A Fragment of Leviticus? (Inv. MOTB.SCR.000122)

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A single fragment containing four lines of Hebrew or Aramaic text is now part of the Museum of the Bible Collection and inventoried as MOTB.SCR.000122. The fragment has been designated DSS F.193 (DSS F.Lev5) by Eibert Tigchelaar according to his new system for classifying texts from the Judaean Desert.

Physical Description

This fragment measures 2.5 by 2.0 cm and preserves the remnants of four lines of text containing sixteen potential letters. Portions of the fragment are as narrow as 5 mm in width. The leather is darkened, but some text can still be seen under natural light. Traces of letters exist written in black ink, but only two of the four lines offer discernable letters. The surface is badly damaged and has flaked away in several places on the fragment, rendering the text almost entirely unreadable. There is ink missing from thirteen of the sixteen letters, and no completely legible word has been preserved. Additionally, distinct holes can be found beneath line 3 and just above line 4.

The distance between lines is 6 mm with no ruling lines or evidence of margins visible on the leather. The column width cannot be determined from the preserved material. In line 3, the distance between the tav appearing at the end of one word, and the first letter of the next word is 2 mm.

The recto appears to be abraded, mottled brown leather (Munsell 7.5yr 5/3). The verso is predominantly yellowish brown (Munsell 10yr 5/4). There are signs of spacing between words in at least three instances, visible on both the recto and verso, which may affect identification, particularly in lines 3 and 4.

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1 Photograph by Marilyn J. Lundberg, Bruce Zuckerman, and Kenneth Zuckerman, West Semitic Research.
Paleography and Date (by Ada Yardeni)

This small fragment contains the scant remains of four lines written in a “Jewish” square, book hand. The letters suspend on the lines and the distance between the tops of the letters in one line and the tops of the letters in the following line is about 6 mm. All words are partly damaged. A small space, such as is detectable, between two words in line 3 seems to have marked the word spacing. The height of the letter shin (line 3) is 2.1 mm and its width 2.3 mm. The letters were written with a thin reed pen, the nib of which was cut, thus enabling variations in the width of the strokes according to the angle in which the scribe held the writing implement. This may be seen at the left down stroke of tav (line 3) and at the right down stroke of lamed as well as at the relative thick “roof” of lamed. Most of the letters seem to lean slightly forward. The form of only two letters in this fragment can be traced with certainty. These are tav in line 3 and lamed in line 4. The other letters are all partly damaged. If the reading of the two last letters in line 3 as yod and (the right part of) medial mem is correct, yod seems unusually long and so is medial mem. The relatively equal height of the letters and their short form indicates a date in the late first century B.C.E.

Transcription

1 \[\overset{\circ}{ד} \overset{\circ}{ה}\]
2 \[\overset{\circ}{ע}\]
3 \[\overset{\circ}{ש} \overset{\circ}{ית} \overset{\circ}{ע}\]
4 \[ט \overset{\circ}{ל}\]

Notes on Reading

1 \[\overset{\circ}{ד} \overset{\circ}{ה}\] The length of the preserved traces of text on line 1 covers 6.6 mm with a maximal height of 2.7 mm. This line contains traces of four visible letters, the second and third of which might be identified as dalet and he respectively.

Only portions of the left downstroke belonging to the first letter have survived, making the letter unidentifiable. This letter may be a vav, yod, or zayin, but there is simply not enough information from the fragment to make an identification. The second letter consists of a right downstroke and crossbar with the head. This letter appears most likely to be a dalet, although