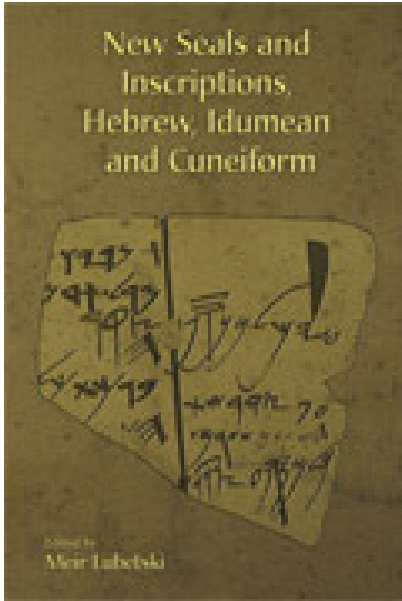


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**Lubetski, Meir, ed.**

***New Seals and Inscriptions, Hebrew, Idumean and Cuneiform***

Hebrew Bible Monographs 8

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Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer  
University of Aberdeen  
Aberdeen, United Kingdom

This collection of sixteen articles forms a valuable contribution to the discussion of the ever-increasing archaeological discoveries in Israel and surrounding countries dating from the first millennium B.C.E. These articles, written by an international group of scholars under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature International Meetings (Cambridge, 2003; Groningen, 2004), focus on the archaeological artifacts in Dr. Shlomo Moussaieff's private collection. The articles present over fifty inscriptions, tablets, and seals, written in Hebrew, Idumean, and Akkadian. The volume is generously presented. There are, for example, high-quality photographs of nearly all of the inscriptions discussed, thus enabling the reader to see the text being discussed and to evaluate the proposed reading.

The essays fall into five categories—seals, ostraca, tablets, Qumran, and onomastics—and they describe various types of artifacts: cuneiform tablets, ostraca, seals, and inscriptions. They provide data not only about ancient Israel but also about Edom as well as about the situation of the Jews in Babylon during the Achaemenid Empire. They also address the issue of forgery and the various ways in which scholars can or should relate to material that is not (yet) generally accepted as genuine.

The collection of articles begins with D. N. Freedman's short but thought-provoking article about the issues of authenticity surrounding two recently found inscriptions: the proclamation of Jehoash of Judah (ninth century B.C.E.), written in classical Hebrew; and the ossuary of Jacob/James the son of Joseph and the brother of Jeshua/Jesus (first century C.E.), written in Palestinian Aramaic. In particular, he raises the issues of fake *versus* real, and false *versus* true, and he explores to what extent our knowledge of the ninth century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. would be enhanced if these inscriptions turned out to be authentic.

The subsequent six essays investigate some of the seals and inscriptions in the Moussaieff collection. André Lemaire presents a sample of hitherto unpublished seals and seal impressions. He describes them, dates them, reads them, and then compares them to other seals found in the same area or that date from the same time period. In cases when relevant, he further explores the possible light that these inscriptions shed upon our understanding of the Hebrew Bible and vice versa.

Lemaire's article is followed by four shorter essays by Meir Lubetski devoted to various artifacts in the Shlomo Moussaieff personal collection. All the artifacts under discussion show clear Egyptian influence. In his first, Lubetski discusses a cast silver signet ring depicting a falcon and a collar of beads stemming from the eighth century B.C.E.. Lubetski identifies these two signs as the Egyptian word for "Falcon of Gold" and discusses the spread of Egyptian symbols in Canaan. Turning to the ownership of the ring, he makes two suggestions as to its purpose: either as a talisman or as a symbol of the owner's profession. In his second essay, Lubetski explores the use of the name Horus the Falcon as a personal name in the community of Arameans and residents of Elephantine. In the third article, Lubetski reflects on the two variants of the name N<sup>W</sup>Y<sup>H</sup>W/N<sup>W</sup>Y<sup>W</sup> as found on a signet stamp and on a patronymic seal in Shlomo Moussaieff's collection. In the case of the ring, the name is accompanied with a picture of a falcon with an eagle's wings spread open, while the seal depicts a two-winged dung beetle. The Hebrew script is typical of northern Israelite writing of the eighth century B.C.E. The name, however, is not known from the Hebrew Bible. The first element is probably the Egyptian finite verb *nw* ("to see") transliterated into Hebrew characters. In contrast, the final element *-yhw/-yw* is clearly a form of the Tetragrammaton. What we have is thus a hybrid form meaning "YHWH sees," a concept known from the Hebrew Bible (see Gen 29:32). In his last article, Lubetski discusses yet another Egyptian-inspired Hebrew seal. This time it is a seal containing the name *Mnr* together with various Egyptian icons. He concludes that the sphere of those who were multilingual among the Israelites was wider than previously thought.

Peter van der Veen reinvestigates the artifacts from Tell Lachish mentioning Gedalyahu in the light of a bulla that reads “Gedalyahu, servant//minister of the king,” belonging to the Moussaieff collection. In his view (*contra* that of Bob Becking), the evidence suggests an identification of the Gedalyahu referred to on these archaeological artifacts with the Gedalyahu who was appointed governor over Judah and is mentioned in 2 Kgs 25:22–26 and Jer 39:14; 40:5–41:18.

The following three articles look at ostraca. In the first, Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni provide an overview of the whereabouts of the various Aramaic ostraca from the land of Israel and their respective state of publication. They discuss the toponomy, onomastics, and chronology of these ostraca and conclude that it is indeed important to publish as many of them as possible, since, although each ostrakon is but a small piece, they together provide valuable information of major historical events.

The same two scholars continue their investigation of the Aramaic ostraca in yet another essay. Dealing with eighty ostraca belonging to the house of Baalrim, they draw conclusions pertaining to the social-economic situation of the village of Baalrim spanning from around 400 B.C.E. and the following one hundred years.

Finally, Martin Heide addresses the difficulty of assessing inscriptions of unknown provenance. In particular, Heide provides a detailed discussion of the possible authenticity of an alphabetic ostrakon bought by Moussaieff from the antiquities market. He concludes that the inscription is likely to be authentic, although until we know more about it and about the development of the Hebrew script, the final verdict is still out.

The subsequent four essays focus on the evidence from cuneiform tablets. First, E. Lipiński addresses the issue of the Akkadian phrase *rēšāti ša Issar ša Arba’il* (“firstfruits” of Ishtar of Arbela”) that is found in connection with several Neo-Assyrian loans of silver. The double use in the Akkadian texts of the determinative-relative pronoun *ša*, once before the name of the deity and once before the name of the person acting as a lender, causes ambiguity regarding the ownership of the silver. Lipiński demonstrates that a comparison with Aramaic texts on the same matter clarifies the situation, as the latter formally distinguish between the divine owner and the human lender. This in turn increases our understanding of the Neo-Assyrian silver trade.

Second, W. G. Lambert discusses briefly an already-published cuneiform tablet from the twenty-fourth year of the reign of Darius I. He argues that this tablet, mentioning a Jewish woman selling a calf, contributes to our knowledge of the Jewish community of exiles in Babylon in the Persian period.

Third, Kathleen Abraham discusses a cuneiform tablet from the latter years of the reign of Darius I recording the division of Ahiya-qām's property among his sons in Āl-Yahudu. She provides philological and textual notes and draws conclusions about the economic and legal situation of the Jews in Babylon at this time. She further discusses the onomastic data within the text.

Fourth, Chaim Cohen investigates in great detail the evidence related to biblical Hebrew philology in the light of the new and potentially authentic Yeho'ash royal building inscription. He points out that, because most of his discussions are philological in nature and are based on interaction with the philological evidence of other biblical and nonbiblical Hebrew texts, his conclusions would remain valid even if the inscription under discussion would turn out to be a forgery, something that Cohen himself doubts.

In the fourth part of the book, dealing with artifacts related to Qumran, Ada Yardeni studies the writings of a particular scribe. As it is possible to differentiate between the handwritings of the different scribes, it is fruitful to look at the combined work of one particular scribe and to explore what that can tell about scribal activities in the Qumran community. Yardeni also describes in detail the characteristics of the script of this particular scribe.

In the final section of the book, dealing with onomastics, Richard Hess provides a survey of recent discussions concerning Israelite personal names and how they reflect the religion of Ancient Israel (Tigay, Day, Zevit, Lemaire, Callaway). He further highlights the fact that, based on the onomastic evidence, the exclusive manner in which Judahite parents gave their children names with Yahwistic elements has no parallel among the neighboring nations. Furthermore, he surveys samplings of personal names from Samaria, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Jerusalem, as well as the onomastic evidence from the time of Hezekiah from the Moussaieff collection of bullae. Hess concludes that these samples confirm Zevit's estimate that fewer than 20 percent of the personal names contained non-Yahwistic divine names.

There is little doubt that the various articles of this collection contribute to our understanding of the history of ancient Israel. The artifacts discussed in this volume provide a glimpse into the world of the Levant in the eighth century and onwards, a world populated with people who spoke Hebrew and who bore names similar to those mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.