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The Inscriptions Written on Plaster at Kuntillet 'Ajrud¹

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Abstract

Although conclusions must to some extent remain provisional, enough is known about the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud which were written on plaster for an estimate of their significance to be made. If the portion of text which can be studied on a photograph is typical, the script includes both Hebrew and Phoenician letters and indicates a link with north Palestine or with an area with which the Phoenicians traded. Meshel's opinion that the language of these inscriptions is Hebrew is justified. The way in which one text speaks of El, or God, is not in accordance with what is known about Phoenician practice, but is consistent with the usage of the Old Testament. Thus in this text El and Baal are not Phoenician gods. It is likely that information about the men who were in charge of this site can be deduced from these texts: they were from north Palestine.

Keywords

Kuntillet 'Ajrud, inscriptions, Phoenician, El, Baal

The inscriptions written on plaster at Kuntillet 'Ajrud have understandably received less attention than the inscriptions on the pithoi which mention

¹⁾ The following works are cited by the names of their author(s) and, in the case of the works by Davies, also by the date of publication:

Davies, G. I., *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions. Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge, etc., 1991).

———. *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions. Corpus and Concordance*, II (Cambridge, 2004).

Delavault, B., and A. Lemaire, "Les Inscriptions Phéniciennes de Palestine", *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 7 (1979), pp. 1-39 and Plates I-XIV.

Renz, J., *Die althebräischen Inschriften*, I. *Text und Kommentar*, in J. Renz and W. Röllig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*, I (Darmstadt, 1995).

The following abbreviation is used:

KAI H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 3 volumes (2nd edition, Wiesbaden, 1966-69).

Yahweh and his asherah. Although after more than thirty years the full publication of these texts is still awaited, enough is known about them for a provisional estimate of their significance to be made. The claim that they are in the Phoenician script has influenced assessments of the extent of Phoenician involvement at this site, and one of the inscriptions is important because it is the only non-biblical text that has so far been discovered in Palestine which contains both the divine names, or titles, El and Baal. The purpose of this article is, first, to review the debate about the script of these texts and to consider what can be deduced about the men who wrote them. Reasons that have been given for thinking that these texts are in Hebrew will then be examined. The content of the text which includes the names El and Baal will be discussed next, and it will be asked whether it refers to Phoenician gods. Finally it will be suggested that conclusions can be drawn from these data about the identity of those who were in charge at Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

I

At one time Meshel said that “fragments of four Phoenician inscriptions” written in ink on plaster were discovered at Kuntillet 'Ajrud,² though subsequently he revised this judgement and spoke of three inscriptions “written in Phoenician script but in the Hebrew language”.³ One of these is illegible.⁴ A second can be studied only in transcription,⁵ but parts of the third⁶ appear on the only published photographs of any of these inscriptions. There is a photograph of part of another inscription⁷ which Zevit wrongly thinks belongs to this series,⁸ but Meshel says that this text is one of the “fragments of two . . . inscriptions, in old Hebrew script, [which] were found in the debris of the entrance to the

² Z. Meshel, “Kuntilat 'Ajrud, 1975-1976”, *IEJ* 27 (1977), p. 52.

³ Z. Meshel, “Kuntillet 'Ajrud”, *ABD* IV (1992), p. 107; *idem*, “Teman, Ḥorvat”, in E. Stern (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, IV (Jerusalem and New York, 1993), pp. 1461-1462.

⁴ Davies, 1991, p. 80 (§8.014) = Renz, p. 58 (Nr. 1).

⁵ Davies, 1991, p. 82 (§8.023); cf. Davies, 2004, p. 234; Renz, p. 59 (§KAgr(9):7).

⁶ Davies, 1991, p. 80 (§8.015); cf. Davies, 2004, p. 233; Renz, p. 58 (§KAgr(9):6).

⁷ P. Beck, “The Drawings from Ḥorvat Teiman (Kuntillet 'Ajrud)”, *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982), Plate 13.2 = *idem*, *Imagery and Representation. Studies in the Art and Iconography of Ancient Palestine: Collected Articles* (Tel Aviv. Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University. Occasional Publications 3; Tel Aviv, 2002), Fig. 25.

⁸ Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London and New York, 2001), pp. 376-377.

western storeroom”.⁹ The photograph of the third inscription provided by both Aḥituv¹⁰ and Meshel¹¹ gives the greatest amount of text. This contains twelve letters of the alphabet, two of which are badly damaged. For reasons which will be outlined below, Zevit¹² doubts whether Phoenician and Hebrew letters should be distinguished in this inscription, but, if they should, he would classify *mēm* and three of the examples of *yôdh* as Hebrew letters and *bêth* and one example of *wāw* and one of *yôdh* as Phoenician letters. *bêth*, *wāw* and *yôdh* are thought by Renz (p. 57) to be in Phoenician script, though he is more definite about *yôdh* than about *bêth* and *wāw*, while Lemaire, whose concern is only with Phoenician letters which help date the inscription, refers to *hē*, *wāw* and *yôdh*.¹³ His identification of *hē* as Phoenician is, however, implicitly challenged by the silence of Zevit and Renz on the point. Although Renz (pp. 57-58) concludes that it is possible that the script of these texts is Phoenician, if the portion of text which can be studied on a photograph is typical, it would be more exact to say that the texts include at least some letters in Phoenician script.

Zevit maintains that, if indeed “there are ‘Phoenician’ characteristics in some letters . . . they could imply nothing more than that the scribe had learned his letters in ‘Phoenicia’ which could mean at Dor on the coast, or at one of the southern coastal cities such as Gazza where Phoenicians traded, or from a teacher who learned his letters at such a place”. He considers, however, that this approach to the problem is unsatisfactory, and that “the ‘Ajrud inscriptions . . . provide the first, unmistakable examples of an emerging Hebrew alphabet”. In that case “the mixed palaeographic data on some inscriptions . . . may indicate a transition period in Israelite scribal practices”. He concludes that the writing in the inscriptions on plaster differs from that in the other inscriptions at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud because they belong respectively to earlier and later stages in the development of “the ‘national’ Hebrew script”.¹⁴ This theory remains to be tested.

By contrast, Dijkstra notes that “‘Phoenician script’ . . . was . . . used in the Northern Kingdom”, and comments that its use at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud “suggests

⁹ Meshel, “Teman, Ḥorvat” (n. 3), p. 1461.

¹⁰ S. Aḥituv, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1992), p. 159.

¹¹ Meshel, “Teman, Ḥorvat” (n. 3), p. 1462.

¹² Zevit (n. 8), p. 377.

¹³ A. Lemaire, “Date et origine des inscriptions hébraïques et phéniciennes de Kuntillet ‘Ajrud”, *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico* 1 (1984), p. 136.

¹⁴ Zevit (n. 8), pp. 377-378.

at the least... the Northern Israelite origin of the occupation of this road station".¹⁵ Meshel, however, thinks it also possible that the site should be connected with "one of the Judean kings" who were "closely aligned with" the northern kingdom.¹⁶ The following twenty-four texts thought to be in Phoenician script which come from other sites in Palestine and are assigned to the ninth or eighth centuries BC are listed by Delavault and Lemaire:

- (1) Achzib: p. 5 (§7);
- (2) Hazor: pp. 6-12 (§§8-14, 17-19); they date §14 to the end of the tenth century/the beginning of the ninth century BC; = Davies, 1991, pp. 102-5 (§§24.001-006, 24.011, 24.015, 24.018, 24.020);
- (3) Shiqmona: pp. 17-18 (§§33, 35-6); they date §35 to the eighth-seventh centuries BC;
- (4) Megiddo: pp. 19-20 (§§40-1);
- (5) Tell Zeror: p. 20 (§42);
- (6) Samaria: pp. 21-22, 30-32 (§§43-44, 58-59); = Davies, 1991, pp. 57-63, 259-260, 262 (§§3.108, 3.201-226, 108.033, 108.053); according to Stern the last two examples are from the seventh to the sixth centuries BC;¹⁷
- (7) Beth Shemesh: pp. 23-24 (§47); = Davies, 1991, p. 90 (§17.001);
- (8) Tell Jemmeh: p. 27 (§50); = Renz, pp. 176-177 (§Gem(8):2);
- (9) a weight: pp. 32-33 (§61); it is "from the Shephelah region, either in Judah or in Philistia",¹⁸ and there appears to be no other weight which Stern could be describing, though, unlike all other authorities known to me, he reads *plg* before *šql*; = Davies, 1991, p. 261 (§108.051); it is placed in the eighth century BC by Delavault and Lemaire (p. 33) and Bron and Lemaire,¹⁹ in the seventh to the sixth centuries BC by Stern,²⁰

¹⁵ M. Dijkstra, "I have blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and his Asherah: Texts with Religious Elements from the Soil Archive of Ancient Israel", in B. Becking, M. Dijkstra, M. C. A. Korpel and K. J. H. Vriezen, *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (The Biblical Seminar 77; London and New York, 2001), p. 22.

¹⁶ Meshel (n. 3), "Kuntillet 'Ajrud", p. 108; "Teman, Ḥorvat", p. 1464.

¹⁷ E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, II. *The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods 732-332 BCE* (New York, 2001), pp. 192-193.

¹⁸ Stern (n. 17), p. 192.

¹⁹ F. Bron and A. Lemaire, "Poids inscrits Phénico-Araméens du VIII^e siècle av. J.-C.", in *Atti del 1 Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici*, III (Collezione di Studi Fenici 16; Rome, 1983), p. 768.

²⁰ Stern (n. 17), p. 192.

and in the sixth or fifth century BC by Reifenberg²¹ and Davies (1991, p. 261).

Barkay argues convincingly that the text from Beth Shemesh is written in Hebrew, and not Phoenician, script.²² Moreover, Naveh²³ holds that two of the texts from Hazor²⁴ and the texts from Tell Zeror and Tell Jemmeh are not Phoenician. Of the nineteen remaining texts eighteen come from north Palestine. It is not surprising that twelve of these were found in the far north of the country, one at Achzib and three at Shiqmona, both of which are on the coast, and eight at Hazor. None of them was discovered further south than Samaria. Three of the texts which Naveh believes are not Phoenician also come from sites which are to the north of Samaria, so, even if Naveh were to be wrong, the argument of this article would not be affected. Tell Jemmeh is in Philistia, and it is disputed whether the text from there includes letters in Phoenician script.²⁵ In addition, Renz suggests that a second text from Tell Jemmeh may be in Phoenician script.²⁶ Thus it is possible, but by no means certain, that either one or two Phoenician inscriptions have been found at this site.

Two texts which Delavault and Lemaire place at the end of the sixth century BC or a little later (pp. 10-11 [§15]) and c. 1000 BC or even earlier (p. 11 [§16]) are dated by Davies to the ninth and eighth centuries BC respectively,²⁷ but both come from Hazor. Davies notes that it is unclear whether a text from Sheikh Shibl which is assigned to the eighth or the seventh century BC is in the Phoenician script.²⁸ Moreover, Gogel supposes that the forms of the letters on a Beth Shean Ostrakon²⁹ “appear close to Phoenician in style”,³⁰ though Delavault and Lemaire (p. 1 n. 1) think the script is Aramaic. This text

²¹ A. Reifenberg, “Ein neues hebräisches Gewicht”, *JPOS* 16 (1936), pp. 39-40.

²² G. Barkay, “‘Your Poor Brother’: A Note on an Inscribed Bowl from Beth Shemesh”, *IEJ* 41 (1991), pp. 239-240; cf. J. Naveh, “Writing and Scripts in Seventh-Century B.C.E. Philistia: The New Evidence from Tell Jemmeh”, *IEJ* 35 (1985), p. 10 n. 9.

²³ Naveh (n. 22), p. 10 n. 9, pp. 16, 21.

²⁴ Delavault and Lemaire, pp. 8-10 (§§12, 14) = Davies, 1991, pp. 102-103 (§§24.005, 24.011).

²⁵ Delavault and Lemaire, p. 27; Naveh (n. 22), p. 16; Renz, p. 177.

²⁶ Renz, p. 176 (§Gem(8):1).

²⁷ Davies, 1991, pp. 103-104 (§§24.012-013).

²⁸ Davies, 1991, p. 116 (§42.001); cf. A. Lemaire, “Notes d’épigraphie Nord-Ouest sémitique”, *Semitica* 32 (1982), pp. 16-17.

²⁹ Davies, 2004, p. 19 (§51.001) = Renz, pp. 172-173 (BSea(8):2).

³⁰ S. L. Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* (SBL Resources for Biblical Study 23; Atlanta, GA, 1998), p. 56.

is dated to the ninth or eighth centuries BC by Gogel, to the “late 8th/early 7th cent.?” by Davies, and to the end of the eighth century BC by Renz. Only two of the seals with Phoenician writing listed by Avigad and Sass whose provenance is known provide relevant information. One comes from Acco and is assigned to the eighth-seventh centuries BC, and the other is an “alleged chance find from Samaria” which is dated “Pre-721 BCE? Post-721 BCE?”.³¹ But Sheikh Shibl, Beth Shean and Acco are all to the north of Samaria. Thus, even if these last six inscriptions were to be in Phoenician script, the picture obtained by examining the texts placed in the ninth and eighth centuries BC by Delavault and Lemaire would be unaltered.

The one fragment of the texts in “Phoenician” script from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud for which a photograph is available is in writing which has a mixed character. If it is legitimate to assume that the remaining texts have similar writing, and if, as is generally agreed, Meshel is right to hold that all these texts were composed in Hebrew, it is unlikely that they are evidence for the presence of travellers from Phoenicia. Barkay argues convincingly that the text from Beth Shemesh is in Hebrew script. Thus, apart from the texts from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, there are, as far as I am aware, at most three inscriptions extant which may show that Phoenician script was used in Palestine south of Samaria in the ninth or eighth centuries BC. Questions have, however, been raised about each of them. The dating of the weight discovered in the Shephelah to the eighth century BC is disputed; Naveh supposes that one of the inscriptions from Tell Jemmeh may be in Philistine script, though he rightly observes that this can be only “a working hypothesis” until more is known about this script;³² and Renz’s identification of another text from this site as Phoenician is tentative. By contrast, a number of texts from this period which it is agreed are in Phoenician script have been found in north Palestine. If Zevit is justified when he claims that the texts in “Phoenician” script from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud represent a stage in the development of “the ‘national’ Hebrew script”, this would mean that the men who wrote them were from Israel or Judah. Zevit is, however, advancing ideas which, if they are approved, would result in “a new hypothesis about the evolution of Hebrew palaeography”,³³ and this has not yet been worked out in detail. If Zevit’s theory wins acceptance, or if a text or texts in “Phoenician” script from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud are shown not to have a mixed char-

³¹ N. Avigad and B. Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem, 1997), pp. 266-267 (§716), p. 278 (§747).

³² Naveh (n. 22), pp. 16, 21; cf. Renz, p. 177.

³³ Zevit (n. 8), pp. 377-378 and nn. 51, 52.

acter, a different conclusion would have to be reached. In the present state of our knowledge, however, these texts should be regarded as evidence for a link with north Palestine, but not, as Meshel believes also possible, with Judah. Alternatively, they could be evidence for a link with an area with which the Phoenicians traded. They were produced by Israelites who had been in either direct or indirect contact with Phoenicians.

II

Meshel has not published his reasons for thinking that the language of these inscriptions is Hebrew, but other scholars have advanced the following considerations.

- (1) Tigay³⁴ draws attention to the use of vowel letters in three words, *wyšb'w*, *yhw* and *ytnw*, in one text.³⁵ Because the final *ū* in *wyšb'w* and *ytnw* and the final *ē* in *yhw* are represented respectively by *wāw* and *hē*, the words are written in accordance with Hebrew, and not Phoenician, conventions.³⁶ *wyšb'w* and *yhw* are both in the part of the inscription for which a photograph is available, and, although the second *wāw* of *wyšb'w* is damaged, the reading is not in doubt.³⁷ The first letter of the first word on the photograph is also damaged, but Meshel reads *y|'rk(w)*, which he renders, "(your days) may be prolonged".³⁸ Some scholars, however, read *brk* instead of *'rk*,³⁹ and, because the text is fragmentary, any conjecture about the restoration of the beginning of this word or about its interpretation cannot claim a high degree of probability. Since in addition the final *ū* in the two third masculine plural imperfect verbs in this inscription is written with a vowel letter, it would be

³⁴ J. H. Tigay, *You shall have no other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (Harvard Semitic Studies 31; Atlanta, GA, 1986), p. 36 n. 76; *idem*, "Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence", in P. D. Miller, Jr., P. D. Hanson and S. D. McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia, 1987), p. 192 n. 115.

³⁵ Davies, 1991, p. 80 (§8.015.1, 2); cf. Davies, 2004, p. 233 = Renz, p. 58 (§KAgr(9):6.1, 2, a).

³⁶ Cf. F. M. Cross, Jr., and D. N. Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography: A Study of the Epigraphic Evidence* (American Oriental Series 36; New Haven, 1952), pp. 13-19, 48, 51, 53-57; J. Friedrich, W. Röllig, M. G. Amadasi Guzzo and W. R. Mayer, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik* (3rd edition, *Analecta Orientalia* 55; Rome, 1999), pp. 57-58, 77-81 (§§100-103, 131-133); Gogel (n. 30), pp. 54, 56-59.

³⁷ Cf. Aḥituv (n. 10), p. 159; Meshel (n. 3), "Teman, Ḥorvat", p. 1462.

³⁸ Meshel (n. 3), "Kuntillet 'Ajrud", p. 107; "Teman, Ḥorvat", p. 1462.

³⁹ So, e.g., Renz, p. 58.

unwise to regard 'rk/°brk as another example of the third masculine plural imperfect, this time with the final *ū* written defectively. Unfortunately there is no published photograph from which the reading *ytnw* can be verified, and, with one exception, this is true of all the other terms which will be discussed in the remainder of this section of the article.

- (2) In another inscription *mlh[mh]* is restored by Davies⁴⁰ and by Renz.⁴¹ McCarter thinks, however, that in line 5 the reading “seems to be *mlhm*, with a word-divider following the final *mem*, indicating a pronunciation *milhamā*”. He comments, “[t]he lack of a final *mater* is consistent with Phoen[ician] orthography, while the final-*ā* rather than (*sic*)-*at* shows that the language of the text is Heb[rew] rather than Phoen[ician]”.⁴² But McCarter is challenging a consensus that only the first three letters of this word have been preserved (so, in addition to Davies and Renz, Weinfeld,⁴³ Ahituv,⁴⁴ Meshel,⁴⁵ and Zevit).⁴⁶ Until the long-awaited photographs of this inscription have been published, it will be impossible to tell whether he has succeeded.

Renz (p. 58) states that the noun *mlhmh* is not found in Phoenician. But it is now attested (spelt *mlhmt*) in lines 2 and 3 of an inscription from Kition which is dated to the beginning of the fourth century BC.⁴⁷ Sznycer⁴⁸ rightly observes that this supports the view that *mlhm* in Byblos 13.5,⁴⁹ a text from

⁴⁰ Davies, 1991, p. 82 (§8.023.2, 3, but in fact lines 5 and 6; cf. Davies, 2004, p. 234).

⁴¹ Renz, p. 59 (§KAgr(9):7.2, 3).

⁴² P. K. McCarter, “Kuntillet ‘Ajrud”, in W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, Jr. (eds.), *The Context of Scripture II. Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2000), p. 173 n. 5 to §2.47D.

⁴³ M. Weinfeld, “Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Inscriptions and their Significance”, *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico* 1 (1984), p. 126.

⁴⁴ Ahituv (n. 10), p. 160.

⁴⁵ Z. Meshel, “Two Aspects in the Excavation of Kuntillet ‘Ağrud”, in W. Dietrich and M. A. Klopfsenstein (eds.), *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (OBO 139; Freiburg, Schweiz, and Göttingen, 1994), p. 100.

⁴⁶ Zevit (n. 8), p. 372.

⁴⁷ M. Sznycer, “Déchiffrement, Traduction, Commentaire Philologique et Historique”, in M. Yon and M. Sznycer, “Une inscription Phénicienne royale de Kition (Chypre)”, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 1991 de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris, 1991), pp. 803, 805, 811-812, 818, 819-820.

⁴⁸ Sznycer (n. 47), p. 811 n. 44, p. 812.

⁴⁹ J. Starcky, “Une inscription Phénicienne de Byblos”, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 45 (1969), p. 262.

the end of the sixth or the beginning of the fifth century BC,⁵⁰ should be understood in the same way. In the text from Kuntillet 'Ajrud Weinfeld restores *mlh[mt]* twice and translates "w[ar]".⁵¹ Like the more usual restoration *mlh[mh]*, this is conjectural. Unless McCarter's theory proves to be correct, there is no reason for supposing that this word is Hebrew rather than Phoenician.

- (3) Two verbs in this inscription, *wymsn* and *wydkn* (for which McCarter reads *wyrkn*,⁵² while Ahituv marks the *dāleth* as damaged)⁵³ end in *nūn* paragogicum.⁵⁴ Though *nūn* paragogicum is well-attested in Hebrew,⁵⁵ McCarter comments that it is "thus far lacking in Phoen[ician] except in late forms influenced by Aram[aeic]".⁵⁶ He supports this conclusion by citing Friedrich and Röllig,⁵⁷ but this judgement is not repeated in the most recent edition of this grammar, which apparently leaves open the possibility that the form is native to Phoenician.⁵⁸ An instance of *nūn* paragogicum has been identified in Kilamuwa i 10 (*KAI* 24.10), a text from c. 825 BC,⁵⁹ where, however, the reading is disputed. *ytwn* is read by Friedrich, who takes it to be the third person masculine plural imperfect hitpa'el of **lwy* with *nūn* paragogicum.⁶⁰ But it is doubtful whether the fourth letter of this word is a *wāw*,⁶¹ and this reading has been abandoned by almost all scholars. Tropper⁶² and

⁵⁰ W. Röllig, "Eine neue Phoenizische Inschrift aus Byblos", *Neue Ephemeris für Semitische Epigraphik* 2 (1974), pp. 12-13.

⁵¹ Weinfeld (n. 43), p. 126.

⁵² McCarter (n. 42), p. 173 n. 3 to §2.47D.

⁵³ Ahituv (n. 10), p. 160.

⁵⁴ Davies, 1991, p. 82 (§8.023.1); cf. Davies, 2004, p. 234 (§8.023.2, 3), and Renz, p. 59 (§KAgr(9):7.1) and n. 3.

⁵⁵ Cf. P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica 27; Rome, 2006), p. 126 (§44e).

⁵⁶ McCarter (n. 42), p. 173 n. 3 to §2.47D.

⁵⁷ J. Friedrich and W. Röllig, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik* (2nd edition, *Analecta Orientalia* 46; Rome, 1970), p. 62 (§135) and n. 2.

⁵⁸ Friedrich, Röllig, Amadasi Guzzo and Mayer (n. 36), p. 82 (§135).

⁵⁹ J. Tropper, *Die Inschriften von Zincirli: Neue Edition und vergleichende Grammatik des phönizischen, sam'alischen und aramäischen Textkorpus* (Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas 6; Münster, 1993), p. 27.

⁶⁰ J. Friedrich, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik* (*Analecta Orientalia* 32; Rome, 1951), pp. 58, 64, 77-78, 80 (§§135a, 149, 174, 177[b], 186).

⁶¹ Tropper (n. 59), p. 40; J. Naveh, review of J. Tropper, *Die Inschriften von Zincirli*, *AfO* 42-43 (1995/1996), p. 278.

⁶² Tropper (n. 59), pp. 40-41.

Krahmalkov⁶³ read *ytlkn*, the third person masculine plural imperfect hitpa“el/ yitpe‘el of *hlk* with *nûn* paragogicum. Naveh, however, claims that the fourth letter is more likely to be a *nûn* than a *kaph*, and he correctly notes that “today [*ytlmn*] is the generally accepted reading”.⁶⁴ In that case, whether the word is a perfect⁶⁵ or an imperfect,⁶⁶ the final *nûn* would be due to reduplication of the last letter of the verb **lyn/lwn*, unless the verb itself is **lwn* (cf. *KAI* II, p. 33). Thus, while it may be incautious to hold that Aramaic influence explains the clearly-attested instances of *nûn* paragogicum in Phoenician, there is no unquestioned example of the usage in early Phoenician texts.

- (4) The verbs *wymn* and *wydkn* are also cases of *wāw* consecutive + the imperfect.⁶⁷ Renz (p. 58 n. 3) rightly observes that, because the context has not been preserved, it is impossible to tell whether *wysb’û*,⁶⁸ which, as was noted above, is in the part of an inscription for which a photograph is available, is another example of this construction. It is unnecessary to document the frequency of this in Hebrew. By contrast, Friedrich, Röllig, Amadasi Guzzo and Mayer say that, if it occurs in Phoenician, which is uncertain, it is extremely rare.⁶⁹
- (5) The reading *hytb*⁷⁰ can be verified from a published photograph.⁷¹ Renz (p. 57 n. 2) comments that the roots *tb* and *ytb* are not attested in Phoenician.⁷² Hofstijzer and Jongeling,⁷³ however, classify *ytb* (which they accept instead of *hytb*) as Phoenician, though this is the only example from Phoenician which they give, and they concede that the word may be Hebrew.

⁶³ C. R. Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 90; Studia Phoenicia 15; Leuven, 2000), p. 158; *idem*, *A Phoenician-Punic Grammar* (Handbuch der Orientalistik I/54; Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2001), pp. 170, 182, 184, but not p. 156, where the *nûn* is omitted.

⁶⁴ Naveh (n. 61), p. 278.

⁶⁵ Friedrich, Röllig, Amadasi Guzzo and Mayer (n. 36), pp. 94, 109 (§§149, 166).

⁶⁶ S. Segert, *A Grammar of Phoenician and Punic* (Munich, 1976), pp. 141, 153 (§§54.364, 54.473).

⁶⁷ Cf. Renz, pp. 58, 59 n. 3.

⁶⁸ Davies, 1991, p. 80 (§8.015.1) = Renz, p. 58 (§KAgr(9):6.1).

⁶⁹ Friedrich, Röllig, Amadasi Guzzo and Mayer (n. 36), pp. 191-192 (§266[1]).

⁷⁰ Davies, 1991, p. 80 (§8.015.2), but cf. Renz, p. 58 (§KAgr(9):6.2) and n. 4.

⁷¹ Aḥituv (n. 10), p. 159; Meshel (n. 3), “Teman, Ḥorvar”, p. 1462.

⁷² Cf. R. S. Tomback, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 32; Missoula, MT, 1978), pp. 119-120, 124; Krahmalkov (n. 63), *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*, pp. 201-202, 207; and, for *tb*, J. Hofstijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 2 volumes (Handbuch der Orientalistik I/21; Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1995), pp. 415-418, 420.

⁷³ Hofstijzer and Jongeling (n. 72), p. 454.

- (6) Meshel once read *wbʿrḥ*, which he rendered “and in the (just) ways (of God)”, in line 1 of the inscription discussed in paragraphs (2), (3) and (4) above.⁷⁴ Renz (p. 57 n. 2) finds here another root, *ʿrḥ*, which does not occur in Phoenician. There is, however, a participle, *mʿrḥ*, in *KAI* 66.1, a Punic text from the first half of the second century BC (*KAI* II, p. 81). It is used as an epithet signifying either “leader”, “guide”,⁷⁵ or “one who provides lodging to the traveller and, by extension, room and care to the ill”.⁷⁶ Moreover, Dahood tentatively suggests that the initial *mēm* should be attached to the previous word, leaving the noun *ʿrḥ*, “way”.⁷⁷ But Meshel now reads *wbʿzrḥ* in the text from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,⁷⁸ and there is a consensus that this reading, meaning “and when (God) shone forth”, should be adopted.⁷⁹ This is the text printed by Renz, though he also records Meshel’s proposal.⁸⁰ It would be unwise to lay any weight on this example.

Although some features of the language of these inscriptions could be Phoenician, there is nothing in what has so far been published which cannot be Hebrew.⁸¹ The use of vowel letters in three words and the two cases of *wāw* consecutive + the imperfect are the strongest indications that these texts were written in Hebrew, and this conclusion is supported by the examples of *nūn* paragogicum and the absence of forms associated with the roots *ṭb* and *yṭb* from Phoenician texts. But no reliance can be placed on Meshel’s reading *wbʿrḥ*, it cannot now be claimed that the noun *mlḥmh* is not found in Phoenician, and it would be premature to accept McCarter’s interpretation of one of the instances of this term until the reading can be verified from a published photograph. It is much to be regretted that, until the readings *ḵtnw*, *wymśn* and *wydkn* can be confirmed, the information provided by these words must be regarded as provisional. On the basis of the evidence which is available, however, Meshel’s belief that the language of these inscriptions is Hebrew appears to be justified.

⁷⁴ Z. Meshel, *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: A Religious Centre from the Time of the Judaeen Monarchy on the Border of Sinai* (Jerusalem, 1978), unpaginated.

⁷⁵ *KAI* II, p. 81; Segert (n. 66), p. 201 (§64.723.1).

⁷⁶ Krahmalkov (n. 63), *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*, pp. 71, 267.

⁷⁷ M. Dahood, “Phoenician-Punic Philology”, *Orientalia* NS 46 (1977), p. 472.

⁷⁸ Meshel (n. 45), p. 100.

⁷⁹ So, e.g., Weinfeld (n. 43), p. 126; Ahituv (n. 10), p. 160, marking the *zayin* as damaged; Davies, 1991, p. 82 (§8.023.1); Zevit (n. 8), p. 372, but without the *wāw*.

⁸⁰ Renz, p. 59 (§KAgr(9):7.1) and nn. a, 1.

⁸¹ Cf. Renz, pp. 57-58.

III

The text on plaster which can at present be studied only in transcription includes the divine name Baal once and the divine name El twice, unless 'l means "God" here.⁸² Ahituv⁸³ transcribes the text as follows:

wbžrh. 'l. br[
wymśn hrm[.
wyđkn. ġbñm[
wšđš. 'ly[
lbrk. b'l. bym mlḥ[mh
lšm [.] 'l. bym mlḥ[mh

Leaving line 4 untranslated, it may be rendered:

And when El (*or* God) shone forth on r[
 and mountains melted
 and peaks were crushed

 to bless Baal on the day of batt[le
 to the name of El (*or* God) on the day of batt[le.

Keel and Uehlinger are uncertain whether this text was composed by Phoenicians or Israelites⁸⁴ and Miller says that "it may or may not be Israelite/Judean in origin",⁸⁵ but Catastini thinks it is a Phoenician inscription which refers to one, and perhaps two, Phoenician gods.⁸⁶ The content of this inscription must now be considered.

The imagery used has parallels in the Old Testament.⁸⁷ Deut 33:2; Isa 60:1-2 may be compared for 'shone forth' (*zrh*, line 1) and Mic 1:4; Ps 97:5 for

⁸² Davies, 1991, p. 82 (§8.023.1, 2, 3, but in fact lines 1, 5 and 6; cf. Davies, 2004, p. 234) = Renz, p. 59 (§KAgr(9):7.1, 2, 3).

⁸³ Ahituv (n. 10), p. 160.

⁸⁴ O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen* (Quaestiones Disputatae 134; Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel and Vienna, 1992), p. 278; ET *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 245.

⁸⁵ P. D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, KY and London, 2000), p. 41.

⁸⁶ A. Catastini, "Le iscrizioni di Kuntillet 'Ajrud e il profetismo", *Annali. Istituto Orientale di Napoli* NS 42 (1982), p. 132.

⁸⁷ Weinfeld (n. 43), p. 126; McCarter (n. 42), p. 173 nn. a, b to §2.47D; Zevit (n. 8), p. 373.

‘(mountains) melted’ (the niph‘al of **mss*, line 2) as part of the vocabulary of theophany. Moreover, Hab 3:6; Judg 5:5, which employ terms not found in this inscription, tell of earthquakes in the mountains during a theophany (cf. line 3). In addition, McCarter rightly speaks of “the distinctively Israelite literary character of this fragmentary poem”.⁸⁸ There are, however, no extant Phoenician literary texts with which it can be compared. Moreover, as far as I am aware, no Phoenician texts which describe a theophany have been discovered, though the text from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and accounts of theophanies of Adad, Marduk, Assur, Ishtar and Ninurta in Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian texts and the account of a theophany of Baal in a text from Ugarit mention similar natural phenomena.⁸⁹ The Phoenicians might well have related a theophany in the same way. Thus, though the text from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud reads like an Israelite composition, insufficient data are available to establish whether Phoenicians could have written it.

In Phoenician inscriptions *b’l*, whether employed as a god’s name or as a divine title, normally occurs in phrases such as *b’l šdn*, “Baal of Sidon” (*KAI* 14.18), *b’l lbnn*, “Baal of Lebanon” (*KAI* 31.1; cf. 2) and *b’l šmm*, “Lord of the heavens” (*KAI* 4.3), though it may also be part of the title of a goddess, as in *štrt šm b’l*, “Astarte-Name-of-Baal” (*KAI* 14.18). But it stands alone in texts from the ninth century BC (*KAI* 30.4; *KAI* II, 48) and c. 720 BC (*KAI* 26.A.I.1, 2, 3, 8; II.6, 10, 12; III.11; C.IV.12; *KAI* II, 35), and so, though the usage is rare,⁹⁰ Phoenicians who came to Kuntillet ‘Ajrud might have known it. As far as *’l* is concerned, the designation *’l qn ’rs*, “El creator of the earth”, is found in the inscription from c. 720 BC which has just been mentioned (*KAI* 26.A.III.18), *rk b’l*, “El’s charioteer”, is one of the gods listed in a Phoenician inscription of c. 825 BC from Zenjirli (*KAI* 24.16; Tropper [n. 59], p. 27), and Bethel, “an hypostasis of *’l*”, and Anath-Bethel his consort are Tyrian deities who are witnesses in a treaty concluded between Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) and Baal, king of Tyre.⁹¹ The divine name El, however, appears in only one other extant Phoenician text, which comes from Umm el-‘Awāmīd, near Tyre. It is assigned to the second half of the second century BC, and begins *l’ dn l’l*, “to

⁸⁸ McCarter (n. 42), p. 173 nn. 1, 4 to §2.47D.

⁸⁹ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 10; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1965), pp. 76-77, 79, 81-84, 87, 89.

⁹⁰ E. Lipiński, *Dieux et déesses de l’univers Phénicien et Punique* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 64; Studia Phoenicia 14; Leuven, 1995), p. 82.

⁹¹ M. L. Barré, *The God-List in the Treaty between Hannibal and Philip V of Macedonia: A Study in Light of the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Tradition* (The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore and London, 1983), pp. 43-50, 134-136, 138, 160-166.

the Lord El".⁹² Lipiński claims that the absence of any information about a sanctuary dedicated to El or about a festival held in his honour reflects the limited rôle he played in Phoenician religion.⁹³ 'l is attested with the meaning "god" in a Punic text from Carthage, where it is in apposition to the divine name *b'l hmn*, "Baal-Ḥammon" (*CIS I*. iii, §4943.1), unless, as Röllig believes, it is a scribal error.⁹⁴ As far as I am aware, it is never used in Phoenician in the absolute state to denote "god" or "a god". Thus the way the text from Kuntillet 'Ajrud speaks of El, or God, is not in accordance with what is known about Phoenician practice.

There is no other extant Israelite inscription which includes the divine name Baal,⁹⁵ though *b'l* is found as a man's name.⁹⁶ In the Old Testament the divine name *b'l* is usually written with the article (e.g., Judg 6:31, 32; 1 Kings 16:31; 18:21; Hos 2:10). It is anarthrous, first, in the phrases *b'l p'ur*, "Baal of Peor" (Num 25:3), *b'l bryt*, "Baal/Lord of the covenant" (Judg 8:33) and *b'l zbw b*, the distorted title "Baal/Lord of flies" (2 Kings 1:2), secondly as a man's name (e.g., 1 Chr 5:5) and a place-name (1 Chr 4:33), and thirdly as an element in place-names such as *b'l-gd*, "Baal-gad" (Josh 11:17), *byt b'l m'wn*, "Beth-baal-meon" (Josh 13:17), and *bmwt b'l*, "Bamoth-baal" (Num 22:41; Josh 13:17), or perhaps at Num 22:41, with Noth, "a high place of Baal".⁹⁷ Although Old Testament usage would suggest that at Kuntillet 'Ajrud an Israelite or a Judaeon might have been expected to prefer *hb'l*, the form *b'l* was also current. 'l, "God", may be present in three Hebrew inscriptions: what may be a dedication formula from Khirbet el-Qom which consists of the one word 'l, "God", or "El", from the late eighth or early seventh century BC;⁹⁸ an ostrakon of the same date from Jerusalem which has been conjecturally restored as 'l] qn 'rṣ, "El creator of the earth",⁹⁹ though other restorations are possible;¹⁰⁰ and an inscription of c. 700 BC from Khirbet Beit Lei where, if this is the correct read-

⁹² W. Röllig, "El als Gottesbezeichnung im Phönizischen", in R. von Kienle, A. Moortgat, H. Otten, E. von Schuler and W. Zaumseil (eds.), *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich zum 65. Geburtstag am 27. August 1958 gewidmet* (Heidelberg, 1959), p. 409; P. Magnanini, *Le Iscrizioni Fenicie dell'Oriente: Testi, Traduzioni, Glossari* (Rome, 1973), p. 19 (§8.A.1).

⁹³ Lipiński (n. 90), p. 60.

⁹⁴ Röllig (n. 92), p. 415 n. 24.

⁹⁵ Davies, 1991, p. 316; 2004, p. 147.

⁹⁶ Renz, p. 93 (§Sam(8):1.12.2) and n. b; cf. Davies, 1991, p. 41 (§3.012.3).

⁹⁷ M. Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose, Numeri* (ATD 7; Göttingen, 1966), p. 147 and n. 1, pp. 159-160.

⁹⁸ Davies, 1991, p. 106 (§25.005.1) = Renz, p. 215 (§Kom(8):8.1).

⁹⁹ Davies, 1991, p. 70 (§4.201.3).

¹⁰⁰ Renz, p. 198 n. c.

ing, 'l would refer to Yahweh.¹⁰¹ In Gen 33:20 the God of Israel is called El, and he is invoked by this name in Num 16:22. The similar invocation in Num 27:16 has Yahweh instead of El. Moreover, in the Old Testament Yahweh is frequently referred to simply as 'l, "God" (e.g., Isa 40:18; Ps 106:14, 21; Job 5:8), and *BDB* (p. 42b) says that when 'l stands for "the only true God, needing no article or predicate to define him", it "always" occurs "in poetry". Although many of the passages cited by *BDB* are from exilic or post-exilic literature, there are probable examples from the pre-exilic period at Pss 78:7, 8, 18, 19, 34, 41; 104:21¹⁰² and Hos 12:1.¹⁰³ It may be added that the synonym 'lwh is the subject of the verb in Hab 3:3 when God's coming from Teman in a theophany is related.

The divine name *b'l* could refer to a god worshipped by Phoenicians, Israelites, Judaeans or Canaanites. It is not known how Phoenicians would have described a theophany, but the imagery used in this poetic text from Kuntillet 'Ajrud is consistent with the view that it is an Israelite composition. The two instances of 'l are also consistent with the usage of the Old Testament. Their inclusion, however, makes it unlikely that Phoenician gods are mentioned. It cannot be shown that 'l and *b'l* are not the names of Canaanite gods here, but they could perfectly well be titles of the God of Israel.

IV

Keel and Uehlinger believe that the wall paintings on plaster were deliberately planned, and they cite, for example, the depictions of a city which may be under siege and of a prince sitting on a throne and holding a lotus blossom as indications that the establishment at Kuntillet 'Ajrud was under state control. They think that both the wall paintings and the texts written on the plastered walls have an official character.¹⁰⁴ If this is so, those who worshipped gods named in these texts would have been responsible for the construction, or perhaps for the running, of this way station. But the theory that the text which

¹⁰¹ Davies, 1991, p. 89 (§15.007.1) = Renz, p. 248 (§BLay(7):2.1).

¹⁰² J. Day, "How many Pre-exilic Psalms are there?", in J. Day (ed.), *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 406; London and New York, 2004), pp. 237-239.

¹⁰³ A. A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 473-474.

¹⁰⁴ Keel and Uehlinger (n. 84), *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole*, pp. 278-280 with Figs. 237, 238a; ET *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, pp. 245-246 with Figs. 237, 238a.

has been discussed in section III above refers to Phoenician gods is implausible. Moreover, in the other legible text written on plaster the divine name Yahweh occurs both on the fragment for which a photograph is available¹⁰⁵ and on a further fragment.¹⁰⁶ The goddess Asherah is never mentioned in Phoenician or Punic inscriptions,¹⁰⁷ but, if the reading is correct, the divine name *ʾšrt* also appears on this fragment.¹⁰⁸ If these texts are representative, it is unlikely that the men who were in charge at Kuntillet 'Ajrud would have been Phoenician.

V

The argument of this article may be summarized as follows. If the portion of text which can be studied on a photograph is typical, the script of these inscriptions is neither exclusively Phoenician nor exclusively Hebrew. This shows that the inscriptions were written by men who were not themselves Phoenician, but who had been in either direct or indirect contact with them. A comparison with inscriptions in Phoenician script which come from other sites in Palestine and which are assigned to the ninth and eighth centuries BC points to a link with north Palestine or with an area with which the Phoenicians traded, but not with Judah. Although some features of the language of these texts could be either Phoenician or Hebrew, there is nothing in what has so far been published which cannot be Hebrew. The use of vowel letters in three words and the two cases of *wāw* consecutive + the imperfect, together with the examples of *nūn* paragogicum and the absence of forms associated with the roots *ṭb* and *yṭb* from Phoenician texts, support Meshel's contention that these are Hebrew inscriptions. The imagery employed in the text which mentions El and Baal has parallels in the Old Testament, but it is not known whether Phoenicians would have used similar imagery to describe a theophany. Moreover, Phoenician and Old Testament evidence about the use of the divine name *b'l* is evenly balanced. The way in which the text speaks of El, or God, is, however, not in accordance with what is known about Phoenician practice, but is consistent with the usage of the Old Testament. This is decisive for demonstrating that Phoenician gods are not referred to here, though it is

¹⁰⁵ Davies, 1991, p. 80 (§8.015.2) = Renz, p. 58 (§KAgr(9):6.2).

¹⁰⁶ Davies, 2004, p. 233 at §8.015.

¹⁰⁷ Lipiński (n. 90), p. 225.

¹⁰⁸ Renz, p. 58 (§KAgr(9):6.b) and n. 6; cf. Davies, 1991, p. 80 (§8.015.2); 2004, p. 233.

impossible to tell whether 'l and b'l are the names of Canaanite gods or titles of the God of Israel. If Keel and Uehlinger's belief that these texts have an official character is correct, those who were in charge at Kuntillet 'Ajrud would not have been Phoenician, but would have come from the northern kingdom of Israel.