

Announcing an Unknown Dead Sea Scroll: Jeremiah 48:29-31a

Jeremiah 48:29-31a [Provisional Research Report]

By James H. Charlesworth, Princeton, 1 May 2010

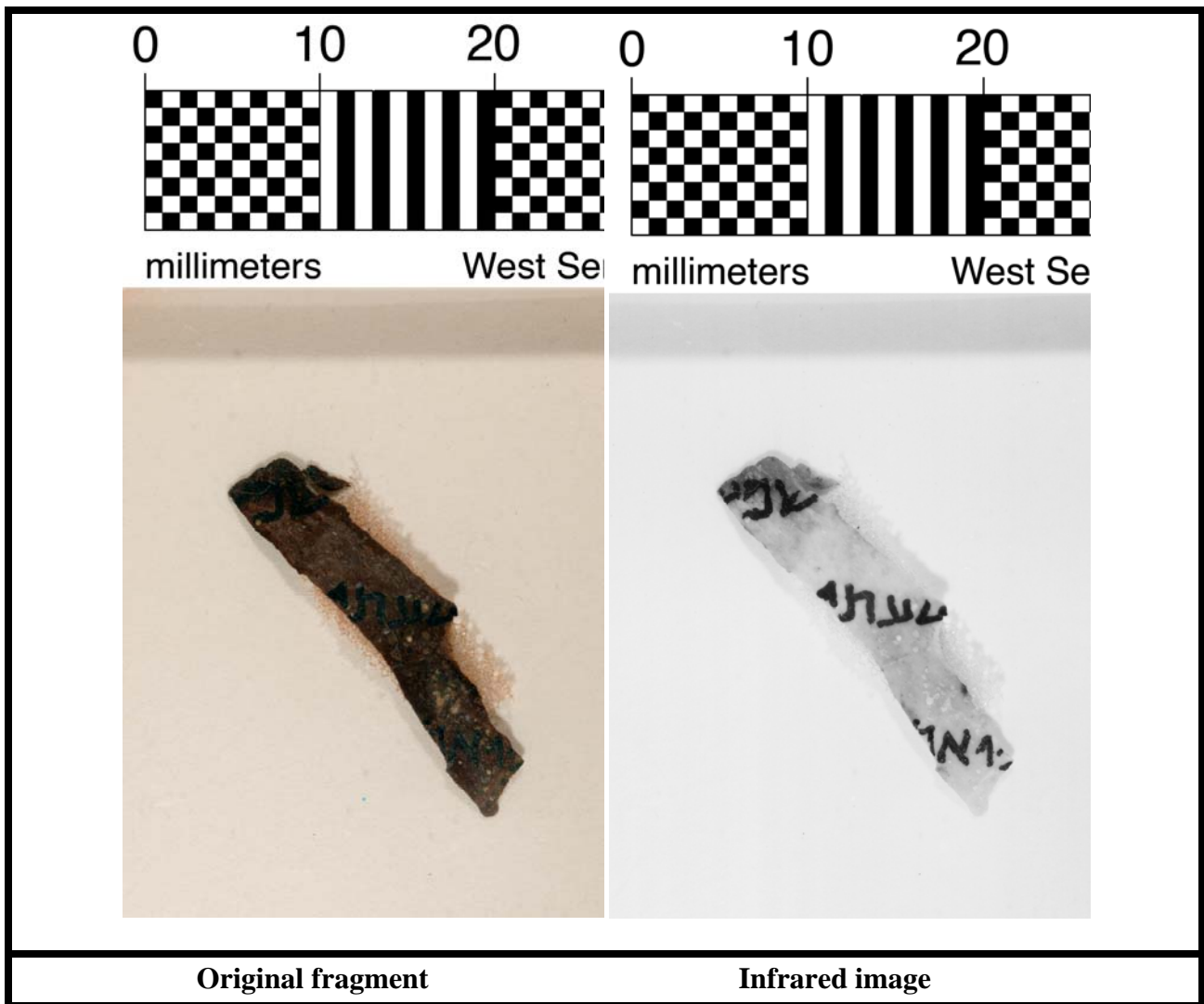


Image: Courtesy of Bruce and Ken Zuckerman of the West Semitic Research Institute. The fragment is 17 mm. wide and about 20 mm high; only eleven consonants are visible or partly discernible. Thus, scientific analysis is hindered by the paucity of what is preserved.

Identification: Only three lines are extant of this scroll; the script ostensibly represents Jer 48:29-31a. The quality of the artwork [the scribal hand] witnesses to the honor accorded the book of Jeremiah in the Second Temple Period.

Palaeography: In order of the appearance of the consonants: The *Shin* is composed of three strokes with the left leg curved inward [and less elegant than the other consonants]. The *Mem* is perhaps two strokes or one continuous stroke from upper left and a clear horizontal bottom [see lines 1 and 3]. The *Ayin* is made with two strokes and has a square right arm; this is a late feature of Dead Sea Scrolls handwriting but appears also in 1QM (30-1 BCE); it appears in lines 1 and 2. The *Taw* is composed of two strokes with the second one extending above the first. The left foot is curved. The form is elegant and appears also in 4QSam^a that is dated to 50-25 BCE. The *Yod* [line 1] and *Waw* [line 3] have a flag at the top and the two forms seem distinct with the *Yod* shorter and a sharper triangular head. The *Aleph* seems to be made of three strokes, beginning on the left leg; it is elegant and refined [and similar to 4QSam^a of 50-25 BCE]. The *Beth* is only partly preserved and has a curved top but no tail; it is unwise to attempt a date for this form. The script is an attractive early Herodian Bookhand of the late first century BCE. Thus, most likely, this portion of a Jeremiah scroll was copied in the late first century BCE by a gifted scribe who placed the black ink on leather.

The patina is in the leather and in the ink (note esp. the *Aleph*). The provenience is the same as almost all the fragments in the Shrine of the Book. Thus, there is ample reason to assume that this piece of leather and the ink is genuine and from Qumran.

Transcription:

שמע[נו
]ידעת[י
]מואב[

Line 1: The left portion of the *Ayin* is lost.

Line 2: The *Ayin* and *Taw* are clear and there is no identically combined consonants between “Moab” in line three and “[we] have heard” in line one. However, the *Daleth* is problematic: Either the *Dalat* is written imprecisely or the copyist inscribed the wrong consonant (it looks like a *Teth* or a *Samekh*). This alleged error precludes me from being certain that this fragment represents a portion of Jeremiah (esp. in a so-called Proto-Masoretic form). Half way between lines 2 and 3 there is a black stain (it is not ink).

Line 3: The *Mem* is visible only partly and the *Beth* has lost its horizontal base.

Translation [influenced by the NRSV]:

[We] have heard [of the pride of Moab; he is very proud. (We have heard) of his loftiness, his pride, and his pridefulness, and the haughtiness of his heart. I [myself] know [his insolence, says the LORD; his boasts are false, his deeds are false. Thus I wail for] Moab; [I cry out for all Moab; for the men of Kir-heres I mourn.]¹

¹ Kir-heres was a capital city in Moab and roughly eleven miles east of the Dead Sea.[]

Text Type: The text of this scroll of Jeremiah is similar to the so-called MT and dissimilar to the so-called Septuagint.

This portion of a Dead Sea Scrolls was given to the Foundation on Judaism and Christian Origins by Michael Sharpe, a rare book collector and dealer in Pasadena, California.

Questions: What is the explanation for the alleged scribal error at the beginning of line two? The left portion of the fragment is neatly cut, did a Roman soldier cut the scroll with his sword or knife when he helped destroy the Qumran area?