

Inscribed Hebrew and Aramaic Potsherds from Samaria

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INSCRIBED HEBREW AND ARAMAIC POTSDHERDS FROM SAMARIA.

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DURING the first two years of the excavations of the Joint Expedition to Samaria, a few potsherds bearing Hebrew and Aramaic Inscriptions were found. Although I have not been able to suggest suitable readings for all of them, we have thought it best to publish photographs and transcriptions of these as well in order to afford also others an opportunity of studying them.

I. *Hebrew.*

1. Fragment of a jug (broken in three pieces), measuring about 5×5 cm. Buff ware containing pink and black grits. Outer surface covered with red slip.

Provenance.—Deep circular trench, full of Israelite pottery, in the rock east of the city.

Register No. : C. 689.

On the red ground of the outer surface are deeply incised in a flourishing hand the four letters פחה (Fig. 1).

The analogy of other single-worded inscriptions beginning with פ would indicate that פחה is a proper name.

פחה occurs as the name of the father of the Jew צחא in an Aramaic papyrus of Elephantine.¹ At a later period פחה appears in three inscriptions on a Palmyrene sarcophagus.² Is it a hypocoristicum of some theophorous name compounded with a root פחה, פוח, or something similar ?

2. Fragment of a shallow bowl measuring about $10 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ cm. Buff ware containing pink and black grits ; red slip on both surfaces ; outer surface and rim burnished.

Provenance : As of No. 1.

Register No. : C. 1101.

¹ A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century, B.C.*, No. 40, l. 2.

² J. Cantineau, *Inventaire des Inscriptions de Palmyre*, Fasc. IV, p. 25.

On the outer surface are incised, to the right, two plain vertical lines, and left of them three horizontal lines of writing. The lower end of the outer vertical line and the left ends of the first two lines of writing are missing. The upper line is written in larger and cruder characters than the other two, and apparently by a different hand. The incompleteness of the lines, and the absence of word division and vowel-letters, render the interpretation very difficult, despite the fact that the reading of most of the letters is certain (Fig. 2).

Transliteration :

1. ברכשלם^{נ?}
2. ברכ־יהרעמחרשבו^{ר? ה? ב?}
3. ימנהשערמי[?] מ

Line 1 can be interpreted with a considerable degree of probability from the roots ברכ and שלם, but the forms—ברכ־ “blessing” or בָּרַךְ “blessed,” שָׁלַם “peace” or שָׁלֵם “healthy”—can only be a matter of speculation. (Other possibilities are the proper names בָּרַךְ, שָׁלַם, שָׁלֵם.)

In line 2 we have again, at the beginning, the word ברכ, followed by two small diagonal strokes, which are probably to be interpreted as numerals. The next letter is certainly ה. The following one is in all probability ר. The ע is also almost certain (the only alternative being ר). The מ, though different from those in the following line, cannot be read otherwise. The following letter is ח if the upward continuation of the lowest tooth was really intended as the left vertical stroke that closes the ancient ח; but it may merely be a flourishing finish to a ה. This letter is apparently followed by ר. The last three letters are almost certain; nevertheless, in the fragmentary state of the inscription, one cannot be certain that the last one is not ס rather than ר. The first half of this line may, therefore, with all due reserve, be read

ברַךְ יֵהֲרַעַם

“Blessed! The 2 shepherds . . .”

The last five letters may be divided as **חר שבו, חרש בו** or otherwise; but I have been unable to read any sensible meaning into them. The continuation of this line is certainly broken.

The letters of line 3 are in themselves quite clear, but how they are intended to be combined is a puzzle. The following are some of the possibilities:—

(a) **ימן השערם ט מ**

“He shall count the barley 10 (?) measures (מ = מר?).”

(b) **ימנה שערם ט מ**

“He shall count barley, etc.”

(c) **ימנה שערם . . .**

“The right of the gates”

(d) **י מן השערם . . .**

“From the gates” (the י being the conclusion of the last word in the preceding line).

(e) **י מנה שערם ט מ**

“. . . . from him barley 10 (?) measures.”

3. Fragment of a bowl, about 6 × 5 cm.; buff ware with pink and black grits; red slip on inside and irregularly on outside surface.

Provenance: As Nos. 1, 2.

On the inner surface are the beginnings of five deeply incised lines of writing, whose resemblance to that of the ostraca found by Reisner and Fisher in the Palace of Samaria is striking as compared with the foregoing. It reads (Fig. 3):—

1. **מרג ???**

2. **קליג ?**

3. **קמכ ?**

4. **אר .**

5. **מן**

The final stroke of lines 1 and 2 may possibly represent a numeral rather than the letter א, like the similar character in the Reisner-Fisher ostraca. In that case the first two lines might mean: "measures X . . . parched corn X . . .," but, of course, this is only a guess. The condition of the inscription offers no basis for the interpretation of the remaining lines.

4. Fragment of a body of a shallow bowl, about 9×5 cm. Buff to grey ware with grits; inside and outside covered with a red slip and burnished.

Provenance: As of preceding Nos.

Register No.: C. 428.

The outer surface is covered with scratchings, some of which resemble Hebrew characters. They seem to be the work of a child (Fig. 4).

5. Fragment of a shallow bowl, measuring 11×6.5 cm. Buff ware, red slip and burnished.

Provenance: Trench in front of south wall of Israelite Palace near rock.

Register No.: D. 857.

On left edge two incised letters לר, obviously the beginning of a proper name (Fig. 5).

II. Aramaic.

1. Fragment of a large jar, about 8×10 cm.; hard buff ware with white and dark grits; yellowish wash on the outside.

Provenance: Under the Herodian corridor on the top of the hill.

Register No.: Q. 474.

Written with black ink on the outside surface are two lines in Aramaic (Fig. 6):—

1. נצבא זי נבואח?

2. [שנ]ת וו וו וו וו

The reading is certain with the exception of the last letter in line 1. The word in question is obviously an Accadian name, Nabû-ahhê- (verb), of which the last element is missing. The first word נצבא I take to mean "plantation" or "vineyard." Its

ordinary sense is "plant," "shoot," but it seems to have the sense of "farm" in an Aramaic papyrus of the Hellenistic period.¹ The archaic spelling יי (for later די) should be noted.

The inscription is in the nature of a label indicating the producer and the year of production of the contents of the jar, which were most likely wine.

2. Fragment of a large jar (Fig. 7), ware and provenance as No. 1.

Size : 9 × 8 cm.

Register No. : Q. 183.

? ? ? ? .1

III ? ? שנת .2

Apparently this inscription is of the same nature as the preceding.

¹ See A. Cowley, *ibid.*, p. 192.



FIG. 1.



FIG. 3.



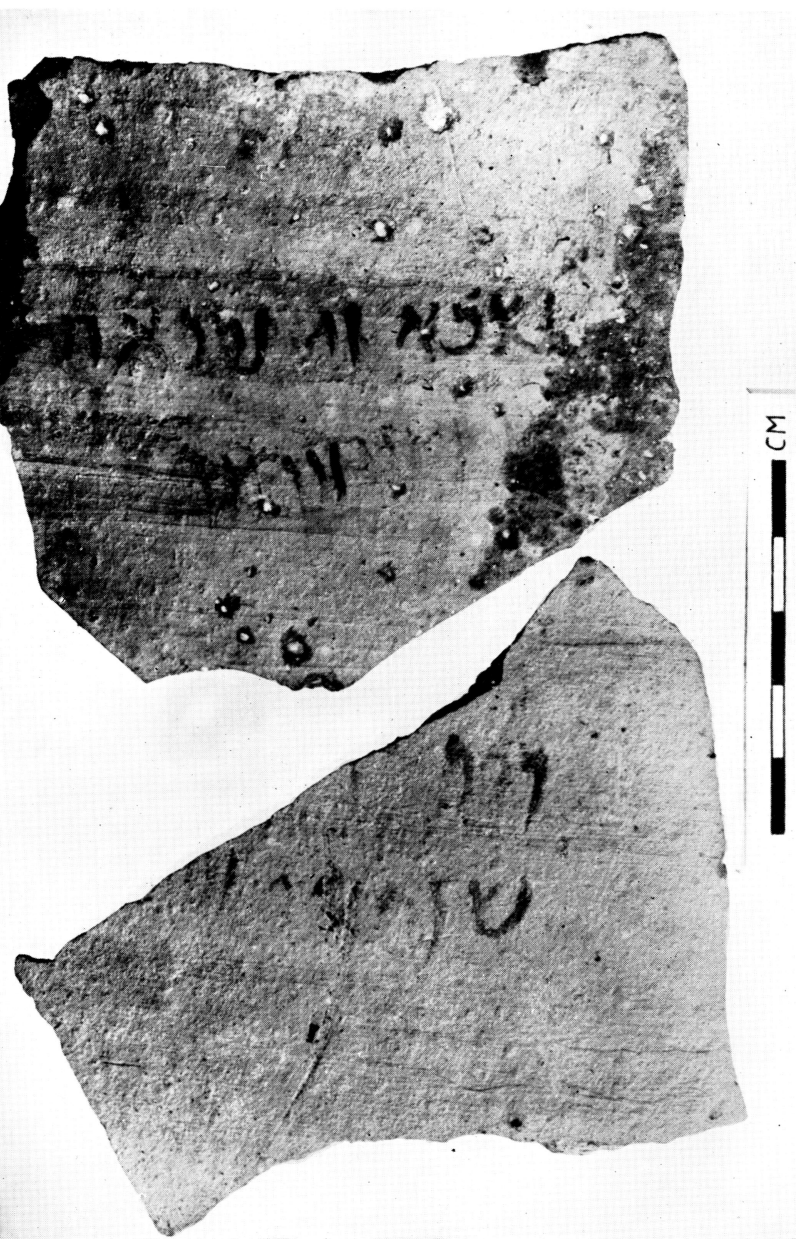
FIG. 4.



FIG. 5.



FIG. 2.



FIGS. 6 AND 7.