

ADZISŁAW J. KAPERA

THE ASHDOD STELE OF SARGON II

The collection of Assyrian records concerning Yamani's rebellion has recently been unexpectedly enriched by a source of primary importance¹. During the second season of excavations at Tell Ashdod in 1963 three fragments of a basalt Assyrian stele were found². They come from the area marked A, and from the trial trench known as Area B, situated at opposite ends of the Ashdod Acropolis, about 200 metres from each other³. Area A,

¹ The present article is the next part of so far unfinished dissertation *Yamani's rebellion in Ashdod ab. 713 — 709 B. C. and His Supposed Connections with Cyprus*, previously announced in the article *Was Ya-ma-ni a Cypriot?*, *Folia Orientalia* 14, 1972—73, pp. 207—218.

² Cf. preliminary reports of the season: M. Dothan, *Ashdod: Preliminary Report on the Excavations in Seasons 1962/3*, *IEJ* 14, 1964, p. 87; D. N. Freedman, *The Second Season at Ancient Ashdod*, *BA* 26, 1963, p. 138; M. Dothan, D. N. Freedman, *Ashdod* [in:] *Chronique archéologique*, *RB* 71, 1964, p. 403. The moment of the uncovering of the stele was described in a very lively and picturesque way by D. N. Freedman in a popular article: *Excavating in an Old Testament Town*, *Presbyterian Life* 17, 1964, No 6, p. 10—12. Photographs of the fragments of the stele, taken by J. L. Swauger, were first published by H. Tadmor in the article: *Philistia under Assyrian Rule*, *BA* 29, 1966, p. 95. Besides, references have been made to the stele in: M. Dothan, *Ashdod: A City of the Philistine Pentapolis*, *Archaeology* (N. Y.) 20, 1967, p. 184 and *Ashdod of the Philistines* [in:] D. N. Freedman, J. C. Greenfield (eds.), *New Direction in Biblical Archaeology*, New York 1971, pp. 24f by the same author. The definite report of the Ashdod excavation of 1963 has only come out recently. Cf. M. Dothan, *Ashdod II—III. The Second and Third Seasons of Excavations 1963, 1965. Soundings in 1967*. Jerusalem 1971, (Vol. 1) Text, (Vol. 2) Figures and Plates (= *Atiqot*. English Series, Vols. IX—X).

³ Cf. the topographical map of the excavations, M. Dothan, *Ashdod II—III*, vol. 1, p. 16, plan 1.

where the fragments marked I and III were found, is situated on a south-eastern slope. One of the fragments was found in the course of the washing of sherds coming from the débris in square H/3, close to locus 32, the other had been reused as a stone in a Hellenistic wall in locus 45⁴. The fragment marked II comes from trial trench G, dug out in the northern part of the tell, on the western slope. The stele fragment was uncovered in the stratum immediately below the surface extending at the depth of 20 to 100 cm. The stratum was full of Byzantine sherds. The fragment in question was not the only Iron Age object in that late stratum. Of the sherds, pieces of pottery, terracotta representations of *Kernos* heads and fragments of an offering table deserve mention. In J. L. Swauger's opinion, we have to do here with a rubbish heap from the 5th—7th c. A.D., situated just outside city walls⁵.

Summing up, let us note that although the fragments of the Assyrian stele were found at Tell Ashdod in the course of a systematic excavation, their archaeological context does not contribute anything substantial to their interpretation. None of the fragments was found *in situ*, i.e. in the original location of the stele. Stratigraphic dating is also out of the question. However, the problem of dating has been solved successfully on the basis of a paleographic study of the existing fragments. It is worth mentioning that the dating has been indirectly confirmed by archaeology. Small fragments of the stele have been dug out in two distant points in the city, which agrees the otherwise well-known fact of smashing the monuments of Assyrian rule at the moment of throwing off the yoke⁶. In the case of Ashdod we can

⁴ Cf. the short mention in M. Dothan, *Ashdod II—III*, vol. 1, p. 40, and the map enclosed in the publication of the first Ashdod season: M. Dothan, D. N. Freedman, *Ashdod I. The First Season of Excavations 1962*, Jerusalem 1967 (= *Atiqot*. English Series VII), p. 19, plan 2.

⁵ J. L. Swauger, The Trench (Area G) [in:] M. Dothan, *Ashdod II—III*, p. 150. It is difficult to understand why J. L. Swauger writes about two fragments of Sargon II's inscription here. Most certainly only one fragment of the stele comes from the trial trench G.

⁶ Cf. the fragments of stelae from the time of Sargon II found in Samaria, Carchemish and Asharne. The literature on the subject is quoted in L. D. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran*, Toronto 1972, pp. 56f.

give the exact date of the rebellion against Assyria during which the stele may have been destroyed. It can be suggested that this happened shortly after the erecting of the stele, in 705 B. C., just after the death of Sargon II, during an anti-Assyrian rebellion led by the Judaeans Hezekiah⁷. Let us remember, however, that after the defeat of the rebels Ashdod is again mentioned in Assyrian sources in 701 B. C. as a payer of tributes [the Taylor Prism (Senah) II, 51].

The publication of the Ashdod stele was entrusted to Haim Tadmor of the Jerusalem University. Already in 1967 he offered the first extensive description in modern Hebrew⁸. Three years later G. Wilhelm published an extract from H. Tadmor's letter with a reconstruction of Fragments II and III in the *Archiv für Orientforschung*⁹. The final version was included in the official report on the excavations in the years 1963 and 1965¹⁰.

The excavated fragments of the stele resemble typical commemorative monuments erected in countries conquered by or subordinated to Assyrian rulers. They usually are three-faced and carry an image of the king facing the symbol of a god on the front¹¹. One of the best preserved objects of this kind from the days of Sargon II is the famous Kition (now Larnaka) stele, built after the homage of the seven Cypriot rulers in 707 B. C.¹² D. D. Levine

⁷ The circumstances of the outbreak and course of the rebellion are described in more detail in J. Bright, *A History of Israel*², London 1972, pp. 282—284; H. Tadmor, *Philistia...*, BA 29, 1966, pp. 95—97; M. Noth, *The History of Israel*², London 1965, pp. 265—269; H. Rowley, *Hezekiah's Reform and Rebellion*, BJRL 44, 1961—2, pp. 395—431.

⁸ H. Tadmor, *Fragments of a Stele of Sargon II from the Excavations of Ashdod*, EI 8, 1967, pp. 241—245, pl. 41 (English summary, p. 75*).

⁹ G. Wilhelm, *Tel Ashdod*, AfO 23, 1970, p. 191.

¹⁰ H. Tadmor, *Fragments of an Assyrian Stele of Sargon II* [in:] M. Dothan, *Ashdod II—III*, vol. 1, pp. 192—197, vol. 2, pls. XCVI and XCVII, 1.

¹¹ L. D. Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 51; H. Tadmor, *Fragments...*, EI 8, 1967, p. 241 and *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 193.

¹² Cf. the tables in the basic publication E. Schrader, *Die Sargonstele des Berliner Museums*, AAWB, Philos.-histor. Kl. 1881/VI, Berlin 1882. The most recent photographs of the stele can be found in Ivo Nicolaou, *Cypriot Inscribed Stones*, Nicosia 1971, pl. III.

classifies the Ashdod stele together with those at Kition and Naja-fehabad (west of Hamadan) among the so-called „standard stelae”¹³.

While it is easy to imagine the shape of the Ashdod stele, its dimensions are difficult to establish. For the sake of comparison let us recall that the height of the Kition stele is above 2 metres (2.09 m.) and its width is 68 cm.; its depth is estimated at 45,5 cm. although only 32 cm. has been preserved, while the rest has been split off¹⁴.

According to H. Tadmor's paleographic analysis the Ashdod stela carries script identical to that on the Kition and Asharne stelae. The script is „smooth, swift, the work of the steady hand of the king's stone-cutter”¹⁵.

While it is carved in the monumental script, analogous to that found on other Assyrian royal monuments, the text of the Ashdod stele also contains some cuneiform characters of Babylonian shape. In Fragment I these are the signs ŠA, ŠÁ, and in Fragment II ŠUR, and in Fragment III DINGIR¹⁶. This was a mannerism characteristic of the times of Sargon II¹⁷.

In his first publication H. Tadmor posed the question whether objects of this kind, had not been transported to their location from Assyria in rough-hewn form. He believes at any rate that the Kition stele was made in Syria and shipped to Cyprus, and that the Ashdod stele, made of basalt, which is not to be found anywhere near the city, was brought there from some other place¹⁸. Both statements must be called into question. The Kition stele was made of gabbro, a material available in Cyprus¹⁹. Besides,

¹³ Cf. L. D. Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁴ Cf. H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 194 and L. D. Levine *l. cit.*

¹⁵ H. Tadmor, *Fragments...*, EI 8, 1967, p. 242.

¹⁶ H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 195, note 20.

¹⁷ H. Tadmor (*Assyrian Stele...*, p. 195, note 21) refers the reader to the so-called Bronze, Silver and Gold Inscriptions from Dur Sharukin for comparison. Cf. H. Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons nach den Papierabklatschen und Originalen*, Leipzig 1889, vol. II, pls. 42—44.

¹⁸ H. Tadmor, *Fragments...*, EI 8, 1967, p. 242.

¹⁹ G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, I, Cambridge 1949, p. 104 and note 2.

a remark in the text of the inscription suggests that the stele was to be erected precisely at Kition. How could an Assyrian stone-cutter have known the details of local topography? ²⁰. As for the Ashdod stele, D. N. Freedman suggests that the stone could have been brought from the region north of Megiddo ²¹. Thus, this stele also could have been made from a local material. It seems more probable, then, that it was the craftsmen carving the texts that travelled rather than ready blocks of stone.

In his second publication, includes in the excavation report for the years 1963 and 1965, H. Tadmor modifies his original views, and states that the Ashdod stele, like the Asharne stele, was made by a skilled artisan in one of the main administrative centres of southern Syria, adjacent to areas where basalt is abundant: eastern Galilee, the Golan Heights or the Bashan ²².

There is little doubt about the date when the Ashdod stele was erected. H. Tadmor stresses the fact that the features of this text of Sargon II are typical of Sargon's later inscriptions. The author also reminds us that it was the Assyrian custom to built stelae in the course of war campaigns and on their conclusion. He believes, therefore, that the Ashdod inscription was made immediately after the conquest of the city in 711 B. C., and certainly not later than that ²³. However, when we consider the chronology of Yamani's rebellion, including a longer stationing of the Assyrian army in the area, untill about 709 B. C., which I postulate in my dissertation, and the striking resemblance of the script on the Ashdod and Kition stelae (we follow H. Tadmor in stressing this), the questions arises whether the Ashdod stele was not erected later, perhaps at the same time as the Kition Stele, or even after that. It is significant that the Kition stele lacks any mention of the Ashdod rebellion, though of course we do not

²⁰ Cf. Colum III (IV), line 52 of the Kition stele in G. Smith's translation, *The Cyprus Monolith*, ZÄS 9, 1871, p. 72 and C. J. Gadd's commentary in: *Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud, Iraq* 16, 1954, p. 194.

²¹ D. N. Freedman, *The Second Season...*, BA 26, 1963, p. 138.

²² H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 195.

²³ H. Tadmor, *Fragments...*, EI 8, 1967, p. 242 and *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 192.

know the full text²⁴. If we assume that the king's stone-cutter left A. syria for Cyprus together with the returning rulers of the island, it is very tempting to suppose that he made the Ashdod stele on his way back, even if there is no proof of that²⁵.

In H. Tadmor's opinion it is not difficult to fix the date of the smashing of the stele²⁶. Its destruction about 705, as has been suggested above, is very likely, and this dating even seems to be indirectly confirmed by the archaeological context — a fact overlooked by H. Tadmor. We can say in any case that the stele stood for a very short time and was smashed to pieces during the period between the death of Sargon II (705 B. C.) and the Palestinian campaign of his son Sennacherib in 701 B. C.²⁷

Fragment I

It comes from an edge of the stele. The left side contains two signs in each line. H. Tadmor²⁸ transcribes and restores the text as follows:

1. [.....] *tim*
2. [.....] SIG₅
3. [.....] *ki-ru*
4. [.....] DAGA] L-*tim*

Acting on the assumption that the fragment may concern the Ashdod events H. Tadmor interprets lines 3 and 4 as follows:

3. [*ittiya u-ša-am-*] *ki-ru* = „They (= the rebels of Ashdod) incited them (against me) / made them my enemies”.

²⁴ It was cut into halves probably still in Antiquity, and it has been preserved because it was used as a building stone. Cf. L. Ross, *Reisen nach Kos, Halikarnassos, Rhodos und der Insel Cypern*, Halle 1852, p. 86.

²⁵ It would be worth while to carry out an epigraphic analysis of both inscriptions in order to see whether they are made by the same stone-cutting technique. Let us note that also D. N. Freedman (*The Second Season...*, BA 26, 1963, p. 138) expresses the view that the Ashdod stele was built in 707 B. C.

²⁶ H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 194.

²⁷ D. N. Freedman (*ibid.*) accepts the year 704 B. C. as the date of the destruction of the stele.

²⁸ H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 195.

4. perhaps: [*ummānāt māt Aššur rapš*]*ā-tim* = (I have mobilized) the im[mense forces of Assyria].

The right side contains one sign in each line, which practically precludes all reconstruction:

1. ¹*in* - [.....]
2. SAL [.....]
3. ^{šá} - ¹*x* [.....]
4. ^{šá} [.....]
-

Fragment II

It is the largest of the three fragments ²⁹. In view of the blank space in its top section H. Tadmor supposes it to have constituted the initial section of the second column, since on the first column the text was inscribed over the ruler's figure. It seems, however, that it would be more correct to describe the text as a fragment of one of the side columns. The fact that four lines of the text (and a trace of the fifth line) have been preserved has enabled H. Tadmor to produce a convincing reconstruction; the reconstructed text lists Humbanigash the Elamite and the lands of Karallu, Shurda and Media in the same order as can be found in other texts of Sargon II: the Bull Inscription, lines 12—14; the Pavement Inscription IV, 14—19; the Display Inscription of Hall XIV, lines 7—8; and the Larnaka stele, Face B, lines 28—37.

1. [.....] ^{md}*Hum-ba-ni*-[*ga-aš*]
2. [.....] ¹*al-lu* KUR ^{šur}-¹*da* [....]
3. [.... KUR] ¹*Ma*-¹*da-a-a* ¹*KUR* [....]
4. [.....] ¹*Aš*-^{šur} ^ú-[.....]

Fragment III

It is of the same size and shape as Fragment I ³⁰. Only the left side makes any attempt at reconstruction possible:

²⁹ As above.

³⁰ Cf. H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, pp. 195, 197.

1. [.....] $\text{r}x^1\text{-}\acute{u}$
2. [.....] $\text{r}lip^1\text{-}ti$
3. [.....] $\text{r}is^1\text{-}tap\text{-}par$
4. [.....] $\text{r}ta^1\text{-}mar\text{-}tuš$

In H. Tadmor's translation the fragment reads:

1. [....]
2. [... *da-bi-ib ša-l]ip-ti = „... (who) speak treachery”*
3. [.....*i]š-tap-par = „he was sending messages”*
4. [.....*ik-la-a ta]-mar-tuš = „... [he (the rebel king) ceased (to deliver) his tri]bute”.*

The reconstruction of the right side of Fragment II is impossible:

1. $\text{r}x^1$ [.....]
2. DINGIR [....]
3. *aš*- $\text{r}x^1$ [.....]
4. *a*- $\text{r}na^1$ [.....]
5. *ša* [.....]

*

* *

The reconstruction of Fragment II proposed by H. Tadmor is excellently documented and correct. As for Fragments I and III, however, the very assumption that „the Ashdod stele described in detail the events that preceded the fall of Ashdod in 712”³¹ is questionable. It may have been so, but not necessarily. For instance, the Larnaka stele does not say much about the relations between Cyprus and Sargon II and the relevant passage on it [cf. Column II (IV), 28—53] takes up a relatively smaller part of its total surface.

Discussing line 3 of the left side of Fragment I H. Tadmor identifies those who incited people against Sargon II with the Ashdod rebels. Yet, the reconstruction of line 4 contradicts that interpretation. That reconstruction is perhaps quite correct and the text may deal with the mobilization of the immense Assyrian

³¹ H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 196.

forces; if we accept this, however, the text cannot be associated with the Ashdod events. Let us recall that the texts of Sargon II contained information of a lightning-speed reaction of the king to the developments in Ashdod and his sending his body-guard only, without additional equipment. The text of line 98 of the Display Inscription explicitly contradicts the use of great forces. Thus, H. Tadmor's argument about line 4 cannot be accepted; hence, line 3 does not refer to the Ashdod rebellion, either. It could be added, incidentally that the expression *gimir Sutē šabī šēri ittiya ušamkir*, parallel to line 3 and quoted by H. Tadmor, appears in the Annals next to the description of the Ashdod rebellion. It appears in lines 233—234, after lines 215—228 in H. Winckler's arrangement³², and in line 266, after lines 249—262 in A. G. Lie's numbering³³. What is more, it is easier to imagine the gathering of the „immense forces of Assyria” against the coalition led by Marduk-aplu-iddina, which included the Sutu nomads.

The reconstruction of lines 2—4 of Fragment III is essentially correct. H. Tadmor is quite right in believing that [... *da-bi-ib ša-lip-ti* was „the derogatory term used in Sargon's inscriptions to denote the rebellious Ashdodites, called *Hittities*, i.e., Westerners, in the archaizing manner”³⁴. He also quotes examples [Annals, line 253, ed. Lie (= line 219, ed. Winckler), and Display Inscription, line 95, ed. Winckler]. It is a rare expression and it occurs in only one other place among Sargon's extant inscriptions: in line 113 of the Display Inscription, in connection with another rebel, Mutallu of Kummuh.

Still, it seems that in the case of line 2 [... *i]š-tap-par* „he was sending messages”, H. Tadmor's reading is somewhat one-sided³⁵. According to J. Zabłocka, „the second line is ambiguous: *štappar* = Prs. I₂ of the verb *šapāru*. Sometimes the verb „may have a reflexive meaning in this form”: a feeling (e.g. fear)

³² H. Winckler, *op. cit.*, pp. 36—39.

³³ A. G. Lie, *The Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria. Part 1, The Annals*, Paris 1929, p. 42f.

³⁴ H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, pp. 196f.

³⁵ H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*, p. 197.

spread-or does not spread (to others). The verb is found in this meaning in Sargon's the so-called *Eight Campaign*, line 21"³⁶

Also H. Tadmor's interpretation of line 4 presents some difficulties. The phrase [... *ik-la-a ta*]-*mar-tuš* denoting (the) ceasing (of paying the tribute) is relatively infrequent in Sargon's texts and it refers to:

1. Marduk-aplu-iddina from Bit Jakin [Display Inscription, line 122 (and not line 79 as Tadmor says) and Annals, line 230 (= Lie, line 265)];

2. Ki-ak-ki, the ruler of Šinuhtu (Display Inscription, line 28 and *Eight Campaign*, line 312);

3. Mutallu of Kummuh (Display Inscription, line 113);

4. Tar-ḥu-na-zi, ruler of Meliddu (Display Inscription, line 79).

In none of the extant texts does the phrase appear in connection with the Ashdod events. What is more interesting, even if we considered only the word *tamartu* by itself, we shall not find it in the direct records on Ashdod. These always speak of *biltu* (Annals, line 216; Display Inscription, line 90; Prism A, lines 8 and 12)³⁷. Of course, the expression *iklā tamartuš* may have appeared in the text of the Ashdod stele, but it is doubtful that it was used with reference to Ashdod.

Another difficulty is connected with the sequence of the lines of the left side of Fragment III. Let us assume for the moment that, in agreement with H. Tadmor's assumption, the Ashdod stele described in detail the events that preceded the fall of the city in 712 B. C.; let us next compare the sequence of the reconstructed fragments in the three records preserved and consider them in reference not only to Azuri but also to the next rulers of Ashdod, Ahimiti and Yamani. The results are shown in the table. The first column gives the three expressions in the order in which they appear on the Ashdod stele, the others provide information on the contents of the Annals, the Display Inscription and the Broken Prism A. The bottom section of the table compares the order of the elements of the story in the three sources (where

³⁶ I wish to take this opportunity to thank Professor Julia Zabolocka from Poznań University for her comments on the fragments of the stele in the letter of February 5, 1972 and in our later discussions.

³⁷ H. Tadmor, *l. cit.*

expressions identical or similar to those found on the Ashdod fragments are used).

The table clearly shows that H. Tadmor's assumption that the left side of Fragment III refers „to Azuri's rebellion for which he was deposed in 713 B. C. E.” is extremely unlikely. The result of the analysis of the Annals and the Display Inscription, where the expressions preserved in Fragment III of the Ashdod stele appear in the reverse order, contradicts that assumption. It is equally unlikely that those expressions should be used in reference to Ahimiti and Yamani. Only single expressions are used in reference to them, but never all three at the same time. Of course we must bear in mind the fact that only fragmentary records of the Ashdod events have come down to us, but even on the basis of the surviving texts, the Annals, the Display Inscription and the Prism A, one can see their interdependence and the similarity of their accounts. Hence, it is hardly probable that the „fourth version” from the Ashdod stele differ from them very much.

It appears that H. Tadmor had dealt with the fragment in question in too one-sided a manner. One should not have been so much influenced by the fact that it was found in Ashdod and that one of its fragments might therefore refer to events happening in that city. Another solution ought to have been sought, or at least, such a possibility should not have been excluded. One of the possible solutions (and I am not saying that it is the only one) is suggested in the last column of the table. The sequence of phrases reconstructed by H. Tadmor roughly agrees with the account of Mutallu of Kummuh in the version found in the Display Inscription (lines 112—113). This ruler was actually plotting treason, communicated with Argistis, the king of Urartu and stopped paying his tribute.

The interpretation of the lines 3—4 on the left side of Fragment III proposed above might also allow us to reconstruct the end of the line 1, which is read by H. Tadmor as [...] $x^1\text{-}\acute{u}$. In the part of the Display Inscription referring to Mutallu's of Kummuh rebellion there is only one word ending in *-u* several signs before *dābib šalīpti*; the word is *pa-tu-ú*. Table XCVI, 2 of H. Tadmor's publication³⁸ shows clearly a sign in the left upper

³⁸ H. Tadmor, *Assyrian Stele...*

	TABLE					
	ANNALS			DISPLAY INSCRIPTION		
	Azuri	Ahimiti Hatti	Yamani	Azuri	Ahimiti Hatti	Yamani
1. <i>dabib šalıpti</i> „(who) speak treachery”	l. 219	l. 219	l. 219	l. 95	l. 95	l. 95
2. <i>ištappar</i> „he was sending messages”	l. 217 <i>iš-pur</i>	0	0	l. 92	0	0
3. <i>iklā tamartuš</i> „he ceased (to deliver) his tribute”	ll. 215—16	0	0	l. 90	0	0

	FRAGMENT OF BROKEN PRISM A			DISPLAY INSCRIPTION
	Azuri	Ahimiti	Yamani	(about Mutallu of Kummuh)
1. <i>dabib šalıpti</i>	?	?	0	l. 113 (beginning)
2. <i>ištappar</i>	?	?	x (cf. ll. 28—36)	x (l. 113 middle)
3. <i>ikla tamartuš</i>	?	x (ll. 8 and 12)	0	l. 113 (end)

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS				
Ashdod Stele	Annals	Display Inscription	Prism A	Display Inscription
1 — 2 — 3	Azuri	Azuri	Azuri	Mutallu
	<i>x/3/-2-1</i>	<i>x/3/-2-1</i>	<i>?-?-?</i>	<i>1-x/2/-3</i>
	Ahimiti	Ahimiti	Ahimiti	
	<i>0-0-1</i>	<i>0-0-1</i>	<i>?-x/3/-?</i>	
	Yamani	Yamani	Yamani	
	<i>1-0-0</i>	<i>1-0-0</i>	<i>0-x/2/-0</i>	

x — similar expression

0 — lack of information

? — damaged text

1, 2, 3 — expressions under discussion

part of the plate which can be identified as *ú* according to R. Labat's table³⁹. It is preceded by a remnant of a cuneiform sign in the form of one vertical cuneus and the ends of two horizontal cunei touching the lower part of the vertical cuneus on the left side. Only a very careful inspection of the stone would enable us

³⁹ R. Labat, *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne (signe, syllabaire, idéogrammes)*, Paris 1952, p. 273.

to determine whether its upper part retains any traces of the ends of further two horizontal cunei. The photograph of this part of the stone cannot be clearly interpreted, but it might be supposed that the preserved cunei are the remnants of the sign *tu*⁴⁰. If this proposal were confirmed by a new inspection of the Fragment III, the line 1 could be reconstructed as [... *pa-t*]u-ú.

To sum up, these remarks on the preserved fragments of the Ashdod stele seem to contradict H. Tadmor's opinion that the fragments can be connected with the events that occurred in Ashdod during the rebellion against Assyria about the year 712 B. C.⁴². One should not overestimate the historical significance of the fragments. On the other hand, we must strongly emphasize the importance of this find as a first-rate source indirectly confirming the accounts of the conquest of Ashdod found in other Assyrian texts coming from Dur Sharukin and Niniveh, as well as the mention in chapter XX, 1, of Isaiah⁴³. As D. N. Freedman rightly observes, this is in fact the first instance of discovering a monumental inscription in Palestine since the finding of Mesha's stele in 1868⁴⁴; for it is hard to count the small fragment of an Assyrian inscription from Samaria⁴⁵, whose dating (also to the times of Sargon II) is uncertain⁴⁶. Of the few objects imported from Assyria or executed in Assyrian style that have so far been excavated and described⁴⁷, the Ashdod stele is among the most important.

⁴⁰ R. Labat, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

⁴¹ H. Winckler, *op. cit.*, II, pl. 34, n° 72.

⁴² M. Dothan expresses the view in his publications that the description of the Ashdod rebellion may have appeared on the lost part of the stele. Cf. his *Ashdod of the Philistines*, p. 24 and *Ashdod II—III*, p. 21.

⁴³ M. Dothan, *Ashdod of the Philistines*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ D. N. Freedman, *Excavating in an Old Testament Town*, p. 10 and *The Second Season...*, p. 138.

⁴⁵ C. J. Gadd [in:] J. W. and G. M. Crowfoot, K. M. Kenyon, *Samaria-Sebaste III: The Objects from Samaria*, London 1957, p. 35 and pl. IV.

⁴⁶ L. D. Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁴⁷ The scarcity of Assyrian finds in Israel is stressed by R. Heistrin and E. Stern, *Two „Assyrian” Bowls from Israel*, IESJ 23, 1973, p. 152.