

חיים ליונה

Solving Riddles and Untying Knots

Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies
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Phoenician Ostraca from Tel Dor

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The paper deals with four Phoenician ostraca from Tel Dor. Because they are in a very poor state of preservation, the readings are suggested with a great amount of reservation.

Four ink-written Phoenician ostraca were found At Tel Dor in 1985 (A and B), 1987 (C), and 1992 (D).¹ Although the script is in a very poor state, what has been preserved indicates that they were written in the cursive style in the fifth or fourth century B.C.E. The decipherment of any Phoenician text is hindered by the Phoenician scribal practice of *scriptio continua* and defective spelling. The reading of Phoenician cursive, in which different letters tend to assimilate to each other, is even more difficult. If, in addition, parts of the script have been effaced, as in our case, then the reading is problematic indeed. Therefore, although the excavators provided me with excellent photographs, the following tentative readings are suggested here with considerable reservation.

Ostrakon A 33608/1

The fragment measures approximately 11.5 × 9 cm. Six lines of writing, of which only the end of the text can be transliterated (figs. 1–2):

4. . . כנאמרעב.כ
5. האיעצכמאשטבח
6. כמי.ח

These characters can perhaps be divided and the text reconstructed and translated as follows:

1. My thanks are due to Ephraim Stern for entrusting me with the publication of these sherds.

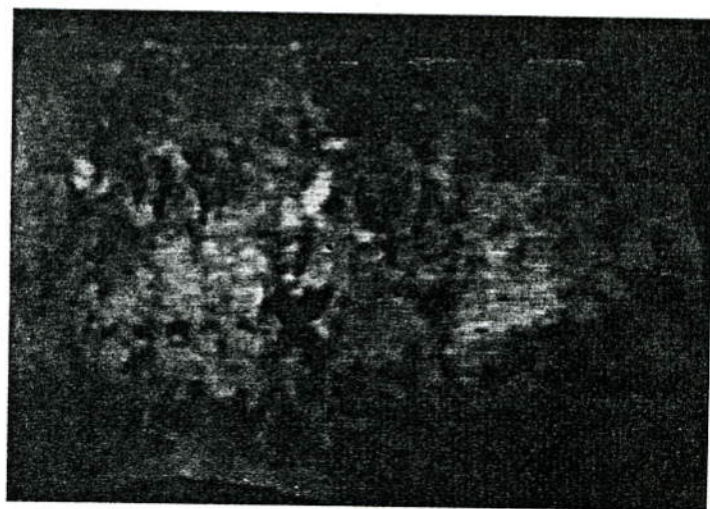
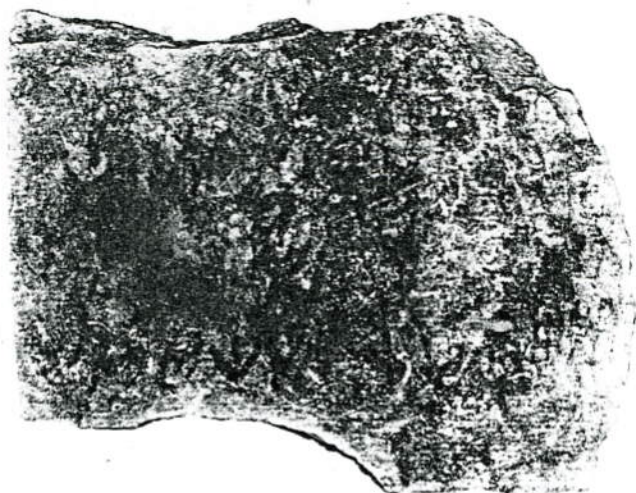


Figure 1 (above). Ostracon A.

Figure 2 (below). Ostracon A (Photo by the Israel Police Laboratory).



Figure 3. Ostrakon B.

4. ... כן אמר עב[ד]ך
 5. הא יעצך מאש טבח-
 6. ך מי[] ת

4. [. . .] so said your ser[vant]:
 5. he advised you what your bene-
 6. fit de[serve]s (?)

Should this reading be correct, at least in part, the text seems to have been part of a letter.

Ostrakon B 33646

This ostrakon measures approximately 8 × 7 cm. It is a badly preserved list in four lines, which may be read as follows (fig. 3):

1. לאהל...
 2. בד צ...ם
 3. בד צ...ם
 4. צ...ם

Line 1. אהל, meaning 'tent' or 'family', seems to be a personal name, as in 1 Chr 3:20 and on a bulla from the City of David that reads: לאליקם בן אהל.² אהל may also be part of a name; see the Phoenician proper name אהלבעל³ and biblical אהליבמה, אהליאב, as well as fem. אהליבה, אהלה. A seal found in a burial cave on the slopes of Mount Zion in Jerusalem is inscribed: לחמיאהל בת מנחם.⁴

Line 2. The reading בד is not certain, but any other possibility that comes to mind is less probable. בד, meaning 'in the hand of', may be part of a personal name; thus one may read ברצ[ד].⁵ However, since at the end of the line there are a *mem* and numerals, it seems likely that the word ending with *mem* (the sign of plural) begins with a *šadê*, and the letters preceding it form the word בד. Tentatively one may read here: [+]₂ בד צרפם 'in the hand of (the) goldsmiths 2[+]'.⁶

Line 3. The text in this line seems similar, if not identical, to that of line 2.

Line 4. The fact that lines 2–4 all contain words (or the same word repeated) beginning with *šadê* is intriguing. Unfortunately, I do not know how to read it/them.

Ostrakon C 64963

The sherd measures approximately 8 × 6 cm. Writing is visible in three lines, which may perhaps be read (fig. 4):

[]	כדס 3	1	42[+]] jars
[]	כדס 3	2	33[+]] jars
[]	כד	3	[]	jars[s]

This text, listing numbers of jars, seems to be an account. In line 3 there are faint traces that may perhaps be reconstructed [] || כדס '22[+] jars'.

Ostrakon D 108150

This piece is approximately 10 × 8.5 cm. There are traces of five lines of writing. In the first two lines one may perhaps read (fig. 5):

2. Y. Shiloh, "A Group of Hebrew Bullae from the City of David," *IEJ* 36 (1986) 29, no. 29. The spelling אהל is one of the very rare preexilic examples of medial *o* marked by *waw*.
3. F. L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions* (Rome, 1972) 60, 262.
4. D. Davies and A. Kloner, "A Burial Cave of the Late Israelite Period on the Slopes of Mt. Zion," *Qadmoniot* 41 (1978) 18–19 [Hebrew].
5. Benz, *Personal Names*, 88, 283–86, 398.



Figure 4. Ostrakon C.

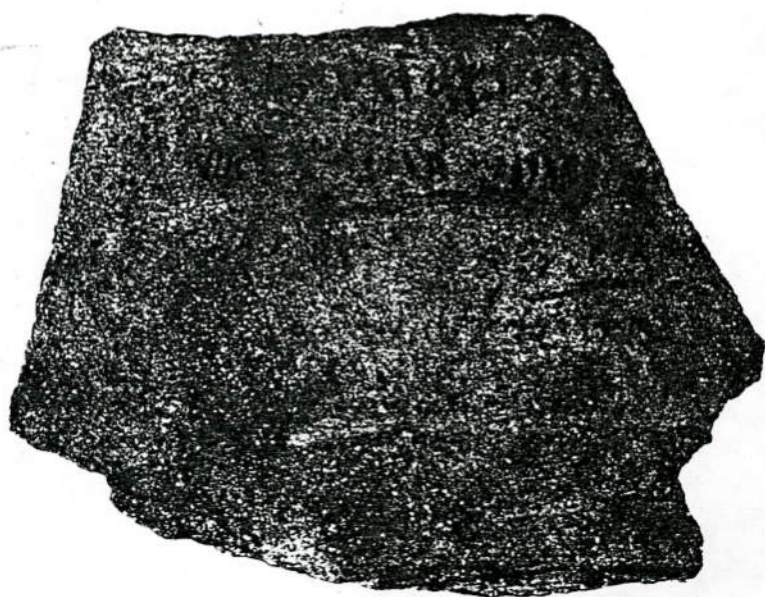


Figure 5. Ostrakon D.

[]1. כד עבדאט וא... לקרת
 ||| → ס[]2. ע כד עבדב[על]

This fragmentary text may belong to a list of amounts of certain goods, given by various individuals in jars. The only clear name is עבדאט, meaning 'the servant of Isis'.⁶

6. See *ibid.*, 149, 271–72.