

AN OSTRACON FROM HESHBON

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A small ostracon in Aramaic script was found in the first season of excavations at Heshbon (modern *Heshbân*) in the summer of 1968.¹ The sherd, Registry No. 309, came from Area B, Square 1, Locus 52, the lowest level reached in the 1968 campaign, associated with pottery dating in large part from Persian times, in small part from earlier periods.

The sherd as presently preserved measures 5.4×5.3 cm. at its largest dimensions. Unhappily it has been broken on three sides as we can judge from its incomplete text, that is, on the top, bottom and left; the right side is evidently intact in view of the calcium deposits on its edge and its parallelism with the right margin of the lines of script. The break on the left, at least, appears to be recent, and there may be some hope of recovering more of the ostracon. The surface of the ostracon is marred by three gouges, no doubt from the blows of the workman's pick. These appear black on photographs, but can be distinguished clearly from ink marks with the naked eye.²

The text of the ostracon (Pl. XXV: B; Fig. 13) reads as follows:

]° בן ל° 1. Bin l°[
 ל עיזא° 2. 'Uzzi' [el

¹ Siegfried H. Horn, director of the Andrews University Heshbon Expedition, has kindly assigned publication of the ostracon to the writer.

² In Figure 13, the gouges are marked, two on line 3, one on line 4, with dotted lines. Shaded areas within or adjacent to the dotted lines are remnants of ink. It should be said that unusual efforts have been made at Heshbon to protect ostraca or graffiti. Iron Age potsherds were brushed with a dry brush before being subjected to water. A technique of dipping potsherds in water and examining them before cleaning, developed first, I believe, by Professor Yohanan Aharoni, at 'Arad, has been followed in part at Heshbon.

3. בן רפא' [Bin Rapa']
 4. בן פסמי [Bin Psammī]
 5. גידן | Nanāyiddin I



A tracing of the Heshbon Ostracon and significant letters of its script

Figure 13. A tracing of the Heshbon Ostracon and significant letters of its script

Line 1. The *bêt* of *bin* is marred at the top by a deep chip in the potsherd which obliterates the right shoulder of the letter. Following *lamed* are remnants of a second letter, very faint and indeterminate; a *hêt* is possible: *l'h* [y]?³

Line 2. The broken *'alep* at the end of the line appears to me to be certain. In this case the reading *'uzzî'ē[l]* imposes itself. Cf. the common biblical name *'Uzzî'ēl*.

³ On the name *lhy*, see now J. Naveh, "The Scripts of Two Ostraca from Elath," *BASOR*, No. 183 (1966), pp. 27 f., and n. 9; G. Ryckmans, *Les noms propres Sud-Sémitiques*, I (Louvain, 1934), 120.

Line 3. Following *bn* is a long gouge in the sherd. Ink remnants preserved at the top of the gouge appear to be *rēš* or *daleš*. Following is the letter *ḫē*, faintly preserved but certain. On the left edge of the line is a stroke which conforms best to *'aleḫ*, but is quite uncertain. *Rāḫā'* or *Rēḫā'ēl* are possible reconstructions.

Line 4. The reading *bn ḫsm̄y* is clear despite the gouge which largely obliterates the *sameḫ*. On the left top of the indentation is ink following the curve of *sameḫ*; almost all of the lower, rounded sweep of *sameḫ* is visible. The name *ḫsm̄y*, Psammī, is well known from Egyptian Aramaic texts.⁴ It appears to be a hypocoristicon of Egyptian *ḫsm̄tk*, in Aramaic script *ḫsm̄šk*.⁵

The Psammī of the Hermopolis papyri is the son of Nabūnatan (nbwn̄tn; the name is Aramaean), the father of Makki-bānīt (< Mankibānīt) and Waḫpere' (Egyptian Hophra-Apries).⁶ The Psammī of the Brooklyn papyrus is the father of 'Attarmalkī. We shall return to this curious mixture of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Aramaean names found in Egyptian Aramaic texts and, as we shall see, in our Heshbon ostrakon.

Line 5. This line with its name and number is apparently the only complete line in the ostrakon. It makes clear that the original ostrakon consisted of names and numbers, evidently a record of payment or rations, or a record of goods shipped

⁴ Cf. E. G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven, 1953), Pap. I, 13; and especially E. Bresciani and M. Kamil, *Le lettere aramaiche di Hermopoli*, *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, "Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche," Serie VIII, Volume XII, 5 (Rome, 1966), *passim*, esp. p. 381. Cf. N. Aimé-Giron, *Textes araméens d'Égypte* (Cairo, 1931), 2. 1 and 34.4; and G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1957), II, 4 (p. 43), and III, 3 (p. 45).

⁵ For the Neobabylonian transcriptions, see K. Tallqvist, *Assyrian Personal Names* (Hildesheim, 1966 [reprint]), pp. 181 f.

⁶ See J. T. Milik, "Les papyrus araméens d'Hermopolis et les cultes syro-phéniciens en Égypte perse," *Biblica*, XLVIII (1967), 546-622, esp. 547 ff.

or received. The name Nanāyiddin is a fairly common name in Babylonia in the 6th century B.C.⁷ It is a transparent formation composed of two familiar elements, the name of the goddess Nanāy,⁸ popular in Neobabylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic times as Nabū's consort, both in Babylonia and among the Aramaeans, and the familiar onomastic element *iddin*, "has given." One may compare such names as *nnyhm*⁹ and *br-Nny*.¹⁰

The script of the Heshbon ostrakon is to be compared palaeographically with the scripts of the Hermopolis papyri (last quarter of the 6th century B.C.), the Meissner Papyrus (515 B.C.),¹¹ Elephantine Papyri, Cowley 52 (late 6th century B.C.)¹² and Cowley 1 (495 B.C.),¹³ and the inscriptions of Sheikh Faḍl (early 5th century B.C.).¹⁴

⁷ *Alep* in line 2 is broken. However, it is clear that the form is that of the 6th-century Aramaic cursive. This form with its right stroke in the form of a horizontal "V" persisted in the chancellery script¹⁵ of the 5th century, but was replaced in

⁷ Cf. K. Tallqvist, *Neubabylonisches Namenbuch* (Helsingfors, 1905), p. 159. The name is written Na-na-a-iddin.

⁸ See D. O. Edzard, *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H. W. Haussig (Stuttgart, n.d.), I, Mesopotamien, p. 108, and references. Note also *Nanāia* of 2 Macabees 1:13, 15. Tallqvist lists some forty names formed with *Nanāy* (see n. 7).

⁹ Cf. *nnyhm* in the Hermopolis Papyri (cited above in n. 4).

¹⁰ Cf. Hatraic *nny* and *brnny*, H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1964), II, 294 f., and references.

¹¹ H. Bauer and B. Meissner, "Ein aramäischer Pachtvertrag aus dem 7. Jahre Darius' I.," *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaft*, Phil.-Hist. Klasse (Berlin, 1936), pp. 414-424; esp. Taf. I and II.

¹² A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century* (Oxford, 1923), pp. 1 ff.; E. Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka*, II (Leipzig, 1911), Papyrus 22, Pl. 24.

¹³ Sachau, *op. cit.*, Pap. 30, Pl. 30.

¹⁴ N. [Aimé] Giron, *Ancient Egypt*, XIII (1923), pp. 38-43. I am indebted to Dr. Joseph Naveh for new photographs of these inscriptions. Cf. his dissertation, shortly to be published: *The Development of the Aramaic Script* (The Hebrew University, 1966), pp. 57 f. [Hebrew].

¹⁵ Naveh, in the study cited in n. 14, has distinguished systematically a "conservative" and a "vulgar" cursive style in fifth-century scripts. His analysis is no doubt correct. Our "chancellery cursive" corresponds to this "conservative cursive."

the ordinary cursive by a form with a more or less vertical right arm.

Bê is still quite elongated as in late 6th-century and early 5th-century styles. The top preserves a narrow form with sharp, upward ticks on either side.

Two features of *dalet* are to be noted, the bold slant of its right leg from left down to the right, a trait of 7th- and 8th-century styles, and the stubbiness of the form, again an early (pre-5th century) character. The closest parallels are in the P. Cowley 52, in the Hermopolis papyri, and in the Meissner papyrus, as well as earlier documents.

The *zayin* in line 2 is broad at the top and angled left to right. This is a very archaic form, much like that of P. Cowley 52 and earlier hands.

Yod in the Heshbon ostracon is very large, composed of two separate strokes, the left stroke having been drawn from right to left. By the beginning of the fifth century there is a strong tendency to draw the letter without lifting the pen in the ordinary cursive, and the letter grows progressively smaller. There is also a tendency for the left stroke to move upward from right to left which appears in the Meissner Papyrus of 515 B.C. The *yod* in l. 2 shows a slight move in this direction. Closest to the Heshbon hand is once again P. Cowley 52 (as well as much earlier hands).

The stance of *lamed* shifts from a slant down right to left (before the broad loop) in the 6th-century, to a stance close to the vertical in 5th-century hands. The Heshbon form is of the earlier type. Compare especially the Hermopolis forms.

Mem is one of the best letters for dating, having a complex evolution in the 7th to 5th centuries. 7th- and 6th-century forms are characterized by the right down-stroke moving straight, uncurved from a squarish shoulder downward. The left down-stroke is relatively short, beginning well above the horizontal. The Heshbon form finds close parallels as

early as the Saqqārah Papyrus (601 B.C.),¹⁶ as late as P. Cowley 1.

Nūn is not especially useful in this period. In the chancellery hand it evolves little in the 7th-5th centuries.

The *ʿayin* of the Heshbon script is characterized by its near circular form and small opening to the top. Its traits are relatively early typologically, though such forms may appear sporadically well into the 5th century.

The Heshbon *pē* in each example exhibits a rounded head and slightly curved downstroke. One may compare the form of Hermopolis Papyrus I, 5 which is identical. The lower curve develops late in the 6th century and continues through the 5th century.

Unhappily, the form of *samek* in line 4 of the ostrakon is too uncertain to be analyzed palaeographically. Its traces may be made to conform with either 6th- or 5th-century styles.

Our palaeographical analysis has revealed that most of the letter forms of the Heshbon ostrakon can be fitted to a date shortly before or shortly after 500 B.C.: *ʿalep*, *hēt*, *mēm*, *nūn* and *pē*. The remaining letters are typologically earlier, especially *zayin*, *lamed*, and *daleth*. We prefer a date in the last quarter of the 6th century, 500 B.C. in round numbers.

The most striking feature of the Heshbon Ostrakon is its mixture of names, two West Semitic, one Egyptian, and one Babylonian. As we noted above, a similar mixture of names obtains in the Aramaean and Jewish population of Egypt in the Persian Age. One suspects that Psammi was not a native Egyptian, nor Nanāyiddin Babylonian, but Aramaeans or Aramaized Arabs who moved over the caravan routes which crossed in Heshbon, the King's Highway connecting with North Arabia and the Gulf of Aqabah in the south to Rabbat Ammon and Damascus in the north, and the westerly road to Jericho, Jerusalem, and Joppa.

Another significant feature of the Ostrakon is its use of the

¹⁶ A photograph may be conveniently found in Donner and Röllig, *op. cit.*, III, Taf. XXXIII.

Canaanite (Hebrew or Ammonite) element *bn* plus Canaanite or Egyptian patronymics. The scribe, while using an elegant Aramaic cursive script, was writing in his native dialect. One may compare the similar use of the Aramaic script for writing Hebrew in Judah in the era of the Restoration.¹⁷

¹⁷ See the writer's paper "Judaean Stamps" *Eretz Israel* IX (1969) [the Albright Volume], 26, 27, Pl. V: 3, 4.