UCLA
UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

## Title
Iron Age Cave Inscriptions from the Southern Shephelah: An Integrative Study of the Beit Lei and el-Qom Inscriptions

## Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/830679fb

## Author
Washburn, Jody

## Publication Date
2016

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

# Iron Age Cave Inscriptions from the Southern Shephelah:

# An Integrative Study of the Beit Lei and el-Qôm Inscriptions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

by

Jody Ellen Washburn

2016

© Copyright by

Jody Ellen Washburn

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Iron Age Cave Inscriptions from the Southern Shephelah:

An Integrative Study of the Beit Lei and el-Qôm Inscriptions

by

Jody Ellen Washburn

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor William M. Schniedewind, Chair

The inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm were originally situated in hewn burial caves in the southern Shephelah. Since their original publication in 1963 and 1970 respectively, new technologies have become available for photographing epigraphic material. Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) is a technique that combines multiple light angles to facilitate enhanced views of the object. This dissertation uses new photographs as the basis for a fresh assessment of the cave inscriptions. Building upon previous paleographic and archaeological analyses of the inscriptions and their setting, this study presents an integrative analysis of the source and purposes of the inscriptions in context. Viewing the inscriptions as physical objects, the production and preservation of which involved numerous processes, each of which were socially and

culturally informed, facilitates a more holistic treatment of the inscriptions. When the inscriptions are examined in the context of various classifications of inscribing, such as informal inscribing, ritual inscribing and mortuary inscribing, a number of themes emerge. The cave inscriptions represent commemorative inscribing, physically memorializing identities and events on the tomb walls. Overwriting and other repetitious inscribing illustrate the importance of the act of inscribing and hint at a ritual or performative use of writing. The unique combination of texts and images along with the burial setting and placement of the inscriptions betray an innovative use of both the content and the space. Given the context of conflict besetting the kingdom of Judah during much of the Iron Age IIB, there are multiple possibilities regarding the more specific impetus for the inscriptions. While it is not possible to ascertain whether or not the inscriptions were associated with the burial use of the tombs, this contextual study highlights the fact that the inscribers would have already been affiliated with the space and that they selected the tomb setting because the meaning of the space aligned with the purposes of the inscribing.

The dissertation of Jody Ellen Washburn is approved.

Aaron Alexander Burke

Bruce Zuckerman

William M. Schniedewind, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

For Danielle

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION
An Integrative Study of the Beit Lei and el-Qôm Inscriptions ..... 1

CHAPTER 2—THE INSCRIPTIONS REVISITED
New Photographs in Context ..... 29

CHAPTER 3—THE CAVE INSCRIPTIONS AS INFORMAL INSCRIBING
Examining the People and Purposes of Graffiti ..... 147

CHAPTER 4— AITUAL INSCRIBING AND MAGIC
The Cave Inscriptions as Vestiges of Ritual Activity ..... 177

CHAPTER 5—THE FAMILY TOMB AS AN INSCRIBED ARTIFACT
A Material and Spatial Analysis of the Cave Inscriptions ..... 206

CHAPTER 6—INNOVATIVE INSCRIBING
The Use of Writing in Times of Transition or Crisis ..... 229

CHAPTER 7—CONCLUSIONS
Commemorative and Effective Inscribing in Times of Crisis ..... 249

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 254

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Map of Judean Shephelah ..... 3

Figure 1.2. Aerial view of Khirbet Beit Lei ..... 8

Figure 1.3. View of Beit Lei tomb today ..... 10

Figure 1.4. View of Tell Mareshah from Beit Lei ..... 11

Figure 2.1. View of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber with inscriptions ..... 33

Figure 2.2. Schematic of the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber ..... 34

Figure 2.3. RTI-derived image of the curse and images (IAA 61-534) ..... 35

Figure 2.4. Magnified detail of the "tent" or draped cloth (part of IAA 61-534) ... 36

Figure 2.5. RTI-derived image and drawing of IAA 61-534 ..... 37

Figure 2.6. RTI-derived detail of curse (part of IAA 61-534) in diffuse gain ..... 38

Figure 2.6. Drawing of curse (part of IAA 61-534) ..... 38

Figure 2.7. RTI-derived detail of curse (part of IAA 61-534) in specular enhancement ..... 39

Figure 2.8. Illustration of two forms of ʾālep ..... 40

Figure 2.9. RTI-derived image of the figure holding an object (IAA 61-532) on the north wall of the Beit Lei antechamber ..... 42

Figure 2.10. Drawing of the figure holding an object (IAA 61-532) ..... 43

Figure 2.11. RTI-derived image and drawing of figure (IAA 61-532) ..... 44

Figure 2.12. RTI-derived image of the partially effaced circle (IAA 61-540) ..... 46

Figure 2.13. RTI-derived image and drawing of circle (IAA 61-540) ..... 47

Figure 2.14. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised ellipse (IAA 61-541) ..... 48

Figure 2.15. Drawing of the deeply incised ellipse (IAA 61-541) ..... 49

Figure 2.16. RTI-derived image and drawing of ellipse (IAA 61-541) ..... 49

Figure 2.17. RTI-derived image of curse phrase (IAA 61-535)..... 51

Figure 2.18. RTI-derived image of curse phrase (IAA 61-535),
in specular enhancement..... 52

Figure 2.19. RTI-derived image and drawing of curse phrase (IAA 61-535) ..... 53

Figure 2.20. RTI-derived image of curse (IAA 61-535), with Lemaire's drawing ... 55

Figure 2.21. RTI-derived image (IAA 61-535) showing *kāp*-like characters..... 56

Figure 2.22. Drawing of the curse phrase (IAA 61-535)..... 57

Figure 2.23. Schematic of the west wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber ..... 58

Figure 2.24. RTI-derived image of the long inscriptions (IAA 61-538)..... 60

Figure 2.25. Magnified detail of long textual inscriptions (IAA 61-538)..... 60

Figure 2.26. Drawing of the textual inscriptions (IAA 61-538)..... 61

Figure 2.27. RTI-derived image and drawing of IAA 61-538..... 62

Figure 2.28. RTI-derived detail and drawing of beg. of line one (IAA 61-538) ..... 64

Figure 2.29. Magnified detail of upper right corner (IAA 61-538)..... 64

Figure 2.30. Detail of the middle of lines one and two (IAA 61-538),
with drawing of *ʾlhy* superimposed ..... 65

Figure 2.31. Overlapping lines in upper middle (IAA 61-538),
and detail of presumed *kl* in first line ..... 67

Figure 2.32. Magnified detail of the upper left corner (IAA 61-538)
showing the end of line one (read by Naveh as *kl hʾrṣ[h*) ..... 68

Figure 2.33. Magnified detail of the beginning of line two (IAA 61-538)..... 69

Figure 2.34. Magnified detail of the middle of the second line (IAA 61-538)..... 70

Figure 2.35. Magnified detail of the word *yršlm* (IAA 61-538) ..... 71

Figure 2.36. Curse (*ʾr*) from the middle of the large block (part of IAA 61-538) .... 72

Figure 2.37. RTI-derived image and drawing of curse (part of IAA 61-538) ..... 72

Figure 2.38. Magnified detail of *nqh* from line three (IAA 61-538) ..... 73

Figure 2.39. Magnified detail of *yh yhwh* the end of line three (IAA 61-538) ..... 74

Figure 2.40. Magnified detail of the beginning of line three (IAA 61-538) ..... 75

Figure 2.41. RTI-derived detail and drawing of the middle of the third line ..... 77

Figure 2.42. Magnified detail of the middle of the third line (IAA 61-538) ..... 78

Figure 2.43. Magnified detail of the middle of line three, read *ḥnn*(*t*) ..... 79

Figure 2.44. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised figure (IAA 61-533) ..... 80

Figure 2.45. RTI-derived image of figure (IAA 61-533), in specular ..... 81

Figure 2.46. Drawing of the deeply incised figure (IAA 61-533) ..... 82

Figure 2.47. RTI-derived image and drawing of figure (IAA 61-533) ..... 83

Figure 2.48. Schematic of the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber ..... 84

Figure 2.49. Figure with raised hands (IAA 61-539) from Beit Lei ..... 86

Figure 2.50. Drawing of the figure with raised hands (IAA 61-539) ..... 87

Figure 2.51. Figure with raise hands (IAA 61-539) with drawing superimposed .. 88

Figure 2.52. Petitionary phrase, "Save, YHWH!" (IAA 61-537) ..... 90

Figure 2.53. Drawing of the petitionary phrase, "Save, YHWH!" (IAA 61-537) ..... 90

Figure 2.54. Petitionary phrase, "Save, YHWH!" (IAA 61-537) with drawing ..... 91

Figure 2.55. Magnified detail of the first word (read הושע by Naveh) ..... 91

Figure 2.56. Magnified detail of the second word (read יהוה by Naveh) ..... 92

Figure 2.57. RTI-derived image of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536) ..... 93

Figure 2.58. RTI-derived detail of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536), in specular ..... 93

Figure 2.59. Drawing of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536) ..... 97

Figure 2.60. RTI-derived image and drawing of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536) .... 98

Figure 2.61. RTI-derived image of the two boats (IAA 61-531) ..... 99

Figure 2.62. Drawing of the two boats (IAA 61-531) ..... 101

Figure 2.63. RTI-derived image and drawing of the two boats (IAA 61-531)..... 102

Figure 2.64. Circle (IAA 61-542) inscribed somewhere in the Beit Lei tomb ..... 103

Figure 2.65. RTI-derived image of the incised epitaph (IAA 72-168)..... 105

Figure 2.66. Drawing of the incised epitaph (IAA 72-168)..... 106

Figure 2.67. RTI-derived image and drawing of the epitaph (IAA 72-168) ..... 107

Figure 2.68. Ink epitaph (IAA 72-460) from Tomb I at el-Qôm..... 108

Figure 2.69. RTI-derived image of the ʾUriyahu Inscription (IAA 72-169), in diffuse gain..... 111

Figure 2.70. RTI-derived image of the ʾUriyahu Inscription (IAA 72-169) ..... 112

Figure 2.71. Drawing of the ʾUriyahu Inscription (IAA 72-169) ..... 113

Figure 2.72. RTI-derived image and drawing of the ʾUriyahu Inscription ..... 114

Figure 2.73. Magnified detail of line one of the ʾUriyahu inscription ..... 116

Figure 2.74. Magnified detail of line two of the ʾUriyahu inscription..... 116

Figure 2.75. Magnified detail of line three of the ʾUriyahu inscription..... 117

Figure 2.76. Overlapping characters in line three of the ʾUriyahu inscription..... 119

Figure 2.77. Magnified detail of strokes at the beginning of line three..... 120

Figure 2.78. Magnified detail of line four of the ʾUriyahu inscription ..... 122

Figure 2.79. Magnified detail and drawing of line four ..... 122

Figure 2.80. Magnified detail of RTI-derived image of the hand (IAA 72-169) ..... 124

Figure 2.81. Lines five and six of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169). ..... 125

Figure 2.82. RTI-derived image of a curse inscription (BLMJ 04663) ..... 127

Figure 2.83. Illustration of various forms of ʾālep ..... 137

Figure 2.84. Drawing of lines one and two of the ʾUriyahu inscription ..... 142

Figure 2.85. Drawing of the curse (IAA 61-534) from Beit Lei ..... 142

Figure 2.86. Drawing of line three of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) ..... 143

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ABRL | Anchor Bible Reference Library |
| *ABD* | *Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992. |
| *ANET* | *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969. |
| AOS | American Oriental Series |
| *AUSS* | *Andrews University Seminary Studies* |
| *AION* | *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* |
| AASOR | Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research |
| *ADAJ* | *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* |
| *AfO* | *Archiv für Orientforschung* |
| *BAIAS* | *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archeological Society* |
| *BASOR* | *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* |
| *BN* | *Biblische Notizen* |
| BZAW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| *COS* | *The Context of Scripture*. 3 Volumes. Edited by William W. Hallo. Leiden, 2003. |
| *ErIsr* | *Eretz-Israel* |
| FAT | Forschungen zum Alten Testament |
| HSM | Harvard Semitic Monographs |
| *HUCA* | *Hebrew Union College Annual* |
| *IEJ* | *Israel Exploration Journal* |
| *JANES* | *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *JAOS* | *Journal of the American Oriental Society* |
| *JBL* | *Journal of Biblical Literature* |
| *JCS* | *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* |
| *JESHO* | *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* |
| *JHS* | *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* |
| *JJS* | *Journal of Jewish Studies* |
| *JNES* | *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* |
| *JSOT* | *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* |
| *JSOTSup* | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series |
| *JSS* | *Journal of Semitic Studies* |
| *JTS* | *Journal of Theological Studies* |
| *NEA* | *Near Eastern Archaeology* |
| *OEANE* | *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Ancient Egypt*. Edited by D. E. Redford. Oxford, 2001 |
| *OEANE* | *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East.* Edited by E. M. Meyers. New York, 1997 |
| *PEQ* | *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* |
| *RB* | *Revue biblique* |
| SAA | State Archives of Assyria |
| SBL | Society of Biblical Literature |
| *TA* | *Tel Aviv* |
| *UF* | *Ugarit-Forschungen* |
| *VT* | *Vetus Testamentum* |
| *ZA* | *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *ZABR* | *Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtgeschichte* |
| *ZAW* | *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* |
| *ZDPV* | *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words are not sufficient to express my appreciation for the support—both professional and personal—offered to me throughout the dissertation journey by my professors and colleagues in the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department at UCLA. During a Graduate Research Mentorship awarded by UCLA's Graduate Division, my doctoral advisor, William Schniedewind, guided me as I explored possible topics and narrowed my research to what became this dissertation. Professor Schniedewind is always available to his students, and spent countless hours with me discussing ideas and encouraging me to pursue a study that would integrate my interests in inscriptions and the socio-cultural context of the ancient Near East. In addition to his support on campus, Dr. Schniedewind also invested in the logistical aspects of the project in multiple ways. He supported the many applications necessary to fund the travel, and also spent time in Israel providing critical assistance with the photography, for which I am very grateful.

A variety of support made the photography aspect of this project possible. Training and use of the equipment were made possible through the generous support of the West Semitic Research Project. Special thanks go particularly to Bruce Zuckerman, Kenneth Zuckerman, Marilyn Lundberg and Johnna Tyrrell who invested time training me and provided continued support while I was in the field and during post-processing. I also wish to thank Eran Arie for making it possible for me to personally view the inscriptions at the Israel Museum on multiple occasions and for mentioning the idea of using RTI techniques for further study of the el-Qôm ʾUriyahu inscription. Many of the inscriptions examined here are stored at the IAA Storage Facility in Beth-Shemesh, and I thank Debora ben Ami

for providing updated information regarding holdings, for facilitating permission for the project, and for coordinating logistics during the photography project so that all the objects were accessible. For funding of the research and new photographs, I wish to thank the Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies at UCLA for supporting my research on the inscriptions three summers in a row (Roter Travel Grant, 2013; Appel Research Travel Grant, 2014 and 2015), and the Humanities Division at UCLA for supporting the photography trip through the Harry and Yvonne Lenart Graduate Travel Fellowship (2014).

I wish to thank the members of my committee, each of whom contributed to the project in different ways. Yona Sabar taught me to love Semitic languages even more than I did upon entering the program, and his smile and encouraging words always brightened my day. He also opened my eyes to the interconnectedness between cognate Hebrew and Aramaic words, an awareness that now shapes how I read texts. Bruce Zuckerman's portrayal of the possibilities of Reflectance Transformation Imaging techniques, presented during one of our graduate seminars, tuned my mind to the potential for fresh analyses of epigraphic material. His attention to detail and his probing yet realistic approach to inscriptions have led me to ask new questions and think more systematically about the implications of stroke order and environment in a socio-cultural examination of inscriptions. Aaron Burke has supported my research in numerous ways, including bringing essential sources to my attention and affirming the importance of an intentionally contextual approach to archaeological and epigraphic material. Some of the groundwork for this dissertation was done during his seminar on the archaeology of the ancient southern Levant. Dr. Burke has also guided my selection of theoretical material and offered fresh insight regarding how cultural and archaeological data might inform my exploration

of the sources and purposes of the cave inscriptions. It is hard to enumerate all the ways in which my chair, Dr. Schniedewind, has contributed both to this project and to my development as a scholar and teacher. The final year of my dissertation research was funded by a Dissertation Year Fellowship from the Graduate Division of UCLA. Throughout that year, Dr. Schniedewind provided continual support, helping me think through various issues and pushing me to ask different and more informative questions. His sense of humor and frank assessments of ideas have made our meetings both enjoyable and thought-provoking. And his interdisciplinary approach has shaped how I think about and present ideas—both in my research and in the classroom.

Numerous other teachers and colleagues in the department have shaped my thinking and provided endless encouragement over the course of my time at UCLA. Nancy Ezer is the best Hebrew instructor I have ever met and her style and enthusiasm have shaped my approach to teaching languages. Barbara Cifola and Bob Englund brought to life the gold mine that is Akkadian language and texts, and some of my fondest memories of my coursework are from their classes. Giorgio Buccellati opened my eyes to the interplay of environmental, social, religious and political factors that shaped the long history of ancient Mesopotamia. Carol Bakhos showed me the endless possibilities inherent in the reading and study of Rabbinic Hebrew. Kathlyn Cooney is an incredibly skilled lecturer, and working as a teaching assistant in her course on women and power in the ancient world has shaped how I approach both course design and teacher-student interactions. And Jeremy Smoak has continually modeled a relaxed yet invested approach in the classroom and I have learned from him many skills that I will take with me as I embark on the teaching journey.

It is impossible to express my gratitude to Jennifer Pantoja, Alice Mandell, Lisa Cleath, Melissa Ramos, Mike Wingert, Nadia ben-Marzouk, Amy Karoll, Rosanna Lu, Timothy Hogue, Andrew Danielson, Jason Price, and Martin Chan for the friendship and grounding they have offered over the past few years. Mike has been my learning partner and sounding board since our first day on campus. Jennifer, Melissa and Rosanna have affirmed both my research ideas and my need for work-family balance. Alice has been my laughing partner and has pointed me to countless resources that have informed my study and writing. Lisa has been my dissertation-writing partner and her encouragement and feedback have pulled me through many stuck places and made it possible for me to finish on schedule. Nadia has also helped me over many hurdles by talking through ideas with me and suggesting comparative materials and resources. Mike's wife, Romina Wingert, as well as Melissa and Lisa, spent many hours assisting me with reading French and German sources, for which I am very grateful. And every one of my colleagues has made it a joy to come to work and attend class throughout the program. Thank you all for the fabulous memories and for your continued friendship.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their untiring support. My parents Rick and Wendy Foster taught me that hard things are worth doing, and worth doing well, and their encouragement of my endeavors has never wavered. My grandparents believe in me, a gift that becomes more and more beautiful the farther I journey in life. My sister Tobi Goff is my lifelong conversation partner and her listening ear and truthful words have pulled me through on many occasions. Most of all, I thank my husband Chad for the unending support he has offered me as I have pursued this degree. He has sacrificed in countless ways and his sense of humor and presence have carried me and provided continual reminders of

what is most important in life. He also helps care for our precious daughter, Danielle, whose smiles and gurgles daily bless us with joy. Others who have helped care for Danielle, and without whom I never would have been able to complete this project, are Ronda Harrison, Jessica Macias and my mother-in-law Charlynn Zinke. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

CURRICULUM VITAE

**EDUCATION:**

| | |
|---|---|
| 2011 to Pres. | PhD student: Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Cultures<br>University of California Los Angeles<br>Dissertation—*Iron Age Cave Inscriptions from the Southern Shephelah: An Integrative Study of the Beit Lei and el-Qom Inscriptions*<br>Anticipated Graduation Date: June 2016 |
| March, 2015 | C.Phil.: Near Eastern Languages and Cultures<br>University of California Los Angeles |
| June, 2013 | MA: Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Cultures<br>University of California Los Angeles |
| August, 2010 | MA: Religion—Hebrew Bible<br>Andrews University |
| May, 2010 | MA: Religious Education—Family Life Education<br>Andrews University |
| June, 2005 | Bachelor of Arts Degree, *summa cum laude*<br>Walla Walla University<br>Major: Theology; Minor: Music-Piano |

**EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE:**

| | |
|---|---|
| 2015-present | *UCLA Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures*<br>Teaching Fellow<br>Courses Taught: Near East M20—Visible Language: The History of Writing |
| 2014-2015 | *UCLA Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures*<br>Teaching Associate<br>Courses Taught: ANE 10W—Jerusalem the Holy City; ANE 15—Women and Power in the Ancient World |
| 2012-2014 | *UCLA Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures*<br>Teaching Assistant<br>Courses Taught: ANE 10W—Jerusalem the Holy City |
| 2008-2010 | *Horn Archaeological Museum/Institute of Archaeology, Andrews University*<br>Administrative Assistant |
| 2007-2008 | *Andrews University Human Resources Department*<br>Employment Assistant |
| 2001-2005 | *Walla Walla University*<br>Hebrew Tutor<br>Hebrew and Greek Teacher's Assistant |

**AWARDS:**

- ASOR Student Travel Grant, 2015
- Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA Graduate Division, 2015-2016
- Appel Research Travel Grant, Center for Jewish Studies, UCLA, 2015

- Lenart Travel Grant, UCLA, 2014
- Appel Research Travel Grant, Center for Jewish Studies, UCLA, 2014
- Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship, UCLA Graduate Division, 2013-2014
- Roter Travel Grant, Center for Jewish Studies, UCLA, 2013
- Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Fellowship, UCLA Graduate Division, 2013
- Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Fellowship, UCLA Graduate Division, 2012
- Fund for Theological Education Fellowship, 2003

**PUBLICATIONS:**

Book Review: "The Psuedepigrapha on Sexuality," *Near Eastern Archaeological Society Bulletin* (2014), 43-44.

Book Review: "Learning Biblical Hebrew Interactively," *Hebrew for Higher Education* 17 (2015) 181-183.

**PRESENTATIONS:**

"Inscriptions in the Family Tomb: Commemorating Identity in the Face of Crisis." Presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 2015

"Prayers in Caves: A Re-evaluation of the Beit Lei and el-Qôm Inscriptions." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Nov. 2015

"Refugee Use of Caves in the Bible and the Ancient Near East." Presented at the Pacific Coast Regional Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, 2015.

"The Potency of Writing: Caves and Curses in the Southern Levant." Presented at the International Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, Vienna, Austria, 2014.

"Tall Jalul—2008 Season." Presented during a poster session at the annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research meetings, 2008

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION EXPERIENCE:**

Tall Jalul, Jordan, 2008 Season, Assistant Square Supervisor
Tall Jalul, Jordan, 2009 Season, Administrative Assistant
Jaffa, Israel, 2012 Season, Participant

**RESEARCH LANGUAGES:**

- Hebrew
- French
- German

**ANCIENT LANGUAGES:**

- Classical Hebrew
- Aramaic
- Akkadian
- Ugaritic
- Moabite
- Phoenician
- Greek

# CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION
## An Integrative Study of the Beit Lei and el-Qôm Inscriptions

Since their discovery in the 1960s, the cave inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm have contributed to numerous discussions in various academic areas, including studies in Hebrew paleography, interment ideology, and Israelite religion and cultic practice. The inscriptions have been dated paleographically between the mid-eighth and early sixth centuries, and a number of factors make them significant in studies of Judean thought and practice during the Iron Age II. Situated in the heart of the Judean Shephelah, Beit Lei and el-Qôm were part of the area significantly impacted by Assyrian and Babylonian incursions. The inscriptions were incised on the hewn walls of well-prepared burial caves, yet the content of many of the inscriptions does not seem to be explicitly related to burial. Even though they were carved in stone, the informal, haphazard appearance of the inscriptions does not align with the standard of craftsmanship usually associated with monumental inscriptions. The Beit Lei inscriptions include the well-known mention of Jerusalem in a confession of Yahweh, a cry "Save, Yahweh," a number of curse phrases and drawings including boats, human figures and geometrical designs. At el-Qôm two epitaphs labeled one of the chambers in Tomb I, and Tomb II included undeciphered pairs of letters, crisscrossing lines, and a blessing mentioning a wealthy individual ʾUriyahu as well as Yahweh and "his A/asherah." Both the variety of content and the unique location make these inscriptions especially appropriate subjects for interdisciplinary study. The overall goal of this study is to look at the cave inscriptions through a number of interpretive lenses, including epigraphy, mortuary archaeology, archaeology of refugees, historical geography, history of writing, funerary practice, magic practice, commemorative

ritual and iconography. Integrating these lines of inquiry will facilitate a nuanced treatment of the inscriptions that offers possible interpretations while fairly reflecting the difficulties and complexities of the limited data.

## OVERVIEW OF SITES

Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm are situated in the central Shephelah, between the Judean hills and the coastal plain. Yehuda Dagan, in his survey of the region, notes the relatively homogenous nature of the Shephelah, with its low rolling hills and mild climate providing ideal conditions for agriculture.[1] These conditions made the region an especially useful asset to the kingdom of Judah.[2] The Shephelah is further divided into sub-regions, each affiliated with a certain urban center, namely Beth-Shemesh, Jarmuth, ʿAzekah, Lachish or Beit Mirsim. Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm were most likely within the Lachish district.[3] Neither site has been extensively excavated, meaning that our sources for archaeological analysis consist of survey data and preliminary publications of salvage excavations. A brief overview of the available data for each site is provided below, including the basic finds and the basis for dating cited in the primary publications.

---

[1] Yehuda Dagan, "Results of the Survey: Settlement Patterns in the Lachish Region" in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish, Volume V* (Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004), 2674.

[2] Gunnar Lehmann and Hermann M. Niemann, "When did the Shephelah Become Judahite?" *TA* 41 (2014): 90.

[3] Anson Rainey, "The Biblical Shephelah of Judah." *BASOR* 251 (1983): 7-10.

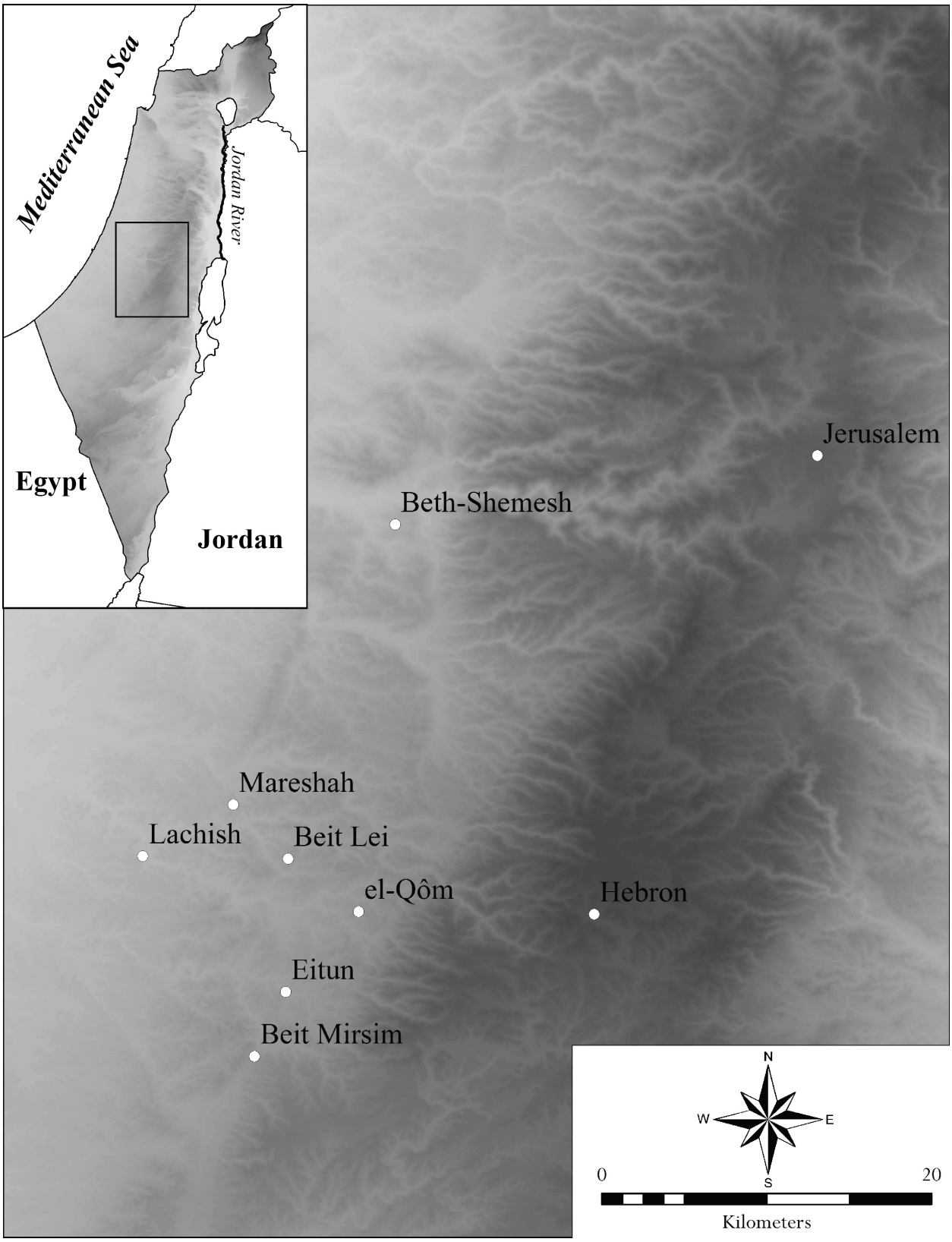


Figure 1.1. Map of Judean Shephelah showing cave inscription sites in context.
Map Credit: Amy B. Karoll.

## Khirbet Beit Lei

The burial cave at Khirbet Beit Lei was "accidentally found" when Jewish National Fund workers "fell into it through a ceiling entrance," according to a *Jerusalem Post* article dated March 1962.[4] This cave, which came to be known as the "Jerusalem Cave" due to the inscription mentioning Judah's capital, was the southern of two caves excavated by Joseph Naveh in June 1961.[5] The burial cave was carved into the soft limestone, with two chambers and what appeared to be the markings for a third chamber.[6] There were three benches in each chamber and skeletal remains were found undisturbed on each bench.[7] No artifacts were found in the cave other than a few pieces of simple bronze jewelry—a ring, an earring, and a clasp, apparently still worn by the deceased when they were placed in the tomb.[8] A few pieces of Persian period pottery were found near the mouth of the cave,

---

[4] Shalom Cohen, "Earliest Hebrew Inscriptions of 'Jerusalem' Found in Cave," *Jerusalem Post*, March 29, 1962 (Article viewed by author May 3, 2015, Archive Branch, Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem).

[5] Joseph Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *IEJ* 13 (1963): 74-92; Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew Inscriptions in a Tomb from the Period of the First Temple," *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society (=Yediot)* 27 (1963): 235-56 (in Hebrew). The northern cave consisted of a rectangular chamber reached by a short flight of stairs. The single burial chamber did not have benches, and while the skeletal remains were better preserved than those in the southern cave, almost all had been disturbed. For a brief summary of the site, see Oren Gutfeld and Michal Haber, *A Guide to Beit Loya (Lehi): An Archaeological Site in the Judean Lowland* (Jerusalem: Beit Lehi Foundation, 2009), 8.

[6] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 74-75. Zevit suggests that the third chamber was not completed because "the cave was put into use before this was completed" (Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* [London: Continuum, 2001], 405-406). In his discussion of the dating of the tomb design, he suggests that one should visualize the layout as if the third chamber had been completed with the same three benches as the others. This would facilitate comparative analysis with other Iron Age chambered bench tombs. However, it is difficult to determine exactly how the third chamber would have looked. There may be a practical reason why the hewing of the third chamber was never completed. According to the cave plan drawn by Naveh, there would not have been space for a third chamber in the marked position. Either a narrow entryway would have had to turn sharply east/northeast and open into a chamber with less than three benches, or the third chamber would have opened into a portion of the completed second chamber. Perhaps the hewers realized this practical issue and abandoned the project.

[7] N. Haas, "Human Skeletal Remains in Two Burial Caves," *IEJ* 13 (1963): 93.

[8] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 75; Haas, "Human Skeletal Remains," 93-95. These simple bronze objects are common in the Iron Age and do not offer any significant data for more precise dating.

apparently coming in through a crevice in the rocks sealing the door.[9] All but one of the inscriptions were found on the walls of the rectangular antechamber.[10] A roughly sketched figure with raised hands was inscribed on the east jamb of the entrance to chamber one.

Various hypotheses have been offered regarding the date and context of the writing in the cave. Naveh suggested a Hezekian date and considered the various inscriptions to have been written within a short period of time.[11] He acknowledged that dating the inscriptions based on specific letter forms—particularly *ʾālep*, three of which seem late, and *mêm*, one of which seems early—was difficult, and presented an analysis that noted multiple factors such as variation in handwriting between writers, height of inscriptions from the cave floor, comparative archaeological analysis of pre-exilic burial caves, and the religious nature of the texts.[12] In later publications Naveh offered observations on implications for religious practice, noted an improved reading, and even referenced an early sixth century date for the inscriptions.[13]

---

Comparable objects have been found at numerous sites, including Lachish and Ein Gedi. See Olga Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), Plates 55-57; Ephraim Stern, *En-Gedi Excavations I* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2007), 183. Zevit notes, "The absence of precious metals from the burial may reflect tenth to eighth century practice," and points out that gold and silver became more common in the seventh-sixth centuries (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 405). See also Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSS 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 86.

[9] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 75, 89.

[10] For a diagram of the position of each inscription within the tomb antechamber, see Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 76.

[11] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 92.

[12] *Ibid*., 87-89.

[13] Joseph Naveh, "Graffiti and Dedications." *BASOR* 235 (1979): 27-30; Naveh "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *IEJ* 51 (2001): 194-207.

Frank Moore Cross argued on the basis of paleography that three of the longer inscriptions cannot be dated any earlier than the sixth century, though he conceded in a footnote that the curse inscriptions are probably older.[14] His speculation regarding possible inscribers attributes the main three inscriptions to "a refugee fleeing the Chaldeans" around 587 BCE.[15] In his suggestions for dating, Cross noted the "developed (or degenerate)" form of the *ʾālep*, comparable to the Gibeon jar handle examples and latest in the eighth-sixth century series of the cursive *ʾālep.*[16] He basically settled for a sixth century date as middle ground between late forms, including *hê* and *ʿayin*, dating "no earlier than the sixth century" and earlier forms, including *ʾālep*, *dālet*, *wāw*, *ṣādê*, and *šîn*, dating "no later than the sixth century."[17] Because many of the forms Cross noted as suggesting a later date for the inscriptions actually do appear by the seventh century, it seems that the late form of the cursive *ʾālep* is the weightiest element of his argument for a sixth century date.

Ziony Zevit and André Lemaire view the paleography of the various inscriptions as fitting within the late eighth to early seventh centuries.[18] This places the inscriptions a

---

[14] Frank M. Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* (ed. J. A. Sander; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), 303. McCarter goes with Cross' early sixth century date (P. Kyle McCarter, "The Khirbet Beit Lei Cave Inscriptions," *COS* 2.53). Gibson is the only one to suggest an even later date, "in the latter part of the sixth century after the restoration of the Temple;" he cites the Aramaic form of the word Judah and the use of *wāw* as a *mater lectionis* for a 3ms suffix as well as content similar to that found in Zechariah and Ezra (John Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions: Volume 1: Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], 57).

[15] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303.

[16] *Ibid*., 301; Frank M. Cross, "Epigraphical Notes on Hebrew Documents of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries B.C.: III The Inscribed Jar Handles from Gibeon," *BASOR* 168 (1962): 18-19. See also Na'aman Avigad, "Some Notes on the Hebrew Inscriptions from Gibeon," *IEJ* 9 (1959): 130-3.

[17] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 301-3.

century earlier than Cross' earliest possible date, but within Naveh's original Hezekian date range. Like Naveh, Zevit points out that the design of the cave adds support for this dating, noting especially a "molding" cut above the antechamber and the lack of a bone repository—features aligning it with the Silwan tombs in Jerusalem dating to the eighth to seventh centuries.[19] It is difficult to assign a precise date both to the incising of the inscriptions and the hewing of the tomb. One must keep in mind that it is impossible to know the precise relationship between the tomb and the inscriptions, meaning dates for the hewing of the tomb, the inscribing, and/or the burial use of the tomb may all be different. The lack of material culture remains in the tomb, and the unclear relationship of the pottery fragments with the sealing of the tomb also make it difficult to determine when the tomb was sealed and whether it was disturbed or robbed in antiquity.[20] This means the

---

[18] Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 420, 435; Andre Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," *Revue biblique* 83 (1976): 563-5.

[19] Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 405-6. See also David Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan, The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem, 1986), 264. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith dated the Beit Lei burial cave to the sixth century, but Zevit argues that her typology actually supports an earlier date (Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices,* 230; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*). Barkay also provided a typology of sorts for Iron Age burial caves, but he placed the Beit Lei cave as the final exemplar in the series, apparently based on Cross' sixth century date (Gabriel Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," in *Graves and Burial Practices in Israel in the Ancient Period* [ed. I. Singer; Tel Aviv: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1994], 162 [in Hebrew]).

[20] Naveh, in his original publication, pointed out that no pottery was found in the tomb, but that some fragments of a Persian period pot were found near the entrance. Because the majority of the pieces from this pot were found outside, Naveh considered the fragments inside to have drifted in "through the crevices in the large stones blocking the entrance;" and later in his analysis, Naveh pointed to the lack of potsherds in the burial cave, along with the fact that the skeletal remains were undisturbed, as evidence that no offerings for the dead had ever been placed in the tomb (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 75, 89-90). Cross noted the disjunction between the burial context and the content of the inscriptions, and highlighted the fact that there was pottery post-dating the age of the tomb as evidence that the "tomb was opened (and robbed presumably) in antiquity" (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303). Zevit suggested the tomb was used by the writers of the graffiti after the first two chambers were hewn; then, in response to a crisis (based on the fact that the third chamber was marked, but not finished) the owner of the tomb buried his dead there and sealed the tomb, which remained sealed until the Jewish National Fund workers happened upon it (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 407).

main evidence that can contribute to a suggested date is the tomb form and the paleographic analysis of letters that show significant development over the course of the Iron Age. Due to the variety found even within the basic typologies of Judean chambered tombs and Hebrew letter-forms, no more than an approximate date range from the late eight to early sixth centuries can realistically be assigned with certainty.

Figure 1.2. Aerial view of Khirbet Beit Lei. The square marks the location of the Iron Age tomb. Gutfeld and Haber, *A Guide to Beit Loya (Lehi)*, 2-3.

Khirbet Beit Lei (or Loya) has not been identified with any ancient place name, though local tradition associates a well one-quarter of a mile to the east with a spring

mentioned in Judges 15:18 that satisfied Samson's thirst after fighting the Philistines.[21] In a way, the site is in good company, as Anson Rainey points out in his study of the Shephelah districts that few of the biblical place names in this area have been identified with Arabic toponyms.[22] Beit Lei is located within what would have been the Lachish district, most likely functioning as a satellite site.[23] The inscription cave (labeled "Jerusalem Cave" in Figure 3) is located at the base of an escarpment where the soft "chalky" limestone provided an ideal setting for hewing tombs. This embankment runs along the edge of a natural hill, the highest point of which Oren Gutfeld, the current excavator of the site, considers the Iron Age (or biblical) "tell" based on concentration of Iron IIB/C pottery found during surveys.[24] While only one other burial cave was excavated nearby, the natural escarpment would have provided an ideal context for numerous other hewn burial caves. Until further excavation is carried out, it is not possible to confirm the extent to which this space was used during the Iron Age.

The cave site is accessible today along a gravel road skirting Khirbet Beit Lei. Much of the cave was destroyed during road construction, leaving only part of the antechamber and the rear benches of each of the chambers. When standing on what would have been

---

[21] "Being that Samson battled the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:14-17), and being that the word 'cheekbone' or 'jawbone' in Hebrew is lĕkhi, some attribute the events described above to the present-day site of Beit Lehi" (Gutfeld and Haber, *A Guide to Beit Loya (Lehi),* 10).

[22] Anson Rainey, "The Biblical Shephelah of Judah," *BASOR* 251 (1983): 7.

[23] This assertion rests on a "three-tier hierarchy" understanding of settlement in a period of urbanization. Dever explores this concept in relation to Iron II Judah, working with a modified "Central Place Theory" (taken from Paynter 1983); in this model, Lachish would be considered a city, functioning as a main administrative center, with Beit Lei being one of many affiliated villages or farmsteads (William Dever, "Social Structure in Palestine in the Iron Age II Period on the Eve of Destruction," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* [ed. T. E. Levy; London: Leicester University Press, 1995], 418-19).

[24] Oren Gutfeld, personal communication, May 8, 2015. Also, see area labels on site photographs above, taken from Gutfeld and Haber, *A Guide to Beit Loya (Lehi),* 2-3.

the floor of the cave antechamber, one can now look directly into the rear bench area of the second chamber. Because the west wall of the antechamber was destroyed, the west bench of the first chamber is now visible next to the back half of the second chamber. The lower portions of cleanly hewn corners are still visible near the entrance and in the corner of what used to be chamber one.

Figure 1.3. View of the Beit Lei tomb looking west. Photo: Jody Washburn, May 2015.

From the top of the hill one can see other key sites in the area, including Tell Mareshah and Khirbet el-Qôm. Tell Lachish is not visible from the site, but it is located to the west just beyond some rolling hills. Recent excavations at Khirbet Beit Lei have revealed a significant presence in the Hellenistic through the Byzantine periods, including multiple columbaria, oil presses, ritual baths, stables, quarries, cisterns and subterranean

tunnels.[25] The site sits just to the north of the Roman road that ran between Eleutheropolis and Hebron. David Dorsey considered this section of the road running north toward Mareshah as a branch of the ancient road connecting Debir with Lachish via ʿEton.[26]

Figure 1.4. View of Tell Mareshah looking NW from the highest point of Khirbet Beit Lei. Photo: Jody Washburn, May 2015.

**Khirbet el-Qôm**

In September 1967 William Dever acquired a large collection of Iron Age material, including the deeply incised epitaph termed Inscription 1, from an antiquities dealer in Jerusalem. After much questioning, he was able to trace the material to the area of Khirbet

[25] Gutfeld and Haber, *A Guide to Beit Loya (Lehi),* 7.

[26] David Dorsey, *Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 197.

el-Qôm, where a visit to the village confirmed that significant robbing of Iron Age tombs had recently been undertaken. During this visit, Dever identified the tomb from which Inscription 1 had been removed, and subsequently made arrangements to immediately undertake salvage work, which was carried out October 11 through the end of November, 1967.[27] During the excavation, which focused on two hewn tombs in which inscriptions had been found, Dever completed section drawings of the tombs as well as noting additional marks on the cave walls such as crisscrossing lines and pairs of letters. Tomb I included two epitaphs, one ink and one deeply incised, following the formula "belonging to PN, son of PN." The famed ʾUriyahu inscription, mentioning both Yahweh and Asherah, which Dever obtained from a local Bedouin, was traced to Tomb II, where it had been situated on the lower portion of a column between two chambers.[28] In his publication of the inscriptions and tombs, Dever also provided a careful analysis of two pieces of inscribed pottery and a number of inscribed weights thought to have come from el-Qôm, though acquired rather than excavated.[29]

---

[27] Dever describes the matching of the tomb with the inscription this way: "The villagers' detailed account of the inscription and the way in which they had removed it tallied very well with the condition of the block of stone we had purchased in Jerusalem. Moreover, some of the obviously fresh chips near the gaping hole in the west wall of the central chamber fit the edges of the block. The final confirmation was the discovery of part of the missing *he* at the beginning of line 3 on one of the chips" (William Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet el-Kôm," *HUCA* 40-41 [1970]: 139, 146).

[28] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 159; and personal communication, June 25, 2015.

[29] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 169-87. A number of shorter inscriptions—some even mentioning the name ʾÔpay, the owner of Tomb I—have also been attributed to el-Qôm, though it has not been possible to determine the precise location of each inscription within the tomb complex as it was for the inscriptions initially published by Dever. See Robert Deutsch and Michael Heltzer, *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 1994), 27-30; Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *IEJ* 51 (2001), 199-206; Andre Lemaire, "Khirbet el-Qom and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (eds. S. Gitin, J. E. Wright and J. P. Dessel; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 233-4; and Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: CARTA, 2008), 226-33. Naveh offered several possible scenarios regarding the relationship of the

In his original publication of the main three inscriptions, Dever dated the two funerary inscriptions from Tomb I to the mid-seventh century, and some graffiti in the same tomb to later in the seventh century or even into the sixth. His reasoning for assigning a mid-seventh century date to Inscription 1 had to do with cursive developments such as the "tic" at the end of the downstroke in *wāw* and the cross strokes in *zayin* as well as the "slightly rounded head and long leg" of *rêš*.[30] Lemaire placed more weight on the archaic *bêt* with its clearly angular form (also noted by Dever), and based on his opinion that the graffiti were contemporary with the epitaphs, he dated the graffiti and inscriptions to the end of the eighth century.[31] After a careful comparison with other lapidary inscriptions such as the Siloam Tunnel and Royal Steward inscriptions, Dever assigned the ʾUriyahu inscription found in Tomb II to the mid-eighth century on the basis of the absence of "three-stroke" *ʾāleps* and "drop-shouldered" *mêms* characteristic of late eighth to seventh century lapidary script.[32] Zevit and Lemaire concur, working from a date range of approximately 750-725 BCE in their publications.[33]

---

provenance and unprovenanced inscriptions, concluding that most likely the inscriptions in Tomb I indicated the ownership of a chamber by ʻOpay, son of Natanyahu. He may have been the leader of a group residing in that tomb or chamber, and the other inscriptions may have come from a nearby cave inhabited by their enemies (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 205-6). No paleographic analysis of these additional inscriptions has been offered, other than a few notes by Deutsch and Heltzer on the inscriptions reading "Blessed be your hewer" and "Here he lays the elders" comparing certain letter forms to other inscriptions from el-Qôm. See Deutsch and Heltzer, *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions*, 29.

[30] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 153-8.

[31] André Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," *RB* 84 (1977): 596-7; Lemaire, "Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy," 231.

[32] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 165. He did note that in a personal communication Cross indicated his preference for a date around 700 B.C. or later.

[33] Ziony Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 (1984): 39; Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 360; Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm," 603.

All the main treatments of the inscriptions mention the burial cave form as fitting within the typology generally attributed to the eighth-to-seventh centuries. The tombs where the inscriptions were found represented only two of the multiple tombs making up the Iron Age cemetery on the slopes of Khirbet el-Qôm.[34] Tomb I was located on the edge of the valley floor below the east slopes of the village. Its entrance was through a small opening leading into a central chamber, from which three other chambers were cut. Each chamber had three benches, and chambers one and three each had a repository under the end bench. While chamber two was more rough and simple, chambers one and three boasted body recesses and niches for head and feet. Similar tombs have been found at multiple sites, including Tell en-Naṣbeh, Beth-Shemesh, Lachish, and Beit Lei, most dated to the ninth-to-sixth centuries. Tomb II was located higher up on the south slope of Khirbet el-Qôm. It was a "butterfly-shaped" tomb with two lateral chambers extending on each side of the central chamber. A repository was cut into the floor in the back left corner of the central chamber. This tomb belongs to the category of tombs that include niches or benches rather than walk-in lateral chambers, also common in the eighth-to-seventh centuries.[35] Attempts to date the tombs based on typology of tomb form involve the same pitfalls inherent in efforts to date the inscriptions according to paleographic typologies. Typologies offer only a likely date range, and multiple forms often appear side by side due to the fact that a given form can continue in use for many years. Certain features are evidenced over extended periods of time. And other features may have been preserved in

[34] Dever wrote, "During the brief excavations there the writer personally observed nearly a hundred robbed tombs; and several thousand pieces would be a conservative estimate of the pottery from the site seen in the village or later in the hands of Jerusalem dealers" (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 187).

[35] *Ibid*., 140-50.

specific circumstances in legitimation efforts—a kind of conservative use of form for ideological purposes. Realistically, probably the most an analysis of the cave forms can provide is a date for the digging out of the caves within the Iron Age II, with the forms found at both el-Qôm and Beit Lei falling within the eighth to sixth centuries BCE.

A salvage excavation of the related settlement at Khirbet el-Qôm, carried out by John Holladay and James Strange in 1971, confirmed a significant Iron Age presence as evidenced by a fortification wall apparently enclosing an area similar in size to other Judean Shephelah sites such as Tell Beit Mirsim and Tell ʿEton.[36] Besides the tombs and the fortification wall, a cistern and cellar yielding numerous Iron II finds were also discovered; and in Field II, late Iron II structures were found under a Hellenistic complex. In Field III, "remains of a seventh century gate with a double entryway, apparently built upon still earlier foundations of the ninth-tenth centuries B.C., were reached."[37] While one of the stated goals of the excavation was "to acquire a closely stratified corpus of Iron II ceramics from the upper Judean Shephelah," it appears that the operation only succeeded in confirming a definite Iron Age II occupation of the site contemporaneous with the eighth-to-seventh century dates of the excavated Iron Age tombs. No site plan is available showing the relationship between the 1971 excavation fields, or showing the connection of the Iron Age remains with the tombs published by Dever.[38]

---

[36] John Holladay, "Khirbet el-Qôm," in Notes and News, *IEJ* 21:2 (1971): 175-7; Ryan Defonzo, "Iron II Judah: An Intra-Regional Study of Production and Distribution" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2005), 88-90.

[37] Holladay, "Khirbet el-Qôm," 176-177.

[38] Lawrence Geraty, who also participated in the 1971 excavation, indicated that the fields were each distinct and in different places within the modern village. The spaces selected for excavation were negotiated with the village leaders. Geraty, Strange and Holladay were each responsible for one of the three fields. Personal communication, November 18, 2015.

While a number of suggestions have been offered, the most defensible identification of the site was offered by David Dorsey, who argued that Khirbet el-Qôm was biblical Makkedah.[39] This places el-Qôm socio-politically on the eastern edge of the Lachish district, the third district described in Joshua 15.[40] Geographically, the site sits in the trough at the base of the Judean hills, on the main ancient road between Hebron and Tell Sheqef via Lachish.[41]

## THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Viewing the cave inscriptions holistically—with content, physical form, location and socio-cultural context considered equally interesting and integral to determining meaning—provides the best foundation for determining what the purposes of the inscriptions may have been. One such approach, called "new" or "material" philology, has primarily been delineated in the context of Nordic and other medieval literary manuscripts, but with slight adaptation the paradigm is useful as a framework for study of Hebrew cave inscriptions. While the cave inscriptions are single words or short lines incised on rock rather than literary works preserved in manuscript form, the concept of "the physical form of the text [being] an integral part of its meaning" is equally relevant.[42] Mark Driscoll, in his

---

[39] Dorsey looked at Joshua 10 as well as Eusebius' reference regarding Makkedah being east of Eleutheropolis, and noted the proximity of Khirbet el-Qôm (which has Iron Age remains) to Khirbet el-Maqdûm, a Roman-Byzantine site already located by the Survey of Western Palestine (David Dorsey, "The Location of Biblical Makkedah," *TA* 7 [1980]: 185-93).

[40] Rainey, "The Biblical Shephelah," 9.

[41] Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*, 194-5.

[42] Mark J. Driscoll, "The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New," in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature* (ed. J. Quinn and E. Lethbridge; University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010), 90.

description of material philology, points out that the text does "not exist independently from its material embodiment," therefore one must look at "the whole book," or in the case of the cave inscriptions, the whole chunk of rock that was taken from the cave as well as the context from which it was removed.[43] Driscoll further explains, "These physical objects come into being through a series of processes in which a (potentially large) number of people are involved; and they come into being at particular times, in particular places and for particular purposes, all of which are socially, economically and intellectually determined."[44] Taking the material embodiment of the inscriptions seriously leads to a more purposeful investigation of the myriad physical and social influences at work in the execution and preservation of any given inscription.

Writing in the ancient world carried significance and was rarely done serendipitously. This study builds upon the working assumption that—barring compelling evidence to the contrary—inscribing was done with intention; that even drawings, word forms or letter combinations we cannot easily decipher were inscribed on purpose and not simply as a time-killing activity or practice in anticipation of incising subsequent inscriptions.[45] There are, of course, certain issues inherent to this assumption. First, even if we argue that a line is inscribed on purpose, it is difficult to take that argument further to contend that intentionality consciously guided a specific curve of the line or the depth of the incision. Second, a focus on the intentionality of the agent can lead to an analysis that

---

[43] *Ibid.*, 90.

[44] *Ibid.*, 91.

[45] This view is contra Lemaire, who suggested that the graffiti were simply practice strokes made in anticipation of the engraved inscription in Tomb I at Khirbet el-Qôm (Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm," 596-7; Lemaire, "Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy," 231).

overlooks the multidirectional and unconscious influences—both material and social—that may be in play at any given point in time. In the case of inscriptions in stone, these influences could range from the texture of the material itself to social or practical conventions internalized and probably unconsciously acted upon by the authors or inscribers. Marian Feldman summarizes the issue this way: "Regardless of what any individual participant might think s/he is doing, her/his embeddedness in a thick web of relations means that ways of doing and reception are not mono-causal but instead the result of complex and multidirectional forces."[46] This study builds primarily upon the idea of intentionality in the sense of purpose. In other words, inscriptions were written with a certain outcome in mind. Incising in stone not only left a tangible mark on the stone, but was also intended to have an effect on the real world. The inscriber not only sought to leave his mark on the stone, but more importantly to accomplish a certain result by means of this efficacious act of inscribing.[47]

This study also builds upon an understanding of the Judean cultural context in the Iron Age as exhibiting more continuity than discontinuity with the larger ancient Near Eastern world.[48] This approach views the socio-cultural background of any given local

---

[46] Marian Feldman, *Communities of Style: Portable Luxury Arts, Identity, and Collective Memory in the Iron Age Levant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 50. Feldman also notes the limits of assertions regarding intentionality, or focus on the conscious vs. unconscious work of the artist, in her work on Iron Age luxury goods (Feldman, *Communities of Style,* 64).

[47] Susan Niditch explains this in the context of ancient Israel as an essentially oral society. "Writing comes to be regarded as capable of transformation and magic, the letters and words shimmering with the very power of the gods. Writing, which is always symbolic in a sense, involved in a process of communication by signification, holds a more overt kind of symbolism in such cultures. God is in the name; a curse is in the words; a person leaves traces of himself in his writing" (Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996], 44).

[48] The history of scholarship on Israelite religion has included a plethora of opinions regarding continuity or discontinuity with the broader ancient Near East. Most work falls somewhere in the middle,

phenomenon as a series of concentric circles, each related yet contributing distinct information to the discussion. For instance, when addressing the question of family religion at Khirbet Beit Lei, considering the evidence within the context of its socio-cultural backdrop will involve an analysis of the data in light of at least three contexts—1) the immediate area such as the local village or farmstead and the Lachish district of which it was a part; 2) the larger socio-political and religious context of which this area was a part, i.e., Iron II Judah; 3) the greater ancient Near East, including both family religious practices such as those evidenced in Syria or Mesopotamia and the changing socio-political interactions and relationships between various polities. Karel van der Toorn, in his work on family religion, points out the intersection of continuity and change in any contextual study of religious practice. For instance, a great deal of shared heritage is evident in a study of ancient Near Eastern religion, yet at the same time, a careful comparison of evidence from different areas or different time periods brings to the forefront distinctions or changes that contribute to a description sensitive to the subtleties of the data.[49]

In summary, the following study builds upon these working assumptions: First, only a holistic consideration of both the material embodiment and social context of the

---

and offers qualifications of terms and historical periods. For instance, Rainer Albertz, although he tended toward a focus on discontinuity, pointed out that "Israel had a share in the religious heritage of the very much older cultures, peoples and states of the Near East…and parallels to almost everything can be found in the environment;" he qualified this observation by asserting, "it is not the individual elements but the structure as a whole which makes the religion of Israel distinctive" (Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period—Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* [trans. J. Bowden; Louisville, KY: Westminter/John Knox Press, 1992], 20). In a brief article on the more specific cult of the dead within Israelite religion, Bloch-Smith notes the pendulum swing in scholarship from focus on continuity to focus on discontinuity with Israel's neighbors (Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Death in the Life of Ancient Israel," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Space: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* [ed. B. M. Gittlen; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002], 141-2).

[49] Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylon, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 4-5.

inscriptions will yield a better and more contextualized analysis that goes beyond a simple reporting of content. Second, writing at this period in the history of the Levant was considered potent—it had the capacity not only to record information or accompany a ritual performance, but actually to be the catalyst for impacting reality. Therefore writing was used with self-conscious intention, and should not be assumed to be an idle activity. Third, the cultural context of Judah—with areas such as family religion and ritual practice most relevant for this study—represents a continuity with the larger socio-cultural context of the ancient Near East, meaning that comparative material, even if separated by space or time, can be useful in achieving an integrated analysis of the data from el-Qôm and Beit Lei.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Beginning with the original publications by Naveh and Dever, and continuing with numerous other studies, the paleography and readings of the inscriptions, as well as their immediate archaeological context, have all been thoroughly analyzed. In this study, I hope to contribute to the continued contextual analysis of the inscriptions in two ways—first, by means of a fresh presentation of the data in context, and second, by means of a multi-faceted analysis integrating a variety of approaches to the data.[50]

[50] As may be expected, the foci, as well as the conclusions, of most studies of the inscriptions reflect (sometimes rather narrowly) the expertise and interests of the scholar—most commonly in the fields of archaeology, paleography, cult studies, or a combination of these areas. For example, Cross' dating of the longer Beit Lei inscriptions to the early sixth century was based on his understanding of the typology of letter forms in Iron Age epigraphy. This analysis then led to his suggestion of a refugee fleeing the Chaldeans as a likely candidate for the writer of the inscriptions (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303). A similar tendency toward a specific focus in studying the inscriptions is also reflected in the topical studies that cite the cave inscriptions. Judith Hadley studied the el-Qôm ʾUriyahu inscription in her study of the cult of Asherah, looking at the inscriptional material with the goal of determining what the word Asherah meant in this particular context (Judith Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 84-105). Much of Zevit's analysis of the Beit Lei material focuses on the cultic implications of the inscriptions, showing possible connections with other cultic texts and proposing the use of the cave as a sort of cult site used as part of the community's response to the Assyrian invasions (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*). These examples illustrate how the inscriptions are

The presentation of the inscriptional data in Chapter Two utilizes some of the latest methods available. The new photographs, taken in July 2014 by the author, represent freeze frames derived from Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) files, in which multiple light angles and various transformations are combined for optimal viewing of the incised strokes. The accompanying drawings are based on careful analysis of the RTI images as well as personal study of the artifacts themselves. In addition to presenting the inscriptions individually, they are also presented in context wherever sufficient data is available to reconstruct their setting in the cave. Notes regarding stroke order and phases of inscribing add further data for consideration. Thus, this project may serve as an example of the publication of epigraphic material using some of the latest methods available to present the available data in such a way that it can be accessed easily for future studies.

The second aim of this project is to provide an integrative study of the inscriptions—to explore how different fields of inquiry may intersect to offer more nuanced insights regarding the people and purposes of the inscriptions.[51] The RTI

---

often approached from specific angles in previous publications. This means that conclusions are based on a great weight of data from one or two areas and less exploration of others. There are legitimate reasons for the somewhat narrow and tentative nature of the discussion so far, including uncertain readings, the problematic genres of the inscriptions, issues of preservation, and the lack of clear archaeological context. Some types of data, such as osteological analysis of the bones, is simply not available due to the lack of resources and funds available to salvage projects as well as the difference in approaches taken to archaeological work sixty years ago. Despite the limited data available, the current study seeks to utilize these more topically driven studies as a foundation for a more detailed integrative analysis of what can be safely stated regarding the inscriptions and what hypotheses best fit the combination of data that is available.

[51] The term "integrative" comes from recent work on methodology in Bioarchaeology. Buikstra, Baadsgaard and Boutin explain this integrated approach in their working definition of bioarchaeology: "…Bioarchaeology: the contextual interpretation of human remains. Understanding the culture and society of interest is indispensable when considering human remains and mortuary contexts; conversely, the analysis of human remains is crucial to a holistic understanding of past societies. A contextualized bioarchaeology is far from a unified approach, however, and in fact encompasses myriad strategies for the study of mortuary remains from archaeological sites. It incorporates, even encourages, a variety of theoretical perspectives with recourse to a broad spectrum of archaeological, physical anthropological, and ethnographic methodologies. It is an effort to 'breathe new life' into the evidence of death, human remains and associated finds from

techniques used to produce new photographs of the inscriptions for this study may provide a useful analogy. An RTI file is derived from over forty photographs, each taken with illumination from a different light angle. When viewing this file using a special RTI viewer, the light can be moved around at will, with each selected angle offering a unique view of the inscription and bringing out details sometimes not visible in other views. Likewise, by looking at the cave inscriptions through a variety of interpretive lens—including paleography, archaeology of refugees, graffiti or informal writing, ancestor cult, typology and cultural significance of hewn tombs, family religion, and ritual use of writing—a more complex network of "views" are made possible. Each "light" brings out specific details and possibilities, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced treatment of the inscriptions.

By bringing together various approaches, this study seeks to integrate multiple perspectives and wrestle with how apparently divergent interpretations may intersect. Taking the RTI analogy one step further, combinations of light angles can also provide useful perspectives regarding how to understand the inscriptions. In the RTI photo viewer, two virtual light angles can be used in tandem in order to shed a unique combination of

---

archaeological sites, to 'resurrect' ancient societies—their social worlds and personae—and to give them a more complete present reality and relevance" (Buikstra, Baadsgaard and Boutin, "Introduction," in *Breathing New Life into the Evidence of Death: Contemporary Approaches to Bioarchaeology* [eds. A. Baadsgaard, A. T. Boutin, and J. E. Buikstra; Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2011], 3). For careful application of such approaches to data from the ancient Near East, see B. W. Porter and A. T. Boutin, eds., *Remembering the Dead in the Ancient Near East: Recent Contributions from Bioarchaeology and Mortuary Archaeology* (University of Colorado Press. 2014). Ian Hodder proposes building upon an integrative approach to include a more intentional awareness of material, along the lines of the materiality approach used as one of the theoretical assumptions of the present study. Hodder's observations are particularly relevant to an analysis of the cave inscriptions since an "inelegant and partial" conclusion is all that a fair analysis of the limited available data may produce. "Nowadays talk of integration in the sciences often focuses on bridging between culture and biology. In this article I have argued that inserting a third term, the material, allows the possibility of some form of integration across a wider swathe of approaches and disciplines, however inelegant and partial" (Hodder, "Human-Thing Entanglement: Toward an Integrated Archaeological Perspective," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 [2011], 173).

illumintations on a given area of the inscription. This eliminates some of the distracting shadows present when only one light angle is used, and also provides a view more comparable to what one would see with the naked eye, but with considerably finer control of angle(s) of light and magnification, literally, at one's fingertips. Likewise, combining distinct lines of inquiry in an effort to look at the inscriptions more holistically will provide a treatment of the data that is both more multi-faceted and more realistic or representative of the complex nature of human actions involved in the production of the inscriptions.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following discussion of methodology will outline how a multifaceted analysis of the limited data associated with the inscriptions may be carried out. Selecting an appropriate methodology basically means deciding what types of questions will prove most useful in meeting the goals of the study. Since this study seeks to analyze the limited available data in an integrative and holistic manner (in the vein of materiality studies), a variety of questions must be considered. Descriptive questions, often associated with a formalist approach, will facilitate the exploration of the form and location and content of the inscriptions as well as the details of their archaeological context. Relationship questions, often associated with a semiotics approach, will facilitate the exploration of individual and group agency, writing and ritual as meaning making, and the possible relationships between the inscribers and the physical space as well as the broader socio-cultural context. Integrating formalist and semiotic approaches will form the basis for the methodological framework of this study.[52]

[52] A formalist approach, often used in literary criticism or art history, focuses on form and structure. It takes analysis of genre, grammatical forms, or shapes of letters as paramount, without recourse to issues of

It is easy for an outline of the available evidence regarding genre of a text or spelling of a word or shape of an artifact to become the main focus of a study, with hypotheses regarding purpose or social context receiving only passing mention. Employing questions taken from sociological and anthropological theory facilitates a more careful treatment of "why?" questions, and furthers the study in several ways. First theories can function to provide a language for discussing interpretations of the phenomena observed in the formal collection and comparison of data. For instance, speech-act theory and work by philosophers of language on performative writing provide a useful vocabulary to delineate the ways writing was viewed as a conscious activity that functions beyond its obvious purpose of conveying information.[53] Second, using relevant theories as a lens through which to view the material under study leads to new perspectives and leads one to consider fresh questions. Maurice Halbwach's pioneering work on collective memory, for example, when applied to the cave inscriptions, brings up questions of what role certain rituals or inscribing practices may have played in creating and commemorating community identity.[54] Third, social theory can provide a framework within which to explore limited or apparently conflicting data. An example of this would be to use Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to construct a backdrop against which to view the meager evidence from the caves.[55] This use of theory combined with a commitment to view information contextually

---

cultural influence or personal agency. A semiotics approach, often connected with the field of linguistics but equally applicable to material evidence such as burial caves, addresses relationship—between signs and their referents, between signs within a unit, and between signs and the agents using the signs.

[53] J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

[54] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (trans. Lewis A. Coser; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

within the larger socio-cultural milieu will move the current study from a simple collection of previous work on the inscriptions to an investigation of how the various views and interpretations complement each other and how they can serve as a springboard for further exploration and discussion.

## OUTLINE OF STUDY

The primary goal of this study is to integrate a variety of approaches in an exploration of two overarching questions: who was responsible for the inscriptions; and what did they intend to accomplish by means of inscribing words and images on the tomb walls? Each of the following chapters will approach these questions from a specific angle, in hope that a variety of approaches will lead to clearer and nuanced conclusions. The updated edition of the inscriptions presented in Chapter Two will focus on paleography, translation, grammatical and orthographic analysis, and phases of inscribing. Relying upon recent RTI images as well as previous publications of the inscriptions, this chapter will center on photographs and drawings of the inscriptions without extensive discussion of social or archaeological context. The organization of the inscriptions according to their placement within the tomb illustrates the material and contextual approach of this study.

The next four chapters take up a specific interpretive lens through which to view the data. Chapter Three considers the implications of the term *graffiti,* often applied to the cave inscriptions to describe the apparent lack of planning and careless execution. An additional connotation associated with the category is a disconnection (perceived or actual) between the content of the inscriptions and their setting. Comparing the use of the

---

[55] Pierre Bourdieu, "Habitus," in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, 2nd ed. (eds. Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 43-49.

term with regards to the cave inscriptions with how scholars use the term in studies of other corpora of informal writing from the ancient Mediterranean world reveals a significant amount of variation in definitions. This chapter draws upon this range of interpretive options to argue that despite their informal appearance, the inscriptions still served a commemorative purpose, and that the inscribers would have been previously connected to the space and were not simply passers-by who hid in the cave and happened to etch these inscriptions in the cave walls.

Chapter Four applies the lens of ritual or magic to the inscriptions. These terms are used not to denote private vs. state religion, but simply to bring out the use of inscribing in sequences or rites intended to bring about an impact beyond the normal (or outside the laws of nature). Drawing upon ancient Near Eastern incantations, longstanding use of amulets, and a variety of magic practices in which writing was an ingredient, this chapter explores the possible ways in which the inscriptions could represent vestiges of ritual practices that took place in the caves. The presence of overwriting and repetition of characters as well as possible examples of effaced writing provide technical data that can play into a ritual interpretation. Additionally, content such as curses and blessings and the juxtaposition of text and image easily lends itself to a ritual understanding of the activity represented by the inscriptions.

The one undisputable fact about the cave inscriptions is that they were situated in caves that were hewn specifically for burial purposes. Chapter Five challenges the common impulse to quickly dismiss the burial context, and explores the possible implications of selecting a tomb context for inscribing content that is not specifically mortuary in nature. I will argue that some content, such as the curses as Beit Lei and the dedicatory formulae at

el-Qôm can reasonably be reconciled with the funerary context. Other content, such as the prayers for protection and images of supplicants and military figures, is more difficult to categorize. Building upon the social and cultural meaning associated with hewn chambered bench tombs in Iron II Judah, this chapter argues that, whether or not the inscriptions were related to the interment of bodies, the burial nature of the space nevertheless held meaning to the inscribers and that meaning aligned with the purposes of the inscriptions.

In Chapter Six, the cave inscriptions are presented as innovative inscribing. This chapter briefly discusses the common refugee hypothesis and highlights the strength of these suggestions—that is, the crediting of the impetus for inscribing the cave inscriptions to the context of conflict and unrest in the final centuries of the ancient kingdom of Judah. Building upon this observation, this chapter presents the cave inscriptions as innovative use of both content and space. The content represents lament songs used as incantations. And the choice of burial space as the setting for the inscriptions highlights the significance of hewn tombs as a place of protection and perpetuity at times when the surrounding countryside was threatened or even decimated. The innovative use of both the content and the space served both apotropaic and commemorative purposes.

The conclusion of this dissertation addresses the various possible intersections between the evidence outlined above, and what these intersections may tell us regarding the identities and goals of the inscribers. Considering the limited nature of the available data as well as the lack of comparable Iron Age Hebrew inscriptions, it is argued here that the material currently available for study is not sufficient to reach conclusions regarding whether or not the inscriptions were associated with the design or subsequent burial use

of the caves. However, there are a number of themes that apply regardless of the conclusion one reaches on this issue. These themes include inscribing for commemorative purposes, inscribing as a potent and efficacious tool, and inscribing as a response to threat or crisis. Thus, the cave inscriptions are the only remaining evidence of an innovative use of both the content and the space in an effort to commemorate identity and mobilize protective forces in the face of current or impending danger.

# CHAPTER 2—THE INSCRIPTIONS REVISITED
## New Photographs in Context

Studies of the cave inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm are usually based either on the photographs and/or drawings in the original publications and/or on personal observation of the artifacts. The original photographs were well done, but they are of limited value—reliant on the standards of black-and-white chemically based photography from over fifty years ago. This chapter presents new photographs taken by the author in July 2014 with the generous permission of the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Israel Museum.[56] Because of the delicate nature of some of the incised lines as well as the "noise" of background lines that interfere with the text in certain places, it can be difficult to determine precisely which strokes to include when deciphering the inscriptions. Despite multiple attempts at establishing the readings of the cave inscriptions over the past fifty years, certain inscriptions are problematic and no consensus has been reached regarding their readings.[57] The new photographs presented in this chapter facilitate a

---

[56] A variety of support made this project possible. Training and use of the equipment were made possible through the generous support of the West Semitic Research Project of the University of Southern Caifornia. Special thanks go particularly to Bruce Zuckerman, Kenneth Zuckerman, Marilyn Lundberg and Johnna Tyrrell who invested time training me and provided continued support while I was in the field and during post-processing. I also wish to thank Eran Arie for making it possible for me to view the inscriptions at the Israel Museum on multiple occasions and for mentioning the idea of using RTI techniques for further study of the el-Qôm ʾUriyahu inscription. Many of the inscriptions are stored at the IAA facility in Beth Shemesh, and I thank Debora ben Ami for providing updated information regarding holdings, and for coordinating logistics during the photographic project, so that all the objects were accessible. My advisor, William Schniedewind, also supported me in this project in multiple ways. He supervised the many applications necessary to fund the project, and also spent time in Israel providing critical assistance with the photography—for which I am very grateful. Finally, I wish to thank the Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies at UCLA for supporting my research three summers in a row (Roter Travel Grant, 2013; Appel Research Travel Grant, 2014 and 2015), and the Humanities Division at UCLA for supporting the photographic trip through the Harry and Yvonne Lenart Graduate Travel Fellowship.

[57] This is particularly true of the third line of the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm, and several portions of the two longer Beit Lei inscriptions. For a list of three main readings of the Beit Lei inscriptions,

fresh assessment of previous readings and assist in determining the most defensible readings of the problematic sections. They also offer insight on *ductus*, that is, stroke order and direction, making it possible in certain instances to describe the tools used or possible phases of inscribing. The goals of this chapter are 1) to present the inscriptions individually with a summary of possible readings and observations related to paleography, including stroke order and direction; and 2) to present each inscription within its larger setting to facilitate contextual and relationship questions that will be taken up in the following chapters.

## Reflection Transformation Imaging

The photographs used in the following analysis were taken using Reflection Transformation Imaging (RTI) techniques.[58] The basic elements of this technique are fixed camera and object positions and varied light angles.[59] When using this technique for small objects, the photography is often carried out in a lab equipped with a special dome fitted with evenly spaced lights and a fixed space for both the camera and the object. Since the cave inscriptions are quite large, photographing each object using RTI techniques involved simulating this set-up on a larger scale—in other words, bringing the variety of light angles

---

see Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: CARTA, 2008), 233-5.

[58] RTI can refer to the methods used to create the photographs, or to a file format that allows for special viewing where light angles can be adjusted at will and other effects can be added to enhance the visibility of certain features of the object. One common file-type for RTI is a PTM, or Polynomial Texture Mapping image, a processing technology used for many of the RTI-derived images presented below. For a recent and thorough treatment of the benefits of RTI for Northwest Semitic epigraphy, see Nathaniel E. Green & Heather Dana Davis Parker, "Field of View: Northwest Semitic Palaeography and Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI)," in *Epigraphy, Philology, & the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives on Philological & Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of JoAnn Hackett* (eds. J. M. Hutton and A. D. Rubin; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 209-35.

[59] Graeme Earl et al, "Reflectance Transformation Imaging Systems for Ancient Documentary Artefacts," in *Electronic Visualisation and the Arts*, London, BCS (2011): 147.

and the fixed camera position to the objects. Because of space limitations, some objects were photographed with certain light angles missing.[60] This means the processed images do not all contain the same level of detail or the same variety of possible light combinations. Also, some transformations such as spectral enhancement, which displays a highly reflective surface, cannot be achieved without a full complement of lighting angles. Despite these issues, however, the new images provide improved data for further study of the inscriptions. Because RTI methods and technologies utilize the interplay between different light angles, they are especially suited to incised inscriptions. By manipulating light angles and applying effects in an RTI viewer, questions regarding stroke order, direction and depth can be addressed with much more accuracy than is possible when viewing a single photograph illuminated by conventional lighting. The presentation of each inscription below includes a static image derived from an RTI that displays the surface information from what are judged to be optimal light angles. However, it should be noted that analysis is based not only on such images but also upon careful study of the inscription with dynamically adjusted lights as can be viewed in an RTI viewer.

---

[60] When I arrived in July 2014 at the storage facility in Beth Shemesh where all the inscriptions (other than the large Beit Lei inscription and two of the el-Qôm inscriptions) are kept, the inscriptions had been placed on pallets on the floor between large storage shelves. I was only able to maneuver the light in the space that was available. For some of the larger inscriptions, this meant a number of light angles necessary for achieving optimal results were impossible to achieve due to the shelving and other large objects on the shelves in the space where the light needed to be placed. Even though this limited the quality of some of the RTI files, however, it may be that better photographs would not have facilitated any further analysis, given the worn state of some of the inscriptions.

## BEIT LEI INSCRIPTIONS

The Beit Lei inscriptions, all found in one burial cave, represent a unique corpus of roughly incised texts and images.[61] It is difficult to determine how the inscriptions are related. Textual inscriptions do not seem obviously related to graphic, non-textual images, and, conversely, such images do not seem to illustrate the text in any clear and direct manner. One of the images is incised much more deeply than the others, and some inscribed texts are more worn than others. The inscriptions are not set in carefully prepared recesses near the burial chamber entrances as may be expected if these are tomb inscriptions. But they are nevertheless concentrated around the chamber entrances. Most are approximately at chest or eye level, and on both the north and south walls deeply incised vertical lines divide the inscriptions into blocks. The inscriptions are listed here

[61] This corpus was originally published by Joseph Naveh ("Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *IEJ* 13 [1963]: 74-92; "Hebrew Inscriptions in a Cave-Tomb from the First Temple Period," *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* (=*Yediot*) 27 [1963]: 235-56 [in Hebrew]). Other publications include: André Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," *RB* 84 (1977): 595-608; Frank Moore Cross, "The Cave Inscription from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* (ed. J. A. Sanders. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), 299-306; Siegfried Mittmann, "A Confessional Inscription from the Year 701 BC Praising the Reign of Yahweh," *Acta Academica* 21 (1989): 17-23; Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *IEJ* 51 (2001): 194-207; Naveh, "Canaanite and Hebrew Inscriptions (1960-1964)," *Lešonenu* 30 (1966): 65-80 (in Hebrew); Pekka Särkiö, "Hilferuf zu Jahwe aus dem Versteck: Eine neue Deutung der Inschrift *yšr m□r* aus □*irbet Bēt Lēy*," *ZDPV* 113 (1997): 39-60; Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 405-37; Patrick D. Miller, "Psalms and Inscriptions," in *Congress Volume, Vienna 1980* (VTSup 32; ed. J. A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 311-32; Shmuel A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 233-236; John C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, Volume 1: Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 57-58; Johannes Renz, *Die althebräische Inschriften: Teil 1 Text und Kommentar* (Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik 1; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 242-250; Graham Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88-89 (numbered 15.001-15.008); F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 125-32; Manfred Weippert, "Archäologischer Jahrebericht," *ZDPV* 80 (1964): 150-93; Alice Mandell and Jeremy Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *JANER* (forthcoming).

according to their location within the tomb—proceeding counterclockwise around the antechamber.[62]

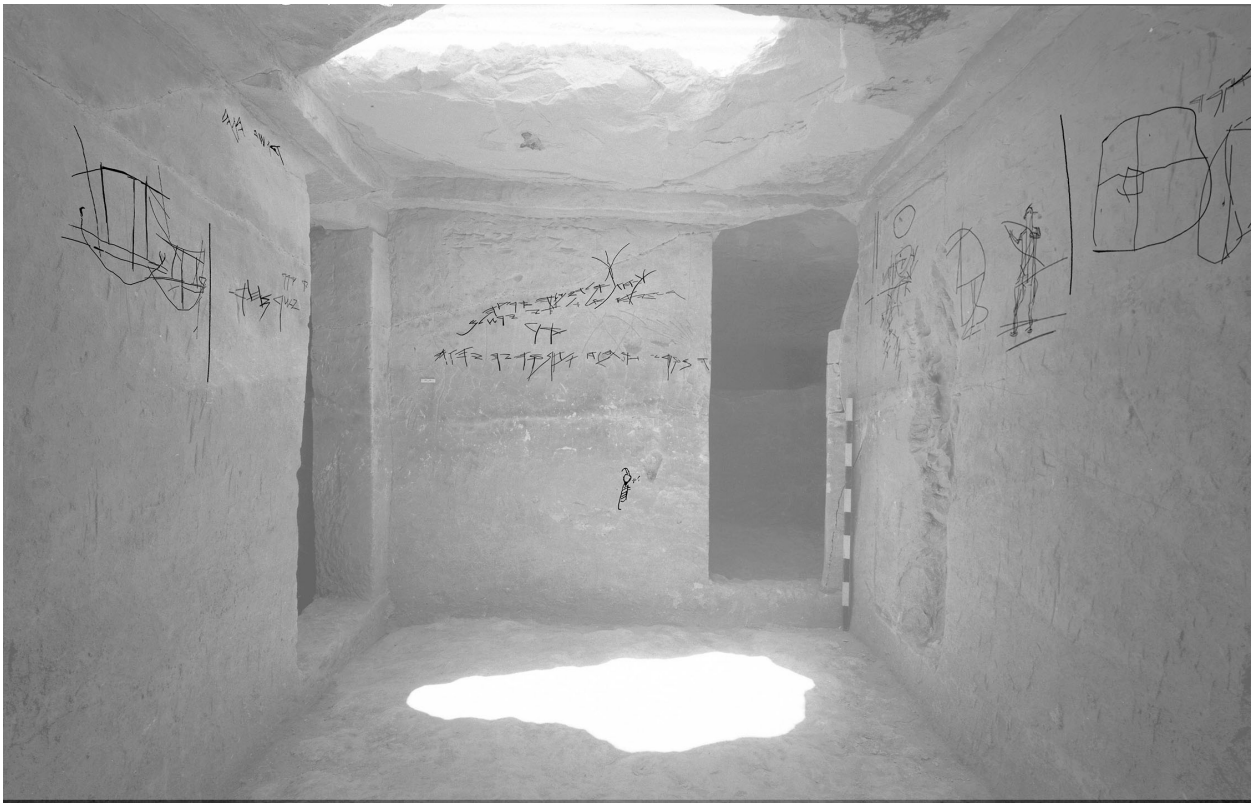

Figure 2.1. View of the Beit Lei tomb looking west into the antechamber. Drawings by the author are superimposed. Photo: Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

## North Wall of the Beit Lei Tomb

The north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber (right panel in fig. 2.1) included two curse inscriptions and multiple images. Upon examining the north wall, one sees that the concentration of the inscriptions and designs around the marking for the third chamber is immediately apparent. The work of hewing was started, but never finished as evident from the shallow hewn area on the right side of the marked chamber entrance (indicated in

[62] This order follows Zevit's idea of a gallery of "stops" proceeding around the antechamber in the direction of writing (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 407).

gray in the schematic below, fig. 2.2). Apparently the inscriptions were there before work began on the planned chamber. The circle to the right was partly obliterated by the hewing, as were several characters (perhaps examples of the *kāp*-like character found throughout this corner of the antechamber) to the left. The strokes marking the third chamber also intersected a horizontal line stretching from the NW corner of the tomb to the area below the curse phrase. Toward the middle of the north wall, two groups of inscriptions and inscribed figures were separated by a deeply incised vertical line. Other than the upper ellipse in the marked chamber entrance, all the inscriptions and figures were approximately at chest level.

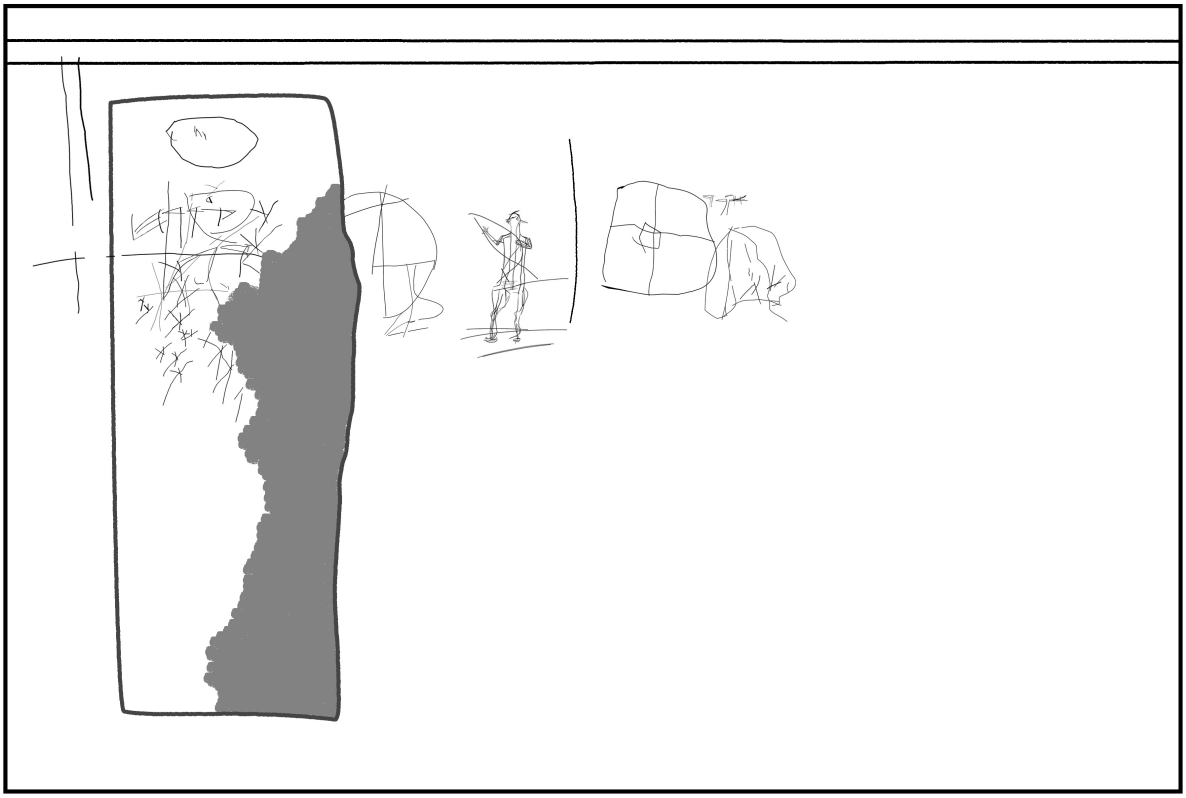

Figure 2.2. Schematic of the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. The gray indicates the area actually hewn in the initial work on chamber three.

IAA 61-534—Drawings and Curse[63]

Figure 2.3. RTI-derived image of the curse and images (IAA 61-534) from the middle of the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

This grouping of inscriptions is situated on the north wall of the antechamber, approximately midway between the tomb entrance and the rear wall. A vertical line separates these inscriptions from the inscribed figure to the left.[64] The crude square with

[63] Cf. Naveh: Inscription 10, Figure 10, Plate 11E; Lemaire: Inscription 6; Zevit: Stop 1, Figures 5.11 and 5.12.

[64] The dividing line between the two inscriptions is not visible in either photograph here, but Naveh's photo of the inscriptions *in situ* reveals that it extended the entire height of the inscriptions.

rounded edges along with what appears to be draped material to the right have been interpreted in various ways as having to do with the Assyrian incursions during the late eighth century.[65] The inscribed curse has often been interpreted as applying to whatever is represented by the images—a curse called down upon the enemy.

Figure 2.4. Magnified detail of the "tent" or draped cloth on the right side of the block (IAA 61-534). Left: RTI-derived image in diffuse gain. Right: RTI-derived image in spectral enhancement. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

[65] Yadin interpreted the figures as representing an Assyrian tent and encampment (Yiga'el Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands: In the Light of Archaeological Study*. Vol. 2 [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963]: 291–2; Yiga'el Yadin, *Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeology* [Ramat-Gan, Israel: International Publishing Co., 1963], 293-4, 393 [in Hebrew]). This interpretation was accepted by several other scholars. See, for instance, Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 76 n. 5; P. Bar-Adon, "An Early Hebrew Inscription in a Judean Desert Cave" *IEJ* 25 (1975): 226-32; and Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 567. Zevit provided a similar interpretation, but argued that the rough square divided in quadrants with a smaller rough square inside represented Lachish where a devastating Assyrian siege took place. Concerning the draped cloth looking figure to the right, Zevit writes: "it is likely that the drawing of either tents or shields might actually represent the Assyrian siege ramp constructed against the south corner of the wall and part of the Judahite counter-ramp built from the inside of the city" (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel,* 410).

Figure 2.5. RTI-derived image of the curse and images (IAA 61-534) from the north wall of the antechamber, with drawings superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Naveh's transliteration of the one word inscription in the top right was אורר.[66] The word can be parsed as a *qal* active participle with the *wāw* serving as a *mater lectionis*. Or it can be considered a mistaken spelling of the more common *qal* passive participle written *plene* with the *wāw* and *rêš* reversed. In an attempt to take seriously the order of letters as representing the actual intentions of the inscriber, the reading אורר as the *plene* writing of an active participle is preferable. Thus, Zevit's translation of "maledictor/curser (or cursed

[66] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 81.

one)" follows Naveh's transliteration.[67] Additional support for this may come from the lack of the conditional phrase that often accompanies the passive participial use of this root.[68] Lemaire proposed that the *wāw* may simply represent an abandoned attempt at *rêš*, meaning the inscription could be read *ʾrr* "cursed!"[69]

Figure 2.6. RTI-derived detail of the curse (part of IAA 61-534) with boosted diffuse gain. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.6. Drawing of curse (part of IAA 61-534).

[67] For a detailed analysis see Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 409-10.

[68] The usual formula is "cursed be whoever_____." This argument is weakened, however, by the fact that the three instances of the active qal participle in the Hebrew Bible are all in the construct form followed by a suffix (Genesis 27:29; Number 24:9) or a noun (Job 3:8). These three instances are all written without the *wāw*, but with the *yôd* indicating the construct.

[69] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 562.

Figure 2.7. RTI-derived detail of the inscribed curse (part of IAA 61-534) with specular enhancement. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Paleographically, one may note that this *ʾālep* is not of the "three-stroke" variety found in the other inscriptions of the same root on the Beit Lei cave walls. This form preceded the more developed form (with an additional diagonal stroke) found elsewhere in the same tomb. A linear understanding of paleographic development may suggest an earlier date for this inscriptions based on the form of the *ʾālep*, but the presence of both forms in the same space is better understood as an example of the common phenomenon of multiple forms being found on the same object or from the same period. Thus, the difference in form is likely to indicate a difference in hand more than an earlier date for the inscription. Here I interpret the second short downstroke behind the extended cross strokes of the first letter as evidence of the *ʾālep* being overwritten, or written twice. Overwriting is also visible in the *wāw* and the second *rêš*.

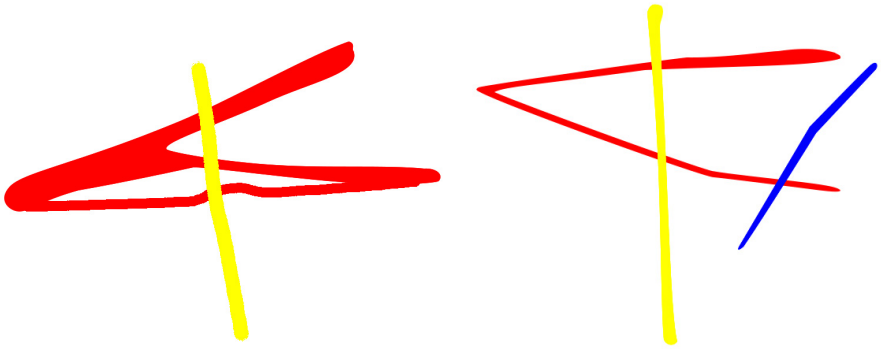

Figure 2.8. Illustration of two forms of *ʾālep*, showing stroke order (red=stroke 1, yellow=stroke 2, blue=stroke 3). Left: A simplified representation of the *ʾālep* from the first curse on the north wall of the antechamber. Right: The first *ʾālep* from the curse on the south wall of the antechamber, exhibiting the additional diagonal stroke. This form has often been referred to as the "three-stroke" *ʾālep.*

IAA 61-532—Human Figure Holding an Object[70]

This inscription portrays a human figure facing the rear of the cave and holding an object in its hands. The object has been variously interpreted as a musical instrument or an object of war.[71] The stance of the arm, appearing cocked for action, aligns with the interpretation of the figure as a human holding a bow. The stance of the figure—standing and facing to the side—further supports this interpretation. Since no exact comparative imagery is available, the interpretation has often hinged upon an author's overall

---

[70] Cf. Naveh: Inscription 4; Zevit: Stop 2.

[71] Naveh interpreted the object as a lyre (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 77). Zevit agreed and offered numerous observations in support of this interpretation (Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 410-12). This figure has been compared with the Bes figure holding the musical instrument painted on one of the Pithoi from Kuntilet ʿAjrud. For the final publication of this image, see Pirhiya Beck, "The Drawings and Decorative Designs," in *Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border* (ed. Ze'ev Meshel; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012), 143-203. See also Dever's treatment of the ʿAjrud figure in the context of the meaning of Asherah in the el-Qôm inscription (William Dever, "Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet ʿAjrûd," *BASOR* 255 (1984): 22-25). In contrast, Bar-Adon suggested that the figure is holding a bow (Bar-Adon, "An Early Hebrew Inscription," 231 n. 9). This suggestion was accepted by Lemaire, who considered the figure to represent an Assyrian archer (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 567).

interpretation of the function of the cave inscriptions.[72] The figure was located on the north wall of the tomb antechamber between two geometric shapes, both of which are roughly divided into quadrants. The deeply incised dividing line to the right of this inscription as well as the orientation of the figure group it with the inscriptions to the left.

[72] Viewing the cave inscriptions as the work of war refugees and the curses as attempts to bring down divine retribution on those devastating the land makes it easy to see an archer holding a bow when looking at the rough drawing. On the other hand, viewing the cave inscriptions as a gallery of cultic texts and images makes it easy to see an instrument of some kind used in religious practice.

Figure 2.9. RTI-derived image of the figure holding an object (IAA 61-532) on the north wall of the Beit Lei antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

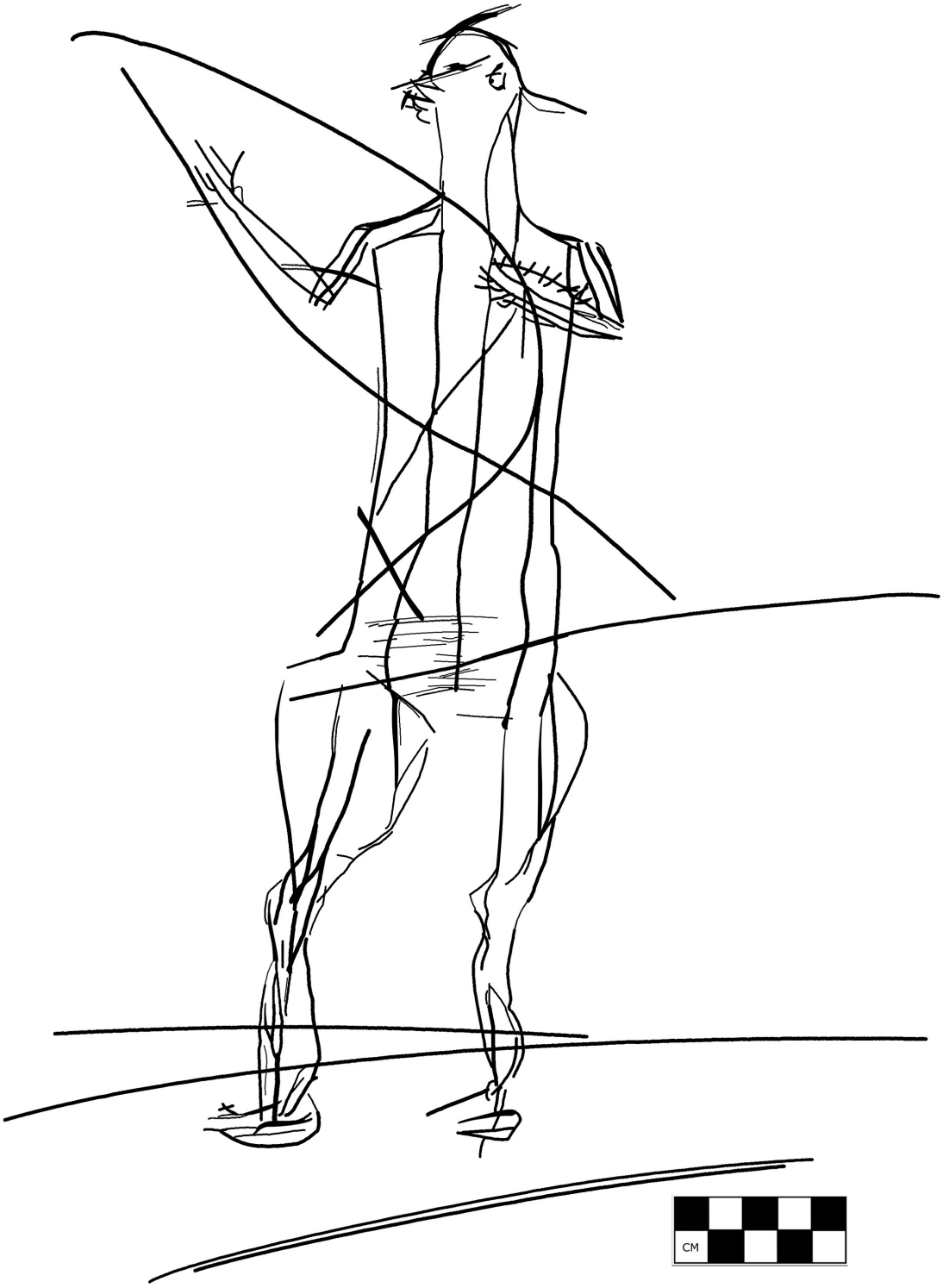


Figure 2.10. Drawing of the figure holding an object (IAA 61-532) on the north wall of the Beit Lei antechamber.

Figure 2.11. RTI-derived image of the figure holding an object (IAA 61-532), with the drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

IAA 61-540—Partially Effaced Circle[73]

This partially effaced circle is divided in quadrants like roundish squares (or squarish circles) also on the north wall of the antechamber.[74] There are also "draping" lines overlapping the lower right quadrant, reminiscent of the combination of shapes discussed above. The chisel marks visible in the lower left of this object seem to represent a portion of the hewing marks remaining from the initial work on the unfinished third chamber, though the fact that the hewing extended outside the area marked for the chamber may indicate an effort to efface the inscription.

[73] Cf. Naveh: no number indicated, pictured in Plate 11A, B; Zevit: part of Stop 2.

[74] Zevit suggested this ellipse be interpreted as a sketch map or schematic drawing along the lines of the interpretation of the rough square and draped cloth representing a camp or city wall (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 413).

Figure 2.12. RTI-derived image of the partially effaced circle (IAA 61-540) from the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.13. RTI-derived image of the partially effaced circle (IAA 61-540), with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

IAA 61-541—Upper Ellipse[75]

This deeply incised ellipse was situated in the upper part of the area marked out for the third chamber. The marks within the ellipse do not form any recognizable character or word.

Figure 2.14. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised ellipse (IAA 61-541) from the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

[75] Cf. Naveh: no number indicated; Zevit: Part of Stop 3.

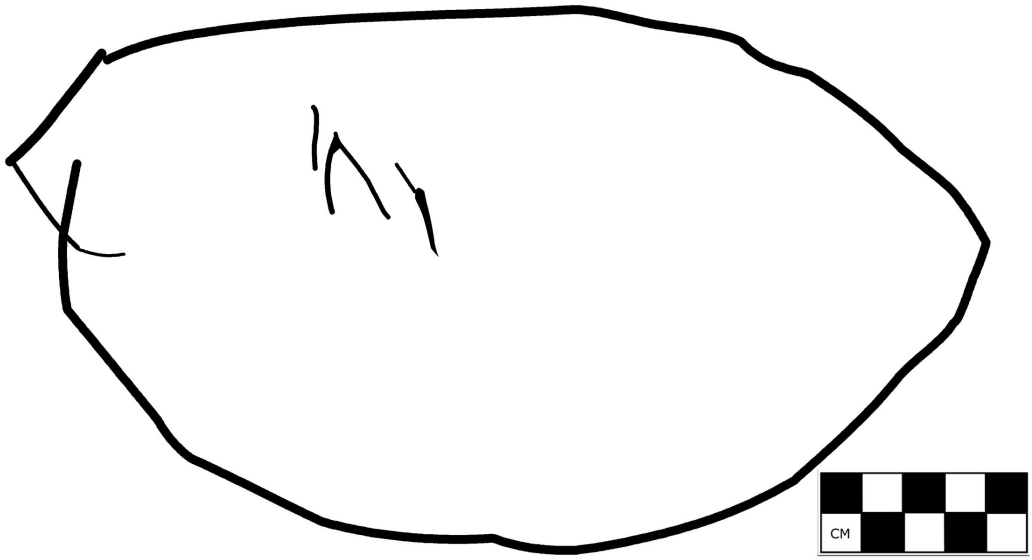


Figure 2.15. Drawing of the deeply incised ellipse (IAA 61-541) from the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

Figure 2.16. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised ellipse (IAA 61-541) with the drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

## IAA 61-535—Curse Phrase[76]

This inscription was situated in the area marked out for the third burial chamber, which was never completed. The inscription is directly below a deeply incised ellipse.[77] Both the ellipse above and the one behind this text have undeciphered marks inside. The tool marks visible on the right side of the object appear to be part of the hewing of chamber three, a process that was begun but not finished. The new photographs confirm that the textual inscription was incised after the cross lines and the ellipse.

[76] Cf. Naveh: Inscription 9; Lemaire: Inscription 7; Zevit: Stop 3.

[77] Zevit admits the difficulty of interpreting these ellipses, but does note the combination of ellipse and curse as above. And in line with his interpretation of the other shapes, offers the possibility these could represent an elliptically shaped Assyrian camp (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 415).

Figure 2.17. RTI-derived image (illuminated from two angles) of the curse phrase and surrounding *kāp*-like characters (IAA 61-535) from the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

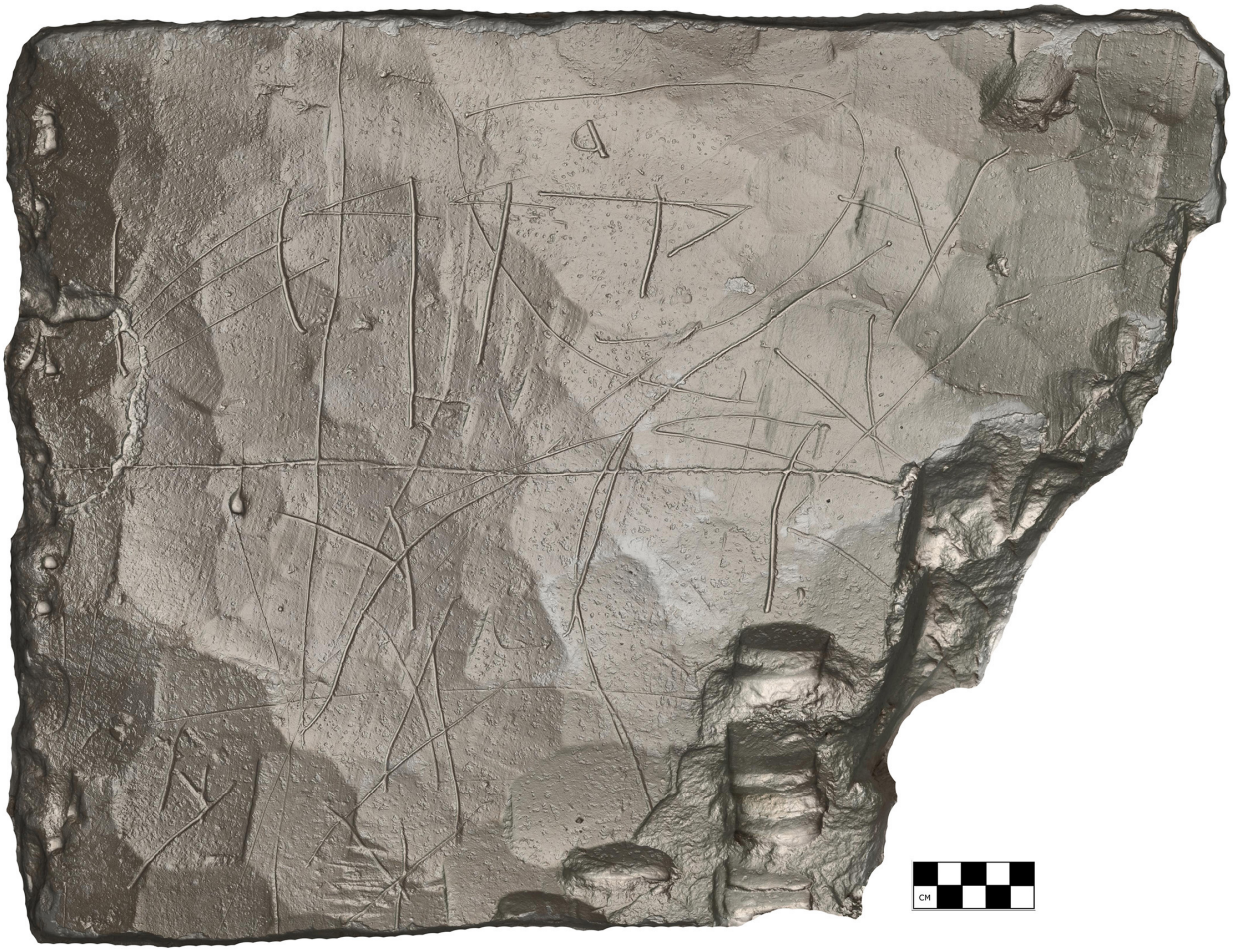


Figure 2.18. RTI-derived image of the curse phrase (IAA 61-535), with specular enhancement. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.19. RTI-derived image in specular enhancement of the curse phrase (IAA 61-535), with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

There are two defensible options regarding the reading of the inscription. Naveh originally read only the first line ארה and suggested in a footnote that even though the *ḥet* seems clear, the writer may have intended ארהו "may he be cursed."[78] Lemaire offered an

[78] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 80. A similar coalescing of letters takes place in the first word of Jerusalem inscription where what appears at first glance as a *ḥêt* has been read by Naveh and others as *hw* (part of *yhwh*). Zevit argues for this interpretation, suggests three possible translations: "you curse him," "he/they cursed him," or "his curser(s)," and even points out other examples of the coalescing of *hê* and *wāw,* including an ostracon from Tel 'Ira and a number of unprovenanced seals published by Avigad (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 413-14). For other examples of the sequence *hê-wāw*, see I. Beit-Arieh, "Tel 'Ira—a Fortified City of the Kingdom of Judah," *Qadmoniot* 18 (1985): 24 (in Hebrew); and N. Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986): 21, 33, 39, 44, 47. These examples are significantly different, however, than the character under discussion here. While the two letters making

updated reading of the inscription in which he included some faint letters below the top line. He read ארר חרפך "cursed be he who reproaches you."[79] Issues that challenge this reading are 1) the fact that the inscriptions apparently preceded the work on the third chamber, meaning that there would have been sufficient space to write each word on a separate line rather than splitting a word, and 2) the final *kāp* is slightly lower than the *rêš* and *pê* in the proposed second line and looks similar to the numerous *kāp*-like characters in this corner of the tomb. Despite these challenges, however, several scholars have accepted Lemaire's reading as the preferable option.[80]

---

up part of the theophoric element of the names do indeed touch or overlap, the *wāw* in each case is more than a single line. It includes the expected hook and short cross stroke. One exception may be seal number 9 in Avigad's book, where the top of the *wāw* is not visible, though this is probably simply a result of the craftsman running out of space to finish executing the final letter (see Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae*, 28). Also, when using seals as comparative material, one should keep in mind the space constraints—a factor not relevant to the form of the *wāw* in the cave inscriptions.

[79] Lemaire also points out that the fact that three of the inscriptions are clearly prayers to Yahweh makes it likely the curse is against anyone who would reproach Yahweh (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 562-3).

[80] Miller, for instance, pointed out the other Psalm-like phrases in the cave and cited a number of instances where the word *ḥrp* is used with reference to individuals or entities that reproach the Psalmist or Yahweh (Patrick Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* [JSOTSS 267; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 223-7). See also Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 236; and Simon Parker, "Graves, Caves and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," *JSOT* 27 (2003): 236.

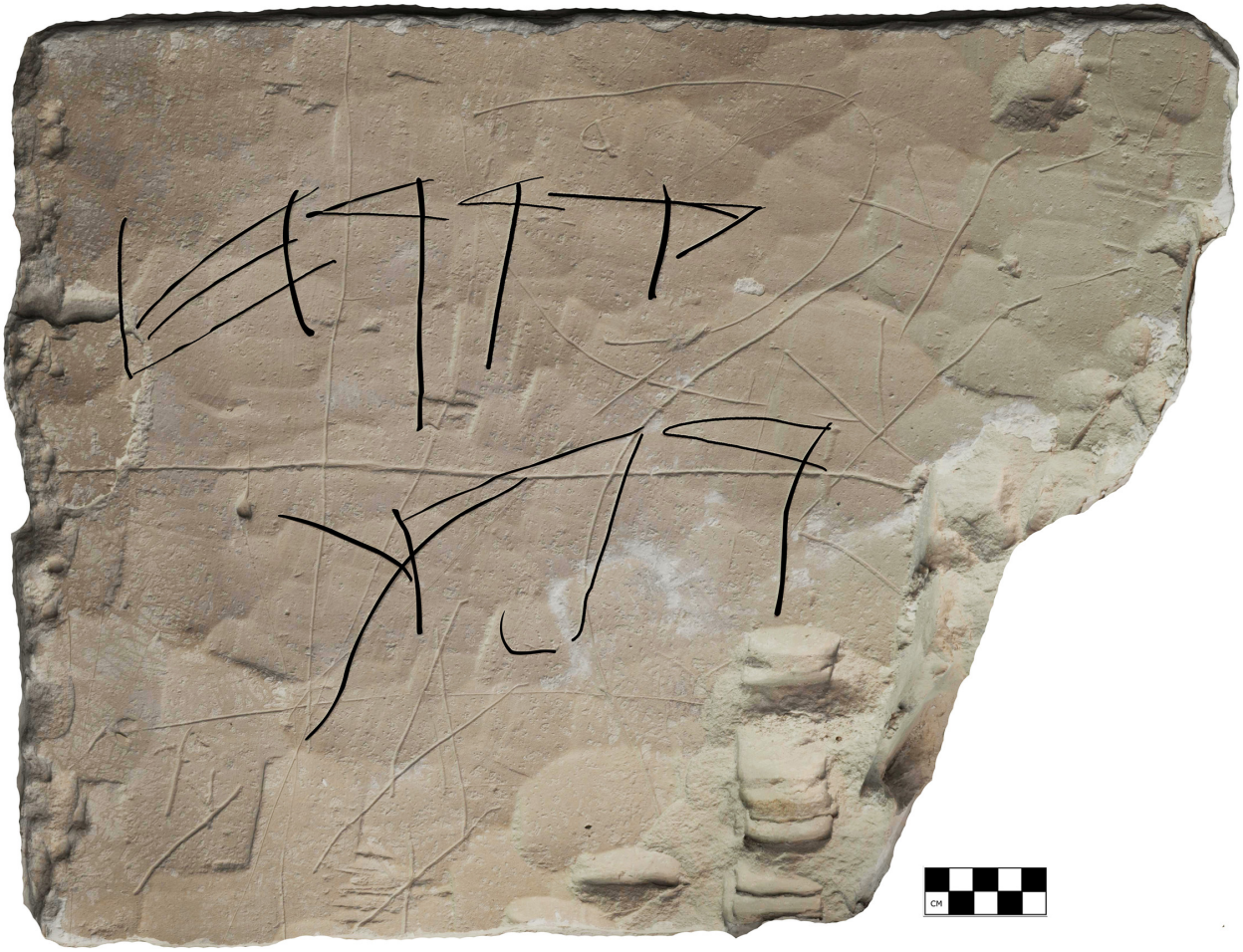


Figure 2.20. RTI-derived image of the curse phrase (IAA 61-535), with drawing of Lemaire's reading (ררא חרפך) superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

The additional characters visible on this block apparently represent multiple inscribings of various forms of a *kāp*-like character present here and on the west wall of the antechamber. Several of these characters are situated on the stone removed from the cave, and additional examples scattered below this block are visible in Naveh's photos of the inscriptions *in situ*. Lemaire interpreted the second person singular suffix at the end of the curse phrase as referring to Yahweh, and suggested the same may be true of the multiple *kāp*s incised in this corner of the tomb. This interpretation finds additional support in the

common context of *ḥrp* as contempt against Yahweh.[81] If partial examples are included, there were as many as eighteen instances of the *kāp*-like character inscribed on this section of the wall. Wherever stroke order is perceptible, the same conventions are used—the middle stroke is made first, starting from the top; next, the left-hand stroke is made starting from the outside and moving toward the center; and finally the longer downstroke is made, sometimes crossing both previous strokes.

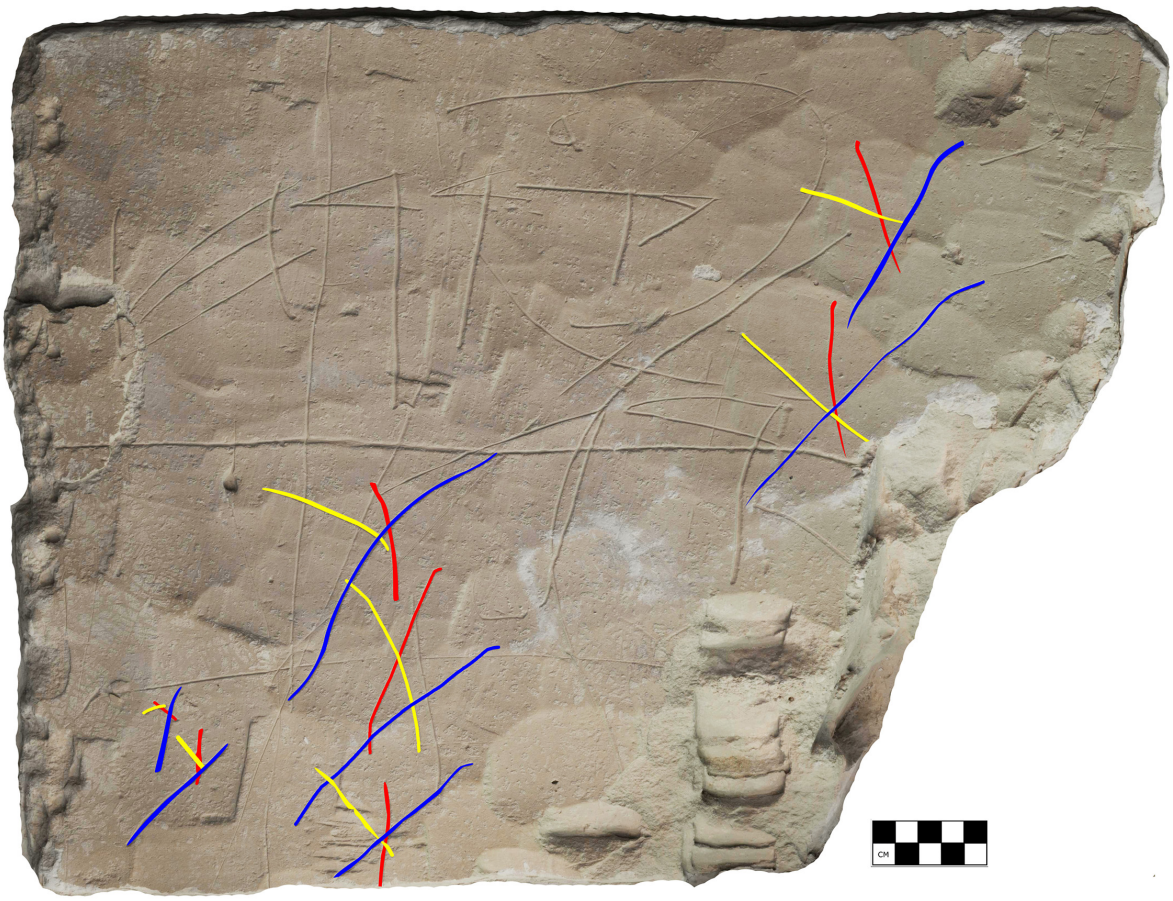


Figure 2.21. RTI-derived image (IAA 61-535) illuminated by light from a low, raking angle. *Kāp*-like characters showing stroke order (red=stroke 1, yellow=stroke 2, blue=stroke 3) are superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

[81] Lemaire points out two instances of this word with the second person singular suffix (Psalm 69:20 and 79:12), and notes that in both cases the suffix refers to Yahweh (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 562-563). Miller cites other examples (2 Kings 19:4, 16, 22, 23; Isaiah 37:17, 23, 24) where reproach is associated with mocking the power and status of Yahweh (Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology,* 225).

Figure 2.22. Drawing (including background lines and *kāps*) of the curse phrase (IAA 61-535) from the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

**West Wall of Beit Lei Tomb**

Entering the tomb from the entrance on the east side, one would have looked directly toward this wall featuring two relatively long textual inscriptions. The slanting baseline of the upper two lines follows a crevice in the cave wall. The two letters in the middle along with the large *kāp*-like characters appear to represent a different phase of inscribing than the long textual lines. The larger size of the two-letter curse situated between the two longer inscriptions may indicate that it was also inscribed at a different time or for a different purpose. The two *kāp*-like characters are also large, although they

resemble in form the characters scattered on the adjacent wall in the area marked out for a third chamber. Stroke order reveals that the *kāp*-like character at the beginning of the line was incised after the upper textual inscription. The second example of this character above the first *ʾālep* of line one is represented here as visible in Naveh's photograph of the inscriptions *in situ*.

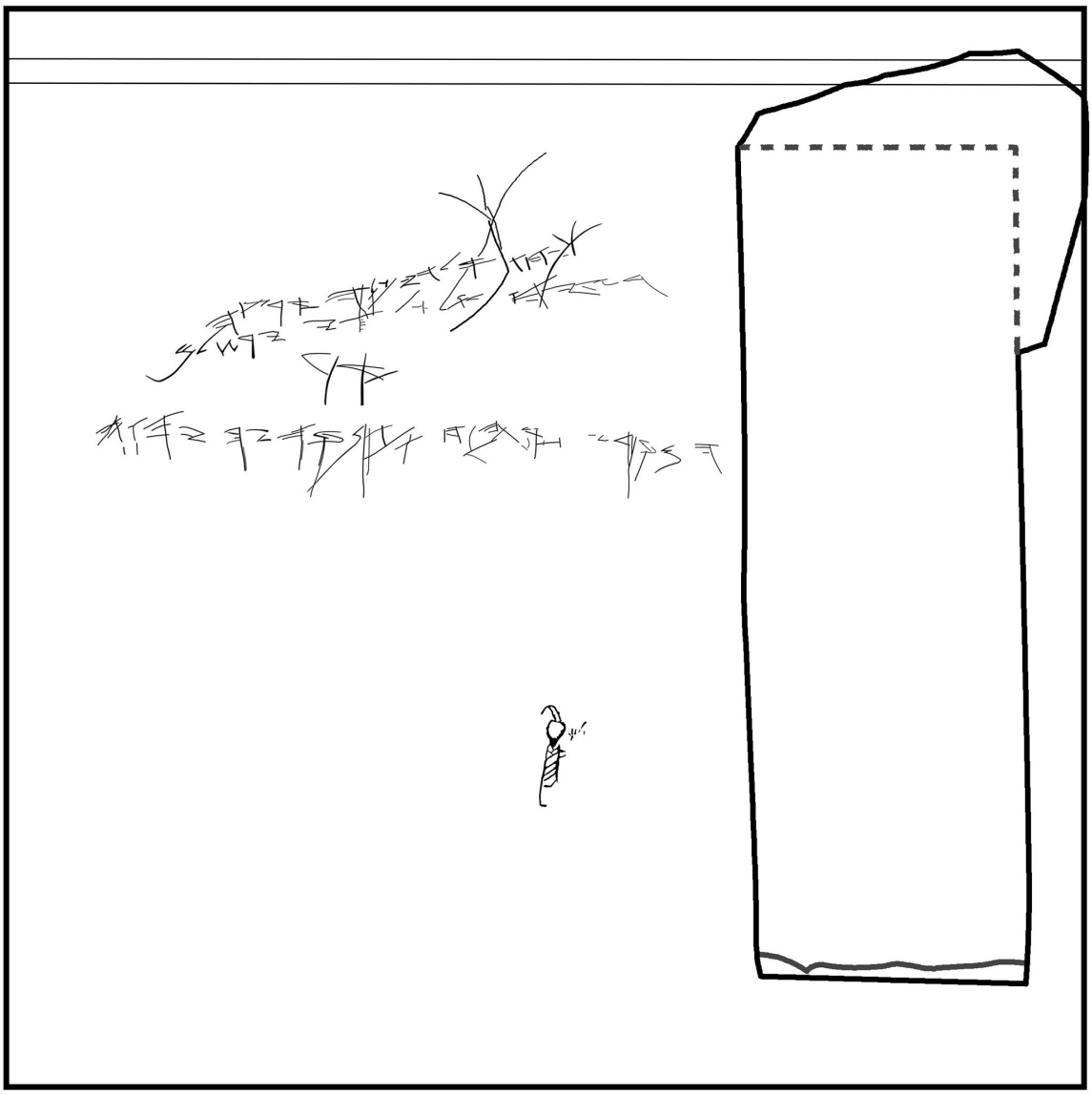

Figure 2.23. Schematic of the west wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

## IAA 61-538[82]

This block contains the longest and shortest inscriptions and originally covered almost the width of the rear wall of the tomb antechamber. The upper inscription is especially well known for its mention of Judah and Jerusalem. Like the other textual inscriptions, these were situated at a comfortable level for someone standing and writing—the upper lines at eye level just below a fissure in the rock, and the lower line at chest level. The inscriptions were shallowly incised, and being on display for many years has incurred additional wear. Currently the stone is displayed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem where it is mounted high on a wall above a display case. It is nevertheless within reach for a person standing in front of the inscription. Multiple modern scratches are visible on the stone, as well as a neatly incised Modern Hebrew *ʾālep*.[83] An exhibition certificate was issued in 1994, but the artifact was apparently on display for many years prior to this official record.[84] The new photographs—both still photographs and RTI-data—provide the basis for a fresh analysis of the inscriptions on this block.[85] The epigraphic analysis below

---

[82] Cf. Naveh: Inscriptions A and B; Lemaire: Inscriptions 1, 2 and 5; Zevit: Stop 5; *COS* 2.53; *AHI* 15.005-15.008.

[83] The color of the recent scratches sets them apart from the characters and crisscrossing lines inscribed in antiquity. The Modern Hebrew *ʾālep* is inscribed in the rock directly above the *nûn* of *nqh* in the lower line of text.

[84] In a personal communication October 27, 2015, Eran Arie (Iron Age Curator) and his assistant Shira Dan indicated that the 1994 exhibition certificate is the first record they have on file. However, they pointed out that the inscription is mentioned as being on display much earlier. For instance, a 1973 museum publication *Inscriptions Revealed* cites the inscription (there #79) as being on display (Ruth Hestrin, Yael Israeli and Muze'on Yisra'el, *Inscriptions Revealed: Documents from the Time of the Bible, the Mishna and the Talmud* [Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1973]).

[85] The images derived from the RTI files are slightly grainy. This is due to logistical issues making it impossible to move the camera close to the inscription and to achieve certain light angles. Despite these challenges, however, the RTI files still facilitate a more detailed analysis of stroke order. Together with the still photographs, the RTI derivatives provide a useful data set for a new assessment of the inscriptions.

will survey the readings based on the new photographs and discuss in more detail certain problematic sections.

Figure 2.24. RTI-derived image of the block (IAA 61-538) containing the three longest textual inscriptions from Beit Lei. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Figure 2.25. Long textual inscriptions (IAA 61-538) from the west wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

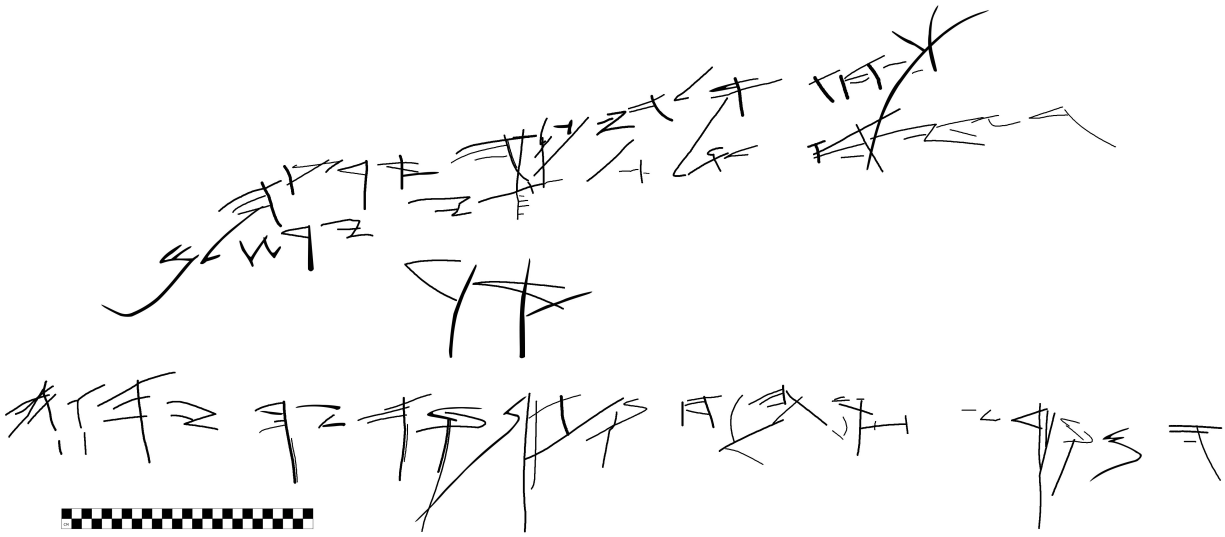

Figure 2.26. Drawing of the three long inscriptions and the short curse (IAA 61-538) on the west wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

Figure 2.27. RTI-derived image (illuminated from the lower right) of large block (IAA 61-538) with drawings superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Inscription A—יהוה אלהי כל הארצה
רי יהד לו לאלהי ירשלם

The top two lines of text on this block have consistently been considered one inscription, with a variety of readings offered in an effort to make sense of the difficult areas.[86] Naveh's original reading, with slight variation, is still widely accepted. "Yahweh (is) the God of all the earth. The mountains of Judah belong to him, to the God of Jerusalem."

The initial character in proximity to line one is a three-stroke character that is somewhat like a *kāp*.[87] The large size of this character in comparison with the ensuing letters in the line probably indicates that it does not belong to the line of text. Note, in this regard, that this character was apparently inscribed *after* the textual inscription, as shown by the long downstroke crossing over the top of the downstroke of the *hê* (of *yhd*) in the line below. A second similar character, only the lower portion of which is preserved in stone slab removed from the cave, is visible in the original photograph of the inscription *in situ,* above the first *ʾālep* of line one (see Fig. 2.23). These characters are larger, but similar in form to the character repeatedly inscribed above and below the inscription in the area

---

[86] To highlight the differences, the main readings are listed here for reference:
Naveh: ỷhwỷlh̊ ⍰lhy kỉ h⍰r⍰ hrỷ yhd̊ ỉw l⍰lh̊y yršlm (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 84).
Cross: [⍰]ṅỷ.yhwh[.]⍰lhykh.⍰r⍰h ⍰rỷ.yhdh̊ wg̊⍰lty.yršlm (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300).
Lemaire: yhwh ⍰lhy kỉ h⍰r⍰ hrỷ.yhwd̊h̊.l⍰lh̊y.yršlm (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 558).
Zevit: yhwh ⍰lhy glh ⍰r⍰h ⍰r⍰ yhd lw ⍰l yršlm (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 424).

[87] Cross and Zevit both perceived additional characters before the word *yhwh*. Cross read [⍰]*ny yhwh*…, and explained his reading as follows: "…traces of the letters *yod* and *nun* (or perhaps *kāp*) appear to the right of Naveh's first word *yhwh*. . . [and] there is evidence of erosion on the right at the beginning of both lines 1 and 2" (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 299-300). Zevit noted a *zayin* and an additional *yôd* before the word *yhwh* (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 421). One factor that supports the claim that additional letters were at the beginning of this line is the fact that the text as it now appears is indented (begins several centimeters to the left) compared to the other two lines of text on this block.

marked out for chamber three on the north wall. They are thus assumed to be extraneous to the content of the text, but will play into questions taken up in later chapters regarding the identity and intentions of the various inscribers.

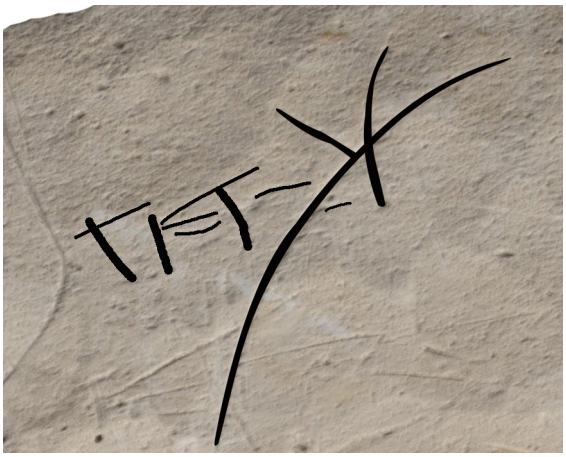

Figure 2.28. RTI-derived detail showing the first word (read *yhwh*) and the initial *kāp*-like character in line one (IAA 61-538) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Figure 2.29. Magnified detail of the upper right corner of text (IAA 61-538), showing the initial characters in lines one and two. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

The first word of line one has been almost unanimously read as *yhwh*, following Naveh's original reading of the inscription. Because much of the *yôd* no longer seems to be visible today, a cursory look at the inscription reveals what might be taken to be a *ḥêt* followed by a *tāw*. However, close examination reveals the top and bottom horizontal strokes of *yôd*, making this a supportable reading. What is not visible in either the original photograph or the actual inscription in its current state of preservation is the remainder of the cross strokes that would make the *tāw* into a *hê*. Therefore, reading the complete word *yhwh* involves taking what appears at first glance to be a *ḥêt* as a *hê* beside a *wāw* made up of only a downstroke as well as supplying the remaining cross strokes of the *hê*. Despite these challenges, however, this is a defensible reading.

Figure 2.30. Left: Magnified detail of the middle section of lines one and two (IAA 61-538). Right: RTI-derived image with drawing of *ʾlhy* superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

The next word, *ʾlhy*, is clearly incised. This is followed by a problematic group of strokes read by Naveh as *kl*. The *kāp* is unusual, with the left-hand stroke meeting the middle stroke rather than connecting to the longer right-hand downstroke as would be more common and consistent with other presumed forms of the letter found elsewhere in the cave complex. As Cross explains, "This is quite different from the seventh-sixth century

cursive in which the upper arm moved leftward away from the vertical."[88] It should be noted, however, that a similar form of *kāp* is found in the Ketef Himmon amulets.[89] The *lāmed*, a small squat form at an unusually upright angle, was considered impossible by Cross, who concluded, "It is scratched deeper than the scribe's usual ductus; it is too short, too much on the vertical, and its hook at this period is utterly anomalous."[90] The angle is certainly problematic. But considering the fissure in the rock and the fact that other strokes had already obscured the surface of the stone, the reading of a *lāmed* is defensible. The vertical stroke extending below the *lāmed* was there before the *kāp* and *lāmed* were inscribed. The same is true of the next vertical stroke to the left, which was there before the curving downstroke of the *hê* was inscribed. These complications could explain the problematic form of the *lāmed*. But Cross' argument that both the form and the spacing provide evidence against reading that stroke as a character is legitimate. Naveh's reading, however, is the most effective at making sense of the lines as a whole without supplying or ignoring characters. The spacing of the line, however, would flow acceptably without considering either the *kāp* or the *lāmed* as forming part of the original inscription. The distinct style and slightly thicker strokes of these two characters provide further evidence that they were added later and are not original to the long line of text.[91]

---

[88] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 299.

[89] See the script chart in Barkay et al., "Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *BASOR* 334 (2004): 48.

[90] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 299.

[91] Special thanks to Bruce Zuckerman for pointing out that these two characters may not actually belong to the original line of text.

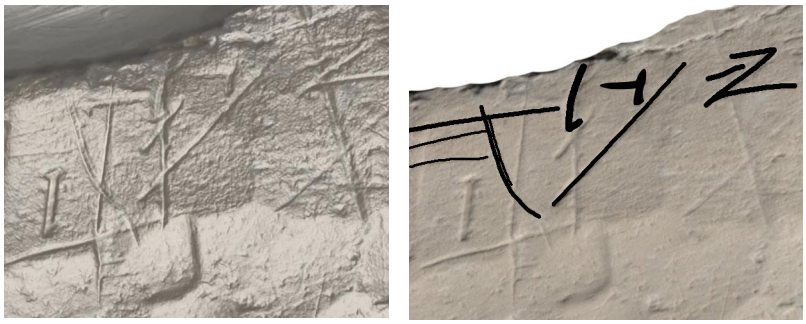

Figure 2.31. Overlapping lines in upper middle section (IAA 61-538),and detail of presumed *kl* in first line. Left: RTI-derived image in specular enhancement. Right: RTI-derived image with drawing superimposed showing Naveh's reading. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Another issue with the reading of this line is the *hê* at the end of the final word. Cross pointed out that there was plenty of space on the cave wall and therefore no reason to divide a word.[92] Naveh read this *hê* as the first letter of the word *hry*, continued in the following line.[93] It is true that most examples of divided words are found in contexts where space limitations clearly contributed to the arrangement of the letters. On this wall of the cave there was indeed additional space to the left, but at the same time the natural fissure in the rock slanted downward and may have led the inscriber to move to the next line at this point.

[92] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 299.

[93] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 83.

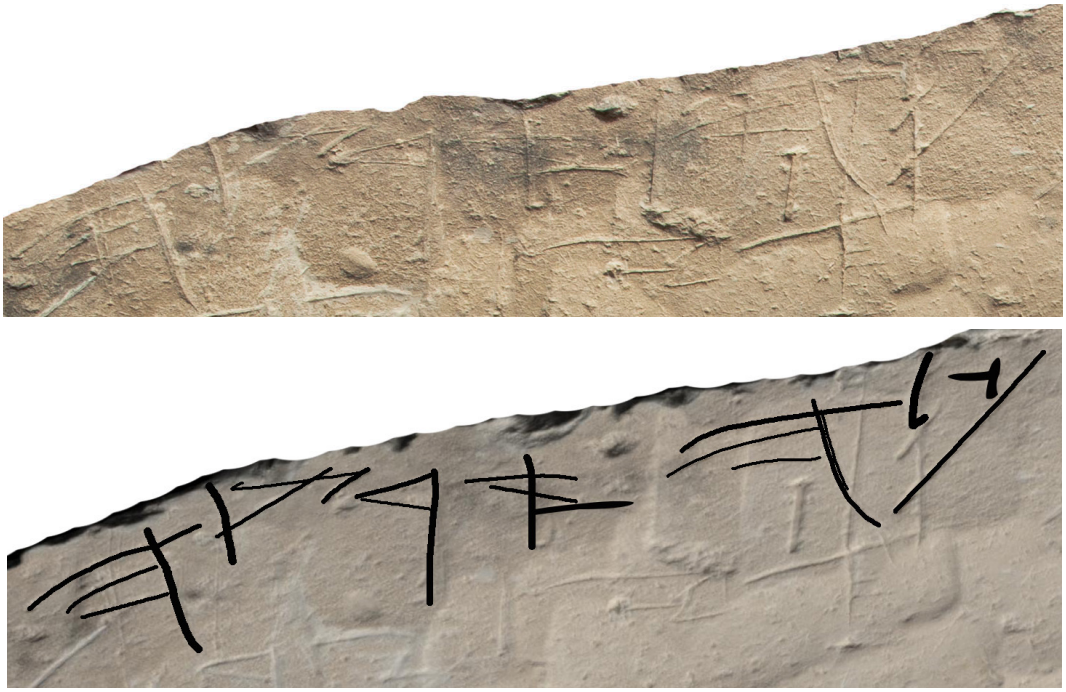

Figure 2.32. Magnified detail of the upper left corner of the block (IAA 61-538) showing the end of line one (read by Naveh as *kl hʾrṣ[h*). Lower image: RTI-derived image with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

The beginning of the second line is the most problematic, especially the interpretation of the fifth, sixth and seventh characters. Although subsequent publications have proposed additional letters at the beginning of this line, here the faint *rêš* is considered the first letter, following Naveh's original drawing.[94] This is followed by two *yôd*s, the first of which is extremely faint like the *rêš*. The second *yôd* begins the word *yhd*. Cross points out the problem of an Aramaic form *yhd* in a Hebrew inscription, instead of *yhdh,* and amends the orthography by restoring the second *hê*.[95] There is certainly sufficient space for the additional letter; but there are no traces of it on the stone. The next

[94] Cross sees an *ʿayin* at the beginning of the line (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300). Zevit considers *rêš* or *lāmed* as equally plausible readings for Cross' *ʿayin*, and also sees a *yôd* earlier in the line between the two deep lines apparently not part of any letter (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 421).

[95] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300.

two letters—an angular and short *lāmed* tilted to the right and a *wāw* with hook and diagonal line, one of which is missing in all the other supposed *wāw*s in the cave—present a different problem. Naveh read these two letters as a 3ms suffix with a preposition, denoting ownership. However, in epigraphic Hebrew we would expect a *hê* rather than a *wāw.* This expectation has recently been reassessed, however, based on the occurrence of *wāw* as a 3ms suffix in line 11 of Ketef Hinnom I.[96]

Figure 2.33. Upper image: Magnified detail of the beginning of line two (IAA 61-538), with the initial two characters only faintly visible. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

The following marks were read by Naveh as a repeat of the word *ʾlhy* from line one, but this time with a prefixed *lāmed*. The *lāmed* is clear (see Figure 2.21). But the following characters are only partially visible. At first glance, especially based on personal inspection, no *ʾālep* is visible on the stone. However, by magnifying the area in the new

[96] See Cross and Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthographyz; A Study of the Epigraphic Evidence* (AOS 36; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1952), 46; Sandra Landis Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 216-23; and Barkay et al., "Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," 54.

photographs, one can see traces of what Naveh read as an *ʾālep*. Next, the upper stroke of a *lāmed* is visible. The angle of the stroke is the same as that of the *lāmed* in the same word above. The next group of marks on the stone include a long cross stroke, which Naveh interpreted as the upper cross stroke of the letter *hê*. The only other part of the character that is visible is a small section of a downstroke crossing the other line at an angle. The stroke order here does align with the usual order, of cross strokes being incised first followed by the downstroke. As with the line above, the perpendicular stroke was there prior to the inscribing of the text. The *yôd* at the end of the word is clear. This section is problematic, and alternative readings have been suggested regarding how the gaps should be filled in. But when comparing the suggested transliterations with the marks on the stone, Naveh's original reading remains the most defensible option. The final word *yršlm*, for which the inscription is famous, is clear.

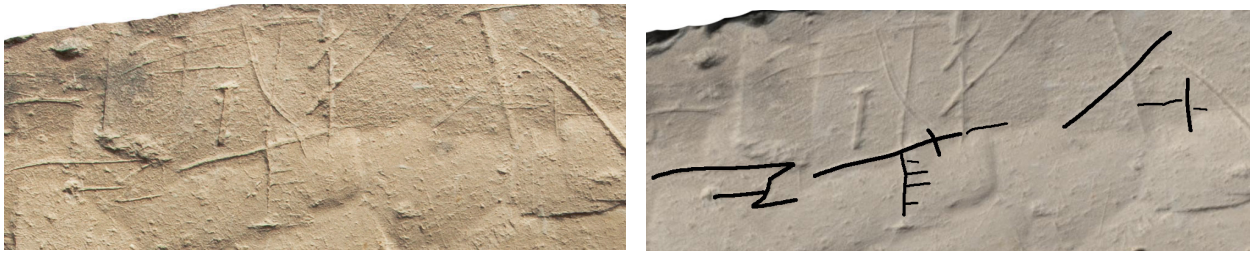

Figure 2.34. Left: Magnified detail of the middle of the second line (IAA 61-538) showing the strokes read by Naveh as *ʾlhy.* Right: RTI-derived image with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

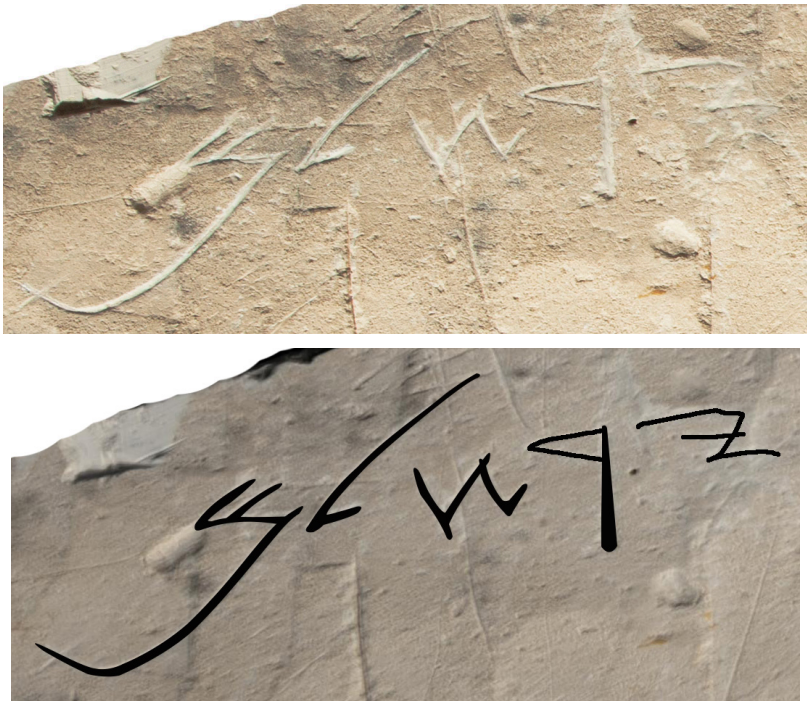

Figure 2.35. Upper image: Magnified detail of the word *yršlm*, showing the chalk used to bring out the word for which the inscription (IAA 61-538) is famous. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Curse Inscription—אר

Between the two longer and fainter inscriptions are the letters *ʾālep* and *rêš*. The characters are large in comparison to the other text on this wall, but relatively close in size to the larger letters in the curse inscription on the south wall of the chamber. Considering the multiple instances of the word in the antechamber, this must be taken as a form of the word *ʾrr*. It could be read either as a noun, "curse," or an imperative, "Curse!"

Figure 2.36. Curse (*ʾr*) from the middle of the large block (IAA 61-538) from the west wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

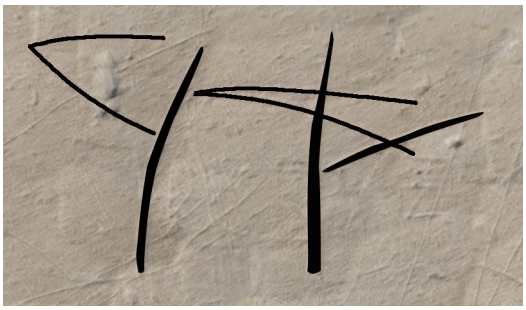

Figure 2.37. RTI-derived image of curse (part of IAA 61-538) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

The lower line of text on this block, labeled by Naveh as Inscription B, is difficult to read. There are portions of the text where a satisfactory reading has been offered. For instance, the final words of the line were read by Cross as הקנ יה יהוה.[97] This reading is

[97] Cross argued that the key to deciphering the line is to see a repetition of the same phrase, *nqh yh* (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300). Yah can be taken as a vocative particle (Aramaic and Ugaritic) or as an

widely accepted, and Naveh cited it in his 2001 article as an improvement over his original reading.[98] Numerous suggestions have been offered regarding how to make sense of the first part of the line, but none have proven satisfactory.[99] The following analysis will proceed letter-by-letter or word-by-word, as is most appropriate.

Figure 2.38. Left: Magnified detail of the beginning of the first half of the final phrase of line three (IAA 61-538), read *nqh.* Right: RTI-derived image with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

---

abbreviated form of the divine name Yahweh, but McCarter points out that the use of yh as a short form of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible is well known, "but always in specialized circumstances and often in textually troubled contexts" (McCarter, *COS* 2.53).

[98] Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 197.

[99] Here are the main readings:

Naveh (original reading): Hmẘryh ⸮th ⸮nnt nwh yh yhẘh "The (Mount of) Moriah Thou hast favoured, the dwelling of Yah, Yahweh" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 86). In a later publication, Naveh affirmed Cross' improved reading of the final words of the inscription, but still argued that the transliteration of the beginning (*hmqryh ⸮th ⸮nnt*) is clear but nevertheless does not make sense. He suggested the magic practice of cryptic writing as a reason why it is not necessary to arrive at a satisfactory reading of the inscription (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 198).

Cross: nqh yh ⸮l ⸮nn. nqh yh yhwh "Absolve (us) O merciful God! Absolve (us) O Yahweh!" (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300).

Lemaire: p̊q̊d̊ yh̊ẘh̊ ⸮nn. nqh yh yhwh "Intervene, merciful Yahweh, Absolve, Yah Yahweh!" (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 560).

Miller: pqd yh ⸮l ⸮nn nqh yh yhwh "Visit us (with mercy) Yah, gracious God, Absolve us, Yah, Yahweh (Miller, "El, The Creator of Earth," 45).

Zevit: Hmqr yd hyh nqh yd yhwh "The source smote the hand. Absolve (from culpability) the hand, YHWH" (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 426).

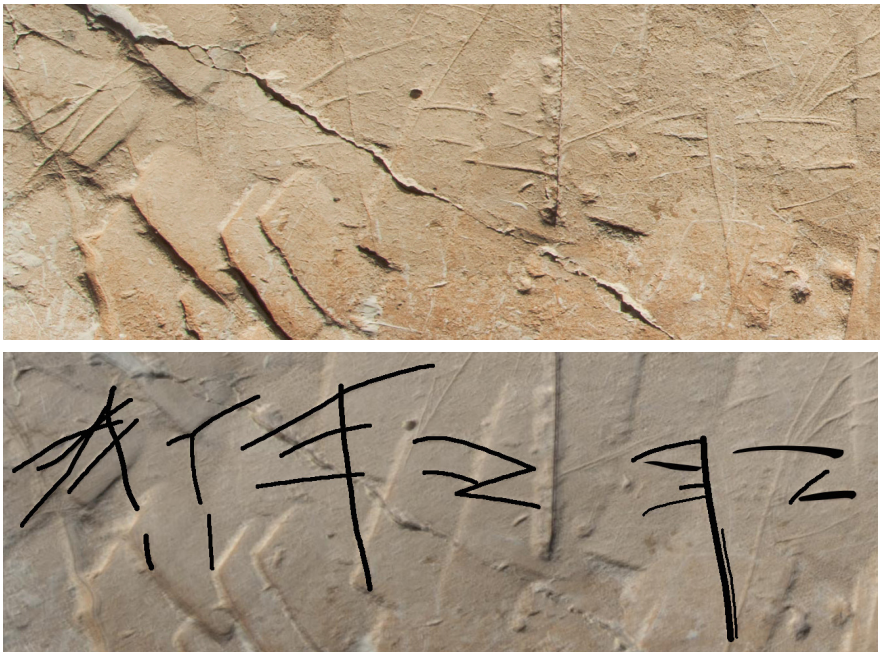

Figure 2.39. Upper image: Magnified detail of the end of the final phrase of line three (IAA 61-538), read *yh yhwh*. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

In his initial publication of this inscription, Naveh noted a *hê* at the beginning of the line, which is no longer visible on the stone in the Israel Museum.[100] A slanting downstroke and two cross strokes are visible in the photograph taken when the inscription was *in situ*. However, even in that photograph, the third cross stroke depicted by Naveh is barely visible. Also worth noting is the fact that the second cross stroke intersects the downstroke, rather than ending where it meets the downstroke as depicted in Naveh's original drawing. A close examination of the new RTI images reveals that traces of this letter are still evident on the stone today, but invisible to the naked eye.

[100] Indeed, Cross was partially correct when he wrote: "I do not believe that the initial *he* of the line exists" (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300).

The second letter, or the first that is currently visible, is a *mêm* showing the rotation to the right seen in certain Arad letters. Christopher Rollston describes this initial shift as characteristic of the late eighth and early seventh centuries, with more significant rotation evident in the late seventh and early sixth centuries.[101] This letter is unmistakably a *mêm*, despite being read as something else in multiple efforts to make sense of the inscription.[102] Cross read it as a *nûn* and Lemaire read it as a *pê*, leaving Zevit as the only one to continue reading it as a *mêm*.[103]

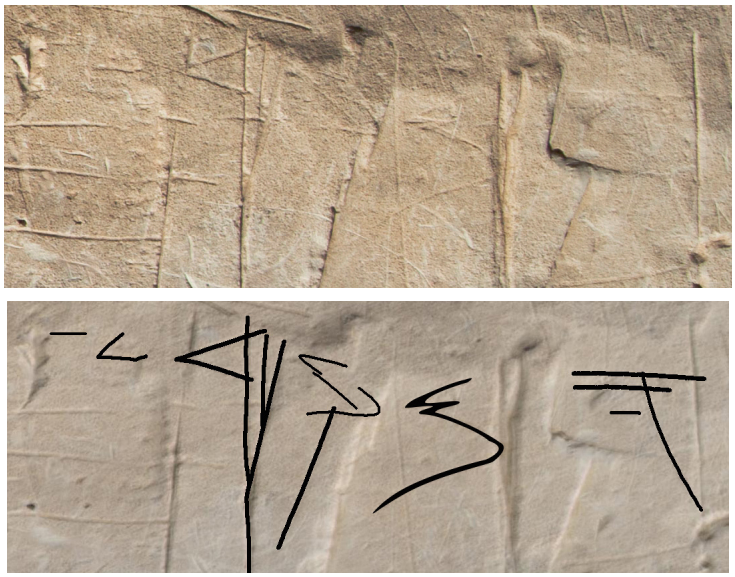

Figure 2.40. Upper image: Magnified detail of the initial characters of line three (IAA 61-538), including the faintly visible *hê*. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

[101] Rollston, "Northwest Semitic Cursive Scripts of Iron II," 220.

[102] Naveh makes the same assertion, in a reassessment of the inscription following other publications. "The first letter is not a *nûn* and certainly not a *pê.* Its form is closest to the cursive *mêm* of the early-sixth-century Lachish Letters" (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 198).

[103] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300; Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 560; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 426.

The upper strokes of the third letter, *qôp*, are now difficult to see, though the downstroke is clear. The worn upper strokes are more clearly visible in Naveh's original picture of the inscription *in situ*, however, making this reading quite certain. The following character looks like a *reš*, but the reading *dālet* is also defensible.[104] Zevit's reading, *hmqr yd* "the source smote the hand" most closely aligns with what is visible on the portion of the stone where the initials letters are situated, but the result is an opaque reading.[105] Lemaire read *pqd*, acknowledging the problematic nature of the characters but settling on this as the best of the options.[106] This reading ignores the initial *hê*, but allows for a more comprehensible reading when combined with the word *ḥnn* later in the line—"Intervene, merciful Yahweh."[107] As Naveh acknowledged, this inscription is unclear and therefore each suggestion is speculative and attempts to come to a smooth reading involve supplying additional letters or creatively interpreting those that are visible.[108] Apparently the inscription was on the stone prior to the carving of the large indents. This is evident especially in the *ʾālep* or *hê*, which is partially obscured by both the cross mark and the

---

[104] Consider for instance, Cross' description of the comparison between *rêš* and *dālet.* "In the late ninth century and early eighth century BCE, the leg of *dālet* began to lengthen in cursive scripts, and *rêš* and *dālet* became much alike and were often mistaken for each other. Later in the eighth century, and especially in the seventh century, distinguishing features were developed, the head of *dālet* remained angular, the upper line broke through to the right, and the stance of the letter shifted further counterclockwise. *Rêš* on the other hand developed a more rounded and proportionally smaller head" (Cross, "Alphabets and Pots," 123-24).

[105] Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 426.

[106] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 560. Cross also acknowledged this reading as "most attractive" (Cross, *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook*, 167 n13). McCarter also considers this reading preferable (McCarter, *COS* 2.53).

[107] Lemaire took the traces of a *yôd* and the following marks as *yhwh* and read "Intervene, merciful Yahweh" (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 560-61). Miller supplied the word *ʾl* in the gap and read "Visit us (with mercy), Yah, Gracious God" (Patrick D. Miller, "El, the Creator of the Earth," *BASOR* 239 [1980]: 45). McCarter takes up Miller's reading and also points out parallels from Kuntillet 'Ajrud for the phrase *ʾl ʾnn* (McCarter, "The Khirbet Beit Lei Cave Inscriptions," *COS* 2.53).

[108] Naveh, "Canaanite and Hebrew inscriptions," 73.

large indent. Overall, then, the first half of the inscription does not lend itself to a coherent reading, though the first few letters are relatively clear. The second half is more clearly inscribed, facilitating a relatively solid reading.

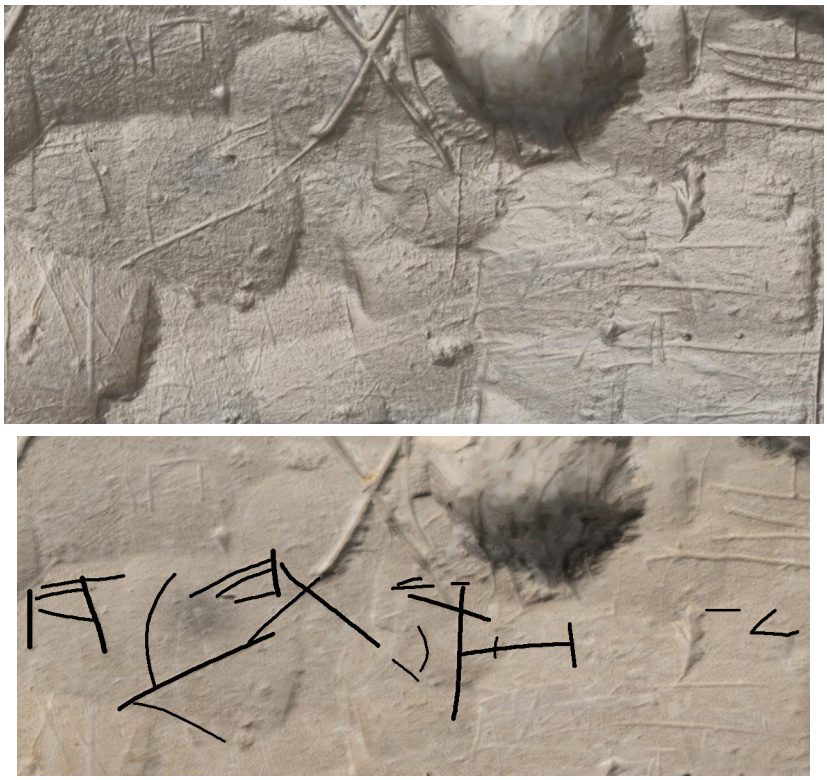

Figure 2.41. Upper image: RTI-derived detail of the middle of the third line (IAA 61-538) with specular enhancement. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Figure 2.42. Magnified detail of the middle of the third line (IAA 61-538). Lighter colored strokes are mostly modern scratches. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Reading the word *ḥnn,* or *ḥnnt* as suggested by Naveh, is quite defensible. *Ḥêt* is clear, followed by two diagonal strokes that Naveh read as *nûn*s. Most subsequent publications have followed this decipherment, despite the fact that the complete characters are not visible. Examining the new photographs, however, has confirmed at least the first *nûn*, the upper curving stroke of which is visible. The next diagonal stroke is longer but at approximately the same angle, meaning it is reasonable to attribute it to a second *nûn*. The following cross marks were ignored in some readings but read by Naveh as a *tāw*. The wide downstroke is similar to the down strokes in *ḥêt;* and the stroke order, with the *tāw* downstroke overlapping the diagonal stroke of the *nûn,* follows the expected order of inscribing. Therefore, Naveh's reading of *tāw* is defensible. But based on letter spacing, these strokes could also be taken as incidental and not part of the textual inscription. Cross' reading of the final phrase, *nqh yh yhwh*, is clear and, as mentioned above, widely accepted.

Figure 2.43. Left: Magnified detail of the middle of line three, read *ḥnn*(*t*). The upper portion of the right-hand *nûn* is faintly visible, confirming at least part of this reading. Right: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

IAA 61-533—Figure with Headgear[109]

This deeply incised figure wearing some kind of headgear was situated in the far wall of the antechamber almost half a meter above the floor and to the right of the entrance to chamber two. The depth of the lines as well as its location distinguishes this figure from the others. Naveh noted the emphasis on the dress and headgear of the figure.[110] In line with their interpretation of the figure on the north wall, Bar-Adon and Lemaire view this figure as representing a military context—a soldier with a helmet.[111] Zevit discussed multiple possibilities and ultimately argued for an interpretation of the figure as a petitioning being, most likely human.[112]

[109] Cf. Naveh: Inscription 6; Zevit: Stop 4.

[110] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 78.

[111] Bar-Adon, "An Early Hebrew Inscription," 231 n. 9. Lemaire observed the unique shape of the helmet and suggested the figure represented an Assyrian lancer (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 567).

[112] Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 415-17.

Figure 2.44. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised figure (IAA 61-533) from the west wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.45. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised figure (IAA 61-533) with specular enhancement. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.46. Drawing of the deeply incised figure (IAA 61-533) from the west wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

Figure 2.47. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised figure (IAA 61-533) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

## South Wall of Beit Lei Tomb

The south wall of the Beit Lei antechamber had two inscriptions (or three if the curse inscription is divided in two), and two inscribed boats. Like the inscriptions on the north wall, these are divided into blocks by a deeply incised vertical line. Also part of this wall, but not visible from a frontal view, is the vague figure with raised hands inscribed on the lower east jamb of the entrance into chamber one.

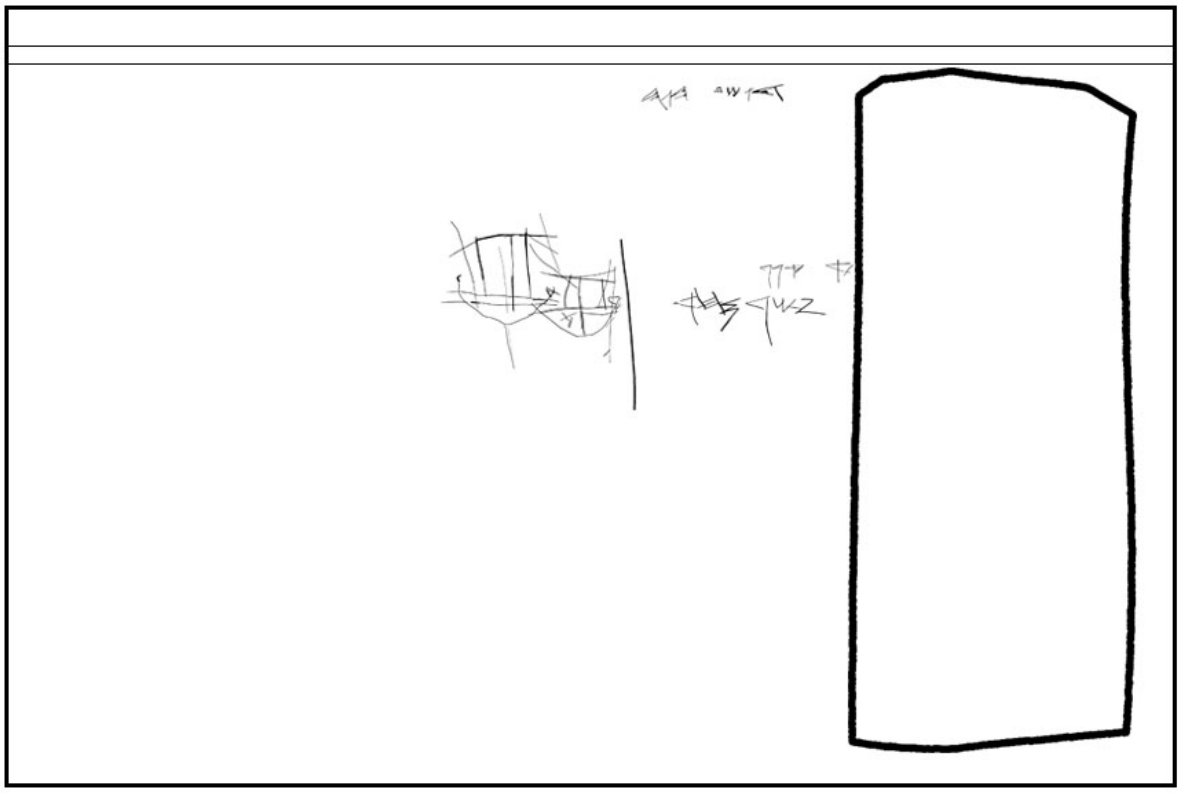

Figure 2.48. Schematic of the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

### IAA 61-539—Figure with Raised Hands[113]

This barely visible figure is the only one not situated in the antechamber. It was found low to the ground on the eastern surface of the entrance to chamber one. Naveh

[113] Cf. Naveh: Inscription 5; Zevit: Stop 6.

pointed out similarities between this figure and the figure on the north wall of the tomb and suggested they were both etched by the same hand.[114] Part of the reason this figure is difficult to make out has to do with the earth that had filled in the incised lines and covered the inscription by the time it was discovered. The faint and elusive image seems to represent two figures—one superimposed upon the other.[115] There is a head, and a shadow of another head. Multiple lines in the area of each main body part could be interpreted as stylistic, or an attempt to portray depth or more than one figure. When drawing such an inscription it is virtually impossible to ascertain which lines should be considered part of the image and which are incidental.[116] What look like arms appear to be raised to the left and right. Also the legs appear to be facing in two different directions. The consensus is that the figure should be interpreted as a supplicant standing in a posture of prayer with hands raised.[117]

---

[114] Naveh suggested it was inscribed by someone sitting on the threshold, and noted several similarities in style and execution when compared with the figure on the north wall. "Both show similar characteristics, such as the utilization of vertical strokes, in representing the soles of the feet or the shoes, and the prominent leg muscles. It is likely that both figures were executed by one and the same hand (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 77-78).

[115] Zevit also acknowledges the possibility of two figures, though he cites only the feet as evidence (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 427).

[116] For instance, I have included repetitive, short, curved lines here; whereas I have not drawn similar lines visible below the prayer inscription from the top of the south wall. These judgments are intuitive, and not necessarily defensible on the basis of a single criterion.

[117] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 78; Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 567. Zevit cites comparisons with the praying figures and lyre player from 'Ajrud (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 427-8).

Figure 2.49. Figure with raised hands (IAA 61-539) from the eastern jamb of the entrance to chamber one in the Beit Lei tomb. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.50. Drawing of the figure with raised hands (IAA 61-539) from the eastern jamb of the entrance to chamber one in the Beit Lei tomb.

Figure 2.51. Figure with raise hands (IAA 61-539) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

IAA 61-537—"Save, YHWH!"[118]

This poorly preserved inscription was situated high on the south wall of the antechamber to the left of the entrance to the first burial chamber. Most publications follow Naveh's original reading, which involves supplying a *yôd* for the reading הוה[י] הושע.[119] Zevit assumes the blank space was intentional and reads the second word הוה "destruction."[120] Scratches of various depths are visible all over the block, and the strokes making up the textual inscription are shallow and worn. Therefore, either suggested reading is defensible.

[118] Cf. Naveh: Inscription C/11; Lemaire: Inscription 3; Zevit: Stop 7.

[119] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 86-87; Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 302; Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," 561.

[120] Noting the sufficient space between the *ayin* and the *hê*, Zevit writes, "Had the author omitted the *yod* accidentally, he or anybody else could have corrected the error easily" (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 429-30).

Figure 2.52. Petitionary phrase, "Save, YHWH!" (IAA 61-537) from the top of the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

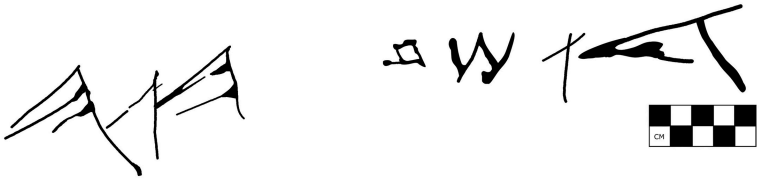

Figure 2.53. Drawing of the petitionary phrase, "Save, YHWH!" (IAA 61-537) from the top of the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

Figure 2.54. Petitionary phrase, “Save, YHWH!” (IAA 61-537) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.55. Magnified detail of the first word (read הושע by Naveh) of the petitionary inscription (IAA 61-537) from the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.56. Magnified detail of the second word (read יהוה by Naveh) of the petitionary inscription (IAA 61-537) from the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

IAA 61-536—Curse Phrase[121]

This inscription was situated just to the left of the entrance to chamber one on the south wall of the tomb antechamber. It was approximately at chest level and a deeply incised vertical line separated it from the inscribed boats to the left. The *mêm* in the second line of this inscription is usually considered early, while the three-stroke form of the *ʾālep* is usually considered late. This presents challenges to attempts at paleographic dating, especially when both lines are read together. The difference in letter size between the two lines (especially apparent when comparing the letter *rêš*) may indicate that the two lines need not be considered together.[122]

[121] Cf. Naveh: Inscription 8; Lemaire: Inscription 4; Zevit: Stop 7.

[122] Naveh also pointed out the fact that the word for curse appears alone on the other walls of the antechamber so there is no reason to consider the two lines as forming a single inscription (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 80). Others also suggested viewing the lines as two separate inscriptions. See Särkiö, "Hilferuf zu Jahwe aus dem Versteck," 48; and Weippert, "Archäologischer Jahrebericht," *ZDPV* 80 (1964): 164.

Figure 2.57. RTI-derived image of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536) from the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

Figure 2.58. RTI-derived detail of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536) with specular enhancement. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

The extra *ʾālep* at the beginning of line one has been explained in many ways. Naveh considered it a false start, and therefore not part of the intended content.[123] Others view this letter as intentionally misplaced, belonging to the second line, but this involves unnecessary manipulation of what is actually visible on the stone.[124] At the end of the second line a few different strokes are visible. Naveh noted the clearer stroke slanting down to the left following the final *rêš* and mentioned the possibility that it may represent an additional letter at the end of this line.[125] Zevit combined this stroke with a faint downstroke and read a *tāw*, although he acknowledged these strokes may not represent an intentionally inscribed character and pointed out that the meaning of the inscription is not changed either way.[126]

Regarding the final reading of the inscription, Naveh originally admitted that he could not "suggest any satisfactory reading."[127] In a later publication he expressed his agreement with the amended reading offered by Bar-Adon following the discovery of the inscribed curse phrase in the Ein Gedi cave.[128] Bar-Adon argued this inscription should be

---

[123] "It would appear that the writer noticed the incisions on the left of this particular aleph only after making this letter. He decided to pass them over and start afresh" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 79). Zevit agreed that it does not appear to belong to the inscription (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 430). Särkiö used the placement of this *ʾālep* to argue that the two lines should be considered separately based on the fact that the lines begin on different vertical axes (Särkiö, "Hilferuf zu Jahwe aus dem Versteck," 50).

[124] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 561.

[125] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 79.

[126] Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 430.

[127] Considering the expected use of the root *ʾrr* in tomb contexts (as compared with the Royal Steward Inscription), Naveh offered a tentative reading ארור ישד מחדר that involved reading *rêš* as *dālet* twice in the second line; however, he considered the lack of burial goods as significant evidence against this interpretation, in addition to the problem of creatively reading certain characters (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 79).

read מחה[י] ארר אשר, a reading that involves creative interpretation of the final character in the second line as well as assuming that both words in the second line were miswritten.[129] Lemaire offered further reasoning for this reading, suggesting not only that the initial *ʾālep* in line one belonged to the first word in line two, but also that the initial *yôd* in line two belonged to the second word.[130] Zevit reads the inscription as-is, and offers the translation, "cursed be he who will sing (in) time to come."[131] In contrast to the creative interpretation of characters involved in Bar-Adon's reading, Zevit's reading creatively explains why an imperfect verb form is used here in a formula that would usually require either a participle alone or a relative pronoun followed by the imperfect.[132]

Särkiö argues that both lines should be considered separately and suggests "May he (Yahweh) free [us] from the hiding place" as the most likely translation of the second line.[133] He admits that no subject or object is mentioned, but considers Yahweh the subject

---

[128] Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," 194.

[129] Bar-Adon wrote: "Although the *yôd* in the second word is clear, it may be an error and originally intended as *ʾālep.* In my opinion, the letter at the end of the third word, which has been read as a *rêš*, is a distorted *hê*; the photograph shows that there is a horizontal line under the triangle" (Bar-Adon, "An Early Hebrew Inscription," 231).

[130] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 561-562. This reasoning was taken up by Simon Parker, who represented it graphically to illustrate the misplaced letters, explaining: "the first letter of ll. 2 and 3 was written in each case between that line and the preceding line" (Parker, "Graves, Caves and Refugees," 262). His representation, however, does not correspond to the placement of the letters on the stone.

[131] Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 430.

[132] Zevit points out that this inscription simply represents a mixing of two formulae. Usually a curse formula using a future verb would have a relative pronoun (*ʾšr*) followed by a future verb (*yqtl*). (1 Samuel 14:24; Jeremiah 11:3; 17:5). However, when a participle is used there is no relative pronoun (Judges 21:18; Deut. 27:17, 18; Jeremiah 48:10). Thus Zevit interprets this inscription as using a combination of these two common curse formulae. He also points out that the relative pronoun is one of the elements often left out in poetic texts (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 430-31).

[133] This reading takes the first word as a Piel 3ms from *šrh* "to release," and the second word as the preposition *min* with the substantive *ʾr* "hole" (Särkiö, "Hilferuf zu Jahwe aus dem Versteck," 48).

and people hiding in the cave as the object. His interpretation hinges upon a variation of the refugee hypothesis, though he does mention the possibility for a symbolic interpretation, taking the hole as a metaphor for abandonment, isolation or distress.[134] Another interpretation of the lower line when considered separately involves reading the words as personal names.[135] It is difficult to judge whether these lines should be considered together or what reading is preferable. Looking at size alone, the initial *ʾālep* and the lower line should be considered together. Depth and style of stroke, such as ribbed or v-shaped appearance, provide hints; but there is not enough such detail visible to come to a conclusion regarding the relationship of the lines. Perhaps the best interpretation would take the initial *ʾālep* as an abbreviation for a curse that was then filled in with the following words (including both lines). Reading it as is, Zevit's interpretation is best: "Cursed be he who sings (in) time to come."

[134] Särkiö, "Hilferuf zu Jahwe aus dem Versteck," 50.

[135] Naveh mentioned this as a possibility suggested by Mrs. Ora Negbi that involved reading ישרם חרת as indicating the name of the inscriber of the boats; but he did not consider this a strong likelihood (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 80). Weippert also noted this possibility and cited 1 Chronicles 2:18 and 4:11 for occurrences of such names (Weippert, "Archäologischer Jahrebericht," 164).

Figure 2.59. Drawing of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536), including background lines, from the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

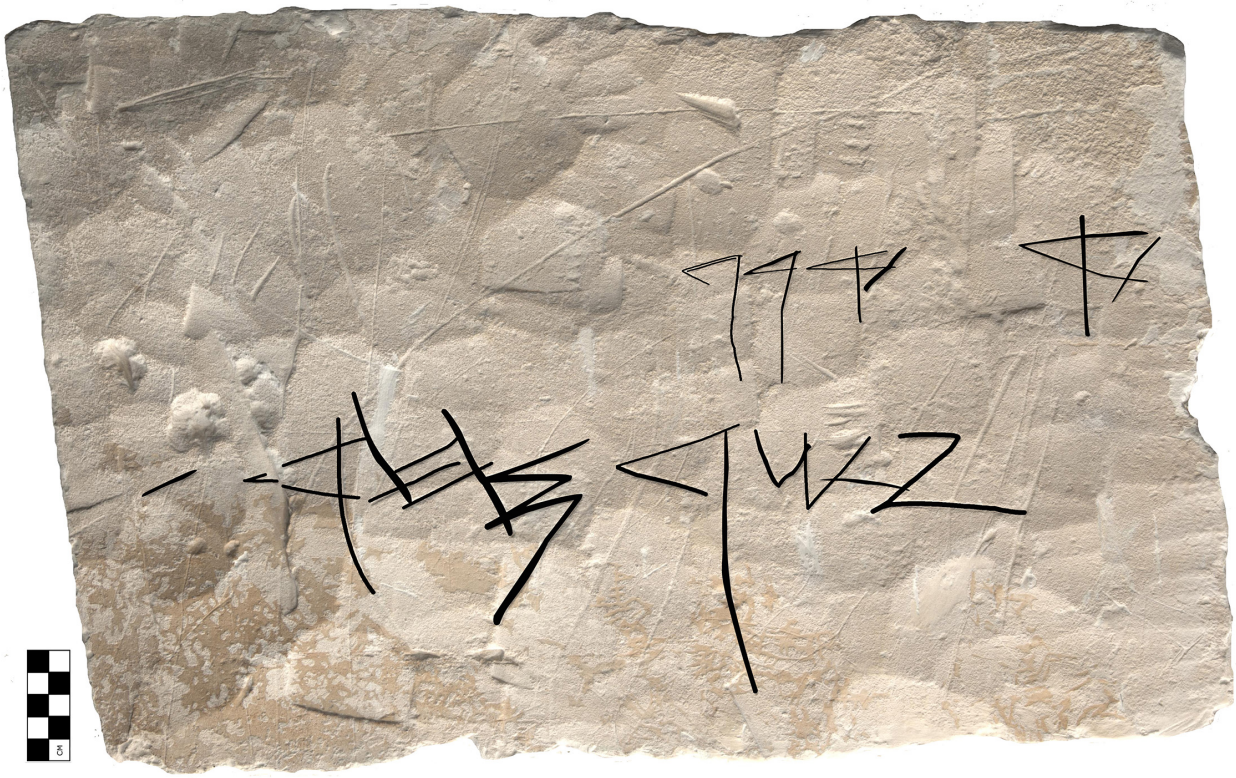

Figure 2.60. RTI-derived image of the curse phrase (IAA 61-536) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

IAA 61-531—Two Boats[136]

This image of two boats is situated on the south wall of the tomb antechamber, immediately to the left of a vertical dividing line incised approximately 50 centimeters from the entrance to the southern chamber. Above both the boats and the adjacent curse phrase is a natural fissure in the stone running horizontally 30-35 centimeters from ceiling. Both boats appear to have been incised with a similar tool, as evidenced by certain lines in each figure having a ribbed or double-line (a narrow and a broad line parallel) appearance. The order of strokes reveals that the left hand boat was inscribed first, with the second boat to the right slightly overlapping the first. The first boat was inscribed by first drawing

[136] Cf. Naveh: Inscription 7; Lemaire: Inscription 6; Zevit: Stop 8.

the hull, followed by the cross strokes making up the two sides of the boat. Then the horizontal lines, perhaps portraying sails, were incised last. The right hand boat seems to have been incised in a different order, with the vertical strokes being made last.[137] The order of the strokes making up the hull and sails/mast is difficult to determine. The design of both boats is essentially the same, with the most obvious difference being a slightly more rounded head on the stern and bow of the left boat.

Figure 2.61. RTI-derived image of the two boats (IAA 61-531) from the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber. Part of the dividing line separating this inscription from the adjacent curse is visible on the right side of the block. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

[137] The intersection between the line making up the hull and the line(s) making up the body of the boat is unclear. Changing the light angle can make either line appear to be incised last.

There are multiple ways to interpret the inscribed boats. One approach to interpreting them attempts to find a connection between the inscribers and some kind of seafaring.[138] The location of the tomb in a small, late Iron Age village most likely functioning as a satellite agricultural estate, however, makes this interpretation unlikely.[139] Another admittedly speculative interpretation is suggested by Zevit, who lists comparative evidence of the "god in a boat" motif, and wonders if the boats portray the presence or absence of deities (perhaps YHWH and another) or their capture or escape in the context of Assyrian incursions into the southern Levant.[140] Like Zevit, Lemaire viewed the boats as part of the portrayal of the Assyrian (i.e. enemy) incursions, but he interpreted them more literally as Phoenician ships related to Sennacherib's campaign "when he installed Itobaal as king of Sidon."[141] Yet another approach uses comparative evidence from later mortuary contexts such as the Tomb of Jason in Jerusalem or the catacombs at Beth She'arim as

---

[138] For instance, Rahmani interpreted the ships drawn on the antechamber wall of the Tomb of Jason in Jerusalem as evidence that an important family member interred there was a naval officer, pictured on the war ship taking the lead in the action portrayed (L. Y. Rahmani, "Jason's Tomb," *IEJ* 17 [1967]: 96-97, first published as "The Tomb of Jason," *'Atiqot* 4 [1964], [in Hebrew]). Naveh, however, considered this unlikely given the location. He wrote: "It is hardly likely that the inhabitants of this region had any connection with seafaring or fishing, and yet we have here two sailing vessels" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 78).

[139] See chapter 1 for a discussion of the likely function of Beit Lei within the Lachish district of ancient Judah.

[140] In this context, Zevit mentions Egyptian barques used to transport deities, the curse in Deuteronomy 28:68 regarding returning to Egypt in ships, an Iron IIB seal with a rigged ship and an empty deck (referencing Avigad, "A Hebrew Seal Depicting a Sailing Ship," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 246 [1982]: 59-62), another seal with an image of a boat with a raised stern and a bearded figure holding a bow (referencing G. Dalman, "Ein neugefundenes Jahvebild," *Palästinajahrbuch* 2 [1906]: 44-56), a similar motif on Phoenician seals (referencing W. Culican, "The Iconography of Some Phoenician Seals and Seal Impressions," *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1 [1968]: 50-103, and a report of Ashurbanipal's campaign to Egypt on the Rassam Cylinder (*ANET,* 294) (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 433-5).

[141] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 567.

support for interpreting the boats as representing passage to or provision in the afterlife.[142] The location of the inscriptions in a hewn burial cave lends support to this interpretation.

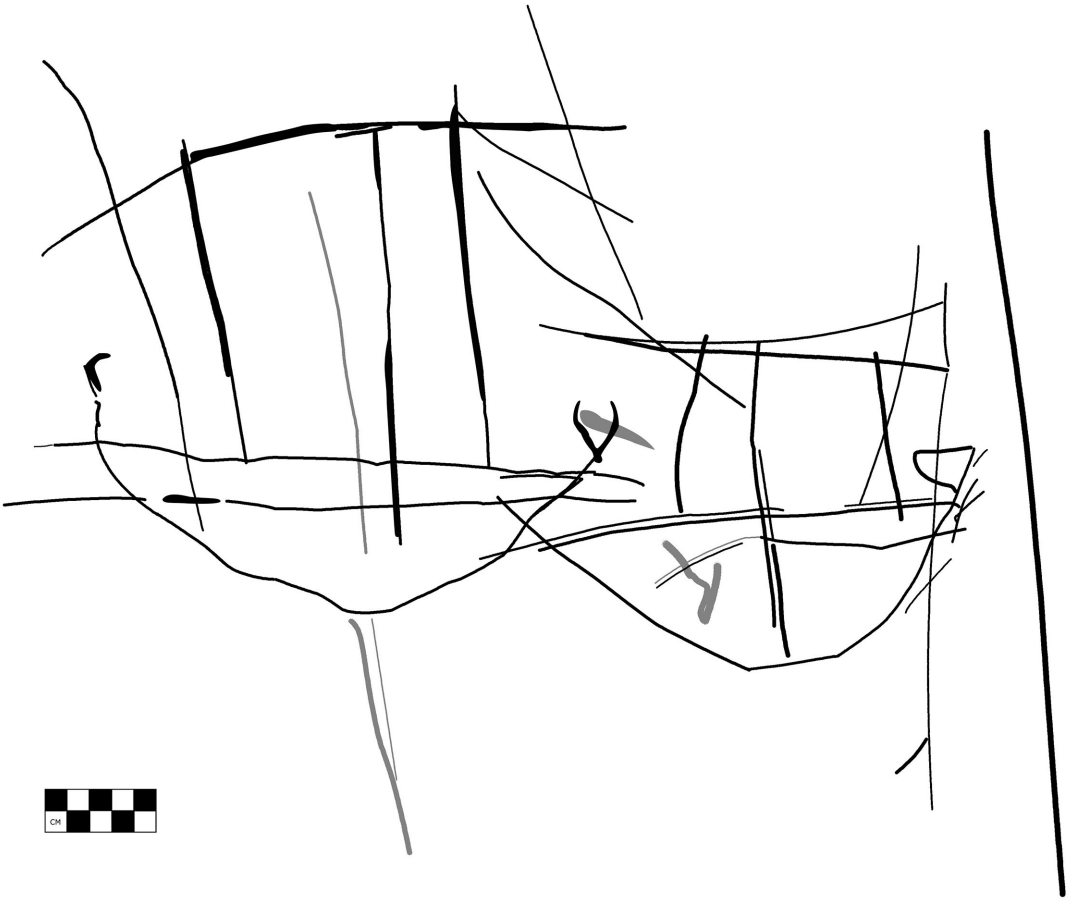


Figure 2.62. Drawing of the two boats (IAA 61-531) from the south wall of the Beit Lei tomb antechamber.

[142] Naveh noted: "The representation of ships in this tomb may be connected with religious beliefs" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 78). Ships have also been found on tomb walls at Masada and Khirbet Beit Lei (Hellenistic period).

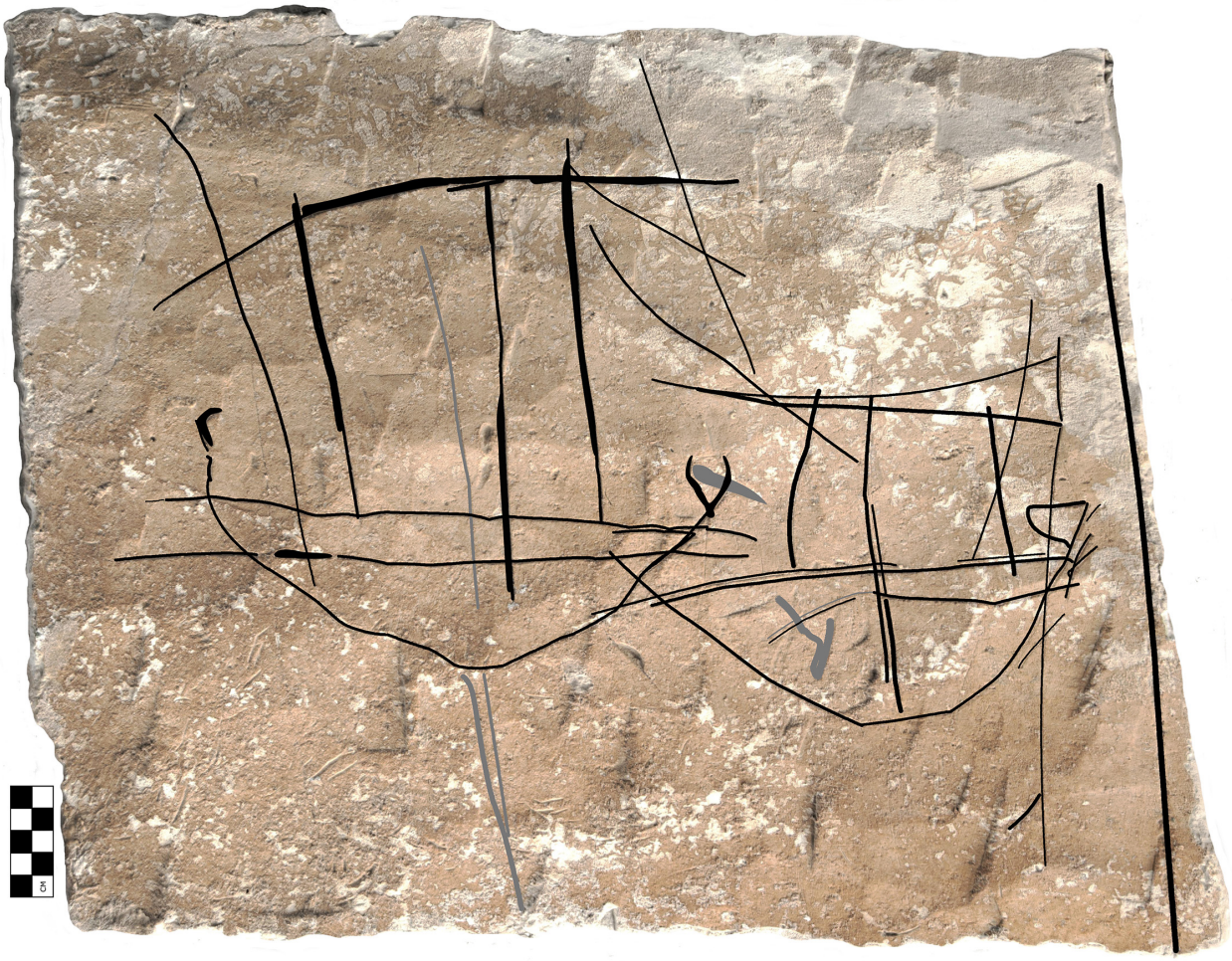


Figure 2.63. RTI-derived image of the two boats (IAA 61-531) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

**IAA 61-542—Rough Circle**

This block has an IAA number identifying it with the 1961 excavation of the burial caves at Beit Lei, and is currently stored with the other Beit Lei inscriptions at the storage facility in Beth-Shemesh. Its original setting within the cave is unknown. I include it here simply for the purpose of acknowledging the presence of multiple inscribed circles or ellipse forms.

Figure 2.64. Circle (IAA 61-542) inscribed somewhere within the Beit Lei tomb. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

## EL-QÔM INSCRIPTIONS

There are three inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qôm.[143] Two epitaphs were situated in Tomb I—an incised inscription purchased on the antiquities market, and an ink inscription discovered above a doorway during excavation. Upon exploration of the space, Dever also recorded a number of graffiti including criss-crossing lines letter pairs. Tomb II was the space to which the ʾUriyahu inscription was traced. It also included criss-crossing lines and "sunburst" patterns in various places on the chamber walls.[144]

### Tomb I

#### IAA 72-168—Incised Epitaph[145]

This deeply incised epitaph was part of a large Iron Age collection Dever obtained on the antiquities market, and traced back to el-Qôm after considerable questioning of dealers and villagers. In his original photographs of Tomb I, the space from which this inscription was removed is visible to the left of the entrance to chamber three when looking southwest into the chamber.[146] As a final confirmation that they had indeed

---

[143] The original publication is William Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet El-Kom." *HUCA* 40-41 (1970), 139-204. See also: Dever, "Inscriptions on Israelite Burial Caves in the Mountainous Region of Hebron," *Qadmoniot* 4 (1971): 90-92 (in Hebrew); Dever, "Qôm, Khirbet-el-," NEAEHL 4 (1993), 1233-35; Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH" *RB* 84 (1977): 595-608. The following anthologies also include these inscriptions: Johannes Renz, *Die althebräische Inschriften: Teil 1 Text und Kommentar* (Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik 1; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 199-211; Dobbs-Allsopp, et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance*, 405-14; Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance,* 105-6; A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 220-26; Emile Puech, "Palestine Funerary Inscriptions," *ABD* 5 (1992), 126-35; and G. Sarfatti, "Hebrew Inscriptions of the First Temple Period: A Survey and Some Linguistic Comments," *Maarav* 3 (1982): 55-83.

[144] For descriptions and drawings of the graffiti from both tombs, see Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 157, 167-8.

[145] Cf. Dever: Inscription 1; *AHI*: 25.001; A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past*: Inscription 2.

[146] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," Figures 2-4 and Plate II:A.

located the original location of the inscription, Dever and his team discovered a chip on the floor of the tomb with part of the missing *hê* from the beginning of line three. The inscription presents no issues with decipherment. It reads לעופי בן נתניהו החדר הזה. "Belonging to ʿÔpay, son of Netanyahu, this chamber."

Figure 2.65. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised epitaph (IAA 72-168) from Tomb I at el-Qôm. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

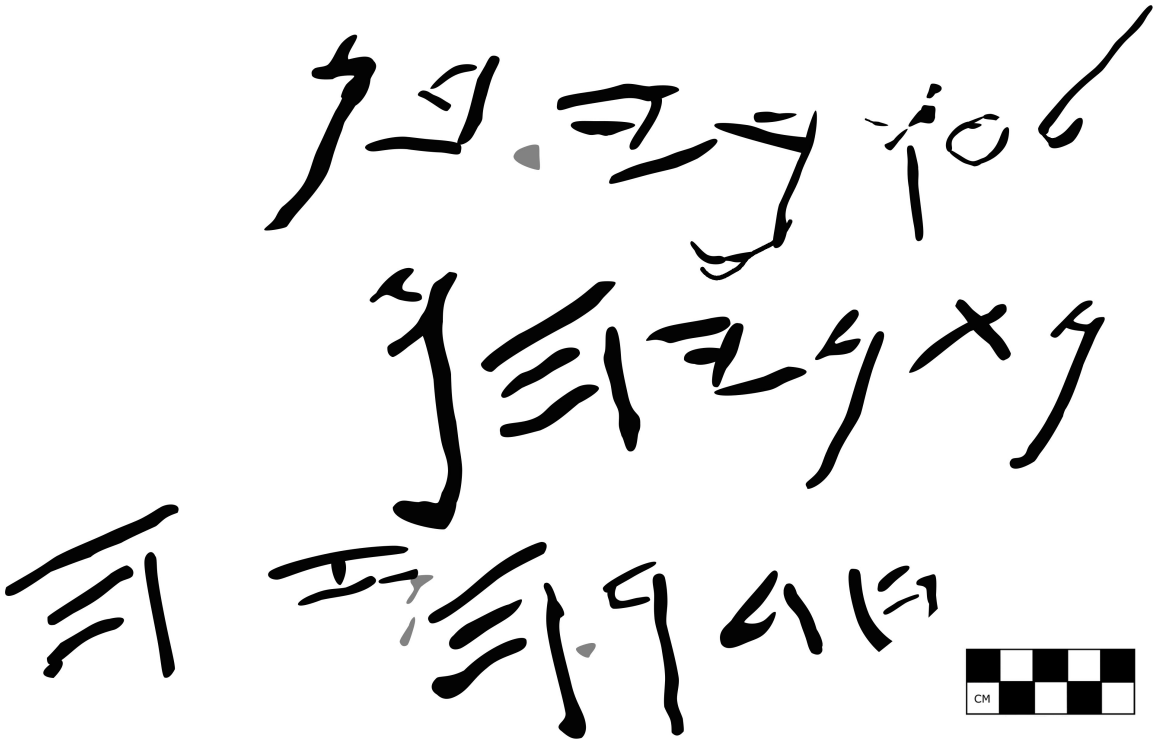


Figure 2.66. Drawing of the deeply incised epitaph (IAA 72-168) from Tomb I at el-Qôm.

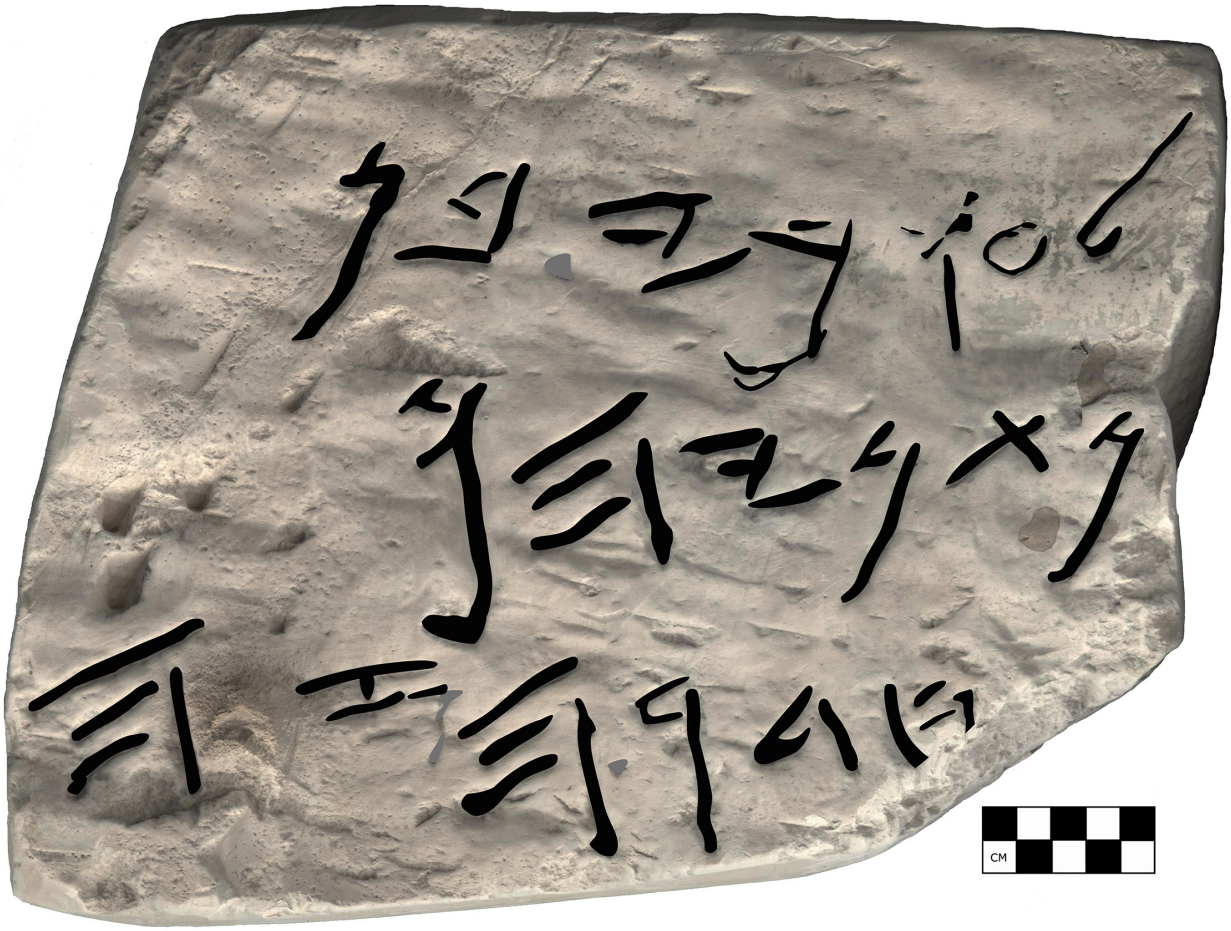


Figure 2.67. RTI-derived image of the deeply incised epitaph (IAA 72-168) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

IAA 72-460—Ink Epitaph[147]

This inscription was situated above the entrance to the third chamber in Tomb I at el-Qôm. It is written in ink or black paint and was discovered by William Dever during his salvage work on the tombs, setting it apart from the other two cave inscriptions that were purchased. The ink was smudged on the chalky surface at the time of discovery, though the writing was more decipherable than it is currently. The picture below, taken recently at

[147] Cf. Dever: Inscription 2; *AHI* 25.002; A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past*: Inscription 3.

the Beth-Shemesh IAA facility, shows the current state of preservation. For original photographs, which show much more than is now visible, see Dever's publication.[148] The inscription most likely read יפועל בן נתניהו.[149] Like the other inscription to the right of the chamber entrance, this inscription served to identify the owner of the chamber.

Figure 2.68. Ink epitaph (IAA 72-460) from Tomb I at el-Qôm, showing current state of preservation. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn.

[148] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," Plates II:A and VI:A.

[149] This is suggested by Lemaire, who pointed out that both inscriptions label the same burial chamber, indicating ownership of the chamber; and therefore they most likely refer to the same individual (Lemaire, "Les Inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qom," 597). Dever originally read לעפ-- בת נתניהו, though he admitted the temptation to read עופי בן נתניהו in accordance to the clear reading of the other inscription (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 156-7). Barag suggested a different reading לעוזה בן נתניהו on the basis of traces of the two smudged letters that he considered to indicated a *zayin* and a *hê*; he cited 2 Samuel 6:6-8 and 1 Chronicles 6:14 as examples of the name spelled with a *hê* as it is here (D. Barag, "Note on an Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm," *IEJ* 20:3/4 [1970]: 217).

## Tomb II

IAA 72-169—ʾUriyahu Inscription[150]

| | |
|---|---|
| אריהו העשר כתבה | ʾUriyahu, the prosperous, wrote it (or his inscription) |
| ברך ריהוא ליהוה | Blessed be ʾUriyahu by Yahweh |
| ומצריה שרתהאל הושע לה | and from his enemies, by his asherah, he saved him (or, save him!) |
| לדניהו | for/by Daniyahu |
| ...ולאשרתה | ...and by his asherah |
| [partially damaged line of text] | |

This inscription was obtained by William Dever from a local villager while he was working at a nearby site. During his subsequent work in the tombs near the modern village on Khirbet el-Qôm, Dever was able to trace the inscription to its original location in the burial cave titled Tomb II in the original publication. The inscription had been removed from the column between chambers one and two.[151] It was located at approximately eye-level, close to the right edge of the column. Six lines of text appear above and to the left of a deeply carved hand.[152] This inscription, mentioning YHWH and his A/asherah has

[150] Cf. Dever: Inscription 3; *COS* 2.52; *AHI* 25.003; A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past*: Inscription 1. See also: Andreas Angerstorfer, "Ašerah als 'consort of Jahwe' oder Aširtah?" *BN* 17 (1982): 7-16; William Dever, "Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd," *BASOR* 255 (1984): 21-37; Giovanni Garbini, "Su un'iscrizione ebraica da Khirbet el-Kom," *Annali* 38 (1978): 191-3; Judith M. Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription." *VT* 37 (1987): 50-62; Karl Jaroš, "Zur Inschrift Nr. 3 von □irbet el-Qōm," *BN* 19 (1982): 31-40; Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Trans. T. H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 236-40; André Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," *RB* 84 (1977): 595-608; Baruch Margalit, "Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet el-Qôm," *VT* 39 (1989): 371-8; Patrick D. Miller, "Psalms and Inscriptions," (*Congress Volume, Vienna 1980.* VTSup 32; Ed. J. A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 311-32; Siegfried Mittmann, "Die Grabinschrift des Sängers Uriahu," *ZDPV* 97 (1981): 139-52; Joseph Naveh, "Graffiti and Dedications," *BASOR* 235 (1979): 27-30; M. O'Connor, "The Poetic Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm," *VT* 37 (1987): 224-30; Saul Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBL Monograph Series 34; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 23-26; Silvia Schroer, "Zur Deutung der Hand unter der Grabinschrift von Chirbet el Qôm," *UF* 15 (1984): 191-9; William H. Shea, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Tomb Inscription Again," *VT* 40 (1990): 110-16; and Ziony Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 (1984): 39-47.

[151] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Evidence," 196.

[152] For a survey of the use of a hand in iconography from multiple periods and contexts, see Silvia Schroer, "Zur Deutung der Hand unter der Grabinschrift von Chirbet el Qôm," *UF* 15 (1984): 191-9.

primarily been studied in the context of religion in ancient Israel—especially in comparison with the inscriptional material from Kuntillet 'Ajrud. The incised hand has been interpreted as serving either a supplicatory or apotropaic function. Baruch Margalit saw in the background strokes the remains of an inscribed tree design related to the lower lines containing the word Asherah, though the more common interpretation of these lines as background scratches is probably more realistic.[153] The upper four lines of text are usually considered a unit, though some scholars argue that the fourth line as well as the lower lines should be considered separately.[154]

[153] Baruch Margalit, "Some Observations," 371-373.

[154] O'Connor takes the upper three lines as a heading followed by two lines of poetic verse, and views the fourth line as a separate inscription (M. O'Connor, "The Poetic Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm," *VT* 37 [1987]: 224-225). Margalit views the lower lines (usually numbers 5 and 6) as a prior and distinct inscription (Margalit, "Some Observations," 371).

Figure 2.69. RTI-derived image of the ʾUriyahu Inscription (IAA 72-169) from Tomb II at el-Qôm, with boosted diffuse gain. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Figure 2.70. RTI-derived image (illuminated from below) of the ʾUriyahu Inscription (IAA 72-169) from Tomb II at el-Qôm. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

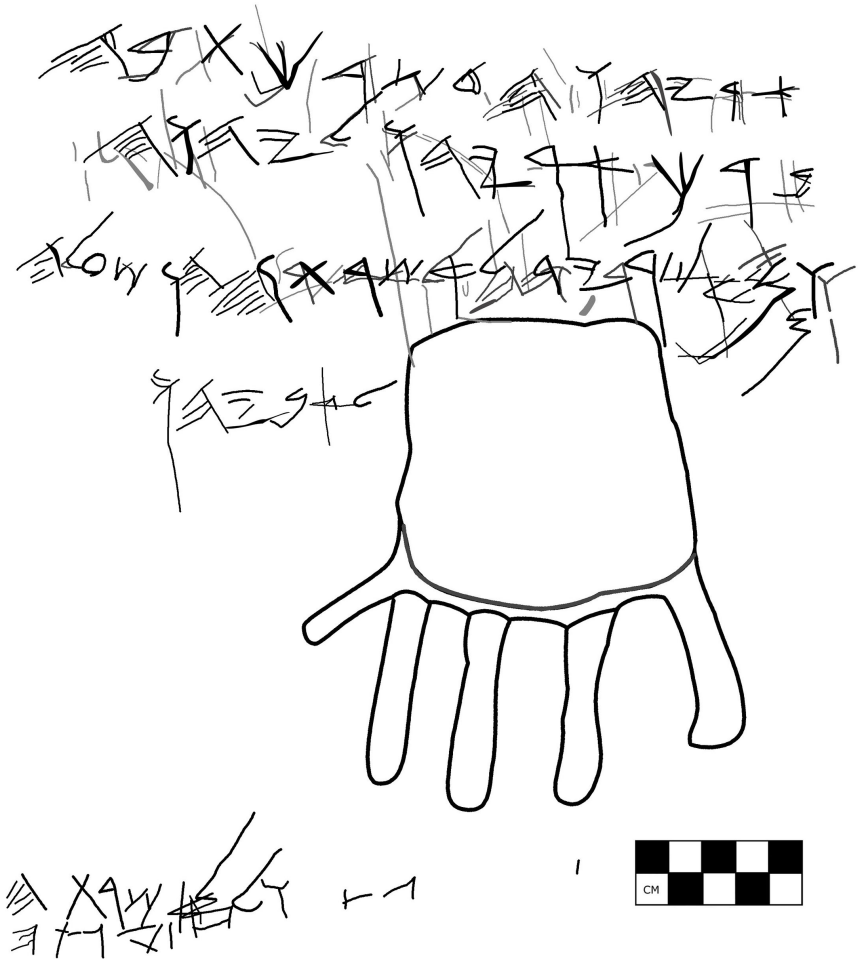


Figure 2.71. Drawing of the ʾUriyahu Inscription (IAA 72-169) from Tomb II at el-Qôm. Where the order is discernible, the layers of inscribing are represented with the upper layer in black and the lower layer in gray.

Figure 2.72. RTI-derived image (illuminated with a single light from below) of the ʾUriyahu Inscription (IAA 72-169) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Line 1—אריהו העשר כתבה

The basic reading of this line is virtually undisputed. The seventh letter is problematic, given the presence of a well-formed *ʿayin* in line three.[155] However, most

[155] But note the presence of similarly "triangular" or cornered *ayins* in the Gibeon jar handles and the Ketef Hinnom amulets. See Pritchard, *Hebrew Inscriptions and Stamps from Gibeon* (Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1959), Fig. 7; and Barkay et al., "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," 48.

scholars prefer the reading *hʿšr* "the rich/wealthy" despite this issue.[156] Other readings are unconvincing due to their unnecessary forcing of the data by either leaving out a character or correcting the writing to fit what they expect.[157] The reading, "ʾUriyahu, the prosperous, wrote it" is preferable.[158]

---

[156] Lemaire was the first to argue for this reading, and most subsequent publications have followed suit (Lemaire, "Les Inscriptions," 600; McCarter, *COS* 2.52; Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 43; Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription," 51).

[157] Dever's original tentative reading (הקשב כתבה "Be careful of his inscription") represents a strained attempt to make sense of the inscription in the context of a tomb; in later publications he abandons this reading, while still arguing that *qôf* is one of the possible readings for the problematic seventh letter (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Evidence," 159-60; "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult," 10*). Both Naveh and Mittmann omit the problematic character. Mittmann explains his omission of the *ʿayin* by viewing it as the beginning of a *rêš*, arguing that when the writer realized their mistake (jumping over a letter), they stopped inscribing that letter and moved on with the correct letter (*šin*) and then continued the word. This provides for two possible readings: *hśr* (the governor) and *hšr* (the singer). Mittmann considers the second option preferable (Mittmann, "Die Grabinschrift des Sängers Uriahu," 141). Naveh opted for *hśr* (the governor) (Naveh, "Graffiti and Dedications," 28). According to Dever, this opinion was shared by Avigad and Cross when they first examined the inscription (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Evidence," 160 n39). Shea viewed the *ʿayin* as a mistake for *ʾālep*, and read "the one who" (William Shea, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Tomb Inscription Again," *VT* 40 [1990]: 110-11). Garbini agreed with Dever regarding the *qôp*, but read *hqšr* "added/addition" (Giovanni Garbini, "Su un'iscrizione ebraica da Khirbet el-Kom," *Annali* 38 [1978]: 193).

[158] The stone is broken at the beginning of the line, meaning that there could have been a *lāmed* before the name ʾUriyahu. If this was the case, the line would read more like a dedicatory inscription and the final word should be read as a noun with a pronominal suffix—"For ʾUriyahu, the prosperous, his inscription." Regarding the final word, Lemaire listed all three options, but opted for reading a *piel* used in a causative sense "he had it written" (Lemaire, "Les Inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 600). Zevit acknowledged the difficulties of reading a suffixed noun but nevertheless opted for "his inscription/his writ" (Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 43-44). Hadley provided a useful summary of the main suggestions regarding emendations or interpretation, and argued herself for interpreting the final word as a suffixed *qal* (Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 52-53).

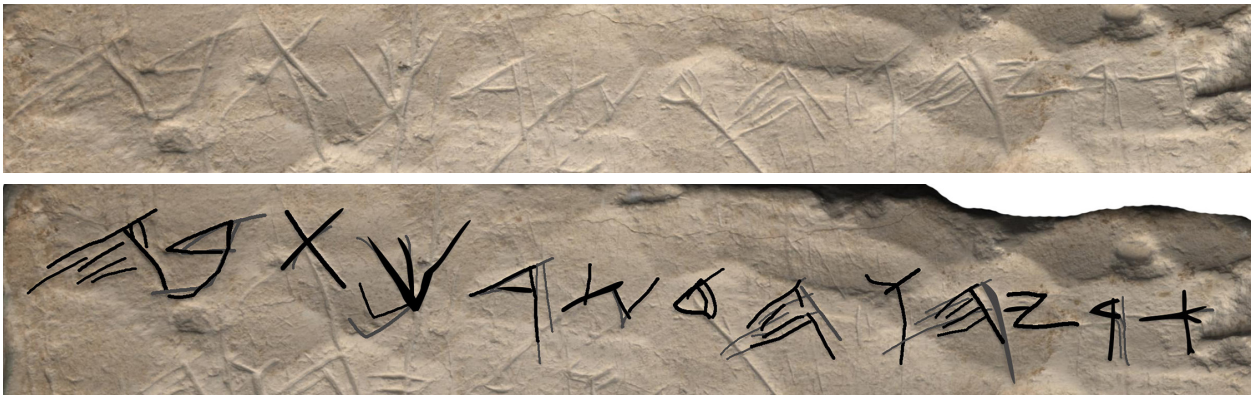

Figure 2.73. Upper image: Magnified detail of line one of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) from el-Qôm. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

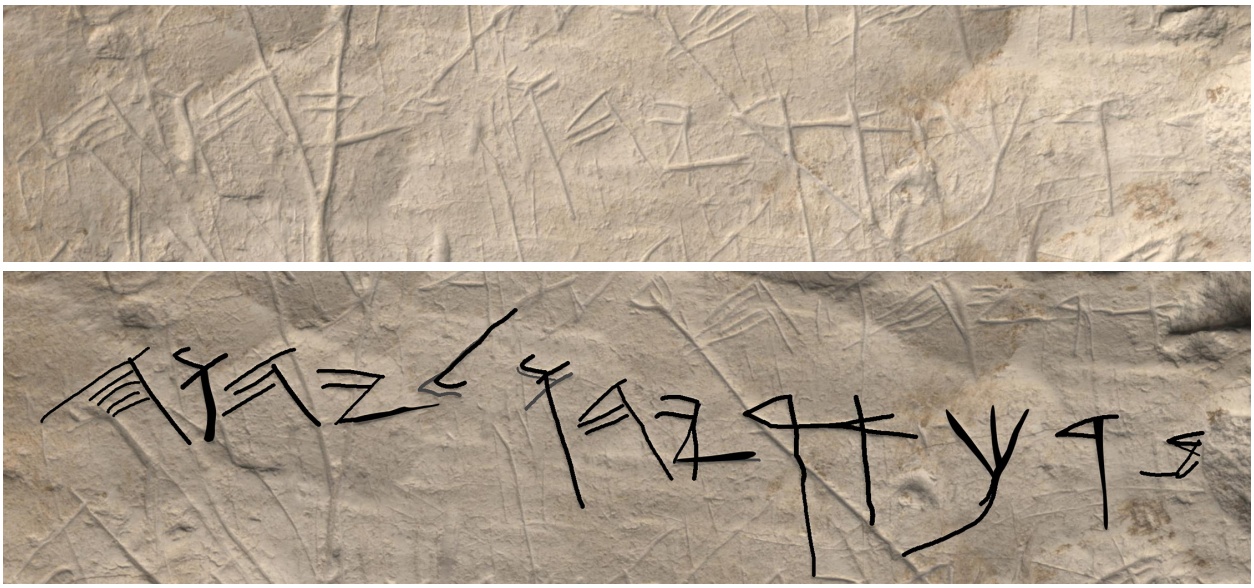

Figure 2.74. Upper image: Magnified detail of line two of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) from el-Qôm. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Line 2—ברך אריהו ליהוה

The reading of this line is clear. "Blessed be ʾUriyahu by Yahweh." At its original publication, this was the first extra biblical Hebrew text with this exact blessing formula.[159]

[159] Dever, "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult," *10.

Subsequently multiple examples of the phrase "Blessed be ____ by Yahweh" were found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud.[160]

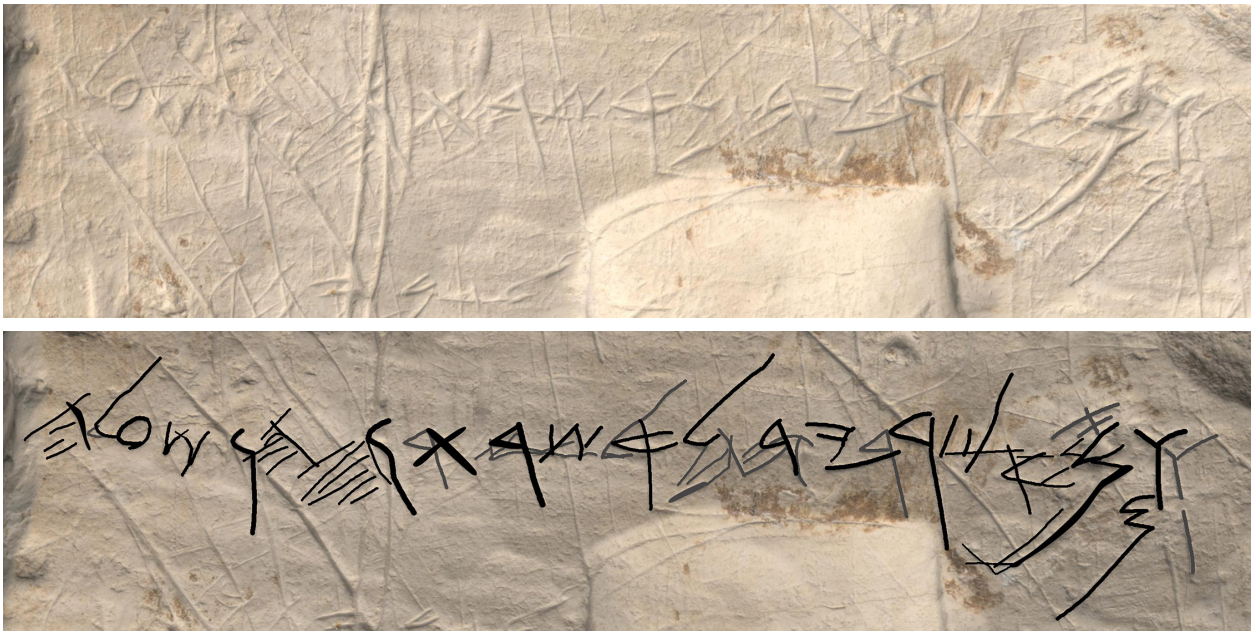

Figure 2.75. Upper image: Magnified detail of line three of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) from el-Qôm. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Line 3—ומצריה לאשרתה הושע לה

This is the most widely accepted reading for the third line of the inscription, and is translated "and from his enemies, by his asherah, he saved him (or, save him!)."[161] It is

[160] Shmuel A□ituv, Esther Eshel and Ze'ev Meshel, "The Inscriptions," in Kuntillet 'Ajrud (□orvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012), 127.

[161] Lemaire was the first to suggest this reading (Lemaire, "Les Inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm," 600). Others followed. See for instance: Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 44; and McCarter, *COS* 2.52. Naveh suggested something close, reading *n□ry* "my guardian" (Naveh, "Graffiti and Dedications," *BASOR* 235 (1979): 28). This leads to a blessing formula like those found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Shea reinterpreted the entire line, arguing that a direct interpretation of the first word of this line is to read *m□r* with a gentilic ending *y* and a pronominal suffix *h* and translate it "his Egyptian," which he understands to be referring to □Uriyahu's servant or slave (Shea, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Tomb Inscription Again," 112).

impossible to arrive at a satisfactory reading of the third line of the ʾUriyahu inscription without making certain selective decisions. Two types of these decisions are quite common—leaving out characters that do not seem to fit the reading, and selecting characters from both the upper and lower layers of text as needed.[162] The new RTI images have clarified the order of strokes in the complex of overlapping lines and characters making up much of line three. Certain characters are clearly in the top layer of inscribed text. These include, reading right-to-left, the left-hand *wāw*, the upper *mêm* (or *nûn*), the right-hand *rêš*, *yôd*, a *hê* with the top horizontals joining (or possibly *rêš*?), the right-hand *lāmed*, *ʾālep*, *šîn*, *rêš*, and *tāw*. Toward the beginning of the line, where most read a *ṣādê*, it is very difficult to determine which lines are related. The strokes often viewed as elements composing this particular letter do not appear to connect, meaning that parts of this letter must be speculatively restored or assumed beyond what is visible on the stone. There is no straight-forward solution to this difficulty. It is pointed out here simply to bring up an issue that is often not visible in previously published drawings, which depict a clear *ṣādê.*[163] Aside from this difficulty, the reading presented here requires minimal creative manipulation of the data, and includes those characters clearly belonging to the top layer of inscribing.

[162] For example, the reading suggested by Dever in his original publication of the inscription included two *rêš*'s (in the word *m□rr*), each of which belongs to a different layer of inscribing (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 159). Similarly, Mittmann submitted a reading that included both *mêm*s as well as the *lāmed* from the lower layer of text (Mittmann, "Die Grabinschrift des Sängers Uriahu," 143).

[163] See, for instance, Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 598; and Mittman, "Die Grabinschrift des Sängers Uriahu," 140.

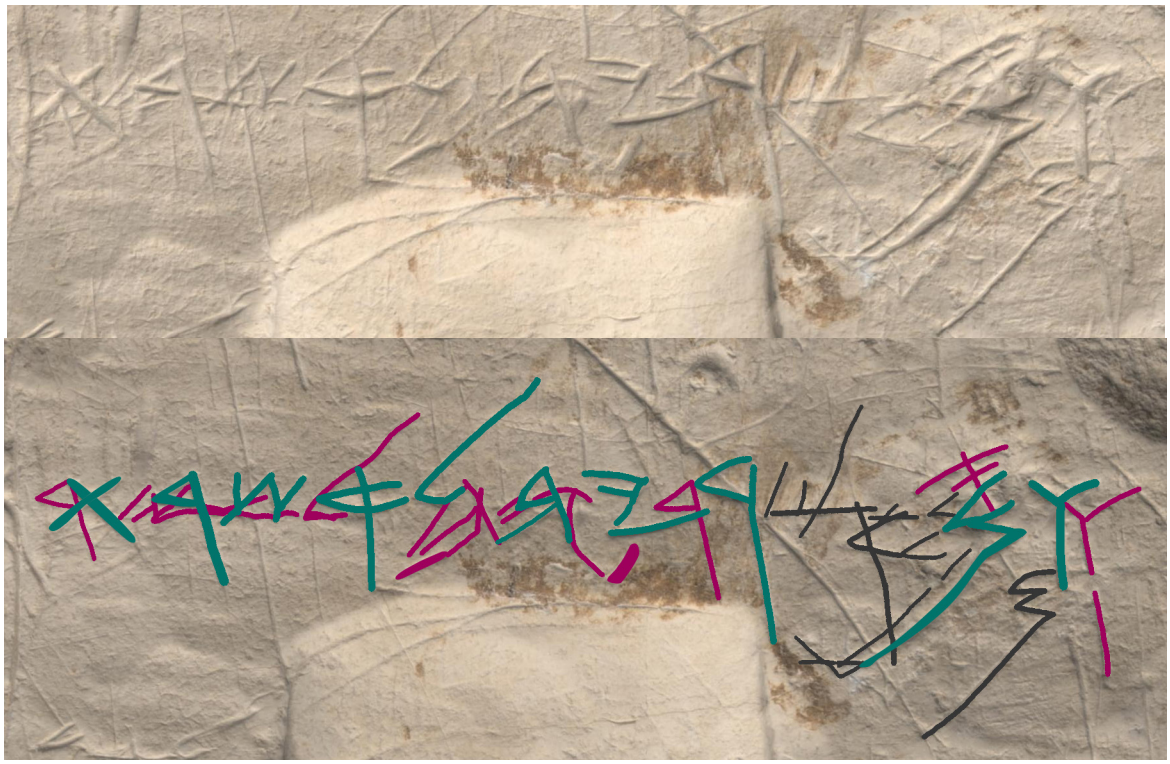

Figure 2.76. Upper image: Overlapping characters at the beginning of line three of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) from el-Qôm. Lower image: RTI-derived detail with drawing superimposed (Teal=characters in upper layer; magenta=characters in lower layer; gray=characters that do not clearly belong to one layer or the other). Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

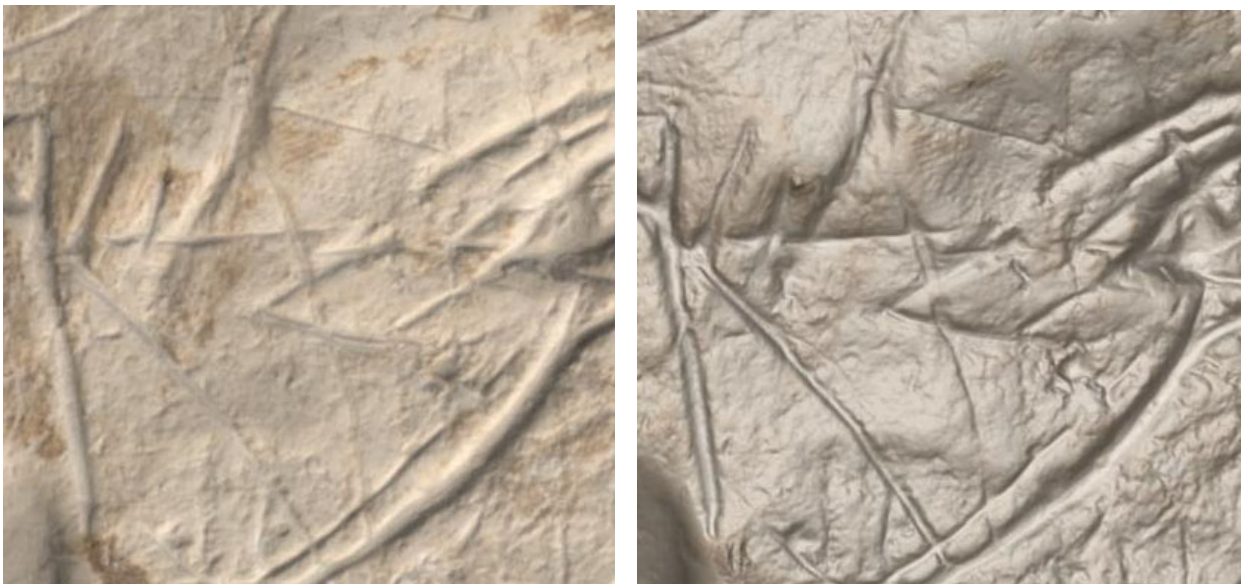

Figure 2.77. Magnified detail of strokes toward the beginning of line three (IAA 72-169) usually read as a *ṣādê.* Left image—no effects; Right image—with specular enhancement filter. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

One of the issues with this reading is the word order, which Lemaire attempted to correct by rearranging the third line so that "by his A/asherah" would form a continuation of line two.[164] This is quite arbitrary, however, and it is better simply to acknowledge the problematic syntax without suggesting errors of such an extent in order to provide an explanation. The reading presented here takes Yahweh (from line two) as the subject of

[164] Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 599, 601-602. As an alternative to Lemaire's proposal to sever the initial conjunction from the first word of this line, Margalit suggests that there may have been additional material at the end of line 2, explaining, "I submit that between *lyhwh* at the end of line 2 and *wm□ryh* in line 3 something like the following is either to be restored or reconstructed: *ky. h□yl*(*h*)*w. m*(*kp.*) *□ybyh* 'For he has saved him from (the hand(s) of) his enemies'. The result is a synonymous couplet which justifies the ascription of poetic qualities to the inscription" (Margalit, "Some Observations," 373). Margalit then takes *wl□šrth* as an error related to the lower inscription, which was related to the "tree" design and inscribed earlier than the longer text. O'Connor considers the word arrangement odd but not impossible, citing specific instances from the Hebrew Bible (Ex. 15:6b, 17c; 2 Sam. 1:19a) where a vocative is found in second position (O'Connor, "The Poetic Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm," 228).

the verb and Uriyahu as the object, thus seeing the second and third lines as a unit. "Blessed be ʾUriyahu by Yahweh, and from his enemies, by his asherah, he saved him."[165]

Line 4—לדניהו

Most publications have followed Dever's original reading of the name in line four as ʾOniyahu.[166] Only two letters are open to question. Dever argued that only the third letter—either *nûn* or *bêt*—was debatable, preferring to read a *nûn* due to the fact that the closing line needed for reading a *bêt* is extremely faint.[167] This analysis is strengthened by examination of the line using the new RTI files. The faint line actually extends far beyond the letter and is better interpreted as extraneous and thus not related to the other strokes that compose this letter. This means that the reading of a *nûn* is definitely the better choice.

---

[165] There has been extensive discussion on how to interpret the phrase *l□šrth.* Some scholars suggest taking the *lāmed* as a vocative marker. See, for instance, Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 46; and Angerstorfer, "Ašerah als 'consort of Jahwe' oder Aširtah?" In a later discussion, Zevit argues for the translation "for the sake of Asherata" (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 363-367). These readings take Asherah as a name of a goddess, the argument put forward most extensively by William Dever. See, for instance, William G. Dever, "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult: How the Kh. El-Qôm and Kuntillet □Ajrûd 'Asherah' Texts Have Changed the Picture," *Eretz Israel* 26 (1999), 9-15*; and William G. Dever, "The Judean 'Pillar-Base Figurines:" Mothers or 'Mother-Goddesses'?" in *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies* (eds. Rainer Albertz, et. al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 129-41. Others argue that the phrase refers to a cult or ritual object. See Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 602. This interpretation is also evident in McCarter's "definition" of Yahweh's asherah as "his divine presence as available in the cult" (McCarter, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," *COS* 2.52). It can appear that this discussion centers on whether or not the phrase refers to an object or a goddess. But the discussion actually hinges on issues of monotheism. Those who argue that the phrase refers to an object often assume based on comparative textual sources that the object in question is related to specific worship of Yahweh. However, taking the phrase as referring to an object would also be feasible if one views the object as a concrete representation or embodiment of the goddess. I definitely believe the phrase refers to an object of some sort, but I believe that object could symbolize Yahweh or a goddess Asherah.

[166] Lemaire, "Les Inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 599; Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 59-60; McCarter, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," *COS* 2.52.

[167] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 162. This is contra Zevit's reading of Abiyahu, based on his assertion that the character "actually has a closed head" (Zevit, "Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 43; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel,* 360).

Figure 2.78. Left: Magnified detail of line four of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) from el-Qôm. Right: RTI-derived detail in specular enhancement. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

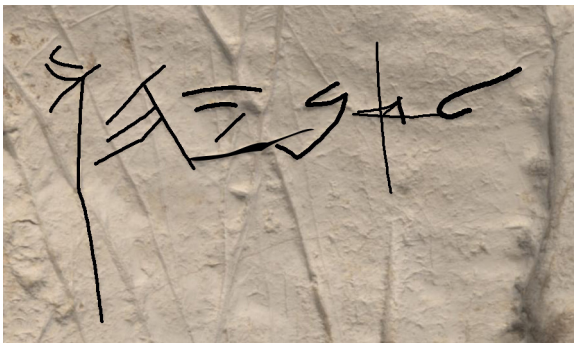

Figure 2.79. Magnified detail of line four of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

My examination of the inscription has further led me to recognize that the second letter should also be reassessed, and would be better read as a *dālet* rather than an *ʾālep.* Therefore, on the basis of the improved photographs, we can confirm the reading, *ldnyhw*, preferred by Ahituv.[168] The long downstroke usually viewed as part of the *ʾālep* is anomalous in that it extends significantly farther up and down than would be expected. And upon close examination, its position underneath the cross strokes (rather than above as would be the usual stroke order for an *ʾālep*), confirms that this line was already there and is better viewed as extraneous and thus unrelated to the inscription. This leaves two options. One could read an *ʾālep,* using the short downstroke to the right. However, this

[168] Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 224.

requires assuming an unusually short downstroke or very faint extentions of the downstroke, and also restoring the portion of the top cross stroke to the right of the downstroke where no apparent trace can be seen. Reading a *dālet* requires assuming an extra long lower cross stroke, if one takes the line touching the *lāmed* as part of the following letter rather than an extraneous line. This reading takes seriously the short downstroke, and does not require any strokes to be restored. This yields the name Daniyahu, "Yahweh is my judge." I prefer this reading, while acknowledging that both readings are possible. The important point to note here is that the short, right-hand downstroke—as opposed to the extraneous long scratch on the left—is the stroke forming part of the character.[169]

To the right of line four is an upside down handprint, carved deeply into the stone. It can be viewed either as an outward facing right hand or an inward facing left hand. The fact that the inscription is situated around the image means either that the inscription (including the image) was planned as a unit, or that the handprint was in place before the inscription. The handprint has been variously interpreted as signifying beneficence or supplication, or serving an apotropaic function.[170]

---

[169] Zevit's drawing shows both downstrokes, but he nevertheless incorrectly reads the longer one as the stroke forming part of the letter (Zevit, "Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 43). Dever, Lemaire and Hadley represent only the longer downstroke, though Lemaire positions it farther to the right almost betraying an inadvertent combining of the two strokes to conform to expectations regarding the form of the letter (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 158; Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 598; Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 52).

[170] Margalit, "Some Observations," 373; Mittmann, "Die Grabinschrift des Sängers Uriahu," 149-52; Schroer, "Zur Deutung der Hand unter der Grabinschrift von Chirbet el Qôm," 191-9.

Figure 2.80. Magnified detail of RTI-derived image of the hand in the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169), in specular enhancement. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

Approximately twelve centimeters below line four the remnants of two lines of text are visible. Most of the top line is clear. The only problematic area is where the upper *lāmed* and the *ʾālep* overlap. The *ʾālep* is difficult to see because it is partially situated down in a groove. Actually there appear to be two *ʾāleps* overlapping each other in the groove. And the upper *lāmed* seems to overlap the upper *ʾālep*, making it difficult to ascertain the order of inscribing or which *lāmed* belongs to the "line" of text. Regardless of which *lāmed* one takes as forming part of this line of text, the line reads *lʾšrth*, like the middle of line three above. Based on comparison with line three above, in which the *lāmed* of the upper layer exhibits a curved "hook" and the lamed of the lower layer of inscribing

exhibits a more angular "hook," I would argue that the right-hand *lāmed* belongs to inscribing that took place at a second event.

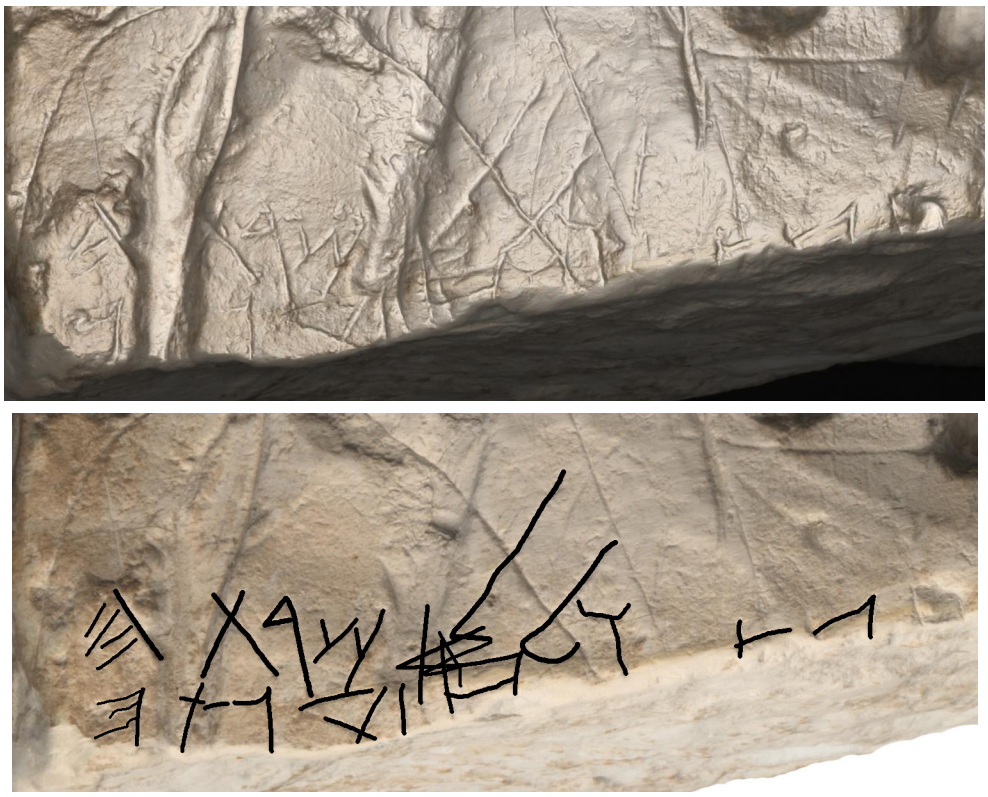

Figure 2.81. Lines five and six of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169). Upper image: Magnified detail of RTI-derived image in spectral enhancement. Lower image: Magnified detail of RTI-derived image (illuminated from below) with drawing superimposed. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Jody Washburn and William Schniedewind.

It is clear from the partially visible characters below line five, as well as the ends of other strokes visible to the right, that there was another line of text. It is not possible to determine the reading of this last line, however, since it was partially destroyed when the block was removed from the cave. It has been suggested that the sixth line contained the same word as the fifth, and certain characters are indeed repeated, including *lāmed*, *ʾālep* (both overlapping in the groove), *tāw* (maybe, though it is down in a groove and unclear),

and *hê*. But such a conclusion is not obvious. The most that can be stated with certainty is that there was an additional line of text.[171]

## Unprovenanced Iron Age Material from el-Qôm

BLMJ 04663—Curse Inscription[172]

Of the many unprovenanced inscriptions thought to come from the vicinity of el-Qôm, this is the only one I was able to locate and photograph.[173] It is displayed at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, where I was able to photograph it in July 2014. The reading of this inscription is quite straight forward: ארר חרף בן חגב ליהוה צבאת "Cursed be Ḥarap, son of Ḥagav, by Yahweh Ṣabaot." The fifth character is debatable. It can be read as a *gîmel* or as a *rêš*. Both readings would yield a personal name. Alternately, it could be read as an active participle: "Cursed be the one who reproaches/taunts." However, its immediate context in the formula "PN son of PN," makes it more likely that the word should be read as a personal name. But it could certainly have had more significant meaning. As Naveh pointed out,

---

[171] This is contra Baruch Margalit who argued that these characters made up a one line dedicatory inscription with supralinear corrections (Margalit, "Some Observations," 373).

[172] See Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 199; Lemaire, "Le 'Dieu de Jérusalem' à la lumière de l'épigraphie," in *Jérusalem Antique et Médiévale: Mélanges en l'honneur d'Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz* (Paris: Peeters, 2011), 55; Lemaire, "Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy," 233; and Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 227 (but note, the transliteration and translation below the photo belongs to a different inscription). Special thanks to the Curatorial and Conservation departments at the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem for facilitating access to the object for photography.

[173] There are a number of inscribed blocks mentioned in various publications as coming from the area of el-Qôm. Other than the object on display at the Bible Lands Museum, I was not able to locate this material, as I had hoped, in order to obtain new photographs that would facilitate comparison of the surface preparation, the tools used, letter-form, stroke order, etc. Besides the stone blocks, there are also numerous pieces of inscribed pottery and weights. See Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 169-87; Renz, *Die althebräische Inschriften,* 211-17; Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions,* 414-19. Lemaire writes, concerning the inscribed pottery, "Although this provenance is not certain, it seems probable;" and he also considers it quite probably that the "blessed be your hewers" inscription is from el-Qôm, even suggesting it may have come from Tomb I (Lemaire, "Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy," 232-3).

both names seem to be nicknames, "cursed be he who taunts, the son of a grasshopper," the latter representing insignificance.[174]

Figure 2.82. RTI-derived image of a curse inscription (BLMJ 04663) thought to be from the area of el-Qôm. Courtesy of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem. Photo: Jody Washburn.

In addition to the inscription displayed in the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, there are ten other unprovenanced blocks thought to have originated in the area of el-Qôm.[175] One of these was published by Deutsch and Heltzer, who cited the testimony of a

[174] Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 204.

[175] If these are indeed from the same cemetery, which Dever indicated included many tombs, they would significantly increase our repertoire of Iron Age cave graffiti. Dever wrote in the conclusion of his original publication of the el-Qom inscriptions: "The epigraphic material we have presented from Kh. el Kôm gives but a glimpse of the Iron Age remains at the site and in the vicinity, although it hints at their importance. During the brief excavations there the writer personally observed nearly a hundred robbed tombs; and several thousand pieces would be a conservative estimate of the pottery from the site seen in the village or later in the hands of Jerusalem dealers" (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 187).

resident from the Hebron area as well as the similar chalkstone and several letters "almost fully identical" with the el-Qôm inscriptions published by Dever as support of this general provenance.[176] This block contained two lines of text as well as some additional characters. Line 1 reads ברך חצבך "blessed be your hewers." Line 2 reads ישכב.בזה.זקנם "He interred in this (place) the elders."[177]

Regarding the provenance of the other blocks, Naveh simply states: "Some years ago, inscribed stone blocks cut out from a cave of unknown provenance were offered on the antiquities market."[178] The fact that one of these inscriptions reads ארר עפי וב.נתנ[יהו] הוהיל "Cursed be ʿÔpay son of Netan[yahu] by Yahweh," led Naveh to suggest that the individual mentioned here was "most probably the same person" mentioned in both epitaphs from el-Qôm Tomb 1.[179] No additional information is available regarding the origin or current location of these ten inscriptions. These inscriptions are nevertheless useful comparative material due to both content and material. They include blessings and curses like the other Iron Age cave inscriptions.[180] They were also incised on stone slabs that show similar

---

[176] Deutsch and Heltzer, *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions* (Tel Aviv: Archaeology Center, 1994), 27, 29. Letters similar to the el-Qôm inscriptions published by Dever include *mêm*, *nûn*, *yôd*, *šîn* and *bêt*. Dever agreed that this slab must have come from el-Qom (Dever, "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult," 10*, 14* note 8).

[177] Deutsch and Heltzer, *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions*, 27-30. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 231-3. Dijkstra points out that "the address to the tomb is rather unique" (Dijkstra, "I Have Blessed you by YHWH of Samaria," 34).

[178] Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 198.

[179] Inscription No. 2 (Fig. 2) Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 200, 205. Inscription No. 5 (but translation mistakenly written under Inscription No. 4) Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 228.

[180] Naveh lists the BLMJ inscription as well as nine others (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 199-205). Ahituv cites Naveh's 1-4 as inscriptions numbers 4-7 from Makkedah (Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 227-233).
Inscription No. 2 ליהוה [יהו]נתנ.בן עפי ארר Cursed be ʿOfay son of Netan[yahu] by Yahweh.
Inscription No. 3 [תניהו]נ.בן פי[ע] [ʿO]fay son of N[etanyahu].

chisel marks to those visible on the Beit Lei and el-Qôm inscriptions. Assuming the inscriptions are not forgeries, the fact that they exist indicates that the practice of inscribing in tombs was not as rare during the Iron Age as the limited corpus of Iron Age tomb inscriptions seems to indicate.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding pages I have presented new photographs of the cave inscriptions along with a concise overview of their content and possible readings. This information will serve as the data to which the following chapters will refer in making various interpretive points. Before continuing with the study, two other areas of analysis are relevant as data sets for the ensuing discussion. Paleographic analysis has often been cited as evidence for dating the inscriptions to a certain period. Some points in this regard are far more convincing than others, and a number of issues should be kept in mind when assessing paleographic dating. These issues will be outlined below, alongside a discussion of what elements are most relevant to the question of who wrote the inscriptions as well as to questions of dating. Phases of inscribing is another area of analysis that brings up data relevant to multiple discussions, including the number of inscribers, repetitious writing in ritual practices, and the possibility of multiple uses of a cave in which inscribing played a role. Observations in this regard will be summarized in the final section of this chapter.

---

Inscription No. 4 הו ליהוה[...] Blessed be [...ya]hu by Yahweh.
Inscription No. 5 יהוה ]נ ברך Yahweh (scratches) Blessed be N[.
Inscription No. 6 ברך ב Blessed be B.
Inscription No. 7 ברך ז Blessed be Z.
Inscription No. 8 ברך.י Blessed be Y.
Inscription No. 9 ]הו הו בע[.
Inscription No. 10 (unclear letters); *hê* and *pê* are identifiable.

## Paleographic Dating of the Inscriptions

A range of dates have been suggested for the inscriptions from both sites, with a variety of paleographic details cited in support of a given date.[181] The variation in proposed dates is reflective of the complexities of paleographic dating due to characteristic traits that overlap or extend over a long period of time.[182] Variations in form and style can indicate a number of factors, including date (as is often cited in paleographic analyses), hand and writing surface or tools. A few examples of variation in letter-forms will facilitate a better understanding of how these various factors come into play. Traits such as long down strokes or a cursive "tic" at the end of a stroke are often cited as indicating a later form. Other examples include how and where strokes overlap, such as the top cross stroke in an *hê* or the shorter strokes in a *kāp*. The overall stance of a character can also hint at its place within a proposed typology, with *mêm* serving as a useful example. It should be kept in mind that date (or placement in a basic typology) is only one factor related to the form of

[181] Naveh, Lemaire, Zevit, and Mittman assign the Beit Lei inscriptions to the late eighth or early seventh century. Cross argues for an early sixth century date, which is followed by McCarter (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303; McCarter, "The Khirbet Beit Lei Cave Inscriptions," *COS* 2.53). In a later publication, Naveh also seems to have changed his mind, citing Cross' hypothesis regarding the Babylonian incursions and mentioning a sixth century date for the inscriptions (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 207). Gibson assigns the latest date, placing the inscriptions in the late sixth century (Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian and Semitic Inscriptions: Volume 1: Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions*, 57-58). Dever dated the el-Qôm inscriptions to the mid-eighth to early sixth centuries, with the ʾUriyahu inscription being the earliest and the graffiti of a few letters being the latest, but in a footnote he indicated that Cross suggested a date of "700 B.C. or perhaps slightly later" for the ʾUriyahu inscription, approximately fifty years later than Dever's date (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 165 n53).

[182] Andrew Vaughn makes some salient observations with regards to the paleographic dating of seals that are also relevant in the case of the cave inscriptions. He points out that "Seals from the late eighth century and from the late seventh century exhibit a much wider variation that might be expected," and only certain letters are diagnostic; even in the case of the diagnostic letters there are "'intermediate' forms that are not diagnostic" (Vaughn, "Palaeographic Dating of Judean Seals," *BASOR* 313 [1999]: 60). In a similar vein, Zuckerman and Dodd point out numerous facets of "letter environment," such as adjacent letters and handedness, that would have an impact on letter forms and their development; and their call for a methodological principle termed the "assumption of complexity" is fitting in the case of a paleographic analysis of the cave inscriptions, especially since there are no other examples of Iron IIB Hebrew graffiti inscribed in soft stone to use as comparative material (Zuckerman and Dodd, "Pots and Alphabets," *MAARAV* 10 (2003): 100-116).

the character. Some variations—especially those consistent throughout a given inscription—may be attributed to the individual hand of the inscriber. Other variations undoubtedly reflect the exigencies of the writing surface, with texture and irregularities as well as the position of the writer's implement in relation to the surface (i.e., standing up to a wall, coming to the edge of an ostracon, etc) all contributing to the form of the character that comes to us for examination. Certain elements of character-form, of course, are more likely symptomatic of one factor over another. For example, the presence of a "tic" or an additional stroke is not likely to be related to the stone writing surface. The stance of a character could be reflective of either the place within a typological continuum or individual style. Curved vs. v-shaped cross strokes on an *ʾālep* could indicate either surface irregularities or individual hand. Length of downstroke could relate to any of a number of factors. These examples are representative of the complexity of any attempt to assign a date based on paleographic analysis alone.

In order to assign a date based on a paleographic analysis of an inscription, it is first necessary to locate the relevant "pegs"—securely dated inscriptions to which other epigraphic evidence can be compared. This situates the inscription in question along a rough typology of letter-forms. The most commonly used "pegs" from the Iron IIB are the Siloam Tunnel Inscription and ostraca discovered in a secure archaeological context, such as the Lachish letters, which come from the final stratum before the destruction of the site by the Assyrians. The limited amount of securely dated epigraphic material means that such "pegs" for use in paleographic dating are not numerous. This has led to comparisons

being made between inscriptions written on different materials or with different tools.[183] Such comparisons are not all equally valuable when assessing the placement of a new inscription on a paleographic continuum.

One of the most obvious factors relevant to a paleographic study of the cave inscriptions is the medium—they were inscribed in stone. The Beit Lei and el-Qôm inscriptions represent much of the corpus of Iron Age stone-cut Hebrew inscriptions. [184] They join the more carefully executed inscriptions from Jerusalem—the Siloam Tunnel Inscription and the Royal Steward Inscription. These inscriptions all fit within the general category of lapidary or monumental inscriptions due to their being incised on stone-cut wall surfaces.[185] As Dever pointed out in his original publication of the el-Qôm material, a methodologically sound treatment of the cave inscriptions will rely primarily on paleaographic comparison with other Iron Age stone-cut inscriptions.[186] The issue is that both the unprepared surface of the stone and the irregular spacing and baselines of the cave inscriptions reveal they are not necessarily to be placed in the same category as the

---

[183] The use of a variety of types of evidence in most analyses of the inscriptions betrays the difficulties inherent in attempts to date the inscriptions paleographically. For instance, Lemaire relies heavily on comparisons with ostraca. Cross considers the Gibeon Jar Handles the most useful comparative evidence for dating the Beit Lei material, but also uses comparisons with papyri.

[184] Other examples of inscriptions incised in stone could also be cited: the Ophel fragment, the Tel Zayit abecedary, the Gezer Calendar, the stela fragment from Samaria and the stone basins from Kuntillet ʻAjrud. For reasons of unknown date/provenance and brevity, these inscriptions are rarely used in paleographic typologies. Also worth noting are the non-Hebrew stone inscriptions such as Ammon Citadel, Ekron, an Ammonite-Aramaic inscription from Ammon, Ammon Theatre Inscription, Mesha, Kerak frament, fragment of a royal Moabite inscription, an inscribed incense stand from al-Mudeineh, and the Tel Dan Inscription.

[185] Demsky, "Writing (Scripts, Materials)," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 21, 236.

[186] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 154.

Siloam and Royal Steward inscriptions.[187] Further differences are present if one considers the density of the inscribed surface. The chalky Eocene limestone of the caves is softer than the Cenomanian limestone of the Silwan tombs and Hezekiah's Tunnel.[188] Different texture can require different tools. And different tools have a bearing on the final form of the letters in a given inscription. Kyle Keimer has demonstrated that the form of a given character is impacted by the procedures involved in engraving the character in the stone as well as by the style of the inscriber. In his recent study of ductus and script in basalt inscriptions, Keimer suggests "the script forms of monumental stone Northwest Semitic inscriptions are the result of the specific tools used and the subjective decisions of the engraver."[189] The impact of tools used on the execution of an inscription can be illustrated by the engraved epitaph from el-Qôm Tomb I. This inscription was incised using a chisel; and the challenges associated with this process are evident in the multiple attempts at curved strokes (see *pê* in line one and the attempt at a cursive tic on the lower stroke of *zayin* in line three) and overshot strokes (see, for instance, *wāw* in line one and *rêš* in line three). Although it is not well preserved, it does not appear that the ink epitaph in the same tomb exhibited the same issues. These differences illustrate the importance of considering medium and tools when studying the cave inscriptions.

---

[187] These distinctions are usually made by using the word "graffiti" to describe the cave inscriptions rather than classifying them as standard monumental inscriptions.

[188] Yigal Shiloh, "Jerusalem: Topography," *NEAEHL* 2, 711. David Usisshkin uses the term *meleke* limestone to distinguish a substratum of the Cenomanian limestone of Jerusalem (Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan*, 283). A similar distinction in density of inscribed material could be made regarding the Gibeon Jar Handles. Some were inscribed before firing; others after firing. The challenges inherent in each of these processes would have been different and should be kept in mind when using a given form for paleographic comparison.

[189] Kyle Keimer, "The Impact of Ductus on Script Form and Development in Monumental Northwest Semitic Inscriptions," *UF* 46 (2015): 190.

The remainder of the cave inscriptions, including the short graffiti from el-Qôm Tomb I, the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm Tomb II, and the Beit Lei inscriptions, exhibit variations that could be attributed to the surface or texture of the stone, but not to the difficulties associated with wielding a chisel.[190] These inscriptions were most likely incised using a simple stylus or a readily available sharp stick or stone, meaning that the inscriber would not have been manipulating two implements (chisel and hammer). Whether the inscriptions were executed by a scribe or craftsman or someone not specializing in either area, the softness of the stone would have allowed etching (as opposed to pulverizing), meaning that the ductus would have followed more closely that of non-monumental inscribing.[191] It is true that certain trends in letter-form are evident across media. But a fair assessment must still take into account the ways in which the texture and variegated surface of the cave walls, as well as the hand/arm mechanics and tools, may have contributed to the appearance of the inscriptions.

Another challenge inherent in an attempt at paleographic dating of the inscriptions is the fact that multiple forms are often found in the same inscription. As Naveh pointed out, "it should be kept in mind…that often more as well as less developed letter-forms may occur in the same period, sometimes even in the same inscription."[192] Even single inscriptions exhibit disparate forms. Consider, for example, the multiple orientations of

---

[190] See, for instance, the two *yôd*s toward the end of the Jerusalem inscription from Beit Lei. The "jags" are reflective of ridges on the stone surface left from the tools used to hew out the tomb.

[191] For further discussion of mechanics of inscribing in different types of stone, see Keimer, "The Impact of Ductus on Script Form," 191.

[192] Joseph Naveh, "Review of Larry Herr, The Scripts of Ancient Northwest Semitic Seals," *BASOR* 239, 75-76.

*ʾālep* in the Yavneh Yam ostracon. Distinct features of certain letters may represent a paleographically significant development, but they may also simply represent the idiosyncracies of a specific writer. Thus, issues of medium, tools, and surface texture and irregularities should all be kept in mind when assigning an inscription to a certain date range based on paleographic analysis.

## Beit Lei

Dating the Beit Lei inscriptions paleographically is problematic on a number of levels. As noted above, the medium and setting are rare in the Iron Age, and the script seems haphazard and inconsistent—the kind of variation one might tend to expect from someone who is either not trained as a scribe and/or who is writing in an informal manner. It is also difficult to determine whether the inscriptions are contemporary. These issues, combined with the already loose paleographic typology of the Iron Age II, make it difficult to reach more than a suggested date range for the incising of the inscriptions. Many publications of the inscriptions have recognized these difficulties and presented a conservative and multi-faceted discussion with paleographic considerations constituting only one factor considered in connection with narrower suggested date ranges.

Since no diagnostic pottery or other goods were found in the tomb, and the tomb form is a general Iron IIB form, a paleographic analysis of the textual inscriptions offers the most promising avenue for determining a more specific date for the inscribing. Cross' treatment of the three longest inscriptions relied heavily on paleographic analysis, and he concluded that the inscriptions belonged to the sixth century.[193] André Lemaire also relied

[193] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303.

primarily on paleographic analysis in his dating of the inscriptions, pointing out that it offers the only possibility for more precise dating beyond the general pre-exilic (eighth-seventh century) date range of the tomb architecture.[194] When the analyses of Cross and Lemaire are compared, it becomes clear that their sixth and late-eighth century dates respectively are possibly correct but also rather too optimistically precise.

The most convincing evidence for a later date is the "developed" or "degenerate" form of the *ʾālep*. What sets this form apart is the third cross-stroke that is no longer "functional," so-to-speak. This stroke appears to have initiated as simply a cursive tick added to the right-hand end of the lower cross stroke, as evident in some of the Samaria ostraca and in the Royal Steward inscription.[195] The assumption is that eventually the original connection of this stroke was lost and it began to be executed as an independent stroke making up the final stroke in the late Iron Age cursive form. As an independent stroke, it provides an example of something that would not be impacted by differences in medium or tools. Avigad considered the Royal Steward example to follow the two-stroke version found at Siloam in the typological continuum.[196] Cross viewed the Siloam form as a distinct development parallel to the cursive form with the "flourish" found at Samaria and in the Royal Steward inscription, with the developed form being connected typologically to

---

[194] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 563.

[195] For a details analysis of the processes involved in the development of the letter *ʾālep*, see Zuckerman and Dodd, "Pots and Alphabets," 123-31.

[196] Avigad, "The Epitaph of a Royal Steward," *IEJ* 3 (1953): 149. The situation is likely more complex than has generally been allowed, meaning that not every exemplar can (nor should) be placed directly into an assumed linear typology. See S. A. Kaufman, "The Pitfalls of Typology: On the Early History of the Alphabet," *HUCA* 57 (1986): 2, referenced in Zuckerman and Dodd, "Pots and Alphabets," 93-95.

those examples with the cursive flourish.[197] Besides the placement of this form at the end of the typological continuum attributed to epigraphic Hebrew of the Iron Age, the dating of this form of the *ʾālep* is essentially based on its occurrence in the Gibeon jar handles.[198] The problem with this is the lack of secure archaeological context associated with these artifacts, which were all found in a two-foot deep section of debris in a hewn pool excavated at the site of el-Jib. This means that the sixth century date so often cited in connection with the jar handles is an educated guess. The date of the corpus is debatable. The jar handles appear to represent multiple generations of wine production, with most examples of the "developed" *ʾālep* being connected with names considered last in the generational continuum.[199] This, coupled with the fact that occupation at the site ended in the early sixth century, provides the primary support for an early sixth century date of the developed cursive *ʾālep.*

| Samaria | Siloam | Royal Steward | Yavneh Yam | Lachish | Gibeon | Beit Lei |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |

Figure 2.83. Illustration of various forms of *ʾālep*[200]

---

[197] Cross, "Epigraphic Notes on Hebrew Documents III," 18.

[198] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 301.

[199] Pritchard, *Hebrew Inscriptions and Stamps from Gibeon*, 15-17.

[200] The order depicted here is a mix of the arguments put forth by Avigad and Cross. Cross considers the Siloam example (also found on a seal) as a different type—where the cross bars are made in two different strokes rather than a "V". He notes the Royal Steward and Samaria examples of the cursive flourish at the end of the lower cross stroke, cites Yavneh Yam as a "simplified" example of the same tendency (apparently since

Interestingly, variant paleographic dates can be based on the same comparative data, which the authors have interpreted differently. For instance, both Lemaire and Cross mention the forms of *ʾālep* and *yôd* as evidence for their suggested date. As mentioned above, Cross views the developed form of the three stroke *ʾālep* as the latest in the preexilic continuum based on the occurrence of the form in Gibeon jar handles. Similarly Lemaire notes the cursive hook that becomes a separate stroke and compares the form of the *ʾālep* to the forms found at Samaria and el-Qôm and on the Gibeon jar handles. However, Lemaire dates these comparative examplars to the eighth and seventh centuries and mentions that this form is not found later.[201] As evidence of this assertion, he notes the absence of this special form in both the ostracon from Mesad Hashavyahu and the ostraca from Arad stratum VII and later strata at both Arad and Lachish.[202] This is one of many examples where different scholars looking at the same or similar data arrive at different conclusions. In the case of *yôd*, Cross notes the "broad and squat" form that persists from the late-seventh century to the fourth century and sees the continuance of the form into the post-exilic period as evidence that combines with other factors and points toward a later date for the inscriptions.[203] Lemaire uses different comparative examples in his analysis of

---

it is missing the upper cross stroke), and then cites Gibeon and Beit Lei as examples of the last or more developed or "degenerate" form where what was formerly a cursive flourish becomes a separate, third stroke. What makes our exemplars from Beit Lei late, as well as the Gibeon corpus, is the fact that the developed form of the *ʾālep* appears alongside the classical and cursive forms. See Cross, "Epigraphic Notes on Hebrew Documents III," 18, 35; and Avigad, "The Epitaph of a Royal Steward," 149.

[201] Here Lemaire builds upon Avigad's date of 700 BCE for the Gibeon Jar Handles (Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 564 n20; Avigad, "Review: Some Notes on the Hebrew Inscriptions from Gibeon," *IEJ* 9 (1959): 132).

[202] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 564.

[203] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 302.

the same character, citing primarily the fact that the lower stroke of *yôd* disappears after the seventh century in the Arad ostraca. Therefore, he argues that a date later than the seventh century is excluded by the shape of *yôd*.[204] These differences in conclusions regarding paleographic dating of the inscriptions illustrate two things—how different interpretations of comparative material yield different results, and how paleographic dating offers at best only a date range due partially to the lack of agreement on the dating of corpora such as the Arad ostraca and the Gibeon jar handles. Depending on one's opinion regarding the date of the jar handles and one's interpretation of the phases of inscribing, any date between the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the sixth century is defensible for the Beit Lei inscriptions. The complexities of paleographic dating along with factors of medium and execution unique to the cave inscriptions compound to make a more precise dating of the Beit Lei corpus fragile or impossible.

## El-Qôm

There is less variation in the dates suggested for the el-Qôm inscriptions. The ʾUriyahu inscription from Tomb II is dated consistently to the eighth century, with differences of opinion centering on the decade. Dever argued originally for a mid-eighth century date based on the minimal presence of cursive elements and the lack of the three-stroke *ʾālep*s and drop-shouldered *mêm*s.[205] Others have basically agreed, dating this inscription in the second half of the eighth century before the Siloam Tunnel Inscription

[204] Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise," 565. Cf. script charts in Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 133-6.

[205] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 164-5.

and the Royal Steward Inscription.[206] In a footnote, Dever mentioned that Cross preferred a date around "700 B.C. or perhaps slightly later," but Cross did not publish his own paleographic analysis of the inscription.[207] Hints of cursive tendencies push the inscriptions from Tomb I later than the ʾUriyahu inscription, with the epitaphs being dated to the mid-seventh century and the graffiti even later.[208] The graffiti are of interest in that they contain two examples of the three-stroke *ʾālep* similar to the Beit Lei examples.

## Phases of Inscribing

The details delineated by RTI images and the ease with which the light can be manipulated when using an RTI viewer facilitate a more nuanced analysis of overlapping strokes. This information reveals phases of inscribing within individual inscriptions and within the cave overall. Other indicators of phases of inscribing include evidence of different tools used to incise the texts and images on the walls of the caves. For instance, the small figure with headgear on the west wall of the Beit Lei cave was etched with a tool that made deeper and more rounded strokes. Differences in letter-form between inscriptions is another factor that may indicate the presence of more than one hand. In his original publication, Naveh also noted the relative heights of each inscription as a way to estimate likely phases of inscribing. For instance, the inscriptions situated between chest and eye level (the natural height of a standing person raising their hand to write) would

---

[206] Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 602-603; Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," 39; Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 360; McCarter, "Khirbet el-Qôm," *COS* 2.52.

[207] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," n53.

[208] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 155-8. Lemaire dated both epitaphs and the graffiti to the end of the eighth century (Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," 596-7; Lemaire, "Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy," 231).

have been inscribed first, with the inscriptions situated higher or lower being added later.[209]

The most obvious indicator of phases of inscribing is the overwriting, found primarily in the ʾUriyahu inscription, but also in one of the Beit Lei curses. Multiple examples of overwritten letters are visible in the ʾUriyahu inscription. In some instances the whole letter is visible twice. For instance, the first *rêš* in line 1 exhibits what appears to be a fainter rendering of the downstroke and parts of the cross strokes to the right of a more clearly incised *rêš*. Similarly, the second to the last letter in line 1, a *bêt*, was incised twice, with one rendering rotated slightly to the right. In the same category, of letters inscribed more than once in the same place, there are multiple examples of repeated strokes. This may indicate the letter was written twice and only some strokes coincided, or it may simply betray a second attempt at a given stroke. Differences in stroke width and depth as well as the order of strokes (where visible) seem to indicate that the ghost images, or lighter strokes visible behind certain letters, represent complete letters now overwritten.[210] Examples of such letters underlying more clearly incised characters include *ʾālep* , *rêš*, *hê*, *šîn*, *kāp* and *tāw* in the first line, and *bêt*, *kāp*, *yôd*, *wāw* and *lāmed* in the second line.

[209] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 88.

[210] It is sometimes difficult to tell which strokes were made first, leading some scholars to believe the light scratches were made by a later visitor. After studying the overlapping lines from a variety of light angles using RTI images, it seems to me that in many instances the letters were written twice, one on top of the other, with the second writing being the character that is most clearly visible.

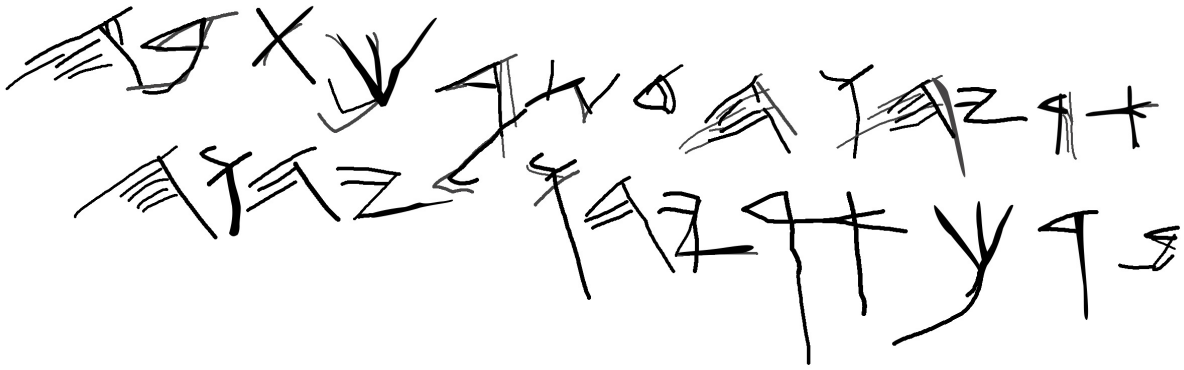

Figure 2.84. Drawing of lines one and two of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) from el-Qôm. Black=strokes in top layer. Gray=strokes in lower layer.

One of the instances of the word *ʾrr* inscribed on the north wall of the Beit Lei cave also exhibits overwriting or double-writing. The *ʾālep* appears to have been rewritten on top and a bit to the right, and the individual strokes in both characters were made more than once. Likewise, the *wāw* as well as the second *rêš* exhibit double strokes. From some angles, it looks like the letters were written twice one on top of the other. From other angles it appears that each stroke was made more than once. This highlights the difficulty—at both Beit Lei and el-Qôm—in determining whether the phases of inscribing evidenced by the overwriting represent events separated in time or multiple attempts at inscribing at one time.

Figure 2.85. Drawing of the curse (IAA 61-534) from the north wall of the Beit Lei tomb.

Another intriguing example of overwriting found at el-Qôm involves letters written over other letters. What sets these examples apart from those described above is that the overwritten characters are different than the letters underneath. This phenomenon is found multiple times in line three of the ʾUriyahu inscription. The clearest examples are: a *yôd* overlapping a *rêš*, a *dālet* or *rêš* on top of what may be a *hê*, a *lāmed* above a *hê*, an *ʾālep* above a *lāmed*, and a *tāw* on top of a *rêš*. Toward the beginning of the line, there is an aggragate of letters that appears to include either a *mêm* or *nûn* inscribed on top of a *sāmek* that is now only partially visible. In some cases, these letters seem to be overwriting of what had been written previously, but now offset one space to the right. For instance, there is a *lamed* underneath an *ʾālep*. A clearer *lāmed* is inscribed one space to the right above what appears to be a *he*. Behind the *šîn* is what could be considered a partially effaced *ʾālep* , the same letter clearly incised one space to the right. Further down the line, there is a deeply inscribed *taw* above a fainter *rêš*, again with a clearly incised *rêš* one space to the right. It almost looks like the word *ʾšrth* was incised twice, written more roughly below and then re-inscribed more carefully one space to the right.[211]

Figure 2.86. Drawing of line three of the ʾUriyahu inscription (IAA 72-169) from el-Qôm. Black=strokes in top layer. Gray=strokes in lower layer.

[211] The problem with this suggestion is that the strokes behind the *rêš* make up only a very sloppy possible *šîn*, and there is no *tāw* visible behind the *wāw*/*hê*. It is nevertheless a possibility worth considering in attempts to make sense of this messy and grammatically difficult line.

Repeated characters and words provide additional evidence of phases of inscribing. For instance, at Beit Lei there is an intriguing character inscribed repeatedly in the northwest corner of the tomb antechamber. The character somewhat resembles a *kāp*, although in some examples the angle of the longer downstroke curves in the opposite direction from what would be expected for a cursive *kāp*. There are fourteen instances of this character if one combines those visible in the original photographs with those visible on the portions of the stone removed and preserved. Before the initial letters of the Jerusalem inscription toward the top of the west wall, there is a large example of this character extending down to line two and clearly incised after the text. An even larger version of this character is visible above the *ʾālep* of the same line; and multiple examples of this character are visible in the area on the north wall marked out for the third burial chamber that was never completed. The fact that most of these characters were formed using the same stroke order—middle downstroke, left downstroke, and then longer right-hand downstroke—leads me to believe they should be considered together, and may in fact be contemporaneous. Variation in both size and style, however, indicate differences in hand or tool or both.

Differences in hand or letter forms in words inscribed more than once offer further evidence of phases of inscribing. Consider the word *ʾrr*, found four times in the Beit Lei cave. It is found once to the left of the entrance to chamber one, once to the left of the entrance to chamber two, and twice on the north wall of the antechamber—once near the entrance to the tomb and once in the space marked out for the third chamber. Despite the differences in size, grammatical form, hand, and placement, three of these examples seem to be contemporary—one on each wall of the antechamber, each of which includes an *ʾālep*

exhibiting the additional stroke. The fourth instance of the word, on the north wall nearest to the tomb entrance, exhibits a form of the *ʾālep* without this third cross stroke, setting it apart from the other examples. Such a difference may indicate different inscribers at the same event, or distinct inscribing events. Another equally intriguing and similarly problematic example of a word being inscribed more than once is found in Tomb II at el-Qôm where the word *ʾšrth* appears as many as four times, some instances admittedly more certain than others. The word appears to have been inscribed twice in the middle of line three, the second time offset one space to the right. In addition, though damaged by the removal of the inscription from the cave, there seem to be two more instances of the word below the inscribed hand. Both instances of the word inscribed last—in line three, it is offset one space to the right and on the lower edge of the stone it is inscribed over an unclear group of letters—seem to have been inscribed by the same hand, as the letter forms and stance are similar.

Relationships between inscriptions as well as the relationship between the inscriptions and the hewing of the burial chambers also indicate phases of inscribing. The presence of the faintly inscribed figure with hands raised on the east jamb of the entrance to chamber one reveals that the inscribing took place after the hewing of chamber one. The fact that the inscription on the west wall was not destroyed by the hewing of chamber two further indicates the inscribing was done after the burial chambers were hewn. The inscribing on the north wall was there before the markings were made for a third chamber, meaning that the hewing of the first two chambers preceded the inscribing and the aborted attempt at a third chamber took place after the inscribing. Overlapping strokes within the inscriptions themselves provide additional indications of the order in which the inscribing

took place. Wherever they overlap with other text, the *kāp*-like characters in the northwest corner were inscribed before the lines of text. Likewise, the ellipse within the marking for the third chamber was inscribed before the overlapping curse. All of these elements reveal phases of inscribing. These phases may be the result of more than one person inscribing, an activity that involved layers of inscribing, or multiple events during which inscribing took place.

## CHAPTER 3—THE CAVE INSCRIPTIONS AS INFORMAL INSCRIBING
### Examining the People and Purposes of Graffiti

The cave inscriptions are best viewed as examples of informal inscribing, as evidenced by their haphazard appearance and their location in private, hidden spaces. Inscriptions incised in stone are more typically formal monumental inscriptions.[212] However, the careless execution and the non-public setting of the cave inscriptions do not fit within the norms of this category. Their location in privately owned tombs only accessible through small entrances indicates the private nature of the inscriptions.[213] The relationship between the inscriptions and their setting is, nonetheless, elusive. The inscriptions are situated in hewn burial caves, but their content does not conform to what is expected in traditional epitaphs. Thus, any attempt to categorize the inscriptions is met with challenges. The most common term used in categorizing the cave inscriptions is *graffiti*. This term captures the inconsistencies in form and execution. But in other ways this is problematic terminology because in can too easily be associated with connotations such as lack of coherent purpose, inscribers thought to be unskilled, and the assumption that the location was simply due to happenstance.

Graffiti have often been minimized or overlooked due to their oblique nature and apparent lack of importance compared to monumental inscriptions or administrative

---

[212] Demsky, "Writing (Scripts, Materials)," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 21, 236.

[213] This is in contrast to the sentiment expressed by Patrick Miller, who wrote concerning the Uriyahu inscription, "The fact that the inscription is in a tomb does not mean it is not a public acknowledgement. Its inscribed character indicates its public character" (Patrick Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* [JSOTSS 267; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 215; first published as Patrick Miller, "Psalms and Inscriptions," in *Congress Volume, Vienna, 1980* [VTSup 32; ed. J. A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1981], 311-32).

records.[214] Due to increasing interest in inscriptions from the private sphere, the tide has turned recently with a number of published volumes focusing entirely on sociological and comparative studies of graffiti.[215] This growing interest in graffiti highlights the timely acknowledgement that non-official texts, especially in out-of-the-way places, provide an unequalled and invaluable resource for the study of the thought and practice of everyday people living in the ancient world.[216] Peter Keegan put it this way: "As a form of written and/or graphic communication invariably free of the usual social restraints limiting more polished artistic and literary works, the phenomenon of graffiti offers a striking opportunity to explore ancient culture."[217] In other words, graffiti potentially provide an unfiltered (or less filtered) window into the lives and ideas of people outside of the spheres producing epigraphic material related to state function or ideology.

---

[214] This common sentiment was expressed well by E. H. Palmer when he wrote regarding the Sinaitic inscriptions: "These are mere scratches on the rock, the work of idle loungers, consisting for the most part, of mere names interspersed with rude figures of men and animals…the 'Sinaitic inscriptions' are as worthless and unimportant as the Arab, Greek, and European graffiti" (E. H. Palmer, *The Desert of Exodus I* [London, 1871], 190-93, referenced in A. Negev, "New Dated Nabatean Graffiti from the Sinai," *IEJ* 17 [1976]: 254).

[215] These works have moved beyond simply publishing individual examples to noting patterns of style, placement and purpose in entire corpora of inscribed graffiti. See for instance: Peter Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2014); J. A. Baird and Claire Taylor, eds., *Ancient Graffiti in Context* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Alexander Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt: Scope and Roles of Informal Writings (c. 3100-332 B.C.)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Karen B. Stern, "Graffiti as Gift: Mortuary and Devotional Graffiti in the Late Ancient Levant," in *The Gift in Antiquity* (ed. M. L. Satlow; Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 137-57; and Roger S. Bagnall, *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[216] Peden explained the importance of the topic as follows: "Why should we study graffiti in the first instance? Because it is in practice the study of human beings using a form of written communication that is invariably free of social restraints. In this regard one might argue that these unostentatious inscriptions are a far more accurate reflection of the character of the society that produced them than much more polished artistic or literary works" (Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt,* xxi). Karen Stern notes, "Graffiti retain important and otherwise unknown information about early Judaism and Christianity, yet receive little attention from textual specialists and historians" (Stern, "Graffiti. II. Archaeology. III. Visual Arts," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Vol. 10. [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015], 792).

[217] Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity*, 8.

Viewing the cave inscriptions through the lens of informal or unofficial inscribing facilitates a reassessment of the qualifications of the inscribers as well as the possibilities regarding the inscribers' purposes and connection to the space. Interpreting the cave inscriptions as graffiti brings several factors into sharper relief: 1) they represent private concerns—they were not commissioned by high officials or on behalf of the state; 2) they represent the work of individuals with varying levels of expertise, but who were most likely from the upper echelons of society; and 3) the inscribers were previously connected to the space and selected the setting for the inscriptions because the space aligned with the purposes of the inscriptions.

## The Cave Inscriptions as Graffiti

Multiple publications have classified the epigraphic material from the caves as graffiti. This designation is applied uniformly to the Beit Lei corpus, and variously to the inscriptions from el-Qôm.[218] The term is used in a variety of ways. The application of the

[218] Publications referring to the Beit Lei inscriptions as graffiti include: Joseph Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *IEJ* 13 (1963): 76, 81; Frank Moore Cross, "The Cave Inscription from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* (ed. J. A. Sanders. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), 299; Lemaire, "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei," *RB* 84 (1977): 558-568; Pekka Särkiö, "Hilferuf zu Jahwe aus dem Versteck: Eine neue Deutung der Inschrift *yšr m*[illegible]*r* aus [illegible]*irbet Bēt Lēy*," *ZDPV* 113 (1997): 39-60; Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 407; Simon Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," *JSOT* 27 (2003): 261-262; William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98; and William Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: From Its Origins Through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 112-114. There are a variety of opinions regarding which inscriptions from el-Qôm should be classified as graffiti: In his original publication, Dever designates only the "meaningless scratches" and letter pairs ([illegible]*ālep* and *'ayin*; [illegible]*ālep* and *bêt*; *nûn* and *lāmed*) in Tomb I as graffiti, considering the main two inscriptions traditional epitaphs; in Tomb II, he notes graffiti such as "network and 'sunburst' patterns" and a possible *qôf*; and also concedes that the [illegible]Uriyahu inscription is "more a graffito than a true lapidary inscription" (William Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet El-Kom," *HUCA* 40-41 [1970]: 157, 162, 167-8). Most subsequent references to the el-Qôm inscriptions follow this differentiation, seeing the [illegible]Uriyahu inscription as a graffito. See, for instance, Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," 280; Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 98; and Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew,* 112-14. Lemaire considers the [illegible]Uriyahu inscription to be a funerary inscription, but uses the term "graffiti" to refer to the two-letter inscriptions in Tomb 1 as well as to a number of unprovenanced inscriptions thought to have

term to the text versus the images at Beit provides an example of the variation in use of the term. McCarter uses the term only with reference to the pictorial inscriptions at Beit Lei; by contrast, Dijkstra refers to the texts as graffiti and the pictures as drawings.[219] Despite such variations, there are three main ideas conveyed overall by the term *graffiti,* when used with reference to the cave inscriptions: 1) the shallow, uneven execution of the inscriptions, 2) the apparently careless or inconsistent forms of the letters, and 3) perceived incongruity between non-burial content and burial context.

The first two of these characteristics align with the basic definition of the term *graffiti,* an Italian word meaning "little scratchings." Naveh, in his discussion of the difficulties of determining which strokes made up part of the Beit Lei inscriptions themselves, noted the hasty manner in which the inscriptions seem to have been executed. Some letters were left incomplete and others blurred, apparently due to the stylus jumping over the uneven rock face. Cross mentioned the use of a "crude stylus" for incising the Beit Lei inscriptions and Dever selected the term graffito for the ʾUriyahu inscription because

---

come from el-Qôm (Lemaire, "Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* [eds. S. Gitin, J. E. Wright and J. P. Dessel; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 231, 233). Like Lemaire, Zevit does not use the term "graffito" to describe the ʾUriyahu inscription (Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 [1984]: 39). In his 2001 book, Zevit uses the designation "memorial inscription" (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 368). Naveh refers to both the inscriptions in Tomb I indicating ʾÔpay as the owner of the chamber, and the ʾUriyahu inscription in Tomb II as graffiti (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *IEJ* 51 [2001]: 194, 196). The differences in opinion regarding the classification of the el-Qôm material highlight the complexities related to categorizing the cave inscriptions.

[219] As an example, the term is applied differently to the text and image inscriptions from Beit Lei. McCarter uses the term only with reference to the pictorial inscriptions at Beit Lei (McCarter, "The Khirbet Beit Lei Cave Inscriptions," *COS* 2.53). By contrast, Dijkstra refers to the texts as graffiti and the pictures as drawings (Meindert Dijkstra, "I Have Blessed you by YHWH of Samaria," in *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* [eds. B. Becking, M. Dijkstra, M. C. A. Korpel, & K. J. H. Vriezen; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 34).

the stylus appeared to have been "only a sharp stick."[220] These references connote convenience (i.e., the inscribers used whatever tools were immediately available), haste (getting it written was more important than careful execution), and/or lay work (assuming a professional scribe would have had the necessary tools at hand).

Another aspect of the careless execution has to do with lack of standardization and inconsistencies in letter-forms. Referring to a number of the Beit Lei inscriptions, Naveh wrote: "the letters were not always carefully written—they are indeed graffiti."[221] Cross described the script of the longer Beit Lei inscriptions as characteristic of a "vulgar semiformal hand."[222] Noting the shallow and irregular forms of the letters, Dever's analysis of the Uriyahu inscription admits the tension between the lapidary nature (i.e., inscribed in stone like the Siloam Tunnel and Royal Steward inscriptions) of the inscription and the careless execution of the characters.[223] Thus, the changing shapes and sizes of the letter-forms supports the categorization of the inscriptions as graffiti.

In addition to the careless execution and inconsistencies in form, a number of scholars mention the incongruity between the content and context of the inscriptions as another reason to categorize them as graffiti. The inscriptions simply do not seem to be appropriate for tombs. Referring to the Beit Lei graffiti, Zevit cites the fact that the

---

[220] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," 299; Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 162. This is in contrast to the epitaph in Tomb I that Dever describes as having been incised with a v-shaped chisel (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 153).

[221] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 77, 81.

[222] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," 301.

[223] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 162. For lack of more appropriate comparative material, Dever utilized lapidary inscriptions in his paleographic analysis, but freely admitted the problems inherent in such comparisons.

inscriptions are "unrelated to the burials," and goes on to list the elements expected in funerary inscriptions such as personal names, dedications, petitions concerning the deceased or statements for their protection.[224] Cross and Parker both cite the discontinuity of the Beit Lei inscriptions' content with their burial location as evidence for their designation as "doodling" or graffiti.[225] Similarly differentiating it from traditional epitaphs, Parker described the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm as a non-funerary graffito in a tomb.[226]

Overall, then, there is a variety of assumptions associated with the term *graffiti* when used to describe the cave inscriptions. These assumptions have to do with the qualifications or level of expertise of the inscribers as well as their random association with the space. Graffiti as a category also carries certain connotations such as inscribing only to pass the time, or leaving one's mark for personal, even casual, reasons. The graffiti from Beit Lei and el-Qôm represent a significant portion of the small corpus of Iron Age Hebrew graffiti.[227] Therefore, definitions of graffiti in northwest Semitic epigraphy are often based

---

[224] Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 407.

[225] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," 303; Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," 261.

[226] Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees," 280.

[227] The only other examples are a few unprovenanced inscriptions that are said to be from el-Qôm, and perhaps the Ein Gedi cave inscription. For a list of the unprovenanced blocks from el-Qom area, see Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," 199-205. Regarding the Ein Gedi inscriptions, Parker refers to them as graffiti, but the term is not used in the original publication (Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees," 270; P. Bar-Adon, "An Early Hebrew Inscription in a Judean Desert Cave," *IEJ* 25 [1975]: 226-32). Parkers reference, however, brings out the similarities between graffiti and dipinti. Rollston lists Beit Lei, el-Qôm and Ein Gedi as the entire corpus of Hebrew graffiti from the First Temple Period; and notes that others have placed the Gibeon jar handles in this category, but that he does not agree with this classification (Rollston, "Graffiti. I. Introduction," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Vol. 10. [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015], 791). There is an additional inscription mentioned by both Zevit and Bloch-Smith that apparently included a figure with raised hands and a few alphabetic characters (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel,* 436-7; Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* [JSOTSS 123;

on these and similar inscriptions. Such definitions usually focus primarily on the hand—often described as unskilled vs. skilled. For instance, Rollston notes the broad and changing parameters of how the term is used in the field of epigraphy, but zeros in on the most widespread use of the term as having to do with a common (vs. trained) hand.[228] Location also factors into categorizing an inscription as graffiti. Demsky's definition is characteristic: Graffiti are "rough scratchings of names, short notices, and etchings incised by an unpracticed hand on walls or on natural stone surfaces."[229] The importance sometimes ascribed to location is also evident in Susan Niditch's description of the Siloam Tunnel inscription as a "classy graffito."[230] Thus, multiple characteristics lead to the categorization of the cave inscriptions as graffiti, and each of these characteristics carry certain connotations. Examining the cave inscriptions by means of comparisons with larger corpora of graffiti will facilitate a nuanced description of some of these connotations and their implications for hypotheses regarding the inscribers and their intentions.

---

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992], 103-4). It should also be noted that the paucity of examples may represent luck or accident and not necessarily the whole picture, though with the number of excavated cave tombs in the hundreds, the percentage containing inscriptions is definitely small. The arbitrary nature of recorded findings should be kept in mind. Both the selection of sites for careful exploration or excavation, and the consistency with which the finds are published are somewhat based on chance—especially in the case of caves.

[228] Rollston, "Graffiti. I. Introduction," 790-91.

[229] Demsky lists the Beit Lei inscriptions as well as material from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm as examples of Hebrew graffiti (Demsky, "Writing (Scripts, Materials)," 240).

[230] Niditch notes the consistency in execution of the Siloam tunnel inscription, while also pointing out the hidden location and lack of state affiliation usually associated with monumental inscriptions (Susan Niditch, *Oral World, Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996], 55).

## GRAFFITI IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS

As noted above, a variety of evidence is cited in support of classifying the cave inscriptions as graffiti. Even more variation is present in treatments of graffiti from the wider ancient Mediterranean world, with each definition reflecting the unique aspects of a given corpus.[231] The complexity of the evidence opens the way for deeper exploration of the connotations associated with graffiti as an epigraphic category. Examining the cave inscriptions against the backdrop of both the socio-cultural context of ancient Judah and larger corpora of graffiti from the ancient Mediterranean, several points come to the forefront: the inscribers possessed at least enough expertise to know both the writing system and specialized formulary, meaning that they were most likely more than functionally literate; despite the appearance of a lack of planning, the inscribers were previously connected with the space and selected the setting because it aligned with their

[231] Karen Stern, in her recent work on graffiti found in the burial complex at Beth Shearim in southwest Galilee, includes as graffiti "both painted and incised words and symbols that border mortuary spaces or adorn passageways, doorjambs, archways, ceilings, and entrances to burial caves" (Stern, "Graffiti as Gift," 138). Joseph Naveh, in the introduction to his *Early History of the Alphabet*, notes a number of factors that indicate a given inscription is a graffito, including: 1) the inscription is short and includes a personal name, 2) it was inscribed on a wall at a place of pilgrimage—these often contained blessing phrases similar to those found in dedicatory inscriptions, or 3) it is a poorly executed and abbreviated epitaph, i.e., only mentioning the name of the deceased; in his definitions, Naveh also points out that a dipinto, the simplest of the ink inscriptions, resembles a graffito, "except that the letters are painted instead of incised" (Joseph Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet* [Jerusalem: Magness Press, The Hebrew University, 1982], 3-5). Moving outside the southern Levant, other studies show similar differences in definitions of the category. Peter Keegan operates with a very general definition of graffiti as "any idea displayed in informal contexts, written or drawn on static or portable surfaces by and for people living in urban or rural spaces of the ancient world" (Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity*, xii). Alexander Peden, in his work on Egyptian graffiti, looks at non-official inscriptions—written with ink or inscribed with an implement—found on the walls or columns of temples or tombs or on rock-faces (Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt,* xix-xx). Overall then, what is meant by the classification *graffiti* varies according to the corpus under discussion. In their introduction to *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, J. A. Baird and Claire Taylor provide a useful summary of the problems related to graffiti as a category, arguing "the definition of graffiti is itself, therefore, contextual" (Baird and Taylor, "Ancient Graffiti in Context: Introduction," in *Ancient Graffiti in Context* [eds. J. A. Baird and C. Taylor; New York: Routledge, 2011], 3-7).

intentions; and the inscriptions serve commemorative purposes, memorializing both identity and event.

## People of Graffiti

Classifying the cave inscriptions as graffiti brings up important implications regarding the identity and qualifications of the inscribers. It should be kept in mind, however, that connotations (such as communication and happenstance) commonly associated with the category do not necessarily apply to the cave inscriptions. The careless execution of the inscriptions implies a less skilled inscriber.[232] Skills, in this sense, relate to scribal training and literacy, and perhaps to the craft of incising in stone. Literacy is defined in a multitude of ways, usually involving the mastering of skills in reading and writing. Applying the term to a given individual based on their work, however, is not necessarily straightforward. Just because someone could read does not mean they could write. And just because someone wrote on the cave walls does not mean they possessed composition skills in ancient Hebrew. Any analysis of the inscribers, then, must acknowledge the complex variety of factors that contribute to the continuum of literacy and scribal training.

[232] Rollston points out that unskilled execution is the most common factor used in classifying a Hebrew inscription as a graffito (Rollston, "Graffiti. I. Introduction," col. 791). This connotation persists even in analyses of inscriptions from the Hellenistic and Roman periods when literacy was becoming more widespread. Mazar, noting the lack of "preplanned order" and the careless execution of the Beit She'arim graffiti attributed them to relatives of the dead or visitors, implying they were not scribes (Benjamin Mazar, *Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations During 1936-1940, Volume I: Catacombs 1-4* [Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1973], 136).

## The Qualifications of the Inscribers

Writing in the ancient world is often considered a specialized field. Therefore designating the inscriptions as graffiti usually implies that they were written by a non-professional or a scribe with minimal expertise. Before discussing levels of literacy or numbers of scribally trained individuals in ancient Israel, it is worth noting that just because individuals possessed the knowledge and resources to carefully produce a formal inscription does not necessarily mean that such professionalism would be evident in every inscription they ever executed. Therefore, it is completely possible that in the case of the cave inscriptions, the inscribers could have produced professional level work, but were either prevented from doing so by lack of light or tools and considerable irregularities in the surface or simply did not consider the execution of the inscriptions as being essential to their purposes. In order to assess the implications of the label, however, it is useful to explore issues of scribal training and literacy in connection with the cave graffiti.

How much scribal training one attributes to the writers of the cave inscriptions has a lot to do with where one places society in ancient Judah on the literacy scale. If literacy was restricted to a few elite who were supported by the administrative centers and trained by apprenticeship, then the writers of the cave inscriptions would most likely have been minimally trained scribes or scribes who were in a hurry or saw no purpose in carefully executing the inscriptions. On the other hand, if literacy were more widespread, the inscriptions could represent the work of anyone who had access to certain formulae and who was familiar enough with the writing system to represent or copy those formulae on the cave walls. There is a lively debate regarding the definition and level of literacy in the

ancient southern Levant.[233] The content of the so-called Letter of a "Literate" Soldier from Lachish includes a strong claim for personal literacy.[234] This means that by the early sixth century there was either a certain stigma attached to being unequipped with basic reading and writing skills, or that literacy skills even among lower ranking officials contributed to their status. The increasing variety of inscribed artifacts from Iron II Judah also reveals

---

[233] One element of the debate centers around the ease with which a "bright" student could learn the writing system—the twenty-two letter linear alphabet. Following Albright's contention that it could be learned quickly, in a matter or day or weeks, many scholars have argued that learning the Hebrew letters would have been relatively easy and would not have required an organized system of education. Crenshaw points out that the lack of scribal errors in most ostraca may speak to the simplicity of the language, as opposed to proving a system of education (James Crenshaw, "Education in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 104 [1985]: 606). Millard similarly asserts, "writing was theoretically within the competence of any ancient Israelite, not the prerogative of an elite professional class alone" (A. R. Millard, "The Practice of Writing in Ancient Israel," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 35 [1972]: 111). As anecdotal evidence MacDonald mentions the following story related to the discovery of the Lachish letters: "When the Lachish letters were discovered during the excavations there in 1935, Gerald Lankester Harding, as a joke, taught the ancient Hebrew script of the letters to his Bedouin workmen, who were completely illiterate in Arabic. They picked it up immediately and began to write their spoken Arabic dialect in the ancient Hebrew script. Of course, they were writing only simple notes to Gerald Harding and to each other and were doing so just for fun, but this story illustrates how easy it is for someone with a well-trained memory to pick up not merely the letter-forms, but the concept of dividing units of sense (that is words) into sounds, and expressing each of these by a particular sign" (MacDonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment," in *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard* [eds. P. Bienkowski, C. Mee, & E. Slater; Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 426; New York: T & T Clark International, 2005], 96). Christopher Rollston, on the other hand, contends: "assumptions such as these about the simplicity of the Old Hebrew writing system, and the rapidity of the pace at which proficiency could have been achieved, are much too sanguine" (Christopher Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* [SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010], 92). Rollston cites a number of studies delineating the stages involved in learning to read and spell and concludes, "The point is that learning one's first writing system is hardly a facile enterprise and this is the case even for alphabetic writing systems." (Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel,* 94. See also Christopher Rollston, "Scribal Education in ancient Israel," *BASOR* 344 (2006): 48-49. The implications of the debate are clear—if learning to read and write ancient Hebrew were quick and easy, there would be no need for organized educational efforts, and the use of writing would not be reserved for a limited group of elites. Rather, the basics could be learned at home and specifics to the trade could be effectively passed on to a new temple tax recorder or seal manufacturer, for instance. And while elite functionaries such as the secretary (*spr*) to the king, or a cultic or magic practitioner, would have been educated in more advanced or specialized formulary, their specialization would in no way have precluded the use of writing in the society at large.

[234] "And now, open the ear of your servant concerning the letter which you sent to your servant last evening because the heart of your servant is ill since your sending it to your servant. And inasmuch as my lord said 'Don't you know how to read a letter?' As YHWH lives if anyone has ever tried to read me a letter! And as for every letter that comes to me, if I read it." Translation from A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 63.

that functional literacy existed well outside of the larger cities and the scribal elite.[235] This does not mean, however, that literacy was widespread. Day-to-day function in ancient Israel and Judah continued along the lines of a primarily oral society.[236] But there is no question that by the Iron IIB period, a variety of people of different statuses possessed functional skills in reading and writing. Skills in reading and writing, just like other skill areas, would be better represented along a spectrum of expertise rather than as an either/or delineation. By way of illustration, a recent article on the letters from the Eliashib archive at Arad makes such a point regarding the letters. They exhibit writing that was the work of individuals of a variety of different ranks.[237] Scribes are often portrayed as their own elite class, whose work centered on providing services in writing and delivering messages. However, it is unlikely that roles were this exclusive. It is more likely

---

[235] Richard Hess addresses the literacy question by outlining the epigraphic finds from ancient Israel. "There are widespread occurrences of writing in cities and villages throughout the entire Iron Age. . . Although state, cultic, administrative, and military concerns do appear, the presence of seals and impressions, as well as texts from small sites, suggests that writing was used for a variety of purposes; [therefore] it is not possible to limit those who wrote and read to specific classes or plaes. . . There is no evidence from the epigraphy to assume that members of any class could not learn how to read and write" (Richard Hess, "Literacy in Iron Age Israel," in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of 'Biblical Israel'* [eds. V. P. Long, D. W. Baker and G. J. Wenham; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002], 95).

[236] Niditch addresses this interplay between literacy and orality, summarizing the issue this way: "Literacy in a traditional culture is very much informed by the worldviews and aesthetics of orality, even while writing increasingly becomes a useful tool in many facets of Israelite life" (Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 45). MacDonald points out that in a society where reading and writing are not needed for functioning, there can still be literacy (as in knowing how to sound out words, or even read and write basic documents, etc.) but it still may not take over the thinking/functioning of the society. He explains the interplay between literacy and orality this way: "When large sections of the population of a literate society cannot read and/or write, they inhabit an oral enclave within that literate society, since their daily lives are usually touched by reading and writing only when they come into contact with the authorities, or when, in relatively rare cases, they need to use long-distance written communication. By contrast, groups of literate individuals within an oral society do not inhabit a corresponding 'literate enclave' for, it seems, they still operate socially as non-literates, even though they can read and write" (M.C.A. Macdonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment," 50).

[237] Shira Faigenbaum-Golovin, et al, "Algorithmic handwriting analysis of Judah's military correspondence sheds light on composition of biblical texts," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113 (2016): 4664-9. This is also evident in the Lachish Letters.

that responsibilities as well as areas of expertise overlapped to varying degrees. Therefore it may be more useful to discuss the level of official training (as evidenced in standardization) rather than whether or not an individual inscriber was a scribe. The main characteristics of the cave inscriptions germane to a discussion of the level of scribal training achieved by the inscribers are the lack of standardization in forms of individual letters and deviance from certain orthographic and grammatical conventions.

The cave inscriptions represent more than one hand.[238] But even within lines that are considered one inscription, or inscribed by the same hand, there are examples of significant variation in form and spacing of letters. This variation, or lack of expected level of standardization, contributes to their categorization as graffiti. Examples include the two *ʾālep*s in line one of the Jerusalem inscription, the heads of the letter *rêš* in the curse on the south wall at Beit Lei, and the curving leg of the *kāp*s in the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm.[239] The assumption is that inscriptions executed by an individual with scribal expertise would exhibit a certain level of consistency that comes with practice. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that while some inscriptions exhibit remarkable consistency in form throughout, many inscriptions, such as letters, represent the work of one writer but

[238] This is evident in differences in letter-forms as well as overlapping inscriptions. Both of the long inscriptions on the west wall at Beit Lei are usually attributed to the same hand. The curse nearest the entrance on the north wall of the Beit Lei antechamber, based on the classic *ʾālep* without the third cross stroke, represents a different hand than the other three curses. The *kāp*-like characters in the NW corner of the antechamber also exhibit significantly different forms, and were inscribed before the accompanying textual inscriptions. At el-Qôm, the ʾUriyahu inscription most likely represents one hand, though the overwriting suggests a possible second inscribing by a different inscriber.

[239] Both *ʾālep*s appear to have the third cross stroke, but the angle and placement of the strokes are markedly different. Other differences evident in various repeated letters similarly exhibit more variation than one would expect of a trained hand. Crenshaw articulates what many assume regarding the relationship between consistency in writing and the presence of scribal training: "paleographic consistency throughout ancient Israel…seems to imply authoritative instruction in the art of writing" (Crenshaw, "Education in Ancient Israel," 606).

exhibit significant variation in letter forms. Therefore the irregularities in the cave inscriptions may speak to levels of expertise, but do not necessarily provide evidence that the inscriptions were the work of a non-scribe. Inconsistencies in form or careless execution could just as easily be the result of irregularities in the surface, lack of professional tools, or a prioritization of completing the inscribing over the appearance or quality.

Similarly, it is expected that scribes would have automatically conformed to certain norms in the areas of grammar and orthography. The accepted readings of the Beit Lei and el-Qôm inscriptions involve overlooking certain expectations in these areas. For instance, Naveh's reading of the upper inscription on the rear wall of the Beit Lei antechamber involves interpreting a *wāw* as a third masculine singular suffix. In pre-exilic epigraphic Hebrew, one might better expect a *hê* rather than a *wāw*.[240] In the area of syntax, the problematic third line of the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm exhibits unusual syntax, as is evident in the variety of explanations offered for the placement of *lʾšrth*.[241] These are

---

[240] Cross states, "*Waw* does not become a vowel letter for *ô* before the fifth century in Hebrew" (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 300, referencing Cross and Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography: A Study of the Epigraphic Evidence* [AOS 36; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1952], 46f). For a summary of features of epigraphic Hebrew, see Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew*, 125. The expected orthography is found in the final phrase of the third line of the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm, where *hwšʿ lh* is usually translated "he saved him." However, Ketef Hinnom amulet one includes the use of *wāw* as a 3ms suffix, necessitating a reassessment of Cross and Freedman's assertion. Barkay et. al. assess it this way: "None of this evidence materially counters the argument that the orthography *bw* would be at home in the late preexilic period. After all, the attestations of final *hê* as the suffix for singular nouns, and prepositions that act like singular nouns, are all in inscriptions that considerably predate the Ketef Hinnom inscriptions [i.e., Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qôm]…another possibility is that –*h* and –*w* orthographies coexisted in the preexilic period, depending on the scribal school or locality" (Barkay et al., "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," 54).

[241] Lemaire mentioned the lack of light and suggested that the engraver mistakenly inscribed *mʾryh* first, and then realizing the mistake, wrote *lʾšrth* and continued the inscription (Lemaire, "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," *RB* 84 [1977]: 602). Hadley used the concept of hendiadys to understand the strange placement and the relationship between *lyhwh* and *lʾšrth* (Judith Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," *VT* 37 [1987]: 56-59).

examples of morphological and syntactical elements that can be interpreted as scribal errors or as evidence that the skill or training of the inscriber was limited.

When it comes to interpreting these inconsistencies or examples of a lack of standardization in the context of who wrote the inscriptions, the crux of the discussion is that the inscriptions do not appear to have been commissioned.[242] The ʾUriyahu inscription may be an exception here, if the reversed syntax is considered an intentional element of poetic style and the fourth line is taken as identifying the scribe. But certainly in the case of the Beit Lei inscriptions, the evidence points to an informal act of inscribing. Besides the obvious inconsistencies in form, there are other indications of a lack of planning. Unlike other Iron Age lapidary inscriptions, such as the Royal Steward Inscription, the space was not prepared for the inscriptions.[243] There are no carved recesses, and there appears to have been little planning related to the size or placement of the inscriptions. In addition, line spacing and letter spacing as well as a wandering baseline in some of the inscriptions, also portray an overall lack of planning. These observations point to an inscriber who did not specialize as a scribe or an engraver, but who nevertheless possessed sufficient knowledge and resources to produce the inscriptions.[244]

---

[242] This distinction minimizes the relevance of questions related to specialization within the scribal field and distinctions between scribe and craftsman with relation to stone cut inscriptions. As mentioned in chapter two as part of the paleographic analysis, there is a discussion regarding whether craftsmen carried out the incising in stone (of a text composed by a scribe). In the case of the cave inscriptions, which appear to have been quickly inscribed with readily available natural implements, it is unlikely that the inscriber possessed any special skills in engraving.

[243] The Royal Steward Inscription as well as the shorter inscription labeling a side room were both situated in carefully prepared symmetrical recesses carved into the face of the rock. For pictures of the inscriptions, see Shmuel A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past, Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: CARTA, 2008), 45, 47; and David Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 248, 251.

The cave inscriptions represent the work of inscribers armed with knowledge of the script, a basic familiarity with common oath and liturgical formulae, and a sharp stick or other readily available implement for scratching in the soft stone. In the context of a continuum of expertise among scribes, artisans and stonecutters, even someone with minimal training could possess a working knowledge of the script and common formulary. The use of epistolary and incantatory formulae, however, does add support to the point that the inscribers must have had at least some training. The inscriptions were most likely executed by a minimally trained individual, an assertion that finds additional support in the function of the sites as agricultural estates or villages within a larger administrative district. Alternatively, the inscriptions could represent the work of a trained scribe in a context where circumstances such as the dark location and irregularities on the stone surface led to the inconsistencies in form and execution. Given the evidence of facility in both the writing system and specialized cultic and epistolary language, it is most feasible to

---

[244] The debate regarding literacy and scribal training in ancient Israel often comes across as an argument over terms rather than over the big picture interpretation of the evidence. For instance, what is the relationship between writing and the title *scribe*? Was a scribe someone whose main tasks were related to reading and writing, or could people of many titles and specializations utilize certain reading and writing skills in carrying out their larger tasks? Cross, in his discussion of Lachish III, the Letter of a Literate Soldier, wrote: "there is every reason to believe that the skilled and elegant hand of the letter which appears on Ostracon III is not the Hand of Hoshaiah, but the hand of an army scribe. Literacy was wide spread in Judah, but the writing of documents was primarily the task of a scribal elite" (Frank Moore Cross, "A Literate Soldier: Lachish Letter III," in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* [ed. A. Kort and S. Morschauser; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns. 1985], 47). This portrays the scribe as an official who served primarily in the arena of writing, alongside others who were army officers, commanders or soldiers. Similarly, Ian Young also presents the idea that scribes specialized in writing and argues that the array of inscribed artifacts found in ancient Israel could have been "produced by a very small number of literate people;" he goes on to assert regarding the issue of variations in standardization: "Different qualities and types of scripts need not reflect professional and non-professional writing, but may even be interpreted as the writing of bad or inexperienced scribes or writing in a variety of contexts" (Ian M. Young, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part I," *VT* 48 [1998], 240). Both Cross and Young represent the school of thought that considers writing as the prerogative of trained scribes. Schniedewind represents the other side of the discussion, viewing both the Letter of a Literate Soldier and the cave inscription thought to come from el-Qôm as evidence that people of other professions (i.e., soldiers and stone cutters) possessed mundane skills in reading and writing (William Schniedewind, "Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a 'Literate' Soldier (Lachish 3)," *Zeischrift für Althebraistik* 13 [2000], 163; Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew*, 113).

view the inscriptions as the work of a scribe with at least enough training to have been exposed to specialized formulary.

## The Inscribers' Connection to the Space

One of the main connotations associated with graffiti is that the inscriptions, and by extension the inscribers, do not make an intuitive match. There is an incongruity—perceived or real—between the content and setting of the inscriptions.[245] Once one notices the disconnection between an inscription and the purposes for which the space was originally intended, it is natural to consider the presence of the inscribers as happenstance. This is evident in the some variations of the refugee hypothesis commonly offered as an explanation of the unique features of the cave inscriptions when compared to other tomb inscriptions.[246] Looking at the relationship between content and location in other corpora

---

[245] The apparent disconnection between the cave, hewn for burial purposes, and the content of the inscriptions has been noted repeatedly as evidence for their classification as graffiti. In the case of the Beit Lei corpus, the lack of personal names and the general petitionary nature of the inscriptions have led scholars to question the connection between the inscribing, and the burial design and use of the cave. At el-Qôm, the inscriptions contain the expected personal names, but scholars point out the lack of protective curse formulae in the epitaphs and the dedicatory nature of the ʾUriyahu inscription as grounds for questioning their funerary function.

[246] Scholars have commonly explained the apparent incongruity between the content and form of the Beit Lei inscriptions and their location in a burial chamber by describing the inscribers as refugees. Naveh, in his original publication of the inscriptions, noted the religious nature of the inscriptions, but considered unsatisfactory an explanation of the inscriptions as prayers related to burial; he therefore suggested they were inscribed by people in a time of crisis who took refuge in a family burial cave (Joseph Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 89-90, 92). Cross noted the inappropriate nature of the drawings and prayers in a burial context and suggested "a refugee fleeing the Chaldeans" in the early sixth century was responsible for at least the three petitionary inscriptions (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," 303). Simon Parker used the Beit Lei inscriptions as primary evidence in an article on the refugee use of caves, with his criteria for selecting data being the differentiation between inscriptions related to the burial of the dead and inscriptions left by refugees (Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees," 260-70). Parker also argued that the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm should be considered a refugee inscription. In addition to the unconventional content when compared with other tomb inscriptions, the lack of grave goods also supports an alternate explanation for the source and purpose of the inscriptions (McCarter, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription," *COS* 2.53).

of graffiti brings up useful nuances for a more careful assessment of the relationship of the inscribers to the cave space. There are many examples of inscriptions that are considered graffiti because they do not seem to belong.[247] In the case of the cave inscriptions, most of which represent the work of individuals with some level of scribal expertise, the disconnection between the inscriptions and the original purpose of the space is the primary factor that legitimates their classification as graffiti. Viewing graffiti from the ancient world contextually, there usually exists a relationship between the inscribers and the space where they have left their inscription. The inscribers may have been in the place for business, or because the place was along the route they routinely traveled.[248] In the case of

[247] For instance, an inscription attributed to a priest or temple official, inscribed on a temple or other monumental building in ancient Egypt is considered graffiti because it is not related to the construction of the building or inscribed on behalf of the royalty and/or gods celebrated by the monument. See for example, Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt,* 61, 270. An abecedary on an ossuary is classified as graffiti both because of the execution of the inscription and the fact that it is not clear what the relationship between the inscription and the function of the ossuary may be. See Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 508-11. At Beth She'arim, there are hundreds of inscriptions, with those not explicitly naming and defending the dead being categorized as graffiti rather than epitaphs. In a sense, then, this label denotes the fact that an inscription does not conform to what is expected in a given context based on other exemplars, or based on archaeological analysis of the space. Karen Stern encapsulates this in her definition of graffiti as "non-monumental texts and pictures, drawn after the completion of surrounding decorations and inscriptions" (Stern, "Graffiti. II. Archaeology. III. Visual Arts," 792). She goes on: "Isolation of markings as graffiti, then, responds less to their appearances that to distinctions of activity, agency, technique, placement, and chronology" (*ibid*.). While her definition is based on graffiti of the Second Temple period, Stern's description of the discerned gap between the inscriptions and the original purpose of the space is fitting, since the categorization of the cave inscriptions as graffiti is often related to the assumption that they are related neither to the original preparation of the space nor to its subsequent use for burial.

[248] During the times of extensive mining and quarrying in Nubia over the course of the Middle Kingdom, increasing numbers of graffiti were incised on rock faces by officials recording state sponsored activity in the area (Peden*, The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt*, 281). Similarly, Negev argues that the Nabatean graffiti found near the oasis at Pharan in Sinai represent the work of informed individuals involved in the mining activities taking place in the region (Negev, "New Nabataen Graffit from the Sinai," 254-5). Even in the case of Egyptian visitors' graffiti, a related point can be made. The inscribers no doubt selected the space where they would leave their mark based on the meaning of the space related to the reasons for their pilgrimage. In other words, though there are certainly examples of graffiti left by bored idlers, most graffiti reveals some kind of connection between the inscriber and their choice of the setting for a given inscription.

tombs, they may have been visiting the burial of an ancestor or other relative.[249] The main point is that inscribers—even writers of graffiti—were usually connected to the space and not simply idlers who happened to be there and idly found something to do. Therefore, when exploring possibilities regarding the identity and qualifications of the inscriber(s) of the cave inscriptions, it is important to consider how the person(s) would have been previously connected to the cave space. The majority of graffiti in the ancient world betray some kind of connection between the inscriber and the space, or at least between the space and the inscriber's intentions in leaving their mark.

Overall, then, classifying the cave inscriptions as graffiti highlights the gap between the original production of the space and the events represented by the inscribing. It does not, however, prove that the inscribers did not possess qualifications as trained scribes. They may have possessed only minimal specialization, with their exposure to standard formulary being facilitated by their positions in the upper echelons of society (as evidenced also by the tomb form). This analysis does not speak to the question of whether the inscribers owned the space or the inscriptions were commissioned. What can be said regarding the inscribers themselves is that they had achieved a level of expertise beyond a functional literacy—knowing the writing system enough to spell names or sound out words.[250] They had at least a rudimentary knowledge of formulae—at Beit Lei curse/oath

---

[249] There are numerous examples of tomb graffiti attributable to relatives or other connected visitors. A few examples from Egypt are found, for instance, at Deir el-Medina, inscribed by descendants of Amennakhte, Scribe of the Tomb. See Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt*, 256-7. Likewise, Karen Stern attributes certain of the graffiti at Beth She'arim (and Tel Eitun) to visitors leaving gifts of graffiti for the protection of the deceased (Stern, "Graffiti as Gift," 146-7).

[250] As Frank Polak points out, "Scribal expertise requires far more than mere knowledge of the letters and the ability to pen and decipher them" (Polak, "Sociolinguistics: A Key to the Typology and the Social Background of Biblical Hebrew," *Hebrew Studies* 47 [2006]: 133).

formulae as well as petitionary/liturgical phrases; and at el-Qôm epistolary/dedicatory formulae.[251] This points to individuals at least in the middle levels on the continuum of scribal expertise. Therefore, the inscriptions are classified as graffiti, not because of the lack of scribal training of the inscribers, but rather because of disconnection between the burial nature of the space and the content of the inscriptions. As noted above, however, this does not mean the inscribers or those who commissioned the inscriptions were not connected in one way or another to the space.

## Purposes of Graffiti

There are numerous purposes attributed to inscriptional material that has been categorized as graffiti. One of the connotations often associated with graffiti is a lack of intention or a sense that the inscribing was done simply to "leave one's mark" or to pass the time. This is hinted at in references like "scratches" or "doodling." Like many of the other implications related to graffiti as a category of inscribing in the ancient world, the level of intentionality seems to exist on a continuum. Some graffiti represented a way to wile away the hours; some represented an intentional use of writing and images to commemorate events or to memorialize identity.[252] Interpretations vary along this continuum, often

[251] Polak also notes that from a sociolinguistic perspective "specific group-language differentiated according to the occupation, rank, location, or situation, such as, for instance, the language of the market, military slang, legal parlance, ritual phraseology, and so on" (*Ibid*., 117).

[252] Macdonald mentions several examples of corpora of graffiti that he views as evidence of inscribing for fun, both in community (games) and as a way to pass the solitary hours spent alone with flocks in the desert; he also notes playful attitudes toward writing evident in "mirror-writing, names made into drawings," and a Safaitic text in which the *'ayin* (literally "eye") was made into an eye by adding a pupil, and the *yod* (literally "hand") was given fingers (Macdonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment," 81-82, 94). On the other end of the spectrum are Pharaonic cartouches incised on rock faces to commemorate the reigning pharaoh, his ability to commission extensive mining operations, or his hegemony in remote parts of the kingdom. Similarly, if one takes the Siloam Tunnel inscription as a graffito, it was inscribed to commemorate a significant event and accomplishment and to memorialize the hewers.

related to the expertise of the scholar or the focus of the study. In the case of the cave inscriptions, these variations in interpretation are readily apparent. Viewing the cave inscriptions as specimens of eighth to sixth century Hebrew writing highlights the careless execution and easily leads to a conclusion regarding their relative lack of meaning or significance in comparison with monumental inscriptions or clearly inscribed ostraca. Viewing the cave inscriptions as evidence of religious or mortuary practice in Iron Age II Judah, on the other hand, provides for multiple possibilities regarding the meaning of both the textual oddities and the scratched lines and images. Despite the extreme variation in interpretations of intention, however, there are certain themes that emerge repeatedly, the most common being graffiti as commemoration.

These themes echo the purposes served by monumental inscriptions. Perhaps the purposes of graffiti are best understood as mirroring the purposes of monumental inscriptions in the ancient world, but appropriated by the inscribers for private interests. Monumental inscriptions often served to commemorate individuals, polities, or events but they were commissioned by kings or other administrative officials and placed in public spaces. Most of the cave inscriptions do not appear to have been commissioned; and they were located in dark hidden private space. But they nevertheless serve purposes of commemoration—of individual or family identity and circumstances. Monumental inscriptions were strategically placed, with the selected setting reflecting the purpose of the inscription. The cave inscriptions, though not public, were nevertheless strategically placed in tombs that would have signified family identity and may even have held potential as set apart space more closely connected to a divine or otherworldly realm. Thus, the

purposes of the cave inscriptions essentially reflect the broad purposes of monumental inscriptions in the wider ancient Near East. The classification of the inscriptions as graffiti, therefore, highlights primarily the private nature of the purposes of the inscriptions.

## Commemorative Inscribing

The cave inscriptions, at the most basic level, are simply inscribing in stone. Writing served a variety of purposes in the ancient world. Of the many possibilities, such as administrative, cultic, etc., writing on stone often served commemorative purposes. Inscribed images also served commemorative purposes. An important element of the use of inscribing for commemorative purposes was the permanence that writing in stone provided.[253] When the people and events had long since ceased to exist, their identity or their legacy was still preserved in the stone.[254] Graffiti from a variety of times and places served this purpose, commemorating the identity of the inscribers or their presence in a given space. Whether one takes the cave inscriptions as the scratchings of refugees hiding in a cave, as funerary inscriptions memorializing or identifying the dead, or as cultic or dedicatory inscriptions betraying a use of the space for religious practice, there is no

[253] An epitaph hewn into the façade of an elite tomb permanently commemorated the identity of the deceased. The craftsmen's success in hewing the water channel known as Hezekiah's Tunnel is permanently commemorated by the account of their work incised near the end of the Siloam tunnel. This is an example of where the purpose of graffiti overlaps that of inscribing in durable material more generally. Inscribed funerary stelae would have served the same purpose, as would inscribed treaty tablets or stelae.

[254] In applying these observations to the cave inscriptions, one could argue that the burial caves were hewn from soft limestone, meaning the normal permanence associated with inscribing in stone is not applicable to this analysis. However, despite the ease of hewing possibly associated with inscribing in the chalky limestone, the incising still seems to have represented an effort to leave a permanent mark in the material world, an effort which indeed succeeded, given the fact that the inscriptions are still an object of study today, almost three thousand years later.

question that the inscribers took advantage of the permanent commemorative potential of incising in stone.

Commemorative inscribing was used in a variety of contexts in the ancient world. The first examples that come to mind are usually monumental royal inscriptions or inscribed mortuary stelae. However, graffiti often served commemorative purposes as well. Informal epigraphs from multiple periods in the history of ancient Egypt served to commemorate projects and to immortalize the identity of the inscribers. Alexander Peden summarizes his work on Egyptian graffiti by pointing out that regardless of the specific contexts or purposes, a "graffito inscription, in whatever script, was an ideal way of ensuring that the name of its author (in Egyptian eyes an essential element in the make up of an individual) would be preserved for eternity."[255] Claire Taylor, in her discussion of commemorative graffiti, writes: "The practice of making one's mark…creates a link between the text/image and the individual as inscriber."[256] Thus, inscribing graffiti was a way to ground ones identity in the material world. Graffiti from a variety of contexts in the ancient world also displayed personal connections, including the inscribers' name as well as their titles or genealogical information. Taylor further points out that graffiti memorializing the inscribers both "situates the individual within a place at a moment in time," and also "situates them within a group of people or a community."[257] These same themes, of leaving a physical mark commemorating one's situation and community

---

[255] Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt,* 293.

[256] Claire Taylor, "Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit: Creating Communities and Writing Alternative Histories in Classical Attica," in *Ancient Graffiti in Context* (eds. J. A. Baird and C. Taylor; New York: Routledge, 2011), 94.

[257] Claire Taylor, "Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit," 95.

connections are evident in the cave inscriptions. The ʾUriyahu inscription alludes to specific positive events (he is rich, and saved from his enemies) and commemorates those events as blessings from Yahweh by (his) A/asherah. The Beit Lei inscriptions commemorate the inscribers' devotion to Yahweh through the exclamations of praise, and set in stone their pleas for protection, apparently in the face of threatening events. And even though no personal names are included, the divine epithets and mention of Judah and Jerusalem identify the inscribers with their political and worship communities. Therefore, at the very least the Beit Lei inscriptions commemorate community identity. It is reasonable to assert, further, that the cave inscriptions at both Beit Lei and el-Qôm commemorate specific events and people's responses to those events.

### Marking Status and Setting Apart Objects or Space

In cultures where writing was associated with the upper echelons of society, inscribing an object or having it inscribed could serve to mark status. In the epigraphic record from Judah, this is most obvious in the inscriptions incised on the elite tombs in Silwan. Jessica Whisenant suggests the graffiti found in the Beit Lei and el-Qom tombs "reveal the efforts of the elite to employ…a technology whose display conveyed status."[258] Even the careless inscribing in the caves would have set apart the space and conveyed a certain prominence regarding the owners of that space. Whisenant's observations ring true to a certain extent, though they represent only part of the picture. The use of writing would indeed have been connected to individuals in the upper echelons of society; but the

[258] Jessica Whisenant, "Document Production by Scribal Institutions," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production* (ed. Brian B. Schmidt; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 151-2.

purpose for utilizing the writing most likely centered more on bringing about a certain impact than simply communicating status (which would have already been communicated to an extent by the fine style of the tombs).

### Purpose Related to Nature of Space

One additional point comes up repeatedly when looking at the purposes of graffiti. Unlike the modern connotation of graffiti as often representing happenstance—the work of people who happened to be in a certain space and leave markings on the available surfaces, the purpose of graffiti in the ancient world is often closely tied to the nature of the space. Throughout history, there are instances of inscribing that simply served to pass the time. But in most cases, especially in the ancient world, the settings chosen for inscribing graffiti were integrally connected with the intents of the inscribers. For instance, Karen Stern has argued that despite the clear difference between the epitaphs and the graffiti at Beth She'arim, the graffiti can nevertheless be interpreted as gifts to the dead—symbols of provision and protection left by visiting relations on the walls of the tombs.[259] Likewise, Peter Keegan points out an example of a later graffito inscribed on the grounds of Dynasty III Pharoah Djoser Netjerykhet's pyramid recording the visit of the scribe Nashuyu and asking for the favor of the now-deified Djoser.[260] Considered within its ancient context, the setting of the graffito aligns closely with its stated purpose. These examples illustrate that the selection of the location for inscribing was significant. In the case of the cave inscriptions, this leaves open the possibility that the purpose of the inscriptions was related to the meaning of the space, despite the content of the graffiti not conforming to

[259] Stern, "Graffiti as Gift," 153.

[260] Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity*, 277.

what is expected in Iron Age tombs. The ʾUriyahu inscription could have served to commemorate the owner of the tomb or individuals interred therein, and by extension to bring about blessing on the both the deceased and the surviving family members. Likewise, the Beit Lei tomb could have been selected as the setting for the inscriptions because of its connection with the identity of the family or even because of potency of tomb space as a transitional space between earthly place and other realms.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter has been to state the common connotations associated with the category, graffiti, and then offer a critique of the relevance of these connotations to a socio-cultural study of the cave inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm. Overall, this discussion has shown that the inscribers most likely possessed a certain level of scribal expertise. This analysis has also highlighted the fact that, despite modern connotations of idling and illicit marking, graffiti in the ancient world were often inscribed with a specific purpose in mind by inscribers who were already associated with the space.

### Beit Lei

Looking at the Beit Lei corpus in the context of the form and function of ancient graffiti, a number of factors are brought to the forefront. The inscriptions represent the work of more than one inscriber. This is evident in both the variation in hands and the differences in placement. The different tool used to inscribe the figure with headgear on the rear wall of the antechamber provides further evidence of multiple inscribers. It is difficult to determine whether these differences also indicate the inscriptions represent

more than one event. They may indicate the contemporary work of multiple inscribers, or multiple instances when someone entered the cave and inscribed something.

Considered against the backdrop of Iron IIB Judah, it is likely that the inscribers were reasonably well-trained in writing, although their efforts were complicated by the cave setting and the pits and hewing marks on the cave walls. The inconsistences in orthography and form and the irregular appearance of all the graffiti seem to discount the expertise of the inscribers, but the formulary used indicates a certain level of expertise beyond functional literacy. Almost anyone from the upper echelons of society—in an administrative role, an official in the military or working in trade as the head of an agricultural estate or as a mercenary—was most likely familiar enough with the writing system to write his name or record basic transactions. But the cave inscriptions include curse/oath and epistolary formulae that betray further training. Whatever the expertise of the inscribers, their purposes were apparently not connected to careful planning or precise execution of the inscriptions. The important thing was simply to get the content on the walls of the cave. Despite the haphazard appearance, then, the specific content points to inscribers with a fair degree of specialized training.

The Beit Lei corpus includes equal amounts of text and image, integrated and positioned by the inscribers to portray most of the content as a series of units. Thus, it is important to consider the text and images together. Studies that mention the cave graffiti often list only the texts.[261] This trend is symptomatic of an artificial break between

[261] For instance, reference works such as *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions* by Graham Davies and *Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik* by Johannes Renz and Wolfgang Röllig list only the textual inscriptions from Beit Lei, making no mention of the presence of images or their relative placement within the cave. Even Naveh's original publication betrays this bias. His diagram of the position of the inscriptions

epigraphy (study of texts) and iconography (study of images).[262] The emphasis on texts and minimization of images also reflects a trend—whether intentional or inadvertent—to view writing as more informative and significant than images, a thought process that builds upon an oversimplified view of pictures as being more primitive than writing. In the ancient world, however, text and image were not necessarily separate categories. Zainab Bahrani has done extensive work on text and image in the ancient Near East, and points out that in ancient Babylon and Assyria signification was not clearly divided between visual and verbal as two separate realms, but was "one greater interdependent symbolic system."[263] The panels of inscribing on each wall of the Beit Lei antechamber look at first glance like decoration; but closer examination reveals curse phrases and incantatory language that would have held ritual significance in the ancient world. This will be explored in greater depth in the chapter on ritual inscribing. Here, the important point is that even though the inscriptions are classified as graffiti due to their haphazard appearance and purposes distinct from the original design of the space, they would nevertheless have been inscribed by individuals with specialized training whose purposes aligned in some way with the mortuary nature of the space.

---

within the antechamber indicates only the textual inscriptions, making it very difficult to visualize the placement of the images in relation to the other inscriptions.

[262] This same trend is evident in other treatments of graffiti from the ancient world. Claire Taylor describes the issues related to the classification of classical inscriptional material as either "inscriptions" or "graffiti." Not only do these differentiations involve judgments of what markings represent the work of "idlers" versus the markings that have value to scholars; "but the nature of epigraphic publication also encourages the text to be divorced from the accompanying image and de-contextualized from the place in which it appears" (Claire Taylor, "Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit," 93).

[263] Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 121.

## El-Qôm

The inscriptions in Tomb I at el-Qôm are undoubtedly epitaphs. Their placement and content both align with what is expected in Iron Age tomb inscriptions. And although they have been mentioned in the context of cave graffiti, there is little evidence in this regard other than what appears to be the same name in an unprovenanced curse inscription that is thought to have come from the area of el-Qôm.[264] The execution of these inscriptions also points toward professional inscribing. Inscription I is deeply incised, likely using a chisel and mallet, and Inscription II is written in ink meaning that the writer had the appropriate tools at his disposal. Therefore the discussion of graffiti only applies to the random markings and letter pairs (*ʾālep* and *ʿayin*; *ʾālep* and *bêt*; *nûn* and *lāmed*) in Tomb I. The crisscrossing lines and "sunburst" patterns in Tomb II are also best viewed as graffiti. The pairs of letter are probably signatures, considering that graffiti so often included personal names. The ʾUriyahu inscription has been classified as graffiti more sporadically, but the fact that the content is distinct from standard tomb inscriptions and that the execution betrays a prioritization of finishing the writing over a fine appearance both indicate that this classification is fitting.

Viewing the ʾUriyahu inscription in the context of graffiti highlights a number of points. The inscription represents at least two phases. This is evident in the overlapping strokes, as well as the repeated letters offset from each other. Additionally, a close look at the style reveals that the two layers seem to represent at least two hands. *Lāmed* provides a clear example—the lower layer *lāmed*s exhibit a flat lower stroke whereas the *lāmed*s inscribed last have a curving lower stroke. Thus, the occasion required either multiple

[264] Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 205.

inscribers or the same inscriber perhaps using different implements. The inscribing memorialized in stone the names of ʾUriyahu and Daniyahu, thereby commemorating them perpetually. One or both of these individuals must have owned the tomb, or at least been related to the tomb owner. The inscribing set apart the space, and at the same time the burial nature of the space made it an ideal setting for purposeful inscribing. Epistolary formulary, exemplified in the blessing formula in the second line, reveals that the inscriber possessed a certain level of expertise. The juxtaposition of the inscription alongside the deeply incised hand portrays an apotropaic purpose for the unit. This plea for protection was not the standard curse against anyone who would rob or disturb the burial chamber; but it nevertheless served to commemorate, and thereby perpetuate, the blessing and protection of Yahweh and A/asherah for the inscriber and his kin—both deceased and living.

# CHAPTER 4—RITUAL INSCRIBING AND MAGIC
## The Cave Inscriptions as Vestiges of Ritual Activity

Writing played a role in numerous ritual practices in the ancient world. Incantations were often written as well as spoken. Both texts and images were also used as components of ritual, or as magical "ingredients" so-to-speak. This chapter looks at the cave inscriptions through the lens of ancient Near Eastern ritual practice. Here I use the term *ritual* in the sense of a multi-faceted ceremony—a process or performance involving a sequence or combination of acts intended to bring about an effect beyond the normal limits of human agency or natural laws.[265] This use of the term focuses on ritual as a rite or ceremony intended to bring about a certain outcome, not necessarily a rite or ceremony that is to be repeated on a calendrical cycle or in association with certain periodic events. Put another way, this interpretation views the cave inscriptions as remnants of acts qualifying as ritual practice because of a combination of word and act and due to the nature of the intended outcome, rather than based on their connection with state cult practice.[266]

---

[265] The use of the term ritual is complex and varies significantly from work to work. Catherine Bell, in her survey of the variety of genres and elements of ritual practice, admits: "there is no intrinsic or universal understanding of what constitutes ritual" (Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 164). Even within the narrower sphere of the ancient Near East, a variety of phenomena are placed under the general category of ritual practice. The reason I use the word *ritual* instead of *ceremony* is because of the added connotation of an expected outcome beyond the normal. This wording, "beyond the normal," was used by Feuchtwang in his discussion of ritual and memory studies (Stephan Feuchtwang, "Ritual and Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* [eds. S. Rastone and B. Schwarz; New York: Fordham University Press, 2010], 282). A similar idea is articulated by Catherine Bell in her discussion of ritualization when she refers to "realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors" (Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 84).

[266] Gregorio del Olmo Lete points out numerous differences between cult and magic in his introduction to the incantations and anti-witchcraft texts from Ugarit. He classifies cult as communal and magic as personal; some of the implications of this differentiation include: magic being atemporal and cult being regulated by a festival calendar; magic confronting concrete evils and cult confronting general crises; and magic being spontaneous and cult being regulated (Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *Incantations and Anti-Witchcraft Texts from Ugarit* [Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 4; Bostin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014], 11-14).

Interpreting the cave inscriptions by means of comparisons with ritual practices from the broader ancient Near Eastern world provides a framework within which to explore possibilities regarding the identity of the inscribers, their actions in the caves, and what they intended to accomplish by means of inscribing the texts, characters and images on the cave walls.

## THE CAVE INSCRIPTIONS AS EVIDENCE OF RITUAL ACTIVITY

This chapter presents the cave inscriptions as the only remaining evidence of ritual activity that took place in the tombs. There are multiple examples of inscribed artifacts that represent the only remaining evidence of a given ceremony or ritual. For instance, objects with treaties incised on them, such as the Sefire stelae or various exemplars of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, are the only remaining evidence of the ceremonies that served to ratify such treaty agreements. These ceremonies would have involved spoken words and accompanying actions, as alluded to in the simile curses.[267] Inscribed amulets also represent the only remaining portion of a prescribed sequence, likely involving spoken words and actions, one of which was the act of inscribing the amulet. Likewise, inscribed execration texts from Egypt and inscribed incantation tablets from Mesopotamia illustrate

---

[267] For example, the Sefire treaty includes these simile curses: "…just as (this) bow and these arrows are broken, so may Inurta and Hadad break [the bow of Mati'el], and the bow of his nobles! And just as the man of wax is blinded, so may Mati'el be blinded! [Just as] this calf is cut in two, so may Mati'el be cut in two." Sefire AI: 38-40. Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty includes a long list of self-curses, one of which reads: "just as [thi]s ewe has been cut open and the flesh of [her] young has been placed in her mouth, may they make you eat in your hunger the flesh of your brothers, your sons and your daughters." This is part of a longer list of curses (lines 526-662) that include words like "just as..." This has contributed to the assumption that some of these curses were acted out, therefore this section is titled: Ceremonial Curse Section. In their introduction to the book, Parpola and Watanabe explain that they selected this title "because they (the curses) involve parables or references to symbolic acts actually carried out during the conclusion of the treaties" (Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* [SAA II; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014], xlii, 52).

how an artifact available to us today for examination can represent only one aspect of the ritual or ceremony making up the original setting of the inscription.[268] Textual evidence also supports the argument that an inscribed object may represent only one portion of a ceremony or ritual performance. For instance, Deuteronomy 27 prescribes the preparation and inscribing of large stone stelae in conjunction with antiphonal recitation of ceremonial curses upon crossing the Jordan. Likewise, the *śōṭâ* ritual outlined in Numbers 5 includes specific instructions regarding the actions and spoken formulae that made up the ritual. Inscribing the curse and washing it off into the water to be ingested made up one part of the larger ritual sequence. Viewed against this backdrop, the words and images inscribed in the caves represent, like other inscribed artifacts, the only aspects of a ritual or ceremony that are still available to us today for examination.

One possible argument against a ritual interpretation of the cave inscriptions is the lack of ritual paraphernalia in the tombs.[269] At el-Qôm no argument can be made one way or another in this regard due to the fact that the tombs had already been disturbed at the time of study. However, associated material culture remains, or lack thereof, are a

---

[268] In these instances, ritual instructions sometimes fill out our knowledge. Longer anti-witchcraft tablets list the incantations and spell out the accompanying ritual sequences. For instance, in addition to eight tablets of incantations, the Maqlû series includes a ritual tablet in which the "incantations are cited by their incipit, their opening line, and alongside each citation appropriate ritual directions are prescribed" (Tzvi Abusch, *The Anti-Witchcraft Seris Maqlû: A Student Edition and Selected Commentary* [State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts XI; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015], ix). In the case of the Egyptian execration texts, not only the written evidence as well as accompanying artifacts (some of which were inscribed) such as broken pots and figurines illustrate the larger ceremony that would have made up the cursing of the execration objects (and by extension the entities represented thereby). See Stephan J. Seidlmayer, "Execration Texts," *OEAE* 1: 487-8. Likewise, Lamaštu amulets most likely represent one aspect of a ritual performance, the other elements of which are simply not visible to us in the material record.

[269] The lack of material culture remains has been mentioned as evidence against other interpretations that connect the inscriptions to either ancestor cult or refugee use of the cave. The same critique could be leveled at a ritual interpretation, since there is no physical evidence of other activities that would have presumably accompanied the inscribing.

significant factor in any interpretation of the Beit Lei inscriptions because the tomb appeared to have been found sealed since its use in antiquity. Only undisturbed skeletal remains, a few pieces of simple jewelry (associated with the bodies), and some stray pottery (apparently entering through a crack in the sealed entrance) were found in the tomb. Thus, the lack of material culture remains related to ritual practice is a fair critique of a ritual interpretation of the cave inscriptions. Examples of ritual-related material culture remains include figurines, pottery used for ritual meals, cult stands or model shrines, and small objects such as rattles or incense shovels.[270] Spaces comparable to the caves have yielded significant collections of so-called cultic or ritual artifacts. For instance, a selection of caves in Jerusalem contained numerous ritual objects and significant amounts of pottery. Schmitt interprets these finds as indicating "ritual actions associated with meals performed in or near the caves."[271] Generally, in order for a space to be categorized as ritual or cultic space, it must contain objects demonstrably non-utilitarian in purpose, or the architecture must set the space apart. Usually a combination of such factors

---

[270] For a more complete list, see Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 267. Schmitt provides a useful discussion of the complexities inherent in judging the use of a space based on material culture remains. As diagnostic of cultic use, he cites the following non-utilitarian objects: "censor (tripod)-cups, kernos rings, miniature altars, decorated stands with religious symbolism, and human and animal figurines," as well as fenestrated and decorated cult stands; other items such as "simple pot stands, luxury and miniature vessels, objects of personal adornment, game pieces, and 'collectables' (such as shells and worked or unworked stones) may provide evidence of cultic practice, especially when found in conjunction with the more obviously non-utilitarin objects (Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012], 59). Of course, there were likely additional ritual items that have not been preserved. Vriesen, for examples, cites the "cakes" mentioned in Jeremiah 7 and 44 as "objects of transient matter [that] were also used during these ceremonies" (Karel J. H. Vriezen, "Archaeological Traces of Cult in Ancient Israel," in *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* [London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 80).

[271] Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant,* 468. A cave near Eitun has also been interpreted by some as a cult place due to the evidence of burning as well as three sets of animal heads carved into the stone. However, there is no consensus in this regard. See, for instance, Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 242-7.

contributes to the designation of a given space as have been used for cultic or ritual purposes. No non-utilitarian pottery or other ritual objects were found within the caves, but the sanctity accorded mortuary space along with the presence of inscriptions on the walls support a ritual interpretation.

The lack of material culture remains such as pottery and ritual objects, therefore, need not preclude a ritual interpretation of the inscriptions. The inscriptions themselves can be considered legitimate physical remains of ritual practice, as mentioned above. Inscribing the stone would have constituted the ritual manipulation of a physical object making up one part of the overall ritual or ceremony. In addition, depending on the details of a given ritual hypothesis, it could be that ritual objects were removed before the tomb was sealed. At both Beit Lei (where the tomb appears to have been sealed and had no ritual objects) and el-Qôm (where the tomb had been disturbed prior to excavation), a ritual interpretation depends upon viewing the inscriptions themselves as material culture remains. Indeed, comparative analysis brings out numerous ways in which the inscriptional material aligns with ritual practice in the ancient Near East.

Ritual activities in the ancient world were wide ranging and often followed broad trends in belief and practice. Because of gaps in time and space, it can be difficult to draw conclusions regarding the transfer of a practice from one culture or milieu to another.[272] It

[272] Textual sources such as the Hebrew Bible mention the ritual use of writing, but teasing out the connections between the final form of the text and life in Iron II Judah is not a straightforward task. Egyptian magical practices spanning from the Old Kingdom to the Late Period exhibit the use of writing as a ritual ingredient, but it is difficult to know the extent to which Egyptian magical practices were adopted in the Levant. The plethora of cuneiform incantation texts provides numerous possibilities for comparative studies, though again, the mode or specifics of shared cultural practices is difficult to determine precisely. When similarities are observed between specific usages and functions of inscribing between divergent data sets, it is often still impossible to determine how, or even if, such usages transferred from neighboring cultures to ancient Judah. For this reason, Quack opted to use wording such as "precursor" or "precedent" rather than "influence" when addressing the history of a specific magical practice (Joachim Friedrich Quack, "From Ritual

is prudent to guard against making sweeping conclusions.[273] However, it is certainly realistic to build comparative efforts upon an assumption that similarities represent broad common traditions or shared cultural phenomena. There is no question that a variety of interaction—direct and indirect—took place between Judah and its neighbors via trade and military activity.[274] Thus, in many cases, it is reasonable to assert some kind of cultural interchange or influence.[275] So, while caution is wise with regard to making claims about the transference of a given practice, it is both useful and reasonable to assume common traditions were adopted and adjusted as needed by people in different places at many times in history.

---

to Magic: Ancient Egyptian Precurors of the Charitesion and Their Social Setting" in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition* [eds. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked; Leiden: Brill, 2011], 78). Keel and Uehlinger, at the outset of their work, mention the importance of avoiding "making pointless comparisons;" for example, they write: "Conclusions drawn from an interpretation of Bronze Age texts discovered in northern Syria, and the religio-historical hypotheses developed from such evidence, cannot be used uncritically to explain the religious history of Canaan during the second millennium and, though it has happened repeatedly, certainly not to clarify what happened in Israel during the first millennium" (Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* [trans. T. H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998], 11). They use this reasoning as support for limiting their study to material from the specific geographic area of Canaan/Israel/Palestine and addressing the data by period.

[273] Jonathan Z. Smith, in a chapter entitled "The Bare Facts of Ritual," describes the temptation to oversimplify and make untenable comparisons as follows: "There is one aspect of scholarship that has remained constant from the earliest Near Eastern scribes and omen interpreters to contemporary academicians: the thrill of encountering a coincidence. The discovery that two events, symbols, thoughts, or texts, while so utterly separated by time and space that they could not 'really' be connected, seem, nevertheless, to be the same or to be speaking directly to one another raises the possibility of a secret interconnection of things that is the scholar's most cherished article of faith. The thought that the patterns and interrelationships that he has patiently and laboriously teased out of his data might, in fact, exist is the claim he makes when his work is completed as well as the claim that appears to be denied by the fact that he has had to labor so long" (J. Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], 53). Such a critique is well-taken, especially in relation to the cave inscriptions, due to the tension between their enigmatic and unique nature, and the inevitable scholarly desire to interpret or contextualize them within ancient Judah and the wider Near East.

[274] A Lamaštu amulet was found at Maresha, for instance, and numerous Egyptian amulets have been found in Iron Age strata in Israel. See Mordechai Cogan, "A Lamashtu Plaque from the Judaean Shephelah." *IEJ* 45 (1995): 155-61; and Christian Herrmann, *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*, Band III (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 24; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006).

[275] For examples of Egyptian influence in Canaan, see Raphael Giveon, *The Impact of Egypt on Canaan* (Freiburg: University of Frieburg, 1978).

Taking a ritual studies approach to the cave inscriptions, then, builds upon the understanding that certain uses of writing and image represent common tradition across the ancient Near Eastern world. The fact that the use of text and image in ritual contexts occurs across boundaries of culture and period, coupled with the inscriptional content and the mortuary setting, supports a ritual interpretation of the cave inscriptions, despite the lack of immediate comparative material. The following analysis assumes broad similarities in uses of inscribing in ritual practices while also acknowledging the challenges inherent in using comparative material from diverse times and places as a key to understanding the function of inscribing in the activities represented by the cave inscriptions.

## THE FUNCTION OF INSCRIBING IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN MAGICAL RITES

Ritual sequences often involved word and act, formulae (spoken or written) and rites. The question of the function of inscribing in the caves must be addressed in order to ascertain the purposes of the inscriptions. What role could the writing have played in the overall function of the ritual? Daniel Miller, in his work on incantations, refers to this as "operational ritual logic."[276] In other words, exactly how was a series of words and actions thought to bring about the intended impact? Miller discusses specific ways to understand the function of inscribing in ritual sequences and presents a compelling case for understanding the *śōṭâ* ritual described in Numbers 5 as an incantatory ritual. Inscribing the incantatory curse onto a scroll essentially infused the physical object with the power of the incantation. Miller understands the "operational ritual logic" as follows: the priest accesses cosmic energy by speaking the incantatory curse, this cosmic energy "becomes

[276] Daniel Miller, "Another Look at the Magical Ritual for a Suspected Adulteress," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5:1 (2010): 13.

incarnate" when written upon the writing surface, the energy is then transferred via the ink to the water, and via the water into the woman.[277] In this interpretation, the act of writing is key in connecting the power needed for a "beyond the normal" impact with the physical entities to be impacted.

This example illustrates how, in order to understand the role of writing in ritual practice, the act of inscribing or the use of inscribed material must be situated within the operative ritual logic involved in a given ritual. What role does inscribing play in the efficacy of a ritual—in "making it work"? Robert Ritner's work on Egyptian magic provides an extensive discussion of the logic of magic as observed in the plethora of evidence available from ancient Egypt. His definition of magic as "any activity which seeks to obtain its goal by methods outside the simple laws of cause and effect," aligns with the broad definition of ritual used in this chapter as any process or performance intended to bring about an effect beyond the normal.[278] Ritner's tripartite categorization of Egyptian magical practices provides a useful framework within which to explore the possible functions of inscribing in ritual and magic.[279] The following discussion considers these three categories—magic by word, magic by material, and magic by rite—in order to explore the

---

[277] Miller, "Another Look at the Magical Ritual for a Suspected Adulteress," 13-16.

[278] Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 69. I am not seeking here to make a case regarding popular vs. state religion, or to say that categorizing the inscriptions as magic inscribing means the writers did not subscribe to mainline Yahwism. Rather, I am working from the understanding that religious practices were varied and incorporated many practices and people from many strata of society; and that practicing what we might categorize as popular religion in no way undermined national religion. They most likely coexisted well into the Iron Age, though conflict no doubt arose toward the end of the seventh century.

[279] Ritner, "Magic: an Overview," OEAE Vol. 2, 322; Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 35-57.

possible roles the cave inscriptions may have played in ritual practices.[280] In other words, looking at this limited and enigmatic evidence though the lens of ancient Near Eastern ritual and magic, what are the possible roles the inscribing may have played in ritual events that took place in the caves?

## Magic by Word

Words—both spoken and written—were essential to many ritual practices and were related to their efficacy.[281] Two factors were integral to the efficacious use of words: 1) correct content, and 2) the act of speaking. These factors are well illustrated by the common use of spells and incantations. A specific formula would be spoken in order to activate a certain power or bring about a desired outcome.[282] The formula content varied, but drew upon what seems to have been a stock set of relevant phrases. The content of the cave inscriptions is similar to that found in incantation formulae, material unquestionably ritual in nature. The curse phrases are also similar in form used in the ceremonial curses recorded in Deuteronomy 27:12-26. Thus, there is no question that content similar to that of the cave inscriptions held ritual significance. The category of magic by word provides a

[280] Making a connection between the cave inscriptions and ritual or magical practices is not a new suggestion. Naveh argued for a magical interpretation of the Beit Lei curses (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *IEJ* 13 [1963]: 81; Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *IEJ* 51 [2001]: 194). And Zevit explained the doubled letters in the ?Uriyahu inscriptions as either a "form of erasure," or a "magical emphasis", preferring the latter (Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 [1984]: 44).

[281] In his discussion of ancient Egyptian magical practice, Ritner points out that the position of Heka (magic) depicted in the Coffin Texts helps explain the intrinsic connection between magic and word: "First of the creations of Re-Atum, Heka appears *before* the emanation of Hu (the creative word or "Logos") from the mouth of the creator. This 'authoritative utterance' he infuses with his magic vitality, thereby bringing the gods and the cosmos into existence. The intimate association of magic and word is here given ontological explanation; magic resides in the word itself" (Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 17).

[282] Ritner points out that the spell takes a prominent place in the study of Egyptian magic because of the "intrinsic association of magic and word" (Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 35).

useful lens through which to explore the purpose of the cave inscriptions by exploring their content.

Examples of content often associated with ritual or magic include curse phrases, divine epithets, and even petitionary or blessing phrases. Curses are perhaps the most inherently "ritual" words given their association with oaths and other such participatory, or acted-out, agreements. In her history of scholarship on curses in the ancient Near East, Anne Marie Kitz notes the complex interplay between curse and act in ritual and oath settings. In the conclusion of her overview of the topic, she references Hillers' observation that written curses gradually came to replace the acted-out ceremonies that so long accompanied such curses.[283] Whether one views the curses as simple inscribed warnings or as representations of larger ritual sequences carried out in order to activate cosmic protective forces, the ceremonial or ritual connotations associated with curses are still applicable. In order for a warning to be effective, the viewers must have understood the inscribed words as representing an enacted oath or conditional curse backed by divine power. Thus, a ritual interpretation of the curse phrases is useful regardless of the specific function (for instance, funerary or non-funerary, curse on enemies or against tomb robbers, etc.) attributed to the curse in a given hypothesis regarding the purpose of the inscribing. The inscribed curse, whether accompanied by spoken formulae, ritual actions, or both, represents an example of magic by word. Similarly, blessing phrases and divine

[283] Anne Marie Kitz. *Cursed are You! The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 25-31.

epithets often occur in ritual and magic contexts, although such content is also found in many other contexts.[284]

Along with selecting the appropriate word content, magic practices often involved speaking those words. Viewed in this context, the elusive, cryptic phrases inscribed on the walls of the Beit Lei cave may represent abbreviations of or references to specific formulae spoken as part of a ritual or ceremony carried out in the caves. This perspective was articulated in passing by Simon Parker as part of his case for the Beit Lei inscriptions representing prayers of refugees hiding in the tomb. He pointed out that the phrases inscribed on the tomb walls could represent a "summation of more colorful curses" or a "kernel of more extended prayers" articulated by sojourners within the tomb.[285] Taking this interpretation further, one wonders if the repeated *kāp*-like characters in the Beit Lei antechamber mark the recitation or even performance of simile curses such as those found in numerous treaty and incantation texts.[286] An example of such a simile curse from Psalm 68:3 reads: "as smoke is scattered, may they be scattered; as wax melts before fire, may the wicked perish before God." Perhaps each inscribed *kāp* was inscribed as a kind of shorthand for a simile curse as it was spoken. In such interpretations, the inscriptions are

---

[284] For instance, the Ketef Hinnom amulets are inscribed with the divine name YHWH in the context of the protection he provides. Referring to the priestly blessing from Numbers 6 incorporated on the amulets, Jeremy Smoak observes: "the amulets locate the lexical significance of the blessing within the practice of protective magic. Although associations between the blessings and amuletic magic are known from later periods, the Ketef Hinnom amulets evidence that such associations stretch back into the first millennium BCE" (Smoak, "'Prayers of Petition' in the Psalms and West Semitic Inscribed Amulets: Efficacious Words in Metal and Prayers for Protection in Biblical Literature," *JSOT* 36 [2011]: 81). Blessing phrases are also part of letter formulary and dedicatory inscriptions such as the one found at Ekron.

[285] Parker, "Graves, Caves and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," *JSOT* 27 (2003): 265-6.

[286] Simile curses are found in a variety of languages and contexts. See for instance, Sefire IA: 35-42; Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon lines 530-656; Maqlû III: 157-169; Hittite Soldier's Oath ii: 17-18. For an overview of simile curses, see Delbert Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964), 18-26.

viewed as serving a mimetic function—to represent in full or abbreviated form words or actions that formed part of a ceremony or ritual. Thus, the act of speaking the selected words, combined with the correct content, facilitated the efficacy of the ritual sequence or performance.

Examining the ritual nature of the inscriptional content brings up the issue of how correct content or performance is related to ritual success. There is an unavoidable tension in this regard when considering the cave inscriptions as ritual inscribing. On the one hand, the content should align with the prescribed material relevant to whatever circumstance the ritual treated. On the other hand, the cryptic content of the inscriptions is sometimes used as evidence for their magical nature. Put another way, there seem to be mistakes—reversed syntax, unusual spellings, words left out, etc. So how does one reconcile this observation with the need for correct execution in order for the ritual to be efficacious? One of the working assumptions of ritual function is that sequences and exact execution of constituent parts mattered.[287] The only remaining element of the ritual activity that took place in the caves is the inscribing still visible in the stone. But the messy inscribing, along with numerous things that appear to be errors, can complicate or call into question a ritual interpretation of the inscriptions.

---

[287] This principle is alluded to by Abusch and Schwemer in their treatment of the Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft rituals. See Tzvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, Vol. 1 (eds. Tzvi Abusch, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 21. And Jan Assman explains it in the context of words both spoken and written as follows: "The principle of ritual coherence is based on the media that make the sacred visibly manifest in the world. These media include holy places, trees, sources, stones, grottos, groves, but also and above all, images, statues, symbols, and buildings such as temples, pyramids, and stupas . . . Where the holy is present in corporeal and visible form, other laws obtain and to ignore them can be fatal. This holds good also for the sacred texts that are embedded in the rituals for the purpose of recitation or already in recitable form. They too make the holy present. To have them recited correctly in the right place, at the right time, and by the right speaker unleashes cosmic energies that keep the world in order" (Jan Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory*: *Ten Studies* [trans. R. Livingstone; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006], 128-9).

On the flip side, the cryptic nature of the inscriptions may actually provide additional support of a ritual interpretation. Naveh alluded to a magical interpretation of the cave inscriptions in his original publication, and subsequently took up the discussion in more detail in his 2001 article on Hebrew graffiti. He cited the "magic practice of cryptic writing" as a reason why "one does not have to endeavor to understand the text by all means."[288] Applying this reasoning to the curse phrase on the south wall of the Beit Lei cave, Naveh wrote, "I have no doubt that the engraver did not err, but deliberately distorted the text."[289] Naveh also noted in the same article the issue of word arrangement in the third line of the el-Qôm inscription, and suggested the same reasoning could be applied there to make sense of why the syntax was apparently scrambled. This seems to go the opposite direction of the argument that accuracy or correctness is essential to the efficacy of a ritual performance.[290] If order and accuracy were central to reaching the intended effect of a given ritual practice, then we must somehow account for the careless and apparently scrambled elements of the cave inscriptions in order to maintain a ritual interpretation. Scrambling a name makes sense if the intent is either to make it so that an

---

[288] Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period." *IEJ* 51 (2001): 198.

[289] In arguing for a so-called "magical" interpretation of the cave inscriptions, Naveh cited a practice wherein inscribed content was intentionally scrambled or obscured (Joseph Naveh "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," 194-5, referencing J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* [New York: Oxford, 1992], 5). Essentially, Naveh seems to imply that the inaccuracy of the cave inscriptions is what betrays their magical function, due to phenomena such as inverted writing observed in amulets and magic bowls from later periods. He goes on to list other examples of inverted or corrupted writing without elaborating on the purpose.

[290] It is difficult to ascertain exactly what Naveh means when he cites the practice of distorted writing as being common in magic. One of his examples comes from Gager's treatment of Greek curse tablets where scrambled or backwards writing seem to have "expressed a symbolic meaning…that the fate of the target should turn backward or be scrambled, just like their written names" (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," 195).

enemy entity cannot decipher the name or to cause a similar scrambling or inverting impact on the entity represented by the inscribed name. However, the cave inscriptions do not contain any clear examples of scrambled or inverted spellings.[291] The general category of cryptic writing, however, applies in multiple instances to the inscriptions from both Beit Lei and el-Qôm.

Without engaging in a full discussion of the interplay between ritual accuracy and magical inversion of writing, suffice it to say that the cave inscriptions can be explained by a combination of the two explanations of ritual practice. Correct execution of the ritual sequence could have been fulfilled by means of executing each action in the correct order (speaking prescribed formulae correctly, carrying out accompanying ritual acts), even if the inscribed content was not correct in every detail. The unclear content, then, could represent either accidents due to irregularities in the surface or a less proficient practitioner, or elements that were intentionally scrambled for magic purposes.[292] Either way, the cryptic nature of some of the content need not undermine a ritual interpretation.

---

[291] There are examples of the tetragrammaton that appear to be missing letters, such as the second word in the Beit Lei inscription "Save, [Y]HWH," but this is different than the letters being scrambled. Also, if one is willing to follow Bar Adon and read a *hê* rather than a *rêš* as the final letter in line two of the Beit Lei curse inscription, then a case could be made for the initial letter of each word being transferred to the previous word. However, this is still different from the other examples of scrambled or inverted writing cited by Naveh.

[292] Inverted or obscured writing was also used in Egyptian magic, protecting the great secrets of the "House of Life." And Ritner points out, "as early as the Pyramid Texts (Spell 281), incantations may include unintelligible vocables, to be understood as either 'magical words' or as transcriptions of foreign recitations" (Ritner, "Magic: An Overview," 325-6). John Gager notes a variety of phenomena related to cryptic writing or content that is unintelligible and then presents a brief history of the approaches taken to such material. He points out various opinions—ranging from such material being meaningless gibberish to such material representing intentional use of foreign elements for activation of divine power—have existed throughout history. As the impetus for recent efforts to take more seriously an attempt to discern the foundations of such uses, Gager cites an essay by Stanley Tambiah entitled "The Magical Power of Words," in which he presents a case for viewing special languages used in magic as a type of language by which the practitioner addresses the demons in "the language the demons can understand" (Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 9, referencing Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," *Man* 3 [1968]: 179).

## Magic by Material

In the *śōṭâ* ritual mentioned above, the written incantatory curse became a physical ritual ingredient—the washed off writing served as part of the potion to be ingested. There are multiple examples of writing and images serving as ritual ingredients, ranging from amulets imbued with apotropaic power to ink or rubbings playing a role in a ritual performance. A modern example can be found in Middle Eastern bowl magic, in which an incantation bowl is filled with liquid, which (after absorbing the formula and thereby becoming potent) is drunk by the person seeking healing or protection.[293] Like clay and other porous material, the soft stone of the caves could have absorbed and transmitted the "magic." Viewing the cave inscriptions through the lens of magic by substance, two related interpretations emerge: 1) the inscribing was perceived to imbue the physical

---

Theodore Shrire, in his background discussion of the corpus of silver amulets published in his book *Hebrew Magic Amulets,* quotes an interesting observation regarding cryptic writing made by Gaster in his discussion of the Samaritan amulets: "These amulets have come down to us in both a very elaborate form and also in very reduced forms; the contents are practically the same, but whilst in the more elaborate ones all the verses quoted from the Samaritan Pentateuch are given in full, in the reduced form they are merely represented by one word selected from each sentence. Thus meaningless words are strung together which can only be understood if each word is traced back to its original complete verse" (Theodore Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation* [New York: Behrman House Inc., Publishers, 1982], 22-23, referencing M. Gaster, *The Samaritans* [London: The British Academy, 1925], 80ff). In the same discussion, Gaster pointed out that later amulet content was sometimes even reduced to where only the first letter of each of these words was inscribed.

[293] Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 16 n11. This magical logic, so-to-speak, is similar to that described by Ritner in his overview of magic in ancient Egypt: "Also extending from the New Kingdom through Hellenistic times are the healing stelae known as '*cippi* of Horus,' which combine traditional ritual techniques with newly standardized imagery and spells to prevent or allay the effect of snakebite and scorpion sting. Produced for general distribution, or in large scale as public benefactions, the healing stelae were not read, but placed in contact with water that was drunk by the sufferer. The notion that magical power can be consumed is found as early as the Pyramid Texts (Spells 273-274), while Coffin Text Spell 341 records the transfer of the power of inscribed imagery to ingested fluids: 'This spell is to be spoken over seven sketched eyes of Horus, washed off in beer and natron and drunk by the man.' In similar fashion, incantations are drawn on the hand and licked off by the practitioner (Coffin Text Spell 277); Book of Going Forth by Day Spell 149e). On the basis of such magical mechanics, the term for 'swallow' acquires the nuance 'to know' by the New Kingdom. The licking or drinking of charged fluids remains a basic technique for subsequent Late Egyptian, Demotic, Greco-Egyptian, and Coptic magical rites" (Ritner, "Magic: An Overview," 325).

material/walls of the caves with power intended for that space, and/or 2) the power in the charged stone was thought to be accessible by contact with the stone or by use of dust or rubbings from the wall for related ritual activity.

One element of the ritual logic described as "magic by material" is apparent in the manufacture and use of amulets. The material object took on ritual power. Once the object was imbued with apotropaic power, that power could be appropriated for any person or space. For instance, the Arslan Tash plaques, inscribed with incantatory text and images, apparently functioned like amulets but were hung in a space rather than worn.[294] The Ketef Hinnom amulets, which were likely worn by those buried in the tomb complex, were inscribed with protective phrases and blessings that included the divine name. Modern examples of the practice of commissioning and wearing amulets reveal that a ritual practitioner inscribes the amulets, thereby imbuing the physical object with protective power. This power was then harnessed by the wearer via proximity to, or physical contact with, the inscribed object. Although our knowledge of the production and use of amulets comes primarily from material that significantly post-dates the cave inscriptions, the idea of an inscribed object holding ritual potency is a phenomenon that transcends cultural boundaries. Viewed in this light, the cave inscriptions represent physical protection intended for either the family who owned the tomb, those interred within the chambers, or other individuals associated with the space. Even though the stone walls of a cave are different from small inscribed amulets, their hidden nature along with the combination of text and image align them in some ways with amulets, which can serve as interesting

[294] Frank Moore Cross and Richard J. Saley, "Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque of the Seventh Century B.C. from Arslan Tash in Upper Syria," *BASOR* 197 (1970): 48.

comparative material. If the presence of inscribed words or images was more important than the reading of those inscribed words by those receiving the protective benefit of the inscriptions, as seems to have been the case with inscribed amulets, then the messy execution of the cave inscriptions would have in no way diminished their effectiveness. The process of inscribing, along with possible accompanying elements such as spoken formulae or the correct ritual practitioner executing the inscribing, would have imbued the cave walls with apotropaic power.

A similar way to interpret the cave inscriptions in light of magic by material is to view the stone as a possible ritual ingredient. Inscribing an amulet imbued the physical object with cosmic protective powers. Perhaps inscribing the cave walls imbued the soft stone with cosmic powers that could then be touched or scraped off in order to retrieve/access charged bits of material. These bits, whether dust on a finger or a bit of stone to carry around or shavings used as part of a ritual, could have functioned to harness that power on behalf of the participants. Multiple possibilities arise when viewing the cave inscriptions through the lens of "magic by material." Deep incisions on the west wall of the Beit Lei cave could reveal where pieces of the inscribed cave wall were removed. The smoothed area near the center of the Uriyahu inscription could betray an attempt to rub off the writing. Bits of stone, then, could have been used for related ritual purposes, or the power imbued by the inscribing in the stone could have been accessed by individuals when they touched the stone. These suggestions illustrate the possibilities that come up when considering the inscriptions in the context of writing and images as ritual ingredients in the ancient Near East.

## Magic by Rite

Ritual and magic practices involved word and act, recitation and rite.[295] Often an inscribed word or formula is considered separately from a rite in treatments of ritual evidence; but the cave inscriptions may provide an example in which the inscribed words not only represent words used but also represent acts or rites. Viewing the inscriptions through a ritual or magic lens, then, involves exploring the possible significance the inscribing act itself held within ritual sequences. In Miller's treatment of the *śōṭâ* ritual outlined above, he describes the act of inscribing as the mechanism through which cosmic power was transferred to a material substance. Smoak articulates a similar understanding with reference to the Ketef Hinnom amulets. "The acts of writing the blessings were not mundane activities, but rather performative acts that sought to materialize the blessing."[296] In similar fashion, the inscribing of the cave inscriptions could have served to bring about certain effects as well as to materialize the essence of the ritual meaning.

The repetitious inscribing evident in cave inscriptions from both sites, and most explicit in the third line of the ʾUriyahu inscription, brings up the question of what significance the act of inscribing held. Words are inscribed more than once.[297] Individual

---

[295] "The ceremonies which accompany the 'Prayers of the Lifting of the Hand' in general character resemble those which occur on other classes of ceremonial or religious texts. They were not merely symbols, but were regarded as potent in themselves, and, as the efficacy of an incantation depended on its correct recital, so their power resulted from a scrupulous performance of each detail" (Leonard King, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery* [New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975], xxx). "Words were only one component of a magical rite. The actions that accompanied the words and the objects or ingredients used in the rite were equally important" (Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt, Revised Edition* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006], 76).

[296] Jeremy Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24-26* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 39.

letters are overwritten, or inscribed a second time in a different place.[298] Characters and images are inscribed multiple times.[299] In the majority of examples, the re-inscribing does not appear to have served purposes of clarity—whether of message or execution. This implies that the act of inscribing was more important than the accuracy of content or execution. The act of inscribing played a role in numerous ancient Near Eastern ritual and magical practices. The question here is how to understand or conceptualize the significance of the act of writing in the particular case of the cave inscriptions.

A basic ritual interpretation of the repetitious inscribing would simply describe the act of inscribing as one part of a given ritual performance or sequence. In order to ensure the efficacy of the ritual, each step must be carried out as prescribed. Viewed in this light, the act of inscribing on the cave walls may well show the physical imprint of someone following a set of ritual instructions. Ironically, this brings up the possibility that, in seeking to carry out the prescribed sequence of actions, the inscribing act itself took precedence over the accuracy or clarity of the inscribed content. This could explain the cryptic and sometimes senseless jumble of content. Many scholars have alluded to the possible magic or ritual significance of the overwriting evident in the ʾUriyahu inscription,

---

[297] For instance, the word ʾ*rr* is inscribed four times in the Beit Lei cave, and the word ʾ*šrth* is inscribed at least three times at el-Qôm—in this case two of the instances are in the same place rather than different places within the cave.

[298] See especially the third line of the ʾUriyahu inscription, though there are also hints of overwritten characters in lines one and two of that inscription and in one of the curses from Beit Lei.

[299] For example, a *kāp*-like character is inscribed multiple times in the northwest corner of the Beit Lei antechamber. And the images at Beit Lei seem to come in multiples—multiple figures, multiple circles and ellipses and two boats.

but obtaining a correct reading has nevertheless remained the ultimate goal.[300] By contrast, the ritual interpretation described here views the overwriting as betraying a ritual or magic use of writing rather than simply as a pretext for causing confusion for the modern epigraphist. The act of inscribing functioned like any other ritual manipulation of a physical object in fulfilling the stipulations for a given rite. Any of the inscriptions could represent a fulfillment of ritual instructions. But repeated characters and phrases provide especially convincing evidence. For instance, the *kāp*-like character inscribed repeatedly in the northwest corner of the Beit Lei cave could represent one element of a ritual in which the act of inscribing was accompanied by other elements such as spoken formulae or ritual actions that left no physical evidence. Likewise, repeated words, such as *ʾšrth* at el-Qom and *ʾrr*, at Beit Lei may also represent an action (inscribing the word or phrase) that made up one element in a ritual sequence. If the sequence was performed more than once, or involved multiple repetitions of similar actions, this could explain the presence of multiple exemplars of certain words and characters and shapes. The act of inscribing, then, would not only have been a means to harness power associated with a given formula or image, but also would have fulfilled part of the prescribed rite.

The terms ritual and rite sometimes refer only to the actions that accompany the words. But these terms can also refer to a performance sequence in its entirety—made up

[300] P. Kyle McCarter's description of the overlapping lines is representative: "The interpretation of the inscription, which is rather crudely written and not deeply incised, is hampered by the fact that much of the text has been retraced, with the result that many letters appear twice, sometimes superimposed on each other, so that it is often difficult for the epigraphist to decide which letters to read and which to ignore" (McCarter, "Khirbet el-Qôm," *COS* 2.52). Likewise, Zevit wrote, "Since no sense could be made of the letters as they appear, an assumption was made that the second of all the doubled and repeated letters was added to the text either as a form of erasure, or, more likely, as a type of magical emphasis, and could be disregarded in the translation" (Ziony Zevit, "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 [1984]: 44). O'Connor agreed, referring to the overwriting as "apotropaic repetitions" (M. O'Connor, "The Poetic Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm," *VT* 37 [1987]: 225). This interpretation of the repetition is usually used to justify leaving out certain repeated letters in order to arrive at a reading that makes sense.

of multiple possible building blocks including speaking words, inscribing words or images, manipulating physical objects, and carrying out certain actions. As the above overview has shown, the three categories of magical strategies functioned together. It is impossible to ascertain much about the rites that may have taken place in the burials caves. But there are multiple ways in which the inscribed words could have served specific functions in ritual practices associated with the caves.

**EXCURSUS: The Images and Their Possible Magical Functions/Significance**

One of the defining characteristics of the cave inscriptions is the presence of images along with the texts. For instance, the ʾUriyahu inscription is incised around a deeply carved hand, a symbol that often held magic significance in the ancient world well before its widespread use as the "hand of Fatima."[301] In many cases, the images have been dismissed or ignored.[302] However, it is clear that in most cases the inscribers intentionally integrated the texts and images.[303] Therefore, a fair treatment must address both, looking at the possible meaning of the images as well as their relationship to the text. As Albert Moore points out, iconography literally means "writing in images;" therefore "to study

[301] McCarter therefore described this inscription as having a religious or magical function. "The use of representations of human hands as religious or magical symbols has a long pre-Islamic history. It is well known in the ancient Near East, though its significance is not always understood. This carving must be taken as an example of such a use, the earliest known in Israelite or Jewish iconography" (P. Kyle McCarter, *Ancient Inscriptions Voices from the Biblical World* [Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1996], 111).

[302] For instance, anthologies such as Graham Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions,* list only the textual inscriptions, numbered 1-8 and make no mention of the accompanying images.

[303] This is evident from observations such as: the arrangement of the ʾUriyahu inscription around the incised hand; the similarities in stroke style in many of the Beit Lei inscriptions; and the division of the Beit Lei inscriptions into what Zevit called "stops" by incised lines giving equal position to both text and image.

iconography is to begin to 'read' the meaning of these images."[304] It is not my aim here to offer a full treatment of the images, but rather to touch on a few possibilities regarding their interpretation in the context of ancient Near Eastern magic and ritual practice. The messy and careless appearance of the images at Beit Lei is sometimes viewed as evidence that the inscriptions simply represent efforts to pass the time rather than as holding any ritual significance. However, this need not be the case given the fact that aesthetic quality was not a priority in ritual inscribing.[305] Posing the question, "what function could these images have served in a ritual context?" brings up numerous interpretive possibilities.

One possibility is to see the images as representing the entities to be cursed or blessed. This is the approach behind interpretations of the Beit Lei images as representing Assyrian soldiers and encampments as the intended recipients of the accompanying inscribed curse phrases. Such an interpretation aligns with the common use of images or figures as symbols in incantatory curses or other magic.[306] The difference here is that the

---

[304] Albert C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 18.

[305] Keel and Uehlinger point out: "The idea that pictures and their production were important only if they measured up to some primarily or even exclusively formal and aesthetic standard is a viewpoint that is no older than the nineteenth century and is typical of so-called 'enlightened,' western civilization. Only modern western-thinking individuals hold such a view. The majority of ancient Near Eastern and ancient Egyptian sign systems are better described as 'a valiant attempt of magic and religion at coexistence'" (Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 395, referencing Orly Goldwasser and Nathaniel Laor, "The Allure of the Holy Glyfhs: A Psycholinguistic Perspective on the Egyptian Script," *Göttinger Miszellen* 123 [1991]: 50). A similar observation is made by Richard Pierce in his review of *Bildzauber im alten Ägypten* by Peter Eschweiler: "If one considers a wide range of images used in Egyptian magic, it becomes evident that their aesthetic qualities were not believed to be decisive for their efficacy" (Richard Pierce, "Book Reviews," *Acta Orientalia* 59 [1998]: 231).

[306] For example, Mesopotamian incantation rituals included figurines being skewered or smashed or burned, and drawings of the malevolent entities being drawn in flour and then scratched out. See, for instance, Walter Farber, *Lamaštu: An Edition of the Canonical Series of Lamaštu Incantations and Rituals and Related Texts from the Second and First Millenia B.C.* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 17; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 195; and Tzvi Abusch, *The Anti-Witchcraft Series Maqlû: A Student Edition and Selected Commentary* (State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts, Vol. XI; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 173.

inscribed curses, which were likely also spoken, were to effect the damage, rather than the curse being represented by scratching out or effacing the figures. The inscribed human figures with their identifying characteristics like arms raised, headgear, or holding a bow, then served to identify the subject of the incantatory curses. Likewise, the geometric figures and the boats could also have served as rough identifiers of entities to be cursed.

Another possibility is that the images could represent the intended impact on the entity being cursed or the entity being protected. For instance, encircling was a multi-cultural concept in ritual and magic. In Egypt, encircling was so commonly associated with magic that the term came to mean "enchant" in later periods.[307] In Mesopotamia, a magic circle was used to create a protective zone to ward off ghosts or evil spirits bringing illness.[308] Applying this concept to the cave inscriptions brings up interesting possibilities regarding the meaning of the circles and ellipses in the Beit Lei cave. It is not clear what is represented by the marks within the ellipses or the crossing lines behind two of the circles. But the circles could have been intended to serve as a symbol of a protective circle to ward

---

[307] In a summary article on magic in ancient Egypt, Ritner provides the following description of encircling: "Perhaps the most common ritual technique is circumambulation (*p□r*), used to enclose and defend sacred space or to ensnare hostile forces. Circular processions accompany funerary rites and a wide variety of temple rituals and are performed by private homeowners armed with sticks to avert the 'plague of the year' at the dangerous calendrical cusp. Similarly protective are the circles scratched into the earth with apotropaic knives. In contrast, an execration ritual to protect the temple scriptorium (Papyrus Salt 825) confines wax figures of enemies within a jar encircled by the practitioner. So basic is the association of 'encircling' with magic that the term *p□r* comes to mean 'enchant' in Demotic and Coptic" (Ritner, "Magic: An Overview," 325). For a more detailed discussion of encircling in Egyptian magic, see Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 57-67.*

[308] For instance, the Ritual Tablet from the series Maqlû includes these lines: "Then you encircle the entrances with parched flour…Thereafter, you encircle the bed with flour-paste" (lines 96 and 148). See Tzvi Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (Ancient Magic and Divination V; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 101-102; a chapter that was originally published as "Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature: Texts and Studies Part I: The Nature of Maqlû: Its Character, Divisions, and Calendrical Setting," *JNES* 33 (1974): 251-62.

off danger.[309] Conversely, the circles could have served to indicate the entity to be cursed.[310] Regardless of the specific function of the circles, the longstanding use of such symbols supports an interpretation of the circles in the cave inscriptions as magic symbols. An even more specific comparative use of such symbols is found in later amulets, which include circles divided into quadrants similar to the circles in the Beit Lei antechamber.[311]

It may be that certain symbols were simply used in magic contexts but that their exact meaning or role is not clear to us. For instance, little has been said regarding the X marks on a Phoenician amulet from Tyre. The drawing of the amulet in the original publication indicates at least nine of these marks surrounding the images, and several more marks that could represent partial examples of the same mark.[312] Such symbols are also found on Aramaic amulets, and transcribed as "magic characters," or in other words, characters of which we are not sure of the meaning.[313] There are two deeply incised X marks, or *tāw*s as Naveh described them, on the west wall of the Beit Lei cave. This type of character is easily passed over since it is technically neither an image or a text. But this

---

[309] Along the lines of the apotropaic nature of the flour circles in the Maqlû series and in some Lamaštu spells. See Tzvi Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (Ancient Magic and Divination V; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 101-2; and Farber, *Lamaštu: An Edition,* 193.

[310] For instance, along with use in purification rituals and protective rituals, encircling in Egyptian magic sometimes connoted a hostile control (Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice,* 64). Similarly, the Lamaštu series includes a hostile use of the magic circle to surround the figurine of the demon (Farber, *Lamaštu: An Edition*, 195).

[311] For examples of circles divided in quadrants as magical characters in late antiquity, see Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 101. For other examples of similar 'magical' characters, see Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells,* 69, 72. This does not mean the symbols in the amulets and the circles on the cave walls are directly comparable. But the ubiquitous use of circles in magic inscriptions does indicate a longstanding association of encircling with magic practice.

[312] Hélène Sader, "Deux épigraphes phéniciennes inédites," *Syria* 67 (1990): 320.

[313] See, for instance, Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 78-81.

does not mean they did not hold significance. It is difficult to ascertain the significance of such marks, but like the repeated *kāp*-like characters mentioned above, it is possible that they functioned similarly to the repeated characters present on numerous amulets. Overall, there is much room for further exploration of the possible ritual functions of the images as Beit Lei and el-Qôm.

## RITUAL PRACTICE AND RITUAL PRACTITIONERS

Carrying out a ritual usually required the correct execution of the ritual sequence as well as the correct executor—a ritual practitioner. This is true in most of the extant examples that include ritual instructions and not just evidence of ritual practice. Numbers 5 describes the priest functioning as the ritual practitioner within the temple grounds where the husband and wife were to come for the performance of the ritual. In Egypt and Mesopotamia ritual practitioners functioned both in connection to the temple and as itinerants going to the people who needed their services. The priests' connection with the established religious centers not only provided them the education necessary, but likely also made available the resources they used in their function as ritual practitioners. Perhaps the most important of such resources would be the training necessary to learn the basics of ritual or magical content. Viewing the cave inscriptions as evidence of ritual use of the tomb space implies that the inscribers were ritual practitioners. Their expertise combined with the proper words and actions contributed to the efficacy of a given ritual. It is not impossible that a ritual practitioner would have been available at villages or agricultural estates such as Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qom. And literacy in the Iron II was likely widespread enough that someone related to the village could have possessed

basic skills in reading and writing. Without delving further into a discussion of the inscriptions in the context of scribes and literacy (which is addressed in chapter 3), suffice it to say that a ritual interpretation of the inscriptions implies not only a certain level of literacy, but also other qualifications—be they knowledge of the correct sequences or an appropriate position in society.[314]

## CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction to a conference volume on continuity and innovation in magical traditions, the editors pointed out how often scholars "encounter similar textual, ritual and cultural phenomena…in magical texts as far apart as the Akkadian cuneiform tablets and an Arabic manuscript bought in Egypt in the late-twentieth century." They go on to explain: "Such similarities demonstrate to what extent many different cultures share a 'magical logic' which is strikingly identical, and in particular they show the recurrence of certain phenomena when magical practices are transmitted in written form and often preserve, adopt and adapt much older textual units."[315] This chapter has looked at the cave inscriptions from Beit Lei and el-Qôm as small bits of evidence for just such a "magical logic" at work in the use of inscribing text and image in ancient Judah. In this way, the cave inscriptions join a long ancient Near Eastern tradition of using curses, blessings, divine

[314] Naveh suggested the inscribers at Beit Lei may have been Levites, citing the cultic nature of the inscriptions, and incidentally accounting for their functional literacy (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 90). This interpretation seems tenuous, but it could perhaps also account for the need of the inscribers to have had some qualifications as ritual practitioners. Most scholars agree that the fourth line of the ʾUriyahu inscription names the scribe responsible for writing on behalf of ʾUriyahu, though little has been said regarding any connection with ritual practice. If the name does identify the scribe, this person may also have served as the ritual practitioner carrying out a ritual involving inscribing on the cave wall on behalf of ʾUriyahu.

[315] Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked, "Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition: A Jerusalem Symposium and its Wider Contexts," in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition* (eds. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 2.

epithets, petitionary phrases and images in various efforts to bring about an impact beyond the normal.

## Beit Lei

Previous treatments of the Beit Lei inscriptions have briefly mentioned potential ritual or magic interpretations. Naveh, with reference to the multiple curses inscribed on each wall of the tomb antechamber, mentioned the possibility of a magic function without elaborating more specifically on what that function may have been. Zevit integrated both the texts and images in his analysis of the corpus and argued that the tomb antechamber at one time functioned as a sort of cultic gallery with a series of stops proceeding counterclockwise around the main chamber. His interpretation focuses on the religious nature of the content without suggesting any specific ritual or magic element to the cultic practice represented by the inscriptions. More recently, Melissa Ramos and Jessica Whisenant have also alluded to a ritual interpretation of the inscriptions.[316] In each instance, however, these interpretations have been only minimally spelled out. The preceding study has delved deeper into the function of inscribing in ritual and magic practices in ancient Judah, using the cave inscriptions from the southern Shephelah as a sort of test case.

---

[316] Ramos comments on the cave inscriptions from Beit Lei and Ein Gedi in the context of ritual oath language and inscribed curses, and concludes: "the inscribing of blessings and curses in the Beit Lei cave and perhaps the Ein Gedi cave also was connected with ritual practice" (Melissa Ramos, "Spoken Word and Ritual Performance" [Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2015], 58). Whisenant makes a similar observation: "The cultic content and incantatory character of much of these graffiti, together with the context in which is it found (i.e., burial tombs) suggests the deliberate manipulation of letters and words for apotropaic and ritualistic purposes" (Jessica Whisenant, "Document Production by Scribal Institutions," "Document Production by Scribal Institutions," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production* [ed. Brian B. Schmidt; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015], 152).

Looking at the corpus of inscriptions in the Beit Lei cave, numerous elements hint at ritual significance. Text and image are integrated. Ritual oath language such as the word *ʾrr*, is used repeatedly. The inscriptions are non-utilitarian in the sense that they do not name the deceased interred within the chambers. Comparisons with Phoenician and Aramaic amulets reveal that repeated symbols such as circles and X marks were used in magic contexts. The multiple instances of the *kāp*-like character in various styles and sizes around the northwest corner of the antechamber also seem to indicate that the act of inscribing formed part of a prescribed and repeated ritual sequence. The combination of content, including divine epithets, apotropaic curses and petitionary phrases, aligns the cave inscriptions with other ancient Near Eastern magic texts such as incantations and inscribed amulets. The fact that the individuals involved in the design and initial work on the partially hewn third chamber effaced part of one of the inscriptions may weaken conclusions regarding the inherent power of inscribed words.[317] But even with this apparent disregard for the sanctity or power of the inscribed stone, the point remains that the act of inscribing held ritual significance and the inscriptions likely represent vestiges of ritual practice involving spoken formulae and/or other actions.

## El-Qôm

Perhaps due to the obvious overwriting, the mention of A/asherah, or the presence of an inscribed handprint, all of which easily connote ritual practice, treatments of the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm have included more detailed discussions of the possible magic functions of the inscriptions than had been offered for the Beit Lei material. For

[317] Special thanks for Aaron Burke for making this point.

instance, the downward oriented incised hand has been interpreted as serving an apotropaic function, protecting either the inscription or those interred within the adjacent chamber. The repetitious inscribing evident in numerous letters and words provides additional evidence useful for a ritual interpretation. Some letters were inscribed more than once, making it appear that parts of the inscription were recopied for the sake of performing the act of inscribing a second time. The fact that several letters in the third line are rewritten in a different place, overlapping other letters, also portrays the message that the act of inscribing was more important than the clarity of the content or execution. The content of the text, as well as the inscribed hand, also lends itself to a ritual context, though perhaps more of a dedicatory ritual rather than an incantatory ritual. Noteworthy in the context of ritual practice in ancient Judah is the phrase "his asherah," found at least twice in the inscription. It has been widely debated whether this phrase refers to a goddess or to a cultic object such as a sacred pole.[318] But either way, it provides one more piece of evidence for a ritual interpretation of the inscription. The conclusion of the dissertation will address the specific application of these observations to hypotheses regarding the source and purpose of the inscriptions at each site. This chapter has served as an expose into the possibilities connected with ritual interpretations of the cave inscriptions.

[318] For an overview of the discussion, see Dever, "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult: How the Kh. El-Qôm and Kuntillet ʿAjrûd 'Asherah' Texts Have Changed the Picture," *Eretz Israel* 26 (1999): 9-15*. Dever references the overwriting in line three of the el-Qôm inscription and suggests that it may be an indication that someone tried to efface such "a reference to 'a/Asherah' in connection with the name of Yahweh…" (*ibid*., 10). In contrast, I do not see the overwriting as an attempt to correct an increasingly unorthodox worldview or practice. Rather, I see both the overwriting (evidence that the act of inscribing held significance) and the mention of divine name(s) along with possible ritual objects as evidence that the inscription is indeed the work of inscribers carrying out ritual practices of some sort in the cave.

# CHAPTER 5—THE FAMILY TOMB AS AN INSCRIBED ARTIFACT
## A Material and Spatial Analysis of the Cave Inscriptions in Context

The inscriptions presented as individual objects in Chapter Two were originally situated within three specific burial caves in the southern Shephelah. Integrating material and spatial analyses, this chapter will consider the caves with inscriptions on their walls as material culture remains or textual artifacts. In other words, rather than considering the content and the setting separately, this chapter will look at each cave as an inscribed artifact, produced and preserved by people living and working in Iron Age Judah. When one studies the cave inscriptions in the context of mortuary inscribing in the ancient Near East, it becomes evident that inscribed words and images served both commemorative and protective functions in mortuary contexts. These functions are implicitly connected to the burial nature of the space even when the act of inscribing is not connected with explicitly burial uses of the tomb, such as its design and hewing or the interment of bodies.

### Classifying the Cave Inscriptions

The aim of many publications has been to determine whether or not the inscriptions are funerary inscriptions. This usually means an effort to decide whether or not the inscriptions are epitaphs. In other words, are they related to the burial use of the tomb space? The inscriptions from Tomb I at el-Qôm are almost universally categorized as traditional epitaphs.[319] They contain two of the elements expected in formal epitaphs—

[319] The only exception is Naveh's suggestion, based on the fact that the same name appears in another an unprovenanced inscription thought to come from the area of el-Qôm, that the other graffiti scratched on the wall of the cave may indicate that the space was used for other purposes besides burial and that the inscriptions served to label this particular chamber as ʾÔpay "own premises" (Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period," *IEJ* 51 [2001]: 206).

name and patronymic, and a description of the object or space, in this case the chamber (חדר). By contrast, the Beit Lei inscriptions, and in some cases the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm Tomb II, are not considered traditional epitaphs. The primary reason given for exploring other possible classifications is that the content does not align with what is expected in mortuary inscriptions.[320] Another factor related to this assertion in the case of the Beit Lei inscriptions is the lack of pottery. Undisturbed burials almost always contain pottery related to offerings for the dead, providing another reason why scholars have sought alternative explanations for the inscriptions.[321]

Classifications of epigraphic material as "mortuary" or "funerary" often involve careful comparison with a list of the expected elements in such inscriptions. Identifying elements include a name and title or patronymic, a reference to the location or object, and a protective curse.[322] When one or more of these elements are present in a clear mortuary

---

[320] Examples of statements made in this regard about the Beit Lei inscriptions include the following: Naveh wrote, "we cannot content ourselves with the answer that these are conventional prayers said on the occasion of a burial" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *IEJ* 13 [1963]: 90). Cross described the inscriptions as "inappropriate tomb decorations," and argued they could "hardly have come from the hand of mourners or near kin of the deceased" (Cross, "The Cave Inscription from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* [ed, J. A. Sanders; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970], 303). Parker asserts that the inscriptions "are not at all related to the cave's excavation and function as a tomb" (Parker, "Graves, Caves and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," *JSOT* 27 [2003]: 261).

[321] Naveh explained this by positing that the cave belonged to Levites. "Since all Iron Age tombs discovered so far in Judah contained such offerings, we may perhaps assume that the people who buried their dead in this cave refrained from offerings in accordance with certain religious beliefs" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 90). Cross interpreted this fact differently, viewing the absence of pottery as evidence "that the tomb was opened (and robbed presumably) in antiquity" (Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303).

[322] In his original analysis of the el-Qôm inscriptions, Dever noted a list of elements that are often included in sepulchral inscriptions: 1) an identification of the deceased, with his titles; 2) an invocation of the gods; 3) a stress on the favored relationship of the deceased with them; 4) an assurance that there are no valuables worth plundering; 5) a special petition not to open the tomb or disturb its contents; and 6) a curse upon anyone who defiles the tomb (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet el-Kom," *HUCA* 40-41 [1970]: 167). For a more detailed analysis, including discussion of the syntax and usual verb forms and variations in how the elements are combined, see Hans-Peter Müller, "Die phönizische

context, the inscription is more assuredly classified as a mortuary inscription. The challenge with making a judgment regarding the funerary nature of the cave inscriptions is that the immediate comparative material is extremely limited.[323] Other than the material from Beit Lei and el-Qôm, the epitaphs on the elite tombs in Jerusalem are the only Iron Age Hebrew tomb inscriptions. This data set does not necessarily represent the norm, given the fact that the Silwan tombs were elite tombs constructed by wealthy individuals in the capital city. Of course, a much larger corpus is available for comparative study if we expand our focus to include a broader range of Northwest Semitic mortuary inscriptions. A survey of attested Phoenician and Aramaic funerary inscriptions, for example, confirms the basic elements that make up a formal mortuary inscription—individual name and family connections or title, description of object, invocation for divine favor, and protective curse, among others. Comparing the cave inscriptions with other mortuary inscribing brings out similarities and differences that are useful in exploring possible classifications.

Because of their unconventional combination of content, the inscriptions from Beit Lei and el-Qôm Tomb II have been assigned to a number of categories, including funerary inscriptions, refugee inscriptions, graffiti, and cultic inscriptions. The variety evident in the different classifications of the cave inscriptions betrays the differences in how scholars prioritize content and location. For instance, the cave inscriptions from Beit Lei are listed

---

Grabinschrift aus dem Zypern-Museum KAI 30 und die Formgeschichte des nordwestsemitischen Epitaphs," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 65 (1975): 104-32.

[323] Zevit acknowledges the limited nature of the data and submits that his assessment of the Uriyahu inscription not being an epitaph is "an intuitive judgment…, since few such inscriptions have been found in Israel" (Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* [London: Continuum, 2001], 367). Naveh wrote in his original publication of the inscriptions, "What do these inscriptions purport to express, and why were they incised on the wall of the cave? Since no other examples are known so far, the explanation is not easy" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 90).

under "Mortuary Inscriptions" in *Context of Scripture*, based on their location; although alternative purposes are mentioned in the discussion based on the unusual content of the inscriptions.[324] In contrast, Parker focuses on the content and argues that function (as judged by analysis of the content) is more important than location when classifying funerary inscriptions. In Parker's assessment, the fact that the content does not align with what is found in other mortuary inscriptions shows that the Beit Lei inscriptions were unrelated to the mortuary nature of the space.[325] This same assumption has formed the basis of many assessments of the cave inscriptions since their original publication.[326] When content is prioritized, it is easy to conclude that the inscriptions represent a use of the space unrelated to burial. When the material setting of the inscription is prioritized, the inscriptions become unconventional mortuary inscriptions.

In order to understand the inscriptions in the context of standard categories, many treatments have resorted to minimizing one or more facets of the inscriptions—for example, their burial context, a certain aspect of their content, or the socio-cultural context of Iron II Judah—in order to arrive at a preferred interpretation. In the case of the Beit Lei inscriptions, the most commonly minimized aspect is their burial context. The same is also true in a few treatments of the el-Qôm material.[327] Multiple reasons are given regarding why the inscriptions are non-funerary in nature.[328] Their setting in hewn burial caves

---

[324] McCarter, "Khirbet el-Qom," *COS* 2.52; McCarter, "The Khirbet Beit Lei Cave Inscriptions," *COS* 2.53.

[325] Parker, "Graves, Caves and Refugees," 261.

[326] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 90; Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303.

[327] Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 205-6; Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees," 280-282.

represents one of their defining characteristics, however, and must form an integral part of any analysis of the cave inscriptions.[329] Mortuary space was chosen by the inscribers as the setting for the inscriptions, meaning that whether or not the inscriptions are explicitly mortuary in nature, they should not be viewed as completely divorced from their original context.

## A Material Analysis

Materiality studies provide a useful framework for this attempt to take a more intentionally integrative approach with regards to the cave inscriptions. Taking a materiality approach involves considering the variety of processes involved in the production and preservation of the inscriptions, and the design and hewing of the tomb space. This view highlights the fact that the cave inscriptions are physical objects, each of which represents a confluence of social, economic, cultural and religious factors.

One issue that presents a challenge to a material and spatial analysis is the fact that it is difficult to determine the relationship in time between the incising of the inscriptions and the hewing of the tombs or their subsequent use for interment. At Beit Lei bones were found undisturbed on each of the benches in the two finished chambers, confirming that the space was indeed used for burial.[330] The placement of the inscriptions also provides information regarding the "stratigraphy" of the tomb and its phases of use. The first such

---

[328] Reasons given for classifying the Beit Lei inscriptions as non-funerary include: lack of personal names, lack of explicit curses protecting the tomb against invaders.

[329] The importance of considering both setting and content is compounded by the fact that few other material culture remains are available for study and there is little comparable epigraphic material. Therefore, all the defining characteristics of this unique corpus must be considered together in a fresh analysis of the cave inscriptions.

[330] Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 75, 89.

hint is the fact that the inscriptions were situated on the hewn walls of the antechamber, and one (the figure with raised hands) was even found on the jamb of the entrance of the first chamber. This demonstrates that the inscribing took place after the hewing of the antechamber and after the hewing at least the chamber on the south. The placement of the long textual inscriptions on the west wall, where the inscriptions span almost the entire remaining space beside the entrance to the second chamber, serves as an indication that the second chamber had also been completed by the time the inscribing took place. The other hint available to us regarding the relationship between the inscriptions and the hewing or burial use of the tomb is found on the north wall. An inscribed circle, with strokes similar in depth and width to most of the other inscriptions, was partially destroyed by the initial hewing of the third chamber, an endeavor that was quickly aborted. This reveals that the pick marks along one side of the marked out third chamber were made after the inscribing of the circle. Therefore, we can safely conclude that the planning and initial hewing of the third chamber took place after the inscribing on the north wall, or at the very least after the inscribing of the circle and crossing lines. The implication is that the tomb boasted multiple phases of use. The obvious phases are: 1) hewing of tomb, 2) hewing of chambers one and two, 3) burial use of first two chambers, and 4) planning and initial work on third chamber. The long history of multi-generational use of hewn tombs supports the interpretation that a need for additional burial space was what prompted the marking and initial work on the third chamber. It is more difficult, however, to ascertain where the inscribing fits within this schedule. It could have taken place 1) simultaneously with the design and hewing of the tomb, 2) after the hewing of the tomb but before the interment of bodies, or 3) after the interment of bodies but before the work on the needed

third chamber. Specific placement of the acts of inscribing within the timeline of the life of the tomb must be based on cultural, religious and other contextual information. What is important here is that despite the lack of explicit burial goods or ritual objects that may support a specific interpretation of the purpose of the inscriptions, the material context does provide important information regarding the relationship of the inscriptions to the use of the tomb. The inscribing took place after the hewing of the tomb antechamber and the first two chambers.

The data available for the two tombs at el-Qôm, like that from Beit Lei, is rather limited. It is difficult to discern the relationship between the inscriptions and the hewing of the cave or burial use of the space. Both tombs had already been disturbed at the time of study, but questioning of the villagers and the fact that there was very little debris in Tomb II led Dever to believe that it was found well-sealed and undisturbed at the time it was robbed.[331] Tomb I had apparently been disturbed in antiquity, as evidenced by considerable silt and few finds in the tomb. The two inscriptions labeling chamber three in this tomb included the personal name ʿÔpay as well as his family connection. This may have served as a simple label of who owned the chamber, but more likely indicated the identity of someone interred there. Because the content of these inscriptions aligns with what is expected in mortuary contexts, it is not difficult to see the relationship between the inscriptions from Tomb II and their setting. The ʾUriyahu inscription from Tomb II was situated between chambers one and two, and includes a personal name and title. However, it has been categorized as anything from a slightly irregular epitaph to a refugee graffito,

[331] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 142, 149.

since its content is different from other Iron Age epitaphs and it is shallowly and somewhat informally inscribed.[332] The only things that can be stated with certainty regarding the relationship of the inscriptions to the space at el-Qôm are that the inscriptions were inscribed after the hewing of the tomb, that they were all situated facing the main chamber and that each was associated with a specific chamber.

Despite the lack of more specific data, we know for certain the inscriptions were situated in a space both intended and used for burial purposes, a fact that a material analysis of the inscriptions takes seriously. Caves can be entered repeatedly, a factor that automatically leaves the relationship between the hewing, burial use, and other uses of the space open to speculation. But whether the incising of the inscriptions was connected to the hewing of the tombs or to a subsequent use of the space related or unrelated to the interment of bodies, the burial nature of the space was still known to the inscribers and would have played a role in their selection of that particular space for the inscriptions.

Besides the reminder that the burial space is an inescapable facet of the cave inscriptions, a material and spatial analysis also brings out factors that have been mentioned in other chapters. The caves were hewn in chalk or soft Eocene limestone, meaning that the execution of the inscriptions would have been relatively easy when compared to other Iron Age stone inscriptions.[333] The inscriptions were all arranged

---

[332] For example, Dever originally presented this inscription as a tomb inscription including the elements of name and title and an emphasis of the favored relationship between the deities and the deceased (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 167). On the other end of the spectrum, Parker suggests the ʾUriyahu inscription is a refugee inscription giving testimony to the deliverance offered him by Yahweh and Asherah at that site (Parker, "Graves, Caves and Refugees," 282).

[333] Eocene limestone was used for hewing burial caves throughout the Shephelah (Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* [JSOTSS 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992], 19-20). Dever described the material from which the el-Qôm tombs were hewn as Senonian chalk (Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 142). Naveh originally referred to the stone of the Beit Lei tomb as

spatially in relation to the chamber entrances or bench niches, portraying some kind of planning despite the apparent lack of preparation when compared with more formal tomb inscriptions.[334] Differences in hand, combined with evidence of distinct tools being used, convey the message that the inscribing was done by multiple inscribers or at different times. This variety of material and spatial features, along with the unmistakably burial nature of the space, must be kept in mind when considering possibilities regarding the inscribers and their purposes in inscribing the text and images on the cave walls.

It has often been assumed that if the inscriptions do not align with what is expected in formal epitaphs, they must not be related to the funerary nature of the space. A material analysis of the cave inscriptions challenges this assumption. Rather than minimizing the burial nature of the setting, viewing the caves as inscribed artifacts requires reworking the question. It is easy to look at the comparative examples and ask, "Are the cave inscriptions funerary inscriptions?" A different, but more informative, question should be, "How might the function of the cave inscriptions be related to their burial context?" Viewed in this light, the cave inscriptions provide the impetus for an examination of how the purposes of the inscriptions and the purposes of hewn burial caves might relate.

---

"soft limestone" (Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions," 74). When I visited the Beit Lei cave site in May 2015, the remaining bench areas were filled with fine, chalky powder eroded from the chamber areas not damaged during road construction. This made me wonder if the surface rock here is actually chalk. But most publications describe the stone as limestone.

[334] See the schematic of each wall of the Beit Lei antechamber presented in Chapter Two, figures 2.2, 2.15 and 2.36. For a spatial presentation of the el-Qôm inscriptions, see Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," figures 2-6, and plates II:A, IV:A, and VI:A.

## THE FUNCTION OF INSCRIBING IN MORTUARY CONTEXTS

Inscribing in mortuary contexts in the ancient world functioned in a number of ways, but two main themes stand out when surveying the evidence from the southern Levant. Inscribing served to indicate identity—either the identity of the owner of the space or the person(s) interred within. An extension of this function is the commemorative or even memorializing power of an inscribed name. The other main function played by inscribing in mortuary contexts was protective. Curses, as well as declarations regarding the lack of valuables, served apotropaic purposes, deterring potential tomb robbers and warning of the divine protection activated (by conditional curse or sworn oath) in that space. Examining these functions of inscribing more carefully, it becomes evident that the inscribing done in the tombs would have served similar purposes whether or not it was connected with the interment of bodies.

### Indicating Identity

The simplest and most obvious purpose writing serves in mortuary contexts is in its role of labeling space. There are two sub-categories of labeling mortuary space—indicating ownership of a given space and indicating the identity of those interred there. These functions, of course, overlap in many instances. For example, the Royal Steward Inscription from Silwan begins, "This is [the sepulcher of …]yahu who is over the house…"[335] The next line however, indicates that the steward's wife was also interred within the tomb. Thus, the name found in an epitaph could identify the deceased and the head of the family who owned the tomb or chamber. A similar function is evident in the epitaphs labeling chamber

[335] Avigad, "The Epitaph of a Royal Steward," *IEJ* 3 (1953): 143.

three in el-Qôm Tomb I. "Belonging to 'Ophai, son of Netanyahu, (is) this tomb-chamber."[336] This label may have indicated the name of an individual interred within; but the benches and repository inside show that the name also would have indicated belonging for others—likely family members—who were also buried there. Tomb inscriptions, then, could label both ownership of a space and the identity of the deceased.

At Beit Lei, the most common argument against viewing the inscriptions as mortuary inscriptions has to do with the lack of personal names. Before this apparent lack is taken as the last word, however, it is worth noting that iconography could also signify identity. Seals are a good example of how the role of signifying identity could be played by both incised words and incised images. The figures situated around each chamber at Beit Lei are distinct and it is possible they were intended to identify the owners of the space or individuals interred therein. But whether or not the inscriptions were related to the burial use of the space, they must have served to identify persons or polities.

Inscribed names in a variety of settings served commemorative purposes. Beyond indicating the identity of the inscriber, an inscribed name or representational symbol memorialized that identity in a specific physical place. Epigraphic remains ranging from graffiti to monumental royal inscriptions illustrate this commemorative function of inscribing. An extension of this function is the idea that an inscribed name could actually embody the essence of a person or represent their presence in perpetuity. This extended understanding of the memorializing potential of an inscribed name is alluded to in Exodus

[336] Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 151. The ink inscription above the door was not well preserved, but it probably contained the same phrase as the deeply incised inscription to the left of the chamber entrance (Lemaire, "Les Inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH," *RB* 84 [1977]: 597).

32:32 where Moses says "blot me out of the book you have written."[337] The implication is that the written name represents the essence of the person and that by effacing the inscribed name, the identity or perpetuity of the person is impacted. The Katumuwa inscription, which includes a reference to Katumuwa's "'soul' that (will be) in this stele," may also illustrate this concept.[338] Thus, an inscribed name indicated, or even preserved, one's identity. This function holds true in a variety of contexts, including both epitaphs and inscriptions not specifically related to burial.

## Apotropaic Inscribing

Writing in mortuary contexts also served apotropaic purposes. The apotropaic use of inscribed curses is well known throughout the ancient Near East. Conditional curses were used to protect spaces, property, and inscriptions. The brief and cryptic nature of the curses from Beit Lei makes it difficult to determine exactly what they were intended to protect or curse. The curses are not specific like the curse found in the Royal Steward Inscription, "Cursed be the man who will open this!"[339] In specifically mortuary contexts, curses often served to protect the burial space and/or those interred there. In this regard,

---

[337] The same verb (מחה) is used in Exodus 17:14 "wipe out the remembrance of" and also in Numbers 5:23 where the priest "wipes off" or washes off the curse into the water, which the accused woman is made to drink as part of a type of incantation ritual.

[338] Dennis Pardee, "The Katumuwa Inscription," in *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East* (eds. V. R. Herrmann & J. D. Schloen; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014), 45. The concept of a name being identified with the person it signifies, and therefore being instrumental in self-preservation, is explored by Karen Radner in her book, *Die Macht des Namens: Altorientlische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005).

[339] Avigad, "The Epitaph of a Royal Steward," 143. Another common form of the protective curse in funerary contexts is found on the Ahiram sarcophagus. "And if a king among kings or a governor among governors or the commander of an army should rise up against Byblos and uncover this sarcophagus, may the scepter of his rule be uprooted, may the throne of his kingship be overturned, and may peace depart from Byblos! And as for him, may his inscription be effaced with the double edge of a chisel" ("The Sarcophagus Inscriptions of ʾAhirom, King of Byblos," translated by P. Kyle McCarter [*COS* 2.55: 181]).

the placement of inscribed curses in the Beit Lei cave is noteworthy. The word *ʾrr* is inscribed in various forms in four places: to the left of the entrance to chamber one, to the left of the entrance to chamber two, in the space marked out for chamber three, and again on the north wall midway between the tomb entrance and the rear wall. Thus, three instances of the word seem to mark a specific chamber, perhaps serving to protect the space and ward off possible intruders from entering the chamber or disturbing the bodies.

Inscribed curses could also serve to protect the accompanying inscriptions. Given the representative, and even embodying, potential of inscribed names, it makes sense why protective curses were activated against anyone who would dare to efface the name on an inscribed stela. A similar function was apparently served by the curse inscribed in the Ein Gedi cave—"Cursed be he who will efface."[340] And Parker argues that the longer Beit Lei curse phrase should be read this way, too, in line with curse phrases in memorial inscriptions used "to try to discourage anyone inclined to change or damage the accompanying inscription for his own benefit and so to damage the reputation or fate of the original author."[341] He considers this purpose "quite distinct from the curse characteristic of tomb inscriptions."[342] In contrast, I would argue that this is another illustration that the same purpose can be served by an inscription whether or not it was specifically related to interment of the dead. Curses in both cases served to protect the identity and perpetuity of an individual or family. Overall, then, the observations usually cited to show the non-funerary nature of the cave inscriptions are legitimate. The cave inscriptions are not

---

[340] Bar-Adon, "An Early Hebrew Inscription in a Judean Desert Cave," *IEJ* 25 (1975): 228.

[341] Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees," 262.

[342] *Ibid*.

traditional formal epitaphs. However, when it comes to understanding the function of the inscribing, the purpose of the inscriptions would have been similar whether or not they were funerary inscriptions, in the usual narrow understanding of that classification.

THE CAVE INSCRIPTIONS AS MORTUARY INSCRIBING

The cave inscriptions—even those often categorized as non-funerary inscriptions—seem to have served the same purposes as inscriptions traditionally classified as funerary inscriptions or formal epitaphs. Just as formal epitaphs served to commemorate and protect identity and legacy, so the cave inscriptions that do not appear to have been directly related to the burial use of the tomb space served to memorialize the inscribers and effect protection on behalf of the family or community. Therefore, rather than seeking an either/or classification of the inscriptional material, it is more useful to explore the interrelationship between the function of the inscribing and the function of the space. This redirected effort reveals that whether or not the cave inscriptions are funerary inscriptions in the traditional sense of the designation, their purposes were certainly related to the cultural significance and purposes of the hewn burial caves in which they were situated.

## The Cultural Significance of Hewn Burial Caves

The space in which the inscriptions were inscribed would have held layers of meaning for someone living in ancient Judah. Hewn burial caves were a distinctive feature of Judean culture from the division of the kingdom in the late eighth century to the Babylonian conquest.[343] Such burial caves with benches or niches are occasionally found in

[343] Irit Yezerski, "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah toward the End of the Iron Age." *Tel Aviv* 26 (1999): 253-70. Bloch-Smith notes that the proliferation of this tomb form actually

Late Bronze age contexts, but become widespread only in the Iron Age II. They are significant in that their design was intended to facilitate multiple burials, with many tombs even having a repository dug out to hold bones and burial goods removed from the benches or niches as additional burials needed to be accommodated. For the inscribers, as residents of Judah during the Iron Age II, the tomb space would have held layers of meaning.[344]

The cave inscriptions were situated in caves that were carved out, or at least expanded and finished, by human beings making up part of society in the southern Shephelah during the first millennium B.C.E. Analysis of both the tomb forms and the letter-forms used in the inscriptions suggest a narrower window within the Iron Age II, most likely between the mid-eighth century and the early sixth century. The decision to inscribe the various words and images on the walls of the tombs involved a decision—whether above or below cognitive awareness—that would have been culturally determined. In order to understand this decision, it is necessary to consider what the space would have represented or meant to people living in Iron II Judah.

---

began in the tenth century, but that by the eighth century the bench tomb was "the definitive Judahite form of burial" (Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 22-23).

[344] This analysis does not pursue the multi-directional questions of meaning-making often associated with a semiotics approach. However, this could be a valid arena of inquiry. James Osborne hints at this type of semiotic analysis of the cave inscriptions in the introduction to his article on hewn burial caves: "A regular, widespread, and symbolically meaningful secondary mortuary practice existed in Judah. Finally, I investigate the significance this type of skeletal treatment has for our understanding of Judahite religion and social structure, arguing that this practice necessitates our acceptance of a ritual veneration of ancestors. The article concludes with the argument that the bench tomb and the human actions associated with it need to be seen not simply as reflections of, but as *active agents upon*, Judah's kinship-oriented social structure" (James F. Osborn, "Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah," *JNES* 70 [2011]: 35 [emphasis mine]).

Both Mazar and Barkay pointed out many years ago that the form of the rock-cut tombs, like the form of the Israelite four-room house, reflected the structure of society in ancient Israel and Judah, centered around the family unit or clan.[345] Grave assemblages provide additional support to an interpretation of the hewn tombs as representing a family house for the dead.[346] Faust and Bunimowitz point out that, while the four-room house was in use over a long period of time spanning from the twelfth century, this form of the rock-cut tomb became common only in the eighth century. They argue that the emergence of the rock-cut tomb in eighth-century Judah was "the sociological and ideological response of the extended family—the biblical *bēt ʾab*—to a series of late Iron Age II threats upon its unity and coherence."[347] It offered an element of permanence in an otherwise volatile environment. Homes and villages could be destroyed. Families could be separated and people displaced. But a hewn family burial chamber could immortalize in stone, so-to-speak, the "house of the fathers" or the family unit with which almost every individual identified.

The hewn tombs at Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm would have represented local family identity in a number of ways. The form of the tombs, as mentioned above, represented the "house of the fathers," and more specifically, Judean identity in the Iron Age II. The form of the tomb also made a statement regarding the status of the owner and

---

[345] Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000-586 BCE*.1st ed. (Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1990), 521; Gabriel Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," in *Graves and Burial Practices in Israel in the Ancient Period* (ed. I. Singer; Tel Aviv: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1994), 147-52 (in Hebrew).

[346] Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 469. For a systematic overview of grave goods, see Elizabeth Bloch-Smith*, Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead,* 63-108.

[347] Avraham Faust and Shlomo Bunimowitz, "The Judahite Rock-cut Tomb," *IEJ* 58:2 (2008): 151.

his family. It is evident from the small number of hewn tombs compared to the estimated size of the general population that many people continued to be buried in simple graves. Therefore a hewn tomb, even with slightly uneven chambers and molding, would have belonged to someone from the upper echelons of society. The form of the hewn burial caves, according to Faust and Bunimowitz, also represented "generational continuity" and "possession of land."[348] Thus, the burial caves where the inscriptions were found served not only as a place to inter the family dead, but also as a concrete representation of the family unit, their status, and their claim to the land where they lived and worked.

### The Alignment of Space and Purpose in the Cave Inscriptions

The setting selected for an inscription in the ancient world was integrally connected to the purpose of that inscription.[349] Despite their unusual content, this is still true in the case of the cave inscriptions from Beit Lei and el-Qôm Tomb II. And even though they do not seem to be related to the burial use of the space, the function of the inscriptions and the

---

[348] Faust and Bunimowitz also point out that in addition to revealing social status and beliefs about the dead, the tombs also "appear to stress generational continuity and the permanent nature of the family as well, and probably also the possession of land" (Faust and Bunimowitz, "The Judahite Rock-cut Tomb," 154). Faust's conclusions regarding the social archaeology of ancient Israel and Judah have met with challenges (see, for instance, Aren Maeir's review of Faust, *The Archaeology of Israelite Society in the Iron II* in RBL 9 [2013]). But regardless of whether or not one agrees that the four-room house (and by extension the hewn chambered tomb) represents the social structure of society, the rock cut tomb would still represent a material and lasting link to the land.

[349] The placement of inscribed words speaks volumes regarding their intended purposes. This connection between the purpose and selecting setting of an inscription was discussed in the previous chapter in the section on the people and purposes of graffiti. Those same observations apply to other categories of inscriptions as well. The selected setting—including immediate material context and position within the larger socio-cultural context—provides numerous hints of what those responsible for a given inscription intended to accomplish by means of the inscribed words or images. Consider objects such as the Esarhaddon Succession Treaty plaque in the Tayinat temple, some *kudurru*s, the Silwan epitaphs, the Siloam Tunnel (Commemorative) Inscription, the Gibeon jar handle inscriptions, the Ketef Hinnom amulets, and numerous seals and ostraca. Each was discovered in a specific setting and written on specific material objects, factors that are integrally connected to a full understanding of the purpose of the inscriptions.

function of the space nevertheless align in many ways. The Uriyahu inscription commemorates the identity of the inscriber(s) and the blessing and protection provided by Yahweh. And even though they do not include any decipherable names or patronymics, the Beit Lei inscriptions also commemorate identity (through the unique features of each figure) and allegiance to Yahweh (through the prayers of praise and petition). Along the same lines, hewn chambered burial caves commemorated the family unit and facets of their identity such as their status and the land they called home. The same analogy can be made between the protective and preservative functions of both the inscribing and the space. Burial caves housed the family dead, with bodies being laid on the benches at the time of burial and subsequently added to the repository when the bench space was needed for another burial. The caves were one of the spaces where the dead were gathered to, or lay down with, their fathers. There the dead were united with kin and provided for by surviving family members. Indeed proper burial was thought to preserve ones identity after death. Similarly the inscribed names at el-Qom immortalized in stone the identity of Uriyahu and Daniyahu, thereby preserving their identity or even essential existence. At Beit Lei, the curses served protective functions, regardless whom one considers to be object of the curses. If they were intended to bring a curse upon an individual or entity threatening the community, they served, by extension, to protect the inscribers. If they were intended to curse someone intruding or disturbing the burials, they would have functioned to protect those interred in the tomb, and thereby the family unit.

This observation is in no way incompatible with the common observations regarding the haphazard appearance and lack of planning evident in the placement of the inscriptions. Graffiti in the ancient world often shows a relationship between the space and

the purpose of the inscribing. Karen Stern's work on the graffiti from Beit She'arim illustrates this point. After carefully studying the inscriptions, Stern argued that despite the clear difference between the epitaphs and the graffiti at Beth She'arim, the graffiti can nevertheless be interpreted as gifts to the dead—protecting and providing for those interred there as well as their families.[350] In other words, the settings chosen for the inscriptions were integrally connected with the intents of the inscribers, despite the unusual content and the time gap between the original design and burial use of the space and the later inscriptions. Similarly, I believe the mortuary settings of the caves at Beit Lei and el-Qôm were selected by the inscribers because they aligned with the purposes of the inscriptions.

Delving deeper into the possible reasons for selecting the burial space for the inscriptions in question, the argument of the previous chapter—that the inscriptions represent vestiges of ritual practice—provides another reason why a mortuary space would have been fitting. The tomb space would have possessed a certain sanctity or potential as an in between space.[351] This observation is often made in the context of ritual meals on behalf of ancestors, etc. But the same observation is fitting in the context of ritual

[350] Karen B. Stern, "Graffiti as Gift: Mortuary and Devotional Graffiti in the Late Ancient Levant," in *The Gift in Antiquity* (ed. M. L. Satlow; Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 153.

[351] In the context of commemorative rituals carried out in caves, Schmitt makes the following observation: "These locations were not a matter of happenstance; it appears that that locations for ritual meals beneath the earth were chosen solely to provide proximity to the dead and the netherworld. As in the Hebrew Bible, the caves or cisterns were a metaphor for death and the netherworld. Thus, one may interpret them as a kind of forecourt of the netherworld, where the world of the living met the world of the dead" (Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant,* 469). Viewed in this light, hewn burial caves would not only have signified family unity and perpetuity but also served as a space through which other realms or additional divine power could be accessed. In ancient Egypt, the connection of divine power and tombs was even more explicit, probably due to their beliefs regarding life after death. Robert Ritner points out that the one factor that unites all execration figures that have been found *in situ* is their location in a burial setting (Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magic* [Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993], 172-3). This illustrates how the divine power associated with burial space could serve to make other inscribing more efficacious.

inscribing. If an inscription were intended to benefit the family—deceased or living, it would make sense to inscribe it in the family tomb. Here the inscriptions could immortalize identity and harness the efficacious potential inherent in tomb space.

## CONCLUSIONS

Previous publications have focused on categorizing the inscriptions as either funerary or not funerary, primarily on the basis of a comparison of the content with the very limited corpus of other Iron Age tomb inscriptions. In contrast, I would argue that whether or not the inscriptions were connected to the mortuary use of the tombs, the space would have held meaning for the inscribers. So in an expanded sense the inscriptions should still be considered mortuary inscriptions. The inscribers selected the burial caves as the appropriate space in which to place the inscriptions. Therefore the purpose of the inscriptions must align in some way with the purpose of the space. Whether or not the inscriptions were inscribed in connection with the design or burial use of the tombs, the inscribing nevertheless functioned to commemorate and protect family identity and was not merely coincidental.

## **Beit Lei**

The Beit Lei tomb represents a mid-range hewn burial cave, as evidenced by the lack of headrests and lamp niches, the uneven molding around the antechamber and the relatively even but not completely smoothed wall surfaces. The first two chambers were used for burial, as evidenced by skeletal remains on all benches. At some point a third chamber was marked, but the hewing of this chamber was never completed. It is difficult to determine the precise relationship between the inscriptions and the tomb space. But the

setting for the inscriptions is unmistakably mortuary in nature. The inscriptions are placed around the chamber entrances, with text and image mixed. They exhibit formulary and other conventions that betray some level of expertise on the part of the inscriber, but at the same time they appear haphazard and do not form a coherent unit. Taking a narrow definition of "funerary," as inscribing that was directly related to the design or burial use of the tomb, it is possible to argue for either a funerary or non-funerary classification of the inscriptions.

A funerary interpretation of the Beit Lei inscriptions argues that some or all of the inscribed material was related in some way to the burial use of the space. The cave in which all the Beit Lei inscriptions were found is unquestionably an Iron Age chambered tomb, hewn specifically for burial purposes. Therefore prioritizing the location when classifying the inscriptions automatically connects them with funerary function. The presence and placement of curses also lend support to this interpretation. Curses are common in mortuary contexts, and the specific term *ʾrr* is the same term found in the protective curse at the end of the Royal Steward Inscription. Strengthening the case even further is the fact that there is a curse in the vicinity of each chamber entrance. Thus, the curses may have served an apotropaic function—drawing on divine power and serving as a warning to potential intruders not to enter or otherwise disturb the chambers or those interred within. Additionally, the boats inscribed on the southern wall of the antechamber may represent transferal to, or function in, the afterlife. But the interpretation of the inscriptions as funerary in nature focuses on the curse inscriptions and the presence of undisturbed skeletal remains in each chamber.

The most compelling evidence against a funerary interpretation involves the lack of personal names and funerary goods. Known epitaphs include an identification of the deceased. In addition, no grave goods were found in the cave, despite the fact that almost every undisturbed Iron Age burial included evidence of some kind of funerary provisions. The placement of the inscriptions and the lack of preparation of the space also set these inscriptions apart from confirmed funerary inscriptions.[352] Close examination of stroke order and style also reveal phases of inscribing—either involving multiple people around the same time, or time gaps between acts of inscribing. These factors make it feasible to argue that the inscriptions actually represent an unconventional use of the space, although this interpretation (often described as a refugee hypothesis) presents its own challenges as well.

There are enough differences in the setting and content of the inscriptions to support the common argument that the Beit Lei inscriptions were not inscribed in connection with the traditional interment of bodies. But the commemorative and apotropaic functions common to formal epitaphs are nevertheless applicable. The burial cave at Beit Lei would have held significance as liminal space between the world of the

[352] Other epitaphs are situated in a carefully prepared space, such as a carved recess or a jam or molding hewn above a door. For instance, the Royal Steward inscription (shown above) was carefully inscribed in a clearly carved recess above the door in the façade of the tomb (Na'aman Avigad, "The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village," 137). Another brief inscription, situated in a carved recess, labeled a side room of the same tomb. For a photo of this inscription, see A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 47. An example that appears to have been situated on the façade but not within a carved recess is a poorly preserved inscription on Silwan Tomb 34. See A Reifenberg, "A Newly Discovered Hebrew Inscription of the Pre-exilic Period," *JPOS* 48 (1948): 134-7; and David Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 180-8; A□ituv, *Echoes from the Past,* 48-49. The epitaphs from Tomb I at el-Qôm also exhibit a smoothed and prepared space for the inscriptions. By contrast, none of the Beit Lei inscriptions throughout the tomb antechamber were situated in a carefully smoothed or prepared space. The placement of many of the Beit Lei inscriptions on the walls of the antechamber also differs from other epitaphs, which tend to be situated near the entrance to a specific chamber. Both the lack of a prepared setting for the inscriptions and their placement on the walls of the main tomb chambers portray a non-formal or non-traditional use of writing within the tomb.

living and the world of the dead and also as a concrete representation of family identity and perpetuity in the land. The inscribers tapped into this potential and meaning when they selected the tomb walls as the setting for the inscriptions.

## El-Qôm

The inscriptions in Tomb I at el-Qôm are traditional epitaphs, even showing a certain level of planning and preparation of the space not present in the other cave inscriptions. But the ʾUriyahu inscription is not as easily classified. It does contain the expected personal name and title, though it does not identify the ancestral line. It also names the object, but instead of naming the chamber (חדר) or tomb (רקב), it names the inscription (כתב). It does not include any mention of the contents of the burial nor any curse against potential intruders. Like the Beit Lei inscriptions, it could be interpreted as being related to the interment of bodies in the tomb, or to a different event. The blessing and dedicatory content combined with the overwriting and the image of a hand reveal the efficacious nature of the inscribing. And whether the inscribing was done on behalf of the living or the dead, the tomb setting would have further strengthened the efficacy of the inscribing and any ceremony that may have accompanied it.[353]

[353] In his analysis of the Ketef Hinnom amulets, Jeremy Smoak compares them to the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm and makes an interesting observation regarding the use of inscribing or inscribed objects in tomb contexts: "To be sure, there are differences between the purposes of the two sets of inscriptions. Still, the fact that both employ blessings in tombs would seem to allow for the conclusion that some in ancient Judah believed that the act of writing blessings in such contexts formed an important means through which to guarantee their efficacy for the dead" (Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24-26* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2016], 55).

# CHAPTER 6—INNOVATIVE INSCRIBING
## The Cave Inscriptions as Responses to Transition or Crisis

Contexts of change or upheaval in the ancient world were prime times for making use of the enduring potential of inscribing.[354] The context of upheaval and threat of invasion in the Shephelah during the final centuries of the Iron Age may provide a useful hint for unpacking the complexities of the cave inscriptions and understanding why the inscribers selected the cave walls as the setting for the inscriptions. As discussed in the previous chapters, there are certain elements of the burial cave inscriptions that do not accord with what is expected in mortuary contexts. This is especially true of the Beit Lei corpus. The content of the inscriptions simply does not conform to patterns observed in other epitaphs or funerary inscriptions. The most common way scholars have explained this apparent incongruity between the content and form of the Beit Lei inscriptions and their location in a burial chamber is to describe the inscribers as refugees.[355] The refugee hypothesis is useful in the sense that it credits the impetus for an innovative use of inscribing to the context of conflict that beset Judah during the Iron IIB period. At the same time, such hypotheses have not been laid out in detail and many of the assumptions related

[354] Though their public nature sets them apart from the cave inscriptions, inscribed stelae provide a useful example. Consider, for instance, the Tel Dan inscription, a portion of a basalt stela apparently erected to commemorate a recent victory in an area over which Israel and Aram had been contesting the others' hegemony. The inscribed stone stood as a way to perpetuate the recent, though perhaps not decisive, victory. A similar observation applies to Phoenician inscriptions from the Iron Age, such as the Kilamuwa inscription—a huge stone slab advertising the legitimacy of the king. Ironically, the size of the monument as well as the proclamations of success and protective conditional curses convey the message that his power and goodness may not have been as absolute as he claims. At the least, the stone inscription in fine raised relief illustrates the use of inscribing in a time of transition. These are only two of many examples of inscribing utilized in contexts of crisis or unrest for the sake of commemorating identity or ensuring perpetuity.

[355] These refugees are variously defined as family, Levites, people who lived in the cave temporarily during a crisis, or people who were hanging out in the tomb before it was used for burial.

to the term *refugee* do not fit the cave inscriptions when viewed in their ancient Near Eastern context. Following a survey and assessment of the assumptions and connotations associated with a refugee interpretation, this chapter will explore the cave inscriptions as evidence of an innovative use of inscribing in times of transition or crisis.

## EXPLAINING THE INCONGRUITIES—THE REFUGEE HYPOTHESIS

A variety of publications have explained the apparent incongruities between the content and context of the Beit Lei inscriptions by attributing them to refugees. Naveh, in his original publication of the inscriptions, noted the religious nature of the inscriptions, but considered unsatisfactory an explanation of the inscriptions as prayers related to burial. He therefore suggested they were inscribed by people in a time of crisis who took refuge in a family burial cave.[356] Cross noted the inappropriate nature of the drawings and prayers in a burial context and suggested "a refugee fleeing the Chaldeans" in the early sixth century was responsible for at least the three petitionary inscriptions.[357] Parker used the Beit Lei inscriptions as primary evidence in an article on the refugee use of caves, with his criteria for selecting data being the differentiation between inscriptions related to the burial of the dead and inscriptions left by refugees.[358] Specific facets of the inscriptional content that do not conform to expectations regarding funerary inscriptions include the complete lack of personal names or patronymics (PN, son of PN, etc.) and the various forms of the word *ʾrr* "curse" without the expected phrase directing the malediction against

---

[356] Joseph Naveh, "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave," *IEJ* 13 (1963): 89-90, 92.

[357] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* (ed. J. A. Sanders; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), 303.

[358] Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory," *JSOT* 27 (2003): 260-70. Parker also argued that the ʾUriyahu inscription from el-Qôm should be considered a refugee inscription.

anyone who might disturb the space or the remains of the deceased. The various designations of the writers as refugees, then, are basically acknowledgements of the unconventional inscriptional content and use of the space, reconciled by focusing on the fact that the inscriptions date to the period of the Assyrian and Babylonian incursions that significantly impacted the Judean Shephelah.

The term *refugee* carries a plethora of connotations, and definitions articulated by sociologists and anthropologists range from referring to anyone whose "social context has been disturbed," to much more complicated definitions involving the crossing of state boundaries and the specific needs represented by the displaced individuals.[359] In the context of the cave inscriptions, the more general definition, referencing displaced people who are temporarily using a given space, is all that scholars seem to mean when denoting the inscribers as refugees. This interpretation utilizes a *longue durée* approach, noting multiple examples over many centuries illustrating the use of caves by people in crisis situations. The land of Israel is dotted with caves and both textual and archaeological

---

[359] Marx employs a minimal definition: "A refugee is a person whose social world has been disturbed" (Emanuel Marx, "The Social World of Refugees: A Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 3:3 [1990]: 190). Another description that more explicitly references the violence and separation inherent in many refugee contexts is articulated by Harrell-Bond and Voutira: "In anthropological terms, refugees are people who have undergone a violent 'rite' of separation and unless or until they are 'incorporated' as citizens into their host state (or returned to their state of origin) find themselves in 'transition', or in a state of 'liminality'" (B. E. Harrell-Bond and E. Voutira, "Anthropology and the Study of Refugees," *Anthropology Today* 8: 4 [1992]: 7). The United Nations defines a refugee as "an individual who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or, who, not having a nationality or being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it;" this definition, while including more "willingness" caveats than would have likely applied in ancient Israel, points out the issues of nationality and political boundaries (United Nations, "Article 1(2)," [U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: United Nations, 1951], referenced in Aaron Burke, "An Anthropological Model for the Investigation of the Archaeology of Refugees in Iron Age Judah and its Environs" in *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* [eds. B. E. Kelle, F. R. Ames and J. Wright; Atlanta: SBL, 2011], 43).

sources mention the use of caves during times of crisis. Indeed, the refugee use of caves is a practice that transcends time periods.[360]

The Hebrew Bible and later historians such as Josephus provide multiple references to the use of caves by refugees. The main connotation associated with caves in the Hebrew Bible is summed up well in Jeremiah 7:11. "Has this house, which is called by my name, become a *den* (*mĕʿārâ*) of robbers in your sight?" Another way to translate this phrase would be "a cave of vagabonds;" or "a bandit's cave." A survey of the use of the word *mĕʿārâ* in the Hebrew Bible reveals only one use of the term in connection to burial—the cave at Machpelah purchased by Abraham from a Hittite for use as the family burial ground.[361] The remaining references to caves are in the context of refuge—shelter for people fleeing for their lives or needing a temporary shelter, a safe place for people banding together on the fringes of society.[362] Looking over these references, a number of

---

[360] Parker writes, "While the Bible gives us a general impression of frequent conflicts on the soil of Judah and of the use of caves and occasionally graves as refuges, these inscriptions provide more direct testimony to the dangers to which vulnerable parties were exposed, the extreme conditions in which they sought refuge, and the religious expressions that sustained them. The availability of such caves and graves, the variety of references to their use in the literature, and the archaeological evidence of their use in earlier and later times means that such experiences were perennial—a recurrent byproduct of the recurrent conflicts in the ancient societies of the Palestinian hill country" (Simon Parker, "Graves, Caves and Refugees," 285).

[361] Genesis 23:9, 11, 17, 19, 20; 25:9; 49:29, 30, 32; 50:13.

[362] Five kings of Canaan hid, and later were buried, in a cave at Makkedah (Joshua 10:16-18, 22, 23, 27). When the Israelites were in distress, they hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns (1 Samuel 13:6). David hid from Saul in the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1; 2 Samuel 23:13; 1 Chronicles 11:15. 1 Samuel 24 also records David hiding in a cave from Saul). Obadiah hid one hundred prophets of the Lord in a cave to protect them from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:2-4, 13. Elijah also hid in a cave (1 Kings 19:9, 13). And prophetic oracles include references to hiding in caves in desperate times For example: "Enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth (Isaiah 2:19); "For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks (Isaiah 32:14); "Say this to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and those who are in the open field I will give to the wild animals to be devoured; and those who are in strongholds and in caves shall die by pestilence" (Ezekiel 33:27); "Our pursuers were swifter

themes emerge. Caves were used in desperate situations—most often in groups, not individually. The people seeking refugee were not necessarily poor people or disenfranchised people, but people from any walk of life that somehow found themselves at odds with the group currently holding power in the area. The same trends continue in texts from later periods.[363]

Archaeological evidence also reveals that the refugee use of caves was and is a common practice in the southern Levant.[364] Perhaps the most explicit archaeological evidence showing refugee use of caves is that dating to the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Publications of this material divide the evidence into two main categories: hiding complexes, which were hewn out below ancient settlements, and refuge caves, which were

---

than eagles in the skies; On the hills they pursued us, in the wilderness they ambushed us" (Lamentations 4:19). The headings of Psalms 57 and 142 both reference David's hiding in a cave when he was fleeing.

[363] 1 Maccabees describes the Romans attacking the rebels on a Sabbath: "Then the enemy quickly attacked them. But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places" (1 Maccabees 2:35-37). This description implies not only the potential offensive efforts those hiding in the cave could use, but also the possibility of blocking up entrances so that the hiding place was not visible. Josephus gives similar accounts from the First Jewish War. "Herod went in haste against the robbers that were in the caves. These caves were in mountains that were exceedingly abrupt" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 14.15.5). Another account found in *Wars of the Jews* speaks of people fleeing out of the city through "impracticable valleys, where no guards were placed, as also through subterraneous caverns" (*Wars of the Jews* 4.1.7). See also *Wars of the Jews* 4.9.3-4.

[364] When asking questions regarding the refugee use of space in the ancient world, a number of challenges must be confronted. Unlike modern anthropological research centered on refugee phenomena, we are not able to visit and interview living people who are experiencing or have experienced displacement. Therefore, our analysis must work from textual references, and hints of population movement found in the archaeological record. Aaron Burke, in his recent work on exile in the ancient Levant, has offered an adaptation of the Impoverishment Risks and Resettlement model as a possible way to collect and assess a variety of data that could contribute to our understanding of refugees in Iron Age II Israel. The categories of data included in this model are: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, access to common property assets, and community or social disarticulation. See Aaron Burke, "An Anthropological Model for the Investigation of the Archaeology of Refugees in Iron Age Judah and its Environs," 41-56; and Aaron Burke, "Coping with the Effects of War: Refugees in the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages." in *Disaster and Relief Management* (ed. A. Berlejung; Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 263-87;

natural caves usually found outside settled areas.[365] Material culture remains associated with these hiding places help date their preparation and use to the period of the revolt.

It is, of course, difficult to prove how a specific space was used in antiquity. The archaeological evidence cited in support of refugee use of a given space is not all equally persuasive. For instance, finds such as textiles, pottery, jewelry, and charcoal remnants could certainly lead one to believe that people had lived in a cave temporarily. But these would not prove the people in the cave were fleeing from danger or hiding from enemies. Weapons, such as arrowheads and daggers or spears, point to the possibility of people preparing for defense, as do the narrow winding tunnels making up the hiding complexes. Specifically dated evidence, such as coins re-struck during the Bar Kokhba Revolt, provide more substantive evidence that the caves were indeed used by people identifying with the

---

[365] Hiding complexes, numbering over three hundred, have been discovered at 125 Jewish settlements, mostly concentrated in the Judean Shephelah. These complexes demonstrate a significant level of planning. They incorporate previous installations, such as cisterns and storage caverns, connecting many areas of the settlements by means of narrow tunnels. In most cases, it appears that the preparation of the hiding complexes would have rendered the previous use of certain spaces impossible. The complexes are found mainly in the Judean Shephelah, with some in the Hebron and Beth El mountains as well. Some scholars believe complexes found in Galilee also belong to this group, though no explicit evidence such as coins have been found there to connect the complexes specifically to the Bar Kokhba Revolt. The main body of these hiding complexes date primarily to before and during the Bar Kokhba Revolt, showing an intentional preparation for a large-scale revolt. The tunnels, some extending far outside the boundary of the settlement, facilitated both last-minute escape attempts and guerilla-type warfare (people could attack from hidden places in the ground those exposed in the open up above; OR, if attackers came into the complex they would be at a severe disadvantage in the turning, low, narrow tunnels against people familiar with the complex who could hide and attack intruders as they came). See Amos Kloner and Yigal Tepper, *The Hiding Complexes in the Judean Shephelah* (Tel Aviv: Israel Exploration Society, 1987) (in Hebrew); and Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu, "Hiding Complexes in Judaea: An Archaeological and Geographical Update on the Area of the Bar Kokhba Revolt," in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered* (ed. Peter Schafer; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 181-216. The other category used to describe caves used during the Bar Kokhba Revolt is Refuge Caves. These are natural caves, found primarily in the Judean Desert, in steep cliffs overlooking the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley. More recently additional examples have been found in the western Judean Mountains. Rich archaeological assemblages found in them make it evident that they served as places of refuge for people who fled for their lives at the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. See Hanan Eshel and David Amit, *Refuge Caves of the Bar Kokhba Revolt* (Tel Aviv: Israel Exploration Society, 1998) (in Hebrew); and Boaz Zissu, Ro'I Porat, Boaz Langford and Amos Frumkin, "Archaeological remains of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in the Te'omim Cave (Mŭghâret Umm et Tûeimîm), Western Jerusalem Hills," *JJS* 62: 2 (2011): 262-83.

rebels during the period of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Archives, such as those found in the Cave of the Letters that included letters between the leaders of the revolt, also provide strong evidence of refugee use of caves during this specific period.[366] Most convincing are bones found deep in the recesses of a cave, where refugees may have been trapped and starved to death; and coin hoards that were carefully hidden and never recovered.[367] Thus, a variety of archaeological evidence—both structural and artifactual—contributes to our understanding of refugee use of caves in the ancient world.

So why has this interpretation been applied to the cave inscriptions? As mentioned above, the most immediate reason is the tension between the inscriptional content and the burial nature of the caves. This combination of evidence can be difficult to interpret. Therefore, the fact that refugee use of caves is widely attested, along with the recurring conflicts plaguing Judah during the later pre-exilic period to which the inscriptions date, make a refugee interpretation quite natural. A variety of textual references describe the refugees who used caves in times of crisis as groups who were from the middle or even upper levels of society (or whose leaders were upper-class). This aligns with the fact that in ancient Judah only people from the upper echelons of society would have been exposed to the variety of formulae used in the cave inscriptions, or have been able to hire a professional scribe or ritual practitioner to inscribe them on their behalf. Textual sources

---

[366] Yigael Yadin, "Expedition D—The Cave of the Letters," *IEJ* 12:3/4 (1962): 227-57; H. J. Polotsky, "The Greek Papyri from the Cave of the Letters," *IEJ* 12:3/4 (1962): 258-62.

[367] Boaz Zissu et al, "Archaeological remains of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in the Te'omim Cave (Mŭghâret Umm et Tûeimîm), Western Jerusalem Hills," *JJS* 62:2 (2011): 262-83. Another example of caves with material apparently left by people hiding (or at least hiding their valuables) is the discovery of papyrus, seal impressions, coins and bones in the Wadi ed-Daliyeh. See Paul W. Lapp and Nancy L. Lapp, *Discoveries in the Wâdī de-Dâliyeh* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1974).

also mention groups, rather than solitary individuals, making use of caves as hiding places. The variation in style evident in the cave inscriptions suggests multiple inscribers; and the variety of locations of the inscriptions within the tombs, as well as the fact that different tools were used, adds further corroborating evidence to the idea of multiple inscribers.

Overall, then, factors that lead to a refugee interpretation of the inscriptions include: 1) the evidence that caves were used by people in times of crisis throughout the history of the ancient Near East; 2) the fact that there was indeed a series of crises during the time to which the inscriptions are dated; 3) evidence, such as stroke order and style and character forms, implies multiple inscribers; and 4) the fact that the inscriptional content does not conform to the patterns observed in other mortuary contexts. These observations, in different combinations, are used to support the various refugee-type hypotheses. Describing the inscribers as refugees, however, is a broad designation. The generality of the designation leaves open the possibility for more specific questions. Who were the refugees? Were they from the local village or from farther afield? Did they prepare and plan to enter the cave or was it a chance entry as they fled from impending danger? How long did they spend in the cave? Why did they write and draw on the cave walls during their time in the space? While there may not be sufficient data to ascertain all such details, questions such as these lead the discussion beyond an attempt to reconcile the incongruence between the content and the location to produce a more nuanced qualification of the refugee hypothesis.

## Qualifying the Refugee Hypothesis

A detailed examination of comparative material highlights several areas in which a refugee interpretation of the inscriptions should be qualified. Given the context of conflict in Judah from the end of the eighth century to the beginning of the sixth century, it is indeed plausible to attribute the unusual aspects of the inscriptions to some kind of crisis situation. However, in the specifics, one should be careful to make suggestions that align with the broader phenomenon of refugee use of caves as well as the socio-cultural context of ancient Judah. Examples of such qualifying points include: 1) the inscribers were most likely previously connected to the space; 2) their time in the space was probably very limited; and 3) the inscribing of both text and image held significance and was done with specific intentions in mind.

The most important point to consider in the context of qualifying a refugee interpretation is the fact that the caves in question were hewn tombs. Such tombs were family property, passed down from generation to generation or used by kin and extended family. Even if the acts of inscribing were not related to the original hewing of the tombs or to burial ceremonies, the funerary nature of the space would not have been irrelevant to people living in ancient Judah. Beyond the fact that hewn chambered burial caves were closely connected to the family unit, a number of other comparative observations support the assertion that the people inscribing within the cave were previously connected to the space and not simply random refugees wandering the wilderness and coming upon a cave complex in which they decided to hide. Textual evidence from both the Hebrew Bible and Josephus' accounts of the first and second Jewish revolts mention caves almost exclusively in the context of places of refuge. However, the caves mentioned are natural caves, not

hewn tombs. Archaeological evidence from the Bar Kokhba revolt reveals the use of multiple types of hewn chambers such as cisterns and graineries being incorporated into carefully planned systems of tunnels hewn under various settlements. Of the over 130 hiding complexes excavated, only one included a burial chamber; and even that example involved only the antechamber and not the chambers used for burial.[368] Although this comparative evidence is late, the sanctity accorded to burial space in the Hebrew Bible seems to indicate that a similar respect for tombs would have existed even in the Iron Age.[369] In addition, archaeological evidence of refugee use of space almost always shows signs of preparation—whether that be the hewing of the hiding complexes or the stockpiling of resources and hiding of coin hoards in the refuge caves in the Judean desert. Sociological studies of graffiti, a categorization frequently applied to the cave inscriptions, also reveal a tendency for people to use space with which they have a previous connection.[370] Considering the regional set-up of the Judean Shephelah, with agricultural estates surrounding main administrative centers such as Lachish, it seems most reasonable to assume that people familiar with the cave would have been from the local village at Khirbet Beit Lei. While the foreign incursions that decimated the land may have caught some villages by surprise, many people would probably have been aware of the impending danger. Therefore, I would argue that the people responsible for the inscriptions were likely to have been previously affiliated with the space and that the inscriptions are more

[368] Here I refer to a hiding complex at Khirbet Binaya that included a tomb. But even in this instance, the tunnel only went through the corner of the courtyard of the burial cave and did not contact any of the chambers (Kloner and Zissu, "An Archaeological/Geographical Update on the Area of the Bar Kokhba Revolt," 185).

[369] For instance, see Numbers 19:11-22, especially verse 18, which includes instructions for a clean individual to sprinkle (for purification) anyone who has touched a human bone or grave.

[370] See Chapter Three, section entitled "People of Graffiti."

likely to represent preparation for impending disaster than idle carving done by passersby who happened to enter the cave to hide from enemies.

While it may be argued that a crisis would render irrelevant usual conventions regarding the use of burial space, it seems unnecessary to make this allowance in regard to the cave inscriptions. It makes more sense to press the argument further and ask why someone would select burial space as the setting for their inscribing during a time of unrest. Considering the variety of spaces that would have held special meaning to families in ancient Judah, a hewn tomb with its small hidden doorway would have been the locality least likely to be disturbed or decimated by invading foreigners. Local sanctuaries would have been searched for valuables and desecrated, homes would have been ransacked. Agricultural fields would have been raided and livestock threatened or taken. The walls of a hewn tomb, therefore, would have served as the setting most likely to survive beyond the impending disaster. Overall, then, the description of the inscribers as refugees is useful but only with further qualification. The inscribers were likely only refugees in the sense that their use of the cave was inspired by crisis or threatened displacement. Their identity and purpose can further be described as family or kin (or commissioned by such), who entered the space for the purpose of commemorative or ritual inscribing and not for the purpose of residing, even temporarily.

## THE CAVE INSCRIPTIONS AS INNOVATIVE INSCRIBING

The unusual aspects of the cave inscriptions are best explained by interpreting the inscribing as an innovative use of meaningful content and space. As mentioned above, the impetus for this innovative use of inscribing should be credited to the context of conflict

that beset Judah during the period to which the inscriptions date.[371] Burial space represented family identity at a number of levels.[372] And the inscriptional content also signifies family and community identity. The combination of inscribed content and the selection of a funerary setting for the inscribing represent an innovative use of inscribing for commemorative purposes in the face of impending threat.

As discussed in Chapter Four, there are many reasons to view the cave inscriptions as vestiges of a ritual use of the space involving spoken formulae and inscribing and possible other accompanying ritual acts. The remains of inscribed texts and images in the Beit Lei cave seem to represent a ceremony, one aspect of which was the act of incising in stone. This use of the cave would have been innovative in a number of ways. Paul Connerton's work on the "bodily practice" aspects of commemorative ceremonies provides a useful language for exploring the innovative nature of such a ceremony.[373] Connerton distinguishes between incorporating practices—cultural reflexes, or "current bodily

---

[371] The use of inscribing for commemorative purposes is often associated with situations of transition, conflict or unrest. Absalom is said to have erected a monument to himself. Although the reason cited in the text has to do with lack of progeny to carry out this responsibility, the need for a memorial stone would also fit the context of conflict over the kingdom. The Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, with multiple copies discovered in Assyria proper and abroad, was written and disseminated at a time when there was a serious question about succession (a younger son was being given kingship), and a shift of allegiance/loyalty could easily tip the scales.

[372] See Chapter Five for a discussion of the symbolic significance of hewn chambered tombs. Schmitt notes the function of not only the tombs but also the associated practices as marking identity. "The most significant social functions of burial practices in Israel and Judah during the Iron Age II seem to have been the creation, maintenance, and continuation of identity both on local and family levels…As in Neh. 2:1-5, the family tomb was a symbol of the location one identified with and a symbol of family identity" (Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns: 2012], 455).

[373] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72-88. The role of collective or social memory in shaping group identity has been noted in a number of recent studies on Levantine material culture. This collective memory, shared by a specific group of people, strengthens bonds within that group and at the same time brings into sharper relief the boundaries excluding those not part of the group. Never is group identity more important than when a person's social world has been seriously disturbed.

activities" that are mostly automatic, and inscribing practices—actions through which information is physically preserved, usually intentionally, to outlast the people acting at a given moment. Of course, these aspects of human function are both present, to varying degrees, in any given action. Here I use Connerton's observations to bring into sharper relief the complexity of factors most likely influencing what took place in the Beit Lei cave. The tension or paradox, noted by Connerton, between reflex and intent is especially relevant to ritual practice at a time of crisis. Any ritual practice, on account of repetition and cultural symbolism, flows from a degree of automatic actions and internalized responses conditioned by the cultural background and experiences of the participants. When people's social world is disturbed, the new circumstances, paired with a natural desire to preserve their previous milieu, can lead to innovative integration of familiar practices.

One aspect of the innovative nature of the happenings in the Beit Lei cave has to do with the burial location. The family tomb, an important locus for the practice of family religion, would have usually served as one of the settings for mortuary rituals or ancestor rites. However, if the usual sites of family religious practice were threatened or even no longer available, the family tomb may have been selected for uses extending beyond interment and care of the family dead. These uses would most likely have been related to preservation of family identity and claim to the land, a purpose well served in times of upheaval by incising in stone in a hidden and hard-to-access location. In addition, the family tomb would have served as a material link between past and present—multiple generations interred in the family chamber; the deceased being "gathered to their fathers." Inscribing in this space could have served as both an acknowledgement of the family roots

in that village and a way to further memorialize their connection to the space in the event that the family connection was otherwise forever severed.

The informal nature of the graffiti in the cave makes it difficult to ascertain on paleographic grounds the date of the inscriptions as well as the level of proficiency or scribal training of the inscriber(s). But variation in these areas does not necessitate a different interpretation of the general commemorative purpose of the inscriptions or the innovative use of the space by family in a time of crisis. Whether one situates the Beit Lei inscriptions in the context of the late eighth century Assyrian siege of Lachish and devastation of the Judean countryside, or the early sixth century Babylonian invasions, these unusual inscriptions could still represent one facet of a ceremonial response to crisis. Similarly, whether one argues that the inscriptions represent the work of a semi-literate family member, or a scribally trained ritual practitioner hired by the family, the incised text and images could still represent vestiges of a ceremony that took place in the family tomb that sought to capitalize on the potency of written words in bringing about intended outcomes.

Viewing the cave inscriptions as innovative inscribing builds upon an acknowledgement of the importance of identity in times of unrest or upheaval. Paul Connerton and Maurice Halbwachs, among others, have pointed out the role of collective or social memory in shaping group identity.[374] This collective memory, shared by a specific group of people, strengthens bonds within that group and at the same time brings into sharper relief the boundaries excluding those not part of the group. Never is group identity

[374] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 21; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (trans. Lewis A. Coser; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

more important than when a person's social world has been seriously disturbed. In the wake of foreign incursions and mass destruction in the Judean countryside, commemorating identity would have been more important than ever. And incising familiar material on the walls of the family tomb would have provided an unconventional but lasting way to commemorate family and/or community identity even as their continued existence in the land was threatened or obliterated.

The Beit Lei inscriptions seem to represent an innovative re-appropriation of content that would have been familiar and meaningful due to its use in every-day life and religious practice. Lament or complaint songs provide one way to understand the combination of content found in the cave inscriptions. The content of the cave inscriptions includes literary-style phrases, petitionary phrases and imprecations, as well as images. The short formulaic phrases are comparable to phrases making up poetic/liturgical/psalmic material. Within the genre of liturgical literature, a sub-form that contains elements similar to the content of the cave inscriptions from Beit Lei is the communal or individual lament/complaint. Typical elements of laments or complaint psalms include invocation, complaint, confession of sin or assertion of innocence, affirmation of confidence, plea or petition for help, imprecation against enemies, acknowledgement of divine response, vow or pledge, blessings, and anticipated thanksgiving.[375] In his description of the forms of cultic poetry, Gerstenberger points out, "PLEA or Petition for help, together with its negative counterpart IMPRECATION against

[375] Gerstenberger, *Psalm Part 1: with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, 12; Mowinkel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 229-35.

enemies, forms the very heart of a complaint song."[376] The contents of the cave inscriptions include these two elements along with epithets of YHWH, a common element in almost all lament psalms. Given the fact that a context of conflict or crisis provides the most realistic explanation for the unconventional use of the family burial chamber, the use of formulae familiar from communal or individual complaint songs would fit the overall circumstances generally associated with the cave inscriptions. Lament songs represent an eclectic mix of affirmations of God's provision and sorrow over loss or disappointment. The Beit Lei cave inscriptions appear to represent hints of ritual performance revolving around lament over the devastating circumstances faced by the inscribers. "Save, YHWH!" "Cursed be anyone who sings tomorrow!" "YHWH is the God of all the earth…the mountains of Judah belong to him."

Another way to understand the combination of content is to view the inscriptions in the context of incantations.[377] The combination of divine epithets with curse phrases is an integral part of the incantation genre. Spells and prayers for protection would have been familiar, either through private or communal religious practice. Lament songs can even be understood as a type of incantation.[378] Viewed in this light, laments were not just calls for

---

[376] Gerstenberger, *Psalm Part 1*, 13.

[377] Another possibility is to view the inscriptions as a combination of content from different contexts or sources. For instance, the curses were known from oath contexts. Conditional curses were associated with sworn oaths, an integral part of personal as well as political agreements in the ancient world. Such language would have been familiar from a variety of contexts. And the petitionary phrases and divine epithets were known from liturgical contexts. Explaining the sources of the content this way involves an innovative combining of content from disparate but familiar contexts. This is certainly a possibility, but it seems more likely that the inscribers viewed the content as some sort of unit even before their appropriation of it for the cave inscriptions.

[378] Miller mentions that Mowinkel's suggestion that certain lament songs served to reverse or protect against sorcery has not been widely accepted. But he continues: "Nevertheless, if one looks closely at the psalms, it becomes apparent that sections therein have been, at the very least, inspired by the incantatory genre" (Miller, "Incantations in Ancient West Semitic Corpora," [Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2006],

acknowledgement of a difficult state of affairs, but efficacious language used when a certain impact was desired. Smoak points out in the context of the priestly blessing, "there was a certain amount of literary overlap between magical formulae and prayer traditions in ancient Israel."[379] Such overlap is evident in lament psalms, which were used in individual and communal response to crisis.

This interpretation of the words incised on the walls of the Beit Lei cave views the cave inscriptions as an innovative combination of content that was familiar and meaningful. Despite the non-traditional combination of setting and content, the content of the inscriptions—both the text and images—would have been selected intentionally. The tomb setting was also selected, not out of happenstance, but because the significance of the space aligned with the purpose of the inscriptions. Considered against the backdrop of the numinous power associated with writing in the ancient world as well as the commemorative function of inscribing in stone, the cave inscriptions can be interpreted as forming part of a commemorative ritual carried out in the family tomb as an effort to preserve family or community identity. Writing was used extensively in commemorative rituals and memorial stelae, immortalizing both the living and the deceased and carrying forward their legacy. Their identity was tied up in written words as well as accompanying inscribed images, thus the severe curses against anyone who would efface their name or otherwise destroy their stone monument. Likewise, the chambered tomb itself, which

---

205-6). His examples of incantatory psalms include: Ps 109:7-19, Ps. 55:16; 59:12-14; 69:23-29; Jeremiah 18:21-23; Psalm 12:4. A definition of incantations such as Pardee's is certainly applicable, at least in some instances, to lament songs. "The incantation in the narrow sense of the word…contains formulae that were believed to hold their own effective power, and it may refer to ritual acts that would have accompanied the pronouncement of the formulae" (Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002], 157).

[379] Jeremy Smoak, "'Prayers of Petition' in the Psalms and West Semitic Inscribed Amulets: Efficacious Words in Metal and Prayers for Protection in Biblical Literature," *JSOT* 36 (2011): 78.

belonged to the family estate, represented the identity and continuity of the family unit. In the carving out and use of the family tomb, the house of the fathers was immortalized in stone. And in the incising of lament or incantation formulae on the walls of the tomb, the family identity as YHWH's people and dwellers of Judah, was immortalized in that same stone.

EXCURSUS: The el-Qôm Inscriptions as Innovative Inscribing

The inscriptions from el-Qôm have rarely been described as refugee inscriptions. Naveh and Parker are two scholars who have discussed the el-Qôm inscriptions in the context of refugee inscriptions. Referring to the inscriptions in Tomb I, Naveh questioned the assumption that they mark the place of ʿÔpay as a deceased individual. The impetus for this question is an unprovenanced curse inscription mentioning the same name. The inscription is translated: "Cursed be ʿÔpay son of Netan[yahu] by Yahweh."[380] Naveh concluded his discussion by suggesting that the chamber was actually used for hiding and not only for burial.

> The graffito and dipinto in el-Qôm Tomb I may perhaps indicate that 'Ofay son of Netanyahu, as the chief of a group of refugees or a gang of outlaws, occupied chamber 3 as his own premises; the inscriptions may have intended that this room was 'out of bounds'. The adversaries of 'Ofay resided in another cave from where the new graffiti were cut.[381]

Similarly Parker argued that the ʾUriyahu inscription from Tomb II is not a mortuary inscription. Rather, he described it as a votive inscription or thanksgiving psalm. As an explanation of why it was inscribed in a tomb rather than in the context of the local

[380] Naveh, "Hebrew Graffiti," 200.

[381] *Ibid*., 206.

sanctuary, Parker concludes, "It is also understandable that the beneficiary of Yahweh's deliverance might wish to have a copy of his testimony inscribed in the place in which his deliverance took place—it would be a very significant message for future refugees who might seek to escape from their enemies in the same location."[382]

As is the case with the Beit Lei cave, there is no additional evidence of refugee use of the space at el-Qôm beyond the presence of inscriptions on the wall. Therefore, this interpretation is by no means self-evident. The inscriptions from Tomb I are best understood as formal epitaphs. But the ʾUriyahu inscription, like the Beit Lei inscriptions, represents an innovative combination of content and location. The first phrase of the inscription is worded much like a dedicatory inscription.[383] This observation is especially true if one takes the final word as a noun—"his inscription." The following line uses a blessing formula as is often present in the epistolary genre. The third line refers to (or requests) Yahweh saving from enemies. It is easy to point out the lack of a mention of a grave or chamber as well as the lack of a curse formula warning against disturbance of the burial as evidence that the inscription is not a mortuary inscription. I would argue, however, that even though the inscription is not a traditional epitaph, the burial setting was not incidental. In his analysis of the relationship between text and image in the el-Qôm inscription, Martin Leuenberger writes, "Yahweh's blessing-power is expanded (by the text) into the realm of tomb and the 'other world' of death, constituting an innovative

[382] Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees," 280-2.

[383] Some scholars even restore a *lāmed* at the beginning of the first line. See Patrick Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*, 216; and Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material," 159.

transformation compared with older blessing-inscriptions."[384] To this observation I would add that the setting aligned with the purpose of the inscription—as a way to memorialize identity. It may not be possible for us to know whether or not this inscription was inscribed in connection with the burial use of the space. But whether it was inscribed as an epitaph or as an inscription commemorating a different event, there is no question that the combination of content and setting aligned to memorialize family identity, perpetually marking their claim to the space and memorializing their allegiance to Yahweh and the blessing and protection he offered them.

[384] Martin Leuenberger, "Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant: A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in ʾirbet el-Qom and on the Stela of Yahiawmilk of Biblos, Teil 1," *BN* 139 (2008): 61-77.

# CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS
## Commemorative and Effective Inscribing in Times of Crisis

The cave inscriptions from Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm constitute a unique data set, bringing up numerous questions regarding the use of inscribing in ancient Judah. The previous chapters have explored the cave inscriptions contextually via a variety of avenues of inquiry. Viewing the inscriptions as graffiti brings out the fact that the inscribers must have possessed some level of scribal expertise, no matter how limited, despite the informal and messy appearance of the inscriptions. Exploring the inscriptions in the context of ritual practice and magic highlights the incantatory nature of the content and provides a possible explanation for the repetitive inscribing. Unpacking the burial context of the inscriptions brings to the forefront the significance of chambered hewn tombs as symbols of kinship and family identity and claim to the land. And noting the strength of the refugee hypothesis—that is, the acknowledgement of a context of transition or crisis—provides a stepping-stone for exploring the innovative nature of the inscriptions. Each line of inquiry brings up specific questions and contributes to a more integrative analysis.

In previous studies, the unusual combination of non-burial content and burial context has often featured prominently in discussions of the cave inscriptions, with conclusions leaning one way or the other and implicitly or explicitly arguing against what appears to be an opposite interpretation. The either-or nature of the issue is often assumed. If the inscriptions are not traditional epitaphs, they must be completely

unrelated to the burial context.[385] If the inscriptions are funerary inscriptions, they must have been inscribed as part of the design or burial use of the tomb space.[386] This tendency to quickly assign the inscriptions to a known and accepted category, however, has led to insufficiently nuanced conclusions, some of which stretch beyond the reaches of the available data.

Looking at the numerous intersections between different areas of inquiry and exploring the questions of who may have inscribed the inscriptions and what they hoped to accomplish by means of these inscriptions, it becomes evident that interpretations appearing at first glance to be mutually exclusive may in fact contribute together to a more holistic treatment. Questions of who left the inscriptions and what the accompanying events may have been are only partially answered by deciding on how to categorize the inscriptions—graffiti or monumental inscriptions, formal epitaphs or refugee inscriptions, and so on. Themes that cross the boundaries of common categories are actually more informative to questions of identity and purpose. Consider, for instance, graffiti and traditional epitaphs, which both fulfill commemorative purposes, preserving the identity or legacy of the inscribers or the individuals on behalf of whom the inscriptions were executed.

There are certain things we simply cannot know for certain due to the limited nature of the available data. For example, it is impossible to know whether or not the inscriptions were connected to the design or burial use of the tombs. No grave goods were preserved for examination. Moreoever, so few Iron Age epitaphs are available for study

[385] Cross, "The Cave Inscriptions," 303; Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 367, 407; and Parker, "Graves, Caves, and Refugees," 261, 280.

[386] Mandell and Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions" (forthcoming).

that comparative analysis of the inscriptional content offers only limited conclusions regarding the relationship of the inscribing to the mortuary design and use of the space. Just because the data does not provide clearcut answers to the common questions of classification, however, does not limit the capacity of comparative study to highlight overarching themes relevant to a deeper understanding of the origin and function of the cave inscriptions. These themes apply in varying degrees to the inscriptions from both sites, and are applicable regardless of whether or not one views the inscriptions as funerary inscriptions.

One theme that emerges in the context of graffiti, monumental inscriptions, funerary stelae, and many other categories of inscriptions, is commemoration. The cave inscriptions served commemorative purposes. Throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, inscribing in stone served to commemorate identity, legacy, events, allegiance and even economic transactions. Both formal and informal, official and unofficial inscriptions functioned to memorialize persons or polities. The cave inscriptions, though etched in soft limestone, nevertheless permanently preserved the text and image in the stone walls of the tomb, thereby memorializing family and community identity as well as significant events.

While it is not possible to go back in time and read the minds of the inscribers in order to understand their intentions, there are good reasons to attribute a magic or performative function to the cave inscriptions. Writing—even informal writing or graffiti—rarely served simply as an idle way to pass the time, even in the ancient world. Inscriptions could convey information. For example, letters written on potsherds served as a conduit of information between the sender and the recipient and inscriptions on jar handles identified the vessel contents or their origin. Inscribed text and image were also

used in contexts where the act of inscribing, the content or even the accompanying spoken formulae or ritual actions were believed to be instrumental in bringing about an impact beyond the normal. Inscribed amulets and spoken and written incantations are examples of this kind of effectual inscribing. Both the content and setting of the cave inscriptions make it evident that the purposes of the inscribers went beyond using inscriptions to convey information. The content, including curse and blessing phrases, petitionary phrases, personal names, and divine epithets, aligns with the content found in magic or ritual artifacts and texts. The inscriptions were situated in dark, hidden space that was intended for burial, meaning that not only would the setting not have been conducive to conveying information, but the funerary space also would have held a certain sanctity itself. Any given inscription, of course, could serve both communicative and performative functions. But if placing the cave inscriptions on a continuum with "inscribed to communicate information" on one end and "inscribed to bring about an impact beyond the normal" on the other end, they would belong toward the latter side of this continuum. It is only possible to speculate concerning possible accompanying ritual speaking or actions, but the efficacious nature of the cave inscriptions can be asserted with confidence.

Another theme that comes up in a comparative study of the cave inscriptions is the idea of crisis or impending danger providing the impetus for the inscribing. The inscriptions from both sites hint at difficulty or threat of some kind. The most widely accepted reading of the ʾUriyahu inscription contains a reference to being saved from enemies. And the Beit Lei inscriptions include curses, a plea for help, and military type images that have often been interpreted as representing an enemy entity. Many inscribed artifacts from the ancient world, including *kudurru*s, succession treaties, and memorial

stela such as the Mesha Stele and the Tel Dan Inscription, seem to have been inscribed at times of transition or unrest. And though such objects were publicly displayed, as opposed to the private setting of the cave inscriptions, the idea that inscribing provided an avenue of permanence in an otherwise shifting environment seems useful in understanding the function of the inscriptions at Khirbet Beit Lei and Khirbet el-Qôm. The socio-political context of ancient Judah certain included plenty of crisis and impending danger. And the cave inscriptions, whatever more specific purposes one assigns to them, seem to have formed part of specific responses to local threat or crisis.

Building upon an integrative analysis of the inscriptions as inscribed artifacts, this study has taken the content and setting of the inscriptions as equally significant. The inscriptions represent an innovative use of both content and space. The content mirrors incantations and lament songs and also incorporates ritual or apotropaic imagery such as a hand, and ellipses and circles. Such content would have served both to affirm identity in the face of crisis and also to secure or memorialize divine protection. The cave setting, signifying generational continuity and claim to the land as well as the kin-based nature of Judean society, would have served as an ideal setting for efficacious inscriptions intended to preserve identity and also bring about change or facilitate divine blessing or protection.

These themes—commemorative inscribing, ritual inscribing, and innovative inscribing in response to crisis—are applicable to both mortuary and non-mortuary interpretations of the inscriptions, and have the potential to help fine-tune more specific hypotheses regarding the sources and purposes of the cave inscriptions.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY


Abercrombie, John R. *Palestinian Burial Practices from 1200 to 600 B.C.E.* Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1979.

Abusch, Tzvi. "Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature: Texts and Studies Part I: The Nature of Maqlû: Its Character, Divisions, and Calendrical Setting," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974): 251-262.

——. *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*. Ancient Magic and Divination V. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

——. *The Anti-Witchcraft Series Maqlû: A Student Edition and Selected Commentary*. State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts, Vol. XI. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015.

Abusch, Tzvi and Daniel Schwemer. *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, Vol. 1. Ancient Magic and Divination 8/1. Edited by Tzvi Abusch, et al. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Ackerman, Susan. *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.

Aharoni, Yohanan. *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979.

Ahituv, Shmuel. *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period*. Jerusalem: CARTA, 2008.

Ahn, John. "Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 267-289.

Albertz, Rainer. *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*. Translated by J. Bowden. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Albertz, Rainer & Rüdiger Schmitt. *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns: 2012.

Angerstorfer, Andreas. "Ašerah als 'consort of Jahwe' oder Aširtah?" *Biblische Notizen* 17 (1982): 7-16.

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

Assman, Jan. *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

——. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Avigad, Na'aman. "The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village." *Israel Exploration Journal* 3 (1953): 137-52.

——. "Some Notes on the Hebrew Inscriptions from Gibeon." *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959): 130-33.

——. *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah.* Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986.

Bagnall, Roger S. *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Bahrani, Zainab. *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Baird, J. A. and Claire Taylor, eds. *Ancient Graffiti in Context*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Bar-Adon, P. "An Early Hebrew Inscription in a Judean Desert Cave." *Israel Exploration Journal* 25 (1975): 226-32.

Barag, D. "Note on an Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm." *Israel Exploration Journal* 20:3/4 (1970): 216-218.

Barkay, Gabriel. "The Iron Age II-III." Pages 302-73 in *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*. Edited by A. Ben-Tor. Translated by R. Greenberg. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1992.

——. "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age." Pages 96-164 in *Graves and Burial Practices in Israel in the Ancient Period*. Edited by I. Singer. Tel Aviv: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1994 (in Hebrew).

——. "Burial Caves and Dwellings in Judah during the Iron Age II: Sociological Aspects." Pages 96-102 in *Material Culture, Society and Ideology: New Directions in the Archaeology of the Land of Israel*. Edited by A. Faust and A. Maeir. Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999 (in Hebrew).

Barkay, Gabriel and Amos Kloner. "Jerusalem Tombs from the Days of the First Temple." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12 (1986): 22-39.

Barkay, Gabriel, Marilyn J. Lundberg, Andrew G. Vaughn and Bruce Zuckerman. "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 334 (2004): 41-71.

Barkay, Gabriel and David Ussishkin. "Area S: The Iron Age Strata." Pages 411-503 in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973-1994)*, Vol. III. Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004.

Beit-Arieh, I. "Tel 'Ira—a Fortified City of the Kingdom of Judah." *Qadmoniot* 18 (1985): 17-25 (in Hebrew).

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

——. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Ben-Arieh, Sarah, ed. *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*. Israel Antiquities Authority Reports 23. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004.

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, 1966.

Bloch-Smith, Elizabeth. *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead.* JSOTSS 123. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.

——. "Death in the Life of Ancient Israel. Pages 139-43 in *Sacred Time, Sacred Space: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*. Edited by B. M. Gittlen. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002.

————. "Life in Judah from the Perspective of the Dead." *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65:2 (2002): 120-30.

——. "Bronze and Iron Age Burials and Funerary Customs in the Southern Levant." *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003): 105-15.

——. "From Womb to Tomb: The Israelite Family in Death as in Life." Pages 122-131 in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel—Sociological and Archaeological Perspectives.* Edited by Patricia Dutcher-Wall. New York: T & T Clark, 2009.

Bohak, Gideon. *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Bohak, Gideon, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked, eds. *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition.* Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Borowski, Oded. "Burial Customs in Southern Judah: The Case of Tel Halif." Pages 71-77 in *"Up to the Gates of Ekron": Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*. Edited by S. W. Crawford, et al. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2007.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Habitus." Pages 43-49 in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, 2nd Edition. Edited by Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.

Bouzard, Walter C., Jr. *We Have Heard with Our Ears, O God: Sources of the Communal Laments in the Psalms.* SBL Dissertation Series 159. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.

Buikstra, Jane E., Aubrey Baadsgaard, and Alexis T. Boutin. "Introduction." Pages 3-26 in *Breathing New Life into the Evidence of Death: Contemporary Approaches to Bioarchaeology*. Edited by A. Baadsgaard, A. T. Boutin, and J. E. Buikstra. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2011.

Burke, Aaron. A. "An Anthropological Model for the Investigation of the Archaeology of Refugees in Iron Age Judah and its Environs." Pages 41-56 in *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*. Edited by B. E. Kelle, F. R. Ames and J. Wright. Ancient Israel and Its Literature 10. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.

——. "The Archaeology of Ritual and Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant, and the Origins of Judaism." Pages 895-907 in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*. Edited by Timothy Insoll. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

——. "Coping with the Effects of War: Refugees in the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages*."* Pages 263-287 in *Disaster and Relief Management*. Edited by A. Berlejung. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 81. Mohr Siebeck, 2012.

Carr, David M. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Charpin, D. "Manger un serment," Pages 85-96 in *Jurer et maudire: Pratiques politiques et usages juridiques du serment dans le Proche-Orient ancient.* Edited by Joannès and Sophie Lafont. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996.

Cogan, Mordechai. "A Lamashtu Plaque from the Judaean Shephelah." *Israel Exploration Journal* 45 (1995): 155-161.

Conklin, Blane. *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew.* Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic, Vol. 5. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Cossu, Andrea. "Durkheim's argument on ritual, commemoration and aesthetic life: A classical legacy for contemporary performance theory?" *Journal of Classical Sociology* 10:1 (2010): 33-49.

Crenshaw, James L. "Education in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 601-615.

Cross, Frank. M. "Epigraphic Notes on Hebrew Documents of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries B.C.: II. The Murabbaʿât Papyrus and the Letter Found near Yabneh-yam." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 165 (1962): 34-46.

——. "Epigraphical Notes on Hebrew Documents of the Eighth-Sixth Centuries B.C.: III The Inscribed Jar Handles from Gibeon." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 168 (1962): 18-23.

——. "The Cave Inscription from Khirbet Beit Lei." Pages 299-306 in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck.* Edited by J. A. Sanders. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970.

——. "A Literate Soldier: Lachish Letter III." Pages 41-47 in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*. Edited by A. Kort and S. Morschauser. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985.

——. *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

——. *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook: Collected Papers in Hebrew and West Semitic Palaeography and Epigraphy*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Cross, Frank Moore and David Noel Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography: A Study of the Epigraphic Evidence.* American Oriental Series 36. New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1952.

Cross, Frank Moore and Richard J. Saley. "Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque of the Seventh Century B.C. from Arslan Tash in Upper Syria," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 197 (1970): 42-49.

Dagan, Yehuda. "Results of the Survey: Settlement Patterns in the Lachish Region." Pages 2674-2692 in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish, Volume V*. Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004.

Darnell, John Coleman, et al. "Two Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from the Wadi el-Ḥôl: New Evidence for the Origin of the Alphabet from the Western Desert of Egypt." *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 59 (2005): 63-124.

Davies, Graham I. *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Defonzo, Ryan J. P*. Iron II Judah: An Intra-Regional Study of Production and Distribution.* PHD Dissertation: University of Toronto, 2005.

Demsky, Aaron. "Writing (Scripts, Materials)," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 21, 235-241.

Deutsch, Robert and Michael Heltzer. *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions*. Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 1994.

——. *New Epigraphic Evidence from the Biblical Period*. Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 1995.

Dever, William. G. "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet El-Kom." *Hebrew University College Annual* 40-41 (1970): 139-204.

——. "Inscriptions on Israelite Burial Caves in the Mountainous Religion of Hebron." *Qadmoniot* 4 (1971), 90-92 (in Hebrew).

——. "Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 255 (1984): 21-37.

——. "Social Structure in Palestine in the Iron Age II Period on the Eve of Destruction." Pages 416-31 in *The Archaelogy of Society in the Holy Land*. Edited by T. E. Levy. London: Leicester University Press, 1995.

——. "Khirbet el-Qôm." Pages 391-392 in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East,* Vol. 4. Edited by E. M. Meyers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

——. "Archaeology and the Ancient Israelite Cult: How the Kh. El-Qôm and Kuntillet ʿAjrûd 'Asherah' Texts Have Changed the Picture." *Eretz Israel* 26 (1999): 9*-15*.

––––. "The Judean 'Pillar-Base Figurines:" Mothers or 'Mother-Goddesses'?" Pages 129-141 in *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies*. Edited by Rainer Albertz, et. al. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014.

Dijkstra, Meindert. "I Have Blessed you by YHWH of Samaria," Pages 81-126 in *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah.* Edited by B. Becking, M. Dijkstra, M. C. A. Korpel, & K. J. H. Vriezen. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

Diakonoff, Igor. M. "The Rural Community in the Ancient Near East." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18 (1975): 121-33.

Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., J. J. M. Roberts, C. L. Seow and R. E. Whitaker. *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Donner, Herbert and Wolfgang Röllig. *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, Band 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002.

Dorsey, David. A. "The Location of Biblical Makkedah." *Tel Aviv* 7 (1980): 185-93.

——. *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Drinkard, Joel. "The Literary Genre of the Mesha' Inscription." Pages 131-154 in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab.* Edited by Andrew Dearman. Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989.

Driscoll, Mark J. "The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New." Pages 87-104 in *Creating the Mediaval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature.* Edited by Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010.

Earl, G, Basford, P. J., Bischoff, A.S., Bowman, A, Crowther, C, Hodgson, M, Martinez, K, Isaksen, L, Pagi, H, Piquette, K.E. and Kotoula, E. "Reflectance Transformation Imaging Systems for Ancient Documentary Artefacts." In *Electronic Visualisation and the Arts*, London, BCS, 2011.

Emerton, J. A. "New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud." *Zeitschrift die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982), 2-20.

Eschweiler, Peter. *Bildzauber im alten Ägypten: Dei Verwendung von Bildern und Gegenständen in magischen Handlungen nach den Texten des Mittleren und Neuen Reiches.* Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 137. Freiberg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994.

Eshel, Hanan and David Amit, *Refuge Caves of the Bar Kokhba Revolt*. Tel Aviv: Israel Exploration Society, 1998 (in Hebrew).

Fantalkin, Alexander. "The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation." Pages 17-44 in *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein*. Edited by A. Fantalkin and A. Yasur-Landau. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 31. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Farber, Walter. *Lamaštu: An Edition of the Canonical Series of Lamaštu Incantations and Rituals and Related Texts from the Second and First Millenia B.C.* Mesopotamian Civilizations 17. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014.

Faust, Avraham. "The Rural Community in Ancient Israel during Iron Age II." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 317 (2000): 17-39.

——. "Settlement and Demography in Seventh-century Judah and the Extent and Intensity of Sennacherib's Campaign." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 140:3 (2008): 168-94.

——. *The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2012.

Faust, Avraham and Shlomo Bunimovitz. "The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb: Family Response at a Time of Change." *Israel Exploration Journal* 58 (2008): 150-70.

Faust, Avraham and Z. Safrai. "Changes in Burial Practices in the Land of Israel in Light of the Analysis of Salvage Excavations." Pages 105-21 in *In the Hill-Country, in the Shephelah, and in the Arabah (Joshua 12:8): Studies and Research Presented to Adam Zertal on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Manasseh Hill Country Surveh*. Edited by S. Bar. Jerusalem: Ariel, 2008 (in Hebrew).

Feldman, Marian H. *Communities of Style: Portable Luxury Arts, Identity and Collective Memory in the Iron Age Levant*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Feuchtwang, Stephan. "Ritual and Memory." Pages 281-298 in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. Edited by Susannah Rastone and Bill Schwarz. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Fitzmyer, Joseph. A. *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire.* Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967.

——. "Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 201-225.

Frankfurter, David. "Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of 'Magicians'." Pages 159-178 in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*. Edited by Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer. (?Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141; edited by R. van den Broek, H. J. W. Drijvers and H. S. Versnel) Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Frick, Frank S. "Another Inscribed Jar Handle from el-Jib." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 213 (1974): 46-48.

Garbini, Giovanni. "Su un'iscrizione ebraica da Khirbet el-Kom." *Annali* 38 (1978): 191-193.

Gerstenberger, Erhard S. *Psalms Part 1: with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. Forms of the Old Testament Literature XIV. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.

Gibson, John C. L. *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, Volume 1: Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Giveon, Raphael. *The Impact of Egypt on Canaan: Iconographical and Related Studies.* Freiburg, Switzerland: University of Frieburg, 1978.

Gogel, Sandra. *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.

Gonen, Rivka. "Structural Tombs in the Second Millennium B.C." Pages 151-160 in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel: From the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods: In Memory of Immanuel (Munya) Dunayevsky*. Edited by Aharon Kempinski and Hannah Katzenstein. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992.

Green, Nathaniel E. & Heather Dana Davis Parker. "Field of View: Northwest Semitic Palaeography and Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI)." Pages 209-235 in *Epigraphy, Philology, & the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives on Philological & Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of JoAnn Hackett*. Edited by Jeremy M. Hutton and Aaron D. Rubin. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Grimes, Ronald L. "Performance Theory and the Study of Ritual." Pages 109-138 in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion, Volume 2: Textual, Comparative, Sociological, and Cognitive Approaches*. Edited by Peter Anges, Armin W. Geertz, and Randi R. Warne. Berlin: Water de Gruyter, 2004.

Gruenwald, Ithamar. *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel.* Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Gutfeld, Oren and Michael Haber. *A Guide to Beit Loya (Lehi).* Jerusalem: Beit Lehi Foundation, 2009.

Haas, N. "Human Skeletal Remains in Two Burial Caves." *Israel Exploration Journal* 13 (1963): 93-6.

Hachlili, Rachel. *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period.* Leiden: Brill, 2005.

Hadley, Judith. M. "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription." *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 50-62.

——. *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Translated by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Hallo, William W. "Letters, Prayers and Letter-prayers," Pages 17-27 in *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies: Held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 7-14 August 1977*, Volume 2. Edited by Israel Gutman. Jerusalem: Magnes Press Hebrew University, 1980.

Harrell-Bond, B. E. and E. Voutira. "Anthropology and the Study of Refugees." *Anthropology Today* 8: 4 (1992): 6-10.

Harrington, Nicola. *Living with the Dead: Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt.* Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013.

Hedeager, Lotte. *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400-1000*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Heeßel, Nils P. "Magie in Mesopotamien." Pages 33-53 in *Ägyptische Magie und ihre Umwelt*. PHILIPPIKA Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 80. Edited by Andrea Jördens. Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015.

Herrmann, Christian. *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*, Band III. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 24. Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006.

Hess, Richard S. "Writing about Writing: Abecedaries and Evidence for Literacy in Ancient Israel." *Vetus Testamentum* 56 (2006): 342-346.

——. "Questions of Reading and Writing in Ancient Israel." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.1 (2009): 109.

Hillers, Delbert R. *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964.

——. "The Effective Simile in Biblical Literature." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 181-185.

Hizmi, H. and A. De-Groot, eds. *Burial Caves and Sites in Judea and Samaria: From the Bronze and Iron Ages.* Judah and Samaria Publications 4. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004.

Hodder, Ian. "Human-thing entanglement: towards an integrated archaeological perspective." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (2011): 154-177.

Holladay, J. S., Jr. "Notes and News: Khirbet el-Qôm." *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970): 175-177.

——. "Chronique archéologique: Khirbet el-Kôm." *Revue Biblique* 78 (1971): 593-595.

Jamieson-Drake, David W. *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archeological Approach.* JSOTTS 109. The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series 9. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991.

Jaroš, Karl. "Zur Inschrift Nr. 3 von Ḫirbet el-Qōm." *Biblische Notizen* 19 (1982): 31-40.

Jeffers, Ann. *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Katz, Hayah and Avraham Faust. "The Assyrian Destruction Layer at Tel 'Eton." *Israel Exploration Journal* 62:1 (2012): 22-53.

Keane, Webb. "The evidence of the senses and the materiality of religion." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14, (2008): S110-S127.

Keel, Othmar and Christoph Uehlinger. *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel.* Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

Keegan, Peter. *Graffiti in Antiquity.* London: Routledge, 2014.

Keimer, Kyle H. "The Impact of Ductus on Script Form and Development in Monumental Northwest Semitic Inscriptions." *Ugarit-Forschungen* 46 (2015): 189-212.

King, Leonard William. *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery*. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975.

Kitz, Anne Marie. *Cursed are You! The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2014.

Kletter, Raz. "The Inscribed Weights of the Kingdom of Judah." *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 121-63.

——. "Pots and Polities: Material Remains of Late Iron Age Judah in Relation to Its Political Borders." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 314 (1999): 19-54.

Kloner, Amos. "Iron Age Burial Caves in Jerusalem and its Vicinity." *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 19-20 (2001-2): 95-118.

Kloner, Amos and Yigal Tepper. *The Hiding Complexes in the Judean Shephelah.* Tel Aviv: Israel Exploration Society, 1987 (in Hebrew).

Kloner, Amos and Boaz Zissu. "Hiding Complexes in Judaea: An Archaeological and Geographical Update on the Area of the Bar Kokhba Revolt," Pages 181-216 in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered*. Edited by Peter Schafer. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

Laboury, Dimitri. "Tracking Ancient Egyptian Artists, a Problem of Methodology. The Case of the Painters of Private Tombs in the Theban Necropolis during the Eighteenth Dynasty." Pages 199-208 in *Art and Society: Ancient and Modern Contexts of Egyptian Art.* Edited by Katalin Anna Kóthay; Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 2012.

Labuschagne, C. J. "The Root *mhh* Attested in Ugaritic." *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955): 312-313.

Laneri, Nicola, ed. *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2007.

Lauinger, Jacob. "Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 64 (2012): 87-123.

Lauinger, Jacob. "The Neo-Assyrian *adê*: Treaty, Oath, or Something Else?" *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 19 (2013): 99-115.

Lehmann, Gunnar and Hermann M. Niemann. "When Did the Shephelah Become Judahite?" *Tel Aviv* 41 (2014): 77-94.

Lemaire, André. "Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei." *Revue biblique* 83 (1976): 558-68.

——. "Les inscriptions de Khirbet el-Qôm et l'ashérah de YHWH." *Revue biblique* 84 (1977): 595-608.

——. "Khirbet el-Qôm and Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy." Pages 231-38 in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*. Edited by S. Gitin, J. E. Wright and J. P. Dessel. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

——. "Le 'Dieu de Jérusalem' à la lumière de l'épigraphie." Pages 49-58 in *Jérusalem Antique et Médiévale: Mélanges en l'honneur d'Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz.* Paris: Peeters, 2011.

Lenzi, Alan. "Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 303-315.

Martin Leuenberger, "Blessing in Text and Picture in Israel and the Levant: A Comparative Case Study on the Representation of Blessing in Ḫirbet el-Qom and on the Stela of Yahiawmilk of Biblos, Teil 1." *Biblische Notizen* 139 (2008): 61-77.

Levtow, Nathaniel. B. "Text Destruction and Iconoclasm in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East." Pages 311-62 in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East*. Edited by N. May. Oriental Institute Seminars 8. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012.

Lewis, Theodore J. *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 39. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.

——. "How Far Can Texts Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead." Pages 169-217 in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel.* Edited by B. M. Gittlen. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002.

——. "Feasts for the Dead and Ancestor Veneration in Levantine Traditions." Pages 69-74 in *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East.* Edited by V. R. Herrmann and J. D. Schloen. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014.

Lipschits, Oded. "Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and the Fifth Centuries B.C.E." Pages 323-76 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. Edited by O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Macdonald, M. C. A. "Literacy in an Oral Environment." Pages 49-118 in *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard.* Edited by Piotr Bienkowski, Christopher Mee, and Elizabeth Slater. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 426. New York: T & T Clark International, 2005.

Mandell, Alice and Jeremy Smoak. "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case." *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religion* (forthcoming).

Margalit, Baruch. "Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet el-Qôm." *Vetus Testamentum* 39 (1989): 371-378.

Martin, Debra L., Ryan P. Harrod & Ventura R. Pérez. *Bioarchaeology: An Integrated Approach to Working with Human Remains.* New York: Springer, 2013.

Marx,Emanuel. "The Social World of Refugees: A Conceptual Framework." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 3: 3 (1990): 190.

Mazar, Amihai. "Iron Age Burial Caves North of the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem." *Israel Exploration Journal* 26 (1976): 1-8.

——. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000-586 BCE*. 1st ed. Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1990.

Mazar, Benjamin. *Beth She'arim I: Catacombs 1-4.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1973.

McCarter, P. Kyle. "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphic Data," Pages 143-144 in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*. Edited by P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride. Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 1987.

——. *Ancient Inscriptions: Voices from the Biblical World*. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1996.

Meshel, Ze'ev. *Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border.* Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012.

Meskell, Lynn. "Archaeologies of Identity." Pages 187-213 in *Archaeological Theory Today*. Edited by Ian Hodder. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.

Millard, A. R. "The Practice of Writing in Ancient Israel." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 35 (1972): 111.

Miller, Daniel. "Incantations in Ancient West Semitic Corpora and in the Hebrew Bible: Continuity and Discontinuity." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2006.

——. "Another Look at the Magical Ritual for a Suspected Adulteress in Numbers 5:11-31." *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5:1 (2010): 1-16.

Miller Max. "The Moabite Stone as a Memorial Stela." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 106 (1974): 9-18.

Miller, Patrick D. "El, the Creator of the Earth," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239 (1980): 43-46.

——. "Psalms and Inscriptions." Pages 311-332 in *Congress Volume, Vienna, 1980*. VTSup 32. Edited by J. A. Emerton. Leiden: Brill, 1981.

——. *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*. JSOTSS 267. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Mittmann, Siegfried. "A Confessional Inscription from the Year 701 BC Praising the Reign of Yahweh." *Acta Academica* 21:3 (1989): 17-23.

——. "Die Grabinschrift des Sängers Uriahu." *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 97 (1981): 139-152.

Moore, Albert C. *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.

Morschauser, Scott. *Threat-Formulae in Ancient Egypt: A Study of the History, Structure and Use of Threats and Curses in Ancient Egypt*. Baltimore: Halgo, Inc., 1991.

Mowinckel, Sigmund. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*. Translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.

Müller, Hans-Peter. "Die phönizische Grabinschrift aus dem Zypern-Museum KAI 30 und die Formgeschichte des nordwestsemitischen Epitaphs." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 65 (1975): 104-132.

Nakhai, Beth A. "The Household as Sacred Space." Pages 53-72 in *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies*. Edited by Rainer Albertz, et. al. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014.

Naveh, Joseph. "Hebrew Inscriptions in a Cave-Tomb from the First Temple Period." *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* 27 (1963): 235-256 (in Hebrew).

——. "Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave." *Israel Exploration Journal* 13 (1963): 74-92.

——. "Canaanite and Hebrew Inscriptions (1960-1964)." *Lešonenu* 30 (1966): 65-80.

——. "Graffiti and Dedications." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 235 (1979): 27-30.

——. *Early History of the Alphabet*. Jerusalem: Magness Press, The Hebrew University, 1982.

——. "Hebrew Graffiti from the First Temple Period." *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 194-207.

——. *Studies in West-Semitic Epigraphy*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2009.

Naveh, Joseph and Shaul Shaked. *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity.* Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998.

Negev, A. "New Dated Nabatean Graffiti from the Sinai." *Israel Exploration Journal* 17:4 (1967): 250-255.

Niditch, Susan. *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Niehr, Herbert. "The Katumuwa Stele in the Context of Royal Mortuary Cult at Sam'al." Pages 57-60 in *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East.* Edited by V. R. Herrmann and J. D. Schloen. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014

O'Connor, M. "The Poetic Inscription from Khirbet el-Qôm." *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 24-230.

Olyan, Saul M. *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*. SBL Monograph Series 34. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988.

——. "Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 601-616.

——. "Family Religion in First Millennium Israel." Pages 601-616 in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*. Edited by J. Bodel and S. M. Olyan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

Osborne, James F. "Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 70 (2011): 35-53.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955.

Pardee, Dennis. "The Katumuwa Inscription." Pages 45-48 in *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East.* Edited by V. R. Herrmann and J. D. Schloen. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014.

——. *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.

Parker, Simon B. "Graves, Caves, and Refugees: An Essay in Microhistory." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (2003): 259-288.

Peden, Alexander J. *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt: Scope and Roles of Informal Writings (c. 3100-332 B.C.)*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Persons, Raymond F. "The Ancient Israelite Scribe as Performer." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 601-609.

Pfälzner, Peter, et. al., eds. *(Re-)Constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Tübingen Post-Graduate School*. Wiesbaden: Harrassovitz Verlag, 2012.

Pinch, Geraldine. *Magic in Ancient Egypt, Revised Edition*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.

Pitard, Wayne T. "Tombs and Offerings: Archaeological Data and Comparative Methodology in the Study of Death in Israel." Pages 145-167 in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel.* Edited by B. M. Gittlen. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002.

Polotsky, H. J. "The Greek Papyri from the Cave of the Letters." *Israel Exploration Journal* 12: 3/4 (1962): 258-262.

Porter, Benjamin W. and Alexis T. Boutin. "Introduction: Bringing Out the Dead in the Ancient Near East." Pages 1-25 in *Remembering the Dead in the Ancient Near East: Recent Contributions from Bioarchaeology and Mortuary Archaeology*. University of Colorado Press. 2014.

Pritchard, James B. "More Inscribed Jar Handles from el-Jib." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 160 (1960): 2-6.

Radner, Karen. *Die Macht des Namens: Altorientalische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung.* Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005.

Rahmani, L. Y. "Jason's Tomb," *Israel Exploration Journal* 17 (1967): 96-97.

Rainey, Anson. F. "The Biblical Shephelah of Judah." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 251 (1983): 1-22.

Ramos, Melissa. "Spoken Word and Ritual Performance: The Oath and the Curse in Deuteronomy 27-28." Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2015.

Renz, Johannes. *Die althebräische Inschriften: Teil 1 Text und Kommentar.* Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik 1. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995.

Ritner, Robert Kriech. "Magic: An Overview." Pages 326 in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Vol. 2. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

———. *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993.

Rollston, Christopher. *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age.* SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 11. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

——. "Northwest Semitic Cursive Scripts of Iron II." Pages 202-234 in *"An Eye for Form" Epigraphic Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*. Edited by Jo Ann Hackett and Walter E. Aufrecht. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2014.

——. "Graffiti. I. Introduction." Pages 790-791 in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Vol. 10. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015.

Rosenthaler, M. "A Paleo-Hebrew Ossuary Inscription." *Israel Exploration Journal* 25 (1975): 138-139.

Sader, Hélène. "Deux épigraphes phéniciennes inédites." *Syria* 67 (1990): 315-322.

Sanders, Seth L. "Performative Utterances and Divine Language in Ugaritic." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 63:3 (2004): 161-181.

——. *The Invention of Hebrew*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Sandovicz, Malgorzata. *Oaths and Curses: A Study in Neo- and Late Babylonian Legal Formulary.* Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012.

Sarfatti, Gad. B. "Hebrew Inscriptions of the First Temple Period—A Survey and Some Linguistic Comments." *MAARAV* 3 (1982): 55-83.

Särkiö, Pekka. "Hilferuf zu Jahwe aus dem Versteck. Eine neue Deutung der Inschrift *yšr mḥr* aus *Ḫirbet Bēt Lēy*." *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 113 (1997): 39-60.

Schloen, J. David. *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2001.

Schmidt, Brian. *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition*. Tübingen: Mohr. Reprinted, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996.

——. "Memory as Immortality: Countering the Dreaded 'Death after Death' in Ancient Israelite Society." Pages 87-100 in *Judaism in Late Antiquity IV*. Edited by A. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner. Handbook of Oriental Studies 49. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Schmitt, Rüdiger. "Magie in Syrien und Palästeina/Israel im 2. Und 1. Jtsd. V. Chr." Pages 54-68 in *Ägyptische Magie und ihre Umwelt*. PHILIPPIKA Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 80. Edited by Andrea Jördens. Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015.

Schniedewind, William. "Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel." *Religious Studies Review* 26 (2000): 327-332.

——. "Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a 'Literate' Soldier (Lachish 3)," *Zeischrift für Althebraistik* 13 (2000): 157-167.

——. *How the Bible Became a Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

——. *A Social History of Hebrew: From Its Origins Through the Rabbinic Period.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

Schrire, T. *Hebrew Magic Amulets: Their Decipherment and Interpretation.* New York: Behrman House Inc., Publishers, 1982.

Schroer, Silvia. "Zur Deutung der Hand unter der Grabinschrift von Chirbet el Qôm." *Ugarit-Forschungen* 15 (1984): 191-199.

Searle, John R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Sergi, Omer. "Judah's Expansion in Historical Context*." Tel Aviv* 40 (2013): 226-46.

Shea, William H. "The Khirbet el-Qom Tomb Inscription Again." *Vetus Testamentum* 40 (1990): 110-116.

Slanski, Kathryn E. *The Babylonian Entitlement narus (kudurrus): A Study in their Form and Function.* Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2003.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Smoak, Jeremy D. "'Prayers of Petition' in the Psalms and West Semitic Inscribed Amulets: Efficacious Words in Metal and Prayers for Protection in Biblical Literature." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (2011): 75-92.

——. *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24-26.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Stager, Lawrence. E., Daniel M. Master and J. David Schloen. *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century B. C*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Stern, Ephraim. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, Vol. II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods (732-332 B.C.E.)*. 1st ed. Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

——. *En-Gedi Excavations I*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2007.

Stern, Karen B. "Graffiti as Gift: Mortuary and Devotional Graffiti in the Late Ancient Levant." Pages 137-157 in *The Gift in Antiquity*. Edited by M. L. Satlow. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

——. "Graffiti. II. Archaeology. III. Visual Arts." Pages 792-800 in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Vol. 10. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015.

Taylor, Claire. "Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit: Creating Communities and Writing Alternative Histories in Classical Attica." Pages 90-109 in *Ancient Graffiti in Context*. Edited by J. A. Baird and Claire Taylor. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Theis, Christopher. "Defensive Magie im alten Ägypten Der Schutz der Grabstätte." Pages 119-170 in *Ägyptische Magie und ihre Umwelt*. PHILIPPIKA Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 80. Edited by Andrea Jördens. Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015.

Thiselton, Anthony C. "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings." *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 25:2 (1974): 283-299.

Tufnell, Olga. *Lachish III: The Iron Age*. The Wellcome-Marston Archaeological Research Expedition to the Near East Vol. III. London: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Ussishkin, David. *The Village of Silwan, The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom*. Jerusalem, 1986 (in Hebrew).

——. *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993.

——. "Area R and the Assyrian Siege." Pages 695-767 in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973-1994)*, Vol. III. Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 2004.

Van der Toorn, Karel. *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Van der Toorn, Karel, ed. *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.

Vaughn, Andrew G. "Palaeographic Dating of Judaean Seals and Its Significance for Biblical Research." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 313 (1999): 43-64.

Versnel, H. S. "The Poetics of the Magical Charm: An Essay in the Power of Words." Pages 105-158 in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*. Edited by Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141. Edited by R. van den Broek, H. J. W. Drijvers and H. S. Versnel. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Watts, James W. "Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124:3 (2005): 401-417.

Weeks, Noel. *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-Cultural Relationships*. London: T & T Clark International, 2004.

Weippert, Manfred. "Archäologischer Jahrebericht." *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 80 (1964): 150-193.

Whisenant, Jessica. "Document Production by Scribal Institutions." Pages 133-160 in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production.* Edited by Brian B. Schmidt. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015.

Woods, Christopher, ed. *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010.

Yadin, Yigael. "Expedition D—The Cave of the Letters." *Israel Exploration Journal* 12: 3/4 (1962): 227-257.

Yezerski, Irit. "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah toward the End of the Iron Age*." Tel Aviv* 26 (1999): 253-70.

Young, Ian M. "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part I," *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 239-253.

Zevit, Ziony. "The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 255 (1984): 39-47.

——. *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches.* London: Continuum, 2001.

Zissu, Boaz, Ro'I Porat, Boaz Langford and Amos Frumkin. "Archaeological remains of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in the Te'omim Cave (Mŭghâret Umm et Tûeimîm), Western Jerusalem Hills." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62: 2 (2011): 262-283.

Zorn, Jeffrey R. *Tell en-Nasbeh: A Re-Evaluation of the Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Early Bronze Age, Iron Age and Later Periods*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of California, Berkeley, 1993

——. "The Burials of the Judean Kings: Socio-historical Considerations and Suggestions. Pages 801-20 in "*I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times": Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday, Vol. 2*. Edited by A. M. Maeir and P. De Miroschedji. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006.