

14. A Proto-Canaanite Fragment of a Jar from Tel Lachish

Provenance: Tel Lachish (map reference 31.565229/34.8463613) (Field no. B1733)

Date: c. 12th century BCE

Script: Proto-Canaanite

Language: Semitic? \Canaanite?

Main publication: B. Sass, *BASOR* 374 (2015), 233–245

Direction of script: horizontal, right to left?

Number of identified signs: 5

Measurements: c. 9.9 x 8.3 cm

A fragment of a jar, found on 13 July 2014 in excavations at Tel Lachish conducted by Yoseph Garfinkel, Michael G. Hasel, and Martin G. Klingbell. It was discovered among other finds inside ruins of a large temple which could indicate its dedicatory nature.

The sherd bears remains of the ends (?) of three lines of Proto-Canaanite letters at its lower part, and the remains of one letter at the upper right-hand corner, all incised before firing on the shoulder of a jar at an angle of about 30 degrees to the wheel marks. The inscription consists of nine letters; the reading of five of them seems certain. There are no word dividers or spaces to indicate the separate words. The inscription is too fragmentary to enable a sound translation or restoration. The reading suggested by Benjamin Sass (2015:236) for the three lower lines is as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. [. . .]pkl [?] | [?] פכל [. . .] |
| 2. [. . .]spr | ספר [. . .] |
| 3. [. . .].p.[?] | [?] .פ. [. . .] |

Following is a citation from Sass, concerning a suggested new

framework for the evolution of the alphabet and the dating of the various phases between the later Late Bronze Age and Iron Age IIA . . . founded on stratified inscriptions, C14 datings, and subsequent developments in the fields of archaeology and West Semitic palaeography. . . . The two systems diverge on the attribution of certain alphabetic phenomena to phases within Iron Age I and parts of Iron Age IIA. . . . there is no unanimity on the absolute dating of Iron Age I and parts of Iron Age IIA. . . . *between* four and six alphabetic inscriptions exist from the outgoing Late Bronze Age, the 13th century and part of the 12th. These inscriptions have undergone a certain “Linearization” compared with the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions . . . :

* Lachish ewer . . . 13th century. * Lachish bowl . . . 13th century. * Lachish bowl fragment . . . 12th century. * Qubur el-Walayda bowl . . . 12th-century context. * Nagila sherd(?) . . . Late Late Bronze Age context (?) * Gezer sherd (?) . . . Surface find, only broadly datable by letter typology.

(Sass 2015:236; see further *ibid.*, 237–245)

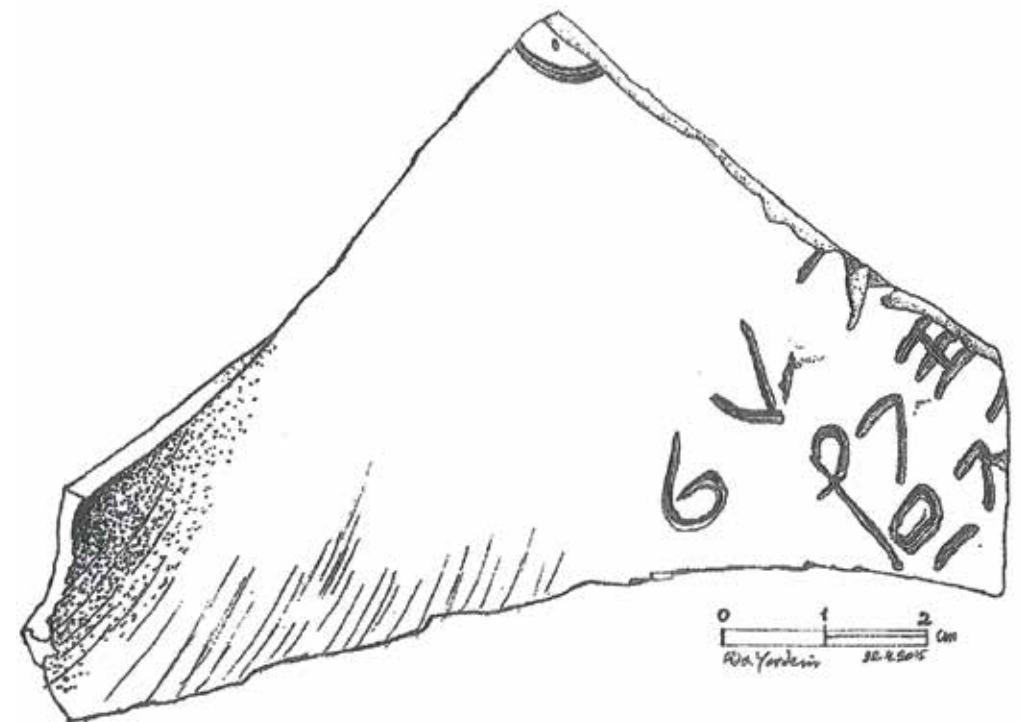


Fig. 29. A Proto-Canaanite fragmentary ostracon from Tel Lachish (photo and drawing).

59. A Letter and a List on Papyrus from Wadi Murabba^cat

Provenance: Wadi Murabba^cat (map reference 31.58833/35.37278)

Date: late 7th century BCE

Script: Palaeo-Hebrew formal cursive

Language: Hebrew

Main publications: J. T. Milik, DJD 2 (1961), 93–100, pl. XXVIII; F. M. Cross, BASOR 165 (1962), 34–46; J. Naveh, *Lěšoněnu* 30 (1965–66), 68; S. Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past*, Jerusalem 2008, 213–215.

Direction of script: right to left

Measurements: 9 x 18.2 cm

This is a rare example of a papyrus document from the land of Israel, dating from as early as the 7th century BCE. Official documents as well as letters were written with a reed pen in ink on sheets of papyrus, which were then rolled, tied, signed and sealed. The expensive material was often used more than once. This required the erasing of the earlier text before a new text was written over it. This kind of document is called *palimpsest*. This is the case here; the earlier text being an erased letter whereas the later text, which was written after turning the sheet upside down, is an account list. This was written over the faint remains of the earlier text. The huge number of bullae (tiny seal impressions used for sealing documents) dating from the 7th century BCE found in Israel testifies to the common use of papyrus, a material decaying in a humid environment which may survive in an extremely dry climate, such as the Judean desert. The reason that the scribe did not write on the back of the papyrus was probably his writing parallel to the papyrus fibers. These run in opposite directions on the two sides of the papyrus sheet. Here they run vertically on the back while on the inner side they run horizontally. The rolling of the sheet, protecting the inner side and preventing the breaking of the fibers, was parallel to the fibers on the back.

Both texts have word dividers in the form of a short down-stroke slanting down to the right, placed in the center of the spaces between the words.

The earlier text:

1. אמר... יהוה לכן [*שלחת* את* שלם ביתכ
2. ועת* אל* תשמע* לן [*אל* איכ*
3.]..... [לן]
4. ר עלן [כ
5.] ע. [] ר. [] ש [] כ ..

¹mr* . . . yhw lk [. . .] *šlht* *t* *šlm bytk ²w^ct* *l* *tšm^c* [. . .] r* *lyk*³ . . . [. . .] l [. . .]

⁴ . . . r^c l [. . .] k⁵ [. . .]^c . [. . .] [. . .] . w^c [. . .] [. . .] š [. . .] k . . .

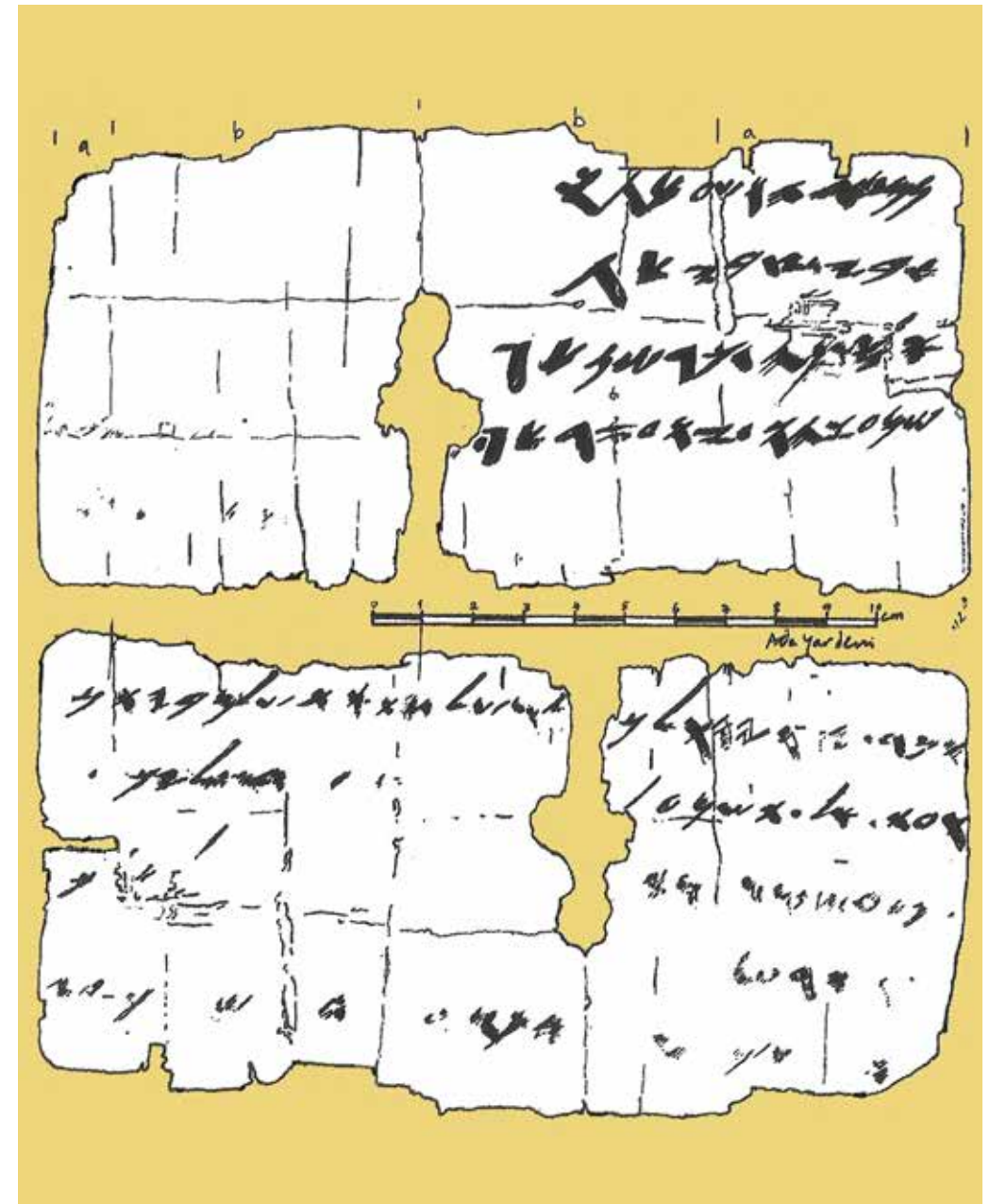


Fig. 132. A papyrus from Wadi Murabba^cat (drawing).