

HOPHNI IN THE IZBET SARTAH OSTRACON A REJOINDER

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My thanks are due to Lawrence J. Mykytiuk for rescuing my interpretation of a segment of line 4 of the Izbet Sartah Ostrakon from the ranks of obscurity. His critique of my reading of the name of Hophni in this passage follows the standard scholarly view that the first four lines of this text were written by a person who was just practicing the alphabet that was inscribed in the fifth line of the text (*AUSS* 36 [1998]: 69-80). This position does not really solve the problem of the text; it only moves it to another area. The question then is, what letters did the scribe practice here? Did he practice only letters, or did he also practice words?

Since Mykytiuk's critique of my reading of the three letters *hpn* is more narrowly focused than those issues, we may leave them to future studies and simply reexamine the photographs of the disputed letters in line 4. All interpreters of the text have agreed that the first of these letters is the box-shaped *heth*.

The second letter, immediately to the right of the box, is a perfect parallel to the *pe*, with the exception that its stance is different—its angled head faces to the left rather than the right, as it does in the alphabetic line. This does not help to identify the letter as a *gimmel*, because the *gimmel* in the alphabetic line also faces to the right, and it is much larger than the *pe*. This accounts for the reading of the *pe*.

The main, new addition, resulting from my reexamination of the photographs, is a fourth letter in this name. It is a fork-headed *yōd* that was incised with double lines over the left end of the *aleph* with which the next word begins. When viewed with magnification, it is seen that the forked head angles up to the right, and its tail angles down to the left.

This additional information would imply, therefore, that a revised reading of the name of Hophni should be given here. It is not *hpn* as I previously wrote but *hpn̄y*, as it now reads with this reexamination of the text. My new line drawing of this brief passage is given in **Figure 1**. This reading

rules out the noun, which means “hollow of the hand,” and points instead in the direction of the personal name Hophni. Mytykiuk argues that even if this is the personal name of Hophni, “there could easily have been dozens of Hophnis in the place and time” (79). If so, then the obligation is upon Mytykiuk to produce evidence for them from onomastica collected from the ancient world. In the onomasticon of the Hebrew Bible there is only one Hophni, and he is the son of Eli, who is known from 1 Sam 4.

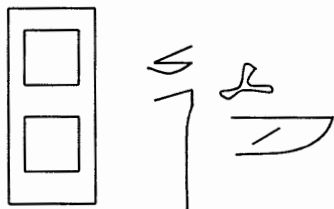


Fig. 1. The name *HPNY* in line 4 of the Izbet Sartah Ostrakon.

Given the facts, archaeologically speaking, that Izbet Sartah is one of the new types of Israelite sites that spread over the country in the early Iron Age, and that it looks down on the location of the battlefield between it and the Philistine camp at Aphek (later Antipatris, located on the grounds of the park of Petah Tikvah), the Hophni in this text should be identified with the only Hophni that is known from the Hebrew Bible.