

## THE HEBREW OSTRACA FROM SITE 94/21, CAVE A-2, AT RAMAT BET SHEMESH

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*with a contribution by Joseph Naveh*

During April–June 1995 salvage excavations were carried out on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), as part of the Ramat Bet Shemesh project, at a site located approximately 400 m southwest of Khirbat Zanu' (Horbāt Zanoah).<sup>1</sup> The site, numbered 14-12-94/21 in a previous survey conducted by Yehuda Dagan (Dagan, Bonfil and Sharon, forthcoming), and labeled “Naḥal Yarmut” in the IAA permit, is located at the southern edge of a topographic saddle, from which rises one of the tributaries of Naḥal Yimla (map ref. NIG 19975–90/62480–90, OIG 14975–90/12480–90; Fig. 1). The site extends along three terraces, c. 400 m above sea level, on the borderline between the Zore'a and Taqiya formations (Geological Survey of Israel 1985).<sup>2</sup>

The excavation was divided into several work areas. In Area A (Plan 1), a cave labeled

A-2 was excavated and dated to Iron IIC (end of the seventh–beginning of the sixth century BCE) according to the pottery assemblage retrieved there. Among the pottery sherds and restored vessels were three ostraca. Two of them (Nos. 1 and 2; Figs. 4, 5, see below) were identified after they were washed, while sorting pottery. The third (No. 3; Fig. 6, see below) was identified when unearthed.

The cave, probably a cellar, was part of an agricultural complex (Plan 1) which included a winepress (A-1) and other installations similar to those found at el-Jib (Give'on; Pritchard 1964). Pending publication of the excavation report (Milevski, forthcoming), this paper presents the contents of the ostraca after a general description of the find spot, followed by a discussion.

### *Description of the Cave*

The opening of the cave (L106) is rectangular (0.75 × 1.00 m) with five large curbstones around the edge (Plan 2). It is located some 5 m east of winepress A-1, and 2 m east of the opening of Cellar A-10 (Plans 1 and 2).

Within the opening, a small rock-cut step leads to the cave which is crudely hewn into the chalk rock. The cave comprises an 8 m long curving corridor (L109; 0.8–1.5 m wide) leading to an irregularly-shaped chamber whose ceiling is largely collapsed. The dimensions were reconstructed as L: c. 4.5 m, W: c. 2.5 m, and H: 2 m.

Remains of vessels, mainly storage jars, were found resting on the floor along the corridor. Potsherds belonging to storage jars, some completely restorable, were scattered throughout the chamber. These were mainly of the 'rosette'

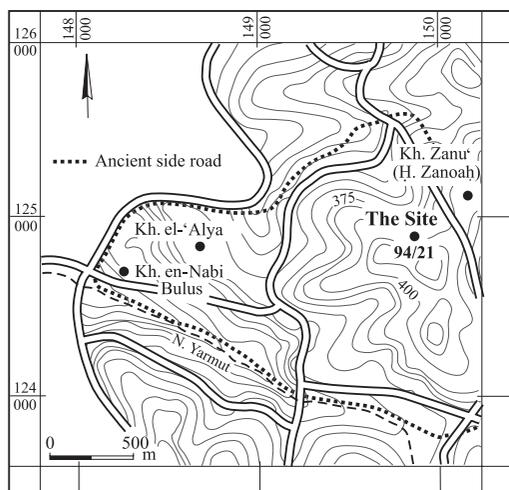
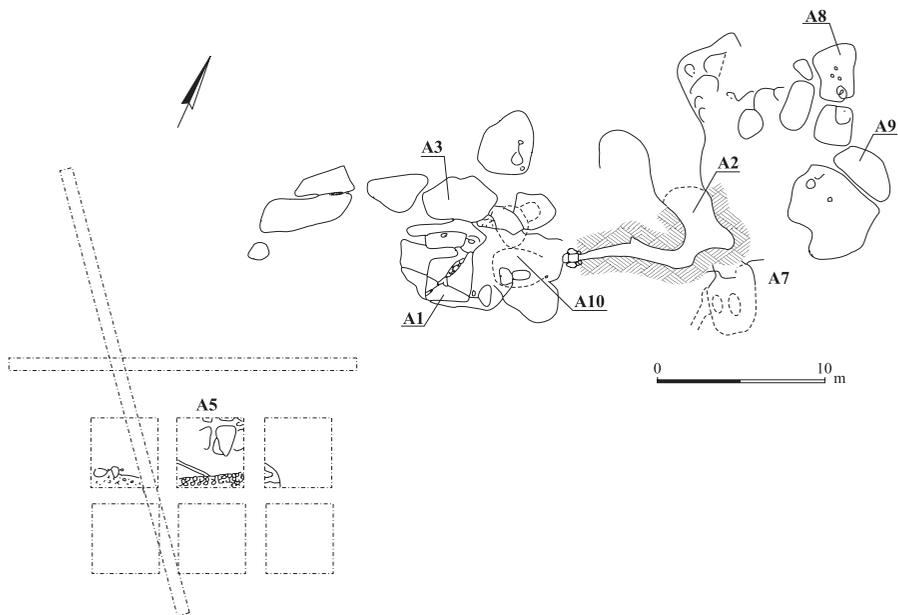
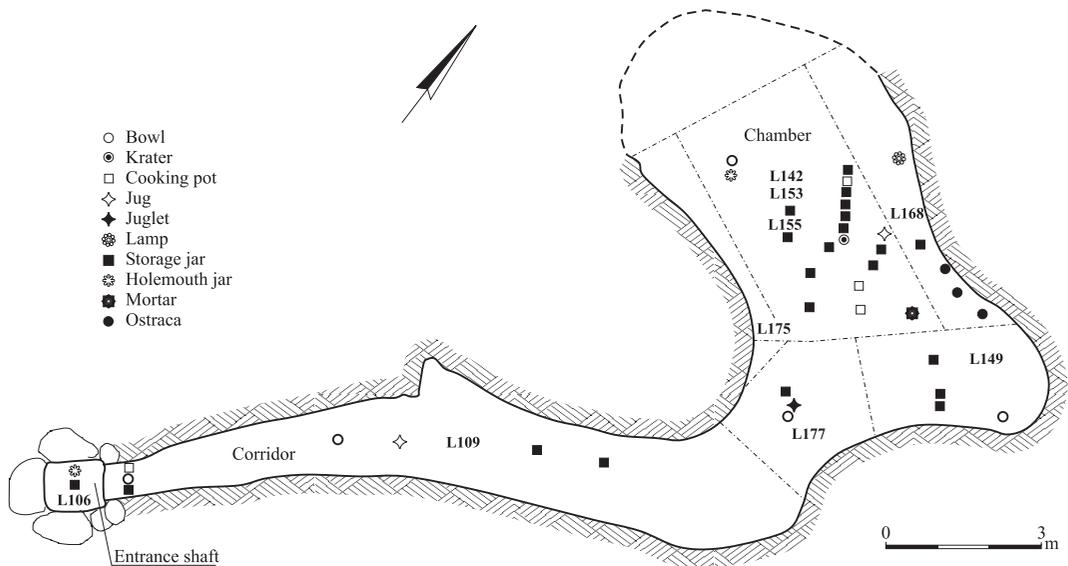


Fig. 1. General map of Ramat Bet Shemesh with the site location.



Plan 1. Site 94/21, Area A.



Plan 2. Plan of Cave A-2 with find spots.

type, and included one ‘rosette’ stamped handle. In addition, bowls, kraters, cooking pots, holemouth jars, jugs, and a lamp were uncovered (Fig. 2), all date to Iron IIC (cf. Aharoni and Aharoni 1976; Zimhoni 1990).<sup>3</sup>

Together with the pottery, a fragment of a limestone mortar was retrieved from the chamber, as well as two samples of charcoal from an olive tree.<sup>4</sup>

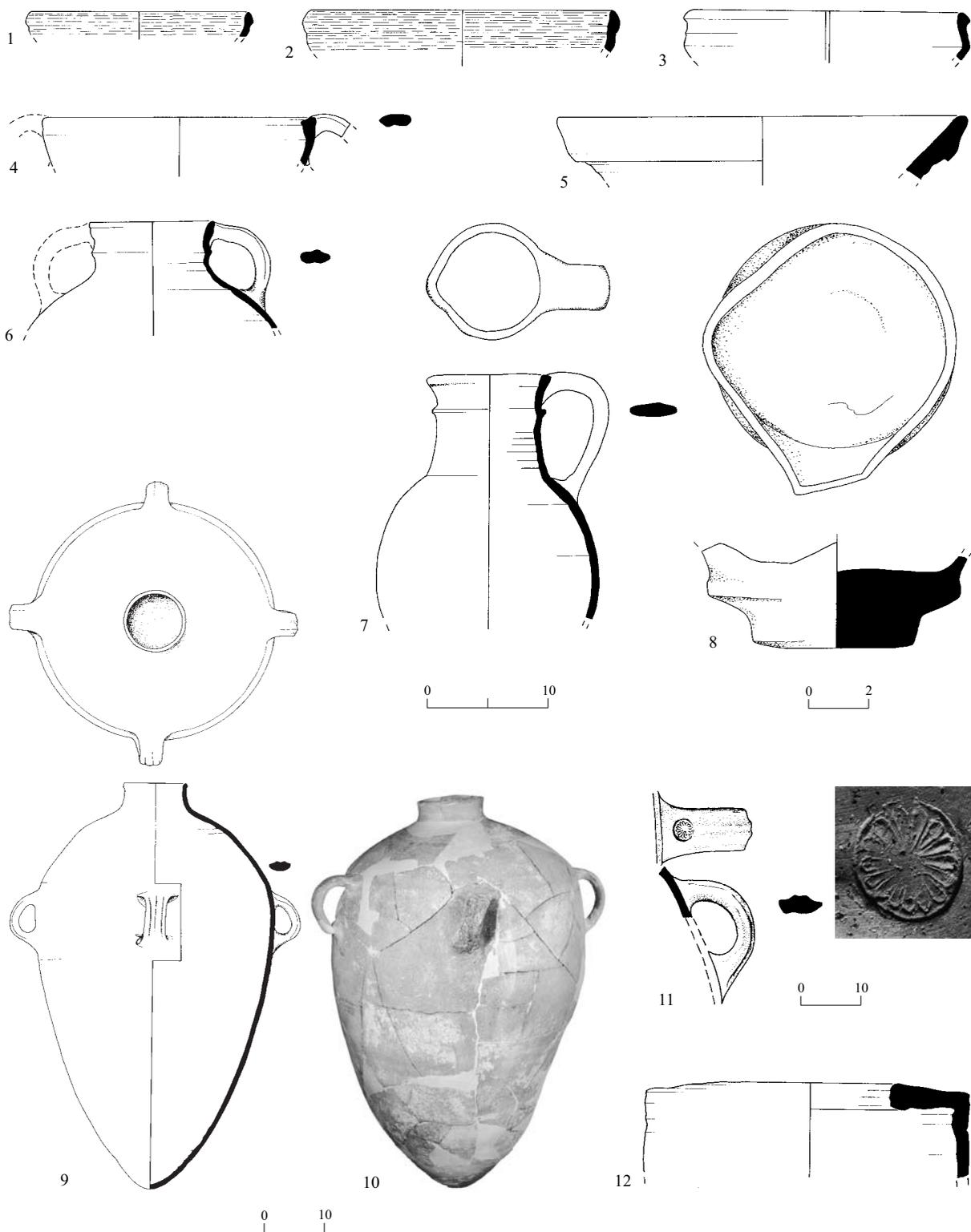


Fig. 2. Iron Age IIC pottery from Cave A-2.

◀ Fig. 2

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Bowl	1015	109	Reddish yellow ware, 5YR 6/6, pale red core 2.5YR 6/2, white grits, red slip 2.5YR 5/6, int. and ext. burnished
2	Bowl	1014/1	106	Reddish yellow ware, 5YR 6/6, pale red core 2.5YR 6/2, white-gray grits, red slip 2.5YR 5/6, int. and ext. burnished
3	Bowl	1112	142	Reddish yellow ware, 5YR 6/6, pale red core 2.5YR 6/2, white and red grits
4	Krater	1128/1	153	Reddish yellow ware, 5YR 6/6, gray core 5YR 6/1, white grits
5	Mortarium	1172	149	Light reddish brown ware, 6/4, light brown core 7.5YR 6/4, white grits, pink wash 7.5YR 7/4
6	Cooking pot	1111/1	142	Red ware 2.5YR 5/8, dark brown core 7.5YR 4/4, few white grits, reddish brown coat 2.5YR 4/4
7	Jug	1144	153	Light brown ware 7.5YR 6/4, yellowish red core 5YR 4/6, small white grits, light gray wash 10YR 7/2
8	Lamp	1246	168	Yellowish red ware 5YR 5/8, brown core 7.5YR 5/4, coarse white grits
9	Storage jar	1067/1	109	Pink ware 5YR 7/4, gray core 7.5YR 5/0, coarse white, gray and red grits
10	Storage jar	1113	149	Reddish yellow ware 5YR 6/8, gray core 5YR 5/1, white grits, light reddish brown coat 5YR 6/4
11	'Rosette' stamped handle	1101/1	142	Brown ware 7.5YR 5/4, gray core 7.5YR 6/0, small and medium very coarse white and red grits, pinkish gray coat 7.5YR 7/2
12	Holemouth jar	1086/2	142	Light red ware and core 2.5YR 6/6



Fig. 3. Ostraca 1 (near the upper right hand corner of the board) *in situ* in Cave A-2.

The three ostraca published here were found in this chamber. Ostraca 1 and 2 (Figs. 4 and 5) were found in L168, while removing the section near the eastern wall above the floor (Plan 2;

Fig. 3). Ostraca 1 was one of several body sherds that apparently belonged to the same jar. A fragment of a third ostraca (No. 3; Fig. 6) was found attached to the cave wall in the same locus, near a high-base lamp (Fig. 2:8).

### *The Ostraca*

Joseph Naveh

Since the letters of these inscribed sherds are very poorly preserved, the readings and interpretation are offered here with considerable reservation. Most legible personal names are typical of Judah at the end of the First Temple period. This dating is corroborated by the script as well.

1. Reg. No. 123-0/1, Fig. 4.

...

4€

שד.ה.י. שלך. בן חגב ב...

2€ ...

שד.ה. יהועז בן הוש [ע]

... ע.כ.

---  
 4 X  
 The field of [--]shalak son of Hagab in --  
 --- 2 X  
 The field of Yeho'az son of Hoshe[a']  
 ---



Fig. 4. Ostrakon 1.

The ostrakon mentions two fields belonging to two persons. It also contains some other information written partly in characters (many of which are illegible), partly in signs (mostly meaningless to us) and in numerals. The sign  $\in$  (marked in the translation as X), occurring here twice, is known in the Hebrew ostraca from 'Arad. In the context of the 'Arad texts this sign served as a measure of flour and was explained as *kor* or *homer* (Aharoni 1981: Nos. 18 and 22). Here the sign seems to designate a measure of wheat or barley, i.e., "fields that yielded such quantities of crops". Another, more plausible interpretation, is that the quantities of wheat or barley are the actual measurements of the fields, generally expressed as בית זרע כור / בית זרע א...סאה. Accordingly, the translation of our text will be: "PN's field for whose sowing X *kor/sea* are needed". See also in one of the fifth-century BCE Aramaic letters of Arsham: בית זרע א 30 "a farm of 30 *ardabs* (Driver 1965: No. VIII:2, 4).

The element שלך is unusual in Hebrew personal names, but it is common in Phoenician ones (Benz 1972:416–417).

2. Reg. No. 1230/2, Fig. 5.

12...טבשלם...[ור]קרבא  
 שלם.בן.3...  
 ...טבשלם...

Qerab'[ur] --- Tobshillem --- 12  
 Shallum son of --- 3  
 --- Tobshillem ---



Fig 5. Ostrakon 2.

Perhaps at the beginning of line 3 the name אלעזר was written, but the remains are very faint.

3. Reg No. 1242/1, Fig. 6.

• [בזנ •]



Fig. 6. Ostrakon 3.

Only *bet*, *zayin* and *nun* can be read. Before the *bet* there may be the left edge of a *resh*, or perhaps of an *alef*. The remnants that follow the *nun* may belong to a numeral. If this is so, we have no suggestion for reconstruction of a meaningful text.

There is a faint possibility that after the *nun* there is a *het*. In this case the word זנה may have been intended. The biblical town זנוח (identified as the mound, Ḥorbat Zanoah) is at a distance of half-a-kilometer from the finding place of these ostraca. This reading, however, is very problematic.

### Discussion

The ostraca raise certain issues relating to the measurement or produce of fields belonging to several persons—most of them bearing Judahite personal names typical of the end of the seventh century BCE (Aharoni 1981: No. 31; Tur-Sinai 1987: No.1; Avigad 1997: Nos. 178, 489–491, 508, 509, 623, 667, 668; Shoham 2000).

The word שדה (field) does not specify the kind of activity performed in it, although it was probably used for cereal production.<sup>5</sup> Apparently the ostraca were connected with the activity in the fields around the complex. At any rate, Ostraca 1 and 2 seem to be accounting documents, referring probably to a local administration of fields and/or their produce.

According to the archaeological finds of Cave A-2 and Installations A-1, A-3 and A-10 (Plan 1), it seems that Site 94/21 was part of a complex devoted to wine production. The burnt

olive tree wood sample retrieved in the chamber of Cave A-2, and Installations A-8 and A-9 (Plan 1), could also attest to olive cultivation and oil production in the area.

If the Arabic name Kh. Zanu' is correctly identified with biblical Zanoah in the list of Joshua 15:34 (cf. Kallai 1954:933–934, Rainey 1983:7; Dagan 1996:138)<sup>6</sup>, then Site 94/21 could be identified as part of one of the חצרים (hamlets) in the periphery of this city. The possible reading of Ostraca 3 as “in Zanoah” (בזנה), while very faint, could support this suggestion. In any case, that the two sites are contemporaneous is indicated by pottery from Iron IIC collected at Kh. Zanu' during the survey conducted by Dagan (1992:92), as well as in a small excavation at his Site 05/4 on the northwest slopes of the tell (Yehuda Dagan, pers. comm.).

In sum, according to the ostraca and other finds from Site 94/21, and following arguments adopted for the *lmlk* and “rosette” storage jars (Aharoni 1979:400; Rainey 1982; Cahill 1995:247–252), the complex may be attributed to the last years of the Judahite monarchy, as part of a center involved in a combination of cereal, wine, and olive oil production.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The excavation (Permit No. A-2308) was directed by Ianir Milevski with the assistance of Damian Vainstub and Yehuda Bueller (area supervisors), Stas I. Stark, Michael Vilchik and Andrei Shilkow (surveyors), and Shai Sopher (administrator). Restoration of the pottery vessels was by Shula Blankstein and Ludmilla Margulis, and photography of the finds was by Tsila Sagiv. Final plans were drawn by Natalia Zak and Ashraf Abu Diab; drawings of pottery vessels were by Luba Poliakov. The author

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<sup>2</sup> For more details of the geomorphology of the area see Barzilay, forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> The complete report on the pottery assemblage from Cave A-2 will be published in Milevski, forthcoming. For a previous short report on the excavation see Milevski 1998.

<sup>4</sup> The wood was identified by Uri Baruch, Israel Antiquities Authority. The meager samples were unified a posteriori in the laboratory (RT-2438). The results of the dating were  $2635 \pm 100$  B.P., calibrated date 908–759 BCE (67%)—677–549 BCE (33%) (Segal and Carmi 1996). The problems raised will be discussed in the final report (Milevski, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> The word *šdh*, parallel to Biblical *sdh* (cf. Brown, Driver and Briggs 1979:961), appeared on several

ostraca related to different types of agricultural use of fields (e.g., Milik 1959:550). In Ugaritic documents RS 15.116 and RS 19.016 a list of names, probably of servants, is related to fields (*šdm*). These persons were probably owners of the fields who provided grain as a tax on their harvests (Pardee 1999).

<sup>6</sup> The edition of this list must be dated to the end of the seventh century BCE as was suggested by Alt (1925) and more recently by Na'aman (1986, 1991).

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