

LITERARY SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF PALESTINE AND SYRIA.

II: HEBREW, MOABITE, AMMONITE, AND EDOMITE INSCRIPTIONS¹

DENNIS PARDEE

The University of Chicago

Beside the Hebrew Bible, which has been preserved as a literary and religious document by the Jewish and Christian communities, modern archaeology has placed a series of inscriptions in Hebrew and closely related dialects recovered from the soil of Palestine itself.² Most of these documents are brief, they usually do not refer specifically to events mentioned in the Bible, and their number has been growing rapidly only in the last forty years or so. Thus they are not generally well known except to specialists in epigraphy, philology, and history. Probably the two best known of these inscriptions are the Mesha Stone, the earliest inscription (ca. 850 B.C.) of considerable length in a dialect close to classical Hebrew, and the Siloam Tunnel inscription, which contains an account parallel to the biblical version (2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chr 32:30; cf. Sir 48:17) of the completion of Hezekiah's water tunnel under Jerusalem's east hill.

¹ This is the second article of a series, the first of which appeared in *AUSS* 15 (1977): 189-203. The reader should note that the various installments do not represent a chronological order, but only a discrete unit of literary material which the writer feels best able to present in published form at a given time.

² I am dealing here only with texts which antedate the bulk of the texts from the Dead Sea caves. The latter will be the object of a future study in this series. On the other chronological extreme, second millennium Northwest Semitic texts from Canaan, such as the Proto-Sinaitic texts (cf. W. F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and their Decipherment*, HTS 22 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969]) or the proto-Canaanite inscriptions (cf. F. M. Cross, "The Evolution of the Proto-Canaanite Alphabet," *BASOR* 134 [1954]: 15-24; idem, "The Origin and Early Evolution of the Alphabet," *Eretz Israel* 8 [1967]: 8*-24*) provide too little historical information and are too unsure of interpretation to be included in this series.

These two inscriptions, though perhaps the most startling, represent only a fraction of the total number. The excavations at Tel Arad in the Judaeen Negev, e.g., unearthed more than two hundred texts, in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Arabic. In this article I will discuss the secondary sources available for the study of the Hebrew inscriptions, the physical characteristics of the texts themselves, the main groups of texts by site, and the various types of texts which appear, giving finally a brief overview of the historical information to be gleaned from them. In a second section I will present the epigraphic material from ancient Moab, Ammon, and Edom.

1. *The Hebrew Inscriptions*

Sources for Study

With the exception of the main site groups discussed below, the Hebrew texts have been published in widely scattered books and journals, some of them not easily accessible today. Fortunately, several collections of these texts exist which are quite accessible, though often expensive, and which contain various combinations of text, translation, and commentary for each text, with bibliography of both original publication and secondary studies.

The standard recent publication, though it contains relatively few Hebrew texts (only nineteen), is H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969-1973), text numbers 182-200 (cited here as KAI + text number). The first volume of this work contains the texts in square Hebrew characters (Phoenician, Punic, Neo-Punic, Moabite, Hebrew, and Aramaic). The second volume contains bibliography and commentary for each text, and the third provides more general bibliographies, glossaries, and photographs and hand copies of some of the texts (not all!).

There are also two major works devoted to Hebrew inscriptions alone, the first in English, the second in French. John C. L.

Gibson's contribution is *Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions*, vol. 1 of his *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971; to date vol. 2, dealing with Aramaic inscriptions, has also been published [1975]). This work is cited here as *TSSI* 1 + page number(s). Gibson's work covers the same material treated in the present overview, but contains only a sample of the numerically extensive text types (ostraca, seals, weights), and in less than a decade has already fallen seriously out of date in some areas (Arad, other texts from the Negev and from Transjordan). Its format is text (in square Hebrew characters), translation, and epigraphic and philological commentary on each text studied. Gibson's book is not as easy to cite as *KAI* because he did not number the texts sequentially. A "serial numerotation" was introduced in the second printing, but the numbers refer only to site groupings, not to individual texts as in *KAI* (e.g., no. 4 is Tell Qasile, a site from which two texts are included; no. 12 is Lachish—this section includes ten of the twenty-two ostraca from Tell ed-Duweir). Moreover, Gibson's terminology, readings, and interpretations have been the object of severe criticism (see especially the reviews of J. A. Fitzmyer, *JBL* 91 [1972]: 109-111; and J. C. Greenfield, *JAOS* 94 [1974]: 509-12). Much care must, therefore, be exercised in using this volume.

The third major comprehensive work is André Lemaire's *Les ostraca*, vol. 1 of *Inscriptions hébraïques*, Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 9 (Paris: Cerf, 1977; vol. 1 is the only volume which has appeared to date). Lemaire's book is cited here as *Ostraca* + page number(s). This is a French translation of the Hebrew texts written on ostraca (the Hebrew texts are not included), with brief philological notes and extensive historical commentary. The last mentioned feature makes this book the most useful for non-specialists who wish to know the historical data or implications of the texts studied. This first volume of *Inscriptions hébraïques* contains only the ostraca, but it includes every ostrakon known to Lemaire of which at

least one full word has been preserved. Lemaire tells us (p. 16) that he is preparing a full philological and epigraphic treatment of these texts for a future fascicle of *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres). Presumably he and his French colleague Pierre Bordreuil will furnish volumes in both series covering the monumental inscriptions and the minor ones (seals, weights, etc.). Lemaire is an excellent philologist, epigraphist, historian, and topographer, and his work may be consulted with confidence (though the scantiness of data frequently makes any conclusion unsure). Lemaire numbered his texts sequentially only within groups and not for the entire book; it is thus easiest to cite *Les ostraca* by page number(s).

Finally, the reader should be aware of W. F. Albright's English translations of several of the more important texts discussed herein, in *ANET*, pp. 320-322, 568.

Physical Characteristics of the Texts

The Hebrew inscriptions are found written on a variety of materials, with a variety of instruments. The most striking, but the most poorly represented, are the inscriptions chiseled in stone. Of these, the best known is the Siloam Tunnel inscription (*KAI* 189; *TSSI* 1: 21-23; *ANET*, p. 321; *ANEP*, no. 275; cf. no. 744) inscribed on the wall of the tunnel which Hezekiah had had pierced through the limestone bedrock underlying the east hill of Jerusalem. Further examples are the Silwan tomb inscription (*KAI* 191; *TSSI*, 1: 23-24) and the Khirbet Beit Lei tomb graffiti (*TSSI* 1: 57-58; studied recently by A. Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," *RB* 83 [1976]: 558-568).

The greatest number of texts in continuous prose are found written in ink on pieces of broken pottery vessels. These pottery sherds with writing are known as ostraca (singular: ostracon). As anyone knows who has tramped over a Palestinian mound, pottery sherds are ubiquitous. They furnished an immediately

available and cheap form of writing material. They were the scratch pads and stationery of their time. With one exception, all extant Hebrew letters of the pre-Christian era are written on ostraca, as are the economic documents. Lemaire (*Ostraca*, p. 13) estimates that about 250 Hebrew ostraca have been discovered, the great majority to be dated to the Israelite period, between ca. 1000 and 587 B.C. The most extensive study of the technique of writing with pen and ink in Israelite times is by G. van der Kooij, "Palaeography," in J. Hoftijzer, et al., *Aramaic Texts from Deir Alla* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 29-96. Van der Kooij was studying texts written in ink on plaster, but many of his remarks are valid for the ostraca also.

Another technique was to incise or stamp an inscription into a pottery vessel before it had completely hardened (i.e., during manufacture). The most frequent stamped inscriptions are the well-known but still enigmatic *lmlk* ("to the king") jar handle inscriptions, discussed in great detail by Peter Welten, *Die Königs-Stempel* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969). Incised inscriptions are rare and the text is always short. This is because of the relative difficulty of producing the inscription and because of its physical limitations (one would not write a letter on a vessel intended for indefinite household use). The content of the text is almost always identification, either of the contents of the vessel or of its owner, e.g., *bt lmlk*, "royal *bat* (-measure)" (*TSSI* 1: 70).

Finally, there are inscriptions on seals and weights. Though the physical material may be the same as that of the monumental inscriptions, i.e. stone (there are practically no metal seals or weights from Palestine of the Israelite period), the characteristics of the finished inscription are quite different (extremely short text), as was the technique of production (miniaturization), and certainly the function. The seals are almost exclusively stamp seals, this being the tradition in Palestine from the Egyptian amulets and scarabs down through Israelite times, as

opposed to Mesopotamia and Northern Syria, where cylinder seals, intended to be rolled out on a soft material, were far more frequent (see *IDB* 4: 255-259). The Hebrew seals were usually engraved in mirror image so that when stamped the impression would read correctly. They were frequently of semi-precious stone and were pierced so as to be suspended around the neck (see the descriptions of a group of seals by P. Bordreuil and A. Lemaire, "Nouveaux sceaux hébreux, araméens et ammonites," *Semitica* 26 [1976] 45-63). They were inscribed with the owner's name, frequently with the patronymic, and occasionally with the owner's position, e.g., *l'zryhw bn šmryhw*, "(Belonging) to Azariah son of Shemariah" (*ibid.*, no. 4); *lšm' bd yrb'm*, "(Belonging) to Shama servant of Jeroboam" (F. Vattioni, "I sigilli ebraici," *Biblica* 50 [1969]: 368, no. 68). Their purpose was to authenticate origin (as on papyrus documents) or ownership (as on jars). They were impressed on wax or clay sealings affixed to missives or commodities and they maintained the untampered status of the sealed item as long as the clay seal was not broken. Both the seals and the clay seal impressions, called *bullae*, have appeared on the antiquities market and have been discovered in formal excavations (cf., e.g., Bordreuil and Lemaire *Semitica* 26 [1976]: 53; Gibson, *TSSI* 1: 62, no. 18).

Principal Groups of Texts

Most of the longer epigraphic Hebrew documents come from three main sites: Samaria, Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir), and Arad.

The *Samaria ostraca* were discovered at the site of ancient Samaria in 1910 by excavators from Harvard University. The texts number about one hundred. They are written in ink on ostraca and deal with shipments of various commodities such as wine and oil. They were not completely edited until 1966, in the Harvard dissertation of I. T. Kaufman, "The Samaria Ostraca: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Palaeography." This dissertation is as yet unpublished, but the content of the texts may be seen

in Lemaire, *Ostraca*, pp. 29-38. A few more ostraca were found in the expedition of 1931-1935; these are discussed by Lemaire in *Ostraca*, pp. 245-250.

The Samaria ostraca furnish the only extensive group of inscriptions, other than seals, from Northern Israel and are thus invaluable for all aspects of the history of the area, especially geography (because of the place names mentioned in the ostraca), onomastics (many personal names are mentioned as senders and recipients), and linguistics (e.g., the spelling *yn* for "wine," versus *yyn* in Judah, provides the principal linguistic isogloss between the two dialects, /*é*/ versus /*ay*/).

Unfortunately, the lack of certain archaeological criteria and the brevity of the individual texts (text 6, e.g., reads "In year nine, from Quseh to Godaw, one jar of old wine") has led to an extreme amount of disparity among scholars in their dating of the texts (plausible dates range from about 795 to about 735 B.C.) and their analyses of the function of the texts (tax receipts, accounts of provisions for the palace, accounts of produce rendered to absent landlords). As recent examples of the options chosen by different scholars I cite two positions. Lemaire, *Ostraca*, p. 81, dates the ostraca to Joash (795-794 B.C.) and Jeroboam II (776 B.C.). He analyzes their function as accounts of provisions entering the palace from royal estates which had been placed under the control of royal favorites. The commodities mentioned would be the payments due to the palace from the actual farmers in the name of the landlord, who was probably absent from the estate, perhaps residing in Samaria. The workings of a comparable arrangement are described quite clearly in 2 Sam 9, where Ziba, the farmer, must send produce to Jerusalem to support his master Mephibosheth, all of this directed by David the king.

Another recent interpretation of these texts is the highly original reconstruction of William H. Shea ("The Date and Significance of the Samaria Ostraca," *IEJ* 27 [1977]: 16-27). Shea

dates the ostraca to Menahem (740-739 B.C.) and Pekah (737 B.C.). He solves the difficulty of the ostraca dated to Pekah carrying the date "year 15" (and in one case "year 17") by referring to 2 Kgs 15:27, which ascribes a twenty-year reign to Pekah (i.e., Pekah was counting his years of secessionist rule somewhere outside territory controlled by Menahem into the total of his years of rule as king of Israel). The function of the ostraca was to mark the entry of taxes imposed by the king. In Menahem's case, these taxes were made necessary by the recent imposition of tribute by Tiglath-Pileser III.

These two plausible reconstructions of the setting and function of the Samaria ostraca illustrate the great difficulties faced by scholars in treating such laconic documents.

The *Lachish ostraca* consist of twenty-two texts from Tell ed-Duweir, a site located in the Shephela, about forty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. The site has been identified quite generally with Lachish since the discovery of the text there which mentions Lachish. (It should be borne in mind, however, that some scholars have interpreted that text, Lachish 4, cited in full below, as referring to Lachish, not as the city to which the letter is being sent, but as a third location. This would mean that the site where the letter was found is not Lachish. See D. W. Thomas, "The Site of Ancient Lachish: The Evidence of Ostrakon IV from Tell ed-Duweir," *PEQ* 72 [1940]: 148-149.) The first eighteen ostraca were found in 1935 and were published by H. Torczyner in the first volume of the Lachish publication series as *The Lachish Letters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938). Three more ostraca were discovered in 1938 and were published by Torczyner in *ʿwdwt lkyš: mktbym mymy yrmyhw hnbyʿ* (Jerusalem: Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, 1940; this publication included a new study of the earlier ostraca, as well). D. Deringer re-edited all these ostraca in the third Lachish volume, *The Iron Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 331-339. Finally, an ostrakon was found during the 1966 excavation un-

dertaken at Tell ed-Duweir by Y. Aharoni ("Trial Excavation in the 'Solar Shrine' at Lachish, Preliminary Report," *IEJ* 18 [1968]: 168-169). All of the ostraca with a readable text have been treated by Lemaire in *Ostraca*, pp. 83-143, and selections are available in many of the collections of Semitic texts (e.g., *KAI* 192-199; *TSSI* 1: 32-49; *ANET*, pp. 321-322).

The state of preservation of the Lachish ostraca ranges from almost perfect (e.g., nos. 1, 2) to practically unreadable (nos. 10, 14, 15, 21). There are two types of texts—name lists (nos. 1, 11, 19, 20, 21) and letters (the rest). We know that the name lists served various functions, because in one each name is followed by a number (Lachish 19), while in another each name is preceded by the preposition "to" (Lachish 22). Unfortunately, we do not have enough texts (and those we do have are too broken) for us to be able to arrive at certain conclusions as to the function of each document. The letters are from an inferior (once named Hoshayahu, in 3:1), to a superior (Ya'ush, named three times: 2:1; 3:2; 6:1). In content, most of these letters appear to deal with preparations for an expected Babylonian invasion, and thus may be dated to summer 589 B.C. (for this dating, which goes against the general trend to date the texts to shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, see Lemaire, *Ostraca*, pp. 139-143). As an example of one of these texts, perhaps the most famous, I cite Lachish 4:³

- 1) May Yahweh give you good news
- 2) at this time. And now, your servant has done
- 3) everything my lord sent (word to do). I have written down everything
- 4) my lord sent me (word to do). As regards what my lord said
- 5) about Beth-HRPD, there is no
- 6) one there. As for Semakyahu, Shemayahu has seized him and
- 7) taken him up to the city. Your servant cannot
- 8) send the witness there today.
- 9) For if he participates in the morning tour
- 10) he will know that we are watching the
- 11) Lachish (fire-) signals according to the code which my lord
- 12) gave us, for we cannot see Azeqah.

³ This translation is my own. For a full philological defense of this interpretation, see my forthcoming *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters*.

The third and final main group of Hebrew inscriptions is composed of the more than two hundred texts from Tel Arad (109 texts in Hebrew, 85 in Aramaic, two in Greek, five in Arabic) published by Y. Aharoni and J. Naveh as *ktwbwt 'rd* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1975). These inscriptions are the epigraphic fruit of excavations carried out between 1962 and 1967. Field director Aharoni employed the method of dipping all sherds in water and examining them for traces of writing before scrubbing off the dirt. It is at least partially due to this technique that many more inscribed ostraca were found at Arad than have been found at any other Palestinian site to date. Of the 109 Hebrew inscriptions, 88 were ostraca, 16 were incised jar inscriptions, and five were seals. There has already been discussion as to the dating of the archaeological strata at Arad⁴ and there will undoubtedly be more discussion of the archaeological and epigraphic evidence. Aharoni found Hebrew inscriptions in Strata XI-VI, which he dates from the tenth to the sixth century B.C. (*ktwbwt 'rd*, pp. 8, 211-216). An independent study of these texts by a specialist in epigraphy has not yet appeared, but from the statements of archaeologists⁵ and from my work on the letters⁶ it appears very likely that the chronological range of the Hebrew inscriptions will be narrowed considerably.

Five distinct types of inscriptions stand out clearly in the Arad texts: letters, commodity lists, name lists, seals, and short jar inscriptions. The letters are the most important from a general historical perspective, for they partially reveal the socio-

⁴ J. S. Holladay, "Of Sherds and Strata: Contributions Toward an Understanding of the Archaeology of the Divided Monarchy," in *Magnalia Dei. The Mighty Acts of God. Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, and P. D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 253-293, esp. pp. 275 and 281, n. 26.

⁵ I have had a preliminary initiation into the discussions while participating in a seminar at the University of Chicago which focused on a paper by Samuel R. Wolff entitled "The Archaeological and Historical Contexts of the Arad Inscriptions." Such discussions will surely make their way into print as time goes by.

⁶ See my "Letters from Tel Arad" (at the time of this writing still forthcoming, in *UF* 10 [1978]).

economic workings of southern Judah in about 597 B.C., shortly before Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion (Lemaire, *Ostraca*, pp. 234-235). They deal largely with distribution of foodstuffs to and through persons called Kittim, probably mercenaries. Another group which is mentioned is the Edomites, who appear as enemies, indicating that the Edomite incursions which earned Obadiah's hatred were under way. The commodity and name lists appear as separate entities (e.g., Arad 33 and 34 are lists of amounts of wheat, while Arad 39 is a list of names) and also as combinations of the two (e.g., Arad 31 begins with the word *ḥtm*, "wheat," and each following line consists of name + symbol denoting an amount of wheat). Relatively few seals were found at Arad, and three of these belong to one person. These three are of great interest, however, for they belong to Elyashib ben Eshyahu to whom most of the Arab letters were addressed and who was thus commander of the fortress shortly before its destruction. I will cite here only two of the jar inscriptions as being the most interesting: Arad 99 consists of the word 'rd, "Arad," inscribed several times on sherds of a badly broken vessel (traces of six repetitions are found on the preserved sherds, which represent less than half of the original surface area of the dish in question). Finally, Arad 104 (and probably 102 and 103 as well) is described with the word *qdš*, "holy," indicating that the vessel and its contents were intended for cultic purposes.

Types of Texts

I will use this section to discuss the various types of epigraphic Hebrew documents (*genres* in a broad sense of the term), introducing here the individual finds and associating them with the principal groups of texts just discussed.

Epigraphic Hebrew furnishes no examples of royal monumental inscriptions, a type well known from Mesopotamia and Egypt. There are, however, several inscriptions on stone intended to be read by a larger number of persons than, say, a

letter. The best example of such an inscription is the Siloam Tunnel inscription, which was inscribed on the wall near the south end of Hezekiah's tunnel. Though the text was cut out of the wall in 1890, the visitor to Jerusalem can still today traverse the water tunnel and visualize the scene as two crews of workmen, tunneling from opposite ends, met "pick against pick. Then the waters flowed from the spring to the pool—(a distance of) 1200 cubits." For a complete English translation, see *ANET*, p. 321, with a photograph in *ANEP*, no. 275.

Another form of the inscription in stone was the tomb inscription. Probably the best known tomb inscription of the Israelite period is the epitaph of a royal steward from the village of Silwan, just a short distance east of the Siloam tunnel. Though it was first discovered by the pioneer French archaeologist C. Clermont-Ganneau in 1870, this inscription was not really deciphered until 1953, by N. Avigad ("The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village," *IEJ* 3 [1953]: 137-152; cf. *KAI* 191; *TSSI* 1: 23-24). We do not know the deceased person's full name (only the last part, *-yhw*, "yahu," an extremely common element in Judaeon personal names, is preserved), but his rank is given as *'sr l hbyt*, "the one who is over the (royal) house." In his inscription he claims that there is no gold or silver in the tomb (to be robbed), and lays a curse on anyone who would open the tomb.

Also on stone, but of an entirely different genre, is the famous Gezer Calendar (*KAI* 182; *TSSI* 1: 1-4; *ANET*, p. 320; *ANEP*, no. 272). Though there is a great deal of debate as to the form and meaning of one of the forms which recurs four times in this inscription (*yrhw* < *yrh*, "month"), the linking of that word with various agricultural terms (such as harvest, sowing, flax, barley, vines, summer-fruit) indicates that the word "calendar" used to describe the text cannot be far wrong. The primary importance of this text is for the history of the Hebrew language, for it is the earliest continuous text in Hebrew (10th century) published

to date. (For an earlier text, which apparently contains only exercises in writing the letters of the alphabet, see the new discovery reported by M. Kochavi, "An Ostrakon of the Period of the Judges from 'Izbet Šarṭah," *Tel Aviv* 4 [1977]: 1-13).

The most important genre in Hebrew inscriptions, in terms of quantity of connected text, is that of letters. As regards the main groups discussed in the preceding section, most of the texts from Tell ed-Duweir are letters and at least twenty-one of the Hebrew texts from Tel Arad are letters.

The letters from Tell ed-Duweir (the so-called Lachish letters) are characterized by being from inferior to superior, dealing with politico-military matters, and containing several formulae unattested elsewhere in the corpus of Hebrew letters. Examples of these formulae are the greeting formula *yšm' yhwḥ 't 'dny šm't šlm 't kym 't kym*, "may YHWH cause my lord to hear news of well-being at this very time," and the formula three times used to offer humble thanks at the beginning of the body of a letter *my 'bdk klb ky*, "who is your servant but a dog that (my lord should remember his servant, etc.)."

Most of the Arad letters are from superior to inferior (this is surmised from the fact that they contain no greetings nor reference to the relationship between correspondents) and deal with shipments of foodstuffs. The following is an example of this type (Arad 1):

- 1) To Elyashib. And
- 2) now, give to the Kittim
- 3) three *bat*-measures of wine and
- 4) write down the date.
- 5) From what is left of the first
- 6) meal, have one *homer*-measure (?)
- 7) of meal loaded (to be used)
- 8) to make bread
- 9) for them. Give (them)
- 10) the wine from the craters.⁷

One letter dealing with foodstuffs is from inferior to superior, as its first few lines indicate (Arad 18): "To my lord Elyashib.

⁷ Hebrew *h'gnt*, large open bowls.

May YHWH concern himself with your well-being. And now, give Shemaryahu a *letek*-measure (?) (of meal?).” In addition, there are three letters between family members (Arad 16, 21, 40), which seem to deal at least in part with matters of more moment—warfare with Edom: [*wz*]’*t hr’h ’š[r]* ’*d[m ’šth]*, “This is the evil which Edom has done” (Arad 40:14-15). Yet another letter, the first part of which is almost completely effaced, deals more clearly with the same problem (Arad 24):

- 12) from Arad fifty and from Qinah [. .]
- 13) and send them to Ramat-Negeb under
- 14) Malkiyahu son of Qerabur. He is to hand
- 15) them over to Elisha son of Yirmeyahu
- 16) at Ramat-Negeb lest anything happen to
- 17) the city. This is an order from the king—a life and
- 18) death matter for you. I have sent you this message to
- 19) warn you now: These men (must be) with Elisha
- 20) lest (the) Edom(ites) go there.

The last letter to be dealt with here does not come from one of the major groups, but from excavations carried out by J. Naveh in 1960 at a site about a mile south of Yavneh-Yam on the coast of Israel. The text was first published by Naveh as “A Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C.,” *IEJ* 10 (1960): 129-139, and has since been included in most collections: *KAI* 200; Lemaire, *Ostraca*, pp. 259-268; *TSSI* 1: 26-30; *ANETSTP*, p. 568 and no. 808. The site has been named Mešad Ḥashavyahu (“Fort of Ḥashavyahu”) after one of the persons mentioned in the texts from the site. The letter is written in fourteen lines on a large sherd recovered in several fragments. The lower right hand corner, comprising parts of lines 11-15, was only partially recovered. The text is a petition from a reaper to the local military official (*hšr* = *haššar*) for the return of a garment which had been seized, apparently because the reaper’s supervisor thought that the reaper had not completed his section of the harvest. The text makes two main contributions to our knowledge of the period (ca. 620 B.C.): the matter of the garment provides an extra-biblical parallel for the biblical laws concerning garments

taken in pledge (Exod 22:25-26; Deut 24:10-17; cf. Amos 2:8). Second, the find of a text written in Judaeen Hebrew, dating on archaeological and epigraphic grounds to the late seventh century B.C., with apparently biblical notions of justice, in a fortress in the southern coastal area, seems to indicate expansion of Judaeen hegemony under Josiah not only north (2 Chr 34:6) but west.

The economic/administrative documents in epigraphic Hebrew are, unfortunately, rather poor. We do have the letters dealing with supplies from Arad (and one from Duweir [no. 9, cf. Lemaire, *Ostraca*, pp. 127-129]), but we have no contracts recording sales, purchases, rentals, sharecropping arrangements, marriages, adoptions, etc. The texts we do have, primarily from Samaria and Arad (for which see above), are so laconic as to defy complete interpretation. Even these, however, are useful for linguistics, onomastics, and topography. One of the most interesting of the isolated finds of this type of text may be cited here. It is the two-line incised ostrakon from Tell Qasile (near Tel Aviv) which reads [z]hb 'pr lbyr hrn š 30, "Gold of Ophir for Beth-Horon: 30 shekels" (B. Maisler, "Two Hebrew Ostraca from Tell Qasile," *JNES* 10 [1951]: 265-267; *TSSI* 1: 15-17; Lemaire, *Ostraca*, pp. 251-255).

The last category to be dealt with here is the minor inscriptions on jars, seals, and weights. These may be classified as a specific type of text from the perspective of function, for they are, in general, intended to identify the item in question either as to quantity (e.g., *bt lmlk*, "royal *bat*-measure" [cf. *TSSI* 1: 70]), content (e.g., *lyhzyhw yyn khl*, "[Belonging] to Yahzeyahu, wine of *khl*" [N. Avigad, "Two Hebrew Inscriptions on Wine Jars," *IEJ* 22 (1972): 1-9]), or ownership (e.g., previous example).

The seals form the most numerous category of these small texts. Literally hundreds have been found in scientific excavations or by treasure-hunters. Since the older collections are

badly out of date (see *TSSI* 1: 59-60 for bibliography), we are desperately in need of a new corpus of seals. Two scholars, N. Avigad in Israel and P. Bordreuil in France, are said to be working on such collections, but actual publication may be quite distant. Larry G. Herr's *The Scripts of Ancient Northwest Semitic Seals* is, at the time of this writing, scheduled for publication by Scholar's Press in 1978. For the time being, one must work with the lists of currently published seals prepared by F. Vattioni: "I sigilli ebraici," *Biblica* 50 (1969): 357-388; "I sigilli ebraici II," *Augustinianum* 11 (1971): 447-454. The primary usefulness of the seals is in the study of onomastics: they provide us with a corpus of names used in Palestine during the periods represented (most of the Hebrew seals come from the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.). In addition they often provide relationships ("X son of Y," "X daughter of Y," "X wife of Y," etc.), and social position (e.g., "X servant of the king," "X who is over the palace," etc.). Occasionally a name and position appear which refer to biblical characters, e.g., *lgdlyhw [']šr ʾ hby[t]*, "(Belonging) to Gedalyahu, who is over the palace," probably to be identified with the Gedaliah of 2 Kgs 25:22; Jer 40:5; etc. (cf. *TSSI* 1: 62, 64).

A closely related type of inscription is the impression left on clay by one of the seals just discussed. The impression often includes not only the seal impression, but traces on the reverse side of the papyrus document which it was used to seal and of the string used to tie the rolled or folded papyrus. Though these bullae have appeared rather frequently in excavation or on the antiquities market (though not nearly as frequently as seals, because of the less durable nature of the clay bullae), the most striking single group of these texts which has been published to date was made available (though not sold) to N. Avigad. He was able to examine and photograph the documents and published them as *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive*, *Qedem* 4

(Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976).⁸ The group consists of 65 bullae and two seals bearing names, relationships and titles, and the province designation "Judah." They come, therefore, from the Persian province of Judah and are dated by the editor to the late sixth century B.C. Their importance is in providing us with many more documents for the period of Persian domination of Judah, along with the name of at least one previously unknown governor of the province (Elnatan: Avigad, pp. 5-7).

A very frequently attested form of stamp inscription is *lmlk*, "to the king," followed by one of four place names, Hebron, Socoh, Ziph, and *mmšt* (the last place is of uncertain identification⁹). Though more than 800 of these stamped jar handles have been found to date,¹⁰ only these four places are included as geographical designations. This has influenced the various proposals regarding the function of these inscriptions; e.g., that they represent royal potteries or vineyards (P. Lapp, "Late Royal Seals from Judah," *BASOR* 158 [1960]: 11-22), or royal estates from which taxes were due (Welten, *Die Königs-Stempel*, pp. 133-174).

Many weights have been discovered in Palestine, the most frequent being "shekel," "half (-shekel)" (the Hebrew word is *bq'*), "pim" (Hebrew *pym*, the name of a unit, perhaps 2/3 of a shekel¹¹), and *nešep* (perhaps meaning "half," but, if so, half

⁸ An even larger group, 128 bullae, was found with the fourth century Aramaic documents discovered in a cave in the Wadi Daliyeh, but these are as yet unpublished (for the present, see F. M. Cross, "Papyri of the Fourth Century B.C. from Daliyeh," *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology*, ed. D. N. Freedman and J. C. Greenfield [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969; Anchor ed., 1971], pp. 45-69 [Anchor ed.]).

⁹ For a recent attempt at fixing the location of *mmšt* (at Amwas = Emmaus of the New Testament), see A. Lemaire, "*mmšt* = Amwas, vers la solution d'une énigme de l'épigraphie hébraïque," *RB* 82 (1975): 15-23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹ Here is a case of a very minor inscription type elucidating the biblical text. In 1 Sam. 13:21 is found the Hebrew word *pim*, whose meaning was totally unknown before these weights were discovered. Now we at least know that a weight, i.e., an amount of money, was intended in the text, though the exact amount is still uncertain (cf. NEB).

of what is uncertain). See the discussions by Gibson in *TSSI* 1: 67-70, and by O. R. Sellers, *IDB* 4: 830-833.

Hebrew Inscriptions as Historical Sources

The Hebrew inscriptions, as compared with the Hebrew Bible, have the great advantage of being original, primary sources rather than texts with a long history of transmission. The advantage consists in furnishing us with documents incontestably composed in the time of the persons and events described in far greater detail in the Bible. The disadvantages are restricted time span (most of the texts date between the middle ninth century and the early sixth, ca. 850-ca. 587 B.C.), restricted literary types (practically no narrative prose and no poetry—the two main types of biblical literature), brevity of individual documents, and frequently lacunary state of preservation. This combination of factors leads to a situation wherein, for example, the ostrakon from Meşad Hashavyahu is extremely important because it is the only Hebrew document of the late seventh century from the southern coast of Palestine. But on the other hand, this text is so non-specific about why such a document was written, why Judaeans were on the coast, and who was responsible for Hebrew-speakers being involved in the grain harvest there, that we are reduced to hypotheses about the exact interpretation and historical import of the text.¹² The same may be said of the Lachish ostraca, concerning which some scholars claim that they depict the final days of the Judaeian monarchy, while others hold that they depict preparations for the Babylonian invasion, that they were written as much as two years before the destruction of Judah.

These pessimistic thoughts having been expressed, it must be made clear that the documents in epigraphic Hebrew are extremely precious. First, because they are all we have, and by their very presence they point up the fact that the Hebrew

¹² For a summary statement, see my "The Judicial Plea from Meşad Hashavyahu (Yavneh-Yam): A New Philological Study" (forthcoming in *Maarav*).

Bible must be considered seriously as a source for the history of Palestine (though the extra-biblical documents discovered to date have not been specific enough or sure enough of interpretation to establish or invalidate the position of one or the other of the various schools of biblical interpretation with regard to the degree of facticity to be expected from a given narrative). Furthermore, though they may not furnish a great deal of material of a specific nature for the political history of Palestine (dates, rulers' names, foreign relations, etc.), they do furnish a great deal of raw data for the auxiliary areas of linguistics, onomastics, topography, and, to a degree, social structure. The documents in Hebrew prose, for example, indicate that biblical Hebrew narrative syntax has been preserved fairly intact since at least the seventh century B.C. The seals and bullae, besides furnishing us with a group of proper names with which to compare the names in biblical narrative, indicate that contracts and other documents were being written on perishable materials which have not come down to us. Such material, though rarely exciting enough to rate newspaper headlines, permits qualified scholars to come to a more precise assessment of life in Palestine during the first half of the first millennium B.C. than would be possible if they were forced to limit their research to the rehashing of old arguments about the biblical text. Moreover, the pace of archaeological discovery in Palestine today¹³ leads us to believe that much more material will be discovered, making the assessment ever more precise.

2. *Epigraphic Documents from Moab, Ammon, and Edom*

The documents in West Semitic dialects from areas generally east of the Jordan and the Rift Valley are included in this survey because they are quite close to Hebrew both linguistically and literarily (the primary difference is that to date no letters are attested from these corpora), while the number of documents

¹³ See, e.g., Ze'ev Meshel and Carol Meyers, "The Name of God in the Wilderness of Zin," *BA* 39 (1976): 6-10.

is yet relatively low, making a brief treatment possible.

By far the most famous document from the area is the 34-line inscription discovered in Dhiban (ancient Dibon) in 1868. After the original discovery, the stela on which the text was inscribed was smashed by suspicious villagers (apparently thinking that a stone so eagerly sought after must contain riches), but a previous squeeze copy and the remaining fragments have permitted a fairly complete restoration of the text, today available in most collections (*KAI* 181; *TSSI* 1: 71-83; *ANET*, pp. 320-321; *ANEP*, no. 274). The text was prepared by Mesha, king of Moab, about 850 B.C. with the purpose of recounting the subjugation of Moab to Israel when Omri was king of Israel, followed by a revolt under the command of Mesha himself once Omri was dead.

The Mesha inscription is of interest from many perspectives beyond the politico-historical one, of which the religious and the linguistic may be singled out. As a religious document, it provides a glimpse into a conception of deity very similar to that of ancient Israel: Mesha's military successes were attributed to the intervention of Moab's principal deity Kemosh, much as Israel's successes were attributed to Yahweh. Linguistically, the language of Mesha was quite close to that of contemporary Israel. Anyone who can read biblical Hebrew can, with some minor adjustments, read Moabite. It is of interest, though of negative interest, that in the more than one hundred years that have intervened since the discovery of the Mesha inscription practically no additional Moabite texts have been found,¹⁴ and, concurrently, no monumental royal inscriptions of Israelite or Judaeon kings have been discovered with which to compare the Moabite text.

Inscriptions in Ammonite, though still rare, have begun to

¹⁴The most important exception is a fragment of another monumental inscription similar in several respects to the well-known version: W. L. Reed and F. V. Winnett, "A Fragment of an Early Moabite Inscription from Kerak," *BASOR* 172 (1963): 1-9.

accumulate in recent years, with several literary types represented, primarily monumental inscriptions, economic texts written on ostraca, and seals. An Ammonite inscription is perceived principally by script (about 750 B.C. the Ammonite script began diverging from the parent Aramaic script,¹⁵ and about 500 B.C. the local script was abandoned in favor of the standard Aramaic cursive¹⁶) and by find spot.¹⁷ Though some recent inscriptions have provided points of comparison with languages used in neighboring countries, we do not yet have enough continuous text in what is certainly Ammonite to determine the parameters of the language.

The most important of the Ammonite monumental inscriptions is the so-called Amman Citadel inscription, edited by S. H. Horn ("The Ammān Citadel Inscription," *BASOR* 193 [1969]: 2-13; for a recent interpretation with bibliography, see E. Puech and A. Rofé, "L'inscription de la citadelle d'Amman," *RB* 80 [1973]: 531-546). The text as preserved consists of only a fragment of the original, and it has yielded little of more than linguistic interest.

The Ammonite inscription which has to date yielded the most politico-historical information was written on a very unmonumental medium: a small bronze bottle, only 10 cm. in length. On the outside of this bottle, inscribed with a sharp instrument, is an eight-line text written by a certain Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, whose father (Hiṣṣalel) and grandfather (another Amminadab) were both kings of the Ammonites (F. Zayadine and H. O. Thompson, "The Ammonite Inscription from Tell

¹⁵ F. M. Cross, "Notes on the Ammonite Inscription from Tell Sirān," *BASOR* 212 (1973): 12-15, esp. p. 13.

¹⁶ F. M. Cross, "Ammonite Ostraca from Heshbon: Heshbon Ostraca IV-VIII," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 1-20.

¹⁷ I.e., most Ammonite texts have been found within the area ascribed to the ancient Ammonites. This criterion is not decisive if the new texts from Tell Deir Alla are indeed Aramaic (the plural in *-n* in these texts would be sufficient to separate them from Ammonite, where the plural is in *-m*; cf. Hoftijzer in *Aramaic Texts from Deir Alla*, p. 290).

Siran," *Berytus* 22 [1973]: 115-140).¹⁸ The text recounts briefly the works of Amminadab and ends with a blessing for his long life.

The Ammonite ostraca of an economic character are from Heshbon and were published by F. M. Cross ("An Ostrakon from Heshbon," *AUSS* 6 [1968]: 223-229; and "Ammonite Ostraca from Heshbon: Heshbon Ostraca IV-VIII," *AUSS* 13 [1975]: 1-20). By far the most important is Heshbon Ostrakon IV, an eleven-line text dated by Cross to about 600 B.C. (*ibid.*, p. 17), which deals with various foodstuffs (wine, flour, cows, grain). Cross interprets the purpose of the text as to note tax receipts.

The Ammonite seals have been brought together by G. Garbini ("La lingua degli Ammoniti," *AION* 30 [1970]: 249-258) and P. Bordreuil ("Inscriptions sigillaires ouest-sémitiques: I. Epigraphie ammonite," *Syria* 50 [1973]: 181-195). The total number of seals in the latter listing was twenty-six. None of the Ammonite seals may be clearly identified with an historical personage known from other sources. The main interest of these documents, then, is for onomastics, epigraphy (the development of the indigenous Ammonite script), and religion (deities which form the theophorous element of some names).

The poorest of the groups being discussed here is the Edomite. The only homogenous group of texts is from Tell el-Kheleifeh (near Eilat). This site yielded texts in Minaean, Judaeen Hebrew, Edomite, Phoenician, and Aramaic (Nelson Glueck, "Tell el-Kheleifeh Inscriptions," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. Hans Goedicke [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971], pp. 225-242. Edomite inscriptions in both cursive and lapidary script were discovered. The most important of the former (no. 6043) is a ten-line list of personal names, some Edomite (most easily identified are those with the divine element *qws*, representing the main Edomite deity). Lapidary

¹⁸ For a list of the known Ammonite kings with a proposed system of dates, see Cross, *BASOR* 212 (1973): 14-15; and for a slightly different version, see F. Zayadine, "Note sur l'inscription de la statue d'Amman J.1656," *Syria* 51 (1974): 129-136, esp. pp. 135-136.

script is found on a jar and on a seal whose imprint reads *lqws'nl 'bd hmlk*, "(Belonging) to Qaws'anal, servant of the king." This seal probably belonged to a high official of an Edomite king who controlled the area of Eilat some time after Judah lost control of it in about 730 B.C.

In an unpublished 1972 Harvard Ph.D. dissertation, L. T. Geraty has argued that at least five of the eight third-century B.C. ostraca found in 1971 at Khirbet el-Kôm (near Hebron) are Edomite. The most interesting of these texts, which appear to be the records of an Idumaeen moneylender, is a 9-line bilingual in Edomite and Greek (L. T. Geraty, "The Khirbet el-Kôm Bilingual Ostrakon," *BASOR* 220 [1975]: 55-61). Though brief, these inscriptions are important for palaeographic, linguistic, and onomastic reasons.

The assessment of the groups of texts just discussed is very similar to that for the epigraphic Hebrew texts: we must be happy that we have even the small amount that is extant. One important problem that plagues the study of these texts is that of identifying them: for the present the dialects are distinguished from Hebrew, Aramaic, and between themselves by extremely few isoglosses.¹⁹ The identification by script is useful, but the Ammonite data indicate that Aramaic texts could be written in Ammonite script and vice versa. For the purposes of writing a history of the area, the presently available texts must of course be utilized, but the tremendous gaps they leave unfilled, both temporally and evidentially, make their final contribution marginal.

¹⁹ The most important linguistic isoglosses are: Moabite has an infixed *-t-* base stem (*lthm* = Hebrew *'lhm* [Niphal]) and masc. pl. nouns in *-n*. Ammonite has a *h-* definite article (separating it from Aramaic) and *-ay* reduces to *-ê* (*bn* = *banê*) while *-aw-* does not reduce (*ywmt* = "days"). Edomite shares at least two of these features (*hmlk*, *qws'nl*).