

## HESHBON OSTRACON III

MYRIAM AYALON

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

This fragment<sup>1</sup> probably belongs to a small plate or bowl (rather shallow), although it is difficult to clearly identify the sherd.

The script is very fragmentary, and it is impossible to make any sense out of it. With some hesitation the following letters can be identified: (1) a final letter of some word, which looks like a *c* ( ك ), or less probably *d* ( د ); (2) a first letter which can be *b* ( ب ), *t* ( ت ), *n* ( ن ), or *i* ( ي ) attached to an *a* ( ا ), followed by an *l* ( ل ), to which was probably attached an *s* ( ص ), or perhaps *t* ( ط ).

Hence the reading could be either ؟ . . . ك با ل ص . . . or ؟ . . . ت نا ل ص . . . ; however, its meaning remains elusive in either case.

On paleographic grounds, it is of the early North Arabic script, ca. 8th-9th cent.

At this point it should be added that among the Islamic pottery found at Susa there is a series of pieces bearing a very similar script. Although the inscriptions are much longer, they can hardly be deciphered, except for some occasional words. Their archaeological date is not always certain, but they were attributed to phase 2 (sometimes with a question mark). Therefore, they come from about the same period as Heshbon Ostrakon III.

<sup>1</sup> This ostrakon, Object Registry No. 886, was found August 4, 1971, in Locus C.4:59, in connection with pottery pail No. 315 which contained: Umayyad, Early Byzantine, Late Roman, few Early Roman, and few Late Iron II.