

HESHBON OSTRACON II

FRANK MOORE CROSS

Harvard University

The excavations at Heshbon in the summer of 1971 have produced an additional ostracon written in Aramaic script.¹ The newly-found sherd, Object Registry No. 803, came from Area B, Square 1, Locus 90 in a context of late Iron II (7th-6th cent.) pottery.²

The ostracon measures 3.25 x 4.20 cm. at its maximum dimensions. Only the right side of the sherd preserves an original edge of the ostracon. Remnants of lines can be detected at the top and bottom of the pottery fragment.³ The ostracon also exhibits broken letters on its left margin, indicating a missing left side. Thus we possess only the central, right side of the original ostracon, with three legible lines of text.

The reading of the brief text can be reconstructed as follows:

]	י	[]	1.	[
נא]	פ	ד	סכ	2.	plou[gh] tip(s)[
				תמכאל	3.	Tamak'el [
				בני גבלא	4.	men of Gubla' [
]	5.	[

Line 2. The script of this line is written with a dry pen, giving letters a narrow, long appearance. The initial *samek* is badly preserved but in my view certain. The following letters, *kap*, *taw*, and *pē* are very clear. *Dalet* has only the tail and a small

¹ On the Aramaic Ostracon 309, found in 1968, see F. M. Cross, "An Ostracon from Heshbon," *AUSS*, 7 (1969), 223-229.

² Private communication of Siegfried H. Horn, director of the Andrews University Heshbon Expedition.

³ The first line is preserved only in a blurred line of ink on the left edge at the top of the ostracon, clearly the tail of a letter extending below the (theoretical) baseline of the script: the tail of a *nūn*, most probably, to judge from length and stance.

remnant of the right upper tick preserved. 'Alep would be a possible reading also, but context strongly suggests the reading *paddāna* (*padnā*), "yoke," "plough," and the idiom extant in several Aramaic dialects, *sekkat paddānā*, "plough tip."



Fig. 10. A tracing of the Heshbon Ostrakon II

Line 3. The script of this line is well preserved in thick, squat letters. *Taw*, *kap*, and 'alep are standard forms. The *mēm* is somewhat unusual but is known from such texts as Sachau P. 22,⁴ and is the occasion of no difficulty. Only the characteristic tail of *lamed* is preserved on the left edge of the ostracon. The personal name *tmk'l* (*tamak'el*, "'El has supported"), its byform 'ltmk, and its hypocoristicon *tmk'* are familiar from Phoenician, Aramaic, and Ammonite seals of the same general period.⁵ This name appears to have enjoyed some popularity precisely in the Ammonite onomasticon, being extant on three or four seals in the very small Ammonite corpus.⁶

⁴ Eduard Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka* (Leipzig, 1911), Pl. 24. The papyrus is Cowley 52: A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century* (Oxford, 1923). The papyrus in question dates from the mid-6th cent. Cf. J. Naveh, *The Development of the Aramaic Script* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 16, 34, Fig. 3, 1A.

⁵ CIS, II, 94 (see n. 6); and Galling (*ZDPV*, 64 [1941], 121-202) 51; cf. F. Vattioni, "I sigilli ebraici," *Biblica*, 50 (1969), 357-388, especially No. 17, p. 361. On Ammonite references, see n. 6.

⁶ The seals in question are Reifenberg 33 (*Ancient Hebrew Seals* [London, n.d.], p. 41), republished by N. Avigad in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, III, 80 (Pl. 3) which reads *tmk' 77 bn mqnmlk*; Diringier 17 (*Le iscrizioni antico-ebraiche palestinesi* [Florence, 1934], p. 176; Pl. XIX, 17) which reads *lbyd'l bn tmk'l*;

Line 4. The base of the initial *bêt* and the tail of the following *nûn* have largely been effaced; nevertheless the reading *bny* is not in doubt. The trace of an *'alep* on the lower left side of the (intact) *lamed* is visible. In the present context alternate readings (*dalet* or *rêš*) are most unlikely. The *bny gbl*, "the men of Gubla'," "the Gublites," the tribe or people *Gēbāl* (<**gubal*) living in conjunction with the territory of Edom is well known from the Bible, Ps. 83:8, where they are mentioned in parallelism with Edom, Ishmael, Moab, the Hagarites, Ammon, and the Amalekites. Josephus gives the name Γοβολιτις⁷ for a district of Idumaea; in Jewish Aramaic the forms אבבלנא and אבבלנא appear.⁸

Line 5. The faint traces of a fifth line of script appear on the abraded lower edge of the sherd. No single letter can be read with certainty. *Mēm* or perhaps *hêt* may be read as the second letter from the right margin; it may be followed by a *lamed* or *'alep*; after a short space, the top of a letter is discernible as the slant of the line moves off the ostrakon; the traces conform perhaps to the top of an *'alep*.

the seal, Ammonite or possibly Moabite, published by Avigad, *EI*, 9 (1969), 1-9, especially No. 18, p. 8; and Pl. II, 18, which reads *l'ltmk bn 'ms'l*; and the seal *CIS*, II, 94 which should be read (in a cursive Aramaic script of the sixth century) *ltmk'l* [*'bd mlkm*, "Belonging to Tamak'el, servant of (the god) Milkom" (a trace of *'ayin* can be seen on the edge of the seal). The first of these, usually called Phoenician, is in a script of Aramaic derivation in fact, and in a script marked by excessively vertical letter-stances of precisely Ammonite style. The second seal, found in eš-Šalt in Transjordan, is less typical but almost certainly Ammonite. The third is evidently from Transjordan, as suggested by Avigad; in style its script shares the vertical stances associated with Ammonite, but exhibits a *mēm* usually attributed to the Moabite tradition. The fourth listed, though not inscribed in pre-Exilic Ammonite script, surely belongs with the other three in the Ammonite corpus. The epithet *'bd mlkm*, "servant of Milkom," is best understood as, not merely a devotee of the Ammonite deity Milkom, but as one, perhaps a priest, attached to a temple of the deity. One may compare Hebrew *mqnyhw*. *'bd. yhw* (unpublished) from 8th-cent. Israel; cf. also *'bd b'l*, Karatepe (*KAI* 26) 1. 1/2; *'bd bt šdtnt*, *CIS*, I.1. 247-249; etc. On the corpus of Ammonite seals, see now Avigad, "Ammonite and Moabite Seals," *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by J. A. Sanders (Garden City, N. Y., 1970), pp. 284-295.

⁷ Josephus *Ant* 2. 6; 3. 40.

⁸ See B. Mazar, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* [Hebrew], II, 403f., and the literature cited.

The script of the ostracon has strong ties to the squat, broad style which marked the Aramaic cursive in the 7th and 6th cent. B.C., dying out most probably in the second half of the 6th cent. The best known representatives of this style are the Assur Ostracon (7th cent. B.C.),⁹ the Saqqarah Papyrus (ca. 600 B.C.),¹⁰ a tablet published by J. Starcky from the 34th year of Nebuchadnezzar,¹¹ and especially Sachau P. 22 (Cowley 52).¹² The script shows also some elements of the classic slender and shaded forms which developed in the late 6th cent. and prevailed throughout the 5th cent. B.C. Early exemplars of this style are the Bauer-Meissner Papyrus (515 B.C.),¹³ the Hermopolis papyri (last quarter of the 6th cent. B.C.),¹⁴ Sachau P. 30 (Cowley 1 from 495 B.C.),¹⁵ and the Heshbon Ostracon 309 (end of the 6th cent. B.C.).¹⁶

'Alep is a typical 6th cent. cursive form shared with the Saqqarah Papyrus, Sachau P. 22, and Heshbon Ostracon 309. The middle diagonal is short; the right upper stroke is more crescent- than "v"-shaped. This type of 'alep, usually with a longer diagonal, extends into the first two decades of the 5th cent. in consistent cursive usage.¹⁷

Bêt is relatively small, its right downstroke moving from the head in a slight diagonal down to the right before turning left, a trait of the "squat" style (Saqqarah, Sachau P. 22, and earlier, in the Assur Ostracon).

⁹ M. Lidzbarski, *Altaramäische Urkunden aus Assur* (Leipzig, 1921), Taf. 1 (KAI 233).

¹⁰ A. Dupont-Sommer, "Un papyrus araméen d'époque saïte découvert à Saqqarah," *Semitica*, 1 (1948), Pl. opposite p. 68 (KAI 266).

¹¹ Jean Starcky, "Une tablette araméenne de l'an 34 de Nabuchodonosor," *Syria*, 37 (1960), 101 (KAI 227); its date is 571/70 B.C.

¹² See n. 4.

¹³ H. Bauer and B. Meissner, "Ein aramäischer Pachtvertrag aus dem 7. Jahre Darius I.," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, Phil.-hist. Kl. 1936, pp. 414-424; Taf. 1, 2.

¹⁴ E. Bresciani and M. Kamil, *Le lettere aramaiche di Hermopoli*, *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Cl. di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Serie VIII, Vol. 12, 5 (Rome, 1966).

¹⁵ See n. 4.

¹⁶ Cross, *AUSS*, 7 (1969), 223-229 and Pl. XXV.

¹⁷ It appears sporadically in archaizing "formal cursives" of a later date. But cf. n. 18.

Gimel and *yōd* are ordinary 6th-cent. forms, but of little use in dating in view of their slow evolution in this period.

Two types of *kap* appear on the ostrakon, the first (line 1) showing a broad double head on the left, and an uncurved downstroke, the second (line 2) exhibiting a ticked, single head, and a nearly vertical, slightly curved leg. These forms appear together in the Assur Ostrakon, the Saqqarah Papyrus, and in the Arsames letters published by G. R. Driver.¹⁸ The broad-headed form appears in the cursive as the exclusive form no later than the beginning of the 5th cent. (Sachau P. 30, 495 B.C.).

Lamed has the short downstroke of the "squat" style (see especially Sachau P. 22).

Mēm has been discussed above as an unusual form closest to the *mēm* of Sachau P. 22. Note that the right downstroke is straight, nearly vertical, and relatively short, all early traits marking the "squat" style. Compare also the *mēms* of Heshbon 309 and the Saqqarah Letter.

The *samek* of our ostrakon is a rare form, closest to the *samek* of the Saqqarah Letter,¹⁹ to judge from its traces. Too much weight cannot be put upon it in dating.

Pē has the broad, angular head of the *pēs.* of the Saqqarah Letter and the Bauer-Meissner Papyrus. Its downstroke is apparently uncurved.

The two forms of *taw* are useful for dating. The long, uncurved form (line 1) with the short, straight right arm cannot be later than the 6th cent.; the short *taw* in line 2 is reminiscent of the "squat" style. The right arm curves only slightly. In neither form does the right arm break through to the left of the leg, a trait of the 7th cent. script, occasionally surviving into the cursive of the early 6th cent. (Saqqarah Letter; Starcky Tablet).

¹⁸ G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century* (Oxford, 1954). These letters are probably to be attributed to Arsames, son of Darius I, who was satrap in Egypt in the first decades of the 5th cent., and distinguished from the Arsames of the Elephantine letters (including Cowley 26). The alternate is to call their script archaizing (Naveh). But their script (unlike that of the Arsames scribe of Cowley 26) is systematically archaic, including its treatment of *kap*. Unhappily, the Driver letters contain neither dates nor historical allusions.

¹⁹ The first *samek* of line 9 of the Saqqarah Letter is virtually identical.

To summarize: a number of letters conform to 6th early 5th cent. types, *'alep*, *gimel*, *yōd*, *kap*, *lamed*, and *nūn*; others have a range no later than the sixth century, *bêt*, *mēm*, *samek*, *pē* and *taw*. The script as a whole shows evidences of the transition from the "squat" to the classic cursive which took place in the second half of the 6th cent. A date ca. 525 B.C. seems most likely.

The ostracon may be a docket recording the distribution of tools, or a letter giving instructions to agricultural workers. It is too badly broken to permit precise conclusions. Its script is Aramaic, and such forms as *gb̄l* and *skt pd[n' ?]* suggest that the language is Aramaic rather than Ammonite (or a related Canaanite dialect). At the same time, the mention of *Tamak'el*, a popular Ammonite name, and of members of the Edomite tribe of Gebal guarantee its local origin. The sherd has special interest in registering the earliest, extrabiblical occurrence of (southern) Gebal.