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<i>Bornas, K. S., and L. T. Gentry, The Fourth Campaign at Tell Heshbon</i>	1
<i>Van Eiltheren, Bastiaan, Area A</i>	17
<i>Sauer, James A., Area B and Square D-1</i>	29
<i>Marr, W. Harold, Area C</i>	63
<i>Herr, Larry G., Area D</i>	79
<i>Sitting, James H., Areas E, F, and G-10</i>	101
<i>Herr, Larry G., Area G-5</i>	107
<i>More, W. Harold, Area G-6, 7, 9</i>	109
<i>Booth, Robert, Jr., Area G-8 (Tamm Es-Sarab)</i>	113
<i>Hatch, Robert, Jr., Archaeological Survey of the Heshbon Region</i>	119
<i>Goldstein, Sidney M., Glass Fragments from Tell Heshbon</i>	127
<i>Yerlium, Abduham, Coins from the 1973 and 1971 Excavations at Heshbon</i>	133
<i>Gentry, Lawrence T., Heshbon Ostraca N</i>	143
<i>Crass, Clark Moore, Jr., Heshbon Ostraca N1</i>	145
<i>Knox, James J. G., A Rhodian Potter's Date-Stamp</i>	149
<i>Kritzerck, James, Two Early Arabic Glass Weights</i>	157
<i>Nitowski, Eugenia, An Inscribed Mamluk Shard</i>	163
<i>James, Harold E., Jr., Geological Study at Tell Heshbon</i>	165
<i>Grantford, Patricia, The Mollusca of Tell Heshbon</i>	171
<i>Grantford, Patricia, and Øystein Sakala Labianca, The Flora of Heshbon</i>	177
<i>Grantford, Patricia, Øystein Sakala Labianca, and Robert B. Stewart, The Flootation Remains</i>	185
<i>Labianca, Øystein Sakala, The Village of Heshbon: An Ethnographic Preliminary Report</i>	189
<i>Sirling, James H., Human Skeletal Remains from Tell Heshbon, 1971</i>	201
<i>Labianca, Øystein Sakala, and Asla Sakala Labianca, Domestic Animals of the Early Roman Period at Tell Heshbon</i>	205
GENERAL ARTICLES, BOOK REVIEWS, BOOKS RECEIVED	
<i>Delezen, Raoul, Karl Rahner's The Shape of the Church to Come</i>	217
<i>Sheu, William H., Fisher and History</i>	227
<i>Book Reviews</i>	247
<i>Books Received</i>	262



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HESHBON OSTRACON XI

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An additional ostrakon inscribed in the peculiar Ammonite script was found in the excavations of the 1974 season at Heshbon. Of the small corpus of inscriptions, now eleven in number, known from Heshbon, the newly-found ostrakon is second in interest only to Ostrakon IV.¹

Ostrakon XI is small, measuring at its maximum dimensions only 8.4 x 5.4 cm. The right side (with its margin) and the bottom side probably belong to the original ostrakon; the break at the top is more recent, perhaps modern, so that a considerable portion of the text must be reckoned as missing. The left side of the ostrakon is uncertain. It is clear, however, that the ink on the left third of the surviving ostrakon was rubbed away almost without trace. Ostrakon XI, Registry No. 2092, came from Area B, Square 2, Locus 126, described by the excavator as an Iron II/Persian ceramic context. Like Ostrakon IV, this ostrakon was made from the body sherd of a heavy storage jar.

The primary text reads as follows:

1. t'n]
2. t'n mn]
3. b'rm]
4. hblm]

Translation:

1. figs]
2. figs from]
3. beasts of burden]
4. ropes]

¹See F. M. Cross, "Ammonite Ostraca from Heshbon: Heshbon Ostraca IV, VIII," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 1-20, Pl. I; cf. also the two ostraca in cursive Aramaic, "An Ostrakon from Heshbon," *AUSS* 7 (1969): 223-229, Pl. XXV:B (Heshbon Ostrakon I), and "Heshbon Ostrakon II," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 125-131, Pl. XVI:A.



Fig. 21. A tracing of Heshbon Ostrakon XI.

The text appears to be some kind of inventory. As is the case with Ostrakon IV, the text no doubt included numbers of quantity, and perhaps also specification by place of origin or by a personal name.

Line 1. In the margin preceding the letters *t'n* are a series of marks, for the most part vertical strokes. One or two can be taken as letters; one could also call many of the strokes numbers. However, the marks are secondary to the larger, thicker script, and may be no more than doodling. In any case, they cannot be read. The word *t'n* is probably complete, a collective equivalent to Hebrew *t'nytn*. One may compare Canaanite *tyn* (the *yod* is consonantal), Ugaritic *tyt* (from **ta'yintu*), for example, in an inventory: *ymst kkr tyt*, "five talents of (dried) figs."²

Line 2. *t'n*, "figs" is repeated followed by what appears to be *mn*, "from . . .", presumably followed in turn by a place name, or possibly a personal name. An alternate, less likely reading is *kk[r]* plus number.

Line 3. The *m* of *b'rm* may or may not belong to the word. *B'r* or *b'rm* concretely refer to beasts of burden, donkeys or possibly camels. We note that Heshbon was upon the main caravan routes, which crossed there.³

Line 4. *Hblm* most likely means "ropes" rather than "pledges" or "sailors" (!). Once again compare the reading in a Ugaritic inventory: *ymn hblm*, "eight ropes."⁴

The script of Ostrakon XI is very much like that of Ostrakon IV from Heshbon.⁵ *Alep* is virtually identical, as are *tau* and *nun*. *Bet* and *'ayin* are more open at the top. *Res* too is farther open, and appear to be moving in the direction of Aramaic. *Mem* still retains the archaic Ammonite form. Particularly characteristic is the cursive *het*, a "reversed-*n*" form which appears in

² Gordon Text 1130:17; 2101:26.

³ See my comments in "An Ostrakon from Heshbon," p. 228.

⁴ Gordon Text 1128:30, 31.

⁵ See the script chart, fig. 2, in "Ammonite Ostraca from Heshbon," p. 15.

Ostrakon IV. If our dating of Ostrakon IV is correct (end of seventh or beginning of the sixth century B.C.), Ostrakon XI should be perhaps a generation later, in the early sixth century, contemporary with the lapidary script of the 'Amman Theater Inscription', ca. 575 B.C. Thus it is the latest of our inscriptions in Ammonite. By 525 B.C. at latest, Ammonite came to be written in the cursive Aramaic of the Persian chancellery, to judge from Ostraca I and II from Heshbon.⁷

⁶ Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

⁷ See "An Ostrakon from Heshbon," pp. 228, 229.