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The 'Išba'al Inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa

YOSEF GARFINKEL, MITKA R. GOLUB, HAGGAI MISGAV, AND SAAR GANOR

A new West Semitic inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa is presented. It was incised in Canaanite alphabetic script on a pottery storage jar before firing. Radiometric dating of the relevant layer has yielded a date of ca. 1020–980 B.C.E. The last few years have seen the publication of several new Semitic alphabetic inscriptions dated to the late 11th–10th centuries B.C.E. and originating at controlled excavations in Israel (Khirbet Qeiyafa, Beth Shemesh, Tell eš-Šâfi, and Jerusalem). The new inscription is an important addition to this corpus.

Keywords: Baal; Personal Names; Khirbet Qeiyafa; Semitic epigraphy; Iron Age inscription

The State of Research

The invention of the alphabetic script is one of the most important achievements of humankind. It was developed at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E., probably by Canaanites who were deeply influenced by the Egyptian writing system (Sass 1988; 2005; Darnell et al. 2005; Goldwasser 2006; Hamilton 2006). This earliest type of alphabetic script has been given various names over the years: Sinitic, Proto-Sinitic, Proto-Canaanite, Old Canaanite, and Canaanite (the term we use here). At this early stage, there was no standardization in the number, shape, or stance of the letters or in the direction of writing. The Canaanite script was not used for official documents. Instead, the Canaanite city-states used cuneiform, as seen in the Amarna letters (Moran 1992; Horowitz and Oshima 2006).

In the early first millennium B.C.E., the Canaanite script underwent a major evolution, becoming what

is known as the “Phoenician script.” Originally, scholars believed that this transition took place at the end of the second millennium B.C.E.; however, the radiometric dating of Khirbet Qeiyafa indicates a later date (Misgav, Garfinkel, and Ganor 2009; Hamilton 2014). At this new phase, standardization was imposed on the number, and stance of the letters (direction that they were facing), and the direction of writing (from right to left). The Phoenician script became the official script of the various kingdoms in the Levant, including Israel and Judah, and in part of Anatolia (Naveh 1982; Sass 2005).

Until recently, the latest phase of the Canaanite script was obscure. Relevant data, like bronze arrowheads inscribed with personal names and an inscription from 'Izbet Šartah (Cross 1992; Demsky 1977), came either from the antiquities market or unclear chronological contexts. Traditionally, these inscriptions have been dated to the 12th–11th centuries B.C.E. This thesis has recently undergone a radical change in light of new finds from controlled excavations.

In 2008, the excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa unearthed a new Canaanite inscription containing 70 letters and organized in five lines—the longest known inscription of this script (Misgav, Garfinkel, and Ganor 2009; see below). As the site has only one Iron Age occupation layer, this find provides a chronological anchor for the first time, showing that the use of the Canaanite script in southern Canaan extended into the 10th century B.C.E. Two other Canaanite inscriptions were found at Khirbet Qeiyafa; one of them is published here, and we are still deciphering the other. Since 2008, six inscriptions dated to the late 11th–10th centuries B.C.E. have become known: three from Khirbet Qeiyafa and three from various sites in the region: Tell

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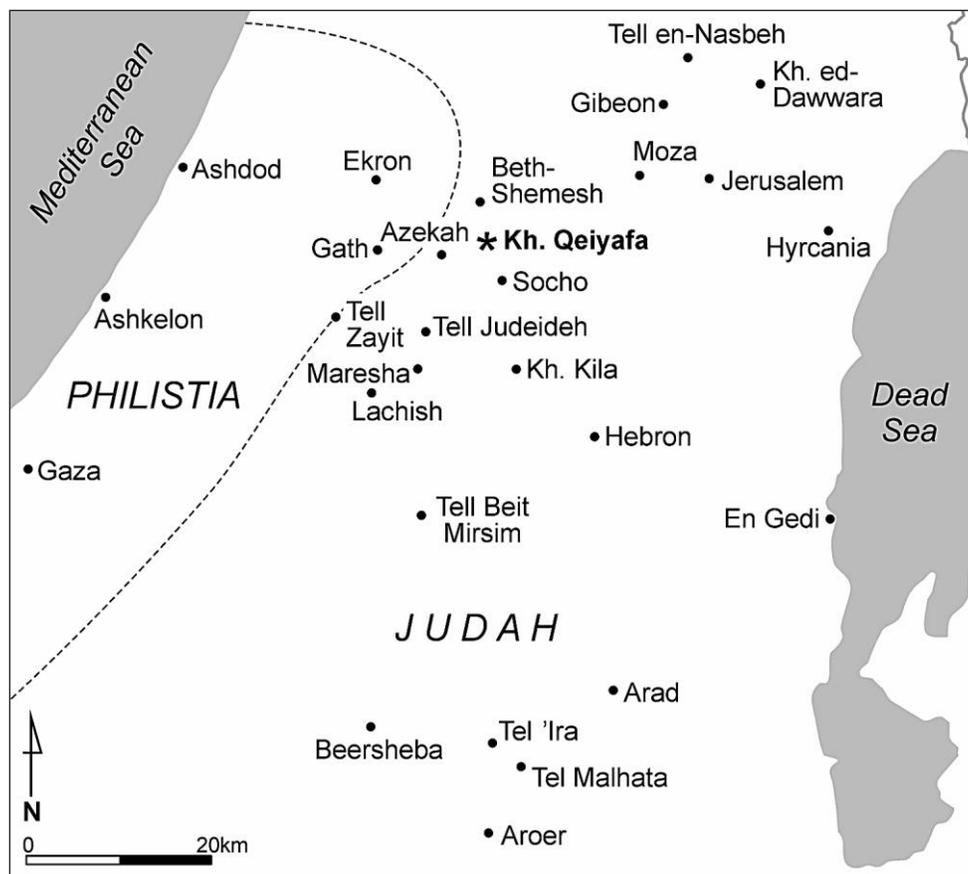


Fig. 1. A map of the biblical kingdom of Judah and the location of sites mentioned in the text. (Map courtesy of the Khirbet Qeiyafa expedition)

eş-Şâfi, Beth Shemesh, and Jerusalem (Maier et al. 2008; McCarter, Bunimovitz, and Lederman 2011; Mazar, Ben-Shlomo, and Ahituv 2013). They are all on pottery, either written in ink or incised. Deciphering these inscriptions is problematic: sometimes the signs do not resemble known letters, frequently there is no clear division between words, and it is not clear whether the inscription should be read from left to right or right to left. The Canaanite script of the late 11th–10th centuries B.C.E. has recently attracted much attention (see, e.g., Sanders 2008; Lemaire 2012; and Finkelstein and Sass 2013), but the new inscriptions from Jerusalem and Khirbet Qeiyafa were not yet known when these articles were published.

The Context of the New Inscription

Khirbet Qeiyafa is located in Israel, ca. 30 km southwest of Jerusalem (Fig. 1). The excavations were conducted on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, directed by Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor. The fieldwork started in 2007 and was completed in 2013. One excavation season was conducted

every summer, for a total of seven seasons altogether. Approximately 30% of the site was uncovered and large parts of an Iron Age city were excavated (Figs. 2–3). The inscription presented here was found in the 2012 season.

The site of Khirbet Qeiyafa was occupied in various periods: Late Chalcolithic, Middle Bronze, Iron, Persian-Hellenistic, and Byzantine. The main phase of occupation was the Iron Age, featuring a fortified city. This settlement was suddenly destroyed, and all the finds from its floors are dated to the same time, late 11th to early 10th century B.C.E. (Garfinkel and Ganor 2009; Garfinkel, Ganor, and Hasel 2010; 2012; Garfinkel 2011; Garfinkel and Kang 2011).

The inscribed jar was found in Area C, Building C11, on the floor of Room B (Locus C6968) in the destruction debris immediately above the floor (Loci C6913 and C9641). Its fragments were collected in Buckets C11487, C11591, and C11592.

Building C11 is elongated in shape and is divided into three architectural units (Figs. 4–5):

Room A is located on the north side of the building. The single entrance to the entire building is located on the



Fig. 2. Aerial view of Khirbet Qeiyafa at the end of the 2012 excavation season, looking north. Area C is located at the bottom. (Photograph by Sky View)

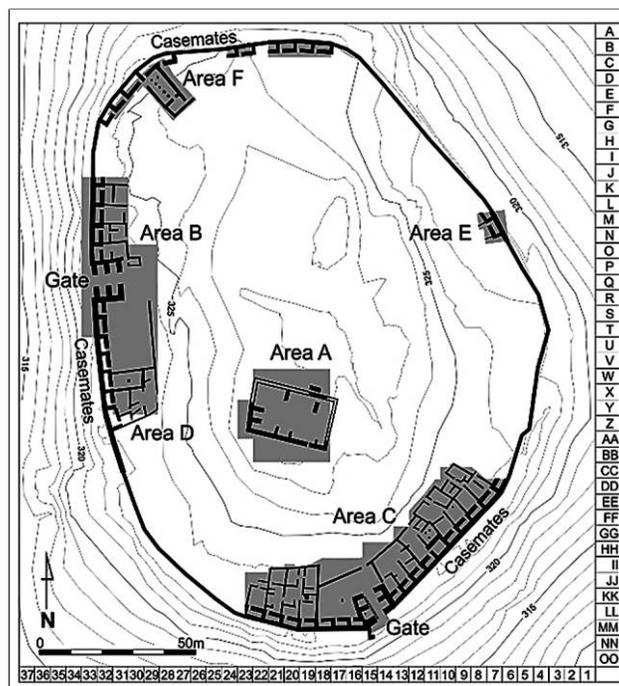


Fig. 3. Excavation map of the Iron Age city of Khirbet Qeiyafa. The inscription under discussion here was found in Area C. Another inscription (previously published) was found in the 2008 excavation season in Area B. (Map courtesy of the Khirbet Qeiyafa Expedition)



Fig. 4. Aerial view of Building C11. (Photo by Sky View)

west side of this room, via two monolithic steps. These truly monumental steps are unique in the site's domestic architecture. From this room, there was an entrance into Room B to the south. Two complete storage jars were found on the floor of the room (designated C6947), next to the southern wall.

Room B is south of Room A. It had a single impressive entrance from Room A to the north. The inner dimensions of the room are ca. 6×5 m. The walls are built of exceptionally large stones—the size usually found integrated into the city wall. The walls are well preserved, sometimes up to 1.5 m in height. Despite the large size of the room, no partition walls of any kind were found in it; hence, it may have been an open courtyard. This is the largest room uncovered in the Iron Age city.

The floor of Room B was excavated as Floors C6967 and C6968. It was covered by a massive stone collapse (C6895), sloping down from north to south and indicating that the stones collapsed from the city wall. Pottery sherds were found between the stones and in the debris that accumulated in the room. Although most of the floor of Room B consists of beaten earth in its western part near Wall C6985, the high bedrock was chiseled down to the same level as the floor. No indication of pillars or pillar bases was found in Room B. This observation, together with the existence of a hearth in the exact middle

of the room, suggests that the unit was in fact an open courtyard rather than a roofed room.

The floor of the room was rich in finds and installations, including a complete storage jar and many restorable vessels. The fragments of an inscribed storage jar were found on the floor in the northeastern corner of the room.

Room C is a city wall casemate located south of Courtyard B and has a single opening from Room B. Since the casemate's floor was lower than that of Room B, there were steps in the entryway leading down to Room C, although these were severely damaged. Several pottery vessels were found on the beaten earth floor.

Radiometric Dating

Two radiometric projects were conducted. The results of the first project were fully published (Garfinkel et al. 2012). Based on 10 measurements of burned olive pits, it was ascertained that the Iron Age IIA city of Khirbet Qeiyafa came to an end at some time between 1020 and 980 B.C.E. (Fig. 6). A second radiometric project was conducted with 17 measurements of olive pits, all found inside one jar. The results of this project placed the end of the city between 1018 and 948 B.C.E. at 68.2% (Fig. 7; Garfinkel et al. in press). When both projects are combined, the end

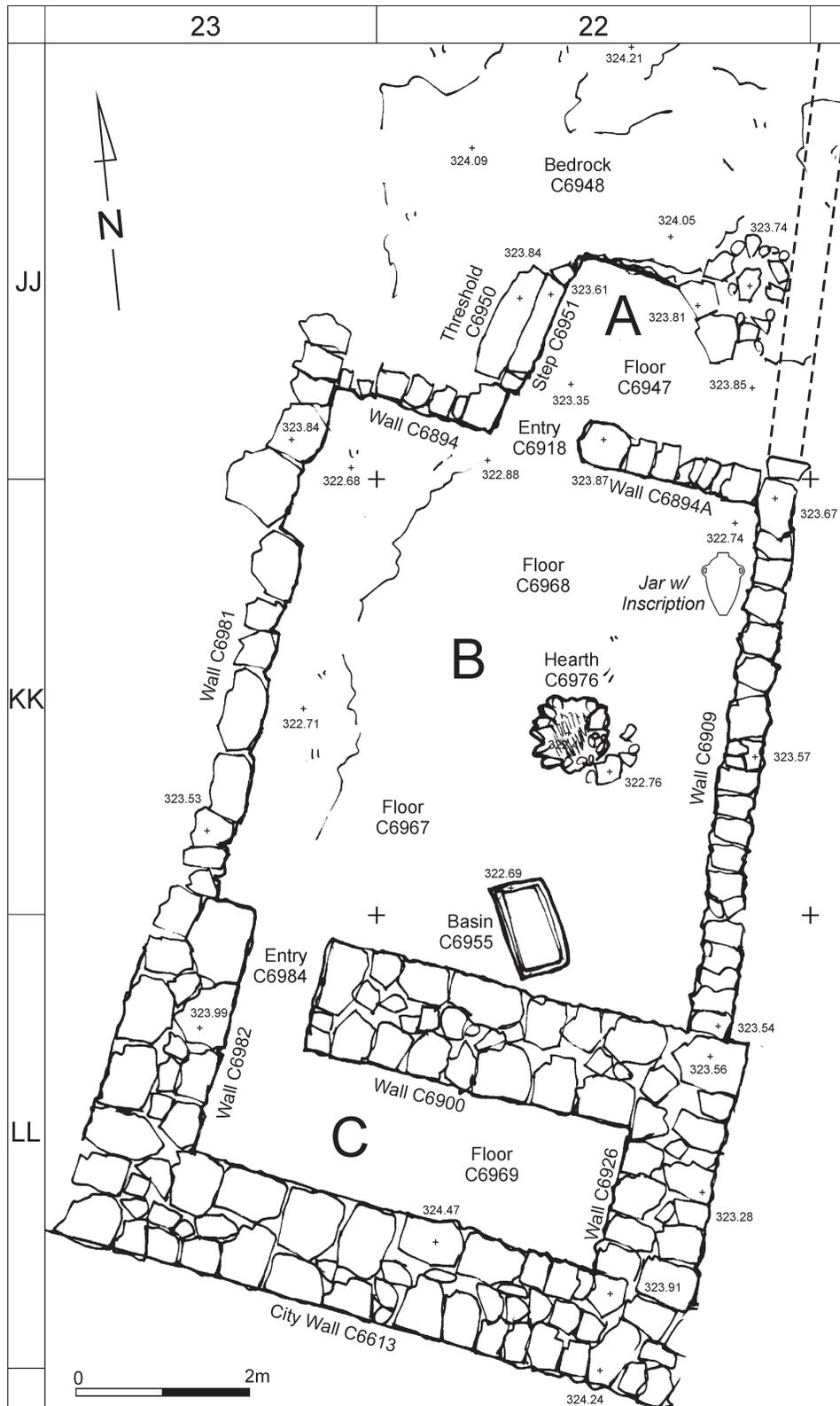


Fig. 5. Excavation map of Building C11. The fragments of the inscription were found in the northeastern corner of the room. (Map courtesy of the Khirbet Qeiyafa Expedition)

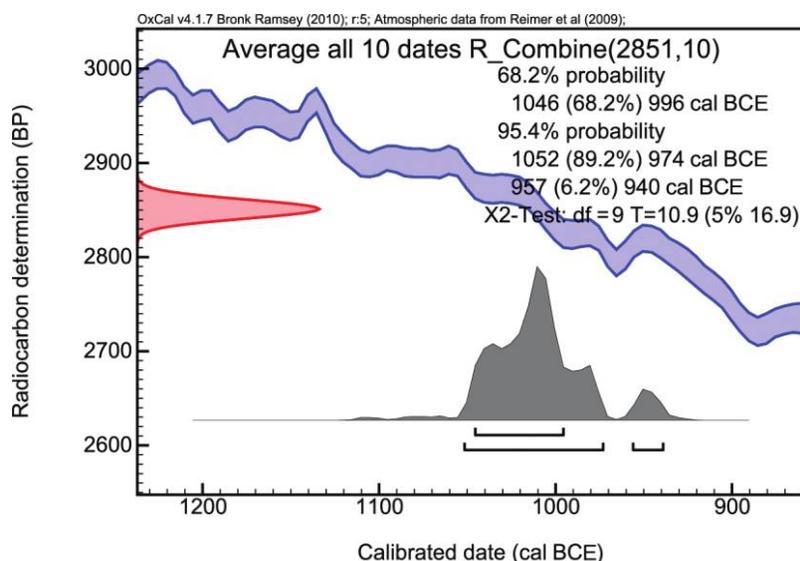


Fig. 6. Khirbet Qeiyafa's first radiometric project: calibrated probability distribution of the average of 10 determinations. (Graph courtesy of the Khirbet Qeiyafa Expedition)

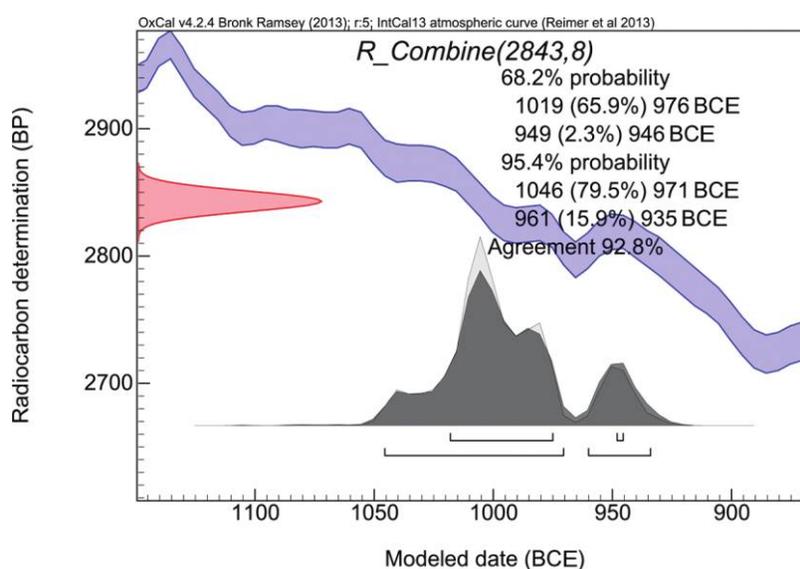


Fig. 7. Khirbet Qeiyafa's second radiometric project: calibrated probability distribution of the average of all 17 determinations from Jar C11747 shown with the IntCal13 calibration curve. (Graph courtesy of the Khirbet Qeiyafa Expedition)

boundary, which indicates the destruction of the city, is calculated as 1006–970 B.C.E. at 68.2%.

The New Inscription

The inscription was incised before firing, written from right to left on the shoulder of a pottery storage

jar. It was recognized in the field; thus, all of the sediment from the room was sifted and every piece of pottery was collected, even if only a few millimeters in size. In the lab, all of the pottery was spread on tables, and the painstaking process of restoration was undertaken in order to recover all of the fragments from the jar and its inscription (Figs. 8–9).



Fig. 8. The storage jar during restoration. (Photo by Y. Garfinkel)

The jar was photographed in three dimensions by Absalom Karasik at the Israel Antiquities Authority (Fig. 10). The inscription was photographed by Tal Rogozin (Figs. 11–14). The inscription was later drawn by Ada Yardeni (Figs. 15–17). The letters of the inscription are large and clear, similar in size and evenly spaced, and were written by a skilled hand in Canaanite script. A short, straight vertical line (a word divider) appears between each pair of words. The inscription includes a personal name: [] | ʾšbʿl | ʾbnʾ | bdʿ (ʾIšbaʿal son of Bedaʿ).¹ The name Bedaʿ is unique,² while ʾIšbaʿal is known from the Bible but has never yet appeared on an ancient inscription.

The first few letters of the inscription are partially preserved, but judging by the upper or lower edges that are still visible, the first word seems to have four letters: *kaf*, *bet* or *pe*, *resh* or *qof*, and the last one being *tav*, probably indicating the feminine ending. As this part is so damaged, we will not speculate here on any specific reconstruction. On principle, two different reconstructions may be suggested for the word preceding ʾIšbaʿal:

1. A place name. Toponyms preceding a family name are found on several incised jar inscriptions from Gibeon (Ahituv 2008: 216–18). In the context of an incised inscription on a large container, such a suggestion would imply that the jar's contents came from the town/estate of ʾIšbaʿal, son of Bedaʿ.
2. Information about the contents of the jar or its function.

¹ *bdʿ* appears to be fully preserved and not broken. Therefore, we do not interpret *bdʿ* as *bdʿ[štr]*, a common Phoenician name (Benz 1972: 82).

² On a Hebrew seal from Arad, we find the name *dršyhw b-ʿ*. However, the reading of the patronymic *b-ʿ* is uncertain. Naveh suggested *bšʿ* and Aharoni suggested *bn ʿzX* (*ʿzr*, *ʿz*, or just *ʿz*) (Avigad 1997: no. 132).



Fig. 9. The storage jar after restoration. (Photo by T. Rogozin)

The Script

The new incised inscription clearly reads from right to left, unlike the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostrakon, which was apparently written from left to right (Misgav, Garfinkel, and Ganor 2009) or from top to bottom (Demsy 2012) (Figs. 18–19). Accordingly, some letters on the new inscription face the opposite direction from those on the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostrakon. One of the features that characterizes the Canaanite script, and distinguishes it from the Phoenician, is the difference in the stance of the same letters. The low number of examples of Canaanite script, dating from the late Iron Age I or early Iron Age II, precludes us from determining whether the accepted direction of writing was from left to right or right to left.

The design of the incised letters on the new inscription is essentially the same as that of the letters on the ostrakon. The letters will be discussed in the order of their appearance on the inscription.

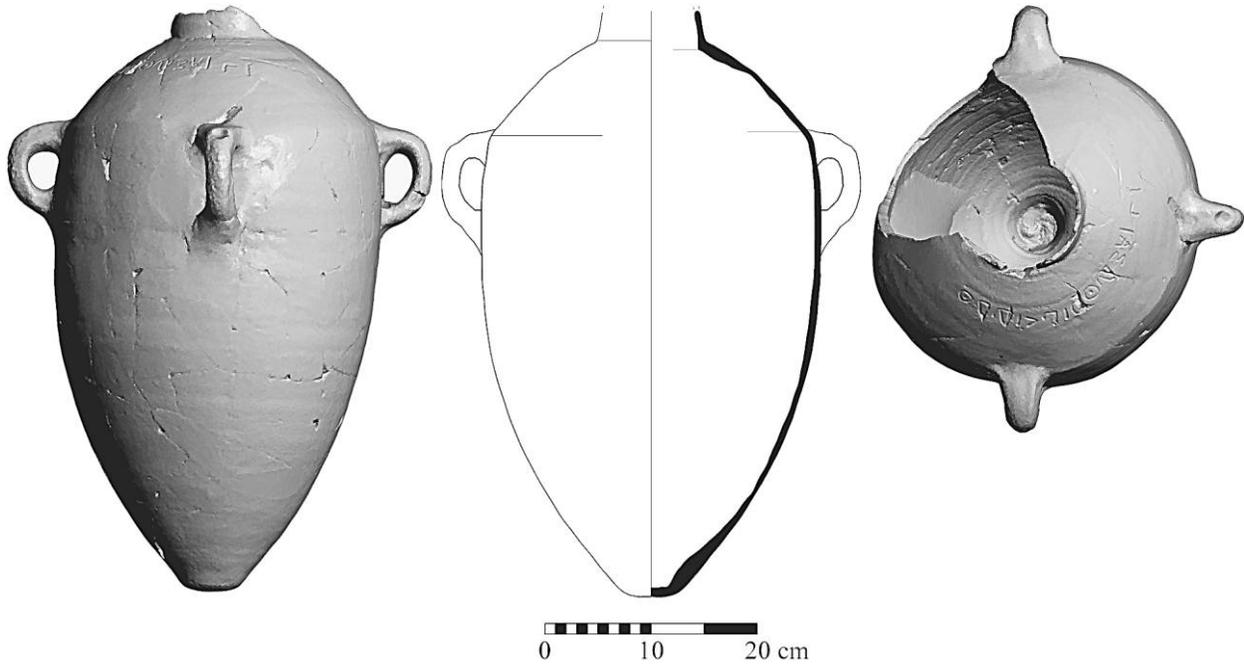


Fig. 10. The restored jar. (Drawings and reconstructions by A. Karasik, Israel Antiquities Authority)



Fig. 11. General view of the inscription. (Photo by T. Rogozin)



Fig. 12. Close-up of the severely damaged right side of the inscription. (Photo by T. Rogozin)



Fig. 13. Close-up of the central part of the inscription. (Photo by T. Rogozin)



Fig. 16. The inscription of ʾIšbaʿal, son of Bedaʿ, from Khirbet Qeiyafa, with emphasized letters. (Drawing by A. Yardeni)

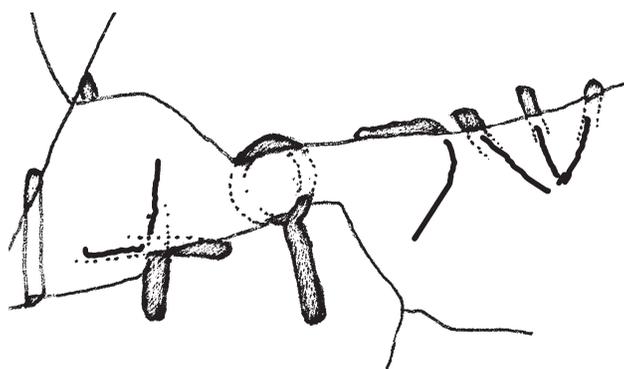


Fig. 17. Close-up of the severely damaged right side of the inscription. (Drawing and reconstruction by A. Yardeni)

Aleph: The letter stands on its point here; as such, it is symmetrical, and one cannot know in which direction it would face if it were rotated by 90°, as it is in one of the three different stances of this letter on the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostrakon.



The crossbar of the *aleph* (horizontal in this inscription) does not cross the boundaries of the diagonal lines. A variation of the same letter appears in the ostrakon

(Fig. 19, line 2). The Qubur al-Walaydah bowl has a similar morphology for its *aleph*, although with a different stance (Cross 1980: 1–4). Note that the crossbar of the *aleph* of the Tel Zayit abecadary does cross the boundaries of the diagonals (Tappy and McCarter 2008).

Shin: Despite the asymmetry of the letter, it remains similar in form to the number 3, like the *shin* in the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostrakon.





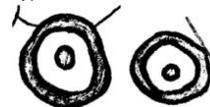
Fig. 18. The first Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription: the ostracon uncovered in the 2008 excavation season. (Photo by Megavision Laboratory)

Bet: This letter stands on its point as in the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon, but in the opposite direction. In the later Phoenician script, the *bet* is reversed and rotated 90° clockwise in comparison with the *bet* in the inscription (see, e.g., Rollston 2014: 208–9).



Ayin: The pupil of the eye is the hallmark of the Canaanite script and appears here. Though the pupil

disappears and the letter becomes a simple circle during the 10th century B.C.E. (see, e.g., Rollston 2014: 223), a dotted *ayin* is still seen in the Phoenician script, such as on a bowl from Kfar Veradim (Alexandre 2006).



Lamed: This letter stands on its closed part. The left arm of the *lamed* is higher than the right, as in the Phoenician script (see, e.g., Rollston



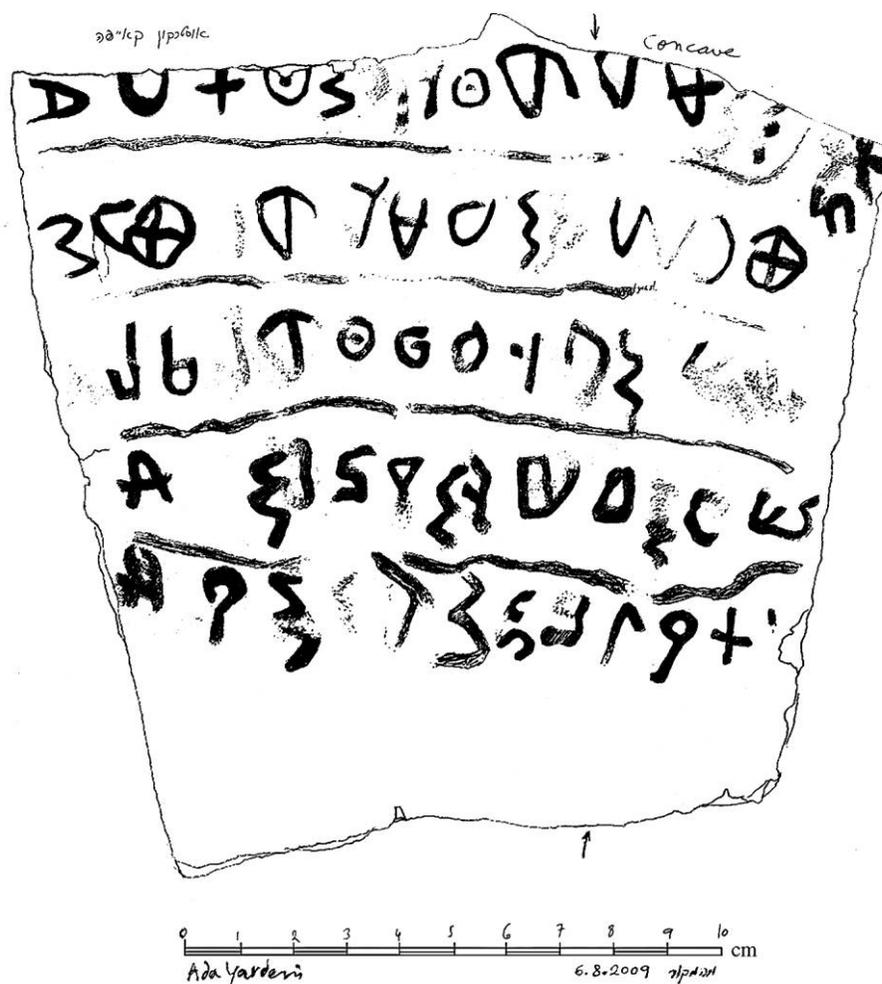


Fig. 19. The first Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription: the ostracon uncovered in the 2008 excavation season. (Drawing by A. Yardeni)

2014: 219). In the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon, two different stances of the *lamed* can be identified.

Nun: Only the upper part of the letter has been preserved. Nevertheless, it seems to face the opposite direction from the *nun* in the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon. Again, in the Phoenician script, the direction is reversed from that of the ʾIšbaʿal inscription (see, e.g., Rollston 2014: 221).



Dalet: This letter too stands on its point. Since the *dalet*, like the *aleph*, is symmetrical, its stance remains the same whether written from left to right or right to left.



As mentioned above, despite the fact that the letters *bet*, *lamed*, and *nun* face in the opposite direction from

the same letters on the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon, their general shape is the same in both inscriptions. This opposite stance may be explained by the different direction of writing: right to left in the ʾIšbaʿal inscription versus left to right on the ostracon. It is evident that there was a solid tradition of writing at Khirbet Qeiyafa, whether in ink or incised on clay before firing.

The new inscription differs from all the other late Canaanite inscriptions known to date: the letters are clear, evenly spaced, and standardized in stance, and the words are clearly separated. As a result, it was easy to decipher the preserved part of the inscription. The skilled hand points to the existence of trained scribes. This new inscription marks a transitional stage between the writing system used for 800 years and the official, standardized Phoenician script used by kingdoms and states in Canaan by at least the 10th century B.C.E.

Onomastic Aspects

Ba'al appears as a theophoric element in West Semitic personal names, such as the Amorite names from Mari and other sites (Huffmon 1965: 100, 174–75; Gelb 1980: 16, 281–84), the Amarna personal names (Hess 1993: 48–54, 236), the Ugaritic names from Ras Shamra (Gröndahl 1967: 81–82, 114–17), the Phoenician and Punic names (Benz 1972: 90–100, 288–90), and Hebrew names (Fowler 1988: 54–63). Ba'al is the Canaanite storm god, and it may also be the divine appellative “lord/master,” perhaps referring to any god (Benz 1972: 288–90; Tigay 1986: 14, 65–66, 68).

The commonly accepted interpretation of $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ is $\text{ʔ}I\text{š}b\text{a}ʕ$, “man of Ba'al.” Other names with the element ʔ are $\text{ʔ}d\text{r}$, $\text{ʔ}stnt$, and probably $\text{ʔ}štrt$ (Benz 1972: 277). Another possible interpretation of $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ is $\text{ʔ}A\text{š}b\text{a}ʕ$, which is derived from the root $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ “to give,” meaning “Ba'al has given” (Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 287).³ Other names derived from the root $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ are $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ (Yehoash) (2 Kgs 12:1, 13:10), $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ (Yoash) (2 Kgs 11:2, 13:12), and probably $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ (Ashyahu) (Avigad 1997: 73, nos. 70–71) and $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ (Ashyah) (Avigad 1997: 73–74, no. 72). In the Bible, $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ appears as “Esh-ba'al” (RSV). He was the second king of Israel, the son of King Saul, and a rival of David (1 Chr 8:33). Unlike Chronicles, the book of Samuel uses the name Ishbosheth (2 Sam 2:10) for the same king, commonly interpreted as “man of shame.” Reflecting a negative attitude toward the Canaanite god Ba'al, the author/editor of Samuel censored the original name and replaced Ba'al with the word Bosheth (“shame”).⁴ Other examples of the replacement of Ba'al in biblical names are the names of Gideon: Jerubbaal (Judg 6:32) and Jerubbesheth (2 Sam 11:21); the names of Jonathan's son: Meribbaal (1 Chr 9:40) and Mephibosheth (2 Sam 4:4); and the names of David's son: Beeliada (“Ba'al knows”) (1 Chr 14:7) and Eliada (“God knows”) (2 Sam 5:16; 1 Chr 3:8). Moreover, it has been suggested that three other individuals bore the name $\text{ʔ}E\text{š}b\text{a}ʕ$, but that the element Ba'al in their name was replaced and the final form became Jashobeam ($\text{ʔ}i\text{š}b\text{ʕ}m$) (Noth 1928: nos. 232, 749, 754, and 756). These individuals are David's mighty man (1 Chr 11:11), the Korahite who joined David at Ziklag (1 Chr 12:7), and the head of David's first course (1 Chr 27:2). All of these names occur in the context of the Davidic period or earlier. In later periods, the Bible mentions no other name with the element Ba'al in Israel or Judah. The name $\text{ʔ}b\text{ʕ}$ is not found on any of the hundreds of inscriptions or on the more than 1,000 seals and seal impressions known from ancient Israel, dated between the ninth and sixth

centuries B.C.E., and recording over 2,000 names (Avigad 1997). Personal names with the element Ba'al, uncovered in excavations in contexts of the ninth through sixth centuries B.C.E. occur in Israel, Philistia, Ammon, and Phoenicia (Golub in press: table 1). In Judah, however, where 495 personal names were found, names with the element Ba'al are absent (Golub 2014: 47, 50). In summary, the name $\text{ʔ}E\text{š}b\text{a}ʕ$ is recorded for one biblical king and likely three other biblical individuals, all from the 10th century B.C.E. In the following centuries, however, the personal name $\text{Eš}b\text{a}ʕ$ or any other personal name with the element Ba'al disappears from the biblical text (Golub 2014: 61–64). Similarly, names with the element Ba'al are also absent from ancient inscriptions from Judah between the ninth and sixth centuries B.C.E.

As mentioned above, the name $bd\text{ʕ}$ is unique and is absent from ancient inscriptions and the Bible. Moreover, the root $bd\text{ʕ}$ is unknown from later periods of Hebrew. In Arabic, however, $bd\text{ʕ}$ is attested with the meaning “to produce, to invent, to begin,” while in Ethiopic it denotes “sudden action” (Cohen 1976: 46). Thus, the name $bd\text{ʕ}$ is probably a hypocoristic (abbreviated) theophoric name where the theophoric element (the divine name) was dropped, meaning “[The deity] has created.” Similar names referring to a god's creative activities are $Bnyhw$, $ʔlqn/qny$, and $ʔyhw/ʔsy$ (Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 277–81, 587–90). Consideration of the two-letter element bd opens additional interpretive possibilities. The element bd is a contraction of the full form byd , meaning “from/by the hand of” (Benz 1972: 283–86). Examples of names with the element bd/byd are $bdb\text{ʕ}$, $bdmlk$, $bdmlqrt$, $bd\text{ʔ}trt$, and $bd\text{ʔ}l/byd\text{ʔ}l$ (Benz 1972: 285; Avigad 1997: 486). Thus, $bd\text{ʕ}$ is probably a hypocoristic theophoric name with an abbreviated theophoric element: $bd\text{ʕ}$ might be an abbreviation of $bd\text{ʕ}m$, meaning “in the hand of the divine uncle” (m is a divine appellative perceiving a god as a paternal uncle). A similar abbreviated name is $rm\text{ʕ}$ —a possible abbreviation of $rm\text{ʕ}m$ (Avigad 1997: no. 345, p. 531). Alternatively, $bd\text{ʕ}$ is an abbreviation of $bd\text{ʔ}trt$, meaning “in the hand of Ashtarte,” or an abbreviation of $bd\text{ʕ}m$, meaning “in the hand of Doam.” Doam ($d\text{ʕ}m$) is a deity known only from personal names in Ugarit, Arabic, and Phoenician-Punic (Benz 1972: 301). Phoenician names with the divine name $d\text{ʕ}m$ are $d\text{ʕ}m\text{h}n\text{ʔ}$, $d\text{ʕ}m\text{lk}$, and $d\text{ʕ}m\text{š}l\text{h}$ (Benz 1972: 108). Since names with an abbreviated theophoric element are not common, we prefer the first presented interpretation of $bd\text{ʕ}$ —“[The deity] has created.”

Summary

From a palaeographic point of view, the $\text{ʔ}I\text{š}b\text{a}ʕ$ inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa presents a clear case of a Canaanite inscription written from right to left. The letters of the inscription are large and clear, similar in size

³ We thank the anonymous reviewer who drew our attention to this interpretation as well as the interpretation of $bd\text{ʕ}$.

⁴ For a detailed discussion on pejorative names in the Hebrew Bible, see Rollston 2013: 377–82.

and evenly spaced. A short, straight vertical line (a word divider) appears between the words. The writing quality of this inscription is higher than that of most other known Canaanite inscriptions, indicating a skilled hand. This inscription cannot be considered as a writing exercise. From a chronological point of view, this inscription, together with the five inscriptions mentioned above, indicate that the Canaanite script was still in use in the 10th century B.C.E. (Hamilton 2014). The limited geographical distribution of five out of the six inscriptions—Khirbet Qeiyafa (three inscriptions), Beth Shemesh (one inscrip-

tion), and Jerusalem (one inscription)—indicates that writing was practiced in this region by the early 10th century B.C.E. From an onomastic point of view, the new inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa presents the names Badaʿ (*bdʿ*) and ʾIšbaʿal (*ʾšbʿl*) for the first time in an ancient inscription. The name *ʾšbʿl* appears in the Bible in the context of the 10th century B.C.E. In the following centuries, however, any personal name with the element Baʿal disappears from the biblical text as well as from ancient inscriptions from Judah between the ninth and sixth centuries B.C.E.

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