

Ancient Pottery Shards Analyzed by Israeli Scientists Seem to Support Biblical Narrative

By Sharona Schwartz
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Israeli archaeologists, mathematicians and physicists are joining forces to uncover the meaning behind inscriptions found on pottery fragments believed to be more than 2,500 years old.

← Impression from the seal of Eliashiv ben Ashiyahu
(Image source: Israeli Foreign Ministry)

The Israeli newspaper Haaretz [reported](#) Wednesday that a Tel Aviv University team has been examining pieces of First Temple-era pots and vessels with ancient inscriptions scratched in. The ancient pot fragment is known as an ostrakon.

One of the inscriptions addressed events described in the biblical book of Jeremiah. Haaretz reported. Even more gripping is the tale told by perhaps the most known ostrakon from the period, which was found in Lachish, the largest Judahite town after Jerusalem. In the dispatch, an official stationed outside the city reports to his commander on the fall of a nearby stronghold, saying that “we can see the signals from Lachish, but we no longer see Azekah.”

Scholars have taken this as a confirmation of the biblical narrative of Jeremiah, which recounts that Azekah and Lachish were the last fortresses of Judah to fall before Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II.

The Israeli foreign ministry has [noted](#) that more than 100 ostraca written in Paleo-Hebrew script have been found in Arad in southern Israel, calling it “the largest and richest collection of inscriptions from the biblical period ever discovered in Israel.” Paleo-Hebrew was used in the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

Some of the inscriptions were addressed to the commander of the Citadel of Arad, Eliashiv ben Ashiyahu, and discussed getting bread, wine and oil to soldiers serving in the Negev Desert. Another excerpt discussed the security threats in the area, warning of an emergency and requesting reinforcements, the foreign ministry explained.

One of the potsherds from Arad, probably sent to one of Eliashiv’s superior officers, is a panicked note from the king in Jerusalem with an order “incumbent upon your very life” to send reinforcements to nearby Ramat Negev to counter a threat from the neighboring Edomites.

We don’t know what the response to the message was, but shortly after the order was received, the Edomites, who were allied with the Babylonians, overran the entire area and destroyed the Arad citadel.

The effort to uncover the meaning behind the ancient inscriptions began...

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