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 Ḥesbān) in the summer of 1968. 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 x 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.

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

jn Bin 1. I05p
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.
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 hé is possible: l'ḥ'[y]? 

Line 2. The broken aleph at the end of the line appears to me to be certain. In this case the reading 'uzzi'ēl['] imposes itself. Cf. the common biblical name 'Uzzi'ēl.

3 On the name hyy, 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 daleth. Following is the letter šē, faintly preserved but certain. On the left edge of the line is a stroke which conforms best to 'aleph, but is quite uncertain. Rāpāʾ or Rēpāʾēl are possible reconstructions.

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

The Psammī of the Hermopolis papyri is the son of Nabūnātan (nbwnn; the name is Aramaean), the father of Makki-bānīt (< Mankibānīt) and Wahpere (Egyptian Hophra-Aplies).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 ostracon.

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

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

or received. The name Nānāyiddin is a fairly common name in Babylonia in the 6th century B.C. It is a transparent formation composed of two familiar elements, the name of the goddess Nānāy, popular in Neo-Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic times as Nabū’s consort, both in Babylonia and among the Aramaeans, and the familiar onomastic element īddīn, “has given.” One may compare such names as nnyhm and br-Nny.

The script of the Heshbon ostracon 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.), Elephantine Papyrus, Cowley 52 (late 6th century B.C.) and Cowley I (495 B.C.), and the inscriptions of Sheikh Fādīl (early 5th century B.C.).

Aleph 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 script of the 5th century, but was replaced in

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


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


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.

\( \text{Bet} \) 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 \( \text{daleth} \) 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 \( \text{zayin} \) 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.

\( \text{Yod} \) 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 \( \text{yod} \) 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 \( \text{lamed} \) 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.

\( \text{Mem} \) 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.), as late as P. Cowley I.

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

The ‘ayin 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 pe’ 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 ostracon 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 ostracon can be fitted to a date shortly before or shortly after 500 B.C.: ‘alep, hēt, mēm, nūn and pe’. The remaining letters are typologically earlier, especially zayin, lamed, and dalet. 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 Ostracon 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 Ostracon is its use of the

10 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" Erets Israel IX (1969) [the Albright Volume], 26, 27, Pl. V: 3, 4.
A. Tell Ḫesbān from the northeast. The acropolis and the shelf between the acropolis and the lower slopes of the mound are clearly noticeable.

B. The staff of the 1968 Ḫesbān expedition.
A. Area B: the lime kiln protruding from the north balk, and cutting through several occupational strata to a depth of three meters.

B. Area B: north face of Wall 17B of the Persian period. The foundation, lying deeper than what is visible in the picture, was not reached in the 1968 season.
A. Area B: view from the top on Wall 17B (running from top to bottom). To the left are cross Walls 27, 21, 28 and 25B, lying south of Wall 17B. The structure at the right of Wall 17B is an auxiliary balk

B. Area B: the narrow foundation trench on the north side of Wall 17B, visible in the auxiliary balk between the meter stick and the wall to the left
A. Area C: aerial view of the L-shaped enclosure wall (C 1:2-3 and C. 2:5)

B. Area C: Structure C. 4:10-8 in the northwest corner of Square 4
A. Area C: south balk of Square 2 showing the tip lines of the layers of wash, and Wall C. 2:10 to the left.

Area C: Square 1 at the end of the first season’s work, with the first encountered architectural remains visible, probably of Roman origin.
A. Area A: Square 2, looking toward the south, showing the Arab water channels running from north to south (cutting through Wall A. 2:8) and from east to west.

B. Area A: storage area in Square 1 with remains of huge storage jars excavated.
A. Area A: Appearance of the mosaic floor fragment (A. 3:3), covered with plaster (below the meter stick), and of the arc-shaped apsidal stones (A. 3:5) in Square 3. The crude filler Wall A. 3:4 is between the mosaic and Wall A. 3:5.

B. Area A: cement bed of the apse mosaic after its removal. Filler Wall A. 3:4 is visible behind it.
A. Area A: looking north over all four Squares. In the right foreground is the apse of the church with its intrusive Arab cistern (A. 3:8). In the center, running from left to right, are three column bases of the church, and behind them the church’s north wall (A. 2:8).

B. Area A: mosaic floor fragment (A. 4:8) shown as found in relationship to architectural features surrounding it.
A. Area A: the apsidal mosaic fragment (A. 3:3) from the 6th-century church

Area A: the fragment of a mosaic floor (A. 4:8) from the central aisle of the church
A. Area A: the end of the northern leg of the apse wall (after removal of the balk between Squares 1 and 3) and junction with Wall A. 1:9. The left stone on which the meter stick rests is reused and bears a Corinthian capital leaf pattern carved on its north face and its bottom face.

B. Area A: north face of north wall of the church (A. 2:8) in Square 2. The two column bases behind it stand on the balk between Squares 2 and 4.
A. Area D: Square 1, looking east. Wall D. 1:4 running from west to east with gateway in the foreground. Wall D. 1:3 is to the left and behind it are the remains of the vaulted room.

B. Area D: the stairway in Square 2 with Wall D. 2:2 on the right.
A. Headless skeleton of a large canine found under Locus 24 in Area B.

B. A variety of fragments from colored glass vessels and of glass bracelets
Painted Arab vessels from the cistern of Area C
A-B. A painted Arab jug and a lamp from the cistern of Area C

C. A lead pendant (white chalk is put on the background to let the design appear on the photograph; see Figure 5 for an artist’s drawing of the design)

D. A bone doll

E. Painted head on plaster from the church (A = half size; B-E = actual size)
A. Fragment of plaster from the church with the word [Δ]ΑΝΙΗ[Δ] painted on it (Actual size)

B. Rhodian jar handle with the seal inscription ΕΗΙ ΑΡΑΤΟΦΑΝΕΥΣ and a helios head
A. A pottery handle with a Latin seal inscription (Actual size)

B. The Heshbon ostracon. (About 1 1/2 times enlarged). Photo: John C. Trever