

HESHBON OSTRACON XI

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An additional ostracon inscribed in the peculiar Ammonite script was found in the excavations of the 1974 season at Heshbon. Of the small corpus of inscriptions, now eleven in number, known from Heshbon, the newly-found ostracon is second in interest only to Ostracon IV.¹

Ostracon XI is small, measuring at its maximum dimensions only 8.4 x 5.4 cm. The right side (with its margin) and the bottom side probably belong to the original ostracon; the break at the top is more recent, perhaps modern, so that a considerable portion of the text must be reckoned as missing. The left side of the ostracon is uncertain. It is clear, however, that the ink on the left third of the surviving ostracon was rubbed away almost without trace. Ostracon XI, Registry No. 2092, came from Area B, Square 2, Locus 126, described by the excavator as an Iron II/Persian ceramic context. Like Ostracon IV, this ostracon was made from the body sherd of a heavy storage jar.

The primary text reads as follows:

1. t'n []
2. t'n mn []
3. b'rm []
4. hblm []

Translation:

1. figs []
2. figs from []
3. beasts of burden []
4. ropes []

¹ See F. M. Cross, "Ammonite Ostraca from Heshbon: Heshbon Ostraca IV-VIII," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 1-20; Pl. I; cf. also the two ostraca in cursive Aramaic, "An Ostracon from Heshbon," *AUSS* 7 (1969): 223-229; Pl. XXV:B (Heshbon Ostracon I), and "Heshbon Ostracon II," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 125-131, Pl. XVI:A.



Fig. 21. A tracing of Heshbon Ostrakon XI.

The text appears to be some kind of inventory. As is the case with Ostracon IV, the text no doubt included numbers of quantity, and perhaps also specification by place of origin or by a personal name.

Line 1. In the margin preceding the letters *t'n* are a series of marks, for the most part vertical strokes. One or two can be taken as letters; one could also call many of the strokes numbers. However, the marks are secondary to the larger, thicker script, and may be no more than doodling. In any case, they cannot be read. The word *t'n* is probably complete, a collective equivalent to Hebrew *t'ny*. One may compare Canaanite *tyn* (the *yod* is consonantal), Ugaritic *tyt* (from **tayyintu*), for example, in an inventory: *hmšt kkr tyt*, "five talents of (dried) figs."²

Line 2. *t'n*, "figs" is repeated followed by what appears to be *mn*, "from . . .", presumably followed in turn by a place name, or possibly a personal name. An alternate, less likely reading is *kk[r]* plus number.

Line 3. The *m* of *b'rm* may or may not belong to the word. *B'r* or *b'rm* concretely refer to beasts of burden, donkeys or possibly camels. We note that Heshbon was upon the main caravan routes, which crossed there.³

Line 4. *Hblm* most likely means "ropes" rather than "pledges" or "sailors"(!). Once again compare the reading in a Ugaritic inventory: *tmn hblm*, "eight ropes."⁴

The script of Ostracon XI is very much like that of Ostracon IV from Heshbon.⁵ *'Alep* is virtually identical, as are *taw* and *nun*. *Beṯ* and *'ayin* are more open at the top. *Reš* too is farther open. *Lamed* is unusually high. These latter traits are more developed, and appear to be moving in the direction of Aramaic. *Mem* still retains the archaic Ammonite form. Particularly characteristic is the cursive *het*, a "reversed-'n'" form which appears in

² Gordon Text 1130:17; 2101:26.

³ See my comments in "An Ostracon from Heshbon," p. 228.

⁴ Gordon Text 1128:30, 31.

⁵ See the script chart, fig. 2, in "Ammonite Ostraca from Heshbon," p. 15.

Ostracon IV. If our dating of Ostracon IV is correct (end of seventh or beginning of the sixth century B.C.), Ostracon XI should be perhaps a generation later, in the early sixth century, contemporary with the lapidary script of the 'Amman Theater Inscription,⁶ ca. 575 B.C. Thus it is the latest of our inscriptions in Ammonite. By 525 B.C. at latest, Ammonite came to be written in the cursive Aramaic of the Persian chancellery, to judge from Ostraca I and II from Heshbon.⁷

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

⁷ See "An Ostracon from Heshbon," pp. 228, 229.