

# A héber nyelv története

BMA-HEBD-201

*Biró Tamás*

4. Az írás története.

*2022. március 9.*

Assignment for this week

Az írásról

# Miért (nem) kell tudnia egy sémi nyelvésznek az írásról?

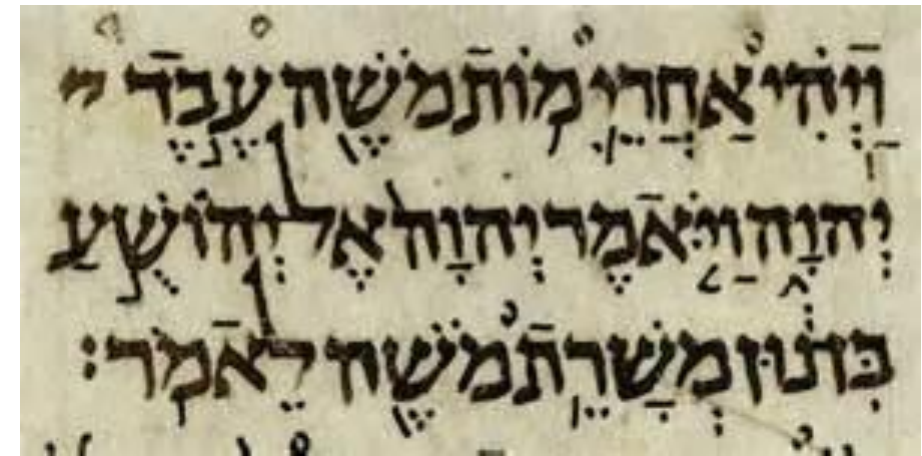
- Az írás nem része a nyelvnek:
  - Kulturális invenció
  - Nagyon sok nyelv nem rendelkezik írásbeliséggel.
  - Írásrendszer vagy helyesírás változása  $\neq$  nyelv változása
- Az ismert sémi nyelvek mindegyikét írásbeliséggel rendelkező kultúrában beszélték. Az írott nyelv normatív hatása befolyásolta a nyelv fejlődését.
- A „híres” sémi nyelvek rendelkeznek írásbeliséggel.
- A régebbi sémi nyelveket, ill. a sémi nyelvek régebbi állapotát csak írott forrásokból ismerjük.

# Mit kell (illik) tudnia egy sémi nyelvésznek az írásról?

- Készség: más írásrendszerrel publikált nyelvi adatokat elolvasni. (Nem mindig írják át nekünk.)
- Megérteni, hogy mely nyelv esetén milyen bizonytalanságot okoz az, hogy az adott nyelvi adatokhoz csak valamely írásrendszer „szemüvegén” keresztül férünk hozzá.
- Írásrendszerek kialakulása és története, paleográfia, az egyes írásrendszerek rokonsága: szerintünk nem, de a nem-nyelvészek szerint ez a terület a mi kompetenciánk.

# Az átírás folyamata

(V.ö. *Beyond Babel*, pp. 21-22)



!בן-נון? בתון

- Eredeti forrás, annak fotója, rajza.
- Írásjelek beazonosítása: א ב ג...
- Transzliteráció: átírás latin betűkkel úgy, hogy abból az eredeti írásmód még egyértelműen visszafejthető legyen.  
De a transzliteráció már részben értelmezés is. Például: בַּי = bēy vagy bê ?
- Normalizáció: mintha az adott nyelvnek létezne egy standard, a kiejtést (részben) tükröző, latinbetűs helyesírása. Az adott nyelvet nem ismerő olvasó számára is hozzáférhetővé válik a szöveg.
- Glossza: jelentés/funkció felsorolása, morfémaról morfémarra haladva.  
Például: *és-volt.Sg.3masc után halál.CONSTR Mózes rabszolga.CONSTR JHVH...*
- Fordítás modern nyelvre

Írástörténet

# From pictograms to a writing system

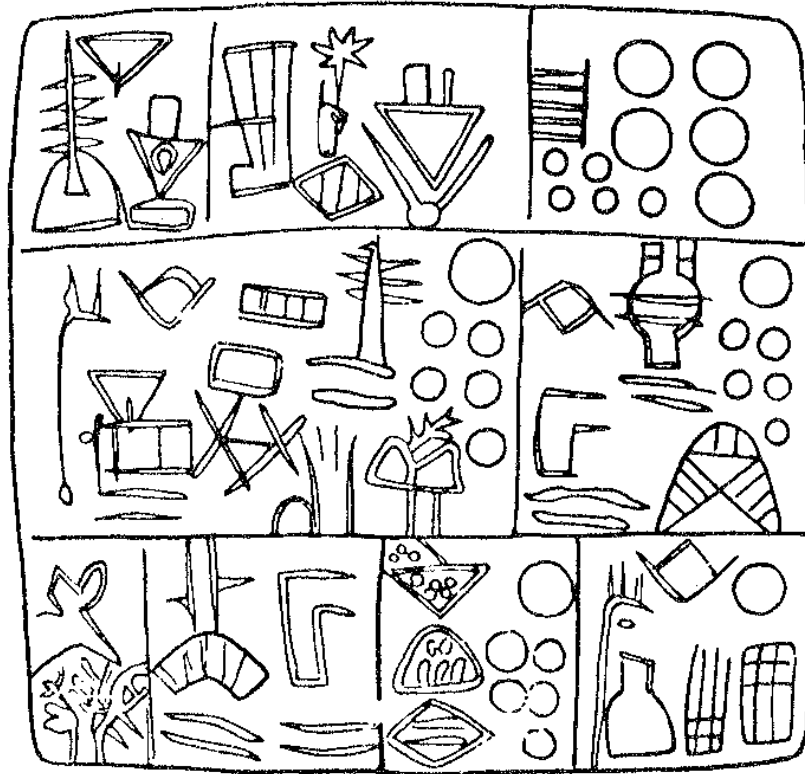


Fig. 2. Sumerian pictographic inscription

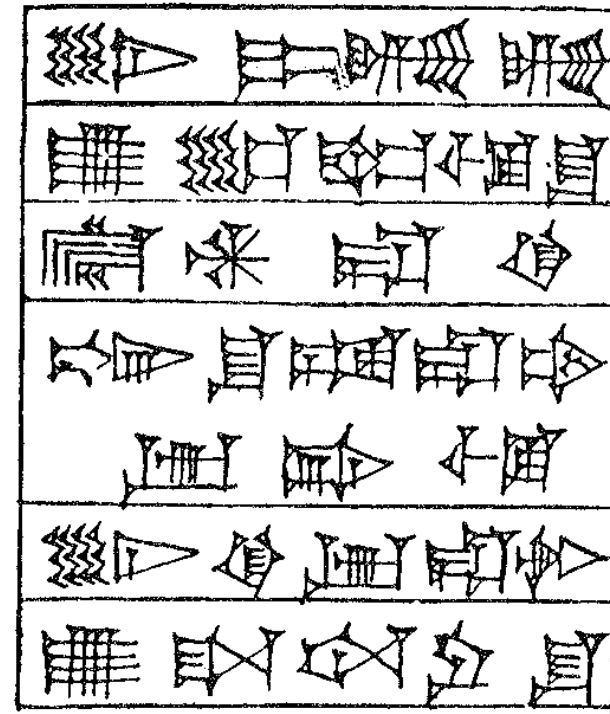


Fig. 3. Babylonian cuneiform text



# From pictograms to cuneiform and hieroglyphs

|           |  |  |  |  |
|-----------|--|--|--|--|
| BIRD      |  |  |  |  |
| FISH      |  |  |  |  |
| DONKEY    |  |  |  |  |
| OX        |  |  |  |  |
| SUN       |  |  |  |  |
| GRAIN     |  |  |  |  |
| ORCHARD   |  |  |  |  |
| PLOUGH    |  |  |  |  |
| BOOMERANG |  |  |  |  |
| FOOT      |  |  |  |  |

- Logograms denote whole word.

Disambiguation:

- Phonetic complements: show last sounds of word.

- Determinatives: denote word class.

-Syllabograms

-Egyptian: also uniconsonantal signs.

Source: Joseph Naveh. *Early History of the Alphabet*. Magnes Press, 1987.

| SIGN | TRANS-LITERATION | OBJECT DEPICTED                               |
|------|------------------|---|
|      | <i>s</i>         | Egyptian vulture                              |
|      | <i>i</i>         | flowering reed                                |
|      | <i>y</i>         | {(1) two reed-flowers<br>{(2) oblique strokes |
|      | <i>r</i>         | forearm                                       |
|      | <i>w</i>         | quail chick                                   |
|      | <i>b</i>         | foot  |
|      | <i>p</i>         | stool   |
|      | <i>f</i>         | horned viper                                  |
|      | <i>m</i>         | owl   |
|      | <i>n</i>         | water   |
|      | <i>r</i>         | mouth   |
|      | <i>h</i>         | reed shelter in fields                        |
|      | <i>h</i>         | wick of twisted flax                          |
|      | <i>h</i>         | placenta (?)                                  |
|      | <i>h</i>         | animal's belly with teats                     |
|      | <i>s</i>         | {(1) bolt<br>{(2) folded cloth                |
|      | <i>g</i>         | pool  |
|      | <i>k</i>         | hill-slope                                    |
|      | <i>k</i>         | basket with handle                            |
|      | <i>g</i>         | stand for jar                                 |
|      | <i>t</i>         | loaf  |
|      | <i>t</i>         | tethering rope                                |
|      | <i>d</i>         | hand  |
|      | <i>d</i>         | snake   |

# Alphabet: the principle of acrophony

- Egyptian uniconsonantal signs.
- West-Semitic alphabet: *consonantal writing*.
- Proto-Canaanite script
  - cca. 1800 BCE: Wadi el-Hol??
  - 17-16<sup>th</sup> c BCE: Gezer, Nablus (Shechem), Lachish
  - approx. 1500 BCE: Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions (discovered by F. Petrie, 1905/06, West Semitic slaves in turquoise mines?)

| Phon. Value | Schematic Forms | Early North-west Semitic | Early South Semitic | Early Letter Names | Meaning of Names |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| ʾ           | 𐤀 𐤁             | 𐤀 (14th) 𐤁 (13th)        | 𐤀 𐤁 (Jamme)         | ʾalp-              | ox-head          |
| b           | 𐤂 𐤃             | 𐤂 (17th) 𐤃 (13th)        | 𐤂                   | bêt-               | house            |
| g           | 𐤄 𐤅             | 𐤄 (15th) 𐤅 (12th)        | 𐤄 𐤅                 | gaml-              | throw-stick      |
| d           | 𐤆 𐤇             | 𐤆 𐤇 (10th)               | 𐤆 (Jamme)           | digg-              | fish             |
| ḏ           | 𐤈 𐤉             | ?                        | 𐤈 𐤉 (Jamme)         | ?                  | ?                |
| h           | 𐤊 𐤋             | 𐤊 (10th)                 | 𐤊                   | hô(?)              | man calling      |
| w           | 𐤌 𐤍             | 𐤌 (10th)                 | 𐤌 (ʾ used for y)    | wô(waw)            | mace             |
| z           | ?               | 𐤎 (16th) 𐤏 (10th)        | 𐤎                   | zê(n-)             | ?                |
| ḥ           | 𐤐 𐤑             | 𐤐 (12th) 𐤑 (10th)        | 𐤐                   | ḥê(-)              | fence(?)         |
| b           | 𐤒 𐤓             | ?                        | 𐤒 (Jamme)           | ḥa( )              | hank of yarn     |
| t           | ?               | 𐤔 (16th) 𐤕 (10th)        | 𐤔                   | tê(-)              | spindle?         |
| y           | 𐤖 𐤗             | 𐤖 (13th) 𐤗 (10th)        | 𐤖 (orig w)          | yad-               | arm              |
| k           | 𐤘 𐤙             | 𐤘 (17th) 𐤙 (13th)        | 𐤘 𐤙                 | kapp-              | palm             |
| l           | 𐤛 𐤜 𐤝 𐤞         | 𐤛 (14th) 𐤜 (13th)        | 𐤛 𐤜 (Jamme)         | lamd-              | ox-goad          |
| m           | 𐤟 𐤠 𐤡           | 𐤟 (15th) 𐤠 (13th)        | 𐤟 (9th) 𐤠 (8th)     | mêm-               | water            |
| n           | 𐤣 𐤤 𐤥           | 𐤣 (14th) 𐤤 (12th)        | 𐤣 𐤤 𐤥               | nahš-              | snake            |
| s           | ?               | 𐤧 (10th)                 | 𐤧 𐤨                 | (šamk-?)           | ?                |
| c           | 𐤩 𐤪             | 𐤩 (12th) 𐤪 (10th)        | 𐤩                   | ʿên-               | eye              |
| g           | 𐤬 𐤭             | 𐤬 (15th)                 | 𐤬 𐤭 (Jamme)         | ḡa( )              | ?                |
| p           | 𐤮 𐤯             | 𐤮 (10th)                 | 𐤮 𐤯                 | pu't-(?)           | corner?          |
| s/z         | 𐤱 𐤲             | 𐤱 (10th)                 | 𐤱 𐤲                 | ša(d-)             | plant            |
| ḏ           | ?               | ?                        | 𐤴                   | ?                  | ?                |
| q           | 𐤷 𐤸             | 𐤷 (14th) 𐤸 (10th)        | 𐤷 𐤸 (Jamme)         | qu(p-)             | ?                |
| r           | 𐤹 𐤺             | 𐤹 (16th-14th)            | 𐤹                   | naʿš-              | head of man      |
| š/t         | 𐤻 𐤼             | 𐤻 (13th) 𐤼 (10th)        | 𐤻 𐤼                 | tann-              | composite bow    |
| š           | 𐤽 𐤾             | ?                        | 𐤽 𐤾 (Jamme)         | ?                  | ?                |
| t           | +               | + x (13th)               | x + (Jamme)         | tô(taw)            | owner's mark     |

Fig. 17. Albright's chart of letters in the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions

# West-Semitic consonantal writings based on the principle of acrophony

- West-Semitic alphabet: strongly influenced by Egyptian uniconsonantal signs?
- Ugaritic script:
  - Akkadian (language & script) was also used in Ugarit.
  - Developed alphabet (27C + 3V), but based on cuneiform:

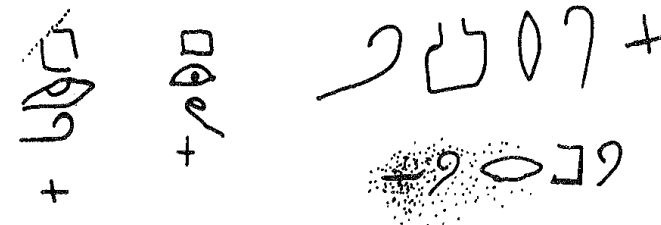


Fig. 16. The word *(l)bt* in the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions

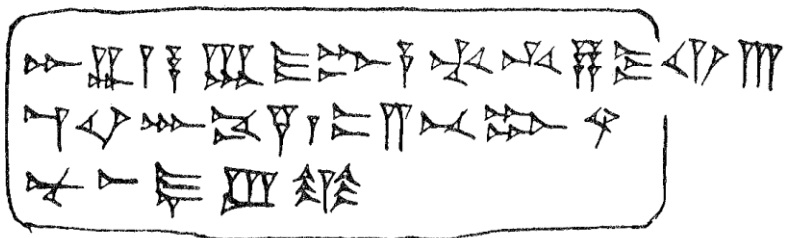


Fig. 25. An abecedarium from Ugarit

'a b g h d h w z h t y k š l  
 m ḏ n z s ' p ṣ q r t  
 ḡ t 'i 'u s<sub>2</sub>



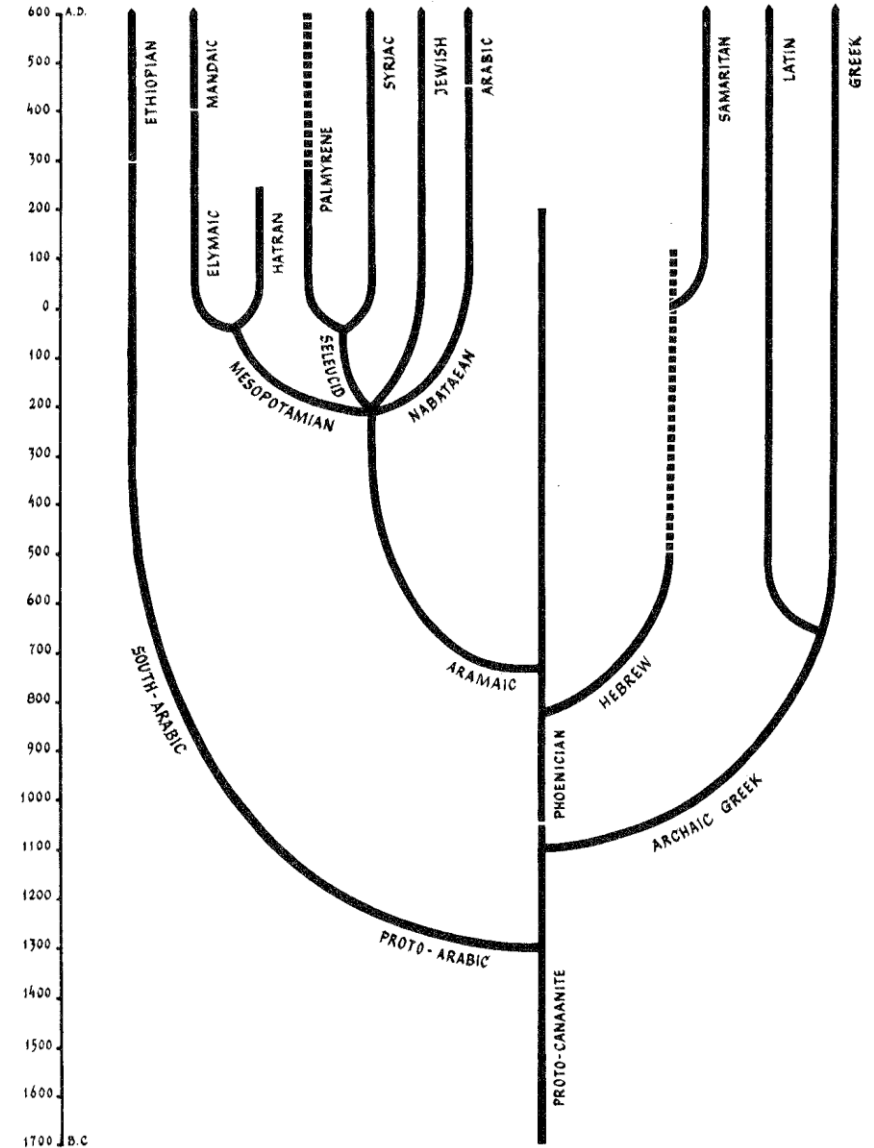
- Abecedarium from Ugarit: did order have ritual importance?

# Adopting a writing system to another language

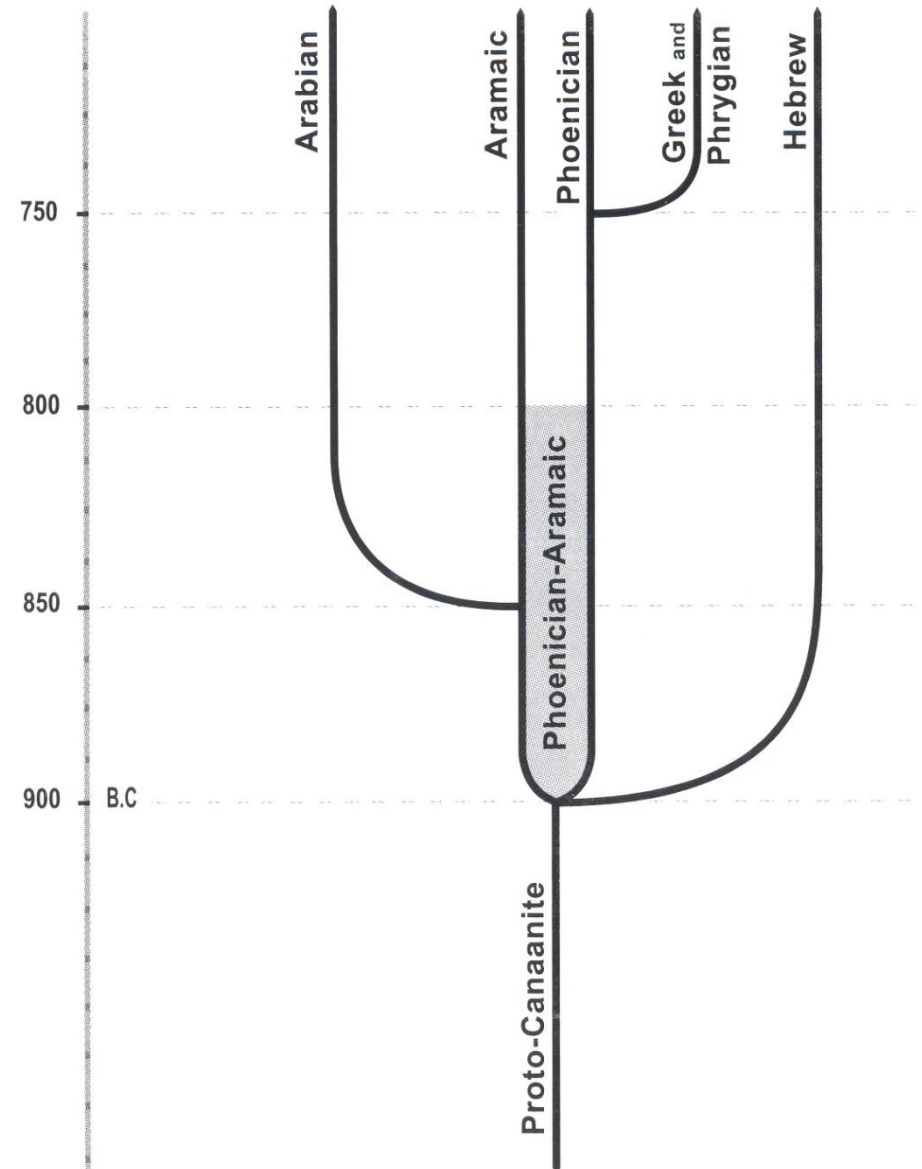
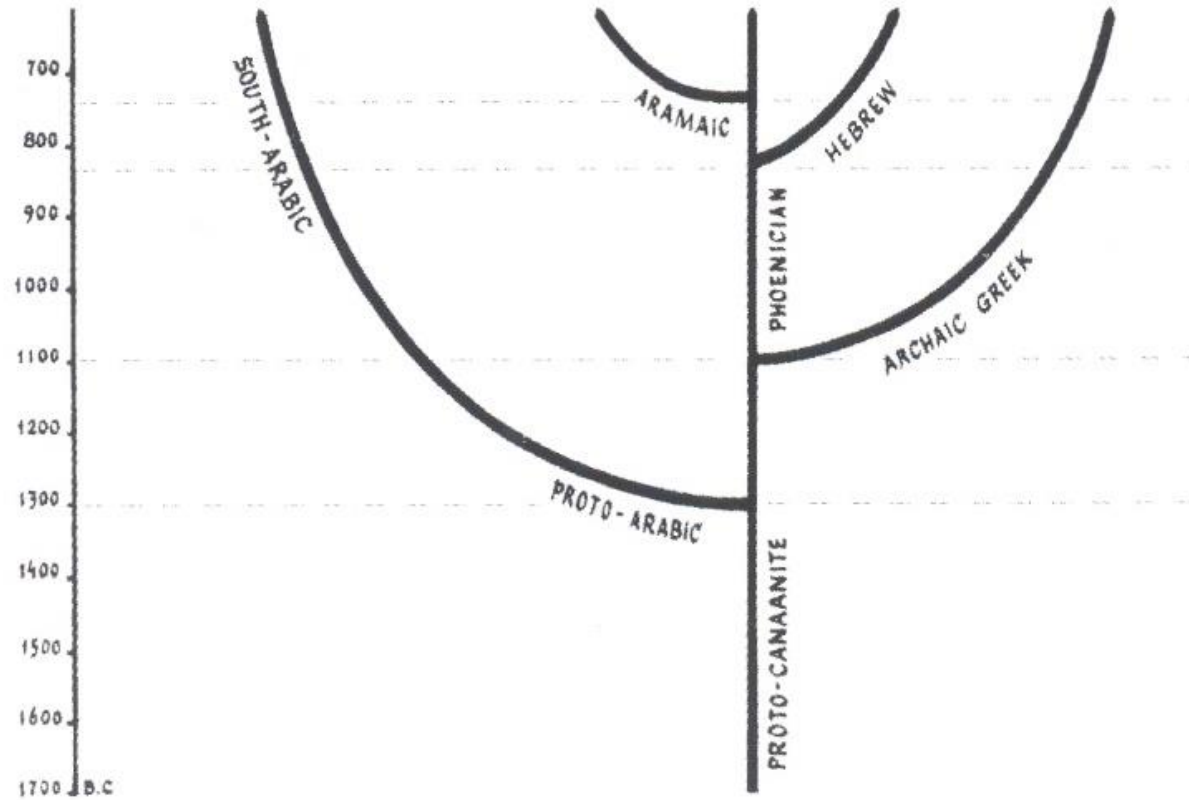
- Cuneiform: Sumerian => Akkadian => Ugaritic, Luwian, Hittite, Elamite, Persian, Old Canaanite
- Hieroglyphic: Egyptian => Luwian, etc.
- Phoenician => Greek => Latin => English, Dutch, French, Maltese (= Arabic dialect) etc.
- Hebrew => Judeo-languages
- Arabic => Persian, Turkish. Cyrillic, etc. to many languages
- Problems arising:
  - Different phonological systems: sounds not in source language (shin/sin, ayin/rayin?)
  - Traditions borrowed together with the writing system that do not make sense in the new language: Hebrew spelling in Yiddish, Sumerian logograms in Akkadian.

# Further history of the Alphabet

- End of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium: reduction
- of the number of letters.
- South-Arabian => Ethiopian
- Phoenician, developed into:
  - - Punic
  - - Greek => Latin, Coptic, Cyrillic...
  - - Paleo-Hebrew => Samaritan
  - - Aramaic =>
    - Jewish
    - Syriac
    - Nabataean, Palmyrene => Arabic; India, Central Asia



# Joseph Naveh 1982 vs. Benjamin Sass 2005



אבגדהוזחטיכךלמם  
נוסעפףאזקרשת

# Jewish scripts

- After Babylonian exile (587-539).
- Qumran, First Jewish War (66-70), Bar Kokhba's revolt (132-135): sporadic use of paleo-Hebrew script (as identity marker, national symbol?).
- Paleography: very different handwriting styles in medieval manuscripts (Italian, Yemenite, etc. etc. etc.)
- Ashkenazi cursive (handwriting) => Israeli cursive.
- Sephardic cursive (handwriting): also used for Ladino.
  - “Rashi” script: 16<sup>th</sup> c., developed from Sephardic cursive to differentiate between Bible text and commentary.
- 1920s: Hebrew stenography. 1936: Hebrew Braille (both left-to-right)  
Signs for each letter in Israeli Sign Language (ISL).

# Early Hebrew epigraphy

Important inscriptions  
from the first temple period



# First temple period

First temple period: 10<sup>th</sup> century – 586 BCE

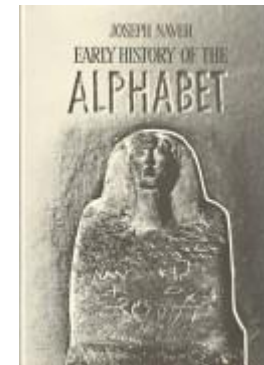
Epigraphy = study of inscriptions.

Found in archaeological excavations.

Using pre-exilic Hebrew script.

Some famous examples given below.

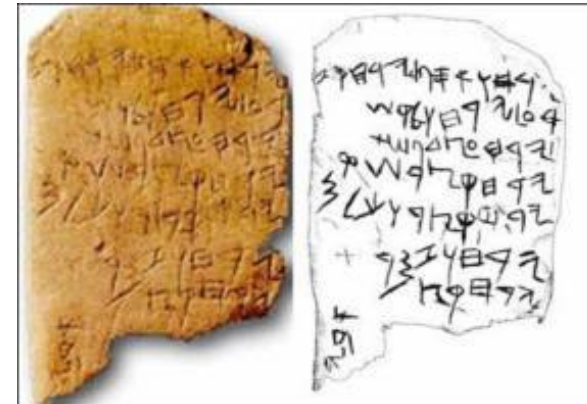
Recommended, even if not up-to-date introduction: Joseph Naveh. *Early History of the Alphabet*. Magnes Pr., 1987.



# The Gezer calendar

End of 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE

School children learning agriculture?



The Gezer Calendar with ancient Hebrew writing

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| “Two months gathering                   | [September-October] |
| Two months planting                     | [November-December] |
| Two months late sowing                  | [January-February]  |
| One month cutting flax                  | [March]             |
| One month reaping barley                | [April]             |
| One month reaping and measuring (grain) | [May]               |
| Two months pruning                      | [June-July]         |
| One month summer fruit                  | [August]            |

Abijah”

Source: [http://www.truthnet.org/Bible-Origins/4\\_How\\_was\\_Bible\\_written/Gezer\\_Calendar\\_Hebrew.jpg](http://www.truthnet.org/Bible-Origins/4_How_was_Bible_written/Gezer_Calendar_Hebrew.jpg)

# The Mesha stele

9<sup>th</sup> century

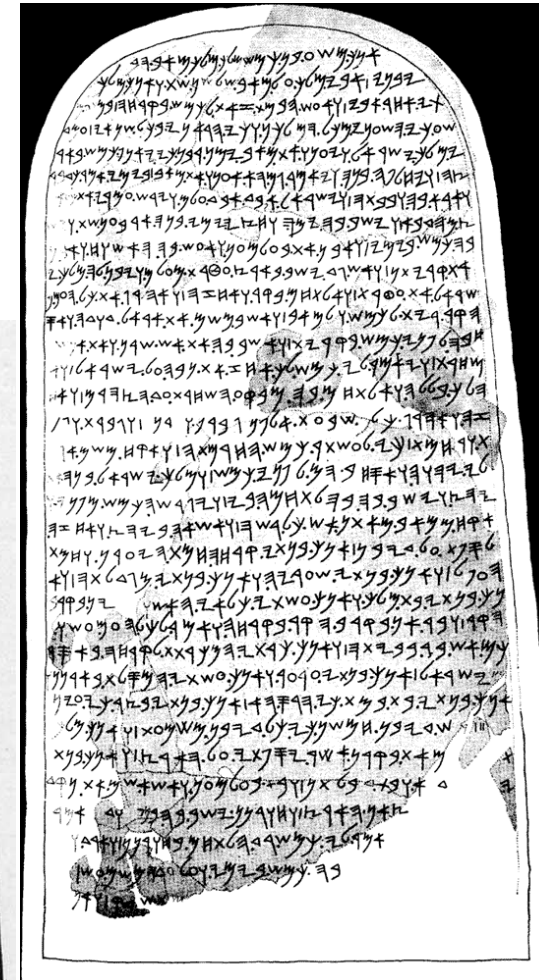
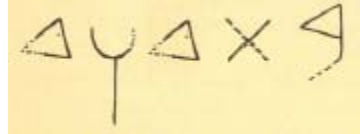
Moabite king's victory  
over house of David.

In Moabite language:  
too similar to Biblical  
Hebrew? Was it a  
general literary style?

Shape of letters:  
first distinctive features  
of Hebrew writing.

Read text on: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

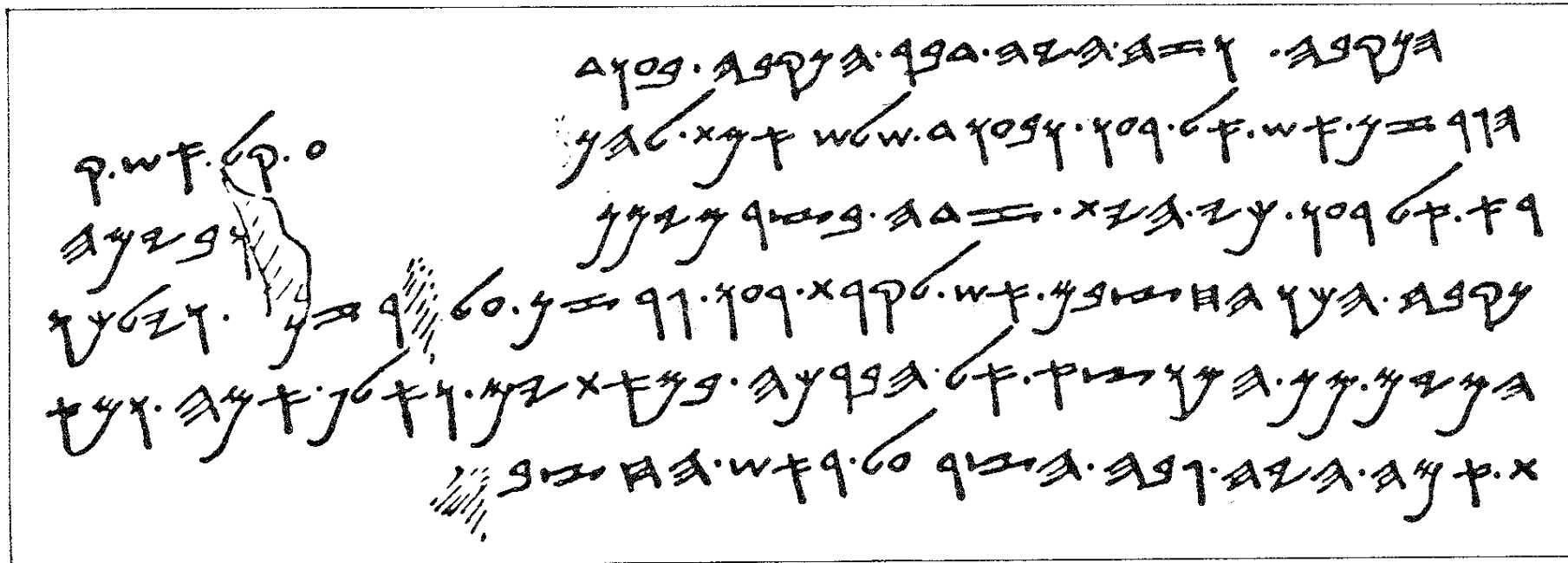
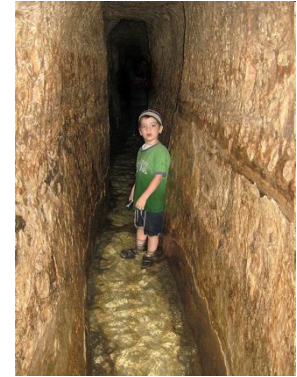
Source of images: <http://issachar5.files.wordpress.com>  
<http://vadym.web.cern.ch/vadym/images/MeshaSteleInscrip10cmh.gif>



[http://www.houseof david.ca/bd\\_mesha.jpg](http://www.houseof david.ca/bd_mesha.jpg)

# The Siloam (Shiloah) Inscription

- 2Chron. 32: *King Hezekiah* building a tunnel at the *Gihon Spring*, before the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 701 BCE.
- Happiness when those digging the tunnel from the two ends finally meet in the middle.



# Seals

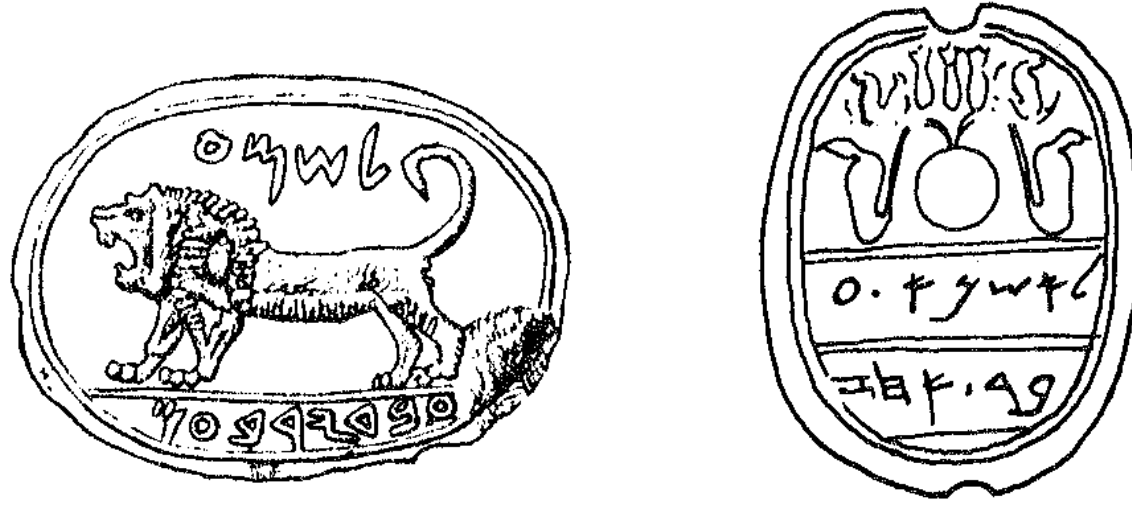


Fig. 64. Two Hebrew seals from the 8th century B.C.

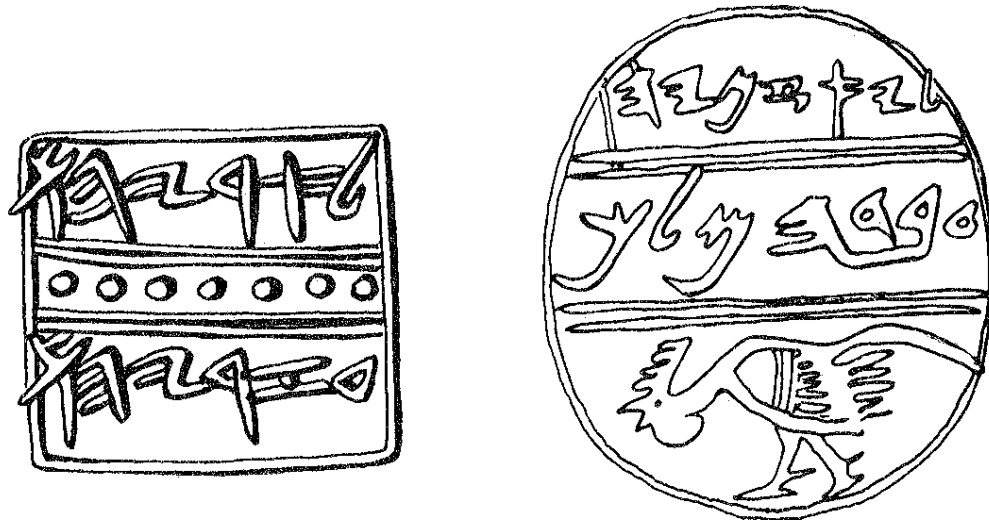


Fig. 61. Two Hebrew seals from the late 7th century B.C.

# Jar handles: *la-melekh* inscriptions



Fig. 62. The *bt lmk* inscription on the shoulder of a jar from Lachish

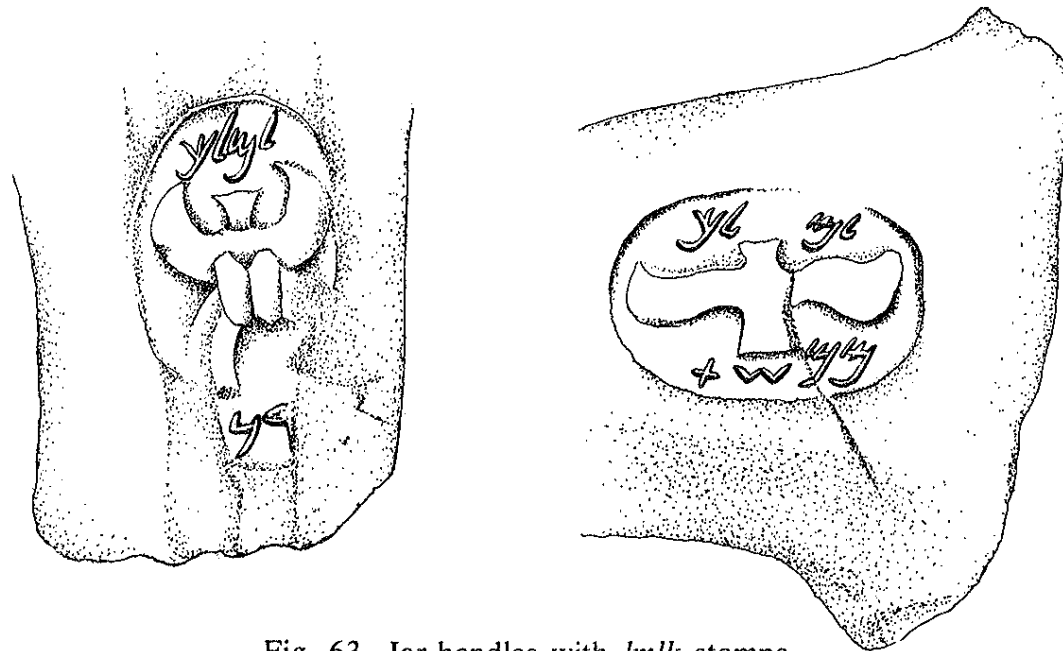


Fig. 63. Jar-handles with *lmlk* stamps

# Ostraca

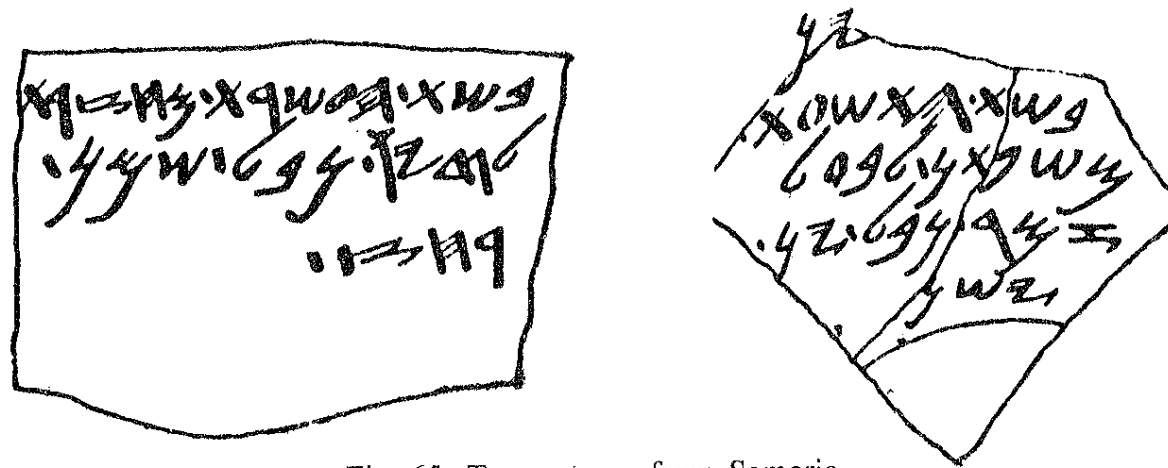


Fig. 65. Two ostraca from Samaria

Ostracoon: letter (or else) written (with ink, sometimes incised) on a piece of pottery (typically broken off from a vase).

Famous ones in Biblical archeology: Khirbet Qeiyafa (1000 BCE?), Samaria (8<sup>th</sup> c.), Mesad Hashavyahu (late 7<sup>th</sup> c.: petition to the local governor), Arad (early 6<sup>th</sup> c.), Lachish (early 6<sup>th</sup> c.)...

# Ostraca

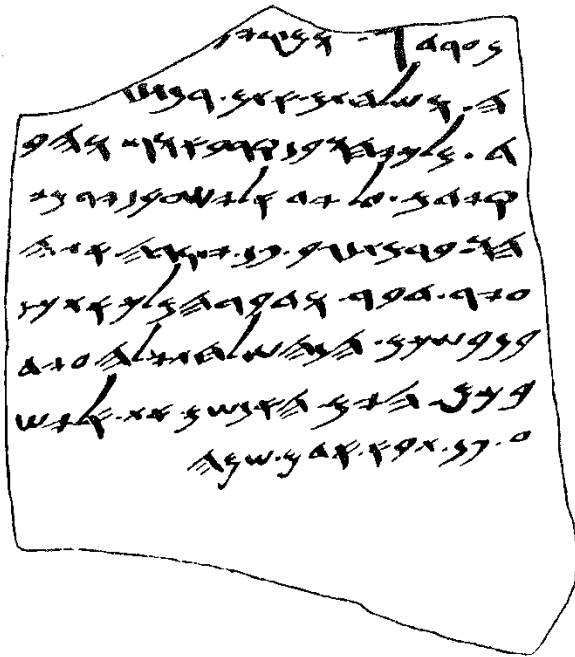


Fig. 66. An early 6th-century B.C. ostracon from Arad

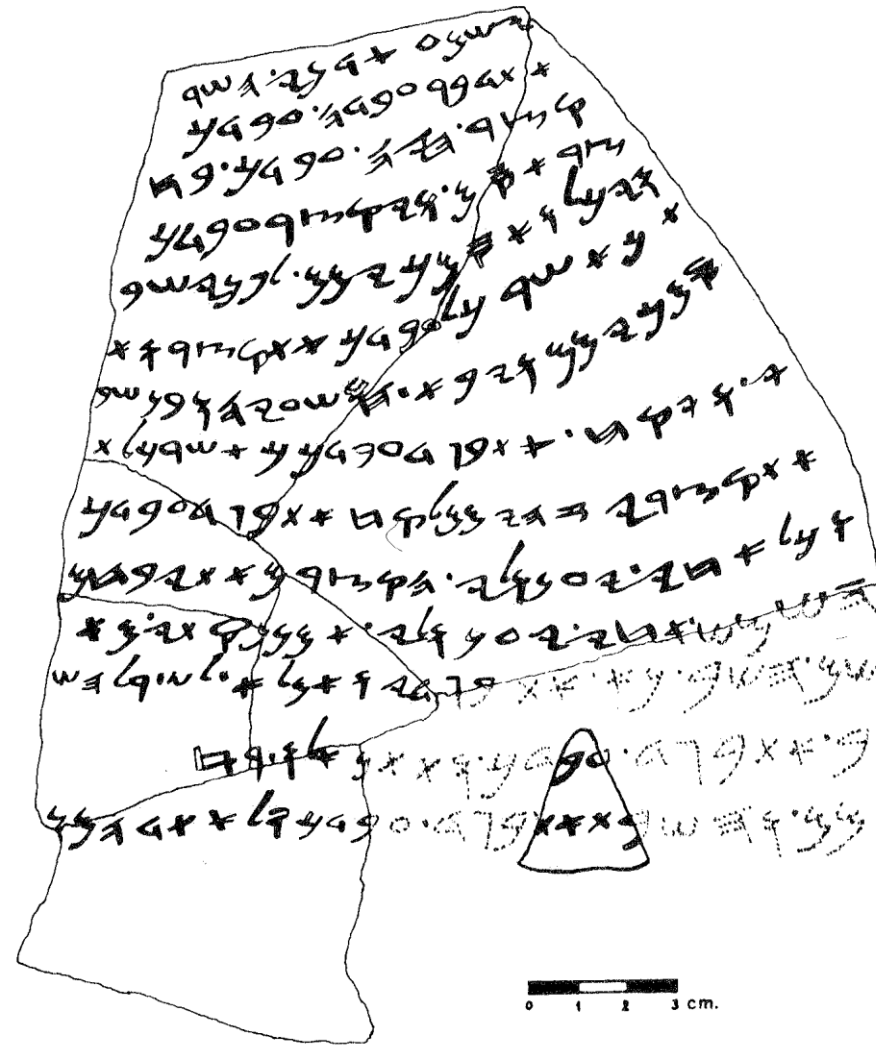


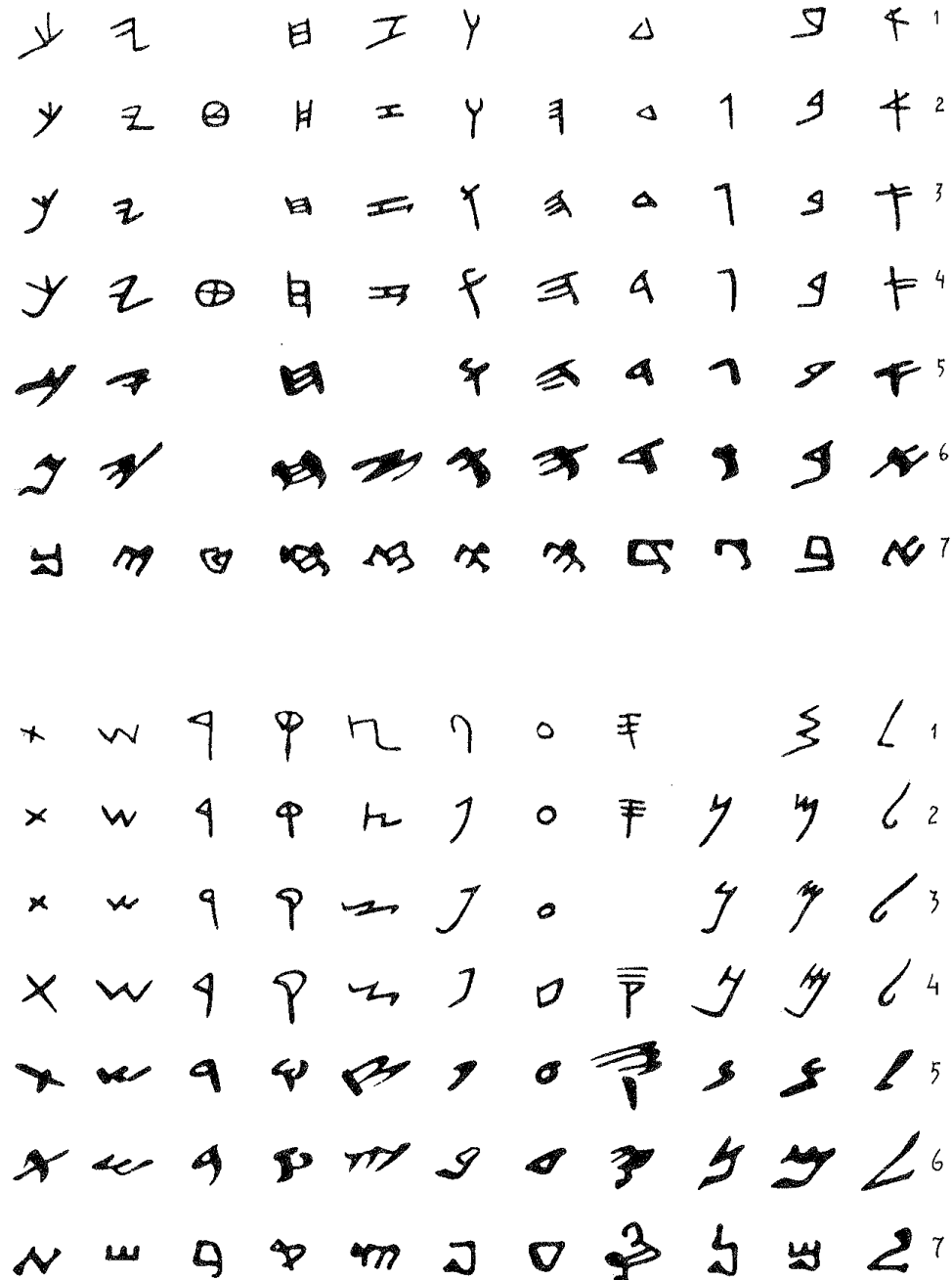
Fig. 67. Late 7th-century petition from Meşad Ḥashavyahu



# Overview:

Development of the  
Paleo-Hebrew script:

- 1. Gezer calendar: 10<sup>th</sup> c.
- 2. Mesha stele: 9<sup>th</sup> c.
- 3. Siloam inscription: late 8<sup>th</sup> c.
- 4. Seals from the 7<sup>th</sup> cent.
- 5. Arad ostraca: early 6<sup>th</sup> c.
- 6. Leviticus fragment:  
2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE.
- 7. Medieval Samaritan  
bookhand.
- Upper box: alef to kaf,
- lower box: lamed to tav.



# Name of the Hebrew letters

- Name of the Hebrew letters come from the Phoenician alphabet.
- Nice examples of sound changes:
  - Phoenician *rēš* ~ Hebrew *rōš*, but cf. *bārēšit* (Proto-Semitic *\*rāš*, cf. Arabic *rās*).
  - Phoenician *bēt* ~ Hebrew *bayit*, status constructus (smichut) *bēt*. Probably, Proto-NW-Semitic *\*bayt* with a diphthong [ay]. It got monophthongized [ay] > [ē] in Phoenician and in the Hebrew status constructus. But in the status absolutus of Hebrew, a second vowel [i] got inserted, [y] became a full vowel, and so the diphthong was eliminated by turning the word into two syllables.

# A few words on orthography

**Spelling** (Werner Weinberg: *The History of Hebrew Plene Spelling*, HUCP 1985, pp. 1ff):

Initially (10<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, Gezer and Phoenician inscriptions):  
extremely defective/chaser:

- בת (for בית),
- ז (for זה),
- לפנ (for לפני),
- שערמ (for שעורים, 'barley+plural')

Insertion of matres lectionis at the beginning of the words (more plene/male writing, cf. Mesha):

- כי [ki], בנתי [baniti]
- בנה [bana] and [b'na], cf. פה, כה, שלמה

# A few words on orthography

Phonological change (*monophthongization*): diphthongs turned into monophthongs:

[iy] > [i:], [uw] > [u:], [ay] > [e:], [aw] > [o:], [aʔ] > [a:].

Hence, letters originally denoting consonants/glides, now denote vowels.

Hence, the idea of vowel letters:

- Crucial in non-semitic languages (Greek borrowing the Phoenician alphabet; Persian borrowing the Arabic alphabet; Yiddish and Ladino...)

Biblical Hebrew: *matres lectionis* sometimes with and sometimes without etymological history.

Late Biblical Hebrew: more plene than classical BH.

Qumran Hebrew: extremely plene spelling.

# A few words on orthography

Israeli Hebrew:

rules of the *Academy of the Hebrew Language*:

- When to use *matres lectionis* in non-vocalized text (e.g., yod in open syllables, but not in closed ones).
- How to transcribe foreign words:  
e.g. t vs. th, such as in תאוריה vs. טלפון.

- ***Please always remember:***

- The *writing system* is not part of the *language system*!
  - Many languages have no writing system. Some have more wr systems.
- *Orthography* is not part of *grammar*!
  - Orthography = social convention, changing independently of lg.
  - Yet, traditional spelling can help reconstruct past stages the languages.
- Do not confuse *sound* with *letter*!

*Viszlát jövő szerdán!*