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A New Look at the Epigraphic Finds from Ḥorvat ʿUza

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In Memory of Itzhaq Beit-Arieh
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The article discusses nine of the 35 inscriptions unearthed at Ḥorvat ʿUza, a Judahite fortress constructed in the 7th century on the southeastern border of the Beer-sheba Valley. It first suggests new readings, translations and detailed commentary of the texts and then discusses their contribution to the understanding of the military organization, administration and economy of the fortress and the role of the Negeb in the international trade of the late First Temple period. The ostraca shed new light on the movement of merchants along the southeastern Negeb–Ḥorvat ʿUza–Aravah Road, the manner in which the fortress obtained part of its grain, the system by which supply was recorded and the military hierarchy at the fortress in the late years of the Kingdom of Judah.

KEYWORDS Horvat ʿUza, Beer-sheba Valley, Aravah, Ostraca, Trade

The fortress of Ḥorvat ʿUza (Khirbet Ghazzeh) is located about ten km southeast of the fortress of Arad, on the southeastern border of the Beer-sheba Valley. It was built in the 7th century BCE at a site that commands the secondary road that led from the Aravah to the Negeb of Arad. Its dominating position guaranteed the Kingdom of Judah early warning in case of a raid or an attack from the southeast, supervision of people who entered or left the kingdom and the collection of tolls from caravans and traders passing through the Beer-sheba Valley to/from Philistia and the Kingdom of Judah (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 2007a).

The site was identified with the town of Qinah mentioned in the Negeb of Judah town list (Josh 15:22) and in an ostracon from Arad (No. 24) (Lemaire 1973: 18–23; Naʾaman 1980: 137). It was named after the Kenite families who settled in the Negeb of Arad, as related in Judg 1:16. The inhabitants of the site were apparently the descendants of the families who wandered in the southeastern periphery of the Kingdom of Judah for

hundreds of years and must have kept their tribal unity and cohesion from the early Iron Age down to the 7th century—hence the naming of the fortress after the tribal affiliation of the families who settled there.

We may further suggest that the building of the fortress and the settlement of the Kenites was part of the policy of the late kings of Judah to settle the pastoral nomads who wandered for hundreds of years in the southern periphery of the kingdom. A clear indication of this policy is the dramatic growth in number of small settlements in the Beersheba Valley in the 7th–early 6th centuries BCE, as detected in the surveys conducted in this area (Beit-Arieh 2003; Thareani-Sussely 2007a; Faust 2008: 171–172; 175–176). Another indication is the growing number of Edomite artefacts, in particular pottery, in the late 8th–early 6th century BCE Judahite settlements (Mazar 1985; Singer-Avitz 2004; Beit-Arieh 1995; 2011; Thareani-Sussely 2007b; Thareani 2010; 2011). The *pax Assyriaca* and the settlement of nomads contributed to the pacification of the area and the growth of commercial activity. The construction of the fortress of Ḥorvat ʿUza as a central spot for the population that wandered in the kingdom's southeasternmost periphery was one of the cornerstones of this long-term policy.

The fortress of Ḥorvat ʿUza was excavated over the course of seven seasons from 1982–1986, and in 1988 and 1996 (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 2007a: 5–6). The fortress encompassed an area of about two dunams and was surrounded by a 1.50 m thick wall. A gate, flanked by two towers, was located on the northern side; an additional eight towers were positioned in the fortress's corners and along its walls. The internal area of the fortress was well planned and densely built. Its eastern part was divided into insulae. The walls in this area were constructed of a single line of stones, and the buildings mainly served for habitation. The northwestern building that had stood west of the gate was much larger than all the buildings on the eastern side, with walls double in width. It must have served as the military-administrative headquarters of the fortress (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 2007b: 15–47).

An extra-mural quarter was built north of the fortress. It seems that in its late stage, the fortress became densely populated and the local inhabitants were forced to settle on the slope of the hill (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 2007b: 48–56).

Thirty-five inscriptions have been discovered in the excavations of Ḥorvat ʿUza, two of them in the extra-mural quarter (Beit-Arieh 2007b). Except for one stamp seal and two inscriptions written on a complete jar, all other inscriptions are ostraca written on jar fragments. All ostraca were written in Hebrew script except for one that was written in the Edomite script (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 133–137). All the inscriptions uncovered in the fortress were concentrated in the eastern side of the fortress and in the gate area, whereas no inscription was discovered in the partially excavated western side (see distribution map of the ostraca in Beit-Arieh 2007b: 180). The distribution indicates that at least some (or even most) of the inscriptions were written by the local inhabitants who lived in the domestic quarter.

The most interesting ostraca uncovered at the site were published shortly after their discovery (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 1985; Beit-Arieh 1986–87; 1993; 1993b; 1999a) and were subsequently studied by other scholars (see below). Beit-Arieh (2007b) published the corpus of 35 inscriptions in the site's comprehensive publication. He presented each

ostracon with a facsimile, photograph, transliteration and interpretation. This is followed by a distribution map of the ostraca within the fortress (2007: 180),[1] a comparative tablet of the scripts of the ostraca (2007: 182), and a list of personal names (2007: 183–184),[2] all of which help in analyzing the published inscriptions.

In what follows, I will examine nine ostraca in an effort to further clarify their texts, analyze their contents and illuminate their contribution to the steadily growing corpus of epigraphic documents from the Beer-sheba Valley.[3] I will avoid analyzing the previously deciphered personal names, as they have already been discussed in detail by Beit-Arieh and other scholars who examined the inscriptions.[4]

The article is written in memory of my colleague Prof. Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, who worked for many years in the Negev and published detailed reports of three out of four of his major excavation projects (Ḥorvat Qitmit [Beit-Arieh 1995], Tel ʿIra [Beit-Arieh 1999b] and Ḥorvat ʿUza [Beit-Arieh 2007a]), as well as a detailed report of his regional surveys in the Negev (Beit-Arieh 2003). The final report of his fourth and last excavation at Tel Malḥata is currently being prepared for publication and it is distressing that he did not live long enough to see its publication. Beit-Arieh deserves a warm thanks from all those who are interested in the history and archaeology of the Negev for his long, indefatigable efforts to explore the Negev and for publishing the results of all his excavations and submitting them to the community of scholars and the broader audience.

Nine ostraca from Ḥorvat ʿUza

Letters

(A) The Edomite letter (No. 7) was discovered on the floor of the front room of the gatehouse together with Inscriptions Nos. 8–10 (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 133–137). It was published a short time afterward (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 1985), and was later discussed by numerous scholars (Israel 1987: 339–340; Zwickel 1988; Knauf 1988: 79; Misgav 1990; Lindenberg 2003: 13; Aḥituv 2008: 350–354; Weippert 2010: 364; Becking and Dijkstra 2011). I will first present a transliteration, translation and notes and then an interpretation of the letter:[5]

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[1]   The distribution plan of the ostraca (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 180) is not entirely accurate. When comparing the data of the ostraca with the fortress plan (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 2007b: 18–19), it is evident that no ostraca were found in Loci 338, 339, 394, 780 and 292. Moreover, one ostracon (No. 25)—not marked on the plan—was discovered in Locus 719.

[2]   The list of personal names from Ḥorvat ʿUza should be corrected in many places. Yet such correction requires detailed discussion of many texts, which is far beyond the scope of this article.

[3]   Ada Yardeni's excellent drawings of seven of the nine inscriptions discussed in my paper (Nos. 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 23, 24; see Beit-Arieh 2007b: 122) are an indispensable tool for the decipherment of the ostraca.

[4]   I wish to express my gratitude to the late Prof. Itzhaq Beit-Arieh and Liora Freud for providing me with a set of digital photographs of the ostraca published in the final report of the site. I owe thanks as well to the staff of the Israel Antiquity Authorities, in particular Debi Ben-Ami, who graciously permitted me to spend time in the storehouse where the ostraca are kept.

[5]   The transcription of the personal names follows that of Weippert 2010: 364.

1. ꜣmr lmlk· ꜣmr · lblbl·   אמר למלך· אמר· לבלבל· .1
2. hšlm· ꜣt · whbrktk   השלם· את· והברכתך .2
3. lqws· wˤt· tn· ꜣt· hꜣkl·   לקוס· ועת· תן· את· האכל· .3
4. ꜣšr· Ꜥmd· ꜣḥ ꜣmh· pṣꜤ   אשר· עמד· אחאמה· פצ[ע .4
5. whrm Ꜥzꜣl· Ꜥl mz[ḥ ---]   והרם עזאל· על מז[בח ---] .5
6. wꜣyꜣsp· ḥmr· hꜣkl   ו[י]סף· חמר· האכל .6

1. Message of Lamilk; Say to *Blbl*:
2. Are you well? I bless you
3. by Qaus! And now, give the grain,
4. which with ꜣAhiꜣummīh is damaged? (*pāṣūꜤa*),
5. and may ꜤUzziꜣil offer (it) on the al[tar of …]
6. [thereby ad]ding? a homer-measure of the grain.

Line 4: Of the three letters at the end of the line, the first (/p/) and the last (/Ꜥ/) are clear and the middle (/ṣ/) is probable. I suggest interpreting the verb *pṣꜤ* (*pāṣūꜤa*), "damaged" (literally "split"), as referring to the condition of the grain that possibly began sprouting due to moisture.

Line 5: Beit-Arieh (2007: 134, 136) and Aḥituv (2008: 351, 354) restored the last word *mz[bḥ]*, "altar", whereas other scholars restored it *mz[w]*, "storehouse/granary" (Israel 1987: 339; Zwickel 1988: 39; Lindenberg 2003: 137; Becking and Dijkstra 2011: 114). However, it is unlikely that Lamlik ordered storing a damaged grain in a storehouse/granary. Moreover, the verbal form *wᵉhērîm Ꜥal*, "will lift on", does not fit storehouse/granary, where grains were either dug in the ground or stored in jars. On the other hand, the *hiphil* form of the verb *rwm* appears frequently in the Bible in the sense of "offer" or "contribute" (Lev 2:9; 6:8; Num 18:26; 31:28, 52; Dan 8:11; 2 Chr 30:24; 35:8–9). Thus, the verbal form *wᵉhērîm Ꜥal*, "will offer on", is construed well with the noun *mz[bḥ]*, "altar".

The altar (*mzbḥ*) is rendered without the definite article, hence in the construct state (*mizᵉbāḥ*). Since a space of about three letters exists at the end of the line, Aḥituv's restoration *qws* (2008: 351, 354) is possible, but so are other alternatives (e.g., a place name or a noun).

Line 6: Faint traces of about four letters are visible at the beginning of the line, followed by a graphical marker that eliminates the restoration [y]ḥmr (Aḥituv 2008: 351, 354). Of the four letters, the third is clearly /s/, the other three might be /w/, /y/ and /p/. Tentatively, I restore the verbal form *wysp* (*wᵉyāsap*), "will add" (compare Lev 22:14; 27:13, 15, 19, 27; Deut 19:9). Lamlik states that the damaged homer-measure of grain (about 100–200 litres; Powell 1992: 903) was added to the grain that was regularly offered on the altar.

Lamlik, an Edomite, was the owner of a large quantity of grain probably held in the fortress under the supervision of ꜣAhiꜣummīh. Since part of the grain was damaged, he ordered *Blbl*, his agent, to let ꜤUzziꜣil add it to the grain offered on the altar. If this interpretation is correct, it indicates that a regular offering of grain was made to god, possibly to Qaus, at Ḥorvat ꜤUza.

Where was the altar on which the grain was offered? Since the letter was found near the fortress gate, the altar might be sought either within the fortress or in its vicinity. In his excavations of the site, Beit-Arieh unearthed a small open cult place located near the gatehouse (Beit-Arieh and Cresson 2007b: 30–31, 33). It is built of flat stones with three steps leading to the top. The area around it was covered by a thick layer of ash and animal bones. Is it the cult place where Lamlik ordered *Blbl* to offer the grain, and was the altar dedicated to Qaus? Did the Kenite inhabitants of the place obey the Deuteronomic law of the cult's centralization and only non-Judahite visitors use the altar?[6] Or did the altar serve for offerings to the two deities, YHWH and Qaus? Unfortunately, the data available for discussing these questions is insufficient for even tentative answers.

The letter does conclusively show that a certain amount of the grain transported to the fortress was cultivated by an Edomite. It illustrates the late 7th–early 6th century trade relations between Judah and Edom, part of which was conducted along the route leading from the Aravah via Ḥorvat ʿUza to the Beer-sheba Valley.

(B) Ostracon No. 2 was found in a small cell of the front room of the gate, side by side with the literary ostracon (No. 1) (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 128). It was written by a non-experienced scribe and the letter forms are inconsistent. I suggest transliterating the text as follows:

1. ʾmr mṣy sḥr	אמר מצי סחר	.1
2. lt[mʾnʾ]y · wʿtʾ	לת[מ?נ?]י· ועת?	.2
3. dkrʾ [-]lʾ[-]· phrsʾ	דכר? [-]ל?[-]· פהרס?	.3
4. mṣ[ʾ?] mḥbʾ	מצ[א?] מחבא	.4
5. mṣbʾ [hʾ]mʾlʾkʾ	מצבא [ה?]מ?ל?ל?ך?	.5

Message of Amaṣi, the merchant, to the Te[mani]te[??].
And now[?], Da/ikri/Dakuri …. found[?] a hiding place[?] from the army of the king[??].

Line 1: The letters *mṣy* are clearly observed in the photograph and facsimile. The scribe probably omitted the short initial /ʾ/ of the original name *ʾĂmaṣî*. The latter may be compared with the biblical *ʾAmᵉṣî* (Neh 11:12; 1 Chr 6:31). Amaṣi is hypocoristic of names like *ʾĂmaṣyāhû*, in which the theophoric element was dropped (Zadok 1988: 75, 97–98, 169).

Line 2: the third letter is blurred, but might possibly be /m/, and the fourth is obliterated. The name might be interpreted as an ethnic or regional designation, *lt[mn]y* "to the Te[mani]te", i.e., a person from Teman or from "the south" (*tēmān*). The ethnic designation 'Temanite' is known from the Bible as the land of Eliphaz, Job's friend (Job 2:11; 4:1; 15:1; 22:1; 42:7, 9), and that of Husham, an early king of Edom (Gen 36:34; 1 Chr 1:45). Such a nickname might fit well a person who lived or stayed in the remote southern site of Ḥorvat ʿUza.

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6   In a forthcoming article, I discuss the Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis of the origins of Yahwism in light of the late 7th–early 6th century inscriptions and artefacts unearthed at Ḥorvat ʿUza, and suggest that some indications exist for the exceptional devotion of the Kenites toward YHWH (Na'aman forthcoming).

The letters /w/ and /ʿ/ appear at the end of line 2 and are followed by what looks like /h/. In light of the standard epistolary introduction of letters, I suggest that the last letter is /t/ and that the upper diagonal line is not part of the letter, and render the word *wʿt* (*weʿattâ*), "and now".

Line 3, *Dkr*: Da/ikri/Dakuri—my assumed rendering of the name—is a hypocoristic name derived from the Aramaic verb *dkr*, "to remember" (Zadok 1977: 80, 130).

Line 4: The letters /m/ and /ṣ/ at the beginning of the line are clear and are followed by a letter with two faint horizontal lines crossed by a vertical line (see drawing). In light of the context, I restored it *mṣ[ʾ]* (*māṣāʾ*). This word is followed by the four letters *mḥbʾ* (*maḥăbōʾ*), "hiding place" (compare 1 Sam 23:23; Isa 32:2).

Line 5: The four letters *mṣbʾ* (*miṣṣebāʾ*) are clearly observed in the photograph. The restoration *hmlk* (*hammelek*) at the end of the line is tentative (see drawing).

The inscription is a short letter that a certain Amaṣi, a Judahite merchant (*sōḥēr*), sent to his agent/partner who at that time resided at Ḥorvat ʿUza and was possibly called by the ethnic or regional name 'Temanite'. It includes the message that a certain person called by the Aramaic or proto-Arabian name *Dkr* found a hiding place from the royal army that pursued him.

A memorandum

Ostracon No. 5 may be transliterated as follows:

1.	bʿlʾm[r]	בעלאמ[ר]	1.
2.	bʾ ʾly b	בא אלי ב	2.
3.	st[r] lʾmr	סת[ר] לאמר	3.
4.	hnh ʿbd	הנה עבד	4.
5.	blʿmˀ yˀwn	בלעם? י?ון	5.
6.	šmwˀ · yšˀ[bˀ]	שמו? · יש?[ב?]	6.
7.	blš[kˀ]t	בלש[כ?]ת	7.
8.	mlktˀ	מלכת?	8.

Baʿal-ʾamar came to me secretly saying: Now, the servant of Bilʿam, hisˀ name is Yawan, st[aysˀˀ] in a royal hall.

The text is probably a memorandum of a verbal message secretly delivered to the scribe by a certain Baʿal-ʾamar, whose identity (along with the context of this message) remains unknown.

The name Baʿal-ʾamar ("Baʿal has spoken") may be compared with the Hebrew name Amaryahu ("YHWH has spoken"), a well attested name in First Temple period Hebrew inscriptions (Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. 2005: 589).

Line 5: The letter /b/ is followed by /l/, which is missing in the drawing. Next appear /ʿ/ and then faint traces of /m/ (see drawing). The rendered name, Bilʿam (*Bilᵉʿām*), is well known from the Bible and the Deir ʿAlla plaster inscription (Hoftijzer and van der Kooij 1976; 1991; Hackett 1984).

The next letter after *blʿm* is eroded, but tentatively may be read either /t/ or /y/ and is followed by /w/ and /n/. If this is the correct rendering, it forms the name *Yˀwn* (Yawan),

which may be compared with the Assyrian name Iāmānû, "the Ionian", a name that designates its holder's origin from the Aegean region (Radner 2000).

Line 6: The third letter is drawn in the facsimile as /r/ (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 131). In the photograph, however, only the diagonal bar is visible, along with what looks like a graphical mark on its left side. Tentatively, I interpret it as /w/ and read it *šmwʾ* (*šᵉmô*), "his name". It is followed by /y/ and then a blotted letter that hesitantly I restore as /š/. Contextually, a verbal form should appear here, so I restored it *yšʾ[bʾ]* (*yōšēb*), "sits, stays".

The noun *liškâ* ("an inner hall") is known from pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic biblical texts (Köhler, Baumgartner and Stamm 1995: 536–537; Clines 1998: 580) and was applied in religious buildings as well as a palace (for the latter, see Jer 36:12, 20, 21). See Kellermann 1997, with earlier literature.[7]

Line 7: The letters /m/ and /l/ are clear, whereas the letters /k/ and /t/ are faint but legible. The noun *mlkt* (*malkût*) in a construct state appears frequently in the Bible.

It seems that Baʿal-ʾamar was a Phoenician merchant and disclosed to the scribe that a certain person named Yawan, the servant of Balaam, possibly a Phoenician merchant, resided in a royal hall. Details of the message as well as the reason for its secrecy were clear to the addressee, but are no longer clear to us.

The theophoric name Baʿal also appears in the fragmented Inscription No. 9 that was discovered on the floor of the gatehouse's front room. The mention of several foreign (non-Judahite) names in the gate indicates the passage of people of mixed origin in the fortress on their way north to the Beer-sheba Valley or south to the Aravah.

Administrative texts

(A) The Aḥiqam ostracon (No. 10) was found on the floor of the gatehouse's front room (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 139–143). Beit-Arieh (1986–1987) published it shortly after the discovery, and since then other scholars have discussed it (Lemaire 1995: 221; Renz 1995a: 443–445; Dobbs-Allsopp *et al.* 2005: 518–521; Aḥituv 2008: 166–168; Mendel 2011: 54–67).

Let me start by translating the text:

Paid ([*šu*]*llam*) to Aḥiqam, son of Me[*šull*]am
ʿImadyahu, son of Zakkur, from Moladah
Hoshaʿyahu, son of Nawi, from *Rptn*[8]
Machi, son of Hiṣilyahu, from Makkedah

Line 1: In an early (Hebrew) publication, Beit-Arieh (1985: 94) restored the first fragmentary letter as /š/ and translated the first line: "Greeting (*šālôm*) to Aḥiqam, son of M[..]m". However, in the English edition of the text (Beit-Arieh 1986–1987: 33; 2007: 139–140), he observed that restoring an introductory salutation *šālôm* is unparalleled and

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7   *Liškāh* is probably a word loaned from the Greek *léschē*, which the Philistines transferred to Canaan in the early Iron Age (Burkert 1993).

8   Beit-Arieh's rendering of the place name (*Rptn*) is preferable to suggestions put forth by other scholars (Misgav 1990: 216–217; Dobbs-Allsopp *et al.* 2005: 518, 520; Aḥituv 2008: 166–168).

evokes serious problems. He dismissed it in favour of the reading ʿlm (ʿōlîm), "going up to [the place of] Aḥiqam".

Following Beit-Arieh's original suggestion, some scholars adopted the reading šālôm as a short greeting at the beginning of the text (Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. 2005: 518–519; Aḥituv 2008: 166). However, the greeting šālôm lᵉ-PN ("greeting to PN") is unknown in ancient Hebrew (Mendel 2011: 58). Also, the restoration ʾōlîm lᵉ-PN ("going up to [the place of] PN") without a place of destination has no parallel in biblical Hebrew.

Lemaire (1995: 221; 1997: 165) suggested restoring the word [ḥ]ylm ("soldiers"). However, only one letter is missing at the beginning of the line, and the fragmentary letter does not look like /y/.

I suggest rendering the first word [šu]llam, "paid (to Aḥiqam)" and interpret the text as a receipt confirming that the three registered persons have already paid their dues to Aḥiqam. This explains the detailed recording of the three persons involved, each registered along with his father and hometown.

At the end of line 1, Beit-Arieh (1986–1987: 34) restored the personal name m[nḥ]m (Mehaḥem). But Lemaire (1995: 221; 1997: 165) correctly noted that the reading m[šl]m (Me[šull]am) is preferable. Indeed, upon examining the photograph, the area below the name appears clean, thus excluding reading the blurred letter as *nun* (i.e., m[nḥ]m) (for the name Meshullam, see Dobbs-Allsopp *et al.* 2005: 608).

Details of the payment and its background are not conveyed in the text. The ostracon was discovered near the gate and was written by an inexperienced scribe. Thus, we may assume that it was written in another place and presented at the gate to the guard of the fortress. The three persons mentioned were probably merchants who passed the place on their way south and presented confirmation of payment they had already made elsewhere. Hence, the document was found where it was delivered to the guard.

(B) Ostracon No. 19 was discovered in one of the rooms on the eastern side of the fortress (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 152–156). It was first published in Hebrew (Beit-Arieh 1999a), and since then discussed by Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. (2005: 535–539), Davies (2005: 157) and Aḥituv (2008: 177–179).

The first line reads ʿśrt and is followed by eight lines, at which point the ostracon breaks. Each line registers a personal name with the name of his father. Beit-Arieh rendered the first line ʿaśeret, "ten", and interpreted it as designating a standard number of military units, similar to a squad today. His interpretation was accepted by Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. (2005: 535–539) and Aḥituv (2008: 177–179). Davies (2005: 157) rendered it ʿaśīrīt and translated it "tenth (month? year? unit?)".

I suggest rendering it ʿaśīrīt in the sense of "tenth (of the crop)", probably a variant form of the more common maʿaśēr. The list, in which each of the mentioned persons is written with his father's name, probably recorded the names of those who paid the tithe. The taxed produce was probably used to supply the garrison lodged in the fortress.

Were the text complete with ten persons listed, that would decide the matter in favour of Beit-Arieh's interpretation. A larger or smaller number of persons would point to the latter alternative. Since the text is broken, there is no way to decide between the two interpretations.

(C) Inscriptions Nos. 23–24 are written on large fragments of a jar that was found in one of the rooms on the eastern side of the fortress. They are not ostraca, since originally they were written on an intact jar (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 159–160). The two inscriptions were first published in Hebrew (Beit-Arieh 1993) and then in Beit-Arieh's English edition (2007: 159–168). Since the original publication, these inscriptions were studied by Lemaire (1995: 222–223), Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. (2005: 527–536), Davies (2005: 156–157) and Aḥituv (2008: 168–173).

I will open the discussion by presenting the transliterations of the two inscriptions alongside each other according to my interpretation of their respective texts and will then discuss them in greater detail.

Inscription No. 24	Inscription No. 23
[ראשן א?טד]	ראשן
[ק]צין אל נתן	על ידי נתן – נחמי[הו]
[ק]צין למטה גדלי	קצין למטה גדל[י]
שני לא?טד – מלש	שני לנחמיהו – אל[?ישב]
שני לגדלי – אביהו	שני לתחתנה – מלש
שלשי למלש – יאזניהו בן צ[...]	שלשי על י[די אלישב – A]
שלשי לאביהו – אלישׁב	שלש[י] על ידי מלש – B
רבעי ליאזניהו – יאזניהו בן	רבע[י] על ידי A – יאזניהו בן]
הושעיהו נ?וה מפלקם	הו[שעיהו .....]

Clearly, Inscription No. 24's upper part is missing. Through comparison to the corresponding name list, I restored a missing line at the beginning of the inscription. Comparison of the two inscriptions indicate that Inscription No. 23 expresses the hierarchy through ʿl ydy, "next to" (lines 2, 6), whereas Inscription No. 24 expresses it with ʾl (line 2). It seems, therefore, that the two inscriptions were written by two different persons.

Lemaire (1995: 223) correctly observed that since the lists record a hierarchy, *lmṭh* (*lemaṭṭāh*) should be interpreted "comme un adverbe de lieu, 'en bas', à rapprocher de *ltḥtnh*, 'en-bas' ou 'en dessus de lui'". Gadli/Giddeli's registration in Inscription No. 24 "below Aṭad" (line 3) and above Abiyahu (line 5) indicates the correctness of Lemaire's observation. Thus, line 5 of Inscription 23 should be translated "second under him (literally: "to the one under him") (*letaḥtônōh*) is *mlš*". Surprisingly, all other scholars who discussed the inscription ignored Lemaire's observations.

Beit-Arieh (2007: 161, 164) read the name *gdly* in Nos. 23:3 and 24:3 and *gʿly* in 24:5, and was followed by other scholars (Lemaire 1995: 223; Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. 2005: 528, 533; Davies 2005: 156–157; Aḥituv 2008: 168, 170). But the photographs indicate that *gdly* (i.e., Gadli/Giddeli; Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. 2005: 530) is the correct reading of all three names.[9]

I suggest reading in No. 24:4 the name *ʾṭd* (*ʾāṭād*). Only the right hand corner of the *aleph* is visible in the photograph; the two other letters were accurately copied in the

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[9] Aḥituv (2008: 168, 170–171) arbitrarily restored the name *gdlyhw* in Inscription No. 24 line 2, although a blank space clearly exists at the end of the line.

facsimile. For the name ʾāṭād, "thornbush", compare the name qwṣ (qôṣ), "thorn".[10] Note also the toponym gōren hāʾāṭād ("threshing floor of the thornbush") in Gen 50:10.

Two of the officers listed in Inscription No. 24 carried the name Yaʾazinyahu; so to distinguish them one from the other, their names appear alongside those of their fathers (lines 6, 8–9). In light of the reference to Ho[shaʿyahu] in No. 23:9, it is possible that the two officers named Yaʾazinyahu mentioned in Inscription No. 24 were also registered in Inscription No. 23.

Lemaire (1995: 223) suggested reading bplqm in place of mplqm and translated line 8, "Hoshaʿyahu campant dans les fissures/grottes?" However, the first letter is identical to all other mems in the inscription and differs from the bets. Moreover, Hoshaʿyahu is apparently the father of Yaʾazinyahu and nwh is a noun (nāveh) rather than a verb. Plqm is probably derived from the verb blq "waste, lay waste", which appears in the prophecies of Isa 24:1 and Nah 2:11.[11] The toponym Nāveh Mᵉpūllaqîm possibly indicated the hometown of Yaʾazinyahu son of Hoshaʿyahu, unlike the other named persons who lived in the fortress.

The two lists reflect the following hierarchy:

Inscription No. 24	Inscription No. 23
First, next to Nathan, is Nehemyahu	First, an officer next to Nathan, is Aṭad
An officer below – Gadli/Giddeli	An officer below – Gadli/Giddeli
Second to Nehemyahu – El[iashib?]	Second to Aṭad – Mlš
Second below him (Gadli/Giddeli) – Mlš	Second to Gadli/Giddeli – Abiyahu
Third to El[iashib? – PN]	Third to Mlš – Yaʾazinyahu son of Ṣ[…]
Third to Mlš – [PN₁]	Third to Abiyahu – Eliashib
Fourth [to PN – Yaʾazinyahu son of] Ho[shaʿyahu …..]	Fourth to Yaʾazinyahu – Yaʾazinyahu son of Hoshaʿyahu (of) Nāveh Mᵉpūllaqîm.

Comparison of the two lists evidently exposes that many names are common to both, in particular if we assume that Eliashib also appears in Inscription No. 23:5 and that Abiyahu and Yaʾazinyahu son of Ṣ[…] are identical to PN and PN₁ in Inscription No. 23. Nathan was probably the commander of the fortress, the officers below him were Nehemyahu and Aṭad, and below them was Gadli/Giddeli.

Distribution of commodities

Several inscriptions unearthed at Ḥorvat ʿUza (e.g., Nos. 6, 11, 21, 22 and 29) record distribution of food rations marked by hieratic numbers and symbols. An exceptional ostracon is No. 29, which has an assemblage of symbols and letters (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 171–172). It was either a draft in which a scribe summarized the amount of food goods expended or an exercise of a student who learned the basics of administrative recording.

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[10]   Zadok (1988: 100, 152–153) considered the possibility that the names ʿĀgē ("thorn [bush]") and Dardaʿ ("thistle") also designate thorny plants. For the recently discovered name pqʿt ("gourd") on a scaraboid from a tomb in Jerusalem, see Reich and Sass 2006: 316. For names of thorny plants and trees, used as toponyms, see Zwickel 1999.

[11]   For the interchange of the letters /b/ and /p/ in Arad, see Aharoni 1981: 48, note on line 13.

Of great interest is Inscription No. 22, in which personal names are registered side by side with the so-called *ṭet*-symbol (marked by ⊕ in the transliteration below) (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 158–159). The symbol, which is well known from the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, appears here on ostracon. Its inclusion in the text requires discussion.

The text is structured in the following manner:[12]

1.	ʿmy ⊕	עמי ⊕	.1
2.	⊕ gdʾlyh	⸱גדʾליה ⊕	.2
3.	yhw mbṭḥ	יהו מבטח	.3
4.	šḥrh ⊕ gḥm	גחם ⊕ שחרה	.4
5.	yhwmlk	יהומלך	.5
6.	⊕ ---yhw	יהו--- ⊕	.6

Line 1: The first letter is probably /ʿ/ and not /d/ (compare the /d/ in line 2). The name *ʿmy* (*ʿammi*) is a hypocoristic form of a name in which *ʿamm* ("paternal uncle") is the theophoric element (compare ʿAmminadab, ʿAmmihud).

Line 2: The second letter looks more like /r/ than /d/.

Line 3: It seems that the scribe first wrote the name on the left hand side of the ostracon and, upon realizing that there was not enough space, inserted the letters *-yhw* between lines 3 and 4. In the photograph, it appears that the third letter of the name looks like /ṭ/ and the fourth seems to be a fragmented /ḥ/. The name *Mibṭaḥyahu* appears in Inscription No. 1:4 from Lachish (Renz 1995a: 409) and on a bulla from the antiquity market (Deutsch and Heltzer 1994: 39). The name is frequently mentioned in 5th century BCE Jewish Aramaic papyri from Egypt (see the list of texts in Renz 1995b: 73).

Line 4: The photograph shows three blurred letters, not marked in the facsimile, on the left hand side of the symbol. They may be rendered *gḥm* (*gaḥam*). Gaham is the second son of Nahor by his concubine Reumah (Gen 22:24) and is mentioned in Arad Inscription No. 31:6 (Aharoni 1981: 56, 58). The name probably means "blazing, shining" (Lemaire 1977: 200; Zadok 1988: 81).

Line 6: The line was cut horizontally, and only its upper part is visible. The first letter looks very much like the other 'ṭet-symbols' and is followed by a six-letter name. Only the three final letters—*yhw* (*yahu*)—are clear.

The ostracon under discussion introduces a new element to the long-debated interpretation of the so-called 'ṭet-symbol' (see recently Lipschits and Vanderhooft 2011: 660–662, with earlier literature; see also Colella 1973: 547–553; Zorn 1995; Naveh 2000: 4–5). It is clear now that the 'ṭet-symbol' first appeared in the Kingdom of Judah in the late monarchical period. In addition to the ostracon, it appears on a late Iron Age jar alongside a personal name (Naveh 2000: 4–5), as well as on 17 late Iron

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[12]   The photograph indicates that the facsimile of the text (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 158) is not always accurate.

Age handles discovered in Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel and Tell en-Naṣbeh (Zorn 1995). It is also clear that, in all other instances, the symbol appeared on jars; the Ḥorvat ʿUza inscription is the first appearance of the symbol on ostracon. As symbols on ostraca designate commodities, it is unlikely that the 'ṭet-symbol' stands for quality. Hence, I doubt the suggestion of Delavault and Lemaire (1975: 34–41; cf. Lemaire 1976; Naveh 2000: 5) that the assumed 'ṭet' originally designated quality (ṭb, "good"), as well as Colella's suggestion (1973: 547–553) that it is an abbreviation of the Aramaic ṭpy'n, meaning "closed, sealed". Mittmann's proposition (1991: 68–73) that the symbol is a schematic form of the bat-sign is similarly unlikely, as there is a marked difference between the bat-sign, which has a single bar, and the symbol, which in all the Judahite examples has internal crossed bars.

The 'ṭet-symbol' does not appear on the hieratic ostraca from Kadesh-barnea (Lemaire and Vernus 1983) and is not included in Wimmer's comprehensive book (2008), in which he collected and analyzed all the hieratic numbers and symbols appearing in inscriptions unearthed in Judahite and Israelite sites. For this reason, I doubt the assumption that the symbol was originally derived from the Egyptian language (Lipschits and Vanderhooft 2011: 661). Naveh (2000: 5) correctly noted that "there is no reason to assume that the ṭet in the Iron Age should be related to the ṭet-symbol of the Persian-Hellenistic periods". The symbol's late interpretation in Phoenician, Aramaic and paleo-Hebrew cannot establish its original meaning.

The majority of scholars agree that the symbol was an official emblem (e.g., Albright 1934: 21; Cross 1968: 231–232; Avigad 1974: 54; Goldwasser and Naveh 1976: 15; Mittmann 1991: 68; Zorn 1995: 104–105; Naveh 2000: 5; Lipschits and Vanderhooft 2011: 661–662). In its round shape with an internal cross, it might have imitated the configuration of the royal rosette stamp, which was in use in the Kingdom of Judah in the second half of the 7th century BCE (for recent discussions of the rosette jar handles, see Koch 2008; Koch and Lipschits 2010; Lipschits, Sergi and Koch 2011: 8–9, 20–23, with earlier literature). This was a cursive way of reproducing the rosette symbol in writing and in incision on pottery. As the rosette symbol was a Judahite royal emblem, I suggest that the symbol under discussion initially carried the same connotation of 'royal' (cf. Sukenik 1934: 182–184; Yadin 1961: 16; Cross 1968: 231; Zorn 1995: 104); and since in the Persian and Hellenistic contexts the symbol was mainly linked to wine, I assume that it originally designated a wine jar.

In sum, the ostracon probably registered the distribution of wine jars to the seven named persons. None of them (except possibly for Gedalyah) is known from other ostraca uncovered at the site, but in the absence of a central archive there it is impossible to draw conclusion from this evidence.

Miscellanies

Inscription No. 25 is written on the neck of a jar fragment, below the handle. I suggest deciphering it as follows:[13]

1. zrʿ wsg · bt l[mlk]   זרע וסג· בת ל[מלך]   .1
2. wtˀk [….]   [….] ותˀך   .2

1. Seed and broken grain (in) r[oyal] jar (*bath*).
2. And inside [….]

The usual designations of grain are *ḥṭm* ("wheat") or *śʿrym* ("barley"). I therefore suggest that *zeraʿ* refers to seed that the royal administration supplied for sowing (see below).

Beside seed (*zeraʿ*) the scribe mentions dross (*sîg*), referring to broken grains. The noun *sîg* usually refers to the dross of metal (Isa 1:22, 25; Ezek 22:18; Prov 25:4; 26:23), but does appear in one instance to have a more general meaning (Ps 119:119a) "All the wicked of the earth you do away as dross (*sîgîm*)". The text under discussion is the first occurrence of *sîg* in the sense of "broken grain".

The letter /b/ after the graphic mark is clearly apparent and is followed by /t/ and the upper part of /l/ (*bt l*). The edge of a triangle is visible in the photograph next to the /l/. I assume that this is the edge of /m/ and restore the end of the line as *bt l*[*mlk*] (*bat lammelek*), "r[oyal] *bath*".[14]

Three additional letters in the second line are not marked in the facsimile. The first is /w/, the third is /k/ and the second consists of two crossing lines, possibly /t/. The context of the noun in the construct state *wtk* (*weˀtôk*), "and inside?" is unknown.

An interesting parallel appears in Lachish Letter No. 5, lines 7b–10: "May YHWH cause you to see the harvest in prosperity today. Is it to your servant that Tobiahu will bring seed of the king (*zrʿ lmlk*)?" The harvest in the fields, which no doubt were crown lands, explains the request for dispatch of grain (contra Aḥituv 2008: 79). Lemaire (1977: 119; see Michaud 1957: 48–49; Pardee 1982: 97) noted that the text refers to provision supplied by the royal administration and pointed out its connection to the system of *lmlk* jars. The *lmlk* stamped jars went out of use before the foundation of Lachish Level II and were replaced by other kinds of royal jars (Lipschits, Sergi and Koch 2010; 2011). The Lachish letter and the Ḥorvat ʿUza inscription probably refer to provision of seeds that the Judahite administration supplied in royal-*bath* jars for sowing the fields the next autumn.[15]

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[13] The photograph indicates that the facsimile of the text (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 168) is not always accurate.

[14] Lipschits, Koch, Shaus and Guil (2010) recently demonstrated that bath was not a fixed measurement for liquid volume but rather a name for the jar itself, namely, the Judahite storage jar. The reference to the royal *bath* indicates that the scribe referred to the royal Judahite jars common at that time in the kingdom.

[15] For different interpretations of *zeraʿ lmlk* in Lachish Letter No. 5, see Renz 1995a: 425 n. 1; Lipschits 2002: 164 and nn. 24–25; Dobbs-Allsopp *et al*. 2005: 322; Aḥituv 2008: 79.

The ostracon probably recorded the supply of seeds for sowing and of broken grain for consumption, both dispatched in the royal Judahite jars by the royal administration.

Synthesis

Ḥorvat ʿUza was a Judahite border fortress that supervised the movement of people along the southeastern Negeb–Aravah route. Travellers and caravans moving along this road must have passed the fortress and potentially might have left their mark on the material culture and documents unearthed at the site. Unfortunately, most of the evidence of people's movement along this road and the administration and economy of the fortress has not survived. What remains is no more than a fraction of a much larger corpus of lost data.

The ostraca discussed here shed new light on some important aspects of the way the fortress functioned. Most remarkable is the light they shed on the trade conducted along the road commanded by the fortress. The international trade along the Beer-sheba Valley has been discussed numerous times in the past, with direct evidence for the trade mainly extracted from the archaeological data and the Assyrian sources (see, e.g., Finkelstein 1992; Singer-Avitz 1999; Naʾaman 2001; Jasmin 2006; Thareani-Sussely 2007a; 2007b). The Ḥorvat ʿUza inscriptions supply, for the first time, written evidence of the late 7th century BCE trade conducted in the region.

According to one letter (Inscription No. 2), a Judahite (Amaṣi), who is explicitly called "a merchant" (*sōḥēr*), left a message for his agent/partner who was possibly staying at the fortress at the time. The message relates that a person called by an Aramaic name (*Dkr*) who was pursued by a kingdom's army, is in hiding. Another document (Inscription No. 5) is a memorandum of a secret conversation held between the unnamed scribe and a person called by a Phoenician name (Baʿal-ʾamar), probably a merchant. Unfortunately, the significance of the secretly conveyed episode remains unknown. The two ostraca reflect the movement of merchants who passed Ḥorvat ʿUza on their way to/from the Beer-sheba Valley.

A third ostracon (Inscription No. 10) documented the toll paid to Aḥiqam—a Judahite official located in an unknown place—by three Judahites, probably merchants, who lived in Moladah, *Rptn* and Makkedah. In return for their payment, Aḥiqam gave them an official receipt, which they delivered at the gate of Ḥorvat ʿUza, thereby avoiding a double payment. Either the official's handwriting was known to the scribe who received the ostracon, or else the three travellers held another identifying object that confirmed the authenticity of the receipt.

The Edomite ostracon (Inscription No. 7) supplies further evidence of the commercial relations between Judah and its neighbours. It documents an Edomite transport of grain, part of which was later damaged, to the fortress, where it was held under the supervision of an Edomite agent.

Evidently, commercial activity in the Negeb, which accelerated following the conquest of the area by the Assyrians in the late 8th century, was carried on after the Assyrian withdrawal from Palestine in the third quarter of the 7th century BCE. Merchants of diverse origins (Phoenicians, Edomites, Judahites) participated in the trade, which was conducted both by independent merchants and by the king's agents.

The Edomite ostracon presents evidence of the cult held by Edomites in or near the fortress of Ḥorvat ʿUza. The writer of the ostracon, Lamlik, allocated a large amount of grain for offering on the altar, possibly to Qaus, the Edomite god.

Other texts illuminate certain military, administrative and economic aspects connected to the maintenance and function of the fortress. Inscriptions Nos. 23 and 24 record two hierarchical lists of officers who served in the fortress. Since the inscriptions were written on an intact jar, about half of which was restored (Beit-Arieh 2007b: 160), they clearly demonstrate the reality of the final stage of the fortress. However, it remains unknown whether the officer lists reflect a routine situation or a stage of emergency in which troops were mobilized and brought to the fortress.

Inscription No. 19 listed persons who probably paid the tithe (assuming that ʿaśīrīt means maʿaśēr, "tithe"), a payment probably used for the maintenance of the garrison lodged there. A number of other inscriptions, most of them not discussed in this article (e.g., Nos. 6, 11, 21, 22), registered the distribution of commodities to the personnel of the fortress. Among them is Inscription No. 22, in which wine jars marked by a symbol of royalty (the so-called ṭet-symbol) were distributed among several recipients. Inscription No. 25 mentions a dispatch of seed for sowing and grain for consumption in the standard royal jars. Poor documentation exists regarding the ways by which Judahite fortresses acquired food and other artefacts necessary for their maintenance. The Edomite ostracon (No. 7), the 'ʿaśīrīt' ostracon (No. 19), Inscriptions No. 22 (in which the royal symbol probably designated wine jars) and No. 25 (supply of grain for seed and consumption) provide some glimpses into the acquisition of supplies by the fortress' administration.

Finally, I would like to re-emphasize the uncertainty of some readings and restorations suggested in the article. Parts of the ostraca are badly eroded or broken, and deciphering them involves a certain degree of doubt. Some scholars support a minimalist approach and reconstruct only what they consider safe readings (e.g., Dobbs Allsopp *et al.* 2005). I support the opposite approach, according to which scholars should suggest a maximal reconstruction and interpretation while clearly noting the degree of uncertainty attached to their suggested readings and reconstructions. The nine ostraca discussed in this paper are reconstructed according to the latter approach, in the hope that other scholars might enter the discussion and attempt to further illuminate this invaluable corpus of inscriptions of the late 7th–early 6th century BCE.

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