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Unpublished Phoenician Inscriptions from Palestine

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In the Persian period, although Aramaic script became dominant throughout the Achaemenid empire, and the use of the old Hebrew script in Judah and Samaria was very limited, Phoenician settlers and merchants in various towns and villages in Palestine employed the Phoenician language and script. The short inscriptions published here represent a small contribution to the Palestinian Phoenician inscriptions already known from the Persian and early Hellenistic periods. These include ostraca and jar inscriptions found in ‘Akko,1 Shiqmona2 and Bat Yam3 on the Mediterranean coast, and at Tell el-Kheleifeh near Elath.4 This paper deals with four texts; two of them come from archaeological excavations at Tel Anafa and Tel Dor, while the other two were bought in Gaza.

1. At Tel Anafa in Upper Galilee, fragments of a jar (TA 80 P 68) were unearthed, on whose handle was an elongated seal impression (Pl. 1:C, D), measuring about 3 x 1 cm.5 and reading as follows:

Germelqart

An impression of the same seal was already known from a jar handle found in 1923/24 in Byblos.6 The name Germelqart occurs in an incised jar inscription from Sarepta7 and it is known from two Phoenician texts from Cyprus (CIS I, 47–48) and many Punic inscriptions.8

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4 J. Naveh: The Scripts of Two Ostraca from Elat, BASOR 183 (1966), pp. 27–28; Delavault and Lemaire (above, n. 2), pp. 28–29, No. 56.
5 My thanks are due to S.S. Weinberg, Gladys Weinberg and Sharon Herbert, who excavated Tel Anafa on behalf of the Universities of Missouri and Michigan, for entrusting me with the publication of this stamp.
The script of the stamp is generally formal in style, but there are two cursive traits: the headless resh and, in particular, the X-shaped mem. The results of the palaeographic analysis of this inscription agree with the archaeological dating proposed by the excavators: 'The jar was used as the lining for a stove which was built into a floor of the last phase of the late Hellenistic stuccoed building. The floor and the construction of the stove (locus 7909) should date to the first quarter of the 1st century B.C.E. — 100–80 B.C.E. The jar is of course in reuse in the stove and could originally come from any level earlier than the floor. Similar hole-mouthed jars have been found in the 3rd and early 2nd century contexts at Tel Anafa and elsewhere'.

2. Among the remains of a fourth century B.C.E. building excavated at Tel Dor was found a sherd, 85 × 55 mm., and 8 mm. thick on which letters were incised after firing (Pl. I: E). The text reads:

[... מלקן[...]]
[... נער אשור[...]]

The word נער, meaning 'youth, servant, squire', is known from Biblical Hebrew, Ugaritic and Phoenician (CIS I, 86). The construction of this inscription, PN, n't PN², occurs in some Hebrew seals, a Moabite one and an Ammonite one, as well as on a Hebrew ostracon from Arad.

This fragmentary Phoenician text from Tel Dor fits in with the historical description in the funerary inscription of Eshmunazar king of Sidon (CIS I, 3), lines 18–19:

'Furthermore, the lord of kings (i.e. the Persian emperor) gave us Dor and Yafo, the great corn-lands which are in the field of Sharon.'

3. In 1976 two inscribed jars were bought in Gaza, which were said to have been

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10 See E. Stern and I. Sharon: Tel Dor, Notes and News, IEJ 33 (1983), p. 118. I would like to thank E. Stern for allowing me to publish this sherd.
15 For another short Phoenician inscription from Tel Dor see Delavault and Lemaire (above, n. 2) No. 39.
found in or near the town.\textsuperscript{16} One (Pl. 1:F) bears an inscription in a formal handwriting:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Abd'ba'il
\end{itemize}

4. The other jar inscription (Pl. 2:A, B) is much more cursive; it reads as follows:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{wax}
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{improved wine of Gaza}
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{in (year) 4 of the king}
\end{itemize}

Before discussing this inscription, let us consider five other Phoenician jar inscriptions of a similar nature, found in Egypt, Cyprus and Palestine.

A. A fragment of a jar found at Saqqarah, Egypt. On it was inscribed in ink the following Phoenician text.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{ Milkma'bar (?)}
\item \textit{ from the 'Akkoite}
\item \textit{ A}
\end{itemize}

The reading of the first word is doubtful, but it is probably the name of a person who came from 'Akko.

B. From Idalion, Cyprus comes a jar inscribed:\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{ Kalb[... ]}
\item \textit{ A}
\end{itemize}

The text comprises an incomplete personal name and the letter \textit{alef}.

C. The following jar inscription was found in Larnaca, Cyprus:\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{ a mark}
\item \textit{ A}
\item \textit{ Shida}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{16} These jars were purchased by R. Hecht; Y. Meshorer drew my attention to them. My thanks are due to both of them for asking me to publish these inscriptions. The jar published here as Inscription No. 4 has been donated to Dr. Hecht by the Israel Museum (No. 80.3.4).

\textsuperscript{17} For an alternative rendering see below, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{18} N. Aimé-Giron: Adversaria Semitica, Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 38 (1939), pp. 18-19, Pl. 1:2.


'There is no difference in opinion: in the place where one of the differing teachers lives they line the jars with wax, which does not absorb much, whereas in the place of the other teacher they line the jars with pitch, which absorbs much.'

Line 3. The first word, 'י, is clear, but the two following words need some discussion.

The identification of the fourth letter as zayin is not entirely certain. Only two other examples of this form are known, in two Phoenician jar inscriptions from Elephantine.24 Whereas on Elephantine jar No. 5 the identification of the zayin seems to be substantiated in the name לַעֲבֵרֵה, on jar No. 45 Lidzbarski read לַעֲבֵרֵה, remarking 'Die Lesung ist sicher, aber erklären kann ich den Namen nicht'.25 Peckham copied both zayins and described them as follows: 'The left arm is drawn downward, the pen-stroke continues upward from the base and downward in a vertical right arm'.26 The letter in our jar inscription does not seem to possess a left arm at all. Nevertheless, even if this form is exceptional, any letter other than zayin is less likely.

אָי may be understood either as 'wine of Gaza', or as 'strong wine'.27 On the contemporary coins struck in Gaza the name of the city is indicated as א in formal Phoenician letters,28 or as א in the Aramaic script.29 The rendering 'strong wine' corresponds to the Aramaic ערב שין, Targum Psalms 75:9 and to Akkadian karanu mana.30 Although both translations are possible, I prefer 'wine of Gaza', not only because the jar was probably found there, but also because it was (and is) very common to name a wine by its place of origin: cf. the Shiqmona jar inscription E mentioned above, 'wine of Gat Carmel', as well as המזון שין, 'wine of Helbon' (Ezek. 27:18, also known from Mesopotamian and classical sources),31 יין יין, 'wine of Sidon' and יין יין, 'wine of Egypt',32 יין יין, 'the wine of Sharon' (Mishnah,

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25 Ibid., p. 16.
26 Peckham (above, n. 23), p. 144.
27 The rendering 'strong wine' was first suggested to me by A. Demsky.
29 Ibid., Catalogue, p. 176, Nos. 1–2; Sylloge, No. 31. My thanks are due to Y. Meshorer for these references.
30 See J.C. Greenfield (in D. Ussishkin: Excavations at Tel Lachish 1973–1977, Tel Aviv 5 [1978], pp. 83–84) who interpreted the inscription יין א found in Lachish on a decanter as 'strong wine', whereas Demsky translated the same word 'smoked wine'. See also A. Demsky: A Note on 'Smoked Wine', Tel Aviv 6 (1979), p. 163.
31 See S.M. Paul: Classifications of Wine in Mesopotamian and Rabbinic Sources, IEJ 25 (1975), p. 44, n. 15.
32 Ibid., p. 44.
Niddah 2:7, יְרוֹם (יִרְוָ), ‘wine of Carmel’ (BT Niddah 21a) and יְרֵמוּס (יְרֵסוּ), ‘wine of Cyprus’ (BT Keritut 6a).

The expression ‘wine of Gaza’ has not yet been attested before the Byzantine period. There is a fourth century C.E. mention of Gazan wine by an anonymous writer, who says that ‘Ascalon et Gaza ... mittunt omni regioni Syriae et Aegypti vinum optimum’ (Ascalon and Gaza ... send the best wine to all the regions of Syria and Egypt). During the fifth and sixth centuries C.E., the term vinum Gazetum became a topos used by poets and a symbol of quality used by writers.

The last word in this line, יָבַשׁ, probably describes the ‘wine of Gaza’ — the contents of the jar. The root יָבַשׁ was hitherto unknown from Phoenician texts, but occurs in Aramaic and in later Biblical Hebrew in the p'el form, meaning ‘to praise’. Thus יָבַשׁ may indicate ‘praiseworthy’, though here one would rather expect a passive (pual) participle, i.e. יָבָשָׁה. In Jewish Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew, however, this root, generally in the qal and hif'il forms, has another meaning: ‘to improve, rise in value’. In fact, Mishnah, Terumot 11:1 and BT Baba Batra 20b say that smoking or boiling improves wine and use the word יָבָשָׁה.

Line 4. The mention of the year, counted from the accession of a certain king, follows the formula יָבַשׁ X ב as in the jar inscriptions from Shiqmona and Alassa (Nos. D and E above). The year is also indicated on the eighth century B.C.E. Samaria ostraca and in the first century B.C.E. ostraca from Nisa, the Parthian capital, which also dealt with wine. Although these two groups of inscribed sherds were unearthed in two excavations which were a long way apart in distance, time and culture, they had the same function. In the wine cellars of Nisa over two thousand ostraca were found, written in Aramaic (or in Parthian, in Aramaic ideographic writing). The Nisa texts generally begin with יָבַשׁ אֱלֹהִים ‘in this jar (there is) ...’, followed by the quantity of wine, its quality and origin, and the year (of the Arsacid era, reckoned from 247 B.C.E.). The ostraca from Nisa and from Samaria were labels placed near the wine jars in the royal store-rooms, where the wine was brought as a tax. On these ostraca the mention of the fiscal year seems to be plausible.

It is not likely that the short Phoenician texts written in ink on jars had a similar function to that of the ostraca discussed above. The jar inscriptions were rather commercial notes describing the contents of the jar. The information brought to the attention of the consumer was generally the name of the wine (i.e. its origin), and/or the name of the vinegrower, the quality (alef) and the year of the vintage.

36 See Densky (above, n. 30); Paul (above, n. 31), p. 44.
38 J. Naveh: The Aramaic Ostraca, in Y. Aharoni (ed.): Beer Sheba I, Tel Aviv, 1973, p. 82, where this subject was discussed.