Introduction

Collections and Publications

Some 350 Aramaic ostraca of the Persian and Hellenistic periods have been excavated at 33 sites, from Yokneam in the north to Eilat in the south, with Arad and Beersheba being the main contributors (fig. 1). The largest cache of texts, however, is unprovenanced and has come to be known as "the Idumean ostraca." These began to see the light of day in 1991. In that year, Robert and Liane Feuer of Woodmere, New York, gave the Israel Museum some 200 pieces, and Lenny Wolfe provided 280 photos to Joseph Naveh. Both collections were published in 1996. The Israel Museum collection was increased by a grant of 8 more pieces from Marilyn Feuer in 1994, and 218 items were published by Andre Lemaire (= L). Still unpublished are 8 more pieces given to the Israel Museum by the Feuers in 1997 and 1 by Dan Barag in 2009 (A7.20a). Of the Lenny Wolfe collection, only 201 photos, considered to be "in a relatively good state of legibility," were published by Israel Ephʿal and Joseph Naveh (= EN), who had never seen the original pieces. Nonetheless, although the location of all the pieces in the Lemaire publication was known, only 28 of those in Ephʿal and Naveh's publication could be traced. Two were in the Reuven and Edith Hecht Museum in Haifa (EN97, 201), and there were 3 in the private collection of Arnold Spaer of Jerusalem (EN167–168, 185), acquired by him in 1992, and 23 in the Bible Lands Museum, also in Jerusalem, acquired by Elie Borowski.

Further sleuthing revealed that there were 4 more collectors who had acquired 118 of the pieces published by Ephʿal and Naveh. The largest collector was David Jeselsohn of Jerusalem and Zurich, who had 91 pieces (94 photos [two ostraca, each with convex and concave sides, were published as separate pieces]), 49 acquired in 1994 and 42 pieces in 1998. Next came Shlomo Moussaieff of London and Herzliya, who had 15 of the Ephʿal-Naveh pieces. These were published a second time, one by Lozachmeur and Lemaire in 1996 (= LL) and the other 14 by Lemaire in 2002 (= AL). Seven were acquired by the Feuer family, who donated them to the Israel Museum. One of these was published a second time by Lemaire in 1996 (L). Five had been acquired by David Sofer in London. Thus, of the 201 photos and/or pieces published by Ephʿal and Naveh, 149 (146 pieces) had been located, but the whereabouts of 52 items remained unknown.

Evidence points to the existence of at least a sixth collector. Ephʿal and Naveh reported that the photographs of the first 36 pieces, which they dubbed "the archive of Ḥalfat" (better: "dossier"), "were received together" (1996: 10). Strikingly, with two exceptions (EN8, 13 [A7.20, 26]), none of these pieces was acquired by any of the 5 collectors. It appears that this dossier was acquired intact by a single collector. Of the two missing pieces, one was acquired, perhaps at random, by Jeselsohn (A7.20), and the other by an anonymous person who donated it to the Bible Lands Museum (A7.26). It is especially valuable because it is one of only two ostraca that bear the name of King Artaxerxes III. The probability that these 34 pieces were in the hands of a single collector reduces the number still unaccounted for to 18.

But what of the 79 photos supplied by Lenny Wolfe that Ephʿal and Naveh never published? We were able to locate 63 (62 pieces) of these. Eleven were in the hands of Jeselsohn, and 25 (24 pieces) were held by the Bible Lands Museum—all 36 still unpublished. But the 23 pieces held by Moussaieff were published by Lemaire in 2002 (AL), and two of the Feuer pieces were published by him in 1996 (L). Two still remain unpublished. Altogether, then, the location of 66 items (52 published, 14 unpublished) in Lenny Wolfe's collection remains unknown (fig. 2).

The past 17 years, from 1996 to 2013, have seen extensive publication of the ostraca, with the most active editor being André Lemaire. At the same time as publishing 218 pieces donated to the Israel Museum by Robert and Liane Feuer and their daughter Marilyn, he also published 9 pieces with Hélène Lozachmeur that were in the possession of Shlomo Moussaieff. Three years later, in 1999, he published 4 pieces belonging to Martin S. Schøyen of Norway. His largest publication came in 2002, with 403 pieces (410 photos)

from three actual collections (Moussaieff [344 photos], Jeselsohn [8 pieces], and Michael Welch [7 pieces]) and one virtual collection (51 photos labeled J, in Jeselsohn's possession). Four years later, in 2006, he published another 26 Aramaic pieces (Oded Golan [14+4 non-Aramaic], Welch [6], and Moussaieff [6]). A year later, in 2007, he published 5 pieces belonging to three different collectors: Welch (2), Jeselsohn (1), David/Mona Sterling (1), and Yosi Uziel (1). Finally, in 2012, he brought out 3 pieces from an anonymous source. Altogether, then, Lemaire has the publication of 682 pieces (689 photos) to his credit.

Three smaller publications appeared in the years 1999, 2004, 2011, and 2012. Eighteen ostraca from the collection of Yigal Ronen were published in two articles, one in 1999 by Aḥituv and the rest by Aḥituv and Ada Yardeni in 2004. Sixteen pieces were published in 2011 by Akio Tsukimoto and Tomohisa Yamayoshi and a single ostracon owned by Jean-Guy Kauffmann was published by Michael Langlois in 2012 (fig. 3).

Where are the known ostraca located? As noted, some are in museums and libraries, but most are in private collections. Altogether, 733 ostraca are to be found in 9 museums and libraries, 6 in Israel, one in the United States, one in Germany, and one in Japan. The Feuers were by far the largest benefactors. Liane and Robert Feuer and his brother Paul Forbes donated 412 Aramaic ostraca to the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University; Robert and Liane gave 226 pieces and Dan Barag gave one to the Israel Museum; and daughter Marilyn gave 23 pieces to the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Elie Borowski had acquired 52 pieces that he deposited in the Bible Lands Museum. The Rockefeller Museum acquired 10 pieces, the Faculty of Humanities of Rikkyo University in Tokyo acquired 5 pieces, the Hecht Museum of the University of Haifa, 2 items, the Dagon Museum in Haifa, and the Arbeitsgruppe für Biblische Archäologie in Schondorf, Germany, one item each.

In addition to these 733 ostraca in public institutions, there are at least 1,166 in 21 private collections around the world. Just about half (571 pieces) are held by David Jeselsohn in Zurich, and slightly less than a third (354 ostraca) are in the hands of Shlomo Moussaieff in Herzliya, Israel. The third largest collector is Yigal Ronen of Beersheba (102 pieces). Although the majority of the other collectors are in Israel, at least 8 reside in Europe, Asia, or the United States. James Charlesworth of Princeton has 10 pieces, Michael Welch of Florida has 14 items, and the dealer Yutaka Funahashi in Tokyo has 11 ostraca. Smaller numbers are held by John Hoffman, David Sofer, and Martin S. Schøyen: 6, 5, and 4, respectively. One each is in the possession of Jim Joiner and Jean-Guy Kauffmann. With four exceptions (Oded Golan [35], Haim Weissman [15], Gil Davidovitz [12], and the dealer Alan Baidun [9]), 7 Israelis have no more than a handful each: Anonymous 1 has five; David A. J. Liebert, Arnold Spaer, and Y. H. have 3 pieces each; and one piece each is held by David Sterling and Yossi Uziel (fig. 4).

Among museums, libraries, and private collections, there are 1,899 ostraca whose location is known. Still unlocated are 105 (66) ostraca known to us from published and unpublished photos. Although there are 913 published ostraca photos, the majority of the texts remain unpublished—1,091 in all.

Provenance

Almost 20 years before the emergence of the first large batch of Idumean ostraca, a lone piece was published; it had been acquired by Danny Pincus, a dealer in Beer Sheba, from a resident of Raphia (Naveh 1972–73 = Naveh 1985: No. 7). It is now housed in the Dagon Museum in Haifa (fig. 5). It contained a previously unknown word (פחלין, tentatively rendered BALE), a term that has since turned up almost 50 times in the Idumean corpus (see A1.2). It is clear from both the script and the combination of this word with תבן ("chaff" [see A7.12]) that this ostracon belongs to our corpus. The place most-often cited in the ostraca (more than 70 times) is "Manqedah," biblical Makkedah (Josh 10:10, 16–17, 28–29; 12:16; 15:41), identified as modern Khirbet el-Kom (Dorsey 1980). In fact, a single piece was acquired by Dan Barag on March 3 1997 from a dealer who reported that it came from Khirbet el-Kom (A5.15). In addition, 5 pieces acquired by Haim Weissman in October 2006 were reported to have come from el-Kom (C61; J10.2; A12.10, 13.1, 255.1), and word of pieces having been found at el-Kom continued to surface. Salvage excavations there in 1971 directed by John S. Holladay yielded seven Aramaic ostraca and one Greek-Aramaic loan document. They were published in 1972 by Lawrence T. Geraty in a Harvard dissertation (Geraty 1972). They bear a passing resemblance to our ostraca, a chit for (ן)תבן משתל, appearing in both (A201.1;

Geraty 1972: no. 8 [fig. 6 here]), with neither a hint of a vast hoard that was yet to come nor any trace of "the storehouse" or "the storehouse of Makkedah," which are places of delivery of barley and of wheat in our ostraca (Tables 1–3). Almost 60 chits record products going to and coming from Makkedah or the storehouse of Makkedah (Tables 1.2, 4; 2.2, 3), while another 35 simply record "to the storehouse" or "from the grain of the storehouse" (Table 1.1, 3). A definite pattern is observed in these payments. Only wheat and barley are recorded in the chits for the storehouse or the storehouse of Makkedah (Table 1). Deliveries earmarked simply "to," however, contain nine different products (Table 2.2), but those sent "from Makkedah" have ten different products (Table 2.3).

Another source seems to be Yatta, biblical Juttah (Josh 21:16). In 1985, Joseph Naveh published an ostracon "reported to have been found in the region of Yatta" (A42.5 [Naveh 1985: 117–18]). Strikingly, it contains a pair of unique names, Ṣubayḥu and Yuthayu, which occur twice elsewhere (A55.5, 78.2; cf. A50.2). The Spaer ostraca, originally acquired in 1992 and published by Ephʿal and Naveh (EN167–68, 185), were reported to have come from Yatta. A single ostracon was acquired by Dan Barag in 1999, but the provenance was not recorded. Finally, 54 pieces acquired in March 2003 by the collector Gil Chaya were said to come from the bottom of a well, albeit site unknown (ISAP883–936). But the most remarkable discovery occurred on the eve of Passover, 2012, when it was noticed that an ostracon from Maresha (Eshel 2010: no. 6) was actually the first in a dossier of 20 other ostraca for wheat flour, all written by a single scribe within a span of seven months between February and August, 344 (Table 4; fig. 7). Furthermore, a mineralogical examination of four ostraca in the possession of David Sofer in London (A2.18, 3.17, 24.12, 51.3), conducted in February 2012 by the archaeologist Yuval Goren, indicated that these pieces also came from Maresha (fig. 8). One of them recorded payment of 20 seahs of wheat "to Makkedah" (A3.17), one of 16 of this type mentioned above (Table 2.2). David A. Dorsey plotted all the roads in ancient Israel, and his north–south route J18a from Maresha intersects with a west–east J14 leading to el-Kom (Dorsey 1991: Map 13; fig. 10, upper right here)—that is, to the storehouse of Makkedah. Following this route eastward a bit further leads us to Hebron and brings to mind the notation of the Chronicler, "and the sons of Mareshah the father of Hebron" (1 Chr 2:42). Another destination for grain, occurring but three times, is Maḥoza, and this may be identified with Ashdod-Yam (see A8.38; also 9.24, 36.4 [fig. 9]), linked through Lachish by route J15 (fig. 10, lower left).

Fakes, Forgeries, and Scribal Exercises

Unprovenanced documents invariably raise the suspicion of inauthenticity. There is not a little irony in an ancient use to which the ostracon was put and the origin of the current corpus. In the century before the dates of our corpus, ancient Athens (487–417 B.C.E.) had a practice known as ostracism. To protect the fledgling democracy against the resurgence of tyranny, the citizens voted annually if they wanted to hold "an ostracism." If the vote were affirmative, each citizen would scratch the name of the person he wished to see banished on an ostracon. The one receiving the most votes was *ostracized* from the city for ten years. A similar dynamic is occurring among scholarly circles in the case of the Idumean ostraca. Because they were not uncovered in supervised archeological excavations, our ostraca are labeled as deriving from an "unprovenanced" source. Some scholarly organizations will not accept publication of unprovenanced artifacts in their journals, and although they will not quite *ostracize* scholars who publish them elsewhere, they do not look upon their work with favor. Certainly, looting must be prevented by every possible means, but once an item or a collection has found its way to the antiquities market, it becomes a precious artifact, not a piece of broken clay to be abandoned or reinterred. In our case, we should be thankful to all of the collectors who viewed their collectibles not as art objects to be held in anonymity but as valuable documents to be made available for scholarly publication.

Nonetheless, one may wonder whether the Idumean ostraca are indeed authentic. Among the more than 1,950 ostraca, some 10 texts clearly stand out as questionable by virtue of their distinct script. These are to be found in three of the above-mentioned collections. Five appeared in the collection of the Feuers, given to the Israel Museum and published by Lemaire (L161–162, 213–214, 218), and four were acquired by the

Feuers and Paul Forbes and deposited in the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University (unpublished [IA11331, 11712, 11713, 11715]). One was found among the 79 photos of Lenny Wolfe that were not published by Ephʿal and Naveh but turned up in the Moussaieff collection and was subsequently also published by Lemaire (AL402). Although it is clear that more than 1,900 inscribed texts were written by knowledgeable and skilled scribes and are in varying degrees intelligible, the questionable texts are written in a script that may be described as "childish-modern" and convey no evident meaning. Three bear a striking resemblance to one another, each lacking word separation. Lemaire attempted a transcription of two of them in his first publication (L161–162 [see figs. 11–12]) but not for the third in his second publication (AL402 [see fig. 13]). He wavered between doubting their authenticity and viewing them as an apprentice's writing exercise, though he did call the form of the letters "anomalous." In his second publication, he included one piece that he clearly recognized as a scribal exercise (AL367 [fig. 28 below]), and the difference between it and these three is quite striking (for scribal exercises, see below).

Regarding two other pieces, Lemaire is unequivocal. With regard to the first, which is written in a different hand but is totally unintelligible, he commented, "fragment of ostracon, apparently comprising the end of three upper lines difficult to read. Upon direct examination, *il semble s'agir d'un faux*" (L213 [fig. 14]). The French word *faux* can be translated both "fake" and "forgery." The second piece is written beneath a jar handle, and of this, he wrote, "Letters quite large (*RWMW?*), *qui font penser a un faux*" (L214 [fig. 15). Were it to be authentic, Ada Yardeni would read כרמו.

Three of the four Feuer/Forbes pieces in the Institute of Archaeology (IA) of the Hebrew University appear to have been written by the same scribe as the three pieces published by Lemaire. Like the Moussaieff-Lemaire piece above (AL402), these three display an exceedingly irregular format. The former gives two lines of text, positioned in the middle of the ostracon, with wide margins on all four sides (fig. 13). The first line has 8 letters without word separation, and the second line has 7, also without word separation. Two of the IA ostraca have two and a half lines of writing, also without word separation, but by contrast, they have no margins (IA11713, 11715 [figs. 16–17). Both of these formats—with no lateral margins and with overly wide margins on all four sides—are anomalous. A normal ostracon has a moderate right and upper margin, almost no left margin, and a variable bottom margin. The third IA piece (IA11712) is meant to be a list of four names, written snugly against the right margin (fig. 18). Of the thirty-some lists of unaffiliated names, there is one in the Jeselsohn collection published by Ephʿal and Naveh that bears apparent resemblance to this format (EN178 = JA147 [fig. 19]). It has six names, also written close to the right edge, but the abundant blank space to the left may be explained by the addition of a second parallel column that fails to reach the bottom of the ostracon. The inability to decipher the names in the IA piece may be contrasted with the clear reading of those in the EN piece. Finally, there are 14 ostraca with single unaffiliated names, and the fourth IA piece is in clear imitation of these, but its script is totally unintelligible (IA11331 [fig. 20]).

What Lemaire recognized as a scribal exercise in his second volume (AL367 = M22 [fig. 28 below]) is clearly illustrative of a group of 20 such texts, eight of which are reproduced here. They are scattered in four collections, three each in the Jeselsohn and Feuer/Forbes collections (JA118, 152, 154; IA11846, 12433, 11292 [figs. 21–26]) and one each in Moussaieff's collection, published by Lemaire, and Lenny Wolfe's photographs of unlocated pieces (Naveh640; AL367 = M22 [figs. 27–28]). The six pieces from the Jeselsohn and Feuer/Forbes collections were studied by the ceramicist Alex Zuckerman, and he concluded that at least five of them derived from Iron Age or Persian Period vessels and displayed no consistent line direction (JA118, 152, 154; IA11846, 12433). The Idumean scribes rarely wrote on both sides of the ostracon, yet two of our eight pieces, both belonging to the Jeselsohn collection, are inscribed on both the concave and convex sides (JA118, 152 [figs. 21–22). The exercises themselves consist of strokes and circles, and we have given each piece an appropriate caption [figs. 23–28]). Identical pieces have been found among the fifth-century B.C.E. Aramaic ostraca excavated at Elephantine, two of which were also written on both sides (figs. 29–30). If we may be permitted an analogy from the world of sport, these exercises resemble a player's warm-up before a game. There is no attempt at writing a meaningful text. Clearly, the six pieces studied above as coming from the same scribal hand (L161, 162; AL402; IA11712, 11713, 11715 [figs. 11–13, 16–18) are not the exercise of an apprentice scribe, because their script stands in no relationship whatsoever to that of all the Idumean ostraca. It is neither a precursor nor a descendent. They are palpable fakes and

stand in stark contrast to that quintessential scribal exercise—the abecedary (fig. 31). Their presence only serves to bolster the authenticity of the corpus as a whole.

The closest thing to an authentic forgery, instead of a mere fake, is the final item in Lemaire's first volume, currently deposited in the Israel Museum (L218 = IM94.38.46 [fig. 32]). Here is his description of that piece: "Inscription possibly over patina, *ce qui signifierait qu'il s'agit d'un faux*. Nevertheless, one notes that the personal name 'Qoslakin' is attested in an unedited ostracon." Lemaire appears to be of two minds regarding this piece, but there is no doubt that it is authentic. First, the script resembles that of the other Idumean ostraca. Second, the name "Qoslakin," hitherto unattested, occurs altogether in our corpus some 16 times, including 8 times in his own personal commodity chit dossier (A39). Third, the chit should be read and understood differently than did Lemaire and belongs to a commodity dossier of 28 chits for *crushed/sifted grain* (Porten-Yardeni 2009: Table 3). Lastly, the matter of patina has been explained in the following fashion by Dr. Ada Yardeni and the ceramicist, Alex Zuckerman:

> Writing on this sherd overlies patina layer. This layer is a result of post-depositional chemical processes that affected the sherd surface after the sherd was discarded. Therefore, it is clear that the sherd in question was inscribed after the patina layer was deposited on its surface. This fact (which is untenable on paleographic grounds) is based of the assumption that ancient scribes used exclusively sherds without patina to write on. Alternatively, it is possible that scribes utilized all suitable sherds, preferring those with flat and smooth surface, but also using slightly curved sherds with somewhat uneven surfaces, as attested by numerous ostraca from the Persian and early Hellenistic periods. There is no evidence that scribes of this period used only fragments of recently broken vessels without patina, and never used stray sherds decades or even centuries old. It follows that sherds covered with pre-existing patina may have been used for writing, at least occasionally, and our sherd represents such a case. An additional possibility is that the ostracon in question was inscribed prior to the accumulation of patina on the inscribed surface, and that patina, consisting of minerals that originated from inside the sherd itself, appeared underneath the ink layer after the ostracon was discarded. This possibility, too, is in agreement with our paleographic conclusions.

The Real Thing

On the positive side, the Idumean ostraca are the product of a dynamic agricultural society with a developed scribal tradition and not the concoction of a presumed forger. They were written in a tongue and script known as Imperial Aramaic. This was the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire that ruled from India to Nubia (מהדו ועד כוש), as the opening of the book of Esther tells it (Esth 1:1). Indeed, official Aramaic letters have been found in Afghanistan at one end of that Empire (Shaked 2004) and in Egypt at the other. In fact, on the island of Elephantine, at the very border of ancient Kush, a hoard of Aramaic papyri and ostraca belonging to a Jewish military colony stationed on the island in the fifth century B.C.E. were unearthed (TAD A–D). It is evident from these documents that Aramaic was not only an official language of administration and legal proceedings but also of daily communication among family members. As already noted, some 30 excavated sites in the Land of Israel—from Yokneam in the north to Eilat in the south—have yielded several hundred Aramaic ostraca, with most coming from Arad and Beersheba (Naveh: 1973, 1979, 1981). Although the Elephantine material was written during the reigns of Darius I, Xerxes (biblical Ahasuerus), Artaxerxes II, and Darius II (495–399 B.C.E.), the Idumean material spanned the last seven years of Artaxerxes II (365–359 B.C.E.), all 21 years of Artaxerxes III (358–338), and two years of Arses (337–336), before reaching into the two decades of the Macedonian kings Philip III (322–316) and Alexander IV (son of Alexander the Great [315–312]), of the general Antigonus (317–312), and down into the rule of Ptolemy I (322–302 B.C.E.). Strangely, there are no dated texts from the time of Darius III (335–331) or Alexander the Great (330–323). All of this material reveals that, as in Egypt so in the Land of Israel, Aramaic was a language of daily economic activity, recorded by a whole bevy of skilled scribes. Much as the date formulas in the Elephantine contracts demonstrate uninterrupted Persian rule during the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes I (Porten 1968: 26–27), so the date formulas in the Idumean chits enable us to trace the power shifts between Alexander IV and Antigonus in the years 315–312 (Porten-Yardeni 2008a [Table 5 here]).

Unlike the relative homogeneity of the 5th-century scribal hands in Egypt, the Idumean corpus gives way to a diversity indicative of scribal individuality.

First of all, we should note that ostraca (singular: ostracon) were the scrap paper of the ancient world. In our case, the material they recorded may be divided into ten categories.

A. commodity chits (1,162 ostraca)
B. payment orders (15 ostraca)
C. accounts (79 ostraca)
D. workers texts (76 ostraca)
E. name lists (62 ostraca)
F. jar inscriptions (88 ostraca)
G. letters (23 ostraca)
H. land descriptions (100 ostraca)
J. uncertain (181 ostraca)
K. no text (218 ostraca)

With one exception (G letters), these are the same categories we find in the Beersheba Aramaic ostraca (Naveh 1973, 1979).

Perhaps the most fascinating topic to emerge from the Idumean ostraca is a robust onomasticon, which leads to the study of personal names. Whereas most of the theophorous names (those compounded with a deity and a verb or noun, such as Natanqos ["Qos gave"] or Qosrim ["Qos is exalted"]), have Hebrew counterparts (e.g., Natanel ["God gave"] or Yehoram ["YHW is exalted"]), a few display Arabian influence (cf., e.g., Qosghayr ["Qos is jealous"] or Qosḥair ["Qos is good"]). On the other hand, a large percentage of nicknames (or hypocoristica) and profane, non-theophorous names exhibit marked Arabian influence, ending in *waw* marking diminutives (e.g., Nutaynu ["little Nathan"] and Lubayu ["lion cub"]) or as case endings (e.g., Amru and Abdu). Furthermore, there are some 70 predicative elements that are shared by the Hebrew and Idumean theophorous names, which thus allows us to speak of a Judeo-Idumean piety, more than two centuries before the arrival of King Herod (Porten 2005; Porten-Yardeni 2007b: 78–79, figs. 14–15). We should remember that Nehemiah's southern opponent in fifth-century Judah was Geshem the Arabian (Neh 2:19, 6:1), also known as Gashmu (Neh 6:6), and his son was known as Qainu king of Qedar (TAD D15.4:10). When Aramaic pronunciation diverged from Hebrew, the shading was represented in the names. For example, the verb for "remember" is זכר in Hebrew and דכר in Aramaic, yielding the Hebrew name Zechariah ("YH remembered") and the Aramaic name Qosdakar ("Qos remembered"). Similarly, "help" is עזר in Hebrew and עדר in Aramaic, yielding Hebrew Eleazar ("El helped") and Aramaic Qosadar ("Qos helped").

If the names are fascinating, the commodity chits are tantalizing. Many, though by no means all, documents recording the transfer of goods from one person to another or to the storehouse were wholly or partially dated by day, month, and year of the reigning monarch. The names of the Persian monarchs were only rarely recorded (A29.2, 7.26, 146.1), but those of the Macedonian rulers were regularly recorded (Porten-Yardeni 2008a [e.g., fig. 33 here]). The same Babylonian month-names that appear in the Elephantine contracts and in late biblical books (Nisan [Neh 2:1], Sivan [Esth 8:9], Tebeth [Esth 2:16], Elul [Neh 6:15], and Adar [Ezra 6:15]) appear in our ostraca. There even are several instances of a second Adar, indicating the practice of intercalation. Even though these examples exactly match those worked out by Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein (1956) in their chronological tables, there are cases in which particular months have 30 days although the two scholars above assigned them only 29 (e.g., A4.7, 13). It was not calculation but new moon sighting that determined the beginning of the month.

The commodity chits pose a puzzle in the variety of their formulations. A chit would maximally consist of a date, a verb, the name of a payer, a commodity and measure, the name of a payee, and perhaps that of an agent, signatory, and sealing sign (A4.14, 9.9 [figs. 34–35]). Most have no payee, and those with an agent rarely have a payee (A47.2 [fig. 36]). Though some have the date at the beginning, others have it at the end; many omit the year, some even the month, and some have no date at all (fig. 37). We have organized

the chits according to dossiers of the name of the person or clan appearing at the beginning of the chit, following the date. As default designations in our marginal captions, we have designated him as the payer; the second person, whose name is preceded by the preposition "to," we have designated the payee; and the third person, introduced by the compound preposition על יד ("by the hand of") as the agent. Although the storehouse or the storehouse of Makkedah figure prominently in our documents as a depository (see below), what became of the commodities lacking a payee? Although the chits record a variety of commodities—several types of grain (wheat, barley, flour, semolina, sifted grain, *resh*) or other foodstuffs (wine and oil) measured in kors, seahs (30 to a kor), and qabs (6 to a seah); chaff and stalks (measured in BUNDLES or BALES); and various kinds of wood (measured in loads or individual units)—they fail to reveal, individually or in their entirety, their economic or legal function. Most abbreviate the names of the products, wheat (ח) and barley (ש) and their measures (kor [כ], seah [ס], qab [ק]), but many times they are written out in full (A1.35 [fig. 38]). They were drawn up by a bevy of professional scribes, some with script more elegant than others, but to whom did they belong once written? It is noteworthy that they rarely deal with monetary payments and make no mention of government officials.

Many of the payers, though apparently not the payees, were further designated by clan—that is, "sons of" or "of the house of" PN. We arranged our material in dossiers according to the name of the payer, with clan affiliates taking precedence. There are 6+ clans: Baalrim (A1 [57 chits]), Gur(u)/Gir (A2 [47 chits]), Qoṣi (A3 [42]), Al(i)baal (A4 [39]), Yehokal (A5 [20]), and miscellaneous clans (A6 [29 chits)]. Following the clans, there appear four dossiers of five prominent individuals: Ḥal(a)fat+Baalghayr (A7 [61 chits]), Samitu (A8 [44 chits]), Qoskahel (A9 [34 chits]), and Saadel (A10 [42 chits]). The 40 subsequent dossiers are arranged in descending order of frequency. Because most names lack patronyms, unlike those at Elephantine, it is not possible to produce a true prosopography beyond the clan members. The dossiers are thus composed of names, not individuals. Most of the 40 remaining dossiers contain names that appeared earlier, in the first 10 dossiers. Each of these is numbered, but with cross-reference to its original appearance for commentary. Summary tables accompany each of the first 10 dossiers (A1–10; Tables 6–15), and genealogical charts appear for the 5 clans (A1–5). Scribal identification was undertaken fully for the first dossier (A1) and sporadically for dossiers A3–5. Each physically available ostracon was provided with a ceramic description.

Altogether, we bring together in this volume 401 commodity chit ostraca. There remain to be published in this category another 761, almost 200 of which are fragmentary. Texts in the other nine categories number 842 (B–K). The two most noteworthy categories are the land descriptions (100 texts [Category H]) and the worker texts (76 texts [Category D]). Not only do the former resemble the chits in that the purpose of their recording is not evident, but in addition their syntax eludes us and much of their vocabulary is otherwise unknown. We read of plots, plantations, marshes, groves, white land, trees, and fields, as well as many words of uncertain meaning, which we print in SMALL CAPS: VALLEY (בקעתא), VALE (חלת), TERRACE (רפיד), LOT (אשל), GARDEN (כפת), FLAT LAND, LOWLAND (אשפל), and STRONGHOLD (חסינא). Many texts attach a measurement to each parcel in terms of seed capacity—that is, the parcel is measured by how many seahs of seed are sown in it. The texts record between 1 and 8 parcels. Sometimes, each parcel is inscribed on a separate line (fig. 39) but often they just run together . A most unique piece runs six lines and records "the ruin of the House of YHW" alongside "the mound beneath the Temple of Uzza" at the beginning and "the tomb of Yinqom" at the end. In the middle, we may have "the WELL of Maš(i)ku" and "a marsh" near another "tomb" (AL283 [fig. 40]). Since Jewish names are barely represented in the rich onomasticon, we can only wonder what happened to the Jews who had built that House and once worshiped there.

The worker texts attest to a hitherto undocumented practice of hiring day laborers, mostly written by a single scribe. Each was recorded on an individually dated ostracon, almost all by the same scribe. Each chit is for one or more day laborers supplied by one of the seven clans mentioned in the earlier dossiers (A1–6) on a stated date, spanning more than seven months in the year, especially Tammuz, Marcheshvan, and Kislev (fig. 41 [Porten-Yardeni 2006: 473–85]).

The relative paucity of letters—only 23 (G1.1–5.1), compared to the 57 ostraca from Elephantine a century earlier (TAD D7.1–57)—indicates that the find-spot of the Idumean ostraca probably did not include private dwellings. The presence of a preexilic Jewish community at our site is indicated by the discovery

of a single Hebrew ostracon recording סלת, the Hebrew equivalent of נשיף (“semolina”), and מקדה, the Hebrew spelling of our מנקדה (Mankedah 〉 Makkedah) [Aḥituv 2008: 180–81, also A4.27 here]). In addition, there are some 20 unpublished fragmentary 6th–7th-century Hebrew ostraca in the Jeselsohn collection, one of which contains the name מנקדה (Jeselsohn Hebrew no. 1). Moreover, an ostracon letter from Ḥorvat ʾUzza sends greetings to one Makki son of Hiṣṣilyahu “from Makkedah” (Aḥituv 2008: 166). This community at the site of Makkedah was overrun, its Temple destroyed, some time during the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Although the biblical prophets (Ezek 35:1–36:15; Joel 4:19; Obad), Psalmists (Ps 137:7), and elegists (Lam 4:21–22) excoriated Edom/Esau for the perfidy it wrought against its brother Jacob (Obad 10–12), it is left to these hundreds of ostraca to inform us of the daily life of those who displaced their brothers. As written in the High Holyday Netaneh Toqef prayer, man is to be “compared to a broken potsherd.”

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Explanation of Typographic Conventions

Certain Text	roman type
Uncertain readings	italic type
(Addition required by English style)	in parentheses
[Restored text]	in brackets
[*Probably restoration*]	in brackets, in italic
supralinear addition	superscript type
EDITORIAL NOTATION: (i.e., OR)	small caps (parentheses)
WORD OF UNCERTAIN MEANING (ERASURE):)	small caps
. . .	ellipsis: missing or uncertain text
d/r	characters separated by solidus / alternate readings
Marginal notation (e.g., Payer)	explanation in smaller type
[5]Line numbers of translation of text	superscript line number
1.	number on line = line number of Aramaic text