Rabbah attests to the ongoing interest in the book of Lamentations during the rabbinic period. This was no doubt due in part to the ancient custom of reading and studying the book of Lamentations on or before the fast of the Ninth of Av (*Tishʿah be-Av*), the date of the commemoration of the destructions of the First and Second Temples, as attested already in the rabbinic period (*EkhR* 4:20, *yShab* 16:1). The many proems in the work may also reflect early homiletic activity surrounding the themes and verses of Lamentations in the synagogue and study circles, although most of the proems embedded in *Ekhah Rabbah* show signs of later editorial redaction.

Besides accounts of Jerusalem and other cities under siege and the destruction of people and land following the Great Revolt of 66–70 CE and the later Bar Kokhba revolt, *Ekhah Rabbah* includes legendary descriptions of the greatness of Jerusalem and its inhabitants before the destruction as well as passages concerning the relationship of other nations to the Jewish people and its tribulations. Among the significant biblical characters referred to in the midrash are Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Rachel, Moses, and especially Jeremiah, the assumed author of the book of Lamentations. Passages from the prophets, especially those concerning prophecies of destruction and comfort, are cited often. Topics discussed include theodicy, reward and punishment, God's attitude to Israel's sins and their sufferings, and the efficacy of prayer and fasting. Interestingly, eschatological issues are rare, although the promise of future consolation, including reconciliation between God and Israel, is mentioned, notably in passages appended to the final verses of the book of Lamentations. There is little halakhic material in *Ekhah Rabbah*, although some passages are cited in later rabbinic codes in relation to customs of fasting on the Ninth of Av and the Day of Atonement.

Ekhah Rabbah served as a major source of inspiration and allusion for *payyetanim* in their compositions of liturgical poetry for the Ninth of Av (*qinnot*). The popularity of the midrash is also attested by the large number of medieval manuscript copies of it that have survived, as well as by the existence of abbreviated versions of it and collections of material selected from it: these include an abbreviation found in Yemenite sources among liturgical passages appropriate for the fast of the Ninth of Av, and a small collection of passages from the midrash and associated stories culled from the Babylonian Talmud known as *Ekhah Zuta* ("the small Lamentations"), attested in Ashkenazic circles from the 11th century on. Numerous passages are cited by medieval and modern rabbinic authorities, and large sections are included in the medieval anthologies *Yalqut Shimʿoni* (Germany, 13th century) and *Midrash ha-gadol* (Yemen, 14th century). Modern historians have taken into account, with the necessary scholarly precautions, the aggadic passages concerning historical occurrences surrounding the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba rebellion, and scholars have noted and studied the collections of tales in *Ekhah Rabbah* from literary and folkloristic perspectives.

An edition based on an Italian manuscript of the midrash from the 13th or 14th century was published by Salomon Buber (Vilna 1899), who appended copious notes citing parallels and providing valuable philological and textual comments, and included a long introduction containing, among other topics, a discussion of the relationship of the midrash to earlier and later rabbinic works and its attestation among medieval authors. As Buber noted, the version of the midrash in this manuscript differs frequently from that of the standard versions (the latter based on the first printed editions), and indeed these two versions can be seen as representatives of two major recensions of the text, whose origins are unknown but may both be the result of early transmissions of the midrash in Byzantium and the Oriental countries during the centuries subsequent to the final redaction of the work.

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Paul Mandel

Ekron

Biblical Ekron (Heb. *ʿEqrôn*), one of the five Iron Age Philistine capital cities, has been identified at the site of Tel Miqne (Khirbet el-Muqannaʾ) on the western edge of the inner coastal plain of Israel. Excavations were conducted for 14 seasons between 1981 and 1996 under the auspices of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem and the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, directed by T. Dothan and S. Gitin.

The tell has a 10-acre Upper City (Field I) and a 40-acre Lower City (Fields II, III, IV, and X), both of

which were occupied in the Middle Bronze Age II (Stratum XI of the 17th–first half of the 16th cent. BCE), as evidenced by a mudbrick rampart in Fields III and X. In the Late Bronze Age, the Lower City was abandoned; only the Upper City in Field I was occupied from Strata X–VIII, the second half of the 16th century through the first quarter of the 12th century BCE. Following the destruction by the Philistines of the Late Bronze Age Canaanite city, evidence for which included a food storage building complex that contained large concentrations of carbonized grains and figs, both the Upper City in Field I and the Lower City in Fields III, IV, and X were reoccupied by the Philistines in Iron Age I Strata VII–IV, the second quarter of the 12th century through the first quarter of the 10th century BCE. After Ekron was destroyed at the end of the Iron Age I, the Lower City was again abandoned, this time for 270 years, and only the Upper City was occupied from Strata III–II, the second quarter of the 10th century through the end of the 8th century BCE. Its primary architectural features were a series of streets with rooms/shops on either side and a mudbrick city-wall with a 7 m deep mudbrick tower. It was at this time that Ekron came under the control of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, as indicated in a relief of Sargon II in his palace at Khorsabad, dated to 720/712 BCE, and the Annals of Sennacherib dated to 701 BCE. At the beginning of the 7th century, both the Upper and Lower Cities were reoccupied in Stratum I, and Ekron, a Neo-Assyrian vassal city-state during the *pax Assyriaca*, expanded in size to 85 acres. This city was destroyed in 604 BCE by the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. The final phase of occupation was in the Lower City in Field III in Stratum IA, destroyed in the first quarter of the 6th century BCE.

Thus, there were two major Philistine urban centers in the Upper and Lower Cities of Ekron, one in Iron Age I and the other in the final phase of Philistine occupation in the late Iron Age II. The Iron Age I city was fortified with a wall and glacis. In Stratum VII, Philistine I pottery made its first appearance, followed in Stratum VI by Philistine 2 pottery and in Stratum IV by Philistine 3 pottery (these designations replace the previously used terms Mycenaean IIIC:I, Philistine Bichrome, and Philistine Debased pottery, respectively) and red-slipped and hand-burnished ware. The main features in the Upper City in Strata VII and VI were pottery kilns, and also in Stratum VI, a cultic room with a bench, a freestanding square hearth in the center, and a limestone bathtub. A cultic shrine with a plastered installation and two incised scapulae were found in Stratum V, and in Strata VI–IV, 30 small round hearths lined with burnt pebbles and five intramural infant burials were found.

In the Lower City in Field III on southern ridge of the tell, the earliest architectural feature was found in Stratum VI – a domestic building complex with 14 small burnt pebble-lined hearths similar to those from the Upper City. The main Stratum V feature was a public building complex with a monumental entrance, and in Stratum IV, two building complexes, one of which had a large platform that supported several plastered installations. In the Lower City Field IV Lower in the elite zone in the center of the tell, architectural features in Stratum VII included a 'silo room' and rectangular raised hearths paved on top with flat-lying sherds. Stratum VI was represented by a new building complex comprising 23 architectural units, one with a sherd-paved rectangular hearth and a bench, and another with a monolith next to a limestone bathtub. Strata V and IV included a double complex of buildings, one a monumental megaron-type building with a room that contained a *bamah*. The pottery sequence was the same as in the Upper City and other parts of the Lower City. On the northwestern periphery of the Lower City, in Field X, a building complex constructed against the city wall contained a shrine with plastered walls and a plastered *bamah* in Stratum VII.

In the late Philistine Upper City of Iron Age IIC Stratum IB/C, the main architectural features included a room with a central drain that served as an entranceway into the city and a monumental magazine with three rooms filled with storage jars. In the Lower City in Field III, the city wall had a three-entryway gate and a gate house, and in Field II, a line of 80 m of storerooms or stables. Behind the city wall was an olive oil production center that contained 115 olive oil installations, representing the largest industrial center of any kind excavated to date. In the center of the Lower City, in the Field IV Lower elite zone, the five Temple Auxiliary Buildings contained seven of the 17 four-horned incense altars and four of the six silver caches found at Ekron, as well as five dedicatory inscriptions, one of which reads *qdš l'šrt*, dedicated to Asherat. In Field IV Upper, monumental Temple Complex 650, based on the design concept of Neo-Assyrian royal palaces, contained a sanctuary with a main hall lined with two rows of column bases. The plan of the sanctuary reflects that of the Phoenician Astarte temple at Kition on Cyprus. The cella contained the Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription: "The temple which he built, *'kyš* (Achish, Ikausu) son of Padi, son of *Ysd*, son of Ada, son of Yaʿir, ruler of Ekron, for *Ptgyh* his lady. May she bless him, and protect him and prolong his days, and bless his land" (see Fig. 11). Both Ikausu and his father Padi are mentioned as kings of Ekron in the 7th-century royal Neo-Assyrian Annals. Ikausu means the Achaean or the Greek; *Ptgyh* has been associated with the sanctuary at Delphi known as Pytho, the shrine of Gaia, the Mycenaean mother-goddess. Another inscription found in one of the santuary side-rooms reads

Fig. 11 Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription (7th cent. BCE)

lbʿl wlpdy, "for Baʿal and for Padi," implying "for god and king."

Following the destruction of this large Stratum IB/C Philistine city, Stratum IA is represented by a large Assyrian-type courtyard building in Field III, which was destroyed in the first quarter of the 6th century BCE.

The Tel Miqne-Ekron excavations have made a major contribution to understanding the role of the Philistines in the history of biblical Israel. The results have shown that as opposed to the negative portrayal of the Philistines in the biblical text, they were a culturally and technologically sophisticated people, and that the Philistines survived as a distinct national entity until ca. 600 BCE, contrary to the previous scholarly consensus that they had disappeared by around 1000 BCE at the time of the united monarchy of David and Solomon. This conclusion is strongly supported by the Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription, a 'smoking gun' that, together with other Ekron inscriptions, shows that in the course of hundreds of years, the Philistines transformed themselves from Sea People invaders into a sophisticated urban society, and under the *pax Assyriaca*, into olive oil industrialists. The presence of the names of Ikausu and Padi in the Ekron Inscription – referred to as kings of Ekron in the 7th-century Neo-Assyrian Royal Annals – also provides a basis for correlating the chronology of the end of the First Temple period with absolute dates from extrabiblical evidence.

The data provided by the archaeological record also address the question of what happened to the Philistines. This immigrant society was marked by a struggle to preserve the features that gave it its own peculiar identity, while going through a process of acculturation as it adapted to the impact of new political, economic, and cultural forces. When Ekron was destroyed by the Babylonians at the end of the 7th century BCE, and the Ekronites were taken into captivity, the long-term effects of the process of acculturation left the Philistines with a core culture so diluted that it was no longer sufficient to sustain a distinct group identity. Consequently, within a relatively short period of time, the Philistines all but disappeared from the historical record.

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El

I. Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament

A description of El takes aim at a moving target, both diachronically and synchronically, within one culture and across cultures. The first problem centers on the lexeme itself, for *ʾl* can serve as a common noun (god), an appellative (God), or a particular divine name (El), thereby obscuring the precise referent. The second, more sweeping issue stems from the nature of divinity within the ANE, namely, how one ought to, or even can, identify and track a deity across time and space given the tendency of deities to absorb the forms, functions, and epithets of other deities through cultural development and exchange (cf. Miller: 53–59). Instead of searching for an immutable El or reconstructing a prototype, this article provides a comparative description of multiple El figures.

Although *ʾl* appears as a distinct entity throughout the earliest literatures of East, Northwest, and South Semitic, Ugaritic materials provide the most complete portrait of a distinct Bronze Age deity (see Cross 1974: 242–44; 1973: 13–43; Eissfeldt; Pope). Hailed as the "Father of the Gods" (CTU 1 1.40 41 etc.; see fig. 12), El is both divine patriarch and progenitor, having sired the pantheon with his consort, Athirat. With reference to the stormgod Baʿl, the phrase "Bull El, his father, King El, who created him" (1.3 V:35–36 etc.) underscores El's supremacy over other deities with images of power and fecundity. Yet even as El sits enthroned and presides over the divine assembly, he displays a charitable dispo-