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The Ancient Written Wor(l)d



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COVER ILLUSTRATIONS

FRONT: Funerary Inscription of Gauthier de Minneabeuf and His Wife Alemanne; 'Akko, the Crusader Period (Photography: © RMN-Grand Palais Jean-Gilles Berizzi)

BACK: Mosaic Greek Inscription in the Refectory of the Hura Monastery, Byzantine Period (Photography: Niki Davidov)

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACOR	American Center of Oriental Research
AIHV	Association internationale pour l'histoire du verre
ANSGBA	Annual of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
' <i>Atiqot</i> (ES)	' <i>Atiqot</i> (English Series)
' <i>Atiqot</i> (HS)	' <i>Atiqot</i> (Hebrew Series)
BAIAS	<i>Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society</i> (Strata BAIAS from 2010)
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>
BIES	<i>Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society</i> (Hebrew)
BJ	<i>Bonner Jahrbücher</i>
BMB	<i>Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
ESI	<i>Excavations and Surveys in Israel</i>
HA-ESI	<i>Ḥadashot Arkheologiyot—Excavations and Surveys in Israel</i> (from 1999)
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
INJ	<i>Israel Numismatic Journal</i>
INR	<i>Israel Numismatic Research</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i>
JEMAHS	<i>Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies</i>
JFA	<i>Journal of Field Archaeology</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSP	<i>Judea & Samaria Publications</i>
LA	<i>Liber Annus</i>
NC	<i>The Numismatic Chronicle</i>
NEAEHL	E. Stern and A. Lewinson-Gilboa eds. <i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> 1–4. Jerusalem 1993
OBO	<i>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PG	J.-P. Migne ed. <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca</i> . Paris 1857–1866
QDAR	<i>Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RDAC	Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus
SBF	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
SCI	<i>Scripta Classica Israelica</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

EDITORIAL

'Atiqot 110 marks a turning point in the publication of this long-standing, leading journal of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). Beginning with the current volume, *'Atiqot* will be a thematic journal, publishing research articles alongside excavation reports, with each volume dedicated to a chosen topic. *'Atiqot* articles—now exclusively in English—are published online (Open Access; <https://atiqot.org.il/>) and in print, reaching out to scholars and the broader public in Israel and abroad. In its new format, *'Atiqot* seeks to present its readers with studies on a vast array of archaeological finds, thus adding significantly to the ever-growing body of archaeological research from Israel.

The revised *'Atiqot*, conceptualized some two years ago, was devised in response to shifts in the way that archaeological data is disseminated and consumed. Today's world of publication marks a sea change in the way that information is presented and accessed. It is thus only natural that the publication of archaeological studies will partake in this new era of publications. In pursuit of this goal, the IAA is engaged in the development of new publication platforms and the renovation of existing ones. The new, thematic *'Atiqot* combines IAA excavation reports and up-to-date research articles, opening many avenues to researchers and provoking thought for those interested in a specific topic. The topics are chosen by the journal Editorial Board, and scholars worldwide are invited to submit research papers.

'Atiqot 110—The Ancient Written Wor(l)d—focuses on writing in the ancient world from the Iron Age to the Ottoman period. The volume brings together the final publication of two excavations that revealed significant inscriptions from the Byzantine period along with 21 research articles presenting newly discovered textual objects, as well as new understandings of previously known ones. While text-bearing artifacts associated with the rich tradition of writing and scribal culture in the Southern Levant are known in Israel from as early as the Middle Bronze Age, their number increased greatly in Iron Age II, perhaps due to the transition from the Proto-Canaanite script to a cursive alphabet. A plethora of textual objects dating from Iron II onward has been discovered, even though the primary materials that served as media for texts—papyrus and parchment—usually do not survive. The rich assemblage of documents from the Judean desert, spanning almost two millennia (<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/learn-about-the-scrolls/historical-timeline>), indicate that what had been found in the rest of Israel, where the climate is far less hospitable to the preservation of organic materials, comprise only a small fraction of the writings of ancient times.

Text-bearing artifacts are among the most intriguing and exciting finds in the field of archaeology. Whether inscribed on stone or pottery, written in ink on pottery, parchment or papyrus, or set within mosaic floors, words always open a window onto the past. In many ancient societies, writing and literacy were limited to the choice few, usually members of the political, religious and intellectual elites. Written objects were of importance, whether they could be read by the few or the many, and the messages conveyed may have been personal, administrative, political or religious. Most impressive are monumental inscriptions, which

were symbols of power that transmitted a message of dominance and wisdom even for those who could not read them. Thus, textual finds allow us a measure of insight into the political, economic and cultural environment in which they were produced, and at times even on the individuals who were either responsible for their production or their intended readers.

Language and script served as markers of cultural identity for people in antiquity, as well as for scholars studying the texts today. While differences in language and script allow scholars to distinguish between various entities, they also reflect a creolization of cultural entities in contact zones. In recent years, studies of textual objects have begun looking beyond the written texts, into the media on which they were written, to enrich our understanding of the examined texts. Studying texts as artifacts—their material and mode of production, as well as their archaeological provenance—sheds light on their chronology, cultural context and importance, and assists in their attribution. Viewed in this light, objects related to writing, such as inkwells, can be of importance in understanding writing practices, even if they do not bear any writing.

Due to their great importance in reconstructing past societies and events, and in view of the immense public interest in ancient written objects and documents, particularly from Israel, a word of caution is in order. Like all other archaeological artifacts, the context of their discovery carries much weight in considering their contribution to our archaeological and historical knowledge. While artifacts coming from controlled archaeological excavations, particularly from *in situ* contexts, provide the most secure evidence, the provenance of many inscriptions and documents remains uncertain. This creates ethical, moral and academic dilemmas: Can and should we, as scholars, publish such texts? Are there ways in which these texts can be authenticated? Should they even be examined for authentication? On the one hand, ignoring textual objects may lead to the loss of important data, but on the other hand, the introduction of false data is likely to be even more detrimental to our understanding of the past. Complicating things even further, the medium may be authentic, with only the inscription forged. Protocols on how such artifacts are studied should constantly be reviewed and updated, in consultation with scholars from a variety of disciplines and institutions. Further caution needs to be taken in sensational interpretations of artifacts as a whole, but particularly texts, which have often been used to “redefine” everything we thought we knew; more often than not, such claims turn out to be baseless and are not such revolutionary data. We thus hope that the publication of the array of textual finds presented in the current volume of *‘Atiqot* will contribute to the complex yet crucial discussion of such artifacts and the questions they raise.

Individuals and societies of the past lived in what is for us “a foreign country,” and all we can know about them is gleaned from the piecing together of bits and pieces of information left behind. We believe that the papers in this first volume of the renovated *‘Atiqot* discuss with proper caution, balance and respect the textual evidence that different individuals and societies left behind.