SCRIPTURE ANALYSIS · BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Ancient Stones, Part 5

Hebrew, Moabite & Aramaic Inscriptions

Translations, images and commentary for the artifacts on the Ancient Stones page

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About this study

This part covers the inscriptions from Iron Age Israel and its neighbours on the Ancient Stones page: the Gezer Calendar, the Mesha Stele, the Siloam Inscription, the Lachish Letters, the Tel Dan Stele, the Ketef Hinnom amulets, Kuntillet ʿAjrud, Khirbet el-Qom, Deir ʿAlla, the Arad and Samaria ostraca, the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon, the Tel Zayit abecedary, the bulla of Hezekiah, the *lmlk* jar handles and the Ekron royal inscription. They are the primary epigraphic witnesses to the language, script and history of the kingdoms of Israel, Judah and Moab from the 10th to the 6th century BC. They are short enough to be given here complete or nearly complete.

About the translations. The Mesha Stele and the Siloam Inscription are given in the public-domain translations of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), followed by notes on modern readings. The Gezer Calendar and the Lachish Letters were published or fully read only after 1930,

so the passages given are translations by the author of this study from the Hebrew text as edited in the standard modern corpora.

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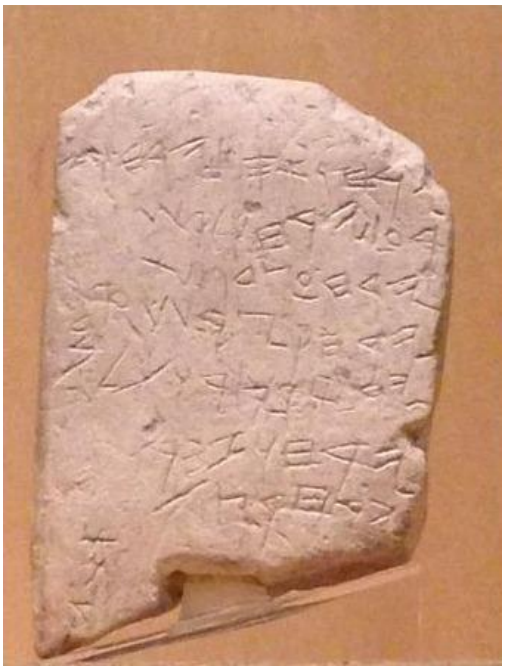
48. The Gezer Calendar



The Gezer Calendar, a small soft-limestone tablet inscribed in early alphabetic Hebrew script (Istanbul Archaeology Museums).

Image: Oncenawhile. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Soft limestone tablet, c. 11 × 7 cm, seven lines plus a marginal name; apparently reused (palimpsest)
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums
Date	10th century BC (late 10th century by most palaeographers)
Provenance	Tel Gezer, Israel; found by R. A. S. Macalister in 1908
Language / script	Early Hebrew or South Canaanite (debated), Phoenician-type alphabetic script
Principal editions	Macalister (1909); Albright, *BASOR* 92 (1943); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005), Gezer 1; Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past* (2008)

What it is

Technical summary. The Gezer Calendar lists the agricultural year as a sequence of two-month and one-month periods, each named for its main task. It begins in the autumn with the ingathering of olives and fruit. Its simple, repetitive form and the evidence of erasure suggest a school exercise or memory text. Linguistically it is one of the earliest substantial inscriptions in a language that may be Hebrew. The forms *yrḥw* ("two months"?) are debated: they may be duals, or plurals with a third-person suffix. The marginal name *ʾbyw* or *ʾby[h]* (Abijah?) may be the writer's.

In plain terms. A ten-line farmer's almanac scratched on a palm-sized stone around 925 BC, possibly by a schoolboy practising his letters. It runs through the farming year month by month.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study from the Hebrew text (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

1. Two months of ingathering (*ʾsp*),
2. two months of sowing (*zrʿ*),
3. two months of late sowing (*lqš*),
4. a month of hoeing (or cutting) flax (*ʿṣd pšt*),
5. a month of barley harvest (*qṣr śʿrm*),
6. a month of harvest and measuring (or feasting) (*qṣr wkl*),
7. two months of vine-pruning (*zmr*),
8. a month of summer fruit (*qṣ*).

(Margin) Abiy[ah]

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The agricultural year.** The calendar starts in the autumn, matching the older Israelite reckoning in which the year "goes out" with the ingathering (Exod 23:16; 34:22). Its sequence of flax and barley harvests fits Exod 9:31–32, where flax and barley are ruined by hail while the wheat, which ripens later, survives.
- **Vocabulary.** *Lqš*, "late sowing," occurs as a noun in Amos 7:1. *Qayiṣ*, "summer fruit," is the basis of the wordplay in Amos 8:1–2 between the "basket of summer fruit" (*qayiṣ*) and "the end" (*qēṣ*) of Israel.
- **Literacy.** As a possible school text, the calendar is part of the debate on the spread of literacy in 10th-century Israel and Judah.

Further reading

- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., J. J. M. Roberts, C. L. Seow and R. E. Whitaker. *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Aḥituv, Shmuel. *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2008.
- Pardee, Dennis. "A Brief Case for the Language of the 'Gezer Calendar' as Phoenician." In *Linguistic Studies in Phoenician*, ed. R. D. Holmstedt and A. Schade. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013.

49. The Mesha Stele (The Moabite Stone)



The Mesha Stele in the Louvre (AO 5066), reconstructed from fragments; the smooth areas are restored from a squeeze taken before the stone was broken.

Image: Tangopaso. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Black basalt stele, c. 1.15 m high, 34 lines (about two-thirds of the original surface preserved)
Museum	Louvre, Paris, AO 5066
Date	c. 840 BC
Provenance	Dhiban (ancient Dibon), Jordan; seen by F. A. Klein in 1868; a squeeze was taken for C. Clermont-Ganneau before the stone was broken by local villagers
Language / script	Moabite, Old Hebrew–Phoenician alphabetic script
Principal editions	Clermont-Ganneau (1870); Smend & Socin (1886); Dearman, ed., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (1989); Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past* (2008)

What it is

Technical summary. In this memorial inscription Mesha, king of Moab, celebrates his rebellion against Israel after the death of Ahab. He credits it to his god Chemosh, whose anger had allowed Omri and his son to oppress Moab for forty years. Mesha recounts the recapture of Medeba, Ataroth, Nebo and Jahaz, and the slaughter of Ataroth's Gadite population and of Nebo's 7,000 inhabitants, devoted (*ḥrm*) to Ashtar-Chemosh. He describes bringing the vessels of YHWH before Chemosh and his building works at his capital, Qarḥoh. It is the longest Iron Age inscription from the southern Levant and the earliest extra-biblical text to name YHWH.

In plain terms. The king of Moab boasts that his god Chemosh helped him throw off Israel's rule, retake his towns, and capture "the vessels of YHWH" from an Israelite shrine. It is the Moabite side of the story in 2 Kings 3.

The text (complete as preserved)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 363–364, public domain.

> I am Mesha, son of Chemoshmelek, King of Moab, the Dibonite. My father ruled over Moab thirty years, and I ruled after my father. And I made this high place to Chemosh in Qarhah (?) because of the deliverance of Mesha, because he saved me from all the kings and because he caused me to see [my desire] upon all who hated me. Omri, king of Israel — he oppressed Moab many days, because Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him, and he also said I will oppress Moab. In my day he spoke according to [this] word, but I saw [my desire] upon him and upon his house, and Israel utterly perished forever. Now Omri had possessed all the land of Medeba and dwelt in it his days and half the days of his son, forty years, but Chemosh restored it in my day.
>
> And I built Baal-meon and I made in it the reservoir (?), and I built Kiryathaim. And the men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Ataroth from of old and the king of Israel had built for himself Ataroth. And I fought against the city and took it, and I slew all the people of the city, a sight [pleasing] to Chemosh and to Moab. And I brought back from there the altar-hearth of Duda and I dragged it before Chemosh in Kerioth. And I caused to dwell in it the men of Sharon (?) and the men of Mehuroth (?).
>
> And Chemosh said to me: "Go take Nebo against Israel"; and I went by night and fought against it from break of dawn till noon, and I took it and slew all, seven thousand men, boys (?), and women, and girls, for I had devoted it to Ashtar-Chemosh. And I took from there the altar-hearths of Yahweh (Jehovah), and I dragged them before Chemosh.
>
> And the king of Israel built Jahaz and dwelt in it while he fought with me and Chemosh drove him out from before me. And I took from Moab two hundred men, all its chiefs, and I led them against Jahaz and took it to add unto Dibon.
>
> And I built Qarhah (?), the wall of the forests and the wall of the hill; and I built its gates and I built its towers, and I built the king's house, and I made the sluices (?) for the reservoir of water in the midst of the city. And there was no cistern in the midst of the city, in Qarhah (?); and I said to all the people: "Make you each a cistern in his house;" and I cut the cuttings for Qarhah (?) with the help of the prisoners of Israel. I built Aroer and I made the highway by the Arnon. And I built Beth-bamoth, for it had been destroyed. And I built Bezer, for it was in ruins … [Chi]efs of Dibon were fifty, for all Dibon was obedient. And I ruled a hundred …, in the cities which I had added to the land. And I built [Mede]ba and Beth-diblathan. And [as for] Beth-baal-meon, there I placed sheep-raisers … sheep of the land. And [as for] Horonaim there dwelt in it … and Chemosh said unto me: "Go down, fight against Horonaim," and I went down … and Chemosh … in my day, and … from there … and I …

Notes on modern readings

- **Line 3.** Barton's "Qarhah" is now generally vocalized **Qeriḥoh** or **Qarḥoh**, the royal quarter of Dibon.

- **Line 12.** The object brought from Ataroth is *ʾrʾl dwdh*. Its meaning is debated: "the altar-hearth of its beloved (or of its David)" or "its chieftain, Uriel."
- **Line 17.** Mesha devoted (*hḥrmth*) Nebo to Ashtar-Chemosh. The verb is the same as the Hebrew *ḥērem* of the conquest narratives.
- **Line 18.** The modern reading is "I took from there the **vessels** (*kly*) of YHWH." Barton's "altar-hearths" follows an older reading. This is the earliest datable occurrence of the divine name YHWH outside the Bible.
- **Line 31.** A. Lemaire (1994) read *bt[d]wd*, "the House of David," in a damaged passage about Horonaim. The reading is plausible but disputed. A clear "House of David" appears on the Tel Dan stele (c. 840 BC, found 1993).

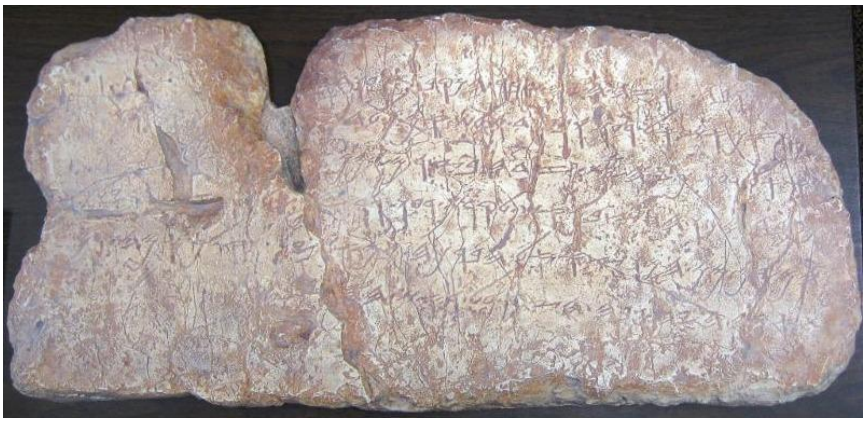
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 1:1 and 3:4–27.** Mesha, "king of Moab, a sheep-breeder" (*nōqēd*, 2 Kgs 3:4), rebelled against Israel after Ahab's death. The Bible narrates the punitive campaign of Jehoram of Israel, Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom, which ended when Mesha sacrificed his firstborn son on the wall. The stele narrates Mesha's own successes and says nothing of that campaign. The two accounts are complementary rather than contradictory.
- **Omri's dynasty.** Omri and "his son" (Ahab, or possibly a later descendant) occupying Medeba for "forty years" agrees with the picture of Omride expansion in 1 Kings 16–22.
- **Theology of war.** Chemosh's anger causing Moab's subjugation, and his favour restoring it, closely parallels the Deuteronomistic theology of Judges and Kings, as does the *ḥērem* of a conquered city.
- **Language.** Moabite is very close to Hebrew. Waw-consecutive narrative verbs, the relative *ʾšr* and the *ḥrm* vocabulary are shared.

Further reading

- Dearman, J. Andrew, ed. *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.
- Lemaire, André. "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20.3 (1994): 30–37.
- Routledge, Bruce. *Moab in the Iron Age*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Aḥituv, Shmuel. *Echoes from the Past*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2008.

50. The Siloam Inscription



A replica of the Siloam Inscription (the original is in the Istanbul Archaeology Museums).
Image: Wikikati. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone panel cut from the wall of the tunnel, six lines
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums (removed from the tunnel in 1891)
Date	c. 700 BC (reign of Hezekiah)
Provenance	Hezekiah's Tunnel, City of David, Jerusalem; about 6 m from the Siloam end; discovered in 1880
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew (Paleo-Hebrew) script
Principal editions	Sayce (1881); Smend & Socin; Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005), Siloam 1

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription commemorates the moment when the two teams of tunnellers, cutting from either end of a 533-metre conduit from the Gihon spring to the Siloam pool, met under the hill of the City of David. It is a monumental Hebrew text with no royal name. Unusually, it celebrates the workmen's achievement rather than a king's. Its script and language are classical Judean of about 700 BC. Radiometric dating of plant material in the tunnel plaster and of speleothems (Frumkin, Shimron and Rosenbaum, *Nature* 425, 2003) supports a date of about 700 BC.

In plain terms. Workers digging a water tunnel from both ends under Jerusalem carved this note on the wall where they met: they heard each other's voices through the rock, broke through, and the water flowed.

The text (complete)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 377, public domain.

> The boring through [is completed]. And this is the story of the boring through: while yet [they plied] the drill, each toward his fellow, and while yet there were three cubits to be bored through, there was heard the voice of one calling unto another, for there was a crevice in the rock on the right

hand. And on the day of the boring through the stone-cutters struck, each to meet his fellow, drill upon drill; and the waters flowed from the source to the pool for a thousand and two hundred cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the stone-cutters.

Notes on modern readings

- **"Drill."** Hebrew *grzn* is the pick or axe of the stone-cutter (compare Deut 19:5; Isa 10:15).
- **"A crevice."** Hebrew *zdh* is of uncertain meaning: a fissure, an overlap, or a deviation in the rock.
- **The figures.** The 1,200 cubits are close to the measured 533 m if a cubit of about 44.5 cm is used.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 20:20** credits Hezekiah with making "the pool and the conduit" and bringing water into the city. **2 Chronicles 32:2–4, 30** adds that he stopped the upper outlet of the Gihon and channelled it down to the west side of the City of David. **Isaiah 22:9–11** and **Sirach 48:17** also refer to these works. Most scholars connect the tunnel with Hezekiah's preparations for Sennacherib's invasion of 701 BC.
- **Dating debate.** In 1996 J. Rogerson and P. R. Davies proposed a Hasmonean date for the inscription. Palaeographers (R. S. Hendel, J. A. Hackett, F. M. Cross and others) answered that the script and language fit only the late 8th century BC. The 2003 radiometric dates have largely settled the question.

Further reading

- Frumkin, Amos, Aryeh Shimron and Jeff Rosenbaum. "Radiometric Dating of the Siloam Tunnel, Jerusalem." *Nature* 425 (2003): 169–171.
- Hendel, Ronald S. "The Date of the Siloam Inscription: A Rejoinder to Rogerson and Davies." *Biblical Archaeologist* 59 (1996): 233–237.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., et al. *Hebrew Inscriptions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

51. The Lachish Letters

Image. The Ancient Stones page shows modern replicas. The only openly licensed photographs found on Wikimedia Commons are of a replica whose lettering does not match the original, so no image is reproduced here. The originals can be seen on the websites of the British Museum and the Israel Museum.

Object	21 inscribed pottery sherds (ostraca); 18 found in 1935, three more in 1938
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Rockefeller Museum); British Museum, London
Date	c. 589–586 BC, during Nebuchadnezzar's final campaign against Judah
Provenance	Tel Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir), Israel; the guardroom of the outer city gate; excavated by J. L. Starkey
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script in ink
Principal editions	Torczyner (Tur-Sinai), *Lachish I: The Lachish Letters* (1938); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005); Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past* (2008)

What it is

Technical summary. The ostraca are mostly letters, or drafts of letters, from a junior officer named Hoshayahu, at an outpost near Lachish, to his superior Yaush, commander at Lachish. They concern the receipt and reading of letters, the movements of officers, a prophet's warning, and the watch for fire-signals. Written in the last months of the kingdom of Judah, they are the most important body of classical Hebrew prose outside the Bible and a direct witness to the language of Jeremiah's time.

In plain terms. These are the last messages of soldiers in Judah's army as the Babylonians closed in. One officer reports that he is still watching for the signal-fires of Lachish but can no longer see those of Azekah.

Key excerpts

Translations by the author of this study from the Hebrew text (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

Letter 4, reverse, lines 10–13

> And may (my lord) know that we are watching for the signal-fires of Lachish, according to all the signs that my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah.

Letter 3, lines 13–21

> And it has been reported to your servant, saying: "The commander of the army, Coniah son of Elnathan, has gone down to go into Egypt; and Hodaviah son of Ahijah and his men he has sent to take (supplies) from here." And as for the letter of Tobiah, servant of the king, which came to Shallum son of Jaddua from the prophet, saying "Beware!", your servant has sent it to my lord.

The greeting formula (Letters 2, 3, 4 and others)

May YHWH cause my lord to hear tidings of peace (*šmʿt šlm*) …

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Jeremiah 34:6–7.** Jeremiah notes that, while the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem, Lachish and Azekah were the only fortified cities of Judah still holding out. Letter 4's report that Azekah could no longer be seen, presumably because it had fallen, is the most frequently cited archaeological illustration of a biblical verse.
- **A prophet and an embassy to Egypt.** Letter 3's unnamed "prophet," whose warning circulated among officers, and a commander going down to Egypt fit the setting of Jer 26:20–23 (Uriah son of Shemaiah, who fled to Egypt and was extradited by Elnathan son of Achbor) and of Judah's reliance on Egypt (Jer 37:5–10; Ezek 17:15). Older proposals to identify the prophet as Jeremiah or Uriah are not provable.
- **Language and religion.** The letters use the divine name YHWH in oaths and greetings. Their many Yahwistic personal names (Hoshayahu, Yaush, Gemaryahu, Neriyahu, Jaazaniah) correspond to names in Jeremiah.

Further reading

- Torczyner, Harry. *Lachish I: The Lachish Letters*. London: Oxford University Press, 1938.
- Aḥituv, Shmuel. *Echoes from the Past*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2008.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., et al. *Hebrew Inscriptions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Ussishkin, David. *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*. 5 vols. Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 2004.

52. The Tel Dan Stele (“House of David” Inscription)



The Tel Dan Stele in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The phrase bytdwd, “House of David,” is highlighted in white near the lower centre.

Image: Oren Rozen. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Three fragments (A, B1, B2) of a basalt victory stele; 13 partial lines
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel Antiquities Authority collection)
Date	c. 840 BC (second half of the 9th century BC)
Provenance	Tel Dan, northern Israel; fragment A found in 1993 by Gila Cook of Avraham Biran’s excavation team, fragments B1 and B2 in 1994, all reused in later walls
Language / script	Old Aramaic, Phoenician-type alphabetic script
Principal editions	Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993): 81–98 and *IEJ* 45 (1995): 1–18; Schniedewind, *BASOR* 302 (1996)

What it is

Technical summary. An Aramean king, almost certainly Hazael of Damascus (c. 842–800 BC), commemorates his accession and his victories over Israel and Judah. He claims that Hadad made him king and that he killed seventy kings. Biran and Naveh’s reconstruction of the fragments names the defeated kings as [Jeho]ram son of [Ahab], king of Israel, and [Ahaz]iah son of [Jehoram], king of the *bytdwd*, the “House of David.” The phrase, written without a word-divider, is a dynastic name of the same type as Assyrian *Bīt-Ḫumri* (House of Omri). It is the earliest undisputed extra-biblical reference to David.

In plain terms. An enemy king of Damascus boasts that he defeated the king of Israel and the king of "the House of David," about 150 years after David. It shows that Judah's ruling dynasty was known by David's name.

The text (lines 3–9, as restored by Biran and Naveh)

Translation by the author of this study from the Aramaic text (Biran & Naveh 1995). Square brackets enclose restorations.

> 3. … and my father lay down; he went to his [fathers]. And the king of I[s]rael entered formerly into the land of my father.
>
> 4. [And] Hadad made me myself king, and Hadad went before me,
>
> 5. [and] I went forth from … of my kingdom, and I slew [seve]nty kin[gs],
>
> 6. who harnessed thou[sands of cha]riots and thousands of horsemen. [I killed Jeho]ram son of [Ahab],
>
> 7. king of Israel, and [I] killed [Ahaz]iahu son of [Jehoram, kin]g
>
> 8. of the House of David. And I set [their towns into ruins …]
>
> 9. … their land into [desolation …]

Notes

- **Authenticity and reading.** After a period of debate in the 1990s, the stele is accepted as genuine by almost all specialists. The reading *bytdwd* as "House of David" is accepted by the great majority. Alternatives ("house of the beloved," a place name) have found little support.
- **The joins.** The fit between fragment A and fragments B1/B2, and therefore the restoration of the names Jehoram and Ahaziah, is less certain than the reading "House of David," which is on fragment A alone.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 8:28–29; 9:14–28.** Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah fought Hazael at Ramoth-gilead, and both were killed in 841 BC, in the Bible by Jehu. Hazael's claim to have killed them is often explained either as royal propaganda taking credit for Jehu's coup or as evidence that Jehu acted in league with Hazael. Either way, the stele independently confirms the two kings, their deaths in the same conflict, and Aramean domination of Israel in Hazael's day (2 Kgs 10:32–33; 13:3, 22).
- **The House of David.** The phrase matches the biblical "house of David" (e.g., 1 Kgs 12:19; Isa 7:2, 13) and confirms that a Judahite dynasty traced itself to a founder named David.

Further reading

- Biran, Avraham, and Joseph Naveh. "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan." *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993): 81–98; "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment." *IEJ* 45 (1995): 1–18.

- Hagelia, Hallvard. *The Dan Debate: The Tel Dan Inscription in Recent Research*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009.
- Bible Odyssey. “The Tel Dan Inscription.” bibleodyssey.org

53. The Ketef Hinnom Silver Amulets



Ketef Hinnom amulet KH2 (the smaller silver scroll), unrolled. Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Image: Scan of the Ketef Hinnom scroll KH2. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Two rolled silver plaques (KH1, c. 9.7 × 2.7 cm; KH2, c. 3.9 × 1.1 cm), worn as amulets
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Late 7th or early 6th century BC (before the Babylonian destruction of 586 BC)
Provenance	Ketef Hinnom, Jerusalem, Cave 24, Repository 25; excavated by Gabriel Barkay, 1979
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script incised with a fine stylus
Principal editions	Barkay, *Tel Aviv* 19 (1992); Barkay, Vaughn, Lundberg & Zuckerman, "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *BASOR* 334 (2004): 41–71

What it is

Technical summary. The two amulets carry versions of the Priestly Blessing of Numbers 6:24–26 together with other liturgical phrases. KH1 also has a formula close to Deuteronomy 7:9, about God keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love him. They were found in a repository of a late Iron Age family tomb. High-resolution imaging by the West Semitic Research Project (University of Southern California) in 1994 allowed the 2004 re-edition. Palaeography dates them to around 600 BC. They are therefore the earliest known texts that correspond to passages of the Hebrew Bible, about four centuries older than the oldest Dead Sea Scrolls.

In plain terms. Two tiny rolled-up silver charms from a Jerusalem tomb, made about 600 BC, contain the blessing "May the LORD bless you and keep you …" from Numbers 6. They are the oldest surviving pieces of biblical text.

The text compared with the MT and the LXX

The amulet text follows Barkay et al. (2004). The glosses are literal renderings of each witness, prepared by the author of this study.

Line of the blessing	Masoretic Text (Num 6:24–26)	Ketef Hinnom KH2 (lines 5–12)	Septuagint (Num 6:24–26)
1	*yĕḇārekḵā YHWH wĕyišmĕreḵā*: "May YHWH bless you and keep you"	*ybrk yhwh yšmrk*: "May YHWH bless you, keep you"	Εὐλογήσαι σε κύριος καὶ φυλάξαι σε: "May the Lord bless you and keep you"
2	*yāʾēr YHWH pānāw ʾēleyḵā wîḥunneḵkā*: "May YHWH make his face shine on you and be gracious to you"	*yʾr yhwh pnyw [ʾlyk]*: "May YHWH make his face shine [on you]" (no "and be gracious")	ἐπιφάναι κύριος τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ ἐλεήσαι σε: "… and have mercy on you"
3	*yiśśāʾ YHWH pānāw ʾēleyḵā wĕyāśēm lĕḵā šālôm*: "May YHWH lift up his face to you and give you peace"	*wyśm lk š[lw]m*: "and give you p[ea]ce" (no "lift up his face")	ἐπάραι κύριος τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δῴη σοι εἰρήνην: "… and give you peace"

Assessment. The MT and the LXX agree fully on the three-line blessing. The LXX's ἐλεήσαι ("have mercy") renders Hebrew *ḥnn* ("be gracious") in the usual way. The LXX differs from the MT only in the order of the surrounding verses, placing verse 27 after verse 23. KH2 (and, where legible, KH1) gives a shorter, two-line form that joins the shining face directly to the gift of peace. Most scholars explain this as an abbreviation for amuletic use rather than as evidence of an earlier, shorter biblical text. The amulets show that the blessing's wording was already fixed in its essentials before the exile, and that it agrees with the consonantal MT in every word it preserves.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

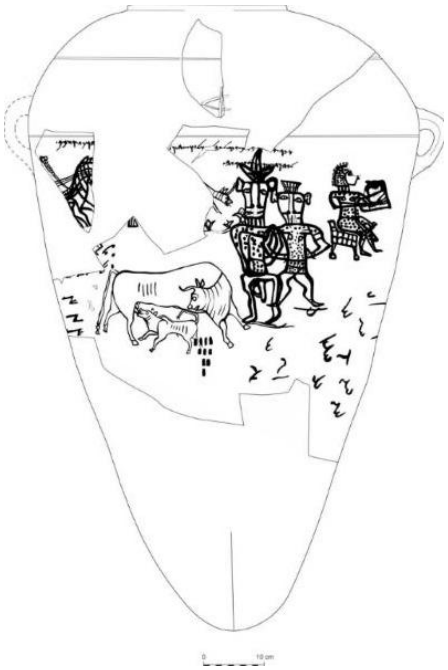
- **Numbers 6:22–27**, the Aaronic blessing, ends with the LORD's promise to "put my name" upon Israel. The amulets literally put the divine name on the wearer.
- **Deuteronomy 7:9** (also Neh 1:5; Dan 9:4): KH1's formula about the God who keeps covenant and steadfast love toward those who love him and keep his commandments.
- **Dating the Torah.** The amulets have been central to debates about the date of the Priestly material. They show only that this blessing was in use by about 600 BC; they do not by themselves date the book of Numbers.

Further reading

- Barkay, Gabriel, Andrew G. Vaughn, Marilyn J. Lundberg and Bruce Zuckerman. "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation." *BASOR* 334 (2004): 41–71.
- Naʾaman, Nadav. "A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom." *Israel Exploration Journal* 61 (2011): 184–195. Academia

- Smoak, Jeremy D. *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

54. The Kuntillet ʿAjrud Inscriptions



Drawing of Pithos A from Kuntillet ʿAjrud, with the inscription "YHWH of Samaria and his asherah" above the painted figures.

Image: Drawing of the Kuntillet ʿAjrud pithos. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Ink inscriptions and drawings on two large storage jars (pithoi), plaster wall inscriptions and incised stone vessels
Museum	The finds were returned to Egypt after the Israel–Egypt peace agreement; the pithoi were long displayed in the Israel Museum
Date	c. 800 BC
Provenance	Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Ḥorvat Teman), northeastern Sinai; excavated by Ze'ev Meshel, 1975–1976
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew and Phoenician script
Principal editions	Meshel, *Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Ḥorvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah–Sinai Border* (2012)

What it is

Technical summary. Kuntillet ʿAjrud was a small way-station on the desert route to Elath, used by travellers from both Israel and Judah. Its inscriptions include blessings in letter form. Pithos A reads: "I have blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and by his asherah." Pithos B has "YHWH of Teman and his asherah." A plaster inscription invokes El, Baal and "the name of YHWH." Whether "his asherah" refers to the goddess Asherah as YHWH's consort or to a cult object (a sacred pole or tree) associated with YHWH is one of the most debated questions in the study of Israelite religion.

In plain terms. Travellers at a desert stop around 800 BC wrote blessings "by YHWH of Samaria and his asherah" on storage jars. This suggests that some Israelites paired their God with the goddess Asherah or her symbol, as the prophets complained.

Key inscriptions

Translations by the author of this study from the Hebrew text (Meshel 2012).

> Pithos A: Thus says ʾAšyaw the king(?): Say to Yahalyaw and to Yawʿasa and to …: I have blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and by his asherah.
>
> Pithos B: … I have blessed you by YHWH of Teman and by his asherah. May he bless you and keep you, and may he be with my lord.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Asherah worship.** The Bible repeatedly condemns asherah poles and the goddess Asherah in Israel and Judah (Deut 16:21; 1 Kgs 15:13; 16:33; 2 Kgs 21:7; 23:4–7). Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom (next entry) show what the prophets were opposing.
- **Regional forms of YHWH.** "YHWH of Samaria" and "YHWH of Teman" are comparable to local manifestations of a god, which Deuteronomy 6:4 ("YHWH is one") may be countering.
- **Blessing formula.** "May he bless you and keep you" echoes Num 6:24 (see the Ketef Hinnom entry).

Further reading

- Meshel, Ze'ev. *Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Ḥorvat Teman)*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012.
- Hadley, Judith M. *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Dever, William G. *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

55. The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription



The burial inscription from Khirbet el-Qom, with an incised hand below the text.
Image: פעמי-עליון. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Inscription incised on a pillar in a tomb (Inscription 3)
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	c. 750–700 BC
Provenance	Khirbet el-Qom (probably biblical Makkedah), west of Hebron; recovered by William G. Dever in 1967
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script
Principal editions	Dever, *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005), Kom 3

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription, scratched beside an incised human hand, blesses a man named Uriyahu by YHWH and by "his asherah," the same phrase as at Kuntillet ʿAjrud. Its reading is difficult because of repeated incisions, but the key words *lyhwh* and *lʾšrth* are clear.

In plain terms. A Judean tomb from the 8th century BC carries a blessing for a man called Uriyahu "by YHWH and his asherah."

The text

Translation by the author of this study (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

> Uriyahu the rich (?) has written it. Blessed be Uriyahu by YHWH; and from his enemies, by his asherah, he has saved him. (Written) by Oniyahu.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

Like Kuntillet ʿAjrud, the inscription documents a Judean belief in YHWH's asherah, the background to the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kgs 18:4; 23:4–7). The incised hand may be an apotropaic sign, a protective "hand" motif known widely in the region.

Further reading

- Zevit, Ziony. *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches*. London: Continuum, 2001.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., et al. *Hebrew Inscriptions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

56. The Deir ʿAlla Inscription (Balaam Son of Beor)



Reconstruction drawing of Combination I of the Deir ʿAlla plaster inscription, written in black and red ink.
Image: Disdero. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Ink inscription on wall plaster, reconstructed from fragments into two "combinations"
Museum	Jordan Archaeological Museum, Amman
Date	c. 800 BC (mid-9th to mid-8th century BC)
Provenance	Tell Deir ʿAlla (biblical Succoth?), Jordan Valley; found in 1967 by H. J. Franken's Dutch expedition
Language / script	A local Northwest Semitic dialect (variously classed as Aramaic, Canaanite or "Gileadite"), Aramaic script
Principal editions	Hoftijzer & van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir ʿAlla* (1976); Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAllā* (1984)

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription, written in red and black ink like a scroll on a plastered wall, is titled "The book of Balaam son of Beor, who was a seer of the gods." The gods come to Balaam at night. He weeps and reports to his people a vision of the divine council (the *šdyn*) ordering a goddess to darken the heavens. The second combination is more obscure and concerns death and the underworld. It is the earliest non-biblical text to name a figure known from the Bible, and the oldest known example of a "book" of a prophet's vision.

In plain terms. A wall painting of about 800 BC in Jordan tells a story of "Balaam son of Beor," the same prophet whose donkey speaks in the book of Numbers.

Key excerpt (Combination I, lines 1–5)

Translation by the author of this study (after Hackett 1984).

> The account of Balaam son of Beor, who was a seer of the gods. The gods came to him in the night, and he saw a vision like an oracle of El. They said to Balaam son of Beor: "Thus it will be done …" And Balaam rose in the morning … and he wept bitterly. And his people came up to him and said to Balaam son of Beor: "Why are you fasting, and why are you weeping?" And he said to them: "Sit down! I will tell you what the Shadday-gods have done …"

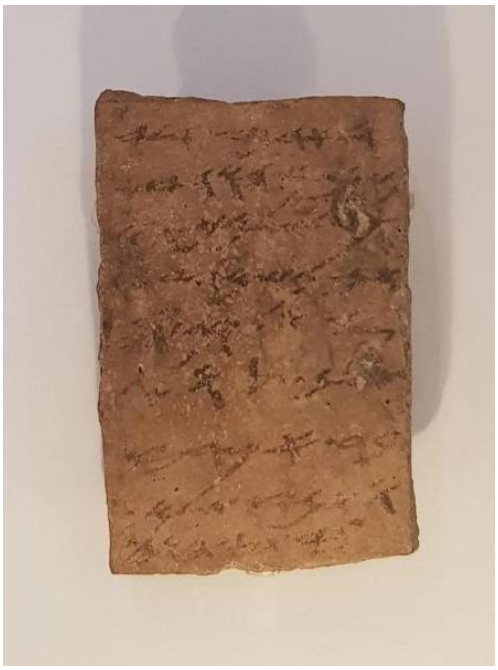
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Numbers 22–24.** Balaam son of Beor is the seer hired by Balak of Moab to curse Israel. God comes to him at night (Num 22:9, 20), and his oracles include visions of the "Almighty" (*Šadday*, Num 24:4, 16). The Deir ʿAlla text shows that Balaam was a famous seer in Transjordanian tradition independent of the Bible.
- **Later tradition.** Balaam is remembered in Deut 23:4–5; Josh 13:22; Mic 6:5; and in the New Testament (2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11; Rev 2:14).
- **The* šdyn*. The council of* šdyn* gods connects with the divine name Šadday ("Almighty") in Genesis and Job.

Further reading

- Hoftijzer, J., and G. van der Kooij. *Aramaic Texts from Deir ʿAlla*. Leiden: Brill, 1976.
- Hackett, Jo Ann. *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAllā*. HSM 31. Chico: Scholars Press, 1984.
- Hoftijzer, J., and G. van der Kooij, eds. *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAlla Re-evaluated*. Leiden: Brill, 1991.

57. The Arad Ostraca



Arad Ostracon 18, a letter to Eliashib that mentions "the house of YHWH" (Israel Museum).
Image: פעמי-עליון. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Over 100 Hebrew ostraca (plus Aramaic and Greek ones from later periods)
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Mainly c. 600–587 BC (Stratum VI); some 8th century BC
Provenance	Tel Arad, Negev; excavated by Yohanan Aharoni, 1962–1967
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script in ink
Principal editions	Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (1981); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005)

What it is

Technical summary. Most of the Arad ostraca belong to the archive of Eliashib son of Eshiyahu, quartermaster of the Judean fortress at Arad in its last years. They are orders to issue wine, bread and oil to troops and to the *Kittiyim* (probably Greek or Cypriot mercenaries), and letters about troop movements, including an urgent order to send men against an Edomite threat (Arad 24). The fortress also contained a small temple with an altar and standing stones, which seems to have gone out of use in the late 8th or 7th century BC.

In plain terms. The orders and letters of a Judean army supply officer from the last years before Jerusalem fell, written on broken pottery.

Arad 18 (complete)

Translation by the author of this study (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

To my lord Eliashib. May YHWH seek your welfare. And now, give Shemaryahu a … (of flour?), and to the Qerosite give a homer (?). And as for the matter about which you commanded me: it is well. He is staying in the house of YHWH.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **"The house of YHWH"** most likely refers to the Jerusalem temple. The **Qerosites** may be the "sons of Keros," a family of temple servants (Ezra 2:44; Neh 7:47).
- **Edom.** The threat from Edom in Arad 24 fits the hostility toward Edom in Obadiah and Ps 137:7 at the time of the Babylonian conquest.
- **The Arad temple.** A Judean sanctuary outside Jerusalem that apparently went out of use around the time of Hezekiah's reform (2 Kgs 18:4, 22) has been much discussed in connection with the centralization of worship (Deut 12).

Further reading

- Aharoni, Yohanan. *Arad Inscriptions*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981.
- Herzog, Ze'ev. "The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad: An Interim Report." *Tel Aviv* 29 (2002): 3–109.

58. The Samaria Ostraca



Drawings of Samaria ostraca with a comparative table of the Old Hebrew letters, from the publication of the Harvard excavations.

Image: Photographer unknown. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	102 inscribed sherds (63 legible), shipping dockets for wine and oil
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums; Harvard Semitic Museum
Date	Early 8th century BC (years 9, 10, 15 and 17 of a king, probably Jehoash or Jeroboam II)
Provenance	Samaria, royal acropolis (“Ostraca House”); excavated by G. A. Reisner, Harvard University, 1910
Language / script	Hebrew (northern dialect), Old Hebrew script in ink
Principal editions	Reisner, Fisher & Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria* (1924); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005)

What it is

Technical summary. The ostraca record deliveries of “old wine” and “fine oil” from estates and clans in the hill country of Manasseh to officials at the royal court in Samaria. They give a regnal year, the clan district, the recipient and the commodity. The clan names include Abiezer, Helek, Shechem, Shemida, Noah and Hoglah, six of the clans of Manasseh named in the Bible. Personal names include both Yahwistic names (with *-yw*, e.g., Shemaryaw) and names compounded with Baal.

In plain terms. Delivery notes for wine and oil sent to the king’s palace at Samaria in the 8th century BC. They are written in the northern Hebrew dialect and name the same family clans as the book of Joshua.

A typical docket

Translation by the author of this study (Samaria 13).

> In the tenth year. From Abiezer, to Shemaryaw: a jar of fine oil.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The clans of Manasseh.** Joshua 17:2–3 and Numbers 26:30–33 list the clans of Manasseh, including Abiezer, Helek, Shechem and Shemida, and the daughters of Zelophehad, including Noah and Hoglah. The ostraca show these names as real territorial districts of the northern kingdom.
- **Religion.** The mixture of Yahwistic and Baal names recalls the religious conflict of the Omride and Jehuite periods (1 Kgs 16–18; Hos 2:16–17).
- **Language.** The northern spelling *yn* for "wine" (southern *yyn*) and the theophoric ending *-yw* (southern *-yhw*) document dialect differences within Hebrew.

Further reading

- Reisner, G. A., C. S. Fisher and D. G. Lyon. *Harvard Excavations at Samaria, 1908–1910*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924.
- Kaufman, Ivan T. "The Samaria Ostraca: An Early Witness to Hebrew Writing." *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982): 229–239.

59. The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon



Illustrative drawing of the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon (by Michael Netzer). The original is in the Israel Museum.
Image: Michael Netzer. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Pottery sherd with five lines in ink, c. 15 × 16.5 cm
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Late 11th or early 10th century BC (radiocarbon dating of the site c. 1020–980 BC)
Provenance	Khirbet Qeiyafa, overlooking the Elah Valley; excavated by Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, found 2008
Language / script	Disputed (Hebrew or another Canaanite language); late Proto-Canaanite alphabetic script
Principal editions	Misgav, Garfinkel & Ganor in *Khirbet Qeiyafa* I (2009); Puech, *RB* 117 (2010); Rollston, *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011)

What it is

Technical summary. The ostracon is one of the longest early alphabetic texts from Canaan, but much of it is faded and the readings differ considerably between editors. Clear words include *ʿbd* ("serve" or "slave"), *špṭ* ("judge") and *mlk* ("king"). Some editors (e.g., G. Galil) read a social-justice text that mentions the widow, orphan and stranger. Others read a list of names or a letter. Whether the language is Hebrew is disputed. The site, a fortified town with a casemate wall and two gates, is central to the debate about whether a Judahite kingdom existed in the time of David.

In plain terms. A five-line inscription from a hilltop fortress dated to about 1000 BC. It is too faded for scholars to agree on what it says, but it is among the oldest alphabetic writings from the land of Judah.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The Elah Valley** is the setting of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17). Qeiyafa overlooks it and has been identified, by its excavators, with biblical Shaaraim (1 Sam 17:52; Josh 15:36), a name that may mean "two gates."
- **Early monarchy and literacy.** The ostracon, with the Tel Zayit abecedary (next entry) and the Gezer Calendar (Part 5), is evidence for writing in Judah in the 10th century BC. That bears on whether royal administration and early written traditions existed in the time of David and Solomon.

Further reading

- Garfinkel, Yosef, Saar Ganor and Michael Hasel. *In the Footsteps of King David: Revelations from an Ancient Biblical City*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2018.
- Rollston, Christopher A. "The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon: Methodological Musings and Caveats." *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011): 67–82.

60. The Tel Zayit Abecedary



Drawing of the letters and other markings on the Tel Zayit stone; the alphabet runs in the long central line.
Image: Funhistory (drawing). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone boulder (c. 38 lb / 17 kg) with an incised alphabet, reused in a wall
Museum	Tel Zayit excavation archive (Zeta Expedition)
Date	10th century BC
Provenance	Tel Zayit, Shephelah of Judah (perhaps biblical Libnah); found by Ron E. Tappy's team, 2005
Language / script	Alphabetic (Phoenician-type, transitional to Hebrew) script
Principal editions	Tappy, McCarter, Lundberg & Zuckerman, "An Abecedary of the Mid-Tenth Century B.C.E. from the Judaean Shephelah," *BASOR* 344 (2006): 5–46

What it is

Technical summary. The stone bears the 22 letters of the alphabet in sequence, with a few departures from the standard order (e.g., the order of *waw* and *he*, and of *kaph* and *lamed*). It was found built into a 10th-century wall. An abecedary is a scribal exercise or display of literacy. Its date and location show that the alphabet was being taught in the lowland region between Judah and Philistia in the 10th century BC.

In plain terms. Someone carved the alphabet, A to Z in Hebrew-style letters, into a large stone around 950 BC. It is one of the earliest known alphabets from the land of Judah.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Acrostic poems.** The order of the alphabet underlies the acrostic poems of the Bible (e.g., Ps 119; Lam 1–4; Prov 31:10–31). Lamentations 2–4 put *pe* before *ʿayin*, an order also found in some early abecedaries.

- **Literacy.** Like the Gezer Calendar and the Qeiyafa ostracon, it bears on scribal training in the early monarchy.

Further reading

- Tappy, Ron E., P. Kyle McCarter, Marilyn J. Lundberg and Bruce Zuckerman. “An Abecedary of the Mid-Tenth Century B.C.E. from the Judaean Shephelah.” *BASOR* 344 (2006): 5–46.
- Rollston, Christopher A. *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel*. Atlanta: SBL, 2010.

61. The Royal Bulla of King Hezekiah



The seal impression (bulla) of "Hezekiah [son of] Ahaz, king of Judah," found in the Ophel excavations, Jerusalem.
Image: Tamir Zegman. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay seal impression (bulla), c. 1 cm across
Museum	Ophel excavations, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (displayed at the Israel Museum)
Date	c. 727–698 BC (reign of Hezekiah)
Provenance	Ophel, Jerusalem, in a refuse dump near a royal building; excavated by Eilat Mazar, found 2009, published 2015
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script
Principal editions	Mazar, *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount 2009–2013: Final Reports* I (2015)

What it is

Technical summary. The bulla was impressed by the personal seal of King Hezekiah. It reads *lḥzqyhw ʾḥz mlk yhdh*, "Belonging to Hezekiah [son of] Ahaz, king of Judah," arranged around a two-winged sun disk flanked by two *ankh* signs, Egyptian symbols of life. It is the first seal impression of an Israelite or Judahite king found in a scientific excavation. Previously known impressions of Hezekiah's seal came from the antiquities market.

In plain terms. A thumbnail-sized clay seal impression, stamped with King Hezekiah's personal seal, found in Jerusalem near the Temple Mount.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 18–20; Isaiah 36–39; 2 Chronicles 29–32.** Hezekiah son of Ahaz, king of Judah. The winged sun-disk motif, common in Judahite royal iconography of the late 8th century BC, shows Egyptian influence in the period when Judah looked to Egypt for help against Assyria (Isa 30:1–5; 31:1).
- A bulla found nearby, read by Mazar as possibly "belonging to Isaiah the prophet" (*lyšʿyhw nby[ʾ]*), is damaged and its reading is disputed.

Further reading

- Mazar, Eilat. *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount 2009–2013: Final Reports*. Vol. 1. Jerusalem: Shoham, 2015.
- Mykytiuk, Lawrence J. *Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E.* Atlanta: SBL, 2004.

62. The *LMLK* Seal Impressions



A lmlk ("belonging to the king") seal impression on a jar handle, with a two-winged sun disk.
Image: Funhistory. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Stamped handles of large storage jars; over 2,000 known
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Israel Antiquities Authority; many collections
Date	Late 8th century BC (reign of Hezekiah)
Provenance	Throughout Judah, especially Lachish (Level III), Jerusalem and the Shephelah
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script
Principal editions	Ussishkin, *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish* (2004); Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah* (1999)

What it is

Technical summary. The handles of a standard type of storage jar were stamped before firing with *lmlk*, "(belonging) to the king," above a four-winged scarab or a two-winged sun disk, and below it one of four place names: Hebron, Socoh, Ziph or *Mmšt* (an unidentified site). Clay analysis shows all the jars were made in a single production centre in the Shephelah. Their destruction context at Lachish (701 BC) dates them to Hezekiah's reign. Most scholars connect them with a royal system of supplies organized in preparation for Sennacherib's invasion.

In plain terms. Thousands of royal storage jars from Hezekiah's kingdom were stamped "belonging to the king." They seem to have been part of his preparations for the Assyrian invasion of 701 BC.

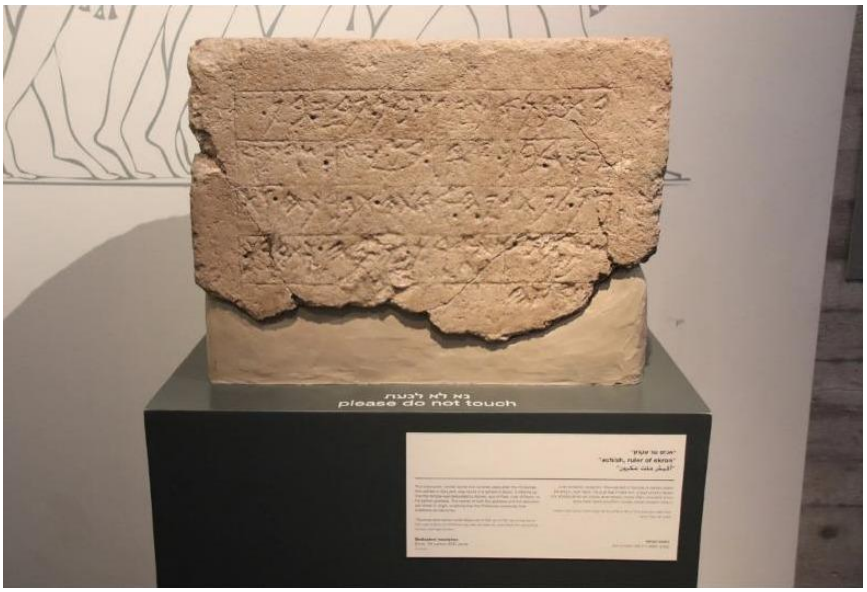
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Chronicles 32:27–29** describes Hezekiah's storehouses for grain, wine and oil and his fortified cities. The *lmlk* jars are generally taken as the archaeological trace of these preparations.
- **Hebron, Socoh and Ziph** are all listed among the towns of Judah (Josh 15:35, 48, 54–55).

Further reading

- Vaughn, Andrew G. *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.
- Ussishkin, David. *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*. Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 2004.

63. The Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription



The Ekron royal dedicatory inscription, naming Akhayush (Achish), ruler of Ekron (Israel Museum, Jerusalem).
Image: Gary Todd. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone block, five lines, found in situ in the sanctuary of a temple
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Early 7th century BC
Provenance	Tel Miqne (ancient Ekron), Philistia; excavated by Seymour Gitin and Trude Dothan, found 1996
Language / script	A Phoenician-type dialect with Philistine features, Phoenician script
Principal editions	Gitin, Dothan & Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 1–16

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription records the building of a temple by Akhayush (*ʾkyš*), son of Padi, ruler of Ekron, for a goddess named *Ptgyh*, perhaps of Aegean origin. It lists five generations of Ekron's rulers. It established the identity of Tel Miqne as Ekron, and it links Philistine kings named in Assyrian annals with the city. Padi is the king of Ekron restored by Sennacherib after 701 BC (see the Sennacherib Prism). Akhayush is Ikausu, king of Ekron, in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.

In plain terms. A building inscription found in a Philistine temple names the king of Ekron and his father. Both kings are also mentioned in Assyrian records, and the king's name is the biblical name Achish.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study (Gitin, Dothan & Naveh 1997).

> The temple which Akhayush, son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Yaʿir, ruler of Ekron, built for Ptgyh his lady. May she bless him, and protect him, and prolong his days, and bless his land.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Achish.** *ʾkyš* is the same name as Achish, king of Gath, with whom David took refuge (1 Sam 21:10–15; 27:2–12). The name, probably Aegean in origin, remained in use among Philistine kings for centuries.
- **Ekron** is one of the five Philistine cities (Josh 13:3; 1 Sam 6:16–17). Its god Baal-zebub appears in 2 Kgs 1:2–16.
- ******The title* śr*** *("ruler," used of Akhayush) corresponds to the biblical* sĕrānîm***, the "lords" of the Philistines (Judg 3:3; 1 Sam 6:4), if the two terms are related, as many suppose.

Further reading

- Gitin, Seymour, Trude Dothan and Joseph Naveh. "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron." *Israel Exploration Journal* 47 (1997): 1–16.
- Dothan, Trude, and Moshe Dothan. *People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines*. New York: Macmillan, 1992.