

WHERE AND WHEN WAS THE ARAMAIC SAQQARA PAPYRUS WRITTEN?

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In 1942 an Aramaic papyrus was found in a jar during excavations at Saqqara by Zaki Saad Effendi. He made the first brief announcement of this find in a report in 1945.¹ The document, in this paper called the Saqqara Papyrus, was published by the French Aramaist, A. Dupont-Sommer, in 1948.² He furnished a linguistic and historical commentary to the text and also dealt with its paleography. Aside from some short reviews dealing with this document,³ several articles on the new papyrus were published during the following six years.⁴ They dealt in part with the linguistic problems, but were mainly concerned with the historical implications.

In 1956 cuneiform texts containing Babylonian Chronicles were published by D. J. Wiseman which covered the first

¹ Zaki Saad Effendi, "Saqqarah: Fouilles royales," *CdE*, XX (1945), 80-82. The papyrus is now in the Cairo Museum, where it bears the number 86.984.

² A. Dupont-Sommer, "Un papyrus araméen d'époque saïte découvert à Saqqarah," *Semitica*, I (1948), 43-68 and Plate.

³ A. Pohl, *Orientalia*, XVIII (1949), 512; R. Dussaud, *Syria*, XXVI (1949), 152, 153.

⁴ H. L. Ginsberg, "An Aramaic Contemporary of the Lachish Letters," *BASOR*, No. 111 (Oct. 1948), 24-27; A. Bea, "Epistula aramaica saeculo VII exeunte ad Pharaonem scripta," *Biblica*, XXX (1949), 514-516; J. Bright, "A New Letter in Aramaic, Written to a Pharaoh in Egypt," *BA*, XII (1949), 46-52; A. Malamat, "The New Aramaic Saqqârah Papyrus from the Time of Jeremiah," *BJES*, XV (1949), 34-39 (Hebrew), pp. II-III (English résumé) not seen by the writer of this article; D. Winton Thomas, "The Age of Jeremiah in the Light of Recent Archaeological Discovery," *PEQ*, LXXXII (1950), 8-13; Malamat, "The Last Wars of the Kingdom of Judah," *JNES*, IX (1950), 222, 223; Rudolph Meyer, "Ein aramäischer Papyrus aus den ersten Jahren Nebukadnezars II," *Festschrift für Friedrich Zucker zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1954), pp. 251-262; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Aramaic Letter of King Adon to the Egyptian Pharaoh," *Biblica*, XLVI (1965), 41-55.

eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar II.⁵ Since the information provided in the Chronicles has an important bearing on the dating of the Saqqara Papyrus and its problems, it is surprising that hardly any notice has been taken of this historical source material for an elucidation of the papyrus.⁶ For this reason a new historical discussion of this papyrus is presented here. This is necessary, because the document is mentioned in recent textbooks as if it hardly poses any historical problems, and dates are given as if they were fully established.⁷

Although the papyrus contains only 9 lines of text, it is an extremely valuable historical document for several reasons: It is one of the earliest Aramaic papyri now known, and presents a sample of the Aramaic language of the 7th-6th century when Aramaic was well on its way to replacing Accadian as the tongue of international affairs. It also demonstrates how often Syro-Palestinian rulers trusted in the help of Egypt, although such trust was usually misplaced, beginning with the Amarna period down to the era of Jeremiah.

Unfortunately only a fragment of the original document is preserved. The left half of the papyrus is missing, with only

⁵ D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London, 1956). Wiseman refers to the Saqqara Papyrus and dates it to the year 604 in connection with Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against Ashkelon, p. 28.

⁶ The only works, known to me, in which the Saqqara Papyrus is discussed in the light of the Babylonian Chronicles are E. Vogt's "Die neubabylonische Chronik über die Schlacht bei Karkemisch und die Einnahme von Jerusalem," *Supplement to VT*, IV (1957), 85-89; and Fitzmyer's article, referred to in n. 4. The following work presents only a brief linguistic and historical commentary, without taking sides: H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1962-1964), I, 51 (text); II, 312-315 (commentary).

⁷ I. M. Price, O. R. Sellers, and E. L. Carlson, *The Monuments and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1958), p. 378, say that "the letter was from Adon, king of a south Palestinian town, probably Ashkelon." In the recent book, *Adam to Daniel*, ed. G. Cornfeld (New York, 1961), p. 460, it is also said that the letter came "probably" from Ashkelon, and was written "about 604." The authors of *Views of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem, 1960), III, 135, are more cautious.

about half of every line preserved. However, the extant part, although leaving several important questions unanswered, gives a fairly good picture of the general contents. We present here a translation in which an attempt is made to emend the broken text, although the reader should be aware of the conjectural nature of the emendations.

1. To the Lord of kings,⁸ Pharaoh, your servant, Adon, king of
[... ? ... May Astarte,⁹ the queen of]
2. heaven and earth, and Baalshamain, the [great] god [make the
throne of the Lord of kings,]
3. Pharaoh, as the days of heaven.¹⁰ That [I have written to my
Lord is to inform him that the forces of]
4. the king of Babylon have reached Aphek and have be[gun to lay
siege to ... and that]
5. ? ... they have taken ...¹¹
6. For the Lord of kings, Pharaoh, knows that [your] servant
[cannot stand alone against the king of Babylon. May he
therefore]
7. send a force to deliver me. Let him not forsake m[e. For your
servant has always been loyal to his lord]
8. and your servant remembers his kindness. And this land¹² [is
my Lord's possession. But if the king of Babylon takes it,
he will set up]
9. a governor in the land,¹³ and will change the border¹⁴ [and the
Lord of kings will suffer harm.]

⁸ Following Dupont-Sommer's (*op. cit.*, pp. 45, 46) translation of **מרא מלך** and rejecting Ginsberg's rendering (*op. cit.*, p. 25, n. 5) "Lord of Kingdoms," for reasons stated by Donner and Röllig, *op. cit.*, p. 313. The term is encountered here for the first time in Aramaic, though it occurs in Phoenician and Ptolemaic inscriptions.

⁹ On this emendation see Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁰ The expression "as the days of heaven" has exact parallels in Dt 11: 21; Ps 89: 29 (Hebr v. 30) and Eccles 45: 15.

¹¹ Aside from the word **אחוז** so little is preserved in this line that it is impossible even to conjecture as to what it originally may have contained.

¹² Following Ginsberg (*op. cit.*, p. 25, n. 4c) who reads **גנא**, "territory, island, coastland," against Dupont-Sommer's reading (*op. cit.*, p. 52) of **גנרא**, "commander, chief, prince."

¹³ **במתא** is translated, "in death," or "through death" in the sense of "punished" by Dupont-Sommer (*op. cit.*, p. 53), but "in the land" by Ginsberg (*op. cit.*, p. 26, n. 10), taking it as a loan word from Accadian *mātu*.

¹⁴ The incompletely preserved word **ספ[ר]** is rendered "secretary" by Dupont-Sommer (*op. cit.*, p. 45), but left undiscussed by Ginsberg.

The linguistic problems of the Aramaic text have been studied by Dupont-Sommer, Ginsberg, Fitzmyer and others, and it is questionable whether more can be extracted in this respect from the document than has already been done. Dupont-Sommer has also studied the paleography of the script of the papyrus and on good evidence dates it to about 600 B.C.¹⁵ He has shown that the script is closely related to that of the Aramaic ostrakon from Asshur which comes from the 7th century. His paleographical conclusions have generally been accepted.

The general theme of the first seven lines of the document is clear. It is a letter written by a king who bears the Semitic name Adon, a hypocoristicon of some fuller name such as Adonijah, Adoniram, Adonizedek, etc.¹⁶ The letter is addressed to a king of Egypt, Adon's overlord, whose name is not given. He is simply addressed as Pharaoh. This title is frequently used in the Bible. On Egyptian monuments it appears for the first time in an 18th Dynasty inscription,¹⁷ but beginning with Sheshonk I it is found more often in connection with the name of the Egyptian king.¹⁸ After invoking the blessings of two gods upon Pharaoh, of whom Baalshamain is the only god whose name is preserved, Adon informs his overlord that the forces of the king of Babylon had invaded the country and had reached Aphek. Reminding Pharaoh that he, Adon, cannot wage a battle against the Babylonian army with any hope of success, he implores him

Meyer (*op. cit.*, p. 256) suggested to translate it "frontier, border," as used in the Talmud and elsewhere (see M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targum, etc.* [New York, 1943], II, 1017, for references. Meyer's reference Yebamoth 48a should be 48b, also to be corrected in Donner and Röllig, *op. cit.*, p. 314). Meyer's rendering appeals also to the writer of this paper.

¹⁵ Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-66.

¹⁶ Adon appears as a personal name in Ugarit. See A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques* (Paris, 1963), I, 215.

¹⁷ A. Gardiner, *JEA*, XXXVIII (1952), 17.

¹⁸ The Dakhleh Stela of Sheshonk is the earliest inscription in

to send forces at once to deliver him and not to forsake him in this hour of desperate need.

The broken sentence of the last two lines allows different interpretations. Dupont-Sommer, connecting it with a statement of Berossus, that the governor of Egypt, Coele-Syria and Phoenicia had defected,¹⁹ thinks that these lines contain the information that the governor had already been put to death and that the secretary had been changed by the invading Babylonians. On the other hand, according to Ginsberg's interpretation of these lines Adon warns the Pharaoh that in the case of a Babylonian victory the land which so far had been Egypt's possession would receive a governor appointed by the Babylonian king, and would experience drastic changes of its borders. The latter interpretation seems more plausible than the former and has been adopted in the translation presented above.

The most tantalizing lacuna is the missing name of the country or city over which Adon reigned. On the original document the name of the place had followed the last preserved word on line 1. This now merely reads: "To the Lord of kings, Pharaoh, your servant, Adon, king of . . ." As the following discussion will show, this missing name is the crux of the whole document. If it could be ascertained, most other questions connected with the letter would likely find satisfactory answers. On the other hand, it is quite certain that the letter never contained a date or the names of either the Egyptian or the Babylonian kings. A date and these names were considered superfluous, for everyone concerned was expected to know them. This missing information must therefore be obtained from considerations about the historical background into which the letter fits.

It is obvious that the letter was written at the time of one of the invasions of the Babylonian army during the

which the title Pharaoh is prefixed to a king's name after the model of the Biblical "Pharaoh Hophra." Gardiner, *JEA*, XIX (1933), 19.

¹⁹ Josephus, *Contra Apion.*, i. 19.

Neo-Babylonian empire, which lasted from 626 to 539 B.C. Of the Babylonian kings who reigned during this period, only Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562) can be considered as the king under whom Adon's city or country was threatened, for in the time of Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, the Egyptian kings of the 26th Dynasty were undisputed overlords of Syria and Palestine. On the other hand, Nebuchadnezzar's successors never carried out military campaigns which brought them into conflict with Egypt. Hence it is rather certain that the letter was written neither earlier than 605, nor later than 562.

The name Adon is of limited value for an understanding of the historical situation in which the letter was written, because no king by that name is known to have reigned in the time of the Neo-Babylonian empire in any Asian area under Egyptian influence, which was at that time Syria and Palestine. The name Adon is a very neutral Semitic name which could have been borne by any Semite king, whether he was an Aramaean, a Phoenician, or even a Philistine, of whom some bear good Semitic names such as Aḥimiti and Aḥumilki, kings of Ashdod.²⁰

The other tangible item of information in the Saqqara Papyrus, the mention of Aphek as a city already reached by the Babylonian army, is of only limited value, because Aphek was the name of several places in eastern and western Palestine and of one place in the Lebanon, as the following list will show:²¹

1. An old Canaanite town in the central coastal area of western Palestine. Jos 12: 18; 1 Sa 4: 1; 29: 1. It has been identified with *Tell el-Muchmar*, near *Râs en-ʿAin*, at the source of the *ʿAujah* River, 10 miles north of Lydda. The place is first mentioned by Thutmose III as *ʾIphē*, lying between Ono and Socoh. In Hellenistic times it was called Pegae. Herod the Great rebuilt it and called it Antipatris after his father.²²

²⁰ *Aḥimiti*, in Sargon II's time, *ANET*, p. 286; *Aḥimilki* or *Aḥumilki* under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, *ANET*, pp. 291, 294.

²¹ See W. F. Albright, *JPOS*, II (1922), 184-189, who presents a good summary of the evidence for five Biblical Apheks.

²² Archaeological evidence shows that it was inhabited from the

2. A town in the territory of Asher, Jos 19: 30 and probably Jugs 1: 31, although it is spelled there Aphik. It has been identified with *Tell Kurdāneh*, 6 miles southeast of Acco.²³
3. A town in Transjordan, 1 Ki 20: 26, 30; 2 Ki 13: 17, which has been identified with *Fīq*, about 3 miles east of the Sea of Galilee.²⁴
4. A town probably north of Sidon, Jos 13: 4, generally identified with *Afqā*, 14 miles east of Byblos, near the source of the *Nahr Ibrahim* in the Lebanon mountains.²⁵
5. Apheka, a town in the southern part of Judah, Jos 15: 53, which has not yet been identified with certainty. Alt locates it at *Khirbet ed-Darrāme*, southwest of Hebron.²⁶

Of these five places, Aphek east of the Sea of Galilee (No. 3), and Apheka near Hebron (No. 5), need not be taken into consideration, because they did not lie on a marching route likely to have been taken by the Babylonian army. But something can be said in favor of each of the other places called Aphek, two of which lay in the coastal areas of Palestine, and one in the Lebanon mountains.

It is unlikely, however, that the Lebanese Aphek (No. 4) is meant, although certain operations carried out in the Lebanon by Nebuchadnezzar are attested by inscriptions left by him in the *Wādi Brīsa*, near Hermel in northeastern Lebanon, and at the mouth of the *Nahr el-Kelb*, north of Beirut.²⁷ The main objection against an identification of the Aphek of the Saqqara Papyrus with the Lebanese *Afqā* is the fact that the crossing of the Lebanon mountains at that point is not easy, as any good map of Lebanon will show. While the access to *Afqā* from the coast along the *Nahr*

Middle Bronze Age to Arab times. Albright, *BASOR*, No. 11 (Oct. 1923), 6, 7; *JPOS*, III (1923), 50-53; A. Alt, *PJB*, XXI (1925), 51-53; XXVIII (1932), 19, 20; M. Noth, *Josua* (2d ed.; Tübingen, 1953), p. 72.

²³ Alt, *PJB*, XXIV (1928), 59, 60. Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* (Paris, 1927), pp. 12-14, equated it with the Lebanese Aphek (our No. 4), a suggestion which no one else seems to have accepted.

²⁴ R. North, *Biblica*, XLI (1960), 41-63.

²⁵ Noth, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²⁶ Alt, *PJB*, XXVIII (1932), 16, 17.

²⁷ F. H. Weissbach, *Die Inschriften Nebukadnezars II. im Wādi Brīsa und am Nahr el-Kelb* (Leipzig, 1906).

Ibrahim is not too difficult, there is no ready pass for a crossing of the mountains by a large body of men to reach *Afqā* from the east. Since several wider mountain passes to the north and south of *Afqā* are available for reaching the coast from the *Bega*⁶, it is hard to understand that the Babylonian army should have crossed the Lebanon via *Afqā*.²⁸ Should, however, the Lebanese Aphek be referred to in Adon's letter, the residence of King Adon would have to be sought along the Phoenician coast, south of Byblos.

The choice between the two remaining Apheks is not easy, although the Galilean Aphek (No. 2) seems to have been rather an unimportant town in the territory of Asher,²⁹ being mentioned only in Jos 19:30 where places assigned to that tribe are listed, and in Jugs 1:31 (called Aphik) where it appears as a Canaanite town not occupied by the Israelites in their early history. The other Aphek (No. 1), in the Plain of Sharon, with its long and virtually uninterrupted history from the 15th century B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era, has a better chance of being the one referred to in Adon's letter. It is this Aphek to which almost all commentators on the Saqqara Papyrus have turned for identification.

In this connection it is necessary to discuss a passage in a cuneiform text covering Esarhaddon's 10th campaign.³⁰ It presents a description of the marching route which the king's army took to Egypt in 671. It contains the information that the city of *Apqu*, belonging to the territory of the land *Sa-me-n*[...] lies at a distance of 30 *bēru* from Raphia. *Apqu* is certainly Aphek, but which? The distance poses a problem as well as the name of the land in which it was said

²⁸ Also Vogt (*op. cit.*, p. 86) discusses the difficulties of identifying *Afqā* with the Aphek of the Saqqara Papyrus.

²⁹ For this reason no commentator on the Saqqara Papyrus has identified its Aphek with the Aphek in Asher. Vogt says, "Niemand denkt im Ernst daran, dass es sich hier um das unbedeutende Aphek im westlichen Galiläa handeln könne," *op. cit.*, p. 86.

³⁰ The latest text publication and translation is R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (Graz, 1956), p. 112.

to be. Some scholars have identified the broken word *Samen*[...] to stand for Simeon, others as an erroneous writing for Samaria. Since no city by the name of Aphek in Simeon is known, it seems more plausible that Samaria was meant, although the remains of the last letter do not look as if they could have belonged to any cuneiform character starting with *r*.

More serious is the distance given. The word *bêru* has more than one meaning, *i.e.*, "mile," "double-hour," and "twelfth part of a circle."³¹ Several translators of Esarhaddon's text have rendered the 30 *bêru* simply as "30 miles."³² Since a *bêru* actually had a length of *ca.* 10,800 meters, the whole distance of 30 *bêru* is about 200 English miles. The distance of the northern Aphek near Acco from Raphia at the *Wadi el-'Arish* is about 150 miles; the distance of Aphek in the Plain of Sharon from Raphia is about 75 miles by road. Neither of the two places fits Esarhaddon's description in this respect. For this reason Albright thought that the *bêru* in this passage must refer to actual traveling time. If 30 double hours are meant, a large army with baggage-train could cover the 150 miles from the northern Aphek to Raphia in 60 hours, and we must decide in favor of the northern Aphek. But Albright is inclined to follow Delitzsch and Langdon, who maintained that the Assyrians preferred a shorter *bêru*, of only one hour, and he therefore thinks that Esarhaddon's text refers to the southern Aphek, since its distance of 75 miles could be covered by an army in 30 ordinary hours of marching.³³ From this discussion it is obvious that Esarhaddon's data are too ambiguous to be of

³¹ See *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, II, 208-211.

³² For example, A. L. Oppenheim, *ANET*, p. 292.

³³ Albright, *JPOS*, II (1922), 186. In *BASOR*, No. 111 (Oct. 1948), p. 26, n. 7, Albright, however, translates *bêru* as double-hours, and says that the marching time of 60 hours between Aphek and Raphia, with two miles an hour, is not inaccurate. But this is not satisfactory, since it would give a distance of 120 miles to cover, while the actual distance is only *ca.* 75 miles.

any help in reaching a decision as to which Aphek he means. This is regrettable, because it seems that his Aphek must have been a place important enough in the 7th century to be mentioned in a military itinerary, and it is plausible that as a well-known city it is the same place to which Adon refers in his letter to Pharaoh.

This leaves us practically where we started this discussion. Certainty as to which Aphek Adon means cannot be ascertained. Most commentators on the Saqqara Papyrus have seen in the Aphek mentioned in this letter the one which lay in the southern part of the Plain of Sharon (No. 1). While it must be admitted that this identification has much in its favor, especially if the letter-writer lived in southern Palestine, the identification cannot be considered as certain, because it cannot be ascertained whether Adon's letter came from a Phoenician, Syrian, or Palestinian city, and if from a Palestinian city, whether that city lay in the northern part of the Plain of Sharon, or in the Philistine Plain. For this reason the mention of Aphek does not present a great help in the search for the city from which Adon's letter came to Pharaoh.

It is now time to study the military activities of Nebuchadnezzar II in Syria-Palestine in order to find a possible military event which may have been the occasion for Adon to write the letter for help to Egypt. Before Wiseman published the Babylonian Chronicles covering the first eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar, all information concerning military campaigns of that king against Syria-Palestine or Egypt was extremely scarce. The only sources for such activities were Josephus, the Bible and two badly preserved fragments of cuneiform texts. These sources mentioned the following military campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar in the west:

- 605 In the last year of his father's reign, which was the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar: Battle at Carchemish against the Egyptians and march through Syria-Palestine against Egypt.³⁴

³⁴ According to Berossus, quoted by Josephus, *Contra Apion.*, i. 19; *Antiquities*, x. 6. 1. Also Dan 1: 1 seems to refer to this campaign.

- 603/2 Possibly a campaign against Palestine, 2 Ki 24: 1. ³⁵
 602 A campaign against Ḥattiland (= Syria-Palestine), in Iyyar of the 3rd year of (Nebuchadnezzar?). ³⁶
 597 A campaign against Judah, as the result of which King Jehoiachin was taken prisoner, in the 8th year of Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Ki 24: 12. ³⁷
 588-586 Siege of Jerusalem, ending with its capture and destruction in the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Ki 25: 1, 2, 8, 9.
 585-572 (?) Siege of Tyre lasting for 13 years. ³⁸
 568/7 Campaign against Amasis of Egypt in the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar. ³⁹

As pointed out earlier, almost all discussions of the Saqqara papyrus were written before Wiseman's publication of the Babylonian Chronicles in 1956, when no more was known about Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns than is enumerated in the preceding list. Dupont-Sommer, the editor of the papyrus and its first commentator, dated it in 605 in connection with

Whether 2 Ki 24: 1 refers to the same campaign or a later one is not certain. Albright has dated the campaign of this text to 603/2, *JBL*, LI (1932), 89, 90. On the present writer's views concerning the dating of events which took place during the last years of the kingdom of Judah, see Horn, *AUSS*, V (1967), 12-27.

³⁵ See n. 34.

³⁶ The text (BM SP.II.407) was published by J. N. Strassmaier *Hebraica*, IX (1892-93), 4, 5, and with reservations was attributed to Nebuchadnezzar. I. H. Winckler in E. Schrader, *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament* (3d ed.; Berlin, 1903), pp. 107, 108, pointed out that the text speaks on the reverse of the finding of a statue with an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar I, but that the obverse seems to deal with the wars of the king, probably Nebuchadnezzar II, who had found the statue. Since the Babylonian Chronicles have revealed that a campaign in Ḥattiland in Nebuchadnezzar's third year took place, it is now quite certain that Winckler's reasoning was correct.

³⁷ This campaign could have taken place any time between the autumn of 598 and the autumn of 597 according to the Jewish civil calendar, or between the spring of 597 and the spring of 596 if the Babylonian calendar was applied. See Horn, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³⁸ Josephus, *Contra Apion.*, i. 21; *Ant.*, x. 11. 1; Eze 26: 7-14; 29: 17-20. On the problems of dating the siege of Tyre see O. Eissfeldt, *Pauly-Wissowa's Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 2. Reihe, 7. Band (Stuttgart, 1948), cols. 1889-1891.

³⁹ According to a fragmentary cuneiform tablet (BM 78-10-15, 22, 37, and 38), translated by Oppenheim in *ANET*, p. 308, where earlier publications are listed.

Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against Necho II, using as chief sources Berossus' record. He maintained that an identification of the city or country over which Adon reigned was impossible, that Adon may have been a Phoenician, Philistine or even Transjordanian ruler, and that the city of Aphek could have been either the one lying in the Lebanon or the one in the Plain of Sharon.⁴⁰

Then appeared Ginsberg's article, in which a brilliant suggestion made to Ginsberg by W. F. Albright was propounded. He pointed out that in 592 there lived in Babylon two persons known as "the sons of Aga', the king of Ashkelon." While it could not be ascertained whether their father "Aga' was still living in Ashkelon at that time as king, it was safe to infer that there had been a king in Ashkelon a decade earlier, when Nebuchadnezzar was sweeping the last vestiges of Egyptian authority out of Asia."⁴¹ Ginsberg therefore suggested that "he [= king of Ashkelon in 602] may well have been our Adon, since the Aphek of l. 4 may well be the Apheq . . . in Sharon."⁴² In a further note Albright pointed out that the presence of other Ashkelonians in Babylon, according to Weidner's tablets, indicated that a considerable number of captives from Ashkelon must have been in Babylon at that time, which all supported the idea that the city had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar's army.⁴³

This very attractive solution of the problems posed by the missing name of Adon's city or country in the Saqqara Papyrus was thereupon adopted by several writers who discussed the papyrus, *i.e.*, Bea,⁴⁴ Bright,⁴⁵ Malamat⁴⁶ and Meyer.⁴⁷ Only Thomas sought Adon's city in Phoenicia and

⁴⁰ Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 50, 61.

⁴¹ Ginsberg, *op. cit.*, p. 26, n. 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Bea, *op. cit.*, p. 515, notes b and c, 516.

⁴⁵ Bright, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 50.

⁴⁶ Malamat, *JNES*, IX, 222.

⁴⁷ Meyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 258, 259.

thought the date to have been 587.⁴⁸ Fitzmyer wavers between Ashkelon and Gaza, but favors the former city.⁴⁹ Also Wiseman, the editor of the Babylonian Chronicles, agreed with Albright's identification, but dated the letter to 604, since the Chronicles indicate that Ashkelon was conquered in that year.⁵⁰ Most books in which the papyrus has been mentioned since Wiseman's publication have expressed agreement with this view.⁵¹

The only writer not agreeing with Albright's suggestion has been Vogt, who in his discussion of Wiseman's Chronicles comes to the conclusion that it is unlikely that Adon was king of Ashkelon. While he agrees that Aphek most likely was the city in the Plain of Sharon, and that Adon ruled over a Philistine city, he thinks that the record of Ashkelon's capture and destruction rules out its continuous existence as a city with its own king. Ashkelon, according to the Babylonian Chronicles, was turned "into a mound and a heap of ruins," an expression also used for the earlier total destruction of Nineveh. That a new king, namely Aga', was put in the place of Adon, as Albright and Ginsberg thought, was also unlikely according to Vogt, since the Babylonian Chronicles say nothing about it while they expressly mention later the installation of a new king in Jerusalem. For that reason Vogt rejects Ashkelon as a candidate for Adon's residence and suggests Gaza as an alternative.⁵² Donner and Röllig remain uncommitted in their discussion of the Saqqara Papyrus. Mentioning four possible dates, 605, 602, 598, and 587, and declaring the last-mentioned date to be the most unlikely one, they leave the whole question open.⁵³

The unanimity of the majority of commentators on the Saqqara Papyrus is impressive but provides no proof for

⁴⁸ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Malamat, *loc. cit.*, opposed this view.

⁴⁹ Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Wiseman, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁵¹ See the examples given in n. 7.

⁵² Vogt, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-89.

⁵³ Donner and Röllig, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

the correctness of the theory of Albright, which is still unproved. Vogt's reasons against accepting Ashkelon as Adon's city are weighty and worth pondering, although his suggestion that Gaza was Adon's residence also poses problems, as G. E. Wright has pointed out.⁵⁴

One of the chief reasons for uneasiness in being definite is the fact that the Babylonian Chronicles have revealed that Nebuchadnezzar campaigned in Syria-Palestine almost every year during the first eleven years of his reign, for which records exist, and that he may have continued to do so in later years, for which no records have been preserved. Adding the evidence of the Babylonian Chronicles to that found in other sources, as given above, we come to the following impressive list of Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns in the west:

- 605 Spring until August, Battles at Carchemish and Hamath against Egyptians and pursuit of the remnants of the Egyptian forces.⁵⁵
- 604 February and March, unopposed march through Ḥattiland (= Syria-Palestine) and collecting of tribute.
June, to December, campaigning throughout Ḥattiland and capture and destruction of Ashkelon in November/December. Return to Babylon in January/February 603.
- 603 From May on, campaigning in Ḥattiland. The terminating date is broken off.
- 602/1 Campaigning in Ḥattiland. Except for the year, the dates are missing.
- 601 November/December, battle against the Egyptians in which the Babylonians were worsted.
- 599 November/December, campaigning in Ḥattiland.
- 598/7 December/January, beginning of campaign against Ḥattiland, which ended with the capture of Jerusalem, March 16, 597.
- 596 January to March, campaigning against Ḥattiland, but only as far as Carchemish.
- 595/4 Campaigning in Ḥattiland. Except for the year, the dates are missing.
- 594/3 December/January, campaigning in Ḥattiland.

⁵⁴ G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 175.

⁵⁵ Wiseman, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-69. Where no documentation is given, the source is the Babylonian Chronicles according to Wiseman's translation, *ibid.*, pp. 67-75.

Here the presently known Babylonian Chronicles come to an end. The following campaigns are known from other sources, for which see above.

- 588-586 Siege of Jerusalem, ending with its capture and destruction.
- 585-572 (?) Siege of Tyre lasting for 13 years.
- 568/7 Campaign against Amasis.

The frequent campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar in Syria and Palestine as attested by our records make it extremely difficult to date a document such as the Saqqara Papyrus, which provides no further clues as to its date other than that a king with a Semitic name calls on Egypt for help during an invasion of Babylonian forces which at that time had reached Aphek. Furthermore, the fact that four years after the battle of Carchemish the Egyptians were strong enough to engage the Babylonians in a new test of strength (601), and seem to have come forth from it, if not as victors, certainly not as vanquished, shows that Egypt was still a power to be reckoned with. This resurgence of Egyptian power prior to 601 lay probably at the base of the rebellion of the pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim against Babylon (2 Ki 24: 1). Even after Nebuchadnezzar had taken the whole of Palestine, including Judah, Egypt still did not consider itself impotent to play a role in Palestine, although it was said that "the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land" (2 Ki 24:7). This statement seems to refer only to a limited time, for it is known that Egypt made further attempts to foment revolts against Nebuchadnezzar and actively harassed his military campaigns. A demotic papyrus tell us that Psamtic II made a trip to Palestine in 591.⁵⁶ It is not known whether this trip was peaceful and was made merely to organize a new coalition

⁵⁶ The papyrus was published by F. Ll. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the John Rylands Library Manchester* (Manchester, 1909), 3 vols., as No. IX. Its historical implications were studied by Alt, *ZAW*, XXX (1910), 288-297; J. Yoyotte, *VT*, I (1951), 140-144; S. Sauneron and Yoyotte, *VT*, II (1952), 135, 136.

against Nebuchadnezzar, or whether it was a military venture. From Jer 47: 1 it is learned that one of the kings of Egypt smote Gaza; from Jer 37: 11 that Hophra made an attempt to relieve Jerusalem when it was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar; and from Herodotus II. 161 that Hophra fought a land battle against Sidon and a sea battle against Tyre.

All this information shows that the struggle for supremacy over Palestine and Syria between the two powers, Babylonia and Egypt, was a long one, and explains why Nebuchadnezzar had to march almost annually into the west for a show of force or to reestablish his authority, which may often have been challenged as it was by Judah. In fact, Judah is a good example of what may have been going on in more than one of the several small kingdoms in Syria-Palestine. The kingdom of Judah had regained its political independence from Assyria under Josiah. After his untimely death in the Battle of Megiddo, 609, the country fell into the hands of Necho II of Egypt, who installed the pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim on the throne. However, this king was forced to become a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar after Necho's defeat at Carchemish in 605, but he changed masters again as soon as he saw that Egypt had become strong once more. The events of 601 seemed to prove that he had shown political foresight in switching loyalties from Babylon to Egypt, and for a few years he enjoyed the protection of Egypt. But Nebuchadnezzar recovered from his near defeat and as soon as he could he carried out a punitive action against Jehoiakim, who died before Nebuchadnezzar's arrival, with the result that his young son had to face the angry Babylonian king. After a 3-month rule he was forced to surrender himself and his city to the Babylonians. Then Zedekiah was put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar and swore an oath of loyalty. For a few years he maintained his allegiance toward Babylon, even making a trip to the Euphrates Valley in 594/3 (Jer 51: 59), but in the end he also succumbed to the temptation to trust in the strength of Egypt, and turned against his Babylonian

overlord. Some men, such as Jeremiah, recognized this act as folly and expressed their views openly, but a great many influential people did not share these views. For Judah this course of action ended in a terrible disaster in 586, when the kingdom was abolished, the country with its cities destroyed, and most of its citizens deported.

It is quite possible that several other small kingdoms of Syria and Palestine shared the same or a similar fate. That Judah was not the only shaky vassal of Nebuchadnezzar is learned from Jer 27: 1-6, where the prophet tells of having warned envoys of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon against breaking their allegiance to Babylon. They had come to Jerusalem with the obvious purpose of strengthening their alliance, which was certainly directed against Nebuchadnezzar. Whether his warning made any impression on them is not known. Jeremiah's warning certainly had no lasting influence in his own homeland, whose leaders were more inclined to accept the protection of neighboring Egypt than to follow the more cautious course of remaining loyal to Babylon. The land or city state over which Adon ruled seems to have gone through a similar experience, and probably suffered similar catastrophic results.

In the light of these considerations it seems futile to speculate which city in Palestine was Adon's capital if one of the two Palestinian Apheks of the Saqqara Papyrus was referred to, or over which city in southern Phoenicia Adon ruled if the Aphek in Lebanon is meant. Too many uncertainties are involved to establish the year of the invasion of which Adon speaks, or to ascertain the part of Syria-Palestine from where his cry for help came.