Palestinian Inscriptions

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The Gezer Calendar

This little inscription was discovered at Gezer in 1908 by R. A. S. Macalister; it is on a school exercise tablet of soft limestone. For a number of years its date was uncertain, but recent discoveries have established its relative archaism and point to the second half of the tenth century or the very beginning of the ninth as its probable time. The writer would date it in or about the third quarter of the tenth century—about 925 B.C. in round numbers. The language is good biblical Hebrew, in modern spelling; it is written in verse and seems to have been a kind of mnemonic ditty for children.


His two months are (olive) harvest, (tricolon, 2:2:2)
His two months are planting (grain),
His two months are late planting;
His month is hoeing up of flax, (tricolon, 3:3:3)
His month is harvest of barley,
His month is harvest and feasting;
His two months are vine-tending, (bicolon, 2:2)
His month is summer fruit.

The Moabite Stone

This important inscription was discovered intact in 1868; it was subsequently broken by the Arabs and in 1873 it was taken to the Louvre. The best publication is found in Dussaud, *Les monuments palestiniens et judaïques* (Musée du Louvre), 1912, pp. 4-22, with a magnificent photograph of the stela and a good bibliography. The work of Smend and Socin, *Die Inschrift des Königs Mesa von Moab* (1886), which was long standard, is not reliable, as was pointed out in detail by Renan and Clermont-Ganneau; see especially Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris*, 4, pp. 1-10. The most recent competent translation is that of Gressmann, *AOT*, 89, pp. 440-42. On the question of the authenticity of the text, which was strangely disputed for a long time (in spite of the fact that no forger of that time could possibly have divined the correct forms of letters in the ninth century B.C.), cf. Albright, *JQR*, xxxv, 1945, pp. 247-250.

For details of translation which depend on recent discoveries see especially Poebel, *Das appositionell bestimmte Pronomen* (Chicago, 1932), pp. 7-11; Albright, *BASOR*, 89, p. 16, n. 55. There are a number of words which were formerly obscure but which have been found in other Northwest-Semitic inscriptions.

The date of the Mesha Stone is roughly fixed by the reference to Mesha, king of Moab, in II Kings 3:4, after 849 B.C. How-
for it lay in ruins—with fifty men of Dibon, for all
Dibon is (my) loyal dependency.

And I reigned [in peace] over the hundred towns
which I had added to the land. And I built (30) [ ... ]
Medeba and Beth-diblathen and Beth-baal-meeon, and I
set there the [ ... ] of the land. And as for Hauronen,
there dwelt in it [ ... And] Chemosh said to me,
“Go down, fight against Hauronen. And I went down
[and I fought against the town and I took it], and
Chemosh dwelt there in my time. ... .

The Ostraca of Samaria

This name is applied to a homogeneous group of 63 docket
on Israelite potsherds which were found by G. A. Reisner in
1910, while excavating a floor-level from the phase of the
second period of palace construction at Samaria. Owing to a
mistake in stratigraphy, which was subsequently corrected by
J. W. Crowfoot and his associates, this level was first attributed
to Ahab; it is now reasonably certain that it should be assigned
to the reign of Jeroboam II (about 786-746 B.C.). The four regnal
years mentioned on the Ostraca extend from the ninth to the
seventeenth (about 778-770 B.C.). These documents, though
jejune in themselves, are of great significance for the script,
spelling, personal names, topography, religion, administrative
system, and clan distribution of the period.

The documents were published first by G. A. Reisner in his
book, Israelite Ostraca from Samaria (no date). A revised
form of this study was then incorporated in the Harvard Exca-
vations at Samaria, by Reisner, Fisher and Lyon (Cambridge,
Mass., 1924), pp. 227-246. For a full bibliography up to 1933
see Director, Le iscrizioni antico-ebraiche palestinesi (Florence, 1934), pp. 21-68, especially pp. 66-68. Subsequent treatments
deal mainly with the question of chronology or with the personal
names; cf. especially J. W. Crowfoot, The Buildings at Samaria
(London, 1942), pp. 5-9, 24-27; Albright, BASOR, 73, p. 21,
n.38.

Samaria Ostraco, No. 1

In the tenth year. To Shamaryau (Shemariah) from
Beer-yam, a jar of old wine. Pega (son of) Elisha, 2;
Uzza (son of) ... , 1; Eliba, 1; Baal (son of) Elisha,
1; Jediah, 1.

Samaria Ostraco, No. 2

In the tenth year. To Gaddiyau from Azzo. Abibaal,
2; Ahaz, 2; Sheba, 1; Merib-baal, 1.

Samaria Ostraco, No. 18

In the tenth year. From Hazeratho to Gaddiyau. A
jar of fine oil.

Samaria Ostraco, No. 30

In the fifteenth year. From Shemida to Hillez (son

Samaria Ostraco, No. 55

In the tenth year. (From the) vineyard of Yehau-eli.
A jar of fine oil.

An Order for Barley from Samaria

In 1932 several ostraca were found at Samaria, and were
published the following year by E. L. Sukenik. One of them is
outstanding because of its length and relative completeness. The
script belongs to the eighth century, probably to its third quarter;
it is characterized by extraordinarily long shafts of such letters
as l, m, n, like other Israelite documents of this general period.
The text is difficult, and the rendering below is tentative.

For the official publication see Sukenik, PEQ, 1933, pp. 152-
154; the text has subsequently been treated by Diringer, Le
iscrizioni antico-ebraiche palestinesi (Florence, 1934), pp. 71-72,
and Albright, PEQ, 1936, pp. 211-15.

Baruch (son of) Shalum [ ... ]

O Baruch ... pay attention and [give (? ) to ... (son
of)] Yimnah (Imnah) barley (to the amount of)
two (or three ?) measures.

The Siloam Inscription

Accidentally discovered in 1880 in the rock wall of the lower
entrance to the tunnel of Hezekiah south of the temple area
in Jerusalem, the inscription is now in the Museum of the
Ancient Orient at Istanbul. Its six lines occupy the lower half
of a prepared surface, the upper part of which was found bare
of inscription. It is, accordingly, almost certain that the first
half of the original document is missing. Its contents and script
to the reign of Hezekiah (about 715-687 B.C.), a dating
confirmed by II Kings 20:20 and especially II Chron. 32:30.

There is a very extensive bibliography, which is collected up
to 1932 by Diringer, Le iscrizioni antico-ebraiche palestine-
si (Florence, 1934), pp. 65-102. For later publications see Sabatino
Moscati, L'epigrafia ebraica antica 1925-1950 (Rome, 1951)
and Albright, JBL, 62, p. 370. The language is perfect classical
Hebrew prose, but the spelling is not entirely consistent; transla-
tions can easily be judged by the quality of Hebrew which
they presuppose.

[ ... when ] (the tunnel) was driven through. And
this was the way in which it was cut through:—While
[ ... ] (were) still [ ... ] axe(s), each man toward
his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be
cut through, [there was heard] the voice of a man
calling to his fellow, for there was an overlap in the
rock on the right [and on the left]. And when the
tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed (the
rock), each man toward his fellow, axe against axe;
and the water flowed from the spring toward the
reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock
above the head(s) of the quarrymen was 100 cubits.

The Lachish Ostraca

These ostraca were discovered in the ruins of the latest
Israelite occupation at Tell ed-Duweir in southern Palestine,
which unquestionably represents biblical Lachish. The first 18
were found by the late J. L. Starkey in 1935; three more
(making 21 in all) were added during a supplementary cam-
paign in 1938. Most of the ostraca were letters, while others were
lists of names, etc., but only a third of the documents are pre-
served well enough to be reasonably intelligible throughout.
Nearly all of the ostraca come from the latest occupation level