Anat Mendel-Geberovich: Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel 6997801; anat.mendel@mail.huji.ac.il

Arie Shaus: Department of Applied Mathematics, Sackler Faculty of Exact Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel 6997801; ashaus@post.tau.ac.il

Shira Faigenbaum-Golovin: Department of Applied Mathematics, Sackler Faculty of Exact Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel 6997801; shirafaigen@gmail.com

Barak Sober: Department of Applied Mathematics, Sackler Faculty of Exact Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel 6997801; baraks@post.tau.ac.il

Michael Cordonsky: School of Physics and Astronomy, Sackler Faculty of Exact Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel 6997801; mcordi@tauphy.tau.ac.il

Eli Piaetzky: School of Physics and Astronomy, Sackler Faculty of Exact Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel 6997801; eip@tauphy.tau.ac.il

Israel Finkelstein: Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel 6997801; fink2@post.tau.ac.il

Method: Multispectral Imaging

An experimental study (Faigenbaum et al. 2012) demonstrated that (a) the optimal imaging wavelength for ostraca lies between 550 nm and 950 nm; and (b) ten different bandpass filters are sufficient for capturing the most favorable image. Accordingly, we used a standard digital camera that is sensitive to the visual spectrum (i.e., 400–700 nm), with its internal infrared (IR) cut filter removed and replaced with transparent glass in order to enhance the camera sensitivity in IR wavelengths (i.e., up to 1,000 nm). Thereafter, the spectrum was sliced into ten channels utilizing commercial external bandpass filters. Using this system, we produced spectral cubes of ten images for each side of the ostracon. We selected the best images (taken at 830 nm for the recto and 890 nm for the verso), based on an algorithm that we developed (described in Faigenbaum et al. 2012 and Shaus et al. 2017). In order to improve the legibility of the images, we performed contrast and brightness manipulations via the freely available ImageJ 1.48V and IrfanView 4.38 software applications. The facsimiles of the inscription were created by us manually, aided by computer software. For further technical details, see Faigenbaum-Golovin et al. 2017.

Figure 1 depicts the recto, comparing an image taken shortly after the excavations with a current color image and with an 830 nm image taken via our multispectral imaging system. Figure 2 (a–c) depicts the verso, comparing a current color image to an 890 nm image taken via our multispectral imaging system (see below). The facsimiles represent our new reading of the ostracon.

Recto

Aharoni read the inscription as follows:


Commentary


Fig. 1. Recto of Arad Ostracon 16: (a) An image taken shortly after the excavations (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority); (b) 830 nm image taken via our multispectral imaging system; (c) current color image; and (d) our facsimile (in red: our new readings, as opposed to older readings by Aharoni and others in black; hollow shapes represent reconstructed letters and characters). (Photos b–d by M. Cordonsky; courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University)
took this kinship term, here and in Letters 21 and 40 (נַכְנָךְ, "your son/s"), at face value. Indeed, the noun "brother" (as well as "sister") is used in the praescriptio of letters throughout the ancient Near East—in Akkadian, Aramaic, Ugaritic, as well as in Hebrew letters (Dion 1982; Fitzmyer 1982; Pardee et al. 1982; Moran 1992; Michalowski 1993); to the best of our knowledge, never found in this corpus. However, with the new photographs, its reading here is certain, and this may be its first attestation. To explain its meaning philologically, we adopt the Greek and Latin translations for אהֵבך אַבְרָהָם (Isa 41:8; 2 Chr 20:7), "Abraham thy friend." We cannot say for certain if אהֵבך signifies a military rank, but it would seem that a "friend" could be regarded as Elyashiv's equal.

Lines 1–3 (Figs. 3–5): שלח לשלם אלישב לשלם ביתך: The idiom שלח לשלם also occurs in Arad Letters 21 and 405 (תָּבֹד is missing only in the latter). Another occurrence in Hebrew epigraphy is in the Murabbaʿat

4 Interestingly, Letters 16, 21, and 40 are a distinct group of military reports within the Arad corpus. Besides sharing the salutation formula בִּרְאָר (which was also taken by Pardee to support his theory about genuine kinship, though he later expressed a less confident approach to this question [see Pardee et al. 1982: 49–50 and Pardee 2003: 83]), they are accounts concerning various matters such as money transfer, mail delivery, and the military situation, as opposed to instructions of supply to the Kittim (see Lemaire 1977: 224–26; cf. Na’aman 2015b: 50).

5 See n. 4 above.
Papyrus (Aḥituv 2008: 213–15), and there are other occurrences in Aramaic letters (Pardee et al. 1982: 50; cf. Porten and Yardeni 1999: 16–33).

ברכתך: We agree with André Lemaire (1977: 173) that there is no final kaph that some other scholars see. In the Hebrew Bible, only the passive formulation, DN לבריך, is attested (Gen 14:15; Judg 17:2; Ps 115:15; etc.). In West Semitic epigraphy, the transitive formula is attested as well (Pardee 2003: 83–84; Aḥituv 2008: 113–16): in Hebrew, at Kuntillet ʿAjrud: ברכתך, ברכתך ליהוה, “I bless you to Yahweh” (Aḥituv, Eshel, and Meshel 2012: 87–91, 95–97; cf. לעבידי ב ועבידי ב [Aḥituv, Eshel, and Meshel 2012: 76–77]); in Aramaic, on an ostracon from Elephantine: הברכתך ליהוה, “I bless you to YHH and to Khenum/to Ptah” (e.g., Porten and Yardeni 1999: 172); in Phoenician, in a letter found at Saqqara in Egypt: ברכתך לכל גביים ולכל מקדשים, “I bless you to Baʿal Zaphon and to all the gods of Taḥpanes” (KAI 50); and in Edomite, in the causative H-stem (Hebrew Hipʿil), הברכתך לוכך, “I bless you to Qos,” in an ostracon from Horvat ʿUza (Beit-Arieh 2007: 133–37; Aḥituv 2008: 351–54). Given this well-attested salutation formula, we see ברכתך as a scribal error wherein the author forgot to add the personal pronoun (ך).

Line 3 (Fig. 5): כצאתי: As Aharoni had already noted, only the letters צא are clear; the rest is a reconstruction in light of בושלחתי in line 4. Still, this reconstruction is plausible enough. This “house” may have been Elyashiv’s residence as well as the storeroom of the fortress (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005: 33). The tense of the construct infinitive כצאתי is defined by the tense of the following verb, בושלחתי (cf. Exod 9:29 and Aḥituv 2008: 116). Also, since this is a military report, it seems more probable that this lexeme refers to an accomplished act (pace Pardee 2003: 84; cf. Pardee 1978: 311).

Lines 4–5 (Figs. 6, 7): השלחת בח שם | חוסא ליסנ entreg: The multispectral photographs show that Aharoni’s
reading of סֶפֶר at the beginning of line 5 is impossible (even though סֶפֶר ["money"] is mentioned later in line 8 [see below]). Looking closely at the photograph, one can see that the three parallel lines belong to a samek and not to a he. Following the samek, the traces of a pe can be discerned. It seems that the first word in line 5 is an indefinite noun, probably in a construct state with the following word. We suggest reconstructing here מסַפֶּר, meaning "a written document" (see Lachish Letters 3, 5, 6, 12, 16, and 18; cf. Num 1:2; 1 Chr 27:24; etc.). In Ugaritic, spr has a similar meaning, often occurring at the head of lists and other administrative documents (Dijkstra 1999; for Biblical Hebrew, see Hurvitz 1996). It is therefore appropriate for this word to occur in a military report such as Arad Ostracon 16. It is also clear from our photo that what Aharoni recognized as the hieratic numeral 8—a reading which has gone unchallenged until today (Lemaire 1977: 172–74; Pardee 1978: 311; Pardee et al. 1982: 48–49; Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005: 34)—is not a numeral, but the letter zayin.

The following word, בן, probably serves as the nomen rectum of ספר, either a personal name or a noun. If it is a personal name, then according to Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass (1997: 495), this could be a hypocoristic from the root ZKK (ZKY) "be clean, pure" or a shortened theophorous name with ZKR (cf. also Zadok 1988: 113, 148–49, 156, 263, 316). Compare the post-exilic form בן יר (Ezra 2:9), as well as Naqia/Zakutu, wife of King Sennacherib of Assyria and mother of Esarhaddon. This name, but with a different spelling (ם), is attested on two seal impressions from Beth-Shemesh (Grant and Wright 1939: 84; Avigad and Sass 1997: 248, no. 674). In that case, ספר בן יר would mean "the letter of בן יר"—that is, a letter sent by Zaka to Ge’alyahu (cf. ספר בנו in Lachish Letter 3, verso, line 19). For the second option, we can still point to the root ZKY, with its three different meanings in various Semitic languages and in different types of inscriptions: "ritually pure," "innocent," and "victorious" (Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 320–21). Integrating these meanings with the context of our ostracon, we prefer suggesting that ספר בן יר means in essence "to exonerate (from payment)"—that is, ספר בן יר = "a written receipt." This also fits better with the context of the inscription, dealing with money transfer.

 maar: Our new images make it possible to ascertain that the second letter in this lexeme is a pe, not a bet. The somewhat enigmatic group of the "sons of Ge’alyahu" (Aharoni 1981: 31) is therefore eliminated.

Our photos confirm Aharoni’s reading of the beginning of the line, and his reconstruction of the name מְאָרָיאוֹ. However, we now see a new complement for the marker of the definite direct object (ואת) —"the parcel" (Akkadian jurāru; Gen 42:35; Hag 1:6; Prov 7:20; Song 1:13); in Genesis, Proverbs, and Haggai, we indeed find a context of "a parcel of money," "a purse made of cloth." The noun גֵּבֵּל, thus far not attested in Hebrew epigraphy, but we do find the verbal form גָּבְלָה in Arad Inscription 3, another order of supply from the Elyashiv Archive (Aharoni 1981: 17–18). This interpretation strengthens our understanding that the inscription concerns the transfer of money. If we may indeed translate here גָּבְלָה, the bundle of money, then we may understand that the sender reports to Elyashiv that he sent a receipt (ספר בן יר) to Ge’alyahu but asks Elyashiv to carry with him the actual money, wrapped up in cloth, as well as to return a certain sum for which he gives measures (but cf. line 8 below).

6 Possibly, Arad Ostracon 17, verso, is such a ספר בן יר (see Lemaire 1972; cf. Na’aman 2015a: 93–95).

7 Also in 2 Sam 17:13 and Amos 9:9 but with a different meaning: "kernel" or "pebble."
Interestingly, the phenomenon of silver hoards is attested in various Iron Age II sites in Israel, among them Tel Miqne-Ekron (Golani and Sass 1998; Gitin and Golani 2001), Eshtemoa (Kletter and Brand 1998), 'Ein Gedi (Kletter and de Groot 2007: 370), and Arad itself (Aharoni 1980). In Arad, even though earlier than the period discussed here, the silver—jewelry and metal pieces—was rp (wrapped up) in cloth (Aharoni 1980; cf. Singer-Avitz 2002: 161, n. 16).8

Line 7 (Fig. 9): This line opens with the verb אָשֶׁר, in the imperative. This reading explains נַשְׁתַּת which Aharoni and others already saw: “carry the bundle (of money) with you” (for bundles of money, see above).

[ב]וֹדֵהוּת[מ] Our photo complements and clarifies Aharoni’s original reading: “and you shall return.” There are traces of an additional letter after the tav, perhaps mem, but they are not sufficiently legible. A separation mark follows this and then comes a kaph. There is room for one or two additional letters after the kaph; we suggest reconstructing here הָנָךְ, “all of it.”9

Line 8 (Fig. 10): We read כֶּסֶף בֶּסֶף instead of כָּסָף, which was accepted by many. The phrase “[שָׁעָד אֶפ] + [noun]” is current in Arad: on Ostracon 2, lines 7–8: אֵם דִּבְרֵךְ תָּבֹאָה (that) to them (also)” (see Aharoni 1981: 15–16; the translation from Pardee 2003: 82). כֶּסֶף is followed by two signs that are probably hieratic. The first one is reminiscent of the numeral 5; some traces of ink are attached to its right side, but they are only barely recognizable. Perhaps they could be read as the sheqel sign. The second sign may be understood as the “Xar” sign, attested on Inscriptions 25 (line 2) and 34 (right column, line 2) from Arad and in Kadesh Barnea’s Ostracon 6, left column. It is a sign for measure which has two variants—one with a single downstroke, the other with a double downstroke; both have short horizontal lines on each side of the downstroke(s) (Wimmer 2008: 37, 264).10 The latter variant is attested, according to our reading, on the verso of our ostracon, as well as on Arad Ostracon 8, line 2. The difficulty is that “Xar” represents a measure of dry commodities, not of money; however, an idiosyncratic use of hieratic numerals is evident throughout our ostracon, recto and verso (for more examples, see below).

Lines 8–9 (Figs. 10, 11): ... וַאֲמֹתָא יֵשׁ בִּמְעָה. ... שָׁמֵן שָׁלֵל ... The first vav marks the beginning of a new sentence, as in other supply instructions from Arad. If our reconstruction is correct, then the phrase אֲמֹתָא יֵשׁ בִּמְעָה is attested one more time in this ostracon, on the verso (see below). It is known from various biblical passages (Gen 23:8, 44:26; 2 Kgs 9:15; Jer 27:18; Job 33:23), to be translated “if there is.” Next, we suggest reconstructing an additional letter bet at the end of line 8 which is connected to the first word in line 9, reconstructed as ובמצות, “your military post,” “your fortress” (Isa 29:3).11 The verb שלך12 was already seen by other commentators; שִׁמְן is now visible with the multispectral photo. The sender here inquires whether there is any oil left at Elyashiv’s post, and if the answer is in the affirmative, then he asks him to send it along: “And if there is any oil left at your post—send it!”13

Line 10 (Fig. 12): ... וַאֲמֹתָא וַאֲמֹתָא. Aharoni’s reading was . . . וַאֲמֹתָא וַאֲמֹתָא. While the letters זא are indeed visible in our new photo, זא* is not. We suggest reconstructing זא[א], “let it be, drop it,” which suits the rest of the line—וַאֲמֹתָא וַאֲמֹתָא, hence: “drop it, don’t send (it).” At the end of the line, we discern a long oblique line.

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9 We wish to thank Prof. Nadav Na’aman (pers. comm., 2016) for suggesting this reconstruction.
10 We wish to thank Prof. Stefan Wimmer (pers. comm., 2016) for suggesting these readings.
11 We are indebted to Prof. André Lemaire for this reconstruction.
12 To be sure, the imperfect form is used in the Arad Letters as an imperative (cf. also וב in Letters 1, 2, 7), but we also find the imperative forms וב and זא in Letters 4, 5, and 6, for example.
13 We are indebted to Prof. André Lemaire for this reconstruction.
It is to be interpreted as a unit sign, comparable to Arad Ostraca 10 (line 3), 14 (line 3), and 17 (recto line 3, verso line 2). The fact that in all of these instances this mark either immediately follows or precedes the lexeme שמן supports our interpretation. It could be that the writer intended for this sign to represent the quantity of oil (line 9) but wrote it here too far down in the text. This lack of proficiency is attested in other features of the ostracon (see below).

**Lines 11–14 (Fig. 13):** We have some traces of letters and symbols. In line 13, we recognize two signs that resemble a sign from Kadesh Barnea Ostracon 6, col. 2, line 11 (Lemaire and Vernus 1983; Cohen 2007). This sign looks like the letter ג and probably stands for “30” (Wimmer 2008: 221–22). In line 14, we recognize the word צחק, which Aharoni (1981: 40–41) read in Arad Inscription 20 but which is today read otherwise (see Lemaire 1973). In short, some other traces of ink are seen on the bottom quarter of the recto, but no coherent reading can be obtained from them. Suffice it to say that its entire surface was used for writing, a fact that supports our conclusion that the verso is a continuation of the recto (see below).

**Verso**

The verso, which until now showed no indication of writing, had not been photographed in the past. While the regular current color image shows no traces of ink, three lines were discovered on the verso by multispectral imaging (see Fig. 2). They read:

1. כל חפצם אם היין. תשלח.
2. ובאָגָאָמָה הָצָע בת ייָן.
3. The lack of a letter opening formula indicates that the text on the verso is a continuation of that on the recto.

**Line 1 (Fig. 14):** In Arad Ostracon 2, line 7, we read: אם הם נתת חמצם עוד ואם. In Ostracon 21, there is יש והם, but the context is unclear. This is an elliptical sentence, which was translated previously as “If there is any vinegar left, give (that) to them (also)” (cf. line 8 of the recto above). This could be considered as a clause serving as a protasis, with the next clause—.הנה—it serving as the apodosis.

The sign כ is hieratic, fairly common at Arad (Ostraca 30, 33, 34, 41; cf. Ostracon 83) and at other sites, such as Horvat ʿUza (Beit-Arieh 2007: 171–72), Tell Jemmeh (Ostracon 2 [see Naveh 1985]), and Tell Jalul in Jordan (Ostracon 1 [see Gane 2008]). However, the closest parallels are found in Arad Inscription 34, left column, line 2, and in Ostracon 6 from Kadesh Barnea, recto, col. 1, line 10. In these cases, the sign is followed on the left by a dot or a small circle. These are the Hekat fractions 1/2 and

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14 In the bottom left corner of the verso, there is a sign made in pencil in modern times.
1/4 (Wimmer 2008: 106–7). It is clear, therefore, that this is a measure of dry commodities (Milik 1961: 97; Naveh 1966: 68; Renz and Röllig 1995: 285–87; see esp. Arad Inscription 33, where it is preceded by the morpheme חטים). Hence, we have a problem with its interpretation, as here it is clearly juxtaposed to “wine”; and, as is well known, the measure for wine, in Arad and elsewhere, is baṭ (written in abbreviated form, “ב”). At any rate, the reading for this line is clear; thus, this could be a mistake on the part of the author. A less likely conclusion would be that we do not fully comprehend the meaning of this sign. Still, we know of no other instance of confusion of measures and types of goods such as this one.

Lines 1–2 (Figs. 14, 15): תשלח חפץך וכול “whatever you desire, send (word)”—that is, write to me about it. חפץ is attested in Biblical Hebrew both as a noun (1 Kgs 5:22, 10:13; Isa 44:28; etc.) and as a verb (Gen 34:19; Num 14:8; etc.). In the context of the military reports and supply orders from Arad, we interpret this sentence as a request to notify the sender in writing whether the recipient needs anything else (cf. Lachish Letter 3, recto, lines 1–2: שלח תשלח;m לא שלחך; and verso, line 2: שלח תשלח; see Bresciani and Kamil 1966: 392–96; cf. Porten and Yardeni 1999: 160, 171).


Lines 1–2 (Figs. 14, 15): תשלח חפץך וכול “whatever you desire, send (word)”

The reading of הposição is uncertain. This lexeme is unknown in Hebrew epigraphy. The root נָזִיעָ is attested in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 51:14, 63:1; Jer 2:20, 48:12) and has various interpretations (“bowed down,” “subdued”; “wandering,” “traveling”), none of which to reconstruct. After a clear he, an inclusion hinders the view. Next, we see two unusual characters which do not resemble known palaeo-Hebrew letters of the 7th–6th centuries B.C. The closest parallel is the “Xar” sign; again, this is a sign for a dry commodities measure, not of wine, which is the context here. They are found, however, on ostraca with hieratic signs: in Arad Ostracon 8, line 2; Arad Ostracon 34, left column, lines 1, 7, and right column, lines 2, 3, 7; as well as on Kadesh Barnea Ostracon 6, col. 1 (left), lines 18, 19. According to our new reading, the “Xar” sign is also attested on the recto of our ostracon but in its variant form (with only one downstroke). However, common to both sides is the unusual usage of hieratic symbols for dry commodities—on the recto with money, and on the verso with wine. [ ] נל is also followed by traces of ink that are difficult to identify.

Line 3 (Fig. 16): גמילוה/גאהלו ונאשא The third line opens with the letters גאהלו. The subject is a personal name. The first two letters are problematic and difficult to read, but the name could be transcribed either גמילוה or גאהלו. As the latter is mentioned on the recto, this reading is preferable, if conjectural.

The reading of יזא is uncertain. This lexeme is unknown in Hebrew epigraphy. The root יזא is attested in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 51:14, 63:1; Jer 2:20, 48:12) and has various interpretations (“bowed down,” “subdued”; “wandering,” “traveling”), none of which
makes much sense in our context. However, the passage
in Jer 48:12, "אָנֵךְ֥ אתֶֽךְ וּלְשָׁלֵלְךָ אֲלֵשָׁהָּֽלָּשֶׁנָּהָּ" is interpreted
by Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser ("Mal-
bim") (1956: 576–77) as "a wine that is fermented and
bubbling to the point of bursting from its container" (as
a metaphor for social agitation [our translation]). This
suggestion seems plausible when it is followed by "wine"
on our ostracon. We therefore interpret התשע here as a
certain type of wine that has hitherto been unattested.

The usage of the full name, בת, preceding "wine," is
unusual in Arad, where it is always written in short, ב.
However, inscriptions that use the full name are known
from other sites such as Tell Beit Mirsim, Lachish, and Tel
Miqne-Ekron (Lipshits et al. 2010: passim). The reading
בת is also conjectural. In addition, what seems like a double
construct form, בת בת, is hard to explain. We make do
with putting forward this suggested reading.

Summary

Along with the rest of the Hebrew epigraphic corpus
from Arad, Ostracon 16 has been well known for over 40
years. However, it was hitherto unknown that this ostracon
bears a second inscription on its verso. All in all, multispectral imaging has added 53 new characters (Hebrew
letters and hieratic signs) on the recto and 52 on the verso.
There are more than 20 words on the recto with a reading
now changed, and 17 completely new words on the verso.
The verso seems to be a continuation of the recto. Support-
ing evidence for this hypothesis includes a full utilization
of the recto surface for writing; an absence of a greeting
formula on the verso—a mainstay of ancient Hebrew cor-
respondence and a clear indication for the opening of a
text; the similar topics of the two texts (details regarding
the provision of supplies); the probable mention of the
same person, Geʾalyahu, on both sides; and the seemingly
idiomeric usage of the "Xar" sign on both sides.

How, then, should we characterize the author of our
ostracon? He was not a novice; he certainly knew how to
read and write. He even knew how to write a letter: using
the salutation formula in the opening (but, according to
our understanding, forgetting the kaph in מַרְבָּח תָּכְנַה), using
רת to mark the passage to the main message of the letter
(Pardee et al. 1982).

However, the high variance in letter stance and mor-
phology indicates that he was not a professional scribe (see
Faigenbaum-Golovin et al. 2016). In addition, his use of
hieratic symbols is atypical of what we know today about
the meaning of these signs. These, as well as some syntac-
tic peculiarities, attest to the idiosyncrasy of this writer.

All these features add up and contribute to the com-
plexity of the picture of ancient Hebrew literacy (Rollston
2006; 2010; 2015; Mendel 2011; 2013), implying that
reading and writing were an integral component of
military life during the last days of Judah (Faigenbaum-
Golovin et al. 2016). We suggest that officers and logistic
personnel knew how to compose letters but that some of
them lacked practice in professional letter-writing.

For the reader's convenience, we present below a con-
tinuous transliteration of the text and our new translation:

Transliteration:

Recto:

אמך: תשלח עלשת אלייש. ולתשל ברכת נברחת <
ופלחת. ונתל_biasת אלייש פ'ץ [ז] זב תקף. שן שחלש
בтопו פפוק [פא] [פי] [פי] [פי] בת פד פלק בַּז [פי] [פי] [פי] [פי] [פי] [פי]
[non-coherent letter remains]. [ז] [ז] [ז] [ז] [ז] [ז] [ז] [ז]

Verso:

אמך. תשלח עלשת ויצעShar למס comercial גיאליו
ולשלם ביתך בברכתך.>

Translation:

Recto:

"Your friend, Hananyahu, (hereby) sends greetings to
(you), Elyashiv, and to your household. I bless (you) by Yah-
weh. And now, when I left your house, I sent the receipt
to Geʾalyahu [by the intermediary] of Azaryahu. Carry the
purse with you! And return all of it. If (there is still) money
<. . .> (in the sum of) 5 sheqels Xar. And if there is still any
oil left at your [p]ost—send it! (As for the other thing,) drop
it, don't send it/ one unit [unintelligible traces]."

Verso:

"If there is any wine, send {1/2 1/4}?. If there is anything
(else) you need, send (= write to me about it). And
if there is still < >, gi[ve] them (an amount of) Xar out of
it. And Geʾalyahu/Gemalyahu has taken a (type of wine)/
bat wine."

Acknowledgments

This study was supported by a generous donation from
Mr. Jacques Chahine, made through the French Friends
of Tel Aviv University. The research received initial funding from
the European Research Council under the European Commu-
nity's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013/ERC
grant agreement no. 229418), and by an Early Israel grant
(New Horizons Project), Tel Aviv University. Arie Shaus is
grateful to the Azrieli Foundation for the award of an Azri-
The writing of this article was made possible by the warm cooperation of Dr. Eran Arie, curator of Iron Age and Persian-period archaeology, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The kind assistance of Myrna Pollak and Noa Evron is greatly appreciated. Professors Stefan Wimmer, André Le- maire, Nadav Na’aman, and Benjamin Sass very kindly read drafts of this article and offered valuable advice. Any mistakes are solely our own. Ostracon images are courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University and of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

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