

A GREEK OSTRACON FROM HESHBON  
HESHBON OSTRACON IX

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During the 1973 season at Heshbon an ostracon was found in Area B, Square 4, Locus 120W. The sherd has been identified as a Hellenistic body sherd by Dr. James Sauer, although the latest pottery found in the associated pottery pail was dated in the Early Roman period, with a mixture of Hellenistic and Iron Age body sherds. The registration number of the sherd is 1668, and its dimensions are 59 x 55 mm. (Pl. II).

There are traces of about 35 Greek letters on the sherd. However, only a few are in alignment, and there is no observable sequence of lines. Examination and experimentation have not produced any identifiable words or combinations. It would appear that this is possibly the product of someone's doodling or scribbling.

The following is a transcription of recognizable letters:

1	a ι	ο
2	θ υ ω η	
3	ρ η σ	
4	a v <sup>o</sup> ασ γ ο σ	
5	ασ κ λ α ρ	

*Along right side:*

6	ο ο ο ο
7	ρ ο σ

Palaeographically, some of the letter-forms on this ostracon can be paralleled in literary documents in the late Hellenistic period. The *alpha* (ll. 1, 4), *gamma* (l. 4), *ēta* (ll. 2, 3), *iota* (l. 1),

*kappa* (l. 5), *rho* (ll. 5, 7), *sigma* (ll. 4, 7), *upsilon* (l. 4), and *ōmega* (l. 2) are the typical forms used in the second and first centuries B.C.<sup>1</sup> The dotted *thēta* in the ostracon (l. 2) is very common in third century documents.<sup>2</sup> However, some examples of the dotted *thēta* are found in the second and first centuries B.C.<sup>3</sup> Since the forms for the *alpha*, *sigma*, and *ōmega*<sup>4</sup> in the ostracon do not occur in the third century documents,<sup>5</sup> it appears that palaeographically the ostracon should be dated in the second or first centuries B.C. This would comport with the ceramic context of the ostracon cited above – late Hellenistic/early Roman.

<sup>1</sup> E. M. Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography* (Oxford, 1912), pp. 144, 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144; C. H. Roberts, *Greek Literary Hands* (Oxford, 1956), no. 1 (4th cent.), no. 2a (1st half of 3d cent.); no. 3a (c. middle of 3d cent.); E. G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1971), no. 51 (325-275 B.C.), no. 52 (early 3d cent.), no. 54 (middle 3d cent.).

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, *Introduction*, p. 145; Roberts, *Greek Literary Hands*, no. 6a (1st half of 2d cent. B.C.); Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*, no. 55 (middle of 1st cent. B.C.).

<sup>4</sup> Reading the second letter after the dotted *thēta* in line 2 on the ostracon as an *ōmega*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Roberts, *Greek Literary Hands*, numbers 1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 5a, 5b; Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*, numbers 40, 51, 52, 53, 54.