

Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel

SBL

Society of Biblical Literature



Archaeology and Biblical Studies

Tammi Schneider, Editor

Number 11

Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel

Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age

Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel
Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age

by

Christopher A. Rollston

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel

Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age

Copyright © 2010 by the Society of Biblical Literature

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by means of any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to the Rights and Permissions Office, Society of Biblical Literature, 825 Houston Mill Road, Atlanta, GA 30329 USA.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rollston, Chris A.

Writing and literacy in the world of ancient Israel : epigraphic evidence from the Iron Age / by Christopher A. Rollston.

p. cm. — (Archaeology and biblical studies ; no. 11)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-58983-107-0 (paper binding : alk. paper)

1. Inscriptions, Semitic. 2. Semitic languages, Northwest. 3. Bible. O.T.—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 4. Middle Eastern literature—Relation to the Old Testament. 5. Palestine—Languages. I. Title.

PJ3085.R65 2010

492—dc22

2010033450

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free, recycled paper conforming to ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R1997) and ISO 9706:1994 standards for paper permanence.



Das Mittelmeer

*Logia about scripts from days of yore
arcana mundi vom distant shore
the meer, the yam, the middle sea
beloved gift of humanity*

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
Preface	xv
Abbreviations	xvii
Introduction: The Importance of Archaeological Context for Analyses of Inscriptions	1
PART 1: THE EPIGRAPHIC RECORD: THE BROAD TABLEAU	
1: The Origins of Alphabetic Writing: A Summary of the Salient Features	11
2: The Use of the Phoenician Script during the Iron Age and the Rise of the Levantine National Scripts	19
3: The Nature of the Northwest Semitic Epigraphic Record: Form and Function	47
PART 2: THE SCRIBE AND LITERACY	
4: The Status of the Scribe and the Tools of the Trade	85
5: Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: The Old Hebrew Epigraphic Evidence	91
6: Monumental Buildings for Education, Scribal Practice Texts, and Print Exposure in the Scribal Home	115
7: The Extent of Literacy in Ancient Israel	127

8: Inscriptions from the Market: A Precarious Basis for Statements about the Nature of the Epigraphic Record, Scribal Practices, and Literacy	137
Glossary	145
Bibliography	149
Subject Index	161
Scripture Index	165
Author Index	169

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1.1	Serabit 346T. Drawing by the author.	12
Fig. 1.2	Albright's chart of the proto-Sinaitic letters.	13
Fig. 1.3	The Wadi el-Hol inscription. Drawing by the author.	14
Fig. 1.4	Gezer sherd. Drawing by the author.	15
Fig. 1.5	Bronze dagger from Lachish. Drawing by the author.	15
Fig. 1.6	QuburWalaydah bowl. Drawing by the author.	16
Fig. 1.7	Chart with Ugaritic alphabet.	17
Fig. 2.1	The bronze Azarba'al inscription. Drawing by the author.	20
Fig. 2.2	The Ahiram sarcophagus inscription. Drawing by M. Lundberg.	21
Fig. 2.3	Yehimilk inscription. Drawing by the author.	22
Fig. 2.4	Shipitba'al inscription. Drawing by the author.	23
Fig. 2.5	'Abda sherd. Drawing by the author.	23
Fig. 2.6	Kefar Veradim bowl. Drawing by the author.	28
Fig. 2.7	The Gezer Calendar. From Naveh 1987a, fig. 54.	29
Fig. 2.8	Tel Zayit abcedery. Drawing of the two-line inscription by P. K. McCarter in Tappy and McCarter 2008, fig. 3.8.	31
Fig. 2.9	Tell Fakhariyeh inscription. Drawing by P. Bordreuil in Abou-Assaf, Bordreuil, and Millard 1982, fig. 3.	34
Fig. 2.10	Kititon Bowl with Phoenician inscription. Drawing by the author.	35
Fig. 2.11	A section of the Karatepe inscription (Phoenician). From Naveh 1987a, fig. 46.	38
Fig. 2.12	Stele of Kilamuwa, king of Yaudi. From Naveh 1987a, fig. 45.	40
Fig. 2.13	Son of Shipitba'al. Fragment B. Drawing by the author.	41
Fig. 2.14	Nora Stone. Drawing by the author.	43
Fig. 2.15	El-Kerak Inscription. Drawing by the author.	44
Fig. 2.16	Aramaic script. From Naveh 1970, fig. 2.	45
Fig. 3.1	Amman Citadel Inscription. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	48
Fig. 3.2	Miqne-Ekron stele inscription. Drawing by the author.	49

Fig. 3.3	Tel Dan stele. Drawing by the author.	50
Fig. 3.4	Mesha stele. From Dearman 1989, fig. 1.	52
Fig. 3.5	Samaria stele. Drawing by the author.	55
Fig. 3.6	Ophel stele. Drawing by the author.	55
Fig. 3.7	Sefire treaty tablet. From Fitzmyer 1995, pl. 3.	57
Fig. 3.8	Tell Fakhariyeh statue. Photo courtesy of Adam Bean.	58
Fig. 3.9	Amman statue inscription. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	60
Fig. 3.10	Deir 'Alla plaster text. Combination 1. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	61
Fig. 3.11	Mudeyineh incense altar inscription. Drawing by the author.	63
Fig. 3.12	Inscribed peg from Byblos. Drawing by the author.	64
Fig. 3.13	Tell Siran bronze bottle inscription. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	64
Fig. 3.14	Umm Udeinah inscribed bowl. Photo of author courtesy of M. Lundberg.	65
Fig. 3.15	Adze head from Ugarit. Drawing by the author.	66
Fig. 3.16	Ø Inscribed arrowhead from el-Khadr. Drawing by Nathaniel E. Greene.	66
Fig. 3.17	Samaria ostracon 17A. Drawing by the author.	67
Fig. 3.18	Arad ostracon 1. Drawing by the author.	68
Fig. 3.19	Yavneh Yam letter. From Naveh 1987a, 67.	69
Fig. 3.20	Lachish ostracon 1. Drawing by the author.	70
Fig. 3.21	Arad 88. Drawing by the author.	71
Fig. 3.22	Kuntillet 'Ajrud pithos inscription. From Meshel 1978, pl. 12.	71
Fig. 3.23	Samaria barley letter. Incised after firing. Drawing by the author.	73
Fig. 3.24	Tel Ira inscription. Drawing by the author.	74
Fig. 3.25	Tel Ira inscription. Chiseled after firing. Drawing by the author.	74
Fig. 3.26	Gibeon inscribed jar handle. Drawing by the author.	75
Fig. 3.27	Umm Udeinah seal J14653. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	76
Fig. 3.28	Umayri seal J16685. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	76
Fig. 3.29	Umayri seal J19332. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	76
Fig. 3.30	La-melek jar handle. Photo courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. Lundberg, West Semitic Research.	76

Fig. 3.31	Royal Steward inscription. From Avigad 1953, fig. 4.	79
Fig. 3.32	Stele 1 from Narab. From Naveh 1987a, fig. 76.	80
Fig. 3.33	Deir 'Alla weight. Drawing by the author.	81
Fig. 5.1	'Alep. Drawing by the author.	98
Fig. 5.2	Dalet. Drawing by the author.	98
Fig. 5.3	He. Drawing by the author.	99
Fig. 5.4	Kap. Drawing by the author.	99
Fig. 5.5	Mem. Drawing by the author.	101
Fig. 5.6	Samek. Drawing by the author.	101
Fig. 5.7	Qop. Drawing by the author.	101
Fig. 5.8	Šin. Drawing by the author.	102
Fig. 5.9	Lachish 3 (reverse). Drawing by the author.	104
Fig. 5.10	Selections from National Scripts. Drawing by the author.	106
Fig. 5.11	Arad 34. Drawing by the author.	110
Fig. 6.1	City of David inscription. Drawing by the author.	120
Fig. 6.2	Trained hand and remedial hand. Drawing by the author.	121
Fig. 8.1	Ø Moussaieff ostracon 1. Drawing by the author.	138
Fig. 8.2	Ø Jehoash inscription. Drawing by the author.	140

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Department of Near Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University provided research and travel funding for me on numerous occasions. The Society of Biblical Literature also awarded me a generous grant. With these sources of funding, I was able to collate a large number of epigraphs in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Damascus, Aleppo, London, Boston, and Philadelphia. The National Endowment for the Humanities gave me a substantial fellowship and this funded much of my research in Amman, Salt, Madaba, Beirut, and Byblos. During my time in the Middle East, I have benefited from the libraries and accommodations at the American Center of Oriental Research (Amman) and the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (Jerusalem).

I am especially indebted to Hava Katz of the Israel Antiquities Authority, Michal Dayagi-Mendels of the Israel Museum, Fawwaz al-Khraysheh of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Frederic Husseini of the Department of Antiquities of Lebanon for their support of my research. In addition, I am grateful to the Rockefeller Museum (Jerusalem), the British Museum, the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Harvard Semitic Museum, and Tel Aviv University for permission to collate inscriptions within their collections. The library staff of Emmanuel School of Religion has assisted my research in various ways, Chris Quillen has my special gratitude for her constant alacrity. In addition, Emmanuel has provided me with some superb research assistants through the years, especially Heather Dana Davis Parker, Alan Dyson, Katya Ivanova, W. G. Hulbert, Stephen Paul, Liesl Huhn, Nathaniel Greene, Adam Bean, C. J. Frisina, and Ra Lovingsworth.

During the course of time, Jo Ann Hackett, Ivan Kaufman, Lawrence Stager, Helene Sader, Benjamin Sass, Yitzhaq Beit-Arieh, Anson Rainey, Zeev Herzog, David Ussishkin, Israel Finekstein, Amihai Mazar, William Dever, and Avraham Biran have been gracious in working to ensure the fact that I was granted access to various epigraphic texts and corpora, or photographic images thereof. Moreover, I have often worked closely on symbiotic photographic and digital projects with Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg of West Semitic Research, and this work has always been enjoyable and pro-

ductive. Annalisa Azzoni, Joel Burnett, and Doug Emery have been frequent sources of fertile discussion. Frank Moore Cross and Joseph Naveh have been mentors and dialogue partners through the years and I have benefited much from their writings and from their personal support. My Doktorvater, P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., has been a paradigmatic teacher, sage, conversation partner, and cherished friend. From him I have learned most and best.

PREFACE

This book is designed to be a non-technical volume focusing on the Iron Age Northwest Semitic epigraphic (written) record. Yet, the purpose of this volume is not simply to analyze or summarize this epigraphic evidence; rather the work intends to discuss the epigraphic evidence so as to provide a window into the world of ancient Israelite scribalism, writing, and literacy. For a number of the subjects treated in this volume, I have authored technical articles; therefore, specialists are encouraged to consult the nuanced data in these articles, as well as the bibliography cited therein.

The ordering of the chapters in this volume conveys, in a sequential manner, certain critical aspects of the depth, diversity, and development of writing practices and literacy in the broader Levantine world (i.e., Syria-Palestine). That is, because ancient Israel did not exist in a cultural vacuum, one must analyze writing and literacy in ancient Israel within the broader cultural milieu. The volume thus begins with a brief discussion of Early Alphabetic writing during the early 2nd millennium BCE and then turns to a discussion of the rise of the Phoenician script during the late 2nd millennium, as well as its usage during the early 1st millennium.

After discussing the invention of the alphabet, the use of the early Phoenician script, and the rise of the national scripts, I provide a synopsis of some of the major and minor Northwest Semitic inscriptions from the Iron Age. This section of the volume reveals some of the depth and diversity of the corpus. At times I have also included in this section some reference to linguistic isoglosses, that is, features that distinguish an Aramaic text from a Phoenician or Hebrew text. At this point, the reader should have a strong sense for the form and function of the epigraphic record, as well as some of the features that distinguish the Iron Age dialects of Syria-Palestine. The discussion is not exhaustive, but is representative.

The volume then focuses on the writers responsible for the production of the lion's share of the Old Hebrew epigraphic corpus: the Israelite scribe. Rejecting the view that the Old Hebrew writing system was so facile that it required minimal training, I conclude that the Old Hebrew epigraphic evi-

dence reflects the type of sophistication that requires the positing of some sort of formal, standardized education. Along these lines, I find that it is naïve to assume that a child learning her or his first alphabetic system could have done so in a matter of days or weeks. Indeed, I use modern analyses from the field(s) of educational psychology to demonstrate the difficulties inherent in assumptions about the pace at which a first writing system can be learned. The Israelite scribe, I contend, was a thoroughly educated member of the elite classes.

At this point in the book I present a discussion of the extent of literacy in ancient Israel. Some scholars have previously concluded that because ancient Israel used a “facile” alphabetic system that literacy rates of the populace were necessarily high. Such experts have thus assumed that people from various strata of society could read and write. Obviously, I do not agree. I contend that literacy rates in Israel were not high. To be sure, I do not believe that the evidence suggests that just the scribes were literate. Rather, I believe that the Old Hebrew epigraphic evidence (and the evidence from the Hebrew Bible) demonstrates that various elite officials (including military officers) were often capable of reading and writing as well. Nevertheless, the epigraphic evidence simply does not support the contention that the average pastoralist or agriculturalist in Israelite society was literate. This is a marvelous romantic notion, but I simply do not find credible evidence for widespread literacy of the non-elite masses.

Finally, I conclude the volume with some reference to the fact that the Northwest Semitic epigraphic corpus has been flooded with inscriptions from the market. I urge caution with regard to the use of inscriptions from the market. After all, some of these inscriptions are modern forgeries. Sometimes forgeries are readily detectable (e.g., when the forger makes significant mistakes with the script, orthography, etc.), but I have seen some that are virtually perfect. Therefore, I caution against using data from the market as the basis for constructs about the past, including assumptions about writing and literacy.

ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL

Ø	signifies an inscription that comes from the antiquities market, not an excavation
Ad	Arad
ca.	circa
C ¹⁴	carbon-14
Gn	Gibeon
GSI	Geological Survey of Israel
Lh	Lachish
Mh	Mesad Hashavyahu (= Yavneh Yam)
obv	obverse (front side of an inscription)
r.	ruled
rev	reverse (back side of an inscription)
SA	Samaria
SA.JE.BL	the Barley Letter from the Joint Expedition to Samaria
SEM-EDS	Scanning Electron Microscope with Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy
TL	thermoluminescence dating

BIBLIOGRAPHIC

AASOR	The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>

BES	Brown Egyptological Studies
<i>BibOr</i>	<i>Biblica et orientalia</i>
BZAW	<i>Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Series
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KAI	Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
PEFQS	<i>Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement</i>
PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBLABS	Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study Series
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
UISK	Untersuchungen zur indogermanischen Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament

ABBREVIATIONS

xix

ZA
ZDPV

Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins

INTRODUCTION:
THE IMPORTANCE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT
FOR ANALYSES OF INSCRIPTIONS

The focus of this volume is the Northwest Semitic epigraphic corpus of the Iron Age. The Iron Age inscriptions discussed herein do not hail from a contextual vacuum. Rather, they were written in a particular place and time, for a particular purpose, in a particular language. Furthermore, the inscriptions discussed in this volume were, for the most part, excavated, and so there is an archaeological context for them as well. Often the archaeological context will provide data that can assist the modern interpreter (archaeologist, epigrapher, or historian). To be sure, the importance of an archaeological context for epigraphic materials has sometimes been marginalized in various, sometimes radical, ways. For example, Deutsch and Heltzer have stated that “in the case of epigraphical material, the provenance and the exact context and locus are of significantly minor importance, as the items are ‘loaded’ with information” (1994, 7). Nevertheless, most specialists within the fields of archaeology and epigraphy would strongly affirm the value of understanding the archaeological context of an inscription. Therefore, as a point of departure, I will summarize some of the ways that knowledge of the archaeological context can assist the modern interpreter of the epigraphic data (see also Rollston 2004).

First, excavated Northwest Semitic epigraphic materials are of enormous importance for the reconstruction of various aspects of ancient Levantine society and history. Note, for example, that the Reisner Samaria Ostraca reveal some information about state administration in the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the early-eighth century (Reisner, Fisher, and Lyon 1924). The Lachish II ostraca contain information about the troop movements (e.g., of the Judean army commander Conyahu to Egypt), rations, and prophetic warnings that were reported to officials (e.g., Ya’ush) at the fortified royal bastion of Lachish during the period immediately preceding this strategic Judean city’s destruction in the early-sixth century B.C.E. (Tur-Sinai, Harding, Lewis, and Starkey 1938). The Old Hebrew epigraphs from Arad (Aharoni 1981) provide the name of the Judean

military leader (Malkiyahu) of the Arad stratum VIII fortress and those of two of his subordinates (Gemaryahu and Nehemyahu). In addition, these epigraphs state the name of the military leader of the stratum VII–VI fortress as well (‘Eliashib ben ’Ishyahu). The Aramaic ostraca from Tel Arad (Aharoni 1981) contain critical information about Arad, including its function as a “way station” supplying barley to horsemen during the Persian period, and suggest ethnic diversity at the site as well.

Epigraphs from scores of additional sites could be mentioned, but the point is that the knowledge of the provenance and archaeological context of inscriptions enables and facilitates various types of site-specific historical analyses, including ancient bureaucracy, the presence of literacy, some of the nature of scribal activities, and the names of military leaders at specific sites in certain periods, as well as military movements in precise regions, ethnic diversity within specific populations or regions, and regional interactions of various sorts. These sorts of foundational data are of peerless importance for detailed historical reconstruction and analysis of the epigraphic data. Without provenance and archaeological context, however, the information derived from these corpora would be diminished significantly, and those attempting to interpret the significance of these corpora would often be forced to resort to generalities and tenuous speculations because the essential *Sitz im Leben* would not be known.

Second, the archaeological context is also of fundamental importance for the reconstruction of regional differences within “dialects” or “languages.” For example, we can state with some confidence that the word for “year” was *št* in northern Israelite, but *šnh* in Judahite. Similarly, in northern Israelite the diphthong *ay* contracted to *ê* and the diphthong *aw* contracted to *ô*; however, in the Judahite dialect these diphthongs remained uncontracted in all positions (Cross and Freedman 1952; Garr 1985; Rollston 2006). Knowledge of provenance facilitates these sorts of analyses of “dialects” and “languages.” That is, the field of Northwest Semitic dialect geography is heavily dependent on provenanced epigraphic data.

Third, the science of palaeography should be based on the best data, and it is readily apparent that provenance and archaeological context is often of fundamental importance for this (Cross 2003; Peckham 1968; Naveh 1987a; Rollston 1999; 2003a; 2006). For example, it is a fact that there are differences between the seventh-century script employed in Ammon and the seventh-century script employed in Judah. Moreover, there are distinct differences between the Aramaic script of the seventh century and the Phoenician script of the seventh century. The reason these sorts of things can be affirmed with certitude is because of the provenanced exemplars from Syria-Palestine during the Iron Age. For the purposes of this volume, therefore, I affirm as an *Ausgangspunkt* that the archaeological context is of fundamental importance for someone attempting to distill data about ancient scribal education, writing, and literacy.

SCRIPTS AND LANGUAGES: TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS

Within this volume, there will be references to various languages and various scripts. Non-specialists sometimes assume that “script” and “language” are the same thing. This is, however, not the case at all. Thus, the alphabet used to write most European languages is the Latin alphabet. For example, the sentence “*Rien ne l’intéresse*” (“Nothing interests him”) is written in the French language, but the script is Latin. Similarly, the sentence “*Daar wil ik niets mee te doen hebben*” (“I will have nothing to do with that”) is written in the Dutch language, but the script is Latin. That is, the script used to write these languages is the same script used to write the Latin sentence “*Bis das si cito das*” (“You give twice if you give quickly”). Similarly, this sentence from Philo “Ἡ μὲν προτέρα σύνταξις ἐστὶ περὶ γενέσεως τῆς Μωυσεώς” (“But the former treatise is about the generation of Moses”) is written in the Greek language and the Greek script, but “*Νετ-μοουρ*” (“those who are dead”) is written in the Greek script, but the Coptic language. The same phenomenon is attested in Northwest Semitic. For example, there are texts written in the Aramaic language but the Phoenician script. Throughout these pages, therefore, readers must be very attentive to the terms “script” and “language.” They are, after all, not synonymous.

SCRIPT TYPES

Various linear alphabetic inscriptions from the Iron Age will be considered in this volume. For these inscriptions, two broad primary categories of scripts are evidenced, namely, lapidary and cursive. The dominant features of a lapidary script are its graphic arrangement, letter clarity, uniformity of letter form and size, and general conservativeness (i.e., retarded development). Lapidary inscriptions are normally found on surfaces that were carefully prepared (e.g., stone) and, in general, they were intended to be permanent. The primary features of a cursive script (often written on surfaces such as papyrus and pottery) are the rapidity with which it can be written and its adaptability. For a cursive script, variations in letter form and size are common, stroke curvature tends to be more prominent, letter spacing is more compact, semi-ligatures are more common, and development occurs more rapidly. Writing instruments and media are of fundamental importance in this regard, but not always determinative (e.g., because cursive scripts can be employed on stone). For the scripts that constitute the focus of this volume, both lapidary and cursive traditions are attested.

Drawings of various inscriptions, on various media (metal, pottery, stone), with various writing instruments (chisel, incising tool, brush and ink) are

included to demonstrate some of the diversity of the epigraphic material in Iron Age Northwest Semitic scripts. Some photographs are also provided to augment the reader's understanding of the media and script.

EPIGRAPHIC METHOD: SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

Northwest Semitic epigraphy is a data-driven field and trained epigraphers should operate on the basis of certain basic epigraphic methodological principles, as follows:

1) First and foremost, modern translations of an ancient Northwest Semitic language are subject to the same caveats and provisos of any translated text. That is, *translations are approximations*. I definitely do not believe that any translation can capture all of the nuances of meaning that are present in the original text (ancient or modern). There are often multiple defensible ways of understanding and rendering words. Obviously, part of this results from the fact that the same word in different contexts will have different semantic ranges and the modern epigrapher must attempt to determine, so much as is possible, the precise nuance of a root in a particular context. That is, I find myself in substantial agreement with the ancient sentiments penned in the prologue to Ben Sira: translations are interpretive approximations.

2) *Determining the operative lexeme is not always a simple task*. That is, a ponderous aspect of language interpretation for various languages (including Northwest Semitic languages) is making determinations regarding the intended lexeme. For example, there are different lexemes consisting of the same two letters: *qš*. Thus, the letters *qš* could signify a nominal lexeme meaning "summer fruit," but the letters *qš* could also signify a nominal lexeme meaning "end" (arguably there is a word play on these words in Amos 8:1–2). Similarly, the letters *ʿlp* could plausibly be understood in multiple different ways, including *ʿlp* "to write," "to be instructed"; *ʿlp* "ox"; *ʿlp* "thousand," "to produce by the thousand." Determination of the actual lexeme is, therefore, a critical component of the epigrapher's responsibility, since there are scores of times when this can be an issue in an epigraphic (or non-epigraphic) text. Epigraphers, therefore, must consider the linguistic context and make a reasonable decision about the lexeme that the scribe intended.

3) Sometimes there will be no real debate about the root, but there will be debate about the way to understand the root (e.g., as a verb, as this noun or that noun, or as an adjective). For example, Lachish 3 (Tur-Sinai, Harding, Lewis, and Starkey 1938) contains multiple occurrences of the root *spr*. At times, there has been some debate about whether this or that occurrence should be understood

as the noun “scribe,” the noun “book,” or the verb “write.” *Often context will be useful in assisting the modern translator, but the context is not always decisive.*

4) *Faded and abraded letters are common, but restoring such letters often cannot be done with absolute certainty.* Sometimes a single letter will be faded or abraded and a plausible reading can be posited on the basis of the traces (of the faded or abraded letter) and the surrounding letters. That is, the lexicon (or one’s lexical knowledge) can be used to assist in determining the probable reading for the faded or abraded letter. Nevertheless, even in such cases, certitude is often elusive, as there are frequently multiple viable lexical options.

5) *Restorations of multiple letters, entire words, or even phrases are normally precarious ventures.* To be sure, there are a number of tools in the epigrapher’s “toolbox” that can be of some use in this situation. For example, a line of a text that contains repetitious language can sometimes be restored with some certitude. Moreover, a formulaic text (e.g., a legal text, such as a contract) can sometimes be restored based on its use of traditional formulaic words and phrases. A critical component of this sort of venture is attempting to measure the lacuna(e) and determine the number of missing letters. Nevertheless, restorations are often speculative and I am normally disinclined to restore much more than a letter or two.

6) Scholars who wish to argue that a person known from the biblical text is also known in an epigraphic text should be very careful. Prosopography is a very scientific venture, but there is a history of people arguing for positive identifications on the basis of tenuous of evidence (see Rollston 2009).

PALAEOGRAPHIC METHOD: SOME ESSENTIAL FEATURES

The premise of the field of palaeography (and all the typological sciences) is that artifacts develop through time and that this development can be discerned in an empirical fashion, described, and used as the basis for typologies (Cross 1982; Rollston 2003a, 150–57; cf. Kaufman 1986; Zuckerman 2003). New finds serve to augment, refine, and revise typologies (e.g., for a script series or pottery sequence). Using the most pristine extant ancient evidence, palaeography focuses on the establishment of: (1) the morphology of the letters of a script series, relative size of the letters, letter environment (e.g., horizontal proximity and relative vertical positioning of the letters), stance of a letter (e.g., the way a letter is “leaning”), ductus of a letter (i.e., number, order, and direction of strokes), as well as the relationship of the various letters to the ceiling line (Northwest Semitic inscriptions were normally “hung” from a ceiling line, rather than written on a base line); (2) the similarities and differences between the various components of

a script series, such as the lapidary and cursives of a script series; issues of media and writing instrument must be factored in as well (e.g., ink on pottery, chiseled in stone); (3) and the diachronic development and synchronic variation within a script series, including things such as script innovations, preservations, and individual scribal idiosyncrasies. For this reason, palaeographic analyses made on the basis of a larger number of letters will be more secure than those made on the basis of a small number of letters. Thus, the longer an inscription is, the more precise and secure the palaeographic analysis can be). (4) In this connection, it should be noted that within a script series, different letters can (and do) develop at different paces. That is, within a script series of a certain chronological horizon some letters will develop rapidly, but some letters will develop very slowly. The pace of development can be cataloged and factored into palaeographic typologies.

The amount of the provenanced epigraphic data is of critical importance for the science of palaeography (and, of course, for epigraphy in general). That is, statements made on the basis of a large(r) number of inscriptions for a script series are more definitive than statements made on the basis of modest amounts of data (i.e., because the extant epigraphic remains of a script series are a fraction of the epigraphic material produced, larger sample sizes permit more definitive conclusions).

Also of great importance is the general quality of the data. Inscriptions (or exemplars of letters within an inscription) that are clear (i.e., not very faded or abraded) are the most valuable. Moreover, inscriptions that contain a date formula, or were found in a primary stratigraphic context (or are dateable via some other means), or contain historical data revealing the date or era of composition are most helpful in establishing chronological “benchmarks” for a script typology. Multiple inscriptions found in secure primary contexts in sequential strata of the same tell are often of particular import, because the chronological sequencing is arguably more secure.

In addition, the geographic and chronological distribution of the data must be factored in to the assessment as well. That is, analyses of the “targeted” script series that are based on palaeographic data from various sites and multiple horizons provide the best window on the diagnostic features, developments, and variation within a script series. Based on these cumulative data, a reliable script typology can be developed for a script series. It should be noted that the more sophisticated the analysis and the more rigorous the method, the more reliable the conclusions; that is, not all palaeographers are equal and not all palaeographic analyses are equal. Of course on some occasions an ancient inscription will nuance epigraphic knowledge (e.g., script typologies, orthography, etc.) in rather dramatic ways. This was the case with the Tell Fakhariyeh bilingual (fig. 2.9; Cross 1995; Naveh 1987b; Rollston 2008b; cf. Kaufman 1982), with its archaizing

script (fig. 2.9). New palaeographic data such as those of Tell Fakhariyeh are not problematic, but rather serve to complement previous conceptions.

Often within an *editio princeps*, hand drawings of faded or abraded letters are included. This is appropriate. However, hand drawings of faded or abraded letters are not to be the basis of a script typology because of the poor quality of the data. That is, a script typology must be based on the clearest exemplars of a script series. Finally, and with rare exceptions, it is methodologically imprudent to use inscriptions from the antiquities market as the basis for palaeographic typologies (Rollston 2004).

It is interesting that some archaeologists consider palaeographic typology to be very imprecise, or even “smoke and mirrors,” but, nevertheless, affirm the substantial accuracy of pottery typologies. The fact of the matter is that palaeographic typologies can be as reliable as pottery typologies. Obviously, the amount of extant pottery of a specific horizon within a pottery series is exponentially larger than that of the epigraphic remains of a specific horizon within a script series, but the palaeographic epigraphic evidence for the horizons of many script series is not negligible, and (most importantly) the innumerable intricacies of the morphology of the letters of a horizon of a script series contain enormous amounts of data that can be analyzed and documented in an empirical manner by a trained palaeographer. It is also intriguing that some non-palaeographers will refer to variation in the writing of a modern script (e.g., the Latin cursive used in American English), note the presence of radical variation often present in the modern period, and *assume* that this is a relevant means of evaluating the accuracy of palaeography. This is hardly, however, a compelling argument. Analyses of an ancient script series must be based on the extant ancient evidence of a series and the synchronic variation and diachronic development attested for that ancient series. Modern analogies of variation for a modern script series are of negligible value, as much more script variation is tolerated within the modern period.

PART 1
THE EPIGRAPHIC RECORD: THE BROAD TABLEAU

CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGINS OF ALPHABETIC WRITING: A SUMMARY OF THE SALIENT FEATURES

The alphabet was invented once, and this occurred during the early-second millennium B.C.E. All alphabets derive, in some fashion, from this original alphabet. Writing itself had already been invented during the late-fourth millennium B.C.E., in the cultural centers of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Sumerian is Mesopotamia's (and the world's) first recorded language, a fact enshrined in the title of Kramer's famed monograph *History Begins at Sumer* (1981). The earliest Sumerian inscriptions demonstrate that the Sumerian writing system was initially pictographic in nature. During the third millennium B.C.E., texts in the Akkadian language become common, but without displacing Sumerian. Because a predominant feature of the writing systems used for Sumerian and Akkadian is the "wedge-shaped sign," the writing system is normally referred to as cuneiform (from Latin *cuneus* "wedge"). Of course, the system that was predominant in Egypt is referred to as hieroglyphics (from Greek *hieros* "sacred" and Greek *gluph* "carving"). Nevertheless, these writing systems of Mesopotamia and Egypt are not alphabetic. Instead, they use logograms, that is, a sign that represents an entire word rather than just a single sound. They also use signs that represent combinations of consonants and vowels (syllables) rather than a single consonant. In addition, Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics use determinatives, that is, signs that identify the semantic category of the associated word; examples include "deity," "person," "metal," "wood," and so on. An alphabetic writing system, on the other hand, is a system in which a single grapheme (i.e., letter) is used to signify a single phoneme (i.e., meaningful unit of sound).

ORIGINS OF THE ALPHABET: BASIC SYNOPSIS

Research on the early alphabet began in earnest during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Sir Flinders Petrie had discovered, in a temple in Serabit

el-Ḥadem (in the Sinai), various hieroglyphic inscriptions. However, he also discovered some inscriptions that he considered enigmatic. He referred to these inscriptions as a “local barbarism” (Gardiner 1906, 129–32). However, Gardiner soon began to analyze this corpus of inscriptions and became convinced that the script was alphabetic, not some “local barbarism.” He rapidly made major strides forward in the decipherment of these inscriptions (often referred to as “Proto-Sinaitic”), based on his assumption that “the acrophonic principle” was operative. Moreover, he also argued that the intellectual soil that facilitated the invention was certain aspects of the ancient Egyptian writing system (Gardiner 1916, 1–16), including various Egyptian signs that represented single consonants. In addition, he became convinced that although these early alphabetic signs “are not in Egyptian Hieroglyphic ... many of the signs are obviously borrowed from that source” (14). Ultimately, based on the date of some of the hieroglyphic inscriptions in the region of Serabiṭ el-Ḥadem as well as the morphological similarities between these early alphabetic signs and certain hieroglyphic signs, Gardiner stated that he believed that it was reasonable to assign the alphabetic inscriptions to the latter portion of the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty (i.e., early-eighteenth century B.C.E.). Nevertheless, because of a dearth of data, he did not rule out a date some three centuries later than this (13). Regarding the writers of these texts, Gardiner proposed that because these early alphabetic texts were written in a Semitic language, the authors were Semites. Moreover, Gardiner argued, because of the similarities between certain hieroglyphic signs and early alphabetic letters, that these Semites were familiar with Egyptian hieroglyphics. Furthermore, he believed that these Semites were connected in some fashion with the Egyptian turquoise mines in this region.

Ultimately, Gardiner was able to decipher accurately a number of letters and this allowed him to read certain portions of some of these early alphabetic texts from the Sinai. Among the most convincing of Gardiner’s readings were the words *tnt lb’t* “gift for the lady,” with *b’t* being a reference to a goddess, that is, the feminine form of the divine name “Ba’al” (fig. 1.1). Some five decades after Gardiner’s initial progress, Albright built on his seminal work and published his own analysis of these inscriptions, positing that he could read twenty-three of the posited twenty-seven letters of the script (fig. 1.2; Albright 1966), and dating the inscriptions to ca. 1550–1450 B.C.E.



Fig. 1.1. Serabiṭ 346T. Drawing by the author.

Phon. Value	Schematic Forms	Early North-west Semitic	Early South Semitic	Early Letter Names	Meaning of Names
ʾ		𐤀 (14th) 𐤁 (13th)	𐤁 𐤀 (Jamme)	ʾalp-	ox-head
b		𐤂 (17th) 𐤃 (13th)	𐤂	bêt-	house
g		𐤄 (15th) 𐤅 (12th)	𐤄 𐤅	gaml-	throw-stick
d		𐤆 𐤇 (10th)	𐤆 (Jamme)	digg-	fish
ḏ		?	𐤈 𐤉 (Jamme)	?	?
h		𐤊 (10th)	𐤊	hêt(?)	man calling
w		𐤌 (10th)	𐤌 (ʾ used for y)	wô(waw)	mace
z	?	𐤎 (16th) 𐤏 (10th)	𐤎	zê(n-)	?
h		𐤐 (12th) 𐤑 (10th)	𐤐	hêt(-)	fence(?)
b		?	𐤒 (Jamme)	ba()	hank of yarn
t	?	𐤓 (10th) 𐤔 (10th)	𐤓	têt(-)	spindle?
y		𐤕 (13th) 𐤖 (10th)	𐤖 (orig w)	yad-	arm
k		𐤗 (17th) 𐤘 (13th)	𐤗 𐤘	kapp-	palm
l		𐤙 (14th) 𐤚 (13th)	𐤙 𐤚 (Jamme)	lamd-	ox-goad
m		𐤛 (15th) 𐤜 (13th)	𐤛 (9th) 𐤝 (8th)	mêm-	water
n		𐤞 (14th) 𐤟 (12th)	𐤞 𐤟 𐤠	nohš-	snake
š	?	𐤡 (10th)	𐤡 𐤢	(šamk-?)	?
e		𐤣 (12th) 𐤤 (10th)	𐤣	ʿên-	eye
g		𐤥 (15th)	𐤥 𐤦 (Jamme)	gâ()	?
p		𐤧 (10th)	𐤧 𐤨	pu't-(?)	corner?
s/z		𐤩 (10th)	𐤩 𐤪	ša(d-)	plant
q	?	?	𐤫	?	?
q		𐤬 (14th) 𐤭 (10th)	𐤬 𐤭 (Jamme)	qu(p-)	?
r		𐤮 (16th-14th)	𐤮 𐤯	na'š-	head of man
š/t		𐤰 (13th) 𐤱 (10th)	𐤰 𐤱	tann-	composite bow
š		?	𐤲 𐤳 (Jamme)	?	?
t		𐤴 𐤵 (13th)	𐤴 𐤵 (Jamme)	tô(taw)	owner's mark

Fig. 1.2. Albright's chart of the proto-Sinaitic letters.

Two alphabetic inscriptions discovered at Wadi el-Hol in Egypt (fig. 1.3) were recently published (Darnell, Dobbs-Allsopp, Lundberg, McCarter, and Zuckerman 2005) and it has been argued that these can be dated to the same basic chronological horizon as the early alphabetic texts from Serabit el-Hadem. Significantly, however, the data from the inscriptions at Wadi el-Hol converge to suggest that Albright's dates were low, and that Gardiner's original sense regarding the dates was correct. After all, various hieroglyphic inscriptions were discovered in the vicinity of the Wadi el-Hol alphabetic inscriptions and these



Fig. 1.4. Gezer sherd. Drawing by the author.

The acrophonic principle is the fundamental component of early alphabetic writing.

It should be emphasized strongly here that early alphabetic inscriptions are attested not only in Egypt, but also in Palestine. For example, an inscribed potsherd from Gezer dating to the Middle Bronze Age II (ca. 1800–1630 B.C.E.; fig. 1.4) contains three early alphabetic letters. The first letter depicts a hand and so can be read with confidence as a *kap*. The third letter depicts a house (Semitic *bayt*) and so can be read with substantial certitude as a *bet*. There has been some discussion about the letter in the middle. It is sometimes understood to be the pictorial sign for the “ox-goad” that represented the letter “l” (that is, *lamed*). This would yield a fine reading, namely, the word *klb* “dog,” a self-designation that secondary and tertiary members of a hierarchy used in communications with superiors (e.g., in the letters from el-Amarna). However, this second sign is most readily understood as the sign for a “mace,” that is, the letter *waw*, and the word “dog” is not preserved on this sherd. In short, there is no consensus regarding the putative meaning of these letters, or if the letters are even part of a single word, or the direction of writing.

Similarly, a stunning inscribed bronze dagger was discovered at Lachish (fig. 1.5). Four alphabetic signs are inscribed on the metal. Based on similar epigraphs from vari-

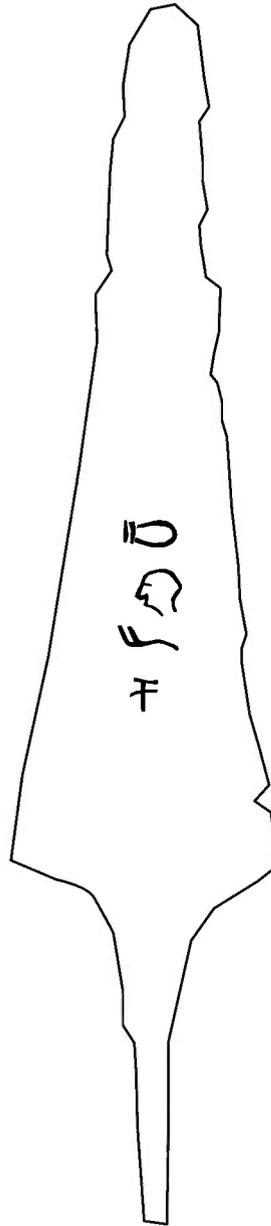


Fig. 1.5. Bronze dagger from Lachish. Drawing by the author.



Fig. 1.6. Qubur Walaydah bowl. Drawing by the author.

ous periods, it is to reasonable to suggest that the letters constitute a personal name. Also, an inscribed bowl was discovered during the final quarter of the twentieth century at a site near Gaza known as Qubur 'el-Walaydah (fig. 1.6). The archaeological context of the bowl (e.g., associated pottery) and the bowl itself have been dated to the terminal portion of the Late Bronze II Age or the beginning of Iron I. Although the entire inscription has not been preserved, a number of letters have been. Cross has argued that it was written from left to right, that is, dextrograde. He dates the inscription to ca. 1200 B.C.E. (1980, 1–20; 2003, 213–30, esp. 213–16) and reads it as follows: *šmp^l. 'y'l.š*. At this juncture, it can be emphasized that the earliest of the early alphabetic linear inscriptions hail from the early-second millennium B.C.E. and the latest of the early alphabetic comes from the late-second millennium B.C.E.

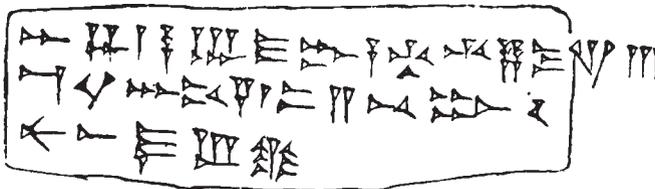
THE ALPHABET AT UGARIT

During the third quarter of the second millennium there was a distinct and important development: the invention and use of alphabetic cuneiform (not to be confused with Mesopotamian syllabic cuneiform). The Mesopotamian cuneiform script was certainly the prestige script in Syro-Mesopotamia during the second millennium B.C.E. The ancient city of Ugarit (Raš Šamra) was a powerful urban center during the second millennium and Mesopotamian cuneiform is very well-attested at Ugarit (as is also Hittite and even some Hurrian). However, the alphabet itself was also known at Ugarit (fig. 1.7). Rather than employing the linear alphabet such as was used at Wadi el-Hol, Serabiṭ el-Ḥadem, Gezer, Lachish, and so on, the scribes at Ugarit used a variant thereof. Namely, they employed

a special system of “alphabetic cuneiform” letters. That is, they used the alphabet, but they employed wedge-shaped letters to write the alphabet rather than using the pictographic or linear forms, presumably because there was a certain cache associated with the cuneiform script, but not with the alphabetic script. Moreover, alphabetic cuneiform tablets have been found not just at Syrian Ugarit (and Ras Ibn Hani and Tell Negi Mend), but also in Lebanon (Sarepta) and Israel (Taanach, Beth-Shemesh, and Nahal Tavor); therefore, the use of alphabetic cuneiform during the mid- to late-second millennium was certainly not confined to the region of Ugarit.

Several remaining facets of the early history of the alphabet merit mention here. (1) A number of the signs of the cuneiform alphabet are modeled after the morphology of the early alphabetic signs. So, for example, the Ugaritic *šin* bears a striking resemblance to the linear alphabetic *šin*. Similarly, the Ugaritic *‘ayin* is reminiscent of the linear alphabetic *‘ayin*. Moreover, the Ugaritic *samek* is a cuneiform version of the linear *samek*. Ultimately, it is convincing to affirm that alphabetic cuneiform was developed later than, and on the basis of, linear early alphabetic.

(2) The evidence of ancient abecedaries (lists of the alphabet) in alphabetic cuneiform, indicates that there were two major variant sequences of the letters of the alphabet during the second millennium. That is, someone writing out the alphabet during the second millennium ostensibly had two basic options. One option was: ʾa, b g, ḥ, d, h, w, z, ḥ, t, y, k, š, l, m, ḏ, n, ṯ, s, ʿ, p, s, q, r, ṯ, ḡ, t, ʾi, ʾu, š. The other option was: h, l, h, m. q, w, s₂ (š or ṯ), r, b, t, s₁ (š or ṯ), k, n, ḥ, š, s₃ (s), p, ʾ, ʿ, d, ḡ, ṯ, z, ḏ, y, ṯ, ṯ. The first of these is often called the “Abgad” order and the second of these is often called the “Halḥam” order. During the succeeding centuries, the former order became predominant in Northwest Semitic (e.g., the acrostics in the Hebrew Bible and at Kuntillet ʿAjrud), but the latter (halḥam)



<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>ḥ</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>ḥ</i>	<i>ṯ</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>š</i>	<i>l</i>
<i>m</i>	<i>ḏ</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>ʿ</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>š</i>	<i>q</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>ṯ</i>			
<i>ḡ</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>š</i>									

Fig. 1.7. Chart with Ugaritic alphabet.

order became predominant in South Semitic (e.g., Ethiopic). However, during the second millennium B.C.E., both orders are attested.

(3) During the terminal horizons of the Late Bronze Age, there were a number of consonantal mergers in Northwest Semitic. That is, some of the consonants attested in early alphabetic and Ugaritic merged with some of the other consonants attested in early alphabetic and Ugaritic. For example, ħ merges with h and, therefore, a distinct grapheme (“letter”) for ħ is not attested in Northwest Semitic during the Iron Age. Moreover, ğ merges with g and, therefore, a distinct grapheme for ğ is not attested in Northwest Semitic during the Iron Age. Because of the various consonantal mergers, Iron Age Northwest Semitic, beginning with Phoenician, consists of just twenty-two letters.

CHAPTER 2

THE USE OF THE PHOENICIAN SCRIPT DURING THE IRON AGE AND THE RISE OF THE LEVANTINE NATIONAL SCRIPTS

Throughout much of the second millennium B.C.E. there was a Northwest Semitic script tradition (“early alphabetic”) but the variations present within the script were often quite significant: there was certainly no standardized Northwest Semitic script tradition. Rather, there was much variation in stance, including the direction of the “face” of the letters. The direction of writing could vary, with sinistrograde (right-to-left), dextrograde (left-to-right), boustrophedon (i.e., consecutive lines written from left-to-right, then right-to-left), and columnar writing all attested. Moreover, there was a larger stock of consonants available, arguably as many as twenty-seven or twenty-eight during the earliest periods of the alphabet (i.e., not just the twenty-two letters of the later Phoenician alphabet). This period of the script has been the subject of several substantive studies (Albright 1966; Cross 2003, 195–343; Sass 1988; Darnell, Dobbs-Allsopp, Lundberg, McCarter, and Zuckerman 2005; Hamilton 2006).

During the terminal horizons of the second millennium, however, several developments occurred: (1) The stance of the letters became more stabilized and standardized; (2) the direction of writing was consistently sinistrograde; and, (3) because of a number of consonant mergers, the number of consonants was reduced to twenty-two. From this point on, because of these three developments, the convention within the field of Northwest Semitic epigraphy is to refer to this stage of the script as Phoenician rather than early alphabetic. Naveh reflects the consensus of the field with his statement that the transition from early alphabetic to Phoenician “took place in the mid-eleventh century B.C.” (1987a, 42). Note that these changes did not occur simultaneously, however. That is, the changes occurred over the course of time, but all were complete by about the mid-eleventh century.

THE IRON AGE PHOENICIAN SCRIPT:
THE *MUTTERSCHRIFT* IN THE HOMELAND

There are a number of Phoenician inscriptions from the Phoenician homeland (modern Lebanon) that provide substantial data about the Phoenician script of the late-eleventh, tenth, and early-ninth centuries (Rollston 2008a; 2008b). Moreover, there are a number of important Phoenician inscriptions that were produced outside of the borders of Phoenicia during this early period as well. Among the most important of the early Phoenician inscriptions from the homeland is the Azarba'al Inscription, often referred to as the Bronze Spatula Inscription (fig. 2.1; Dunand 1945, 155–57). This prestige object was discovered during controlled excavations at Byblos (ancient Gebal, in Phoenicia). Six lines of Phoenician text (often considered enigmatic) are etched into the metal. The script reflects archaic features, such as the trident *kap*, the *mem* with a strong vertical stance, *samek* with a short vertical shaft (i.e., not extending much below the bottom horizontal), and the box-shaped *het*. The five strokes of *mem* are of the same approximate length, as are the three strokes of *nun*; these are early features. Some have argued that this inscription reflects the terminal horizon of the eleventh century, but a date in the (early-)tenth century is also possible.

There are several early royal Phoenician inscriptions from Byblos. Among the most impressive of these is that of the Ahiiram Sarcophagus (fig. 2.2), an inscription commissioned by Ahiiram's son Ittoba'al (Dussaud 1924; Lehmann 2005; Lundberg 2004). The majority of this inscription is written on the lid of the sarcophagus (the long edge), but the initial component of the inscription is written on the end of the sarcophagus itself (i.e., not on the lid). Most of the letters were chiseled with care and substantial precision, although there is a diminution of letter size that is visible (and quantifiable) in the terminal portions of the inscription. Space constraints probably necessitated the diminution. That is,

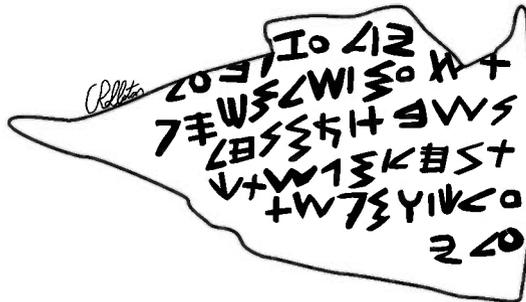


Fig. 2.1. The bronze Azarba'al inscription. Drawing by the author.

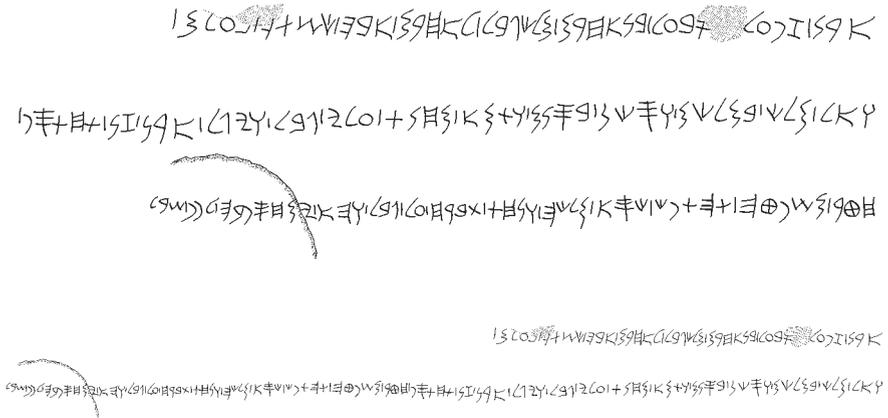


Fig. 2.2. The Ahiram sarcophagus inscription. Drawing by Marilyn Lundberg. Above: Line 1 = side 1; lines 2–3 = side 2. Below: Transcription with side 2 in one line.

as the scribe realized that there was not sufficient space to complete the entire inscription using such large letters he began to reduce the sizes of the letters.

The Phoenician script of the Ahiram Sarcophagus can be distinguished from the script of the Azarba'al Inscription by the presence of some discernible and diagnostic typological differences, or developments, that indicate that the script of this inscription is later than that of the Azarba'al Inscription. The differences that are among the most important are the distinct lengthening of the vertical shaft of *samek*, the occasional lengthening of the fifth stroke of *mem*, the occasional lengthening of the third stroke of *nun*, and the lengthening of the verticals of *het* (i.e., no longer box-shaped). Note, however, that *kap* remains trident-shaped (the trident form of *kap* is an early feature). Based on the script, I consider this inscription to be dateable with substantial certitude to the tenth century B.C.E. (Rollston 2008a; 2008b).

Hailing also from Byblos during this same basic horizon are the Yehimilk Inscription (fig. 2.3), the Abiba'al Inscription, and the Eliba'al Inscription. Yehimilk is a monumental Byblian inscription, chiseled into a stone tablet (Dunand 1930, 321–31). The Abiba'al Inscription is inscribed on a statue of Pharaoh Sheshonk I (reigned ca. 945–924 B.C.E.) and so it is among the most interesting and important of the early Byblian (Phoenician) lapidary inscriptions (Clermont-Ganneau 1903, 378–83). Similarly, the Byblian inscription of Eliba'al (Dussaud 1925, 101–17) was inscribed on a bust of Pharaoh Osorkon I (reigned ca. 924–

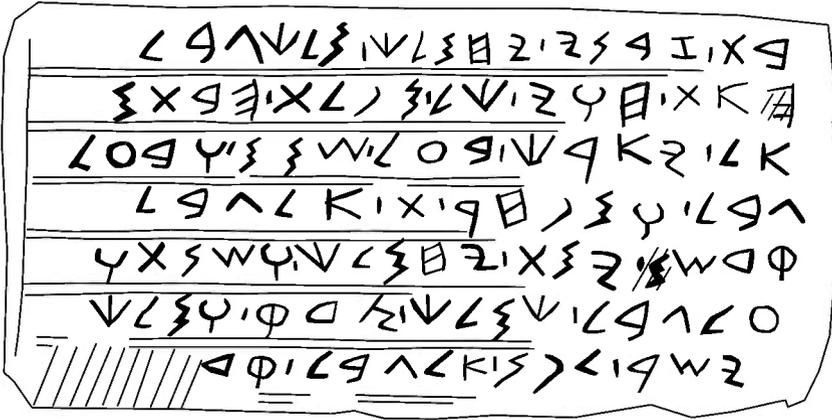


Fig. 2.3. Yehimilk inscription. Drawing by the author.

889).¹ Of consequence is the fact that within this inscription, Eliba'al provides his father's name: Yehi[milk]. The inscriptions of Yehimilk, Abiba'al, and Eliba'al reflect the same basic script typology as that of the Ahiaram Sarcophagus Inscription. For example, the vertical stroke of *alep* is at the leftmost extreme of the vertex of the two horizontal crossbars; this is an early feature. Moreover, *kap* continues to be trident-shaped; this too is an early feature.

Some modest typological differences are present in the inscriptions of Ahiaram, Yehimilk, Abiba'al, and Eliba'al. Among the most interesting is the length of the final stroke of *mem* and *nun*. Here is the way that I would summarize the palaeographic data. Within early Phoenician, the *mem* consists of five oblique downstrokes and the *nun* consists of three oblique downstrokes. The *mem* of the Ahiaram Sarcophagus Inscription, Yehimilk, Abiba'al, and Eliba'al has a strong vertical stance. Often (but not always) the five strokes of the *mem* are all about the same length and often (but not always) the three strokes of the *nun* are all about the same length. Thus, the five strokes of the *mem* and the three strokes of the *nun* in the Eliba'al Inscription are each about the same length, with some modest variation. However, the fifth stroke of *mem* and the third stroke of *nun* in the Ahiaram Sarcophagus and the Yehimilk Inscription do sometimes exhibit

1. Note that the names in the cartouches of these statues of Sheshonq and Osorkon are those of Sheshonq I and Osorkon I. That is, it would be problematic for someone to suggest that these statues were those of Sheshonq II (r. ca. 890 B.C.E.) and Osorkon II (r. ca. 874–850 B.C.E.), as the readings of the latter two are quite different (Beckerath 1999, 185). I am grateful to James Hoffmeier for discussing this issue with me and providing this reference.

chronological horizon also comes the 'Abda Sherd (fig. 2.5). Note that the morphology of *bet* in these two inscriptions is the same; this feature was ephemeral. In sum, during the tenth and very-early-ninth centuries, the Phoenician script is well attested in the Phoenician homeland and Shipitba'al is the latest of the early Byblian royal inscriptions.

DEBATES ABOUT DATES OF EARLY PHOENICIAN INSCRIPTIONS

There has been some criticism of the standard dates of the early Byblian royal inscriptions, with some scholars arguing that they date to the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E. (e.g., Sass 2005). For this reason, some reference to the sequence of finds, the progress of scholarship during the first half of the twentieth century, and the rationale for the standard dating, should be instructive.

The Abiba'al Inscription (on a statue of Sheshonq) was published in 1903 (Clermont-Ganneau 1903, 378–83), but the entire text was not deciphered (because scholars had misunderstood the archaic *kap* as a *šin*). Nevertheless, even though the text was not deciphered in its entirety, the fact that it was inscribed on a statue of Sheshonq I (r. ca. 945–924 B.C.E.) resulted in its being dated to the late-tenth century B.C.E. The Ahiham Sarcophagus was discovered in 1923 (Dussaud 1924). Because two fragments of alabaster vases in the tomb of Ahiham bore the name of Ramesses II, the Ahiham Sarcophagus Inscription was initially believed to have hailed from that chronological horizon (i.e., the thirteenth century B.C.E.). However, because the script of the Abiba'al Inscription and that of the Ahiham Sarcophagus Inscription were so similar, it soon began to be argued that the Ahiham Sarcophagus Inscription must be dated to the tenth century, not the thirteenth century. Two years after the discovery of the Ahiham Sarcophagus, Dussaud (1925, 101–17) published fragments of the Eliba'al Inscription, inscribed on a statue of Osorkon I (r. ca. 924–889 B.C.E.). The Phoenician script of this inscription was very similar to that of the Abiba'al and Ahiham Sarcophagus Inscriptions. Soon thereafter, Dunand (1930, 321–31) published the Yehimilk Inscription from Byblos.

Albright had been active in the analysis of all of these inscriptions. Initially, he had dated the Ahiham Sarcophagus Inscription to the twelfth century, but he had subsequently lowered his date from the twelfth century to ca. 1000 B.C.E. He suggested that the lowest date he would consider tenable was ca. 975 B.C.E. (Albright 1947, 153–54). Dunand published the Shipitba'al Inscription in 1945. This was the last of the great early Byblian royal inscriptions (Dunand 1945, 146–51). Dunand stated that the Shipitba'al Inscription antedated the “autres inscriptions Phéniciennes” and he argued that this was established with absolute decisiveness on the basis of script. Indeed, he argued that it was plausible to date

this inscription to the end of the eighteenth century B.C.E. or the beginning of the seventeenth century (Dunand 1945, 150–51). Dunand's early dating of Shipitba'al had few followers, however. Albright stated that in his judgment "there is no need to date any of [the early Byblian royal inscriptions] after the beginning of the ninth century, and the group as a whole belongs to the tenth century" (1947, 154). Regarding the fact that there was initially such diversity of opinion among epigraphers and archaeologists regarding the dating of these inscriptions, Albright noted that "when the first documents of this category were published there was much less external evidence bearing on grammar, lexicography and spelling than there is today. All scholars made numerous mistakes" (155). Behind Albright's statement is the fact that a strong scholarly consensus had emerged by, or during, the 1940s. Of course, Albright was among those who contributed in a substantive manner to the discussion and his views represented the consensus.

Albright's dates for the kings of the early Byblian royal inscriptions are as follows (160): (1) Ahiram, ca. 1000 B.C.E.; (2) Ittoba'al (son of Ahiram), ca. 975 B.C.E.; (3) Yehimilk, ca. 950 B.C.E.; (4) Abiba'al (son of Yehimilk?), ca. 930 B.C.E.; (5) Eliba'al (son of Yehimilk), ca. 920 B.C.E.; (6) Shipitba'al (son of Eliba'al), ca. 900 B.C.E. Since Albright's era, the dates for which he argued have normally been accepted. Within McCarter's detailed analysis of these inscriptions he posited the following dates: (1) Ahiram, fl. 1000 B.C.E.; (2) Ittoba'al, fl. 980 B.C.E.; (3) Yehimilk, fl. 960 B.C.E.; (4) Abiba'al, fl. 940 B.C.E.; (5) Eliba'al, fl. 920 B.C.E.; (6) Shipitba'al, fl. 900 B.C.E. (1975, 34). Some might not wish to be as precise in assigning dates as Albright and McCarter, but the fact remains that a tenth century date for the early Byblian royal inscriptions has stood the test of time (Rollston 2008b).

The reasons for the persistence of the standard chronology of the early Byblian royal inscriptions, however, should be reiterated. (1) Monumental inscriptions such as the Mesha Stele and the Tel Dan Stele can be dated securely on the basis of historical content to the ninth century. The scripts of these inscriptions are typologically later than the scripts of the early Byblian royal inscriptions. (2) The inscription of Abiba'al was inscribed on a statue of the Egyptian King Sheshonq I. (3) The inscription of Eliba'al was inscribed on a statue of the Egyptian King Osorkon I. (4) The Ahiram Sarcophagus refers to Ittoba'al as the son of Ahiram. Thus, in terms of royal chronology, it can be affirmed that Ahiram was succeeded by his son Ittoba'al. (5) The Shipitba'al inscription contains a three-generation genealogy: Shipitba'al, king of Byblos; son of Eliba'al, king of Byblos; son of Yehimilk, king of Byblos. Thus, in terms of royal chronology, the following sequence can be affirmed: Yehimilk, then Eliba'al, and then Shipitba'al. (6) In terms of script typology, the script of the Shipitba'al Inscription is definitely the most developed of all of the early Byblian royal inscriptions. That is, the script of this inscription can be affirmed to be the latest of the early Byblian royal inscriptions.

Thus, at this juncture, there are two sets of royal sequences that can be discerned on the basis of the early Byblian royal inscriptions:

Ahiram	Yehimilk
Ittoba'al	Eliba'al
	Shipitba'al

Because the script of the Shipitba'al Inscription is definitively the most developed (i.e., typologically latest), it has been considered reasonable to argue that the sequence that includes Shipitba'al should be understood as the later of the two royal sequences. This then yields the following combined chronology:

Ahiram – Ittoba'al – Yehimilk – Eliba'al – Shipitba'al

At this point in the reconstruction, the early Byblian royal inscriptions of Ahiram, Yehimilk, Eliba'al, and Shipitba'al have been factored into the discussion. However, for the Abiba'al Inscription, there is no preserved patronymic; therefore, the question of placement of Abiba'al within the royal sequence cannot be known with certitude. Certain things can be noted, however. First, the script of the Abiba'al Inscription is not as late as that of the Shipitba'al inscription, so the palaeographic evidence would militate strongly against placing the reign of Abiba'al after that of Shipitba'al. Second, the Eliba'al Inscription is on a statue of Osorkon I and the Abiba'al Inscription is on a statue of Sheshonq I. Sheshonq I reigned before Osorkon I; therefore, it can be reasonably postulated that Abiba'al reigned before Eliba'al. Although it might be tempting to suggest that Abiba'al reigned before Ahiram, in light of the fact that the inscription of Abiba'al was inscribed on a statue of Sheshonq I (who was the immediate predecessor of Osorkon I) it is arguably most convincing to posit that he was the immediate predecessor of Eliba'al. The sequence then is as follows:

Ahiram – Ittoba'al – Yehimilk – Abiba'al – Eliba'al – Shipitba'al

Of course, an issue that arises in this connection is the paternity of Abiba'al. Because there is no preserved patronymic, it is not possible to answer this question with confidence. However, Albright's tentative proposal (1947, 160; see also Donner and Röllig, 1973–79, vol. 2, 8) that Abiba'al and Eliba'al were brothers (and thus both sons of Yehimilk) is plausible (cf. Kings Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, both sons of King Josiah, 2 Kgs 23:30, 34). Nevertheless, the precise placement of Abiba'al within the sequence is not a critical component of the tenth century dating of the early Byblian royal inscriptions. Rather, in various ways, it is an

ancillary component. In any case, the main point is that the standard chronology of the early Byblian royal inscriptions is based on the convergence of a constellation of compelling data; therefore, the standard dating is the most cogent position (Rollston 2008b; contra Sass 2005).

THE USE OF THE PHOENICIAN SCRIPT OUTSIDE OF PHOENICIA

ISRAEL

The Kefar Veradim bowl is a stunning artifact, made of bronze, and fluted (fig. 2.6; Alexandre 2006). The inscription consists of just four words, all preserved quite well, with two word dividers present. The inscribed bowl was found in a burial cave at Kefar Veradim (Israel). Moreover, the script is definitively Phoenician, even though this inscription was found in Israel.

The excavator has stated that, according to the standard chronology, the associated archaeological materials (bowls, craters, including some black-on-red ware, etc.) can be dated to the tenth century (Alexandre 2006, 31), or early-ninth century (22–23). Alexandre contemplated the possibility that this bowl might have been an heirloom piece, but does not come down definitively on the subject (31). From my perspective, based on the quality of the bowl and the presence of an inscription, this is an obvious prestige item. Moreover, the script of this inscription reflects the work of a trained, consummate scribe. Its script reflects the same basic script morphology as that of the Azarba'al Inscription. For example, *kap* is trident-shaped, *samek* has the short vertical shaft, and the *het* is box-shaped. Because of the medium (a bowl) it is difficult to place substantial emphasis upon the stance of *mem* and *nun*. However, the five strokes of *mem* and the three strokes of *nun* are of the same approximate length (although the scribe had some difficulty incising certain of the strokes of the *mem*). I consider this inscribed bowl to hail from the same basic chronological horizon as the Azarba'al Inscription. Based on the script, therefore, I am comfortable with an early-tenth century date for this inscription.

Note that Sass argues that the low chronology should be accepted and so he dates the artifacts from this tomb to the mid-ninth century. Furthermore, he argues against the possibility that the inscribed bowl is an heirloom piece (Sass 2005, 34–39, 50–74). At one point, with some deft (if problematic) rhetoric, he states that if the standard chronology for “West Semitic palaeography and Palestinian archaeology” is applied, “an absurd situation ensues: the Kefar Veradim inscription would be 200 years older than the bowl it is written on ... the inscription would date to the eleventh century, the tomb assemblage to the tenth, and the

