THE STYLE OF THE GEZER CALENDAR AND SOME "ARCHAIC BIBLICAL HEBREW" PASSAGES

by

IAN YOUNG

Sydney

I. The Gezer Calendar

One unsolved problem of the small limestone tablet known as the Gezer Calendar is its specific place either within or outside the Hebrew literary tradition. Three letters in the margin at the bottom of the tablet \[ by\] are often interpreted as the name of the author "Abiyah", formed with the name of the Israelite God,\(^1\) hence, it would seem, indicating a classification of the inscription as Hebrew. Despite the likelihood of this reading of the name, however, the linguistic peculiarities of the inscription have made it difficult for many scholars to accept this straightforward equation. E. Y. Kutscher, for one, expressed doubt even whether the Gezer Calendar should be considered Hebrew.\(^2\) Z. Zevit also considered its Hebrew classification to rest solely on historical considerations, the Calendar containing no characteristically Hebrew linguistic or palaeographic features.\(^3\) There is some agreement that the Calendar must be dated to the 10th century B.C.\(^4\) J. Naveh expressed a similar opinion to Zevit on the lack of Hebrew characteristics and suggested that perhaps in the 10th century B.C. the Israelites wrote in the prestigious Phoenician language.\(^5\) It is clearly the form of

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\(^1\) W. F. Albright, "The Gezer Calendar", \textit{BASOR} 92 (1943), p. 22.


\(^3\) \textit{Mataris Lectiohis in Ancient Hebrew Epigraphs} (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 6, n. 23, i.e. historically, the Gezer Calendar comes from an area under Israelite control (see n. 4 below), and therefore must be Hebrew (despite its peculiarity).

\(^4\) Albright (n. 1), pp. 16-21. Albright discussed the comparative aspects of the script, along with the archaeological and historical context, settling on a date in the second half of the 10th century B.C., during the Israelite occupation of the town.

\(^5\) \textit{Early History of the Alphabet An Introduction to West Semitic Epigraphy and Palaeography} (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 76.
language used which has caused these scholars problems, specifically that they believed that the language of the Gezer Calendar was somehow outside the Hebrew tradition. Yet, even if accepted as Hebrew, the language of the text has been described as aberrant. Thus, J. C. L. Gibson classified it on its own as an “archaic Hebrew dialect”.6 F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman described it as a Northern Israelite dialect.7 It is the thesis of this article that the language of the Gezer Calendar is not outside the Hebrew tradition. Nor, when properly placed in the context of the style of language used in certain biblical passages, need it be seen as some sort of local literary dialect. We will seek to demonstrate, in fact, that the linguistic peculiarities of the Gezer Calendar are not primarily the result of the age or dialectal status of the text, but represent a style of language use that is well attested in Hebrew literature.

First, we must delineate the characteristics of the language of the tablet. A clearly dialectal trait which distinguishes the language of the inscription from Official Judean Hebrew is the reduction of the diphthong [ay] > [â],8 thus qayṣ > qṣ (i.e. [qayṣ] > [qēṣ]) “summer fruit” in line 7.9 Dialectal features are therefore clearly present in the language of the text.

Much scholarly dispute on the Gezer Calendar centres on the form yrhw in lines 1 (bis), 2 and 6. The two major scholarly theories which still command the field today are that the waw is a suffix, or that it is some sort of remnant of a case ending. The suffix theory involves reading the waw as the third person singular masculine

9 Gibson (n. 6), p. 2, also interprets kl in line 5 as representing [kayl] > [kël], from a base kyl. He compares Isa. xl 12 and Yavneh Yam line 5 for the meaning “measuring”. In contrast, A. Lemaire favours a base kḥ “to complete” both here and in Yavneh Yam (“L’ostracon de Mesad Ḥashavyahu [Yavneh-Yam] remplacé dans son contexte”, Semitica 21 [1971], p. 67). A case can be made out for both readings, so we must leave qṣ as the only certain dialectal form in the Gezer Calendar.