

THE LACHISH HIERATIC BOWL ONCE AGAIN

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In a recent article, J.B. Redford (1979:66-67) called attention again to a much debated problem in Canaanite archaeology: the destruction date of the last Late Bronze Age city of Lachish. Redford concentrated on bowl no. 3 from Lachish, which bears a hieratic inscription dated by J. Černý (*Lachish IV:133*) on palaeographic grounds to the end of the 19th dynasty, while one sign (the *b3* ligature) recalled examples from the Great Papyrus Harris (a document of Ramesses IV), thus leaving the door open for a date early in the 20th dynasty.

As Redford notes, the contents of the text are arranged in three dated entries, namely IV *3ḫt* 26, II *šmw* [] and IV *šmw* 1, all in year 4 of an unspecified king, and according to him, inscribed in that sequence. He claims that since the ostrakon was clearly written by the same scribe at a single sitting, "there can be no other conclusion than that the order of the entries corresponds to the chronological order of the receipts", from which he concludes that "the anniversary of this particular king's accession date did not fall between IV,26 and XII,1" (Redford 1979:67). On these grounds, all the kings between Ramesses II (whose fourth year was far too early, palaeographically speaking, to even be considered) and Ramesses VI would be excluded from candidacy, except Mernephtah, since he is the only one who ruled four years or more whose date of accession would result in the above-suggested sequence.

Redford's argument would indeed be irrefutable if these were three *consecutive* entries; however, in actual fact, only II *šmw* [] and IV *šmw* 1 are inscribed consecutively (on the outside of the bowl), while IV *3ḫt* is written separately (on the inside).

Attempts to solve this problem should concentrate on establishing which part of the bowl is to be read first. Černý (*Lachish IV:133*) chose the interior, but apparently without any specific textual reason, since the bowl does not yield any consecutive text whether read from inside to outside or *vice versa*.

Recently a number of artifacts bearing hieratic inscriptions (four complete bowls, one ostrakon and several small sherds) were uncovered in the final Late Bronze Age stratum at Tel Sera' (Tell esh-Shariya), a site in the northwestern Negev excavated by E.D. Oren (for a detailed discussion of these inscriptions, see Goldwasser, in press). The inscriptions on the bowls, all of an administrative nature, are dated by palaeographic considerations to the 20th dynasty. This material exhibits the same rare phenomenon as the Lachish bowl: they are *complete* bowls of the Late Canaanite period inscribed with Egyptian administrative inscriptions, most likely representing a system of income accounting employed by the authorities of the Egyptian religious institutes at both sites.

Significantly, the Tel Sera' bowls are inscribed solely on the exterior — which suggests that there is a very reasonable possibility that it was also the exterior of the Lachish bowl that was the first to be inscribed.

If so, the consecutive dates on this bowl would be: II *šmw* [], IV *šmw* 1 and IV *3ḫt* 26, a

sequence that fits perfectly Ramesses III, whose accession date was I 5mw 16 (Redford 1979:67).

In this connection, it is worthwhile mentioning two other mementos of this monarch discovered at Lachish. The first is the scarab of Ramesses III, found not far from the hieratically inscribed bowl unearthed by the Wellcome-Marston expedition (*Lachish IV*:126; Pl. 39:388). The second is the new and still unpublished find from the recent excavations, namely the bronze cartouche of Ramesses III (Ussishkin 1980). Together these should be taken to establish the *terminus post quem* of the destruction of the final Late Bronze Age stratum at this site.

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