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# The Samaria Ostraca — an Additional Note

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As Prof. Yadin refers above to the short notes on the interpretation and date of the Samaria ostraca made in my paper on 'The Districts of Israel and Judah',<sup>1</sup> I should like to supply a translation of the relevant passages for the benefit of the English reader. A few additional remarks are appended on the new points raised by Yadin.

I cannot agree with Prof. Yadin's suggestion<sup>2</sup> that the persons whose names are prefixed by a ל were the tax-payers, not the collectors. What would be the point of mentioning the districts or regions on the ostraca, if the taxes were sent by the same persons from different regions? And what could be the explanation of the additional names, and especially the wording of ostraca Nos. 1 and 2 terminating with a list of persons and numbers, if these were not the senders?

From the philological point of view too the arguments advanced by Yadin seem unconvincing. The ostraca are documents accompanying delivery. In Hebrew אל שלוח means to 'inform somebody', e.g. 'And Hiram sent to Solomon (אל שלמה) saying etc.' (1 Kings v, 8). However, speaking about the delivery itself, the text reads: 'And Hiram sent to the king (למלך) sixscore talents etc.' (1 Kings ix, 14). The same is true of the Lachish Letters: אל stands at the beginning of a letter; compare however in Letter III, line 6: 'the letter which my lord had sent to thy slave etc. (לעבדך)'. Since the wording of the Samaria ostraca is ... ל ... מ, it seems difficult to interpret this in any other way than 'from ... to ...', i.e. delivery from a certain place to a certain person in charge of this area.

The Samaria ostraca probably belong to one of the kings of the dynasty of Jehu, whose three kings, Jehu, Jehoahaz and Jeroboam II, ruled at least 17 years. Dr. Kenyon believes that the pottery from which these ostraca were taken belonged to level IV of Samaria, dated by her to the beginning of the eighth century B. C.,<sup>3</sup> and by the writer and Ruth Amiran to the second half of the ninth century B. C.<sup>4</sup> Yadin's new suggestion that all the ostraca are from the ninth

<sup>1</sup> In A. Malamet, edit.: *The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah*. Jerusalem, 1961, p. 122, nn. 38, 39 (Hebrew).

<sup>2</sup> *IEJ*, 9, 1959, pp. 184-187.

<sup>3</sup> J. W. Crowfoot, G. M. Crowfoot, Kathleen M. Kenyon: *The Objects from Samaria (Samaria-Sebaste, III)*. London, 1957, p. 470.

<sup>4</sup> *IEJ*, 8, 1958, pp. 178-180.

and tenth years of a certain king only is unacceptable. Yadin disregards not only the fact that the wording of the ostraca with the numerical signs is different from the wording of the ostraca of the ninth year, but also that all the names in both kinds are different, while the same names appear on the ostraca of the ninth and tenth years. How can we explain these facts unless we assume that a considerable time elapsed between the writing of the different ostraca? Yadin is of course right in interpreting the sign  $\gamma$  on the weights as 4, and this is logical for weights. However, there is no evidence of any ancient system of numbers, which had different signs for 4 and 5 and expressed 9 through the addition of both. On the other hand, Noth has already shown the Egyptian origin of these signs.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to believe that it is only by chance that exactly the same signs as appear in the ostraca were used in the hieratic Egyptian script as symbols for 10 ( $\wedge$ ) and 5 ( $\gamma$ ).<sup>6</sup> The use of Egyptian numerals seems reasonable—especially in the administration of the state and the royal estates that was undoubtedly influenced by Egyptian example.

Nor is the use of the definite article conclusive proof that a number is below ten. The number is usually written in the Samaria ostraca without the definite article (19 times), and the article *ha-* precedes the number in only six cases. On the other hand, 'in the ninth year' (בשנת התשעה) or 'in the tenth year' (בשנת העשרת) is always written with *ha-*. If the number expresses the ninth year, why is the definite article usually omitted? It seems more likely that when a numerical symbol was used, the definite article could be either written or omitted, and the value of the number cannot be inferred from this fact.<sup>7</sup>

Finally a few short remarks on the new points raised by Yadin:

(1) I fully agree with the obvious fact that the ostraca were written at Samaria, and regret that Yadin should have understood my words in this matter differently.

(2) The name אהימא in ostrakon No. 3 is only a restoration, as nothing is preserved in the original but the final א.

(3) Not all the places and areas are different in the 'numerical' ostraca and the others. Thus not only כרם התל, but also חצרת and מספר appear in both classes. Only the wording differs, in adding to the place-names the names of the regions or districts as well.

<sup>5</sup> ZDPV, 50, 1927, pp. 240-244.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. G. Moeller: *Hieratische Paläographie*. Leipzig, 1909, I, p. 60; II, pp. 55-56; III, pp. 59-60.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. F. M. Cross, *BASOR*, 163, 1961, pp. 13-14.

(4) The Samaria ostraca are unfortunately the only administrative documents from the period of the Israelite monarchy to have been found in the country so far. It is therefore dangerous to base conclusions on the fact that they have no epigraphic parallel in Israel.

(5) As regards the Ugaritic parallels quoted by Mr. Rainey (above, p. 63), not only their language but their contents too must be taken into consideration. Any satisfactory solution of the whole problem of the Samaria ostraca must give an acceptable answer to the question why the persons to whose names the  $\text{𐤃}$  is prefixed are connected with different places in different districts, and why various persons are mentioned in connection with the same place. It seems to me that besides the 'royal estate' theory of Noth, the new suggestion made by Rainey is the only possible solution to this fundamental question.