

## A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF ARAMAIC OSTRACA OF SYRIA-PALESTINE DURING THE PERSIAN PERIOD

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### 1. Introduction

This study investigates the semantics of the Aramaic ostraca of Syria-Palestine during the Persian period. It attempts a structural system of classification on the basis of the analysis of the meaning of each individual word of the corpus of inscriptions, as ascertained by studying the context of each word within the specific inscription. Here only the results of this analysis are presented.<sup>1</sup> The structural system was adapted from Louw and Nida's semantic domains.<sup>2</sup>

According to Louw, semantics is "the study of the relationship between meaning (defined as the content of what people intend to communicate) and the linguistic signs used to express such meanings."<sup>3</sup> A "semantic domain" describes areas of meaning, structured in a specific pattern. For example, all terms relating to *possess*, *transfer*, and *exchange* are grouped together; subdivisions of this semantic domain are such ideas as *earn*, *pay*, and *give*. H. Donner suggests that the main emphasis of Aramaic lexicography should be in the area of comparative Semitic philology/lexicography, which forms a part of the study of semantics. However, before the study of comparative philology can be attempted, one must grasp the full meaning of a term as it exists in a given time

<sup>1</sup>This study is partly based on my M.A. thesis, "The Aramaic Epigraphical Material of Syria-Palestine During the Persian Period with Reference to the History of the Jews" (Department of Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Stellenbosch, 1992). I wish to thank the Centre of Science Development for financial assistance, and my promoter Dr. P. A. Kruger, and my internal examiner Prof. W. T. Claassen for reading this manuscript and providing helpful suggestions. The bulk of my thesis discusses each term with reference to its morphology, semantics (main and subdomains), syntactical function within the inscription, and reference to specific terminology, including military, sacrificial, and administrative terminology. For example, the discussion of the 13-word Arad 1 inscription takes up more than four pages (108-111).

<sup>2</sup>J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>J. P. Louw, "Semantics," *ABD*, 5:1078.

period, language corpus, and geographical unit.<sup>4</sup>

The study of semantics partly concerns lexicography and is most important in the search for the meaning and significance of an inscription. Lexicography includes sub-disciplines such as etymology, comparative linguistics, and semantics. In the past the field of semantic studies has been widely neglected.<sup>5</sup> Standard Aramaic grammars commonly lack a separate section on the theory and application of semantics and are predominantly concerned with morphology, phonology, orthography, and—to a certain degree—syntax. Most lexicons and dictionaries seem to pay more attention to etymology and comparative linguistics and do not “concentrate on showing the use that Biblical writers make of the Hebrew [and Aramaic] vocabulary.”<sup>6</sup> This can also be seen in Kutscher’s programmatic review article on Aramaic, which contains only sections on phonology, morphology, and syntax.<sup>7</sup> In recent years, however, there seems to be a new trend towards the integration of semantic studies and lexicography.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>H. Donner, “Aramäische Lexikographie,” in *Studies on Semitic Lexicography, Quaderni di Semitistica*, 2 (Florence: Istituto di Linguistica e di Lingue Orientali Università de Firenze, 1973), 127-143, esp. 131, n. 7.

<sup>5</sup>J. P. Louw maintains that “earlier writings on semantics were even more restricted; they were concerned merely with the historical development of words and their meanings” (“Semantics,” *ABD*, 5:1078). Luis Alonso Schöckel provides the rationale for the theoretical basics of the new *Diccionario Bíblico Hebreo-español* project: “At the present time there is a general agreement that neither etymology nor comparative linguistics is the proper approach to determine the meaning of a word” (“The *Diccionario Bíblico Hebreo-español*,” *ZAH* 4 [1991]: 76).

<sup>6</sup>Alonso Schöckel, “DBHE,” 76. See also Luis Alonso Schöckel, V. Morla, and V. Collado, eds., *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español* (Madrid: Trotta, 1994), 7-17; J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 206-262. For a review of the history of linguistics, see M. F. Rooker, “The Diachronic study of Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 14 (1988): 199-214; C.H.J. van der Merwe, “Recent Trends in the Linguistic Description of Hebrew,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 15 (1989): 231-234.

<sup>7</sup>Although it represents a cursory overview of some lexicographic studies, with no attempt to systematize the findings, the only section that could be considered to involve a semantic analysis is the section on lexicography.

<sup>8</sup>Louw sees a changing paradigm in the study of semantics: “During the 20th century, however, etymology became restricted to the mere history of words and their change of meanings, while semantics emerged as the study of the relationship between meaning (defined as the content of what people intend to communicate) and the linguistic signs used to express such meanings” (“Semantics,” *ABD*, 5:1078). The basic methodological considerations on semantics—although 30 years old—are contained in James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). Although it contains no specific section on semantics, Waltke and O’Connor’s work has a quite comprehensive list of references to semantics in its index (B.K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990]). Muraoka’s revision of Joüon’s classic grammar lacks any reference to semantics in its index (P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical*

My study seeks to contribute to this trend.<sup>9</sup>

Since the point of departure of the semantic analysis is the system of semantic domains developed for NT Greek, my viewpoint should be explained. While it is important to keep in mind that the classification of semantic domains is not universal and that similarities of different bodies of literature in different languages might be coincidental, it is nevertheless possible to utilize both the methodological and the structural framework (in terms of organization of the analysis) of semantic analysis in another language. The fact that not all domains that are proposed by Louw and Nida occur in the semantic analysis of the Aramaic epigraphical material of Syria-Palestine has to be understood in light of this consideration. Furthermore, the source material is limited. This article does not comprehensively cover the whole Aramaic material of the Persian period or even of Imperial Aramaic. It is rather a pilot project seeking to apply the principles of Louw and Nida's work to the limited corpus of the epigraphical material from Syria-Palestine on hard surface (i.e., ostraca).

My study is designed as follows. First I will give an overview of the main principles of Louw and Nida's work which form the methodological basis of the study. Next I will introduce the sources. Then I will deal with the actual list of the semantic domains discovered in the corpus of inscriptions; a concise translation has been included with each word. An analysis will follow, evaluating the findings of the semantic domains with respect to the possibility of defining *genre* borders in regard to the employed semantic domains. Finally, a summary of the findings will be presented.

## 2. *Semantic Principles Involved in This Study*

The following principles, taken from Louw and Nida, form the basis of the dictionary: (1) There are no synonyms; thus no two lexical items have the same meaning; (2) "Differences in meaning are marked by context, either textual or extratextual"; (3) "Meaning is defined by a set of distinctive features"; (4) "Figurative meanings differ from their bases with respect to three fundamental factors: diversity in domains, differences in the degree of awareness of the relationship between literal and figurative meanings, and the extent of conventional usage"; (5) "Both the different

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*Hebrew*, trans. and rev. T. Muraoka, 2 vols., *Subsidia Biblica* [Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991].

<sup>9</sup>Work on a semantic-domain dictionary of the OT began in 1985 (J. P. Louw, "A Semantic-Domain Dictionary," in *Proceedings of the First International Colloquium, Bible and Computer: The Text* (Paris: Champion, 1986), 261. Rainey's analysis of the semantics of seal impressions is a further example of careful work (A. F. Rainey, "Private Seal Impressions: A Note on Semantics," *IEJ* 16 [1966]: 187-190). See also A. F. Rainey, "Royal Weights and Measures," *BASOR* 179 (1965): 34-36.

meanings of the same word and the related meanings of different words tend to be multidimensional and are only rarely orthogonal in structure—that is to say, the different meanings tend to form irregularly shaped constellations rather than neatly organized structures."<sup>10</sup>

My work has applied these principles to the field of Semitic epigraphy. The end result should be a more comprehensive understanding of certain terms or discovering specific patterns. When implemented, these principles helped to put words into their main and subdomains, thereby filtering out the specific meaning of a word in a specific context.

### 3. *The Sources*

The inscriptions included in this study share the following similarities: They all consist of Aramaic material from Syria-Palestine during the Persian period (538-332 B.C.) and are all written on hard surfaces (thus excluding material on parchment or papyrus). The provenance of one inscription (Jericho ostrakon) is not absolutely clear, although the arguments seem to favor a Palestinian origin for the sherd.<sup>11</sup> For the Lachish ostrakon, a new reading has been suggested, since the official excavation report labels the sherd as "illegible."<sup>12</sup>

The following table is a concise list of the relevant inscriptions in alphabetical order with their bibliographic reference to the *editio princeps* of each.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Louw and Nida, 1:xvi-xviii.

<sup>11</sup>See A. Lemaire, "Un nouvel ostrakon Araméen du V<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C.," *Sem* 25 (1975): 94-96.

<sup>12</sup>Compare O. Tufnell, *Lachish, III (Tell ed-Duweir): The Iron Age. Text and Plates* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pl. 49:2 and remarks there; see Gerald A. Klingbeil, "The Aramaic Ostrakon from Lachish: A New Reading and Interpretation," *AUSS* 33 (1995): 77-84.

<sup>13</sup>For a more detailed list of the Aramaic inscriptions and bibliographical references to the most relevant studies on each, see Klingbeil, "Aramaic Epigraphical Material," 30-33.

NAME OF INSCRIPTION	NUMBER	BIBLIOGRAPHY
Arad ostraca	45 published 42 utilized <sup>14</sup>	J. Naveh, "The Aramaic Ostraca from Tel Arad," in <i>Arad Inscriptions</i> , ed. Y. Aharoni, Judean Desert Studies (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 153-176. Y. Aharoni and R. Amiran, "The first season of excavations at Tel Arad," <i>BIES (Hebrew Yediot)</i> 27 (1963): 227-229; pl. VIII:2.
Ashdod ostrakon	1	J. Naveh, "An Aramaic Ostrakon from Ashdod," in <i>Ashdod II-III: The Second and Third Seasons of Excavations 1963, 1965</i> , ed. M. Dothan, 'Atiqot IX-X (Jerusalem: The Department of Antiquities and Museums/Ministry of Education and Cultures/Holy Land Exhibition Fund/Ashdod Expedition, 1971), 200-201; pl. 13:1.
Beer-Sheba ostraca I excavation of 1969-71	27 excavated 17 legible (numbers 1-17)	J. Naveh, "The Aramaic Inscriptions," in <i>Beer-Sheba I: Excavations at Tel-Beer-Sheba 1969-1971 Seasons</i> , ed. Y. Aharoni (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University/Institute of Archaeology, 1973), 79-82; pls. 35-38.
Beer-Sheba ostraca II excavation of 1971-76	45 excavated 28 are legible <sup>15</sup> (numbers 18-45)	J. Naveh, "The Aramaic Ostraca from Tel Beer-Sheba. Seasons 1971-76," <i>Tel Aviv</i> 6/3-4 (1979): 182-198; pls. 24-31.
Beth Pelet ostraca	2 <sup>16</sup>	A. Cowley, "Two Aramaic Ostraka," <i>JRAS</i> (1929): 111-112; pl. V. A. Cowley, "Aramaic Ostrakon," in <i>Beth-Pelet II</i> , ed. by J. L. Starkey and G. Lankester-Harding (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1932), 29; pl. 61:3.

<sup>14</sup>Naveh has suggested readings for 45 ostraca (153-176). My study analyzes only 42 from Arad, since inscriptions 44 and 45 bear Herodian and Nabatean scripts, respectively, and thus do not fall into the time for this study. Naveh's inscription 42 was not included because it did not render an intelligible reading, although individual letters were legible. Consequently Naveh's number 43 is my number 42.

<sup>15</sup>Since only 17 of the total 27 inscriptions of the first found corpus of inscriptions could be deciphered, the second batch was numbered sequentially, from 18 to 45. (Naveh started his numbering from 27.)

<sup>16</sup>The classification of Beth-Pelet ostracas nos. 1 and 2 was arbitrary, with no. 1 corresponding to Cowley's 1932 publication and no. 2 corresponding to Cowley's 1929 publication.

NAME OF INSCRIPTION	NUMBER	BIBLIOGRAPHY
Heshbon ostraca <sup>17</sup>	2 <sup>18</sup>	F. M. Cross, "An Ostrakon from Heshbon," <i>AUSS</i> 7 (1969): 223-229; pl. 25, fig. 13. F. M. Cross, "Heshbon Ostrakon II," <i>AUSS</i> 11 (1973): 126-131; pl. 16, fig. 10.
Jericho ostrakon	1	Lemaire, 87-96; pl. 5.
Lachish ostrakon	1	Tufnell, <i>Lachish III</i> , 145-146; pl. 49:2. <sup>19</sup>
Nebi Yunis ostrakon	1	F. M. Cross, "An Ostrakon from Nebi Yunis," <i>IEJ</i> 14 (1964): 185-186; pl. H.

#### 4. List of Semantic Domains

The *genre* which appears to be involved in these inscriptions is undoubtedly the category of business and administrative texts. Because the Aramic epigraphical material of Syria-Palestine during the Persian period seems to represent a rather compact body of inscriptions in terms of its context, purpose, and *genre*, the semantic analysis of this spectrum of inscriptions renders a survey of semantic domains used in this specific *genre*. The list will be structured according to the following pattern and will be sorted according to Louw and Nida's list of main domains.<sup>20</sup>

#### MAIN DOMAIN

*Subdomain (with at least one reference from the corpus)*

Number—Word in Aramaic → contextual translation → one reference<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup>The language of these ostraca is disputed. Cross noted that the script was Aramaic, but the dialect was either Ammonite or Hebrew ("Ostrakon from Heshbon"). Aufrecht includes them in the corpus of Ammonite inscriptions (*A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*, Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies, 4 [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1989], 174-176, 199-201). His interpretation has not been universally accepted.

<sup>18</sup>The numbering of the Heshbon ostraca corresponds to the original numbering of the excavators used in the *editio principes*.

<sup>19</sup>A photograph is published, but no reading is suggested; a note states that the ostrakon is illegible.

<sup>20</sup>For this reason the numbering of the main domains is not consecutive. Only the main domains found in the corpus of inscriptions are given. The numbering system is the one used by Louw and Nida.

<sup>21</sup>The reference includes the following information: (1) name of the ostrakon, (2) number of the ostrakon in the corpus from the specific site, and (3) the line in the inscription

## 1. GEOGRAPHICAL OBJECTS AND FEATURES

*H. Depressions and holes*<sup>22</sup>

1.1. מערה - cave - Arad 38:1

*O. Pastures and cultivated land*

1.2. חקלא - field - Beth-Pelet 1:1

## 3. PLANTS

*C. Plants that are not trees*

3.1. שערן - abbreviated ש - barley - Arad 1:2

3.2. חנשין - abbreviated ח - wheat - Arad 13:2

3.3. כרם - vineyard - Ashdod 1:1

## 4. ANIMALS

*A. Animals*

4.1. סוסה - mare - Arad 1:1

4.2. חמר - donkey - Arad 1:2

4.3. בני רכש - colts - Arad 6:1

4.4. גמל - camel - Arad 24:1

5. FOODS AND CONDIMENTS<sup>23</sup>*A. Food*

5.1. שערן - abbreviated ש - barley - Arad 1:2

5.2. חנשין - abbreviated ח - wheat - Arad 13:2

5.3. קמח - flour - Arad 28:1

5.4. עבור - corn - Beer-Sheba 5:2

## 6. ARTIFACTS

*B. Instruments used in agriculture and husbandry*

6.1. פדנא - plough - Heshbon 2:1

*K. Money and monetary units*

6.2. כסף - silver - Arad 41:1 obverse and reverse

6.3. רבען - abbreviated ר - quarter - Arad 41:6, 8, 9 obverse

6.4. חשקל - abbreviated ש - sheqel - Nebi Yunis 1:1

6.5. מעהמנה - abbreviated מ - weight or small coin(?) - Beer-Sheba 28:1

(separated by a colon). Thus Arad 1:2 indicates the second line of the first ostrakon from Arad.

<sup>22</sup>As may be noted in this entry, the first subdivision of geographical objects and features, *Depressions and holes*, starts with the letter H. In Louw and Nida other subdivisions precede *Depressions and holes*.

<sup>23</sup>It seems important to note that "barley" שערן and "wheat" חנשין are not merely plants (as found in main domain no. 3), but are also descriptive of food and condiments and should therefore also be included in this group. On the other hand, the term קמח is clearly processed food and cannot be included in the plant main domain.

*M. Images and idols*

6.6. נשבא - stele, statue - Samaria 3:1

*P. Containers*

6.7. חסף - earthen vessel - Beer-Sheba 13:1

6.8. גרב - abbreviated ג - jar - Ashdod 1:2

6.9. שפיאן - pitchers - Tell el-Kheleifeh 2:1

6.10. כפק - pitcher - Samaria 5:1

*R. Adornments*

6.11. חרוז - bead - Arad 41:8 obverse

6.12. רקמא - embroidery - Arad 41:9 obverse

*S. Plant products*

6.13. חמר - wine - Tell el-Kheleifeh 2:2, 3

*W. Miscellaneous*

6.14. נצבא - stele, sign to remember, statue<sup>24</sup> - Samaria 3:1

**7. CONSTRUCTIONS***B. Buildings*

7.1. מחבנה - straw-shed - Arad 38:2

7.2. בית - house<sup>25</sup> - Arad 38:3

*H. Building materials*

7.3. אריא - beam (presumably of wood) - Beer-Sheba 41:1

**8. BODY, BODY PARTS, AND BODY PRODUCTS***B. Parts of the body*

8.1. יד - hand - Beer-Sheba 3:1

**9. PEOPLE***B. Males*

9.1. גברין - men (pl.) - Arad 7:2

**10. KINSHIP TERMS***A. Groups and members of groups of persons regarded as related by blood*

10.1. בית - house<sup>26</sup> - Beth-Pelet 2:2

<sup>24</sup>Since the meaning of the stele is not clear from the inscriptions, the term can have several meanings: a religious gift, a sign to remember a political decision, a business contract, etc.

<sup>25</sup>The exact contextual meaning of this term depends on the reading of the next word. Naveh reads תבנה וביה, "and his house of straw" ("Aramaic Ostraca from Arad," 166). J.C.L. Gibson reads תורה וביה, "and his ox-stable" (Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, vol. 2, *Aramaic Inscriptions* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975], 152); Y. Aharoni and R. Amiran read תבה וביה, "and its house of fruit," a strange translation, since the 3 sg. m. suffix appears on a well-attested male name ("Excavations at Tel Arad: Preliminary Report on the First Season," *IEJ* 14 [1964]: 141-142).

<sup>26</sup>The following word is אמצין, which could refer to either a proper name or to "your workman." Therefore, in this context בית indicates some kind of kinship and not a building.

## 11. GROUPS AND CLASSES OF PERSONS AND MEMBERS OF SUCH GROUPS

*D. Ethnic-cultural*

11.1. ערביא - Arab (as an socioethnic tag) - Beth-Pelet 2:6

*F. Artistic-economic*<sup>27</sup>11.2. אמןך - workman (or personal name)<sup>28</sup> - Beth-Pelet 2:3

## 12. SUPERNATURAL BEINGS AND POWERS

*A. Supernatural beings*

12.1. יה - hypocoristicon of יהוה - YHWH - Samaria 2:1

## 15. LINEAR MOVEMENT

*J': Ride*<sup>29</sup>15.1. פרשי - horsemen - Arad 7:1<sup>30</sup>15.2. חמר - donkey-drivers - Arad 12:1<sup>31</sup>

## 19. PHYSICAL IMPACT

*E. Press*

19.1. דקיר - to crush (crushed) - Arad 7:2

## 23. PHYSIOLOGICAL PROCESSES AND STATES

*L. Ripen, produce fruit, bear seed*

23.1. זרע - to sow - Beth-Pelet 1:1

## 33. COMMUNICATION

*B" Swear, put under oath, vow*

33.1. נדר - to vow - Samaria 3:1

## 37. CONTROL, RULE

*D. Rule, govern*

37.1. מדינה - city-state, province - Arad 12:1

## 43. AGRICULTURE

*A. Produce, fruit*

43.1. תנבה - fruit - Arad 38:3

## 53. RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

*I. Roles and functions*<sup>27</sup>This subdivision is not included in Louw and Nida's list.<sup>28</sup>In view of the suffix, "workman" seems to be more probable.<sup>29</sup>This subdomain does not appear in the NT and is therefore not in Louw and Nida's list.<sup>30</sup>It may be possible to understand this term as depicting a specific office, thus placing it under main domain 87.<sup>31</sup>In Arad 12:1, חמר was used for "donkey-riders." This term might also be understood as a title and thus placed under domain 87.

53.1. כהן → priest → Samaria 1:1

## 55. MILITARY ACTIVITIES

### C. Army

55.1. דגל → military and socioeconomic unit<sup>32</sup> → Arad 12:2

### F. Bodyguards<sup>33</sup>

55.2. טבחיא → bodyguard → Arad 37:3

## 57. POSSESS, TRANSFER, EXCHANGE

### H. Give

57.1. יתב → to give → Arad 5:1

57.2. נתן → to give → Arad 14:2 obverse

57.3. אסיקו → to bring up → Beer-Sheba 5:2

57.4. דשנא → donation → Nebi Yunis 1:2

### L. Pay, price, cost

57.5. נפקח → expenses → Beth-Pelet 2:2

57.6. יד → hand (indicating change of ownership) → Beth-Pelet 2:7

### N. Tax, transfer, exchange

57.7. קרפלגס → tax-gatherer<sup>34</sup> → Tell el-Kheleifeh 2:1

### P. Earn, gain, do business

57.8. תגר → merchant → Beer-Sheba 38:1

### Q. Lend, loan, interest, borrow, bank

57.9. נצא → to give a loan/take a loan → Arad 41:1 obverse and reverse

### T. Keep records

57.10. ננובר → treasurer → Arad 37:1

## 58. NATURE, CLASS, EXAMPLE

### F. Different kind or class

58.1. אחרתא → other (field) → Beth-Pelet 1:3

<sup>32</sup>In view of the material from Elephantine, the military hierarchy during the Persian period included the following: *degel* (ca. 1,000 men) → *century* (ca. 100 men) → *decarchy* (ca. 10 men). See B. Porten, *The Archives of Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), 29-32. A. Temerev stresses that *dgl* was not only a military unit but functioned also as a socioeconomic unit ("Social Organizations in Egyptian Military Settlements of the Sixth-Fourth Centuries B.C.E.: *dgl* and *m't*," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. C. L. Meyers and M. P. O'Connor [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983], 523-525).

<sup>33</sup>This subdomain is not included in Louw and Nida's list, but no other seemed to fit the semantic range of "bodyguard."

<sup>34</sup>Most probably a Greek loan word, possibly from *καρπολόγος*, "tax-gatherer"; see Glueck, "Ostraca from Eilath," 9.

60. NUMBER<sup>35</sup>

B. *One, two, three, etc. - Cardinals* - Arad 1:1, 2

C. *First, second, third, etc. - Ordinals* - Arad 1:3

## 63. WHOLE, UNITE, PART, DIVIDE

B. *Unite*

63.1. מקשר - to bind together - Beer-Sheba 13:1

## 67. TIME

I. *Definite units of time: year, month, week, day, hour*

67.1. תמוז - Tammuz (name of month) - Beer-Sheba 1:1

67.2. שנה - year - Beer-Sheba 1:1

67.3. סיון - Siwan (name of month) - Beer-Sheba 3:1

67.4. כסלו - Kislev (name of month) - Beer-Sheba 5:1

67.5. אלול - Elul (name of month) - Beer-Sheba 6:1

67.6. אב - Ab (name of month) - Beer-Sheba 9:1

67.7. מרחשון - Marheshwan (name of month) - Beer-Sheba 20:1

## 79. FEATURES OF OBJECTS

W. *Shapes*

79.1. סכת - tip - Heshbon 2:1

## 83. SPATIAL POSITIONS

C. *Among, between, in, inside*

83.1. ב - in - Beth-Pelet 1:1

E. *At, beside, near, far*

83.2. קרבתא - near - Beth-Pelet 1:2

F. *In front of, face to face, in back of, behind*

83.3. קדם - before - Arad 41:7 obverse

## 86. WEIGHT

B. *Pound, talent - Specific units of weight*

86.1. סאה - abbreviated ס - seah (unit of weight) - Arad 1:2

86.2. קב - abbreviated ק - qab (unit of weight) - Arad 1:2

86.3. כר - abbreviated כ - kor (unit of weight) - Beer-Sheba 1:2

86.4. פלג - abbreviated פ - peleg (unit of weight) - Beer-Sheba 3:2

86.5. אבם - stone (unit of weight) - Beer-Sheba 3:3

86.6. פרס - abbreviated פ - peras (unit of weight) - Beer-Sheba 30:1

C. *Liquid weight*<sup>36</sup>

86.7. לג - log (unit of liquid weight) - Samaria 1:1

<sup>35</sup>Because the numbers in the Aramaic epigraphical corpus of Syria-Palestine are graphic signs, no further subdivisions were made.

<sup>36</sup>This subdomain does not appear in Louw and Nida.

## 87. STATUS

A. *Position, rank*<sup>37</sup>

87.1 פָּרָשִׁי → horsemen → Arad 7:1

87.2 חֹמֵר → donkey-drivers → Arad 12:1

E. *Slave, free*

87.3 עֶבֶד → servant → Tell el-Kheleifeh 1:1

## 89. RELATIONS

C. *Derivation*

89.1 מִן → from (in connection with a specific place) → Arad 12:1

D. *Specification*

89.2 כּ → in, on → Arad 1:3

Q. *Addition*

89.3 וּ → and → Arad 22:1

## 90. CASE

A. *Agent, personal or nonpersonal, causative or immediate*

90.1 לְ → for (indicating purpose) → Beth-Pelet 1:1

C. *Source of event or activity*

90.2 לְ → on (with date) → Beer-Sheba 1:1

I. *Benefaction*

90.3 לְ → for (in connection with a person) → Arad 5:1

90.4 עַל → in (in connection with change of ownership) → Beer-Sheba 3:3

## 92. DISCOURSE REFERENTIALS

F. *Relative reference*

92.1 וְיִ → who → Arad 25:1

92.2 כִּי → when → Arad 41:5 obverse

93. NAMES OF PLACES AND PERSONS<sup>38</sup>A. *Persons* → Arad 1:1, 3; etc.B. *Places* → Heshbon 2:3

<sup>37</sup>On this subdomain see notes on main domain 15. From the context, either option is possible.

<sup>38</sup>For a complete list of the names included in the Aramaic inscriptions of Syria-Palestine during the Persian period, see G. Klingbeil, "The Onomasticon of the Aramaic Inscriptions of Syro-Palestine during the Persian Period," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 18 (1992): 67-94.

### 5. Interpretation and Analysis of the Data

The semantic analysis of the Aramaic epigraphic material of Syria-Palestine during the Persian period exhibits a definite lack of abstract terms, such as feeling, sensing, or thinking. There are only five abstract terms in four different main domains: 19. *Physical impact*, 23. *Physiological processes and states*, 33. *Communication*, and 37. *Control, rule*.

Altogether, the semantic spectrum of the corpus includes only 87 different terms, excluding the differing numbers and names of persons and places. Because more than one-quarter of the total number of words found in the inscriptions are personal names (165 of 651 words), the second largest group of referents are *unique referents*, referring to one person only and having distinctive semantic features not shared with any other term or person. By far the largest contingent of word referents is the so-called *class referents*, which are subdivided into common words that designate a class of entities, events, or abstracts. In the corpus studied more than 85 percent of the class referents refer to entities or objects; only twice is the class referent described as being abstract.<sup>39</sup>

Class referents referring to events appear nine times,<sup>40</sup> amounting to roughly 10 percent of the total referents. In view of the predominance of business and administrative texts, these numbers should be expected, since in receipts, accounts, and orders the amount of some specified article, object, or entity is normally stated. The purpose of a written text evidently influences the semantic spectrum used in a document.<sup>41</sup>

Combined, the four largest domains amount to more than 43 percent of all terms, with the following distribution. Following *artifacts*, domain 57. *Possess, transfer, exchange* is the largest—to be expected, since the texts mainly deal with business transactions.

<sup>39</sup>In Arad ostracon 37:1 the term נֹכַח, "treasurer," occurs; it cannot be analyzed as either "event" or "object/entity," but rather as being an abstract official title. In Samaria ostracon 4:1, the verb נָדַד, "to vow," appears; it could be understood as either an abstract or an event class referent.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. the imperative הִבּ in Arad 5:1, פָּרַשׁ in Arad 7:1, רָקַד in Arad 7:2 (and some ostraca following this one), פָּרַשׁ in Arad 11:1, נָטַן in Arad 14:2 obverse, נָצַא in Arad 41 (2 times), מִקְשֵׁר in Beer-Sheba 13:1, הִבְהוּה in Beer-Sheba 16:1, and לִירַע in Beth-Pelet 1:1.

<sup>41</sup>W. R. Tate correctly observes that "there is an intimate relationship and interconnectedness between form and content. Hermeneutics must concern itself not only with content, but also with the form of the text. This concern entails understanding conventions of the generic systems. This is true because different *genres* involve different literary codes and conventions [and also specific vocabulary and syntactic style]" (*Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991], 63-65).

Name of main domain	Number of subdomains	Number of terms	Percentage
6. Artifacts	7	14	16 %
57. Possess, transfer, exchange	6	10	11.4 %
67. Time	1	7	8 %
86. Weight	2	7	8 %

### 6. Conclusions

The corpus of inscriptions investigated in this article is most definitely to be understood as business texts. The pattern of semantic domains contains very few abstract terms; the two largest domains are "artifacts" and terms regarding "possess, transfer, and exchange." These constitute, of course, typical business terminology. The purpose of a text evidently influences the terminology used. The *genre* of Aramaic inscriptions on hard surface of Syria-Palestine during the Persian period must be identified as business and administrative texts, comprising lists of persons, receipts, and order forms.

Customarily, *genre* identifications are predominantly based upon presuppositions and axioms of turn-of-the-century biblical scholarship.<sup>42</sup> Both form and content need to serve as the basis for *genre* identification. In this context, my work may provide a possible alternative in identifying *genres* based upon the semantics *and* their content. Thus by analyzing the occurrences of semantic domains (and sometimes the absence thereof) in a specific corpus of inscriptions (or textual corpus as found in the Bible), it may be possible to rectify this subjective approach.

It does appear that the semantic approach of Louw and Nida to lexicography—while still in its beginning stages and beset with certain restrictions—may contribute to the often neglected study of the semantics of ancient Near Eastern texts as well as the OT texts themselves. In future studies it may be possible to assign a specific text to a certain *genre* on the basis of the analysis of the semantic domain of each word included in the text.

<sup>42</sup>For example, the categorization of the Psalms by H. Gunkel and S. Mowinckel. An evaluation of these classifications is provided by M. G. Klingbeil, "Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography" (D. Litt. dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1995), 143-155. J. Barton maintains that "there is obviously a danger in inferring the existence of a *Gattung* from very few examples, since it is always possible that a single text is anomalous" ("Form Criticism [OT]," *ABD*, 2:840).