

# Josiah's Bid for Armageddon

The Background of the Judean-Egyptian Encounter in 609 B.C.

ABRAHAM MALAMAT

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

In attempting to clarify the historical background of the clash between Judah and Egypt at Megiddo in the summer of 609 B. C., we are faced with a double dilemma: historically and militarily, we must ask who held Megiddo at this time. Did Josiah, king of Judah, seek here to block the Egyptian advance to the north? Or did Megiddo already serve as an Egyptian base? And then, there is the archaeological quandary concerning Stratum II at Megiddo, generally ascribed to the second half of the seventh century B. C. Was the massive building discovered in this stratum an Israelite fortress built by Josiah, as often thought, or should it be regarded as Egyptian, whether actually built by Egyptians or merely appropriated?

In my recent studies on this period, I have noted the latter possibility, and have assumed that Josiah's move was intended, *inter alia*, against the center of the former Assyrian province of *Magiddu* which, in the meantime, had most likely been taken over by the Egyptians, recently acquired allies of Assyria.<sup>1</sup> The lack of clear-cut data, however, leaves any preference between the above alternatives in the realm of conjecture.

## I. Megiddo Stratum II—Israelite or Egyptian?

Let us first review the archaeological evidence from Megiddo Strata III—II (see plan).<sup>2</sup> It is almost unanimously agreed today that Megiddo Stratum III represents the seat of the Assyrian province founded after the annexation of the norther parts of the kingdom of Israel

---

1 See A. Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem," *IEJ* 18 (1968), 137f., n. 1, and the passing remarks in my lecture on "Jeremiah according to the Bible and the External Sources," delivered in the autumn of 1969 at the Jerusalem Bible Circle, subsequently published in the anthology, *Studies in the Book of Jeremiah*, vol. 1, ed. B.-Z. Luria (Jerusalem, n.d.), and see pp. 14 and 30 there [in Hebrew]. Prof. Y. Milgrom, who was present at my lecture, followed this point up in a paper in *Beth Mikra* 44 (1970), 23-27, claiming that the already declining Assyrians had little choice but to turn Megiddo over to the Egyptians, in return for military assistance.

2 See the excavation report of R. S. Lamon and G. M. Shipton, *Megiddo* (Chicago, 1939), 1: 62-87. I am much obliged to Dan Bahat, of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, for preparing the plan of Megiddo Strata III-II as presented here, and for an informative discussion with me on the archaeological material. The fortress of Stratum II at Megiddo is shown in our plan with full restorations, whereas in the excavation report (p. 84, fig. 95), the extant ruins as found are marked, with restorations dotted.

by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 B. C. or, in any case, after the fall of Israel in 720 B. C. This settlement—which underwent slight repairs during its existence—was well fortified and well planned, with a regular street network and blocks of houses. Near the city gate, two structures were discovered (Buildings 1052 and 1369), of the “Assyrian open court” type, in best Assyrian architectural style.<sup>3</sup> In their report on Megiddo, the excavators ascribe this stratum to 780–650 B. C. W. F. Albright raised the final date of this stratum to as early as 732 B. C., that is, until the conquests of Tiglath-pileser III in Palestine. This chronology was adopted by Ruth Amiran and I. Dunayevsky in their study on the buildings of the Assyrian court type.<sup>4</sup> Such a high dating, however, seems unlikely and several other archaeologists have shown that the end of Stratum IV A at Megiddo is to be placed in the second half of the eighth century B. C., and, consequently, ascribe Stratum III to the period of Assyrian rule there.<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that the excavations revealed no traces of the destruction of Stratum III, and the transition to Stratum II seems to have been rather smooth.

The duration of Stratum II has been fixed by the excavators, “arbitrarily,” as 650–600 B. C. This settlement came to a close, on the basis of the findings, in what would appear to be a partial destruction. While many of the earlier private dwellings continued in use in Stratum II, the city wall and Assyrian buildings of Stratum III were abandoned, and the city was left unfortified. The large structure built in Stratum II partly overlies the “offset and inset” wall of the earlier city and was seemingly the sole fortification on the site in this period (see plan). This massive structure was built at the eastern edge of the mound (area C), providing a clear view of the Plain of Megiddo and the pass from Wadi Ara. The building is of unusually large dimensions, as seen from the plan: 68 meters (average) length and 48 meters (average) width; the walls are up to 2.5 meters thick. It differs from the Assyrian court buildings of the previous stratum not only in its size but also in its plan. The spacious court is not surrounded on every side by rows of chambers, but is bordered on the east by the outer wall of the entire structure. The suggestion of the excavators that there were rooms on the eastern flank as well, which “had collapsed and been washed down the steep slope,” is most unlikely because of the proximity of the edge of the mound. Indeed, extensive erosion here is precluded by the fact that parts of the Stratum III city wall were found *in situ* at the very edge (see plan). In any case, this is certainly a fortress, with storage facilities for a considerable amount of equipment and provisions, as well as space for a large garrison. The paucity of finds from within the building (none even warranting mention in the report) does not enable a more precise dating, or even an identification of its occupants.

The excavators somewhat hesitatingly ascribed Stratum II, including the fortress, to Josiah, actually only on the basis of historical considerations—that is, because of the ex-

3 See Ruth B. K. Amiran and I. Dunayevsky, *BASOR* 149 (1958), 25–32, and figs. 1–2 on p. 27.

4 *Ibid.*, 31f., after W. F. Albright, *AASOR* 21–23 (1943), 2, n. 1.

5 Cf. K. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land* (London, 1960), 286; Y. Yadin, in *The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah*, ed. A. Malamat, (Jerusalem, 1961), 104 and n. 86 [in Hebrew]; Y. Aharoni, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1962), 4:629, s.v. *Megiddo* [in Hebrew]. Similar, too, was Albright's earlier opinion, in his review of *Megiddo*, vol. 1, in *AJA* 44 (1940), 549, where he suggested the dates 733–ca. 670 and 670 (?)–609 (?) for Strata III and II, respectively.

pansionist tendencies of this Judean king within the territories of the former kingdom of Israel. This ascription has been accepted by other archaeologists, who thus regard the destruction of Stratum II as the outcome of Josiah's defeat here at the hands of the Egyptians in 609 B.C.<sup>6</sup> Theoretically, however, there are three other possibilities with regard to the construction and control of Megiddo Stratum II: (1) a continuation of Assyrian occupation; (2) a fortress built by the Babylonians following Nebuchadnezzar's conquests in the West, beginning in 605 B.C.; and (3) a site under Egyptian control with a fortress built by Psamtik I or at least passed into his hands.

The first possibility is untenable. By the second half of the seventh century B. C., not only had Assyrian rule in Palestine disintegrated, but it is inconceivable that the Assyrians themselves would disregard the plan of their own earlier city—with its fortifications—in favor of an isolated fort, built in a style varying from theirs. The second possibility would force us to lower the date of the end of Stratum III to at least 605/604 B. C., that is, we would have to ascribe to this stratum a duration of a century or more; though this is not an impossibility, Stratum II would have been of very short duration—indeed, only a few years—a most unlikely proposition. This chronological conclusion derives from the fact that the pottery of Stratum I still included typical Iron II forms, signifying that the beginning of this stratum was around 600 B. C. (according to the excavators) and, in any event, not much later than this.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, there is another possible factor negating both of the above two possibilities—the measurements of the fortress in relation to the standard employed. The measurements do not seem to suit the standard Assyrian or Babylonian cubits; that is, the short cubit of 49.5 centimeters commonly found in the Assyrian and Babylonian building projects. In contrast, they do suit the short cubit of 44.5 centimeters used by both the Israelites and the Egyptians (alongside the “royal” Egyptian cubit of 52.2-52.7 centimeters).<sup>8</sup> Employing this shorter cubit, the outer dimensions of the fortress measure 150 x 108 cubits (67 x 48 meters); the courtyard, 60 x 60 cubits (27 x 27 meters); and the basic square of the structure (without the rooms on the south), 108 x 108 cubits (48 meters square). If the “reed” (*qāneḅ*) measure of six cubits, known to have been current in Palestine,<sup>9</sup> was employed here, then these all are whole numbers, as would suit such a monumental building. With all due reservation in reaching any definite conclusions based on measurements, the results of such an investigation would appear to be of aid in identifying the fortress as being of Israelite or Egyptian foundation, rather than Assyrian or Babylonian. Any actual or supposed resemblance of the plan of the fortress to

6 Cf. Lamon and Shipton, *Megiddo*, 87, followed by Aharoni, loc. cit. (above, n. 5), and Y. Yadin, *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1970), 315 [in Hebrew].

7 See Lamon and Shipton, *Megiddo*, 87; cf. also Albright, *AJA* 44, 549. For the same reasons we cannot accept the variant proposed by Milgrom, *Beth Mikra* 44, 24, according to which the Assyrian Stratum III itself later passed into Egyptian hands. He completely ignores Megiddo Stratum II.

8 For the linear measurements in the ancient Near East, and in the Bible, see E. Stern, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1962), 4:848-52 [in Hebrew]. For the standard Assyrian and Babylonian cubit, cf. now also D. J. Wiseman, *Anatolian Studies* 22 (1972), 143; for the Israelite and Egyptian cubits, see especially R. B. Y. Scott, *JBL* 77 (1958), 205-14.

9 See the previous note. I must thank R. Grafman who brought to my attention the possibility of

the Assyrian open court plan, even if regarded as a degenerate version of the Assyrian prototype,<sup>10</sup> can be of little historical significance.

Generally speaking, the archaeological findings in Megiddo Stratum II leave us with the alternative which we raised initially—to regard this stratum as an Israelite or Egyptian settlement. This latter suggestion may seem surprising, for, at least according to the meager remains recovered, Stratum II is not of an Egyptian character.<sup>11</sup> Thus, we must seek a solution based on strictly historical considerations.

## II. Psamtik I and Josiah

The gradual disintegration of Assyrian rule in Palestine in the second half of the seventh century B. C. is obscured by a paucity of data. The latest datable evidence for Assyrian control in the various regions of this country is as follows: Assyrian deeds of sale found at Gezer, dating to 651 and 649 B. C., pointing to an Assyrian administration at this site; the mention of an Assyrian governor at Samaria in 646 B. C.; and the punitive expedition undertaken by Ashurbanipal to Akko and Usu (mainland Tyre), now to be dated 644/643 B. C., or a year or two earlier.<sup>12</sup> If our longstanding assumption that the bloody events at the Judean court in the days of King Amon (2 Kings 21:19-26) reflect hostility toward

employing standards of measure as a criterion in attributing structures; and to the field architect Y. Mintske who, at my request, calculated the measurements of the fortress according to the plan published in the excavation report. He was able to confirm the assumption that this fortress was built according to a reed based on the cubit of 44.5 centimeters. He further suggested emending the reconstruction so as to eliminate the southeastern corner room (broken line in our plan), which he regards as impossibly close to the edge of the mound there; this would make the eastern wall conform to the curved edge of the mound.

<sup>10</sup> As proposed by Amiran and Dunayevsky (*BASOR* 149, 29f.) in their second category (Series II) of buildings. These buildings, however, in contrast to the true Assyrian open court type (their Series I), hardly seem to form a coherent group (see figs. on p. 30 there). The above suggestion of a derivative, local version has been followed by some scholars, who claim that the fortress was erected by Josiah in imitation of the Assyrian prototype. See most recently E. Stern, *Qadmoniot* 6 (1973), table 1; and idem, *The Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period* (Jerusalem, 1973), 57-59 [in Hebrew]. There, he drew attention, inter alia, to the palace of Pharaoh Hophra at Memphis (see W. M. F. Petrie, *The Palace of Apries, Memphis II*, [London, 1909], pl. 1), whose plan is of the open court type. But rather than regarding this as a parallel to a derivative version of the Assyrian type, as does Stern, we can see in it a parallel to the Megiddo building insofar as it was surrounded, too, by rooms on only three sides (Stern accepts the Megiddo excavators' hypothetical row of rooms on the fourth side; see above).

<sup>11</sup> But we should note that in two loci of Megiddo Stratum II, Egyptian faience figurines were found, one of them identical with figurines of the 26th dynasty in Egypt; see *Megiddo*, vol. 1, pl. 76: 2, 3.

<sup>12</sup> For the Assyrian deeds at Gezer, cf. K. Galling, *PJb* 31 (1935), 81f.; for the Assyrian governor (*šaknu*) at Samaria, cf. R. A. Henshaw, *JAOS* 88 (1968), 478; and for the date of Ashurbanipal's campaign to the Phoenician coast in 644/643 B. C., cf. H. Tadmor, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1968), 5:109f. [in Hebrew]. For a 645/644 B. C. dating of this latter campaign, calculated on the basis of Ashurbanipal's prism F (published by J. M. Aynard, *Le prisme du Louvre AO 19.939*, [Paris, 1957]), see I. Eph'al, *The Nomads on the Border of Palestine . . .* (Doctoral Dissertation, Jerusalem, 1971), 114 and n. 315 [in Hebrew].

Assyria is basically correct, then the Assyrians were still of some weight in the West in 640/639 B. C.<sup>13</sup> This assumption loses much of its substance, however, with the discovery of a new prism of Ashurbanipal, which necessitates dating the above Assyrian punitive expedition several years prior to the events of King Amon's reign. In this light, we might venture to attribute the murder of Amon to Egyptian instigation; Egypt was possibly already seeking to bring a sympathetic faction to power in Judah. This finds support in the fact that it was the 'am bā' āreš who undertook the counter-coup in Jerusalem, eliminating "them that had conspired against King Amon," and placing his son Josiah on the throne. For the 'am bā' āreš appears to have been a steadfastly anti-Egyptian faction, as is indicated by its support of both Josiah and Jehoahaz, two kings of clear anti-Egyptian sentiment—whereas the pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim, Josiah's first-born, natural heir to the throne, was purposefully rejected by this body.

In any event, we may assume that Assyrian rule in Palestine had already come to an effective end by the early thirties of the seventh century B. C.—that is, a decade prior to the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B. C. The political vacuum and the "no-man's land" left in the Assyrian districts in this country were the objects of rivalry primarily between Egypt and Judah. From the description of Josiah's reform in the Book of Kings, it would appear that in the twenties of this same century the Judean king extended his rule over territories which coincided, more or less, with the former Assyrian province of *Samerina*. Besides the cult at Bethel, Josiah systematically destroyed "all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria" (2 Kings 23:15, 19). In contrast, the Book of Chronicles—according to which the cultic reform in the north reached "as far as Naphtali" and spread "throughout all the land of Israel" and "all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel" (2 Chronicles 34:6, 7, 33)—is little more than a late, tendentious expansion of the geographical extent of the reform.<sup>14</sup> Thus, this source is hardly proof of Josiah's political control reaching into Galilee, though he may well have sought to annex parts of the former province of *Magiddu* which encompassed the Jezreel valley and Galilee.

A minimalistic approach would limit Josiah's annexations in the north to the area of Mount Ephraim alone. Thus, B. Mazar, followed by Z. Kallai, contends that the actual borders of the kingdom of Judah at that time are reflected in the delimitation of the reform: "from Geba to Beersheba" (2 Kings 23:8); Geba here, according to Mazar, is the Geba of Ephraim, which he identifies with et-Tell, some five kilometers southwest of Shiloh.<sup>15</sup>

---

13 See *IEJ* 3 (1953), 26-29; however, according to Ashurbanipal's prism F (see preceding note), Susa had been destroyed by 646 B. C. and not ca. 640, as previously held; and its inhabitants were most likely exiled to Samaria several years earlier than we proposed there.

14 For such a tendency on the part of the Chronicler, cf., e.g., M. Noth, *Überlieferungs-geschichtliche Studien* (Halle, 1942), 1:178 (=p. 200); for the exclusion of Galilee from Josiah's rule, but not the sphere of his reform, cf. Milgrom, *Beth Mikra* 44, 26.

15 See *Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society* 8 (1940), 35-37; Z. Kallai, *The Northern Boundaries of Judah* (Jerusalem, 1960), 75f. [in Hebrew]. For an even more minimalistic view, see the early study of A. Alt, *PJb* 21 (1925), 100-16, and recently P. Welten, *Die Königs-Stempel* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 163f.—both of whom have Josiah's territories in the north reaching only as far as Bethel.

This approach leaves open the matter of the spread of Josiah's political influence towards Megiddo—in contrast to actual control. On the western flank, Josiah did extend his territorial rule, apparently obtaining a sort of corridor in the northern Sefhela, and reaching the sea. This is indicated by the Hebrew epigraphic finds at Gezer, on the one hand, and at Mešad Ḥashavyahu, a small fortress on the coast, one and a half kilometers south of Yabne-yam (Minet Rubin, which also may have been a Judean settlement at this time), on the other hand.<sup>16</sup>

In the scramble over inheritance of the former Assyrian territories, a decided advantage in time was held by Psamtik I, who reigned in 664–610 B. C.—for Josiah's expansion apparently began only in 628 B. C., upon the institution of his reform in his twelfth regnal year (cf. 2 Chronicles 34:3; he came to the throne as a minor in 639 B. C.). Psamtik's variegated relations with the Assyrians can be divided into four phases:<sup>17</sup> (1) Initially, with the reconquest of Egypt by Ashurbanipal in 663 B. C., he was an Assyrian vassal; (2) Between 656 and 652 B. C. he threw off the Assyrian yoke, with the support of Gyges king of Lydia, who died in 652 B. C.; (3) Shortly after, he undoubtedly began undermining Assyrian rule in Palestine. This is reflected in Herodotus (II, 157), concerning Psamtik's conquest of Azotus, that is, Ashdod, after a siege of supposedly twenty-nine years.<sup>18</sup> The excavators of Ashdod tend to relate this conquest to the destruction of Stratum VII there, the city of Stratum VI (which presumably endured till Nebuchadnezzar's conquest) now undoubtedly having come under the Egyptian aegis.<sup>19</sup> The extension of Egyptian hegemony over Phoenicia, as well, at least towards the end of Psamtik's reign, is indicated by an Egyptian

H. D. Lance. *HTR* 64 (1971), 332, excludes even the latter city from the Josianic kingdom, on the basis of the complete absence of the *lamelek* royal jar stamps at this site.

16 Josiah's rule over Gezer is evidenced by the number of *lamelek* jar stamps found there; see most recently, Welten, *Die Königs-Stempel*, 65f., 180; and Lance, *HTR* 64, 330. For the Hebrew ostraca from Mešad Ḥashavyahu, see J. Naveh, *IEJ* 10 (1960), 129–39; idem, *IEJ* 12 (1962), 27–32, and cf. 89–99. For a seal weight found at Minet Rubin (and not *Nebi* Rubin, further inland, as often erroneously stated), bearing unit marks and a Hebrew (?) name, see N. Glueck, *BASOR* 153 (1959), 35–38.

17 For recent studies on Psamtik I vis-à-vis Assyria, see the following books: H. de Meulenaire, *Herodotos over de 26ste Dynastie* (Louvain, 1951), 22–43; Mary F. Gyles, *Pharaonic Policies and Administration, 663 to 323 B. C.* (Chapel Hill, 1959), 16–25; E. Drioton and J. Vandier, *L'Égypte*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1962), 574–92; F. K. Kienitz, in *Fischer Weltgeschichte* (Frankfurt a/M, 1967), 4:256–62; K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (Warminster, 1973), 399–406.

18 For an attempt to correlate the beginning of this Egyptian siege with the assassination of King Amon of Judah, in 640/639 B. C., see Malamat, *JNES* 9 (1950), 218; *IEJ* 3 (1953), 29, followed by H. Cazelles, *RB* 74 (1967), 25f., 42. For ca. 655 B. C. as the beginning of this siege, see F. K. Kienitz, *Die politische Geschichte Ägyptens vom 7. bis zum 4. Jahrh.* (Berlin, 1953), 17. Interpreting Herodotus's statement as implying the twenty-ninth year (!) of Psamtik's reign (instead of a twenty-nine year duration), Tadmor (*BA* 29 [1966], 102) arrives at a date of 635 B. C. for the siege.

19 See M. Dothan, "Ashdod II–III," *'Atiqot* 9–10 (1971), 21, 115. The discovery of fragments of Egyptian faience "New Year bottles," two of them bearing Egyptian inscriptions (37, 170f.; figs. 3:15 and 96:17), in Stratum VI is significant of more than ordinary relations with Egypt. On the other hand, the assumption of the excavators, that later the same stratum was incorporated within Josiah's kingdom (assumed on the basis of finds such as a single *lamelek* jar stamp and inscribed Hebrew weights; cf. p. 22 there), is stretching the evidence.

stele from his fifty-second year, that is, 612 B. C. This inscription shows the princes of Lebanon to have been vassals placed under an Egyptian commissioner and paying tribute to Pharaoh;<sup>20</sup> (4) The weakening of home-rule in Assyria proper, following the rise of Babylonia (and later also the Medes), led finally to a community of interests with Egypt, and thus to a league between the erstwhile rivals.

This Egyptian-Assyrian alliance came into existence, apparently, between 622 and 617 B. C., as can be inferred from the data in Nabopolassar's Babylonian Chronicle ("Gadd's Chronicle").<sup>21</sup> Such a dating is based on the fact that, in the first tablet of the Chronicle (BM 25127), reporting on Nabopolassar's first years, 626-623/622 B. C., there is no mention of Egypt in the struggle between Assyria and Babylonia; however, in line ten of the following tablet (BM 21901), which opens with the events of 616 B. C.—after a gap of six years—mention is already made of the military assistance rendered to the Assyrians by Egypt. Similar Egyptian aid was rushed to the Euphrates in 610 and 609 B. C. But in 606 and twice in 605 B. C.—the last instance being the renowned battle with Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish (cf. Jeremiah 46:2)—the Egyptians alone were left to face the Babylonians, as is revealed by the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle published by Wiseman (end of BM 22047 and beginning of BM 21946). By analogy, we may assume that in previous cases, too, Carchemish served as the central Egyptian base on the Euphrates; this is supported by the Egyptian finds uncovered in the excavations there, which include a bronze ring bearing the name of Psamtik I, and four clay sealings of Pharaoh Necho.<sup>22</sup> Carchemish is also specifically mentioned in 2 Chronicles 35:21 as the destination of Necho's campaign in 609 B. C., which passed through Megiddo. Based on this latter campaign, in turn, we may assume that the other campaigns had also been conducted via Megiddo, which undoubtedly was an essential staging base for the Egyptians in their lengthy route to the Euphrates.<sup>23</sup> An additional base on this military route was surely at Riblah in Syria—as is to be inferred from 2 Kings 23:33, as well as from the flight of the Egyptian army from Carchemish to the land of Hamath (in which Riblah was situated), where it was finally annihilated by Nebuchadnezzar, in 605 B. C. (BM 21946, lines 1-7).

---

20 See most recently K. S. Freedy and D. B. Redford, *JAOS* 90 (1970), 477. For an early translation of this stela see Breasted, *ARE* IV, §959f.; the following inscription there, "Statue Inscription of Hor", § 967f., also indicates Egyptian control over the forests of Lebanon, but its attribution to the time of Psamtik I remains conjectural.

21 Published by C. J. Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh* (London, 1923), and with minor revisions, together with the publication of additional Neo-Babylonian chronicles, in D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B. C.)* (London, 1956). A similar dating for the alliance has been suggested by J. Yoyotte, *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, 6:374, s.v. *Nécho*. The alliance may have been initiated under Sinsharishkun, whose actual rule over Assyria began in 623 B. C.; for the chronology of this king, cf. most recently J. Reade, *JCS* 23 (1970), 1-9.

22 These, as well as other Egyptian finds, were uncovered in House D in the lower city of Carchemish, which may have served the Egyptian garrison; see C. L. Woolley, *Carchemish* (London, 1921), 2:123-29, pl. 26:1-4.

23 There are no grounds for assuming that the Egyptians reached Syria by sea in previous campaigns, bypassing Palestine, as is sometimes held; cf., e.g., Yoyotte, *Supplément*, 375.

We can thus conclude that Megiddo became an Egyptian base certainly *prior* to 616 B. C., and at some time *after* 646 B. C. As noted, in this latter year an Assyrian governor is mentioned at Samaria, implying Assyrian presence still in the province of *Magiddu* (an Assyrian governor at Megiddo proper is mentioned last in 679 B. C.). This, then, is the range for dating the end of Stratum III at Megiddo, and for the construction of the Stratum II fortress there. But, whether the fortress was built by Psamtik or by Josiah, we can safely assume that Megiddo was already a logistic base, or at least a vital way-station, for the Egyptian army in campaigns to Syria no later than 616 B. C., and probably even several years earlier. Megiddo Stratum II remained under Egyptian control till Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to the West in 605 B. C., or at the latest, the autumn of 604 B. C., when the Babylonian Chronicle has the king of Babylonia leading his army into southern Palestine and to the conquest of Ascalon.

### III. The Battle at Megiddo

The political and strategic factors which may have governed Josiah in deciding to attack Necho's army at Megiddo have been treated by us previously.<sup>24</sup> One of the possible additional factors behind this bold step—I believe not yet noted—was the Egyptian military failure on the Euphrates in 610 B. C., half a year or so before the battle at Megiddo. The Egyptian intervention in the north in 610 B. C. seems to have been passed over generally, for in the Babylonian Chronicle the name of Egypt in the relevant passage is damaged, and must be restored: *māt mi-šir* (BM 21901, line 61).<sup>25</sup> In Marheshvan of the same year (November 610), the Babylonians and their allies, the Umman-Manda tribes, attacked the city of Harran where Ashur-uballit, the last king of Assyria, had based himself after his capitals at Ashur and Nineveh had already fallen. The document continues (lines 61-62); "As for Ashur-uballit and the army of Eg[yp]t which had come [to his help], fear of the enemy fell upon them; they abandoned the city and . . . crossed [the river Euphrates]." That is, they fell back, most probably, upon Carchemish. And so, the defenseless Harran—the last Assyrian capital—was plucked by the king of Babylonia.

The failure of the Egyptian army—whether merely garrison troops brought up from Carchemish to the battlefield or, even more so, an expeditionary force dispatched especially from Egypt—undoubtedly left its impression in both Egypt and Judah (unlike the moderately successful operations of 616 B. C.). Chronologically, it has recently been ascertained that Necho already reigned at this time, for Psamtik died between the end of July and the end of September, 610 B. C.<sup>26</sup> But we cannot know whether Necho personally took part

---

24 See my article in *JNES* 9 (1950), 219f.; and cf. M. Noth, *Geschichte Israels*, 3rd ed., (Göttingen, 1956), 251f. (who maintains that Megiddo was in Josiah's possession).

25 Gadd read *māt gul-* [ ], but the initial sign of the country's name is certainly *mi*, as first suggested by J. Lewy, *MVAG* 29 (1923), 85, followed by Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 62 and cf. pl. xii, line 61. Since then, several scholars have noticed the allusion to Egypt in 610 B. C.—e.g. E. Vogt, *VTS* 4 (1957), 69; Yoyotte, *Supplément*, 375; Cazelles, *RB* 74, 26; Freedy and Redford, *JAOS* 90, 474f.—but without drawing any conclusions for the battle at Megiddo.

26 Cf. E. Hornung, *ZÄS* 92 (1965), 38f.; Freedy and Redford, *JAOS* 90, 474 and n. 48.

in the unsuccessful military operation, in other words, whether he himself passed through Palestine less than a year prior to the battle at Megiddo. His not being mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle is of no significance, for in 609 B. C., too—when Necho stood at the head of a military expedition, as witnessed by the Bible—the fact was overlooked in this Babylonian source. In any event, in the spring or early summer of 609 B. C., Necho made intensive efforts to field a new expedition, for the Chronicle emphasizes that in Tammuz “a great Egyptian army” crossed the Euphrates (lines 66-67). But still Egypt and her Assyrian allies were unable to retake Harran. The Egyptian military defeat the year before was undoubtedly an encouraging factor in Josiah's decision to stand up to Necho at Megiddo—which battle unluckily ended in an Israelite fiasco.

Actually, the details of the conflict between Egypt and Judah in 609 B. C. are still quite muddled. The Book of Kings, which merely outlines the events (2 Kings 23:29-30), does not even relate the opening of a battle; this has sometimes led scholars, unjustifiably, to doubt the military background of the episode.<sup>27</sup> But in this instance we may prefer the fuller version in Chronicles, according to which matters did not go beyond a mere skirmish because of Josiah's fatal wound at the very outset (2 Chronicles 35:20-24). It is this version on which the tradition in 1 Esdras (1:23-31) and Josephus (Ant. X, 1, 5) is based. The latter, besides his embellishments, drew additional data from reliable sources independent of the biblical account, for he appears to be acquainted with the geopolitical situation revealed in “Gadd's Chronicle” relating, as he does, that Necho went up to the Euphrates in order to fight the Babylonians and Medes. The version in Chronicles has Pharaoh declaring to Josiah that his campaign is not intended against Judah: “But he sent envoys to him [Josiah], saying ‘What have we to do with each other, king of Judah? I am not coming against you this day, but to *bêt milḥamtî* [see below]; and God has commanded me to make haste. Cease opposing God, who is with me, lest he destroy you’ ” (2 Chronicles 35:21). It has been suggested<sup>28</sup> that Necho's words were of little point if actually stated near Megiddo, and more sensible if delivered in southern Palestine, before Josiah could guess Necho's intentions and true destination; we shall return to this below.

Many scholars have connected the battle at Megiddo with Herodotus II, 159, relating Pharaoh Necho's defeat of the Syrians at Magdolos, that is, Migdol, and the subsequent capture of Kadytis, “a large city in Syria,” undoubtedly Gaza.<sup>29</sup> They generally assume

---

27 See now—in addition to the references already given in *JNES* 9 (1950), 220, n. 13—S. B. Frost, *JBI*, 87 (1968), 369-83; and G. Pfeiffer, *MIO* 15 (1969), 297-307. Hence, these scholars, and many others, consider the account of the military encounter in Chronicles as a mere midrashic exposition of the version in Kings; cf. most recently T. Willi, *Die Chronik als Auslegung* (Göttingen, 1972), 159. On the other hand, a plethora of exegetes as well as historians have strongly defended the reliability of the Chronicler in this case; see, e.g., W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (Tübingen, 1955), 332f.; and most recently J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed., (London, 1972), 324.

28 Orally by Y. Yadin in a private conversation; and see his treatment of Josiah's battle in his *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* (Jerusalem-Ramat Gan, 1963), 2:311f.

29 For an abundant bibliography, which could easily be expanded, cf. E. Lipiński, *Annali Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 32 (1972), 19f., n. 3, who, however, justly denies any connection between the two events.

that "Megiddo" was corrupted by Herodotus to read "Migdol," but sometimes the opposite, emending the biblical text to read "Migdol." Among the latter scholars, some have suggested locating Migdol in the vicinity of Ascalon, for instance at Majdal, or at some fortress (Hebrew *migdā/ōl*) erected by Josiah along the coast, in the border area between Judah and Philistia.<sup>30</sup> Thus, they hold that the battle took place in the south, rather than at Megiddo, and Pharaoh's message would thereby become more intelligible.

But the supposed corruption of the name of the city, whether in this text or that, is entirely superfluous, and we ought clearly to distinguish between the biblical Megiddo and Herodotus's Magdolos. The latter was most probably the well-known Egyptian border fortress of Migdol, west of Pelusium (some identify it with Tell el-Ḥer, northeast of Qantara), and mentioned by Jeremiah together with Tahpanes (Jeremiah 44:1; 46:14), the Daphne of the Greek sources, west of Qantara. Only in this case can sense be made of the course of Necho's campaign according to Herodotus, for Gaza lies on the *via maris* east of Migdol, whereas the emendation reading "Megiddo" would create difficulties in the geographical order. Moreover, the invasion of an enemy into Egypt is more likely if subsequent to Necho's defeat at Carchemish in 605 B. C., and assuming that it took place at the instigation of the Babylonians. Could this penetration have indeed been associated with Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to the border of Egypt in the winter of 601-600 B. C., of which we are now informed by the Babylonian Chronicle, in spite of the fact that Herodotus identified the invaders as Syrians rather than Babylonians?<sup>31</sup> This Babylonian campaign to Egypt may well find echo in Jeremiah's prophecies concerning the nations, for his second prophecy on Egypt, after the oracle on the defeat at Carchemish, is superscribed: "The word which the Lord spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to smite the land of Egypt" (Jeremiah 46:13).<sup>32</sup> The invective does not, however, reflect the actual circumstances in which the Babylonian forces were repelled at the border of Egypt, suffering heavy casualties, as frankly related in the Babylonian Chronicle itself. Coming back to the passage in Herodotus, we should note that the first spot in

---

30 For the last opinion see Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 311. For a location of Josiah's battle at a supposed Migdol near Ascalon, see already L. E. Binns, "The Syrian Campaign of Necho II," *JTS* 18 (1917), 40, and the earlier literature cited there; cf. now also Yoyotte, *Supplément*, 390 (who, himself, however, opposes the equation of Megiddo with Magdolos).

31 See Freedy and Redford, *JAOS* 90, 475, n. 57, and especially Lipiński, *Ann. Ist. Or. di Napoli* 32, 235-41. The latter (p. 239) disregards our assumption in *IEJ* 18 (1968), 142f. that the Aramaic letter found at Saqqarah, requesting Egyptian aid against the approaching Babylonians, was sent within this context; moreover, he identifies the vassal with a ruler of Tyre or Sidon (following J. T. Milik) rather than the king of Gaza or, less likely, Ashdod. But this letter, sent by King Adon (or Adonimelek, as preferably to be read) must be predated by some two or three years if either of these latter cities had been conquered earlier (for Gaza, see n. 33 below).

32 On this prophecy, see recently J. G. Snaith, *JSS* 16 (1971), 15-32, who, however, is very vague about its chronological context. Our prophecy has usually been ascribed (see the commentaries on Jeremiah 46) either to the aftermath of the Egyptian debacle in 605 B. C. or to Nebuchadnezzar's supposed invasion of Egypt in 568 B. C. (an entirely obscure event due to the broken state of the relevant cuneiform tablet; cf. Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 94f.; and Addendum below)—but both assumptions are unsatisfactory.

Jeremiah's prophecy to be smitten is significantly Migdol (Jeremiah 46:14), and that at the end of the prophecy (verse 26, possibly an editorial addition), mention is made of "Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon, and his servants," the latter very likely his Syrian and Palestinian = Transjordanian vassals.<sup>33</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 24:2 for (his?) use of such auxiliaries.

In fact, without resorting to Herodotus and to emendations of the biblical text, we can suggest here a reasonable interpretation of Necho's seemingly peculiar message, and of the historical-military course of events. We may assume that Pharaoh was still in southern Palestine when he became aware of Josiah's military preparations, and he attempted to forestall any attack on the Egyptian army by explaining his intentions to the Judean king. But it was this very message which told Josiah of his route, passing through the Egyptian base at Megiddo. It might even be that the enigmatic term *bêt milḥamtî* (literally "house of my war") refers to a "fortified base" or "garrison city."<sup>34</sup> Then this *hapax legomenon* would refer to the Egyptian base at Carchemish or Riblah, as already suggested—though it could equally be the fortress in Stratum II at Megiddo.

Josiah's chances of blocking the passage of the Egyptian army in the south, in the Judean corridor between Gezer and Mešad Ḥashavyahu, were hardly favorable, for this fairly level region would have necessitated a pitched battle with Pharaoh's forces. The topographical conditions farther south, especially in the Ascalon region (or near Raphia between the sand-dunes and the sea-coast), are much better suited for such an attack. But Josiah was certainly denied access to this region by the cities of Ashdod, Ascalon and Gaza. Under the circumstances, he preferred to spring an ambush on his enemy in the Plain of Megiddo, more precisely at the strategic pass leading out of Wadi Ara, before the Egyptian army could deploy on the plain or find protection within Megiddo. Admittedly, initiating such an attack at this spot, 1.5-2 kilometers from Megiddo, necessitated considerable daring on Josiah's part—especially if Megiddo itself were in Egyptian hands; but even so, the risk was no unreasonably calculated. Josiah thus hastened, at the head of his army, through Samaria to

---

33 If our above dating of Jeremiah's second oracle is correct, then the superscriptions of all three successive prophecies in Jeremiah (MT) concerning Egypt represent the actual chronological chain of events: (a) 46:2—battle of Carchemish in 605 B. C.; (b) 46:13—Babylonian invasion of Egypt, 601/600 B. C.; (c) 47:1, "against the Philistines before whom Pharaoh smote Gaza"—alluding to the Egyptian capture of Gaza sometime later in 600 B. C., subsequent to the repulse of the Babylonians (and not in 609 B. C., my previous view, in keeping with the general trend—*JNES* 9 [1950], 221; *IEJ* 1 [1950/51], 154-59), in accord with Herodotus II, 159; cf. Lipiński, *Ann. Ist. Or. di Napoli* 32, 240. It follows that Egypt's control over Gaza must have been lost to the Babylonians in the meantime, most likely in the campaign of Nebuchadnezzar's second year (after the conquest of Ascalon in the previous year). Indeed, A. Rainey has suggested restoring "Gaza" in the lacuna in Wiseman's Chronicle (BM 21946; beginning of line 22; *Chronicles*, 70), thus placing its conquest by the Babylonians in the summer of 603 B. C. (cf. Rainey's chapter in the forthcoming report by Y. Aharoni on the Tel Aviv University's excavations at Lachish).

34 For this obscure technical term in 2 Chronicles 35:21, numerous unsatisfactory explanations have been put forward; see, e.g., Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 330, and bibliographical references there; he suggests, inter alia, emending *byt* to *bbl*. The most likely interpretation seems to me to be B. Alfrink's translation in *Biblica* 15 (1934), 176: "Kriegsstadt, Festungstadt, Garnisonstadt"; he takes the term as referring to Pharaoh's headquarters at Riblah in Syria.

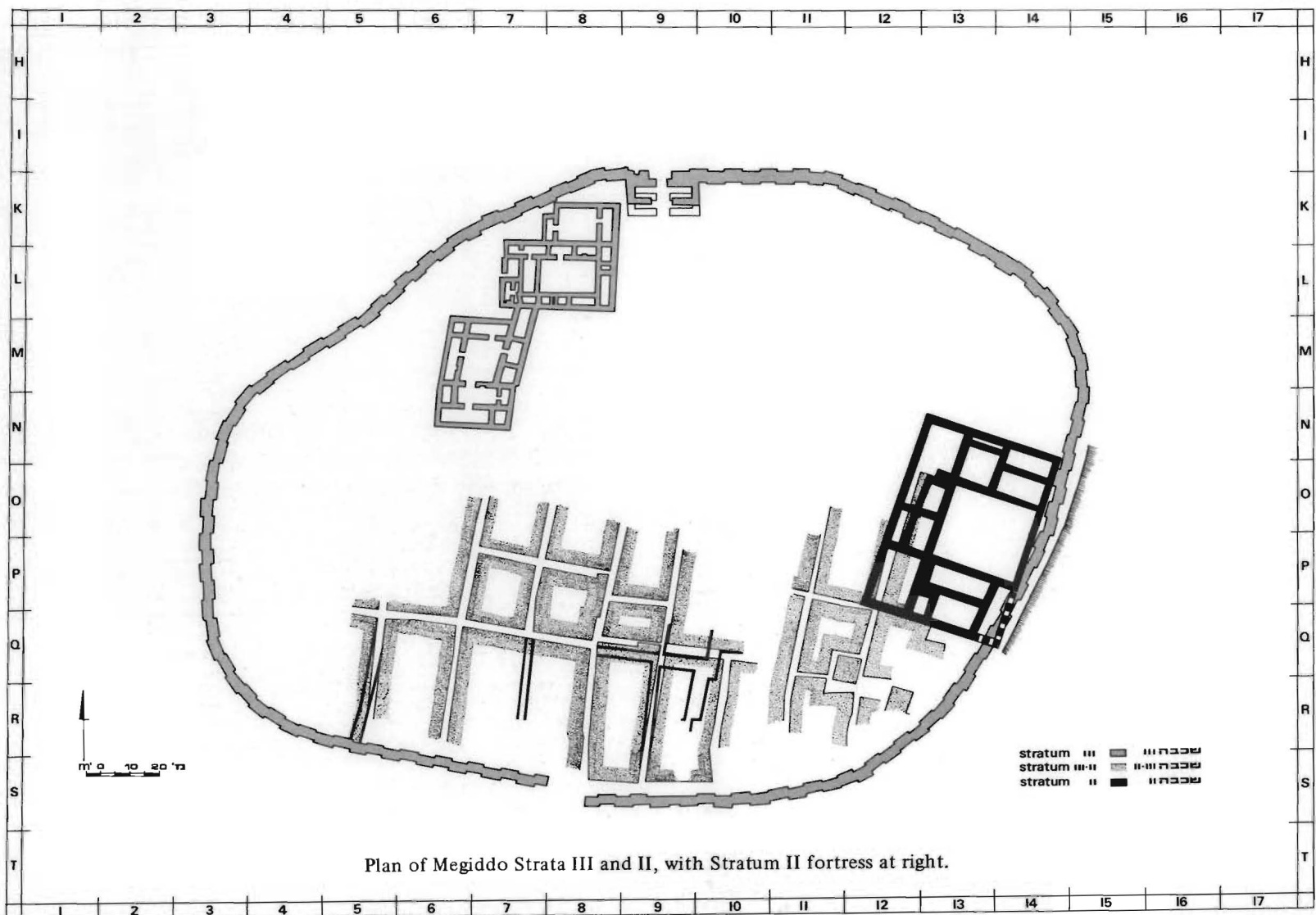
the Megiddo region in order to intercept the Egyptian column winding its way up Wadi Ara. Such a reconstruction quite suits the chain of events as described in Chronicles, following Necho's appeal: "Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn away from him but *girded himself*<sup>35</sup> in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Necho from the mouth of God, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo" (2 Chronicles 35:22). Thus, Josiah put his military plan into operation in spite of Pharaoh's attempt to dissuade him; in fact, it was Necho's very message which prompted him to march toward Armageddon as he so fatefully did.

*Addendum* to note 32:

It has now been demonstrated that this broken tablet is merely a list of foreign mercenary contingents in Babylonian service, rather than areas conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in his supposed campaign to Egypt in 568 B.C. (with which the prophecy in Ezekiel 29:17-21 has sometimes been associated). Cf. P.-R. Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften*, *OAT* 4/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1973), 6.

---

35 This would appear to approach the meaning of the Hebrew verb here, *biḥappēs*, which has never been explained satisfactorily; for the various interpretations, ancient and modern, see, e.g., Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 330; and Pfeiffer, *MIO* 15, 300. The usual translation, "he disguised himself," based on the other occurrences of this word in the Bible (cf. W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon* [Leiden, 1967], 328a), is certainly wrong—seemingly in all the instances. The verb appears in 1 Kings 22:30=2 Chronicles 18:29, in a similar military context and thus appears simply to mean 'gird oneself'. Furthermore, in this latter instance, as well as in 1 Sam. 28:8, it is in opposition to *lābaš beḡed* 'to put on a garment'; this might indicate a more specific meaning of 'covering the head', that is, putting on a helmet. This interpretation would suit 1 Kings 20:38 as well (also in a military context): "So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, *girding himself* with an *'āpēr* ('bandage', 'helmet?') over his eyes." (On *'āpēr* and its Akkadian equivalent, cf. the biblical dictionaries and J. C. Greenfield, *JCS* 21 [1967], 91a). Such a headdress may, of course, have made the wearer unrecognizable—and thus became, in effect, a disguise; still, a new investigation of the original meaning of *biḥappēs* is surely warranted.



Plan of Megiddo Strata III and II, with Stratum II fortress at right.