

## A 7th. Century BCE Bulla Fragment from Area D3 in the 'City of David'/Silwan

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# A 7<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BCE BULLA FRAGMENT FROM AREA D3 IN THE 'CITY OF DAVID'/SILWAN

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This article reports on the discovery of a bulla fragment in Area D3 in the City of David/Silwan, Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> The first excavation season at the site took place between February 4 and June 14, 2013; the aim was to create an east-west section on the eastern periphery of the City of David/Silwan. The season was primarily devoted to understanding the seven-meter-thick dump layers that dated to the Early Roman period (1st century CE), estimated to be the Roman city's garbage dump (Reich and Shukron 2003; Bar-Oz *et al.* 2007; Zelinger 2010).<sup>2</sup> Previous field work on the same layers of waste had noted the enormous volume of everyday artifacts such as ceramics, bones, seeds and charcoal, stone vessels, coins and metal objects. In order to produce a statistically valid sample of the finds and distribute them into different types, and also in order to study the formation process of the dump, careful wet-sifting was implemented. Dirt buckets were spread over a

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<sup>1</sup> The excavations along the eastern slope of the 'City of David' ridge (license number G-4/2013) are directed by Yuval Gadot on behalf of the Sonia and Marco institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The excavation team includes H. Machline (area supervisor) and O. Moshevich (wet-sifting supervisor), N. Nehama and R. Abu-Halaf (administration), A. Peretz (photographs), V. Essman and Y. Shmidov (surveying and drafting), S. 'Adalah (metal detection). We would also like to thank Prof. Christopher Rollston and Prof. David Vanderhooff for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> While most scholars agree that the material within the earth layers dates only to the first century CE, there are disagreements regarding its formation processes. Some scholars claim that the layers are the city's actual garbage dump dating to the 1st century BCE (Bar-Oz *et al.* 2007; Reich and Shukron 2003). Yet others claim that the remains were only discarded at the spot after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans (70 CE) as part of land clearance for the quarrying of natural rock on the slopes above (De-Groot 2012: 183–184).

sifting net of 1mm and then carefully sprayed with water. When the soil dried, it was sorted for any items that might be related to human activity.

### THE BULLA FRAGMENT

On April 9, 2013, while wet-sifting soil from the excavation, a small fragment of an Iron Age bulla was found (Reg. no. 13483/1, Locus 1027), unique among all the rest of the finds in these excavated layers, dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. It is the left segment of a bulla.



Signs of breakage are clearly seen on its backside. The narrow slot marks made by the bulla tying cord are visible. The color of the bulla is unified gray. When examining the section created by the breakage, the high quality and homogeneity of the clay can be observed; the fact that there are hardly any inclusions added is also obvious.

In order to investigate the technology and possible provenience of the bulla, it was subjected to Microarchaeological examination following the sampling procedure and examination method that were discussed elsewhere (Goren and Gurwin, in press). A shallow lamina, sizing only few mm, is peeled off from the broken facet of the bulla or from its reverse side under the stereomicroscope with the aid of a scalpel. The sample was set in a polyethylene mould and dried in an oven at 60°C for a few hours. Then it was put in a desiccator and impregnated with Buehler Epo-Thin epoxy resin under vacuum conditions. After curing, the resulting pellet was used for the preparation of a standard thin-section and subjected to routine petrologic examination under a polarizing microscope using X40 - X400 magnifications.

Like all the contemporaneous bulla from Jerusalem that we examined so far (Arie *et al.* 2011; Goren and Gurwin, in press), the raw material of this bulla is readily identified as derived from *terra rossa* soil. The properties of the clay matrix in thin section indicate that it was exposed to high temperature of above 500°C, hence it was most likely fired or accidentally heated, most likely after it was detached from the document that it sealed. Although *terra rossa* soil is widespread along the Judean-Samaritan hill area, it is exposed locally in the immediate

surroundings of the site. Based on several considerations it has been suggested in the past that all the examined bullae were locally made. It should be emphasized that none of the nearly 300 bullae that we have examined so far were made of clay from other geological formations, such as the local Moza clay formation, even though it was extensively used for pottery production in Judah throughout the ages. This indicates that the entire assemblage of bullae from the City of David was most likely made locally around Jerusalem in a highly standardized manner. It appears that the bullae were used to seal local legal and administrative documents, rather than letters or other external dockets. We therefore join the opinion first presented by Avigad (1997: 33–39) and Shiloh (1986: 36–37) and we assume that Judahite bullae such as the item under discussion were used as sealings of legal documents.

The quality of the seal used for stamping the bulla is excellent; it includes two written registers with two separation lines between the registers. It was probably elliptical in shape, and a double bezelled line, clearly visible on the lower left half of the fragment, indicates that it surrounded the entire seal. A reconstruction of the full encirclement of the bulla, based on the existing lines, attests to a vertical diameter of 8 mm. The transverse diameter, along the two separating lines, should be larger, since, according to the size of the existing letters, a round radius would not allow room for more than 4 letters in each register. Since we do not know the width of the seal, we cannot estimate the number of missing letters on the central and right side of the bulla.

### THE LETTERS IMPRESSED ON THE BULLA

On the upper register, two letters are clearly seen: the left part of a *qop* (ק) and a complete *mem* (מ). On the lower register two letters can be clearly observed: *lamed* (ל) and *kap* (כ). The reading should, then, be:

ל--- // ק---

It is most probable that two private names were written in the two registers, as is the case in most other bullae: “(belonging to) Personal Name / (\*son of) Personal Name”

ל[xxx] (בן) קם[xxx][ל]

A private name might also be in the first register followed by a title in the second register: “(belonging to) Personal Name / title”

ל[xxxxx] קם[xxx][ל]

From the paleographical perspective the writing is similar to many of the bullae found in Stratum 10 of the City of David, and the script matches characteristics known from the late 8th to 7th/early 6th centuries BCE.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For example, the downstroke of the *mem*, which has a well-defined obtuse angle, may be earlier than more gently curving single strokes without a sharp angle, while the *qop* matches exactly what we know in the Siloam inscription, and the *kap* looks very much like the

### THE NAME IN THE UPPER REGISTER

Theoretically, in the first register, a name with a suffix derived from the root נקם could be considered, but this root, especially as a suffix, is very rare among Judahite (Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 582), as well as Phoenician (Zadok 1988: 95; Benz 1972: 363), Ugaritic (Gröndahl 1967: 168), and even Emorite (Huffmon 1965: 241) personal names. Theoretically a name derived from the root רקם could also be considered, since according to Josh. 18:27 it was a geographical name in the territory of Benjamin, according to Num. 31:8 it was a name of a Midianite king (and cf. to Josh. 13:21), and it also appear as a personal name in 1 Chron. 2:43; 7:16. This name did not appear in epigraphic finds, however, until now, just like a name with a suffix derived from the root שקם (cf. Zadok 1988: 69). The preferable suffix of the name in the upper register was well defined by Albertz (in Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 301, 306, cf. pp. 540, 550–551, cf. Noth 1966: 176–177) as derived from the root קום *QWM* in Qal (as a subgroup of names that refer to divine attention express notion of movement toward a sufferer). From this root three names appear in epigraphic finds: אחיקם (*ʾĀhīqām*) or in the abbreviated form אחקם (*ʾĀhīqām*) – “my [divine] brother has arisen,”<sup>4</sup> יהוקם (*Yēhōqām*) – “Yhwh has arisen,”<sup>5</sup> עזריקם (*ʾĀzrīqām*) or in the abbreviated form עזרקם (*ʾĀzrīqām*) – “my [divine] help has arisen,” or as derived from the same root but in hiphil (as a subgroup of names that express divine assistance in the sense of God’s raising a fallen sufferer), with two names that appear in epigraphic finds: אליק(י)ם (*ʾElyāqīm*) – “El has raised,”<sup>6</sup> and יהויק(י)ם (*Yēhōyāqīm*) or in the abbreviated form יוק(י)ם (*Yauqīm*) – “Yhwh has raised.”<sup>7</sup>

The name אחיקם (*ʾĀhīqām*) or in the abbreviated form אחקם (*ʾĀhīqām*) is well known in epigraphic finds, and appears three times in ostraca from the late 7th or early 6th century BCE: אחיקם בן שמעיהו in line 5 of ostracon 31 from Arad

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*kap* in the monumental inscription fragment from the City of David (Naveh 2000: 1–2).

<sup>4</sup> This name appears 20 times in the Old Testament (2 Kgs. 22: 12, 25: 22; Jer. 26:24, 39: 14, 40: 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 16, 41: 1, 2, 6, 10, 16, 18, 43: 6; 2 Chr. 34: 20). In three of these selections *ʾĀhīqām* is an important figure at the court of King Josiah and is active until the rule of King Jehoiakim. He has an important role in Josiah’s cultic reform, and according to Jer. 26:24 he protected the Prophet Jeremiah from the people, a clear indication of his status and importance.

<sup>5</sup> This name does not appear in the Old Testament, but cf. to the inverted order of the two components of the name – יקמיה (1 Chron. 2:41; 3:18).

<sup>6</sup> This name appears twice in the Old Testament (2 Kgs. 23: 34; 2 Chr. 36: 4) as the former name of King Jehoiakim, but in most cases (2 Kgs. 18: 18, 26, 37, 19:2; Isa. 22:20, 36:3, 11, 22, 37:2) as one of the ministers in King Hezekiah’s court, and once as a prophet in the days of Nehemiah (12:41).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. to the rare name read by Lemaire (2007: 17) — *hāqīm* on a seal of unknown origin.

(Aharoni 1981, no. 31, p. 58–61); [אחיק[ם] in line 3 of the fragmentary ostrakon discovered in the City of David (Stratum 10B, dated to the late 7th or early 6th century BCE, and see Shiloh 1981: 165; Naveh 2000, no. 3); [מ[של]ם] in line 1 of the ostrakon from Ḥorvat 'Uza (Beit Arieh 1985; 1986–87; 2007: 139–143; the reading of the last name follows Lemaire 1995: 221; 1997: 165; Na'aman 2012: 219). The letters אַחַק (*ḥq*) were incised on the body of a jar from Stratum VII (Building 521 in Area E) at Tel 'Ira, and it seems that Beit Arieh (1999: 409–410) correctly restored the name [אַחַק[ם] and pointed to what seems to be the beginning of another a *mem* at the end of the word.<sup>8</sup>

The name יהוקם (*Yēhōqām*) is only known from seals and bullae of unknown origin.<sup>9</sup> The name עזריקם (*ʿAzrīqām*), which is the abbreviated form of the name עזריקים (*ʿAzrīqām*), is known from a bulla excavated by Shiloh in the City of David (Area G, Stratum 10, dated to the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE, and cf. to Shiloh 1986, no. 32, p. 29; Shoham 1994, no. 32, p. 58, and drawing p. 59) with the name

<sup>8</sup> The name אַחַק was mentioned twice more in ostraca of unknown origin: אַחַק בן עזר (Deutsch and Helzer 1995, no. 77:5, pp. 83–88) and אַחַק (ibid. no. 79:8, pp. 92–102). Four persons with the name אַחַק are known from seals and bullae, all of unknown origin: מתן / לאַחַק (scaraboid seal, Hecht Museum H-1744, Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 57, p. 69); בן חבי / לאַחַק identical bullae, Hecht Museum H-2445 to H-2451, Deutsch and Helzer 1997, no. 94a, b, c; Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 430, p. 181); [אַחַק[הו] (bulla, private collection, Deutsch 1997, no. 24, p. 74–75); [בן]אַחַק / [בן]אַחַק (bulla, private collection, Deutsch 1997, no. 25, p. 75–76; Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 431, p. 181). Five persons with the abbreviated name אַחַק are also known from seals and bullae of unknown origin: אַחַק / פלטיהו (seal, private collection, Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 61, p. 70); אַחַק / אַחַב (bulla, private collection, Avigad 1986: no. 16, p. ; Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 432, p. 182); אַחַק בן [ן] / טביהו (bulla, Israel Museum, Avigad 1986: no. 14, p. ; Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 433, p. 182); אַחַק / נריהו (bulla, private collection, Avigad 1986: no. 15, p. ; Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 434, p. 182). One more name was mentioned in an ostrakon of unknown origin (Deutsch and Helzer 1995, no. 79: 8, pp. 92–102); אַחַק ב / ת אַחַק (Deutsch 2003, no. 46, p. 75–76); אַחַק ב / [ן] אַחַמ(לך) (Deutsch 2003, no.72, p. 106); אַחַק / אַחַק (Deutsch 2003, no. 78, p. 107). The name also appears on two Aramaic seals – אַחַק / בר בהס (Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 764, p. 286–287); אַחַק ב / ר נשרי (Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 765, p. 287, with further literature).

<sup>9</sup> For the seals and bullae from an unknown origin with the name יהוקם, see: a bulla with the name יהוקם (Avigad 1975, no. 11, p. 69); יהוקם / יהונדב (ibid., no. 12, p. 69); יהוקם / לפדיהו (Avigad 1986, no. 12, p. 32); [ל]יהוק / [ם] חגי (Deutsch 1997, no. 51, p. 98); יהוקם / לשלם (Deutsch and Lemaire 2000, no. 83, p. 89); אַחַק / לאַשיהו (Deutsch 2003, no. 120, p. 141–142); אַחַק / להושעיהו (ibid., no. 154, p. 167); אַחַק / [י]אחוקם (two identical and damaged bullae, ibid., nos. 176 a-b, p. 184–185); אַחַק / ליהוקם (ibid., no. 193, p. 198); אַחַק / זכריה (ibid., no. 194, p. 199); אַחַק / ליהוק (four identical bullae, ibid., nos. 195a-d, p. 199–202); אַחַק / חי... (ibid. no. 401, p. 360–361).

עזרקם / מכיהו. In all the other cases, this name is known only from seals and bullae of unknown origin.<sup>10</sup>

The name אַליק(י)ם (*ʿElyāqīm*) was discovered on two identical bullae excavated by Shiloh in the City of David – לַאליקם / בן אוהל (Area G Stratum 10, dated to the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE, and cf. to Shiloh 1986, nos. 29 and 30, p. 29; Shoham 1994, nos. 29 and 30, p. 58). The name is also well known from four identical stamp impressions on jar handles – ר. יוכן / לַאליקם.נע (discovered at Ramat Rahel, Tel Beit Mirsim and Beit Shemesh, and cf. Grant and Wright 1939: 80; Vaughn 1999: 199; Albright 1932: Nos. 623, 860; Aharoni 1964: 33, Fig. 37: 6 and Pl. 40: 4). In all the other 14 occurrences the name appears on seals and bullae of unknown origins.<sup>11</sup>

The name יהויק(י)ם (*Yēhōyāqīm*), or its abbreviated form יוק(י)ם (*Yauqīm*), are poorly represented in the epigraphic material. In line 3 of ostrakon 31 from Lachish, as part of the five lines of names, a person named [בן י]הוי[קם] was mentioned (and cf. to Ussishkin 1983, pl. XLI, and p. 159, and cf. to Dobbs-Allsopp et. al. 2005: 344–345). The other few occurrences of this name are from two bullae and two seals of unknown origin.<sup>12</sup>

The conclusion from the above is that the names אַחיקם (or in the abbreviated form אַחקם), and אַליקם are the best

<sup>10</sup> The name עזריקם (*ʿĀzriqām*) and its abbreviated form עזרקם (*ʿĀzriqām*) are familiar in seals and bullae from unknown origin: עזרקם (Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 1167, p. 442, with further literature; Deutsch and Lemaire 2000, no. 133, p. 140); לעזרקם / בן פרפר (two identical bullae, and see Avigad 1986, no. 138, p. 82–83); לעזריקם / בן מכי (Avigad 1986, no. 139, p. 83); [בן] צדקא (Avigad 1986, no. 139, p. 83); [ל]עזרקם / [בן] צדקא (Deutsch 1997, no. 75, p. 118–119); לעזריקם / בן / לצפן (ibid., no. 83, p. 125–126, and cf. to another bulla with the same name, as published by Deutsch 2003, no. 335, p. 309–310); לעזרקם / בן / לשפן / בן / עזרקם (ibid., no. 93, p. 133–134); לעזריקם / בן חבי (Deutsch 2003, no. 302, p. 285–286).

<sup>11</sup> For the name אַליק(י)ם (*ʿElyāqīm*) in seals and bullae of an unknown origin, see: עבד המלך / לאליקם (seal, Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 6, p. 51–52); עזא / לאליקם (seal, Hestrin and Dayagi-Mendels 1979, no. 91, p. 115); בן מעשיה / לאליקם (Avigad 1969, no. 8, p. 4); [בן ח]לקיהו / לאליקם (Deutsch 1997, no. 30, p. 79–80, and cf. to two identical bullae published by Deutsch 2003, nos. 84a-b, p. 112–113); לאל / י / ק / מ / חבי (ibid., no. 87, p. 129); אַליקם (Deutsch 2003, no. 83, p. 111–112); בן סמך / לאליקם (ibid., no. 85, p. 114); קם שאל / לאלי (two identical bullae, ibid., 86a-b, p. 114–115); לאליק / מ תלא (ibid., no. 87, p. 115–116); אַליקם / לינש (two identical impressions on the same clay bulla, ibid., no. 198, p. 204–205); / לנרא (ibid., no. 266, p. 258); לקעלת / י. אלי / קם (ibid., no. 342, p. 314–315).

<sup>12</sup> For the name יהויק(י)ם (*Yēhōyāqīm*) in the two bullae from an unknown origin, see: [בן]הוי[קם] / לאשיהו (Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 96, p. 80); בן-שע / יהויקם (seal, ibid., no. 177, p. 104). Diringier (1934: 197, Pl. XX 8a-b) published the seal and read it: לעשיהו / בן יוקם. Deutsch and Helzer (1995: 77–79) published a fragmentary steatite stone mould of a seal, which on its right side a mirror inscription was engraved: יוקם.

candidates for the name in the first line, since they are the more attested in epigraphic finds, including finds from the City of David.

### THE NAME / TITLE IN THE LOWER REGISTER

If the two letters at the end of the lower register are the suffix of a name, it is part of a group of names ending with the title מלך (king); among this group the most common name in epigraphic finds is אַחְמֶלֶךְ (*ʾĀḥīmelek*) “my [divine] brother is king,”<sup>13</sup> while all the other names - אֲדֹנָיִם לְמֶלֶךְ “[my] lord is king,” אֱלֹהֵי־מֶלֶךְ “[my] god is the king,” חַנּוּמֶלֶךְ “The [divine] king is [my] mercy,”<sup>14</sup> etc., are very rare in epigraphic material.

If the two letters at the end of the lower register are a final component of a title, something that seems to be better represented in epigraphic material, then two well-known and common titles in the biblical material, as well as in epigraphic finds, can be reconstructed: בֶּן־הַמֶּלֶךְ (the son of the king) or preferably, עַבְד־הַמֶּלֶךְ (the servant of the king).

The title (in singular) עַבְד־הַמֶּלֶךְ (*ʿbd hmlk* - the servant of the king) appears only six times in the Old Testament, and it ascribes to David, “the servant of Saul the king of Israel” (1 Sam. 29:3); Joab, “the king’s servant” (2 Sam. 18:29); Jeroboam, “a servant of Solomon” (1 Kgs. 11:26); Asaiah, “the king’s servant” (2 Kgs. 22:12, cf. to 2 Chr. 34:20), and Nebuzaradan, “a servant of the king of Babylon” (2 Kgs. 25:8).<sup>15</sup> This title was meant to define the highest-ranking members of the court in the Kingdom of Judah from the end of the 8th century and during the 7th century BCE (Sacher-Fox 2000: 53–63). Yet, this appellation was not intended to define a specific position. Rather, it was used to stress the special status of those who held it, their eminence over the other ministers, and their extraordinary loyalty to the king (Lipschits 2002). This title has an analogous meaning that can be seen from Ostrakon 3 from Lachish and in the 16 Hebrew stamp impressions and seals, many of them well known (Lipschits 2002, Table 1 and Table 2, with a detailed list of finds and the relevant archaeological data). Evidently, any of the king’s officials who defined himself as *ʿbd hmlk* (“servant of the king”) might have worn a seal on his finger or around his neck with this label on it. In this

<sup>13</sup> The name appears nine times in the Samaria Ostraca (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005, cf. citations on p. 769); once in an ostraca from Arad (72: 2, and cf. *ibid.*, p. 93). It also appears on a stamped jar handle, bullae and seals of unknown origin, and see Avigad and Sass 1997, nos. 58–60, pp. 69–70; Deutsch and Helzer 1994, no. 8, p. 31; Deutsch and Helzer 1995, no. 79(4), line 4; Deutsch 1997, no. 18a-b, p. 69–70, and no. 26, p. 76; Deutsch and Lemaire 2000, no. 54, p. 60; no. 56, p. 62; Deutsch 2003, nos. 75–77, pp. 105–106; no. 108, p. 132; no. 288, p. 275. For the many occurrences of this name in epigraphic finds see also: Zadok 1988: 54; Davies 1991: 274–275; Albertz and Schmitt 2012: 578.

<sup>14</sup> On this name, see Shoham 2000, no. 3, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> This is not the place to discuss the name of Ebedmelech the Kushite, mentioned six times in Jeremiah (38: 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 39: 16).

manner he would be expressing his absolute loyalty to the king, and the fact that he was close to him and had a unique status in his court.

The title **בן המלך** (*bn hmlk* – the king’s son) was meant to define the son of the reigning king or of a predecessor (Sacher-Fox 2000: 43–53). Five people with this title were mentioned in the Old Testament: “Joash, the king’s son” was mentioned in 1 Kgs. 22:26 (and cf. to 2 Chr. 18:25); “Jotham, the king’s son,” who “was over the household” was mentioned in 2 Kgs. 15:5 (and cf. to 2 Chr. 26:21); “Jerahmeel, the king’s son” was mentioned in Jer. 36:26; “Malchijah, the king’s son” was mentioned in Jer. 38:6, and “Maaseiah, the king’s son” was mentioned in 2 Chr. 28:7. In the epigraphic material 29 seals and stamp impressions are known; most of them are of unprovenanced origin.<sup>16</sup>

### SUMMARY

Finding the bulla in a controlled excavation, even out of its original context, is a welcome addition to the growing corpus of bullae, stamp impressions and Hebrew names dating between the late 8th and the early 6th centuries BCE. Although the name on the seal cannot be safely reconstructed, the seal’s quality and the reconstructed title of its bearer leave no doubt that it was used by a high official in the royal Judahite administration.

The names **אחיקם** (or in the abbreviated form **אחקם**), and **אליקים** are the best candidates for the name in the first register, since they are the more attested in epigraphic finds, including finds from the City of David. The title **עבד המלך** (“the servant of the king”) is the best candidate for the reconstruction of a title in the second register. The best parallel to our reconstruction is a seal published by Vermeule (1970: 202, and cf. to Avigad and Sass 1997, no. 6, p. 51–52, with further literature). It is a seal with very similar characteristics — two inscribed registers, a double bezelled line, and with the name **לאליקים** in the upper register and the title **עבד המלך** in the lower one. Also the script is very similar, even if the seal is far from being identical to our bulla, since it is much larger and with a triple line field divider.

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<sup>16</sup> Deutsch 2003: 56–60, with a detailed list on p. 60.

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