

A Greek Ostrakon from Masada

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IN April 1989 a short excavation campaign was carried out on Masada with the purpose of determining whether Hasmonaean buildings existed there.¹ Building VII, located in the Northern Section to the west of the central Storeroom Complex, was among the structures investigated.²

The soundings in the north-eastern section of Building VII led to some interesting revelations: under the floor, already exposed in 1963–1965, a number of earlier floors were uncovered, sometimes as many as three, one below the other. Four floors were exposed in the north-eastern corner of Square 174, situated to the north of Building VII.³ In all these soundings, however, no material evidence that could be securely dated to the pre-Herodian period was found; it had to be concluded, therefore, that Building VII was built in the early part of Herod's reign.

The above-mentioned early floors exposed in the north-eastern corner of Square 174 correspond, on the whole, to the three Herodian building phases on Masada.⁴ The lowest floor belongs to the construction of Building VII, the earliest building phase. The floor above it corresponds to the construction of the storerooms during the main building phase (the building of a room which was later cancelled and incorporated into Square 174 also belongs to this stage). The next floor, third from the bottom, was laid on top of a layer of fill about 1 m. thick; this floor belongs to the third and last stage of Herod's building activity. At this stage, Square 174 was levelled and redesigned, and the entrance to Room 153 — the north-eastern room of Building VII — was cancelled. The uppermost floor in this section should probably be assigned to the Sicarii occupation (66–73 or 74 C.E.).

The ostrakon under discussion (Fig. 1)⁵ was discovered in the above-mentioned thick fill; it must, therefore, pre-date the third Herodian building stage, which began c. 20 B.C.E.⁶ It measures 5 × 2.5 cm. and is inscribed on the outside. It contained four lines of Greek; the left margin and the beginning of the lines are preserved. Ἔτους implies that this is the beginning of the document; the blank space at

1 The excavation was initiated and directed by E. Netzer on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

2 E. Netzer: *Masada III, The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965, Final Reports: The Buildings, Stratigraphy and Architecture*, Jerusalem, 1991, pp. 5–25.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 34–36.

4 *Ibid.*, p. xv.

5 The ostrakon (No. 8035–247) is now located in the Institute of Archaeology (Hebrew University). The photograph is by G. Laron.

6 Netzer (above, n. 2), p. xv.

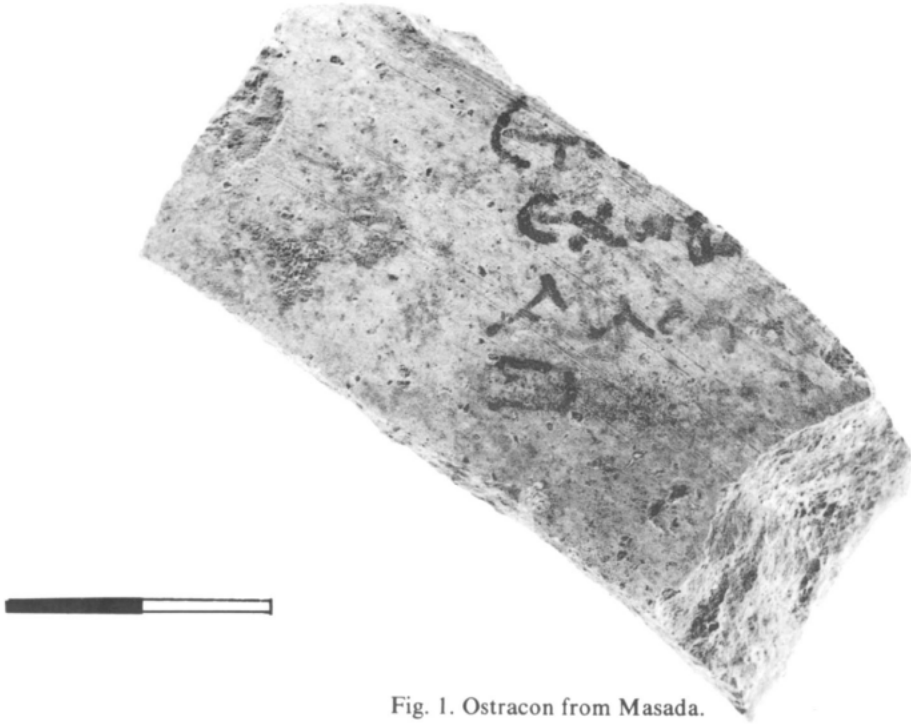


Fig. 1. Ostracon from Masada.

the bottom indicates that there were no more than four lines of text. The hand is clear and practiced; all difficulties in decipherment are due to fading.

Text

1. ετου[ἔτου[Year...?
2. εχω..[ἔχω ..[I have received...
3. αλδη..[Αλδη ..[Alde...
4. ξ.....[ξ.....[

The stratigraphic location dates the ostracon somewhere in the late thirties or twenties of the first century B.C.E. (see above). The more precise date once contained in the first line is now lost. We cannot tell what era is indicated by ἔτους: the Seleucid era, the era of a city,⁷ a regnal year of Herod, or a Nabatean regnal date (see below).

The date in the first line and the verb ἔχω in the second suggest that what we have is a formal, or even legally binding, admission or acknowledgement: either a receipt or an I.O.U. note. ἔχω, ἀπέχω and their cognates, following immediately upon the date and followed by παρά or another preposition is the

⁷ H.M. Cotton and J. Geiger: *Masada II, The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965, Final Reports: The Latin and Greek Documents*, Jerusalem, 1989, No. 740, l. 11 and pp. 84–85.

standard formula in Egyptian tax receipts.⁸ It is attested in a receipt from the Babatha archive: *P. Yadin* 27, ll. 8–9: ἀπ[έ]σχ[ο]ν π[α]ρ[ά] σου ἰς λόγ[ο]ν τρ[ο]φίω[ν] ... ἀργυρίου etc.;⁹ as well as in a receipt for tax or rent found among the so-called ΧἩεβ/Ἐε papyri:¹⁰ Ἀπέσ[χ]αμεν π[α]ρὰ σοῦ] τειμηὴν φογγίκος οὐ ὀφείλεις Κ[υ]ρίω Καίσαρι ἐν Μαώζα ἔτους ὀκτωκαιδεκάτου.¹¹ It could, however, be an I.O.U. note, i.e. an acknowledgement of a debt, ἔχω meaning in this instance: ‘I have it on loan (from you)’, as in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* II 114, ll. 9–12: ‘Ὁμολογῶ] ... σοὶ ἀργυρίου ... ἃ καὶ ἀπέσχογ καὶ ἡρίθμημε; or in *P. Yadin* 11, ll. 2–3 = 14–15: ὁμολογῶ ἔχειν καὶ ὀφείλειν σοὶ ἐν δάνει ἀργυρίου etc.¹² True, in all these instances we find the ὁμολογῶ element, but this could easily be omitted on an ostracon.¹³

It is not impossible that our text is neither a receipt nor an I.O.U. note, but a reminder of an obligation. In ἔχω the lender could be pointing out that he has a claim on the borrower, as in *Masada* I, No. 554 (a request for payment of money owed), l. 3 (literally): ‘that I have in your hands — (וְכִי־כֹחִי) כֹחִי בְּיָדְךָ לִי אִתִּי יָדִי.¹⁴ In other words, ἔχω of the opening of the ostracon would follow Aramaic usage, where the obligation is seen from the lender’s point of view, as in *P. Yadin* 5, fr. a, col. i, ll. 5–7: ὁμολογῶ ἐγὼ ... ἔχ[ει]ν σε παρ’ ἐμ[οῦ] ἀργυρίου etc., rather than Greek usage, where the obligation is seen from the borrower’s perspective: (ἀπ)έχω παρὰ σοῦ.¹⁵

8 E.g., *O. Tait*, Nos. 124–241; see also L. Amundsen: *Ostraca Osloensia, Greek Ostraca in Norwegian Collections*, Oslo, 1933, p. 2.

9 N. Lewis: *The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters, Greek Papyri*, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 116.

10 Now commonly agreed to have come from Naḥal Ḥever like the Babatha archive, see J.C. Greenfield: *The Texts from Naḥal Ṣe’elim (Wadi Seiyal)*, in J. Trebelle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner (eds.): *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18–21 March 1991*, II, Leiden, 1992, p. 662.

11 See H.M. Cotton: *Rent or Tax Receipt from Maḥoza*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100 (1994), p. 550, ll. 4–7.

12 Cf. *P. Yadin* 17 (deposit), ll. 3–6 = ll. 21–25: ὁμολογήσατο Ἰουδας ... ὥστε ... ἀπε[σ]χηκέναι παρ’ αὐτῆς ... ἀργυρίου etc.; 37 (marriage contract), ll. 7–8: [καὶ ὁμολογήσατο ὁ γήμας ὁ αὐ]τὸς Ἰησοῦς [ἀπ]εσχηξ[ε]ναι παρ’ αὐτῆς ... τειμογ[ρ]αφίαν κομίας γυναικειάς.

13 It could even be omitted in a *cheirographon*, for which see, e.g., L. Mitteis and U. Wilcken: *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde*, Berlin, 1912, II.2, No. 140, ll. 3–4: ἔχω παρὰ [σοῦ], and see his comment in II.1, p. 74.

14 Y. Yadin and J. Naveh: *Masada I, The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965, Final Reports: The Aramaic and Hebrew Ostraca and Jar Inscriptions*, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 49; cf. B. Porten and A. Yardeni: *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt 2, Contracts*, Jerusalem, 1989, B4.1 = Cowley 49 + P. Berlin 23104, l. 2: ‘I shall not be able to say to you: “I have (a claim) on you (for) silver”’ — כֹּחִי עֲלֶיךָ כֶּסֶף (cf. l. 4).

15 Lewis (above, n. 9), p. 15. In Aramaic I.O.U. notes the borrower employs the lender’s point of view in order to point out that the latter has a claim on him, see Porten and Yardeni (above, n. 14), B4.5 = Cowley 29, ll. 2–3: ‘You have a claim on me for silver’ — אִתִּי אֶשְׁכַּח עָלַי כֶּסֶף; cf. B4.6 = Cowley 35 + No. 69 of 96 Frags. l. 3; P. Segal: *The Hebrew IOU*

Αλδη is a common transcription¹⁶ of the well-attested Nabatean female name ʾlḏh, and occurs in all regions where Nabatean presence is attested. We find it in Palmyrene, as well as in other pre-Islamic Arabian dialects, and it is the equivalent of modern Arabic Ḥalid.¹⁷ A well-known bearer of the name is the wife of Aretas IV (9/8 B.C.E.–40 C.E.), whose name appears on coins issued in the first 28 years of his reign.¹⁸

We have argued that all the Greek documents found at Masada — with the exception of a few Byzantine items — were Jewish,¹⁹ and that they antedate the fall of the fortress.²⁰ Since, to the best of our knowledge, there is no secure evidence for the use of Nabatean names by Jews,²¹ it is all but certain that Alde was Nabatean. We are completely in the dark as to the identity and nationality of the other party to the transaction.

The presence of a Nabatean female name on Herodian Masada cannot but remind us of the close links between the peoples in this area. Herod himself was the son of a Nabatean woman,²² and the powerful minister of the Nabatean realm, Syllaus, courted Herod's sister, Salome, who favoured his advances.²³

This ostrakon may be further evidence for commercial links between Jews and Nabateans at Masada, already implied by the occurrence of the Jewish name Simon in Nabatean characters on a jar found at Masada,²⁴ and also for 'the role played by women ... in the economic life of Palestine'.²⁵

Note from the Time of Bar Kochba Period, *Tarbiḥ* 60 (1991), pp. 113–118 (Hebrew) for the correct interpretation of *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* II, 18, ll. 3–4 from 55/56 C.E.; and M. Broshi and E. Qimron: I.O.U. Note from the Time of the Bar Kochba Revolt, *EI* 20 (1989), pp. 256–261 (Hebrew), now revised and corrected in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 45 (1994), pp. 286–294.

- 16 Alongside Χαλδη, see H. Wuthnow: *Die semitischen Menschennamen in griechischen Inschriften und Papyri des vorderen Orients. Studien zur Epigraphie und Papyruskunde* I.4, Leipzig, 1930, pp. 17, 119; J. Cantineau: *Le Nabatéen* II, Paris, 1932, p. 96.
- 17 A. Negev: *Personal Names in the Nabataean Realm (Qedem 32)*, Jerusalem, 1991, p. 29.
- 18 Y. Meshorer: *Nabataean Coins (Qedem 3)*, Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 94–103; see also *CIS* II 158 (Puteoli).
- 19 Cotton and Geiger (above, n. 7), pp. 2–3: for which purpose we use the definition of *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* I, Introduction, p. xvii.
- 20 Cotton and Geiger (above, n. 7), pp. 3–5.
- 21 H.Z. Hirschberg: *New Jewish Inscriptions in the Nabataean Sphere, EI* 12 (1978), pp. 144–145 (Hebrew): in *CIS* II 219 'Omrath (עמרַת) is the wife of a man who declares himself a Jew (יהודי); it is not at all certain that she too is Jewish.
- 22 Herod's mother was Cyprus, see Josephus, *Ant.* 14.121; *War*, 1.181.
- 23 Josephus, *Ant.* 16.220–225.
- 24 Yadin and Naveh (above, n. 14), No. 514; we are informed by Ms. Rachel Bar-Nathan that Nabatean painted bowls, jugs and pots were found at Masada and are to be published by her in the *Final Reports*.
- 25 Cotton and Geiger (above, n. 7), p. 191 and see there, Nos. 891–895.