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An Aramaic Ostrakon (HB 135) from Khirbet el-Kom

Issam K. H. HALAYQA

Until the present day, over two thousand Aramaic ostraca from Idumea have appeared regularly at different sites¹, either during controlled excavations or illegal digging. In 1971, eight Aramaic ostraca were discovered (6 in a room and 2 in the foundations of the city gate) from the Hellenistic Period during the excavations directed by J. Holladay of the University of Toronto at Khirbet el-Kôm (sea level 425m, E-146590 N-104440), thirteen kilometers southwest of Hebron (Holladay 1971). They were described, deciphered and interpreted in a detailed study in L. Geraty's dissertation in 1972, and were republished by Yardeni 2000a, A. 358–359; B. 119. Based on ostrakon No. 3, which bears bilingual writing (Edomite and Greek), the ostraca in Geraty's study were dated to 277 BC². They belong to the records of an Idumean moneylender called *qwsyd*^c son of *hn*ⁿ. One hundred Aramaic ostraca from Arad, dated to the early 4th century BC, are about deliveries of barley and wheat, horses and donkeys (Naveh 1981).

Another sixty-seven Aramaic ostraca come from Bir Es-saba^c (Naveh 1973; 1979); four from Tel Jemmeh, dated to the 7th century BC (Naveh 1992); and one from Marisa.³ Around 201 legible Aramaic ostraca bought from the antiquity dealers appear in Eph'al and Naveh's monograph in 1996, the archeological contexts and provenances of which are not defined by the authors but are randomly attributed to different sites in Idumea and dated to the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. The largest collection of Aramaic ostraca found in the area (621 ostraca) was published by Lemaire in two volumes in 1996 and 2002. Some of these may have originated from Khirbet el-Kôm. A further 17 Aramaic ostraca from Idumea were published in

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¹Porten–Yardeni 2017, 61; Yardeni 2000, 158.

²Geraty 1975, 55–61.

³Yardeni 2000, A-342; B. 117.

an article by Aḥituv–Yardeni 2004. Presumably further ostraca are still being found during illegal digging in the area.

Ostracon HB 135

This ostracon was found by a team from the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage of the Palestinian Authority during a field visit to Khirbet el-Kôm on 22 December 1999. It was made of light red clay and is irregular in shape. Four lines cursive script were written on the sherd in ink. In part of the first line, the writing is poorly preserved and hard to read due to the fading of the ink. This would indicate that it had lain in humid soil. The script of the ostracon shows close similarities with the script of the Aramaic ostraca from Idumea previously published by Eph'al and Naveh in 1996. It is therefore possible to date this ostracon to the fourth century BC. Due to the poor state of preservation of the sherd, the reading given below is tentative.



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) <i>b</i> 14 <i>ltmwz šn[t]</i> | on the 14 th of Tammuz (=July), yea[r] |
| 2) 1 <i>ḥ</i> 6 <i>zyd'l br</i> | one, wheat 6 (to) <i>zyd'l</i> (PN) son of |
| 3) <i>'bydw q</i> 3, <i>kr</i> [1] <i>ṭḥ</i> | 'bydw (PN), flour 3, [one] kor |
| 4) [<i>w</i>] ⁿ <i>phlšn</i> 2 | (from) the grind, 2 sacks/bales ⁴ (of straw). |

This ostracon is about grain delivery. Delivering grain in July is attested elsewhere in Idumean ostraca (see Eph'al–Naveh 1996, 99:1; 100:1; Porten–Yardeni 2014, A1.42). The one who received the delivery is a certain *zyd'l* son

⁴Porten–Yardeni 2014, A6.26.

of *'bydw*⁵. The sender is not mentioned. Similar texts are also known from the area (Eph'al-Naveh 1996).

This short text includes numbers indicating the date and the amounts of some agricultural products. The information about the year appears in a more complete form in some other ostraca from Idumea as year three (Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 1:1, 2:1, 3:1, 4:1ff.; Porten-Yardeni 2014, A1.22, A1.42). Based on this information the ostrakon can be most probably dated to the 3rd year of the reign of King Artaxerxes III (358–338 BC), i.e., 355 BC.

Some agricultural products typical to that semi-arid area are mentioned in abbreviations: *h* (line 3) for *hntn* “wheat” (cf. Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 96; Lemaire 1996, 160; 2002, 248), *q* (line 2) for *qmḥ* “flour” (cf. Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 97 and 3:3, 53:3, 93:3; Lemaire 1996, 161; 2002, 259 and 76, 78).

There are familiar measures for dry or liquid products that were regularly used in other documents from different periods: *kr*⁶ line 3 (cf. Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 13:3, 62:3, 99:2, 190:6) as well as an irregular load called *phlš* line 4 “sack (of straw)”⁷ (cf. Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 18:2, 23:2, 77:2).

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⁵For parallels of the personal name *zyd'l* from Idumea, see Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 146:1, 182:7; Porten-Yardeni 2014, A7.9. For *'bydw*, see Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 62:2, 64:1, 178:1, 182; Porten-Yardeni 2014, A2.25, A2.30.

⁶For parallels from Idumea, see Lewy 1944, 56–73; cf. Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 9:3, 13:4, 61:3, 92:2, 100:4, 108:3ff.; for the full forms and the abbreviated ones, see Lemaire 1996, 250; Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 96; Porten-Yardeni 2014, A1.40, A2.42, A2.2.6, A10.33. Compare the word in the cognate languages: Akkadian *kurru* A “measure of capacity” (CAD K, 564; AHw 511); Epigraphic Hebrew *kr*₁ and Official Aramaic *kr* (Hoftijzer-Jongeling 1995, 533–34); Biblical Hebrew *kôr* I (Koehler-Baumgartner 2001, 496); Jewish Babylonian Aramaic *kôrā*₁ (Sokoloff 2003:565); Jewish Palestinian Aramaic *kwr*₂ (Sokoloff 1990, 254); Samaritan Aramaic *kwr*₂ (Tal 2000, 383); Arabic *kurr* (Lane 1863, 2601f.).

⁷*phlš* “sack/bales (of straw)” is attested in Eph'al-Naveh 1996, 18:2, 19:2, 23:2, 77:2; Porten-Yardeni 2014, A1.12, A6.2, A6.10.

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