Two Notes on the Ostraca from Ḥorvat 'Uza

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Source: *Israel Exploration Journal*, 1990, Vol. 40, No. 2/3 (1990), pp. 215–217

Published by: Israel Exploration Society

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27926184

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IN the excavations held during 1982–1983 at Ḥ. 'Uza in the Negev by I. Beit-Arieh, a Judahite fort from the seventh and early sixth centuries B.C.E. was excavated. Eleven ostraca were found at the site, but only two were published by the excavator. One of them, written in the script and language peculiar to the Edomites, has implications for the history of the Edomite expansion in the south of Judah.[1] The other ostracon is in the Hebrew script and language; but the style of its script is vulgar cursive, i.e. of an unexperienced writer.[2] This causes some difficulties in reading, but the ostracon has been completely read except for part of the first line.

A. האכל אשר עמד אחאמה

The first ostracon is Edomite. Examples of similar script were first discovered at Tell el-Kheleifeh. This was at first very close to the Hebrew script, but over time it was much influenced by the Aramaic script.[3] As little information is available about the Edomites' language and most of the written evidence comes from seals containing only personal names, this ostracon is of considerable importance for the study of the Edomite dialect, since it contains three or four sentences. Beit-Arieh notes that the language and the linguistic formulae of the ostracon are very similar to biblical Hebrew. There is, however, one divergent form, והברכתך (line 2), in which the *hif'il* rather than the *pi'el* of the root ברך is used. This usage is different from that usual in all other related Semitic languages.

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[1] I. Beit-Arieh and B. Cresson: An Edomite Ostracon from Ḥorvat 'Uza, *Tel Aviv* 12 (1985), pp. 96–101.

[2] I. Beit-Arieh: The Ostracon of Ahiqam from Ḥorvat 'Uza, *EI* 18 (Avigad Volume), Jerusalem, 1985, pp. 94–96, Pl. 20 (Hebrew).

[3] J. Naveh: The Scripts of Two Ostraca from Eilat, *BASOR* 183 (1966), pp. 27–30; idem, *Early History of the Alphabet*, Jerusalem, 1982, pp. 100–105.

This fact might suggest an explanation for another divergent form in this ostracon, based on what is known from other Semitic languages, as a special form of Edomite. Beit-Arieh suggested that the word עמד (line 4) should be understood as a verb meaning 'prepared, collected'. However, as he admits, this verb has no parallel in the sources known to us in biblical Hebrew. Perhaps this word is related to the familiar Hebrew preposition עמדי, which has been preserved in the first person.[4] It is possible that the Edomites used this word in the absolute form, as in Arabic *'ind*. Indeed, some have tried to see in some of the uses of the Hebrew preposition עד an original *'nd* with assimilation of the *nun*; this would explain some textual difficulties in the Bible.[5] According to this the *dalet* was geminated, but at the end of the word the gemination was lost, as is the case with the word בת, originally *בנת. In any case, from the inflected form עמדי it seems that the ancient Hebrew form was *עמד and not *ענד.

If this is correct, the meaning of the above phrase is the same as Hebrew האכל אשר עם אחאמה, 'the food that is with *ḥ'mh*'.

B. מרנתן, מרפאם or מרפתם

In the second ostracon there is a Hebrew name list written in a clumsy and inexperienced hand, a clear example of the vulgar style.[6] Therefore, when deciphering one must examine carefully the particular way in which various letters are formed by the writer.

Beit-Arieh read in line 3 הושעיהו בן נוי מרנתן and suggested an identification for רנתן.[7] The reading, however, is different from that proposed by Beit-Arieh (Fig. 1:1). The third letter is *pe* rather than *nun*. Beit-Arieh did suggest this possibility because of the head, which is somewhat different from that of *nun*, but rejected it. Yet this seems to be the correct reading. The form of the head does not resemble that of *nun*s elsewhere in this ostracon, but is slightly rounder and thicker; moreover, it does not incline like other *nun*s, moving from upper right to lower left, but is more erect. The last letter is *mem*, for it has its base on the left and the angle of its shoulder is flatter (Fig. 1:2). In the fourth letter two lines cross each other like a *taw*. Yet, although we are dealing with a vulgar hand

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4   W. Gesenius: *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das alte Testament*, p. 541; F. Brown *et al.*: *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 767.

5   D. Yellin: Forgotten Uses of Hebrew Roots, *Leshonenu* 1 (1928), pp. 5–26 (Hebrew).

6   Naveh (above, n. 3, 1982), pp. 8, 75.

7   Beit-Arieh, above, n. 2. The locations of the other cities mentioned in this ostracon are also unclear. The identifications made in this article have recently been used as part of a theory about the division of the country into districts and regions at the end of the First Temple period; G. Galil: The Administrative Division of the Kingdom of Judah in View of the Epigraphic Findings, *Zion* 52 (1987), pp. 495–509 (Hebrew). See also Y. Garfinkel: City Lists, Epigraphic Discoveries and the Administrative Division in Judah, *ibid.*, pp. 489–494.
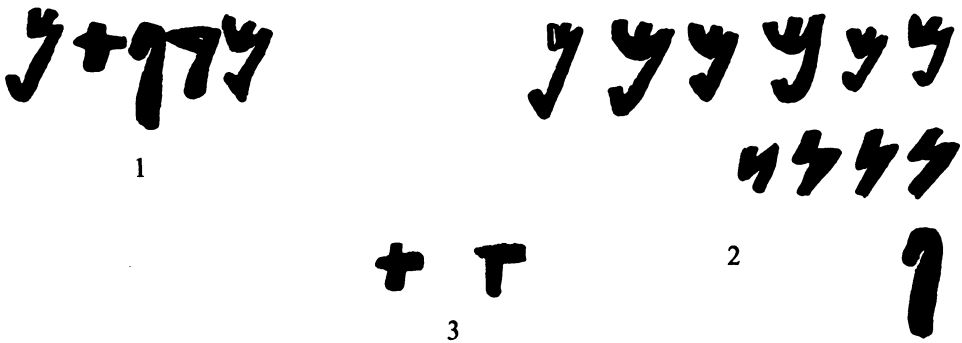
Fig. 1. 1: the final word of line 3; 2: forms of *mem*, *nun* and *pe* in the ostracon; 3: forms of *aleph* in the ostracon.

in which forms are often unexpected, the stance of the letter is not that of a *taw*, but rather like an *aleph* (compare the *aleph* in the first line). *Taw* usually has the form of an X and not that of a cross, as the fourth letter of the word under discussion seems to have (Fig. 1:3).

If the reading is מרפאם, we can consider a place name from the root רפא or רפה. Such names are common throughout Palestine, e.g. עמק רפאים (the Valley of Rephaim) south of Jerusalem, ארץ רפאים (the land of Rephaim) in Bashan (Num. 3:13), הרפא or בני הרפה (sons of the Rafah or Rafaʾ) who lived in Gat (II Sam. 21:22, I Chron. 20:8), ירפאל in Benjamin (Josh. 18:27), and perhaps בית רפא (I Chron. 2:12).

However, since a vulgar script may be unusual, the reading מרפתם, רפתם being the plural form of רפת (see Hab. 3:17), may be considered. Although such a place is unknown, it is possible as a place name.[8]

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[8] Compare with חצר סוסא (Josh. 19:5).