap extending from the late sixth century BCE through the Hellenistic period.

A large area was exposed in Area K, superseding Stratum X. The poorly preserved walls and the accumulation were less significant than those of Iron I. In Area H, to the west, the Iron IIB–C strata were almost completely eroded away. The general plan of Area K shows continuity between the Iron I and Iron II levels. The lowest level substantially reached in Area K parallels Stratum IX–VIII of Areas A and G, Stratum VIII of Area D and Strata IX and VIII of Area M. Despite its thin accumulation this stratum seems to represent a lengthy duration, manifested by several constructional phases and pottery forms, as well as by historical considerations (see discussion of Area M: *Ashdod* IV:56). The seventh century BCE or Iron IIC is represented by Strata VII–VI in Areas A, D, G, H, K and M and seems to indicate a decline compared to the preceding Stratum IX–VIII. These strata were also not well preserved in Area K and nearly all eroded away in Area H.

The major building of Stratum IX–VIII, built north of the street, consists of a courtyard or hall surrounded by rooms, a plan somewhat similar to the Iron I dwellings. The architecture and finds of this building also seem to indicate the relative prosperity of its inhabitants. West of the building several phases of construction were distinguished in a small area immediately overlying the Stratum X remains. Though there was difficulty in separating the strata, some of the material from this area is here presented, as it includes special finds.

South of the street scanty remains of another building were preserved.

The layout of Stratum VII barely changed and several walls from the previous levels were reused. South of the street most of the area was now covered by installations. In the ultimate Iron Age stratum, VI, the main street was retained, including the walls facing it, but many of its rooms went out of use; most of the area both north and south of the street was open. Several installations are assigned to this stratum, notably a rounded pottery kiln. Complete vessels were retrieved in a destruction level related to the Babylonian conquest.

The uninterrupted sequence of the general plan of the area throughout the Iron Age, i.e., Strata XIII–VI, is exclusive for Areas H and K. Area A exhibits continuity through Strata X–VI, but has very fragmentary Iron I strata (*Ashdod* II–III:25–36). Area B yielded only Late Bronze Age (and possibly some early Iron I) remains, while Area C barely preserved any architectural remains at all. Area D had only Iron IIB–C finds, while Area M included those of Iron IIA but none of Iron I. Although Area G exhibits a continuity running through Strata XIII–X, its general plan changed in Strata IX–VI (*Ashdod* II–III:140).

The Babylonian destruction at Tel Ashdod was possibly followed by a period of sparse settlement, as attested in Areas A, D, G and possibly K and M. Stratum V, representing the Persian period, is of completely different plan, orientation and building technique, unrelated to the Iron Age remains. This phenomenon is also attested in Areas A, G and K (*Ashdod* II–III:38, 140, 171). In Area K, the excavation of a large structure, belonging to Stratum V and partly cleared in the earlier seasons (see *Ashdod* II–III:171, Plan 22), was extended during the 1968 season. Three sub-phases were distinguished in at least two rows of rooms facing a very large open area, which accommodated several domestic installations.

The Hellenistic period is represented by Strata IV–III, particularly in Areas A and G, and only fragmentarily in Areas D and M. In Area K only several wall and floor segments came to light, although many individual finds can be dated to this period. Stratum II, representing the Early Roman period, is the latest stratum uncovered in Area K—solely attested by a conduit system nearly devoid of finds (*Ashdod* II–III:178).

It is noteworthy that the finds from Areas H and K, excavated in the 1968–1969 seasons—particularly the

Iron Age material—are remarkably rich and exhibit wide diversity.

Only several sherds come from Late Bronze Age contexts but pottery and other finds in the Canaanite tradition continue to appear in Iron I Strata XIII–XI, particularly Stratum XIII. Here a variety of Canaanite forms dominates, e.g., plain hemispherical bowls, decorated kraters, open cooking pots, Canaanite storage jars and lentoid flasks. Some of the material is of Egyptian origin or shows Egyptian affinities. At the nearby site of Tel Mor Egyptian influence is more distinguishable and is associated with a lack of Myc. IIIC:1 pottery.

Mycenean IIIC:1 (monochrome) pottery makes its initial appearance in Stratum XIII. As the floor levels of this stratum were usually not reached (and when reached were almost devoid of finds), the assemblage from Stratum XIII is relatively poor and mixed with Philistine Bichrome pottery. Stratum XII yielded a larger, diversified assemblage of both Myc. IIIC:1 and fully developed Bichrome pottery (similarly to Strata XIIIa and XII in Area G, or to Stratum VI at Tel Miqné-‘Eqrón). Thus, the initial phase of Myc. IIIC:1 pottery *per se* is not represented here, as it is in Stratum XIIIb of Area G or Stratum VII at Tel Miqné-‘Eqrón.

Mycenean IIIC:1 pottery assemblages from excavations in Philistia have rarely been published and this report therefore represents a significant contribution to the published repertoire. Most common are open forms, such as bell-shaped bowls and kraters and carinated strap-handled bowls. Nevertheless, rarer forms, such as the kylix and closed forms, including stirrup jars and strainer-spouted jugs, also appear. The decorative motifs are very rich and include birds, fish and fine complex geometric designs, directly related to the Myc. IIIB–C pottery of Greece, the Aegean and Cyprus. A phenomenon unfolded in this report is the diversity of the fabric of the Myc. IIIC:1 pottery, a subject that requires further research. Related early Philistine forms exhibiting Aegean affinities include the kalathos kraters and the cooking jugs, similar to the findings in other areas of Ashdod and at Tel Miqné-‘Eqrón.

In Stratum XI, Canaanite pottery forms continuing Late Bronze Age traditions are rare, while only few Myc. IIIC:1 pottery sherds appear. Elaborate Philistine Bichrome pottery, however, dominates, comprising c. 50% of the assemblage. The well-known forms

include bell-shaped bowls and kraters (of larger dimensions than the Myc. IIIC:1 forms), stirrup jars, strainer-spouted jugs, etc. The data are insufficient to typologically distinguish between the two phases of Stratum XI. The rich Bichrome pottery repertoire of Strata XII–XI displays elaborate decorative motifs, some of which were previously known only from Myc. IIIC:1 pottery.

The Iron I strata of Area H yielded many finds other than pottery. Many small finds came from a structure in Stratum XII, which proved to be a rich Philistine dwelling (Building 5337): terracottas, bronze, gold, ivory and bone finds and much jewelry (particularly beads). The small finds illustrate Aegean as well as Canaanite and Egyptian (relating to the Late Bronze Age) characteristics.

Iron I contexts also yielded several Aegean-type male and female figurines, and two outstanding seals, all related to the Philistine material culture. Aegean-type terracotta figurines and the like continue to appear in Stratum X and subsequently in Iron II. These include the *Ashdoda* figurines and the ‘Musicians’ Stand’—a unique cult object illustrating some elements characteristic of Philistine iconography.

As noted above, the pottery of Stratum X shows a significant change from that of Iron I, as red-slipped and burnished pottery becomes dominant, replacing Philistine Bichrome pottery. Although there are only few uncontaminated loci from this stratum, the pottery assemblage is relatively rich and includes several complete vessels. The decorated Ashdod Ware, familiar from other areas of Ashdod and other (mainly coastal) sites, makes its first appearance here. It is noteworthy that a large assemblage has recently come to light at Tell es-Safi (Maier 2001). There might have been an earlier phase of Stratum X—with red-slipped and ‘degenerate Philistine’ pottery but lacking Ashdod Ware—similar to that of Area M, as well as that of Tel Miqné-‘Eqrón Stratum IVA and Tell Qasile Stratum X. The final stage of Stratum X and early Stratum IX–VIII yielded pottery similar to that of a number of sites in southern Palestine, notably, e.g., Phase 4 at Tell es-Safi (Maier 2001), thus filling the ninth-century BCE ‘gap’ of the Philistine material culture, as at Tel Miqné-‘Eqrón, Tel Batash and other sites.

In Stratum IX–VIII and more so in Strata VII–VI, Assyrian influence is apparent, especially in several bowl forms. This tallies well with finds from parallel strata at other areas of Ashdod and with the known

historical background. Many forms, however, extend from Iron IIA into Iron IIB–C, including some of the decorated Ashdod ware pottery. Nonetheless, red-slipped pottery is much less common in Strata VII–VI than in Strata X–VIII, in agreement with most contemporary southern sites. Phoenician and imported wares (i.e., Cypriot and East Greek) are relatively rare in Ashdod, with only few examples of Black-on-Red ware, or Phoenician Bichrome ware, in Strata X–IX. Thus comparison with northern sites of the Iron II is difficult. It should be noted that due to the sparseness of the Iron IIB levels in Area K (IX–VIII, VII and VI), most of the pottery comes from stratigraphically poorly substantiated loci. Chronological conclusions regarding the different Iron IIB strata can therefore hardly rely on pottery alone.

Other Iron II finds from Area K include some well-preserved iron weapons, tools and slag, testifying to metallurgical activity. Several Egyptian amulets were also recovered, attesting to continuity in Egyptian relations. An inscription reading *ldggrt* comes from Stratum IX–VIII and a fragmentary ostrakon was recovered from topsoil.

Most of the finds associated with the Persian and Hellenistic periods derive from very poorly stratified contexts, and as much of this material has already been published in the report of Area K, only samples of the finds are presented here. These include Black-and-Red-figured Attic wares from the Persian period, as well as pottery and some small finds from the Hellenistic period. Several special finds, such as figurines recovered from unstratified contexts but dated to the Iron Age, are also presented, as are several coins from Areas H and K.

Unfortunately, the excavations of Areas H and K at Tel Ashdod have not contributed significantly to the issue of the absolute chronology of the Iron Age. Most scarabs and inscribed artifacts derived from unstratified contexts, while others do not bear royal names and thus indicate a wide chronological range. The transition between the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of Iron I is not clear in this area as the Late Bronze Age or the earliest Iron I levels were rarely reached. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain from this area alone if, for example, Myc. IIIC:1 pottery immediately replaced the ultimate Late Bronze Age stratum (which contained Mycenaean and Cypriot imports). However, three of the five scarabs recovered in Stratum XII confirm its date in the last two-thirds

of the twelfth century BCE, particularly a scarab which bears the name of Ramesses IV. Stratum XIa may be considered as the last Iron I stratum in this area, although it may have continued into the early tenth century BCE. The possible destruction between Phases b and a of Stratum XI cannot yet be linked with any historical event. The absolute date of the Iron I–IIA transition is still open to question, possibly to be determined by future radiocarbon tests on material from Areas H and M.

As noted above, the finds relating traditionally to the tenth century BCE—the Iron IIA–IIB transition—are fragmentary both in architecture and pottery. This horizon might be relatively wider at Ashdod, as Stratum IX hardly exists in most areas. Thus, a tenth/ninth-century transition may not have been very well distinguished. Moreover, Areas H and K show no signs of violent destruction in Stratum VIII, in contrast to the situation in Area D. Therefore, we also lack the chronological anchor of the Sargonid conquest of 712 BCE. Lacking a textual chronological anchor it seems preferable to define an Iron IIA (tenth–ninth century) assemblage in Strata X and X–IX, an Iron IIB (late ninth–eighth century) assemblage in Stratum IX–VIII and an Iron IIB/C (eighth–seventh century) assemblage in Strata VII and VI.

Different areas of the tell apparently display variations of settlement history, with the strata not always synchronized between the areas. A sole chronological anchor in Areas H and K is the destruction of Stratum VI, dated to the Babylonian conquest of Nebuchadnezzar (603 or 601/600 BCE). Hence, Stratum V, representing the Persian period and perhaps founded after a short hiatus, seals the Iron Age strata.

In summary, Stratum XIII is the earliest Iron I stratum at Tel Ashdod containing Myc. IIIC:1 pottery. Ending the Iron Age sequence at Tel Ashdod in the late eighth century BCE may have far-reaching implications and poses difficulties for the dating of other sites in the region. The Iron Age sequence at Tel Ashdod is far more reasonably interpreted as a continuous occupation without any gaps, although the nature of occupation in specific areas within the settlement may have changed from time to time. Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz's recent (2001) reinterpretation of Ashdod's Iron Age sequence is based on incomplete or negative data (Ben-Shlomo 2003). Their attribution of Stratum XIII in Area H to general Stratum XIV,

predating the appearance of Monochrome pottery, is based on partial evidence. Moreover, there is no evidence for a gap at the beginning of Iron IIA. A continuity in architecture is witnessed in some areas and typical early Iron IIA pottery is present at Ashdod. The absence of some seventh-century pottery forms can easily be explained by regional differences. The mention of Ashdod in seventh-century Assyrian, Babylonian and biblical texts cannot reasonably be

explained by a new site, named ‘Ashdod’, having been built at Ashdod-Yam.

On the whole, it is evident that the original stratigraphy and dating of Tel Ashdod need be retained (Table 1.1). Moreover, the excavations of Areas H and K have reasserted Ashdod’s distinct significance, in yielding a complete sequence and continuity in architecture and material culture of the Iron Age in this major Philistine city.

Table 1.1. Correlation of General Tel Ashdod Strata with Local Strata in Areas H and K

<i>General Strata</i>	<i>Local Strata Area H, 1968–1969*</i>	<i>Local Strata Area K, 1968*</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Date (Century BCE)</i>
I			Byzantine–Arabic	
II		1	Early Roman	1st
III		2	Hellenistic	3rd–2nd
IV		3	Hellenistic	3rd–2nd
Vc–a		4	Persian	6th–4th
VI	1	5	Iron IIC	Late 7th
VII	2a	6	Iron IIC	7th
VIII	2b	7	Iron IIB	Late 9th–8th
IX	2b	7	Iron IIB	Late 9th–8th
X	3	Probes	Iron IIA	10th–9th
XIb–a	4b–a	Probes	Iron IB	11th
XII	5		Iron IB	12th
XIIIb–a	6		Iron IA	Early 12th
XIV	7		LB IIB	13th
XVI–XV	Trench		LB II	14th–13th

*Ashdod II–III

