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Eleven Non-Royal Jeremianic Figures Strongly Identified in Authentic, Contemporaneous Inscriptions

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ELEVEN NON-ROYAL JEREMIANIC FIGURES STRONGLY IDENTIFIED IN AUTHENTIC, CONTEMPORANEOUS INSCRIPTIONS

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This essay seeks to honor the excellence and usefulness of the epigraphic analyses of Joseph Naveh. Following in the tradition that he vigorously upheld in exposing forgeries, this presentation rejects forgeries exposed in publications from 2003 to 2014.¹ It considers only materials known to be authentic, including discoveries from 2005 to 2008, which have added five more biblical persons to those who can be strongly identified in inscriptions contemporaneous with them.²

The book of Jeremiah is conducive to addressing the question of extrabiblical identifications (hereafter abbreviated IDs) of its persons, because it frequently refers to individuals by name in a context of narrative prose, not genealogies, thus offering related data for historical connections. Also, Near Eastern epigraphs contemporaneous with the book's coverage are still extant.

Non-royal here means that the identified persons were not kings. The word *Jeremianic* here refers to individuals 1) to whom the book of Jeremiah refers or 2) who were contemporaneous with the prophet Jeremiah. Below, using established protocols, this study identifies people in both of these categories in inscriptions known to be contemporaneous with them. Such IDs go beyond plausibility³ and beyond a degree of detail that some attribute to historical observation.⁴

Identification protocols⁵

The protocols for discerning the strength or weakness of IDs and non-IDs of biblical persons in inscriptions employ three questions:

Question 1: Are the epigraphic data of known authenticity and are the biblical data well based in ancient manuscripts containing biblical texts?

Question 2: Is there a match between the biblical and inscriptional settings of the persons potentially to be identified, that is, their time (within a lifetime, ca. 50 years) and socio-political "place," such as late 8th-century Israelite?

Question 3: Are the identifying marks of the individual in the inscription which match those in the Bible sufficient to insure that the inscription and the biblical text are not referring to two different persons?

For each ID below, question 1 is clearly answerable in the affirmative. Therefore, as a space-saving expedient, the list below usually omits data on question 1, in order to provide space for examination of the identifying marks to answer the third question.

The eleven IDs below are all strong. Strong IDs are of two kinds. Some are virtually certain IDs, as determined by applying the protocols, and are called grade 3 IDs, because they are based on three or more identifying marks of an individual. These seek to insure the ID by reducing the chances of confusing two different individuals to a negligible level. The other strong IDs (none of which appear below) are certain because singular circumstances point to one and only one person indicated in both the inscription and the Bible. Such evidence logically requires these IDs. They are classified in grade S, because they are based on singularity.

How archaeological context helped to identify four officials in two City of David bullae: that of Gemaryahu ben Shaphan and that of Azaryahu ben Hīlqiyahu

One might expect that if a personal name and patronymic appear in the Bible, and if the same name and patronymic appear in an inscription from the historical setting indicated in the Bible, then the identification of the biblical person in the inscription would be assured. The Achilles heel of this expectation is the possibility that two fathers having the same name (with its possible variants) might have given their sons the same name (again with its possible variants). If a clear, yes-or-no verdict is attainable, to call such an ID “probable” reveals inadequate research.

In seeking at least three marks of an individual, infrequently, the archaeological context of the inscription can provide a mark of an individual, namely, the person’s workplace. Certain bullae not only fulfil the requirement of matching the socio-political group and time period of the biblical person, providing matching settings, but they also indicate the locale of the person’s workplace within a distance of about 250 m. Among these are the City of David bulla “belonging to Gemaryahu, son of Shaphan” and the City of David bulla “belonging to ‘Azaryahu, son of Hīlqiyahu.”

1. **Shaphan** the scribe, who served during Josiah’s reign (fl. within 640/639–609. 2 Kgs 22:3 etc.; 2 Chr 34:8 etc.; Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10ff; 39:14; 40:5ff; 41:2; 43:6; Ezek 8:11)

and

2. **Gemariah** the son of Shaphan the scribe, an official during Jehoiakim’s reign (fl. within 609–598. Jer 36:10ff)

are identified with virtual certainty in the aniconic City of David bulla *lgmryhw* / [*b*]n *špn*, “belonging to *G^maryāhu*, / [so]n of *Šāfān*” (Avigad and Sass 1997: 190, no. 470; Mykytiuk 2004: 139–147, 228, person no. 36, 232, person no. 50, as corrected in Mykytiuk 2009: 110–111, no. 27 and 28; Mykytiuk 2012: 48–49, no. 13 and 14).

Petrographic analysis affirms that this bulla was produced at Jerusalem, effectively eliminating any

need to suppose it to have been made in another city by some other official having the same name and patronym.⁶ Also, its distinctive form of the Hebrew letter *nun* in [*b*]n clearly narrows down the date to the late 7th to early 6th century, the fairly narrow period in which the book of Jeremiah places Gemariah ben Shaphan.⁷

The three identifying marks for each of these two individuals are:

- a. the name of the father, Shaphan. It is an infrequent name belonging to only three or four individuals in the Bible besides the scribe in 1 Kgs 22:3. It occurs only once (here) in a provenanced Hebrew inscription, adding strength to this ID.⁸
 - b. the name of the son, the seal owner, Gemaryahu
 - c. the remarkable provenance, namely, “the house of the bullae,” within 250 m. of the Temple, where the Bible depicts the official activities of both men.⁹ It is most likely that Shiloh’s group of fifty-one bullae, which included this one, formed a government archive, which is consistent with the royal administrative positions of both father and son mentioned in the Bible.¹⁰
3. **Hilkiah** the high priest, during Josiah’s reign (within 640/639–609. 2 Kgs 22:4 etc.; 1 Chr 9:11; 2 Chr 34:9 etc.; 35:8; Ezra 7:1)

and

4. **Azariah** the high priest, son of Hilkiah, during Josiah’s reign (within 640/639–609. 1 Chr 5:39, 40 (=E.T. 6:13, 14); 9:11; Ezra 7:1)

are identified with virtual certainty in the aniconic City of David bulla *lʿzryhw b / n hīlqyhw*, “belonging to *ʿAzaryāhu*, son of / *Hīlqiyāhu*” (Avigad and Sass 1997: 224, no. 596; Mykytiuk 2004: 148–152, 229 in inscription no. 50, City of David bulla; Mykytiuk 2012: 48–49).

Petrographic analysis affirms that this bulla was produced at Jerusalem.¹¹ Regarding date, in the lower register, the paleographically distinctive form of the Hebrew letter *he* in the patronym narrows down the date to the late 7th to early 6th century (see note 22). According to 2 Kgs 22:3, 4 and 1 Chr 5:39–41 (E.T., 1 Chr 6:13–15), the high priest Hilkiah and his son Azariah lived and worked in

this particular location during this same, fairly narrow time period.

The three identifying marks for each of these two individuals are:

- a. the name of the seal owner, ʿAzaryahu
- b. the name of the father, Ḥilqiyahu
- c. the remarkable provenance, namely, a public archive within 250 m. from the Jerusalem Temple precincts, where the Bible depicts the official activities of the priesthood.

Although both father and son have common names, the Bible contains only one instance of the *combination* of these two names in which Ḥilqiyahu (or other forms of this name, such as Ḥilqiyah) is the father and ʿAzaryahu (or other forms of this name) is the son (1 Chr 6:13, 14; 9:11). And in provenanced inscriptions, just as with Shaphan's name, this *combination* of names occurs only once: here (Avigad and Sass 1997: 224, no. 596; Davies 1991: 235, no. 100.827, 351–352; Davies 2004: 158, 204–205).¹² Thus, within the limits of provenance and date, this infrequent *combination* of names, like the infrequency of *Shaphan*, greatly reduces the possibility of confusion with other persons, making it practically negligible.

Solving the problem of identifications in the bulla of Yehukal ben Shelemyahu ben Shobi and the bulla of Gedalyahu ben Pashhur

It is not unusual to find archaeologists stating or suggesting that an administrative center was located somewhere in the City of David between the 10th and early 6th centuries.¹³ The bullae of Gemaryahu ben Shaphan, Azaryahu ben Ḥilqiyahu, Yehukal ben Shelemyahu ben Shobi, and Gedalyahu ben [P]ashhur were discovered within a few dozen meters of each other along the eastern edge of the City of David, and all can be dated paleographically between the late 7th century and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586. Their collocation and contemporaneity suggest a common origin, that is, an administrative center in the upper portion of the City of David.¹⁴

That there *was* most likely an administrative center can be seen by comparison of E. Mazar's description, accompanied by pictures of the nearby

and immediate archaeological contexts, with the administrative contexts elsewhere in Judah described by Arie, Goren, and Samet.¹⁵ Their following two statements are particularly significant:

... , [W]e join the opinion ... that Judahite bullae were used as sealings of legal documents. The facts that both in Jerusalem [Shiloh's excavations] and in Lachish, the bullae were found in rooms together with standard weights and that in Lachish an ostrakon was found also associated with the bullae strengthens this assumption, since these rooms may have functioned as the place where legal affairs physically took place and where the documents were written, sealed, and stored.¹⁶

... [A]ccording to the available data and parallels from the ancient Near East, we believe that these bullae were attached to legal and administrative papyri. This identification provides an insight into Judahite bureaucracy of the 7th and early 6th centuries B.C.E. The Judahite bullae were used by private individuals or public officials, probably as a way to ensure the validity of various legal documents, such as land sales, loans, wills, marriage contracts and slave sales, all of which are now lost.¹⁷

Eilat Mazar's description of the fill underneath the Persian-era Northern Tower includes bullae and stone weights from the late pre-exilic period.¹⁸ Such fill would have come from an administrative center somewhere above the base of the Northern Tower. An administrative center, therefore, was very likely located in or near the Large Stone Structure (hereafter abbreviated LSS), a pre-exilic government building whose northeast corner is only several steps southwest of the location of that tower. The upper City of David, in the vicinity of the LSS, certainly seems a reasonable location for such a center. Other indications are the findspots of the two bullae, one on each side of that northeast corner of the LSS.

The proximate locations of these pieces of evidence, namely, two late 7th- to early 6th-century bullae, the LSS, and late pre-exilic weights and bullae in the fill beneath the Persian-era North Tower, combine to present a reasonable picture: that of an administrative center housed in or near

the LSS. In this center, officials would have used stone weights to verify accurate payment and affixed bullae to documents recording the transactions. Remnants of the administrative center were dumped as fill, upon which the North Tower was built. This is the simplest reasonable interpretation of the physical evidence for an administrative center in that location during Judah's late monarchic period.¹⁹

5. **Shelemiah**, perhaps not himself an official, but the father of the Jehucal who was a royal official of Judah, (fl. late 7th to early 6th century. Jer 37:3; 38:1)

and

6. **Jehucal/Jucal**, the son of Shelemiah and a royal official of Judah during Zedekiah's reign (fl. within 597–586. Jer 37:3; 38:1)

are now identified with virtual certainty in the aniconic City of David bulla *lyhwkl b / [n] šlmyhw /bn šby*, “belonging to *Y^hhukal*, so / [n] of *Šelemyāhu*, / son of *Šōbī*.”²⁰

Petrographic analysis affirms that this bulla was produced at Jerusalem.²¹ Also, this bulla of Yehucal contains a distinctive letter *he* that dates it to the late 7th to early 6th century.²²

The three identifying marks for each of these two individuals are:

- a. the seal owner's name, Yehucal
- b. the patronym, Shelemyahu
- c. the remarkable provenance within approximately 250 m. from the palace, to which the king presumably summoned Jehucal and Zephaniah (Jer 37:3; cf. Jer 37:17). An individual mark of Yehucal was his workplace in an administrative center very likely housed in or not far from the LSS.²³

7. **Pashhur**, perhaps not himself an official, but the father of the Gedaliah ben Pashhur who was a royal official of Judah (fl. late 7th century. Jer 38:1)

and

8. **Gedaliah** the son of Pashhur, an official during Zedekiah's reign (fl. within 597–586. Jer 38:1)

are now identified with virtual certainty in the aniconic City of David bulla *lgdlyhw / bn [p]šhwr*, “belonging to *G²dalyāhu*, / son of [*P*]ašhur.”²⁴

Petrographic analysis affirms that this bulla was produced at Jerusalem.²⁵ Also, in this bulla, Gedalyahu's name contains a distinctive letter *he* that dates it to the late 7th or early 6th century.²⁶

The three identifying marks for each of these two individuals are:

- a. the seal owner's name, Gedalyahu
- b. the patronym, [*P*]ašhur
- c. the remarkable provenance, within 250 m. from the palace, presumably where the Bible depicts Gedaliah, the son of Pashhur, with others in the presence of the king (cf. Jer 37:17). An individual mark of Gedaliah was his workplace in an administrative center very likely housed in or not far from the LSS.²⁷

Identifications of Babylonian officials at the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 BCE

9. **Nebo-sarsekim/Nabu-šarrūssu-ukīn** (fl. early 6th century. Jer 39:3²⁸), officer of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604–562), is identified with virtual certainty in a cuneiform inscription on a 595 BCE Babylonian clay tablet, BM 114789 (1920-12-13, 81).²⁹ The time reference in Jeremiah 39:3, 587/586, is within nine years of the inscription, or, according to Babylonian documentation, only about four years.³⁰ For this ID, the individual's three identifying marks are:

- a. the courtier's name, Nebo-sarsekim (Heb.)/Nabu-šarrūssu-ukīn (Akk.)
- b. the courtier's title, rab-saris (Heb.)/rab ša-rēši (“chief official,” Akk.)
- c. the name of the courtier's royal master, Nebuchadnezzar (Heb.)/Nabû-kudurrī-ušur (Akk.).

The extreme unlikelihood that two individuals having the same personal name would have been the sole holders³¹ of this office, and within a decade of each other, makes it safe to assume that the inscription and the book of Jeremiah refer to the same person in different years of his time in office.

10. **Nergal-sharezer/Nergal-šarra-ušur/Neriglisar**³² (fl. early 6th century. Jer 39:3), officer of

Nebuchadnezzar II, is identified with virtual certainty in a cuneiform list of Nebuchadnezzar's court officials, ca. 570 BCE, within about 16 years of the biblical reference to him.³³ For this ID, the individual's three identifying marks are:

- a. the courtier's name, Nergal-sharezer (Heb.)/Nergal-šarra-ušur (Akk.)
- b. the courtier's title, samgar (Heb.)/sin-magir (Akk.)
- c. the name of the courtier's royal master, Nebuchadnezzar (Heb.)/Nabû-kudurrî-ušur (Akk.).

11. Nebuzaradan/Nabû-zēr-iddinam (fl. early 6th century. 2 Kgs 25:8 etc.; Jer 39:9 etc.), officer of Nebuchadnezzar II, is identified with virtual certainty in a cuneiform list of Nebuchadnezzar's court officials, ca. 570 BCE, again within about 16 years of the biblical reference to him.³⁴ For this ID, the individual's three identifying marks are:

- a. the courtier's name, Nebuzaradan (Heb.)/Nabû-zēr-iddinam (Akk.)
- b. the courtier's title, rab-ṭabāḥîm (Heb.)/rabnu-hatimmu³⁵ (Akk.)

- c. the name of the courtier's royal master, Nebuchadnezzar (Heb.)/Nabû-kudurrî-ušur (Akk.).

Conclusion

Although epigraphs that permit strong IDs of ancient Near Eastern monarchs are very valuable,³⁶ strong IDs of persons who were officials reach a level of verified detail that commands even stronger credibility than IDs of well-known kings.

These strong IDs of seven Jeremianic officials mentioned in the book of Jeremiah (not IDs 3 and 4) and two of their fathers in the ancient writings of two cultures are multiple indications of historical intent and accuracy. If the authors of the book of Jeremiah had not intended to produce such historically accurate work as they did, these results would be inexplicable. We will never have empirical data relevant to historical reliability of every detail in the entire narrative in Jeremiah. But given this implicit, serious historical intent and result achieved by the biblical author(s), we do have multiple, credible *indications* that we are dealing with material that originated with eyewitnesses of the details of the setting and/or direct witnesses of or participants in the narrated events.

Notes

- 1 Unprovenanced inscriptions supposedly of the era of Jeremiah, including some that have now been disqualified as forgeries, were earlier listed in Mykytiuk 2004: 228–235, 242–243. Among various disqualifications, Mykytiuk 2009: 61–67 states that several supposedly “possible” identifications (IDs) listed in Mykytiuk 2004 are now disqualified in the forged “three shekels” ostrakon. “Potential” IDs of Baruch the scribe and his father Neriah (Jer 32:12, etc.), are now disqualified in two forged bullae (Rollston and Parker 2005; Mykytiuk 2009: 62–63 based on Rollston 2003: 160–162; Goren and Arie 2014).
- 2 Namely, Shelemiah and his son Jehucal in a bulla discovered in 2005 (E. Mazar 2006), Nebo-sarsekim discovered in a clay tablet in 2007 (Jursa 2008), and Pashhur and his son Gedaliah in a bulla discovered in 2008 (E. Mazar 2009).
- 3 Both Lundbom 1999: 876–881 and Glatt-Gilad 2000: 40 seek to establish plausibility by comparing the names in a portion of the Bible with names in recovered epigraphs from the setting to which that portion of the

- Bible refers. In these two publications, use of epigraphs of unknown authenticity as supposedly historical evidence is methodologically unsound.
- 4 Regarding multiple relationships between named persons and particular situations in Jeremiah, Glatt-Gilad construes massive variety and detail as evidence of origin in a living society, rather than artificial invention, much like Nicholson regarding the whole Hebrew Bible (Glatt-Gilad 2000: 40; Nicholson 2004: 15, 17–19). Indeed, Lundbom uses three pages to clarify the complex political picture among persons in Jeremiah (Lundbom 1999: 882–884). Of course, in contrast with comparison of biblical and epigraphic onomastica, it is now impossible to compare the biblical text with details of politics, buildings, etc., destroyed long ago.
- 5 These identification protocols, initially detailed in Mykytiuk 2004: 1–89 (see Google Books), were summarized online in Kitchen 2005: 2, further developed in Mykytiuk 2009: 80, n. 90, and restated in Mykytiuk 2012: 39–40.
- 6 Arie, Goren, and Samet 2011: 10, partly quoted in

- Mykytiuk 2012: 48–49 n. 34. One may safely conclude that the officials who made the bullae, namely, Gemaryahu ben Shaphan and ʿAzaryahu ben Ḥilqiyahu, were present in the City of David.
- 7 Vaughn 1999: 54–55; Mykytiuk 2009: 110–111, no. 27, 28.
- 8 In unprovenanced Hebrew inscriptions, it occurs only three times (Mykytiuk 2004: 145).
- 9 See Mykytiuk 2009: 100, penultimate paragraph.
- 10 Shiloh 1984: 20; Arie, Goren, and Samet 2011: 13; but cf. Steiner 2001: 284.
- 11 See note 6 above.
- 12 The two other occurrences of this combination of names are in unprovenanced inscriptions, which lack evidential validity (Avigad and Sass 1997: 139, nos. 306 & 307).
- 13 E.g., Faust 2010: 128; Steiner 2001: 281, 283.
- 14 Cf. Mykytiuk 2009: 100, penultimate paragraph.
- 15 E. Mazar 2009b: 66–70; Arie, Goren, and Samet 2011: 12–13 (the section titled “The Database: Judahite Bullae from Controlled Excavations”), 23–24.
- 16 Arie, Goren, Samet 2011: 23.
- 17 Arie, Goren, Samet 2011: 24.
- 18 E. Mazar 2009b: 67–68, 70 lower photograph.
- 19 This interpretation and the relevant online note in Mykytiuk 2014a supersede my earlier view in two publications which stated only the *potential* for four virtually certain IDs in these two bullae: Mykytiuk 2009: 85–100; Mykytiuk 2012: 50–51, no. 1 and 2. This essay undergirds Naʿaman’s observation: “... [T]he bullae of Gedaliah son of Pashhur ... and Jehucal son of Shelemiah ... mentioned in Jer 37:3 and 38:1, have been discovered in the excavations near the Large Stone Structure, *near the place where the two officials must have officiated* (Naʿaman 2012: 27, emphasis mine).
- 20 This bulla, discovered in 2005, is described in E. Mazar 2006: 16–27, 70; E. Mazar 2007: 67–69; E. Mazar 2009a: 24–33, 66; E. Mazar 2009b: 66–71). See Mykytiuk 2009: 85–89. The information on question 3 in Mykytiuk 2009: 89–100 and in Mykytiuk 2012: 50–51 is here revised.
- 21 Arie, Goren, Samet 2011: 3, 10.
- 22 Vaughn 1999: 47, 52–53.
- 23 See note 19 above.
- 24 This bulla, discovered in 2008, and the circumstances surrounding it, are described in E. Mazar, 2009a: 29; E. Mazar, 2009b: 68, 69, 71). See Mykytiuk 2009: 92–95. The information on Question 3 in Mykytiuk 2009: 95–100 and in Mykytiuk 2012: 51 is here revised.
- 25 E. Mazar, Ben-Arie 2015: 445 No. 28990,449.
- 26 See note 22 above.
- 27 See note 19 above.
- 28 For an accurate rendering of the names and titles in Jeremiah 39:3, see Lundbom 2004: 84–85.
- 29 Discovered in July 2007 (Jursa 2008: 9–10; Becking 2009: 35–46; Mykytiuk 2009: 121–124; Mykytiuk 2012: 47, n. 31). On the translation of *rāb ša-rēši*, see Tadmor 2007: 171, n. 16.
- 30 Becking 2009: 39, n. 21.
- 31 This office was normally occupied by only one person (Mykytiuk 2009: 123–124 citing Chavalas, private communication; Jursa 2008: 9–10). But on military campaigns, this all-important office could have been jointly held by an understudy and potential immediate replacement in the event of the loss of the senior office-holder.
- 32 Neriglissar is an Assyrian alternative rendering of Nergal-sharušur. This particular official might have been the Neriglissar who in 560 seized the throne of Babylonia (van Driel 2001: 228. Cf. Grayson 2000: 232).
- 33 Pritchard 1969: 307; Wiseman 1985: 73–75.
- 34 See previous note.
- 35 His title can mean “chief of the cooks [or butchers or executioners].”
- 36 The five kings strongly identified in the book of Jeremiah are: Pharaohs Neco II (Jer 46:2) and Hophra/Apries/Wahibre (Jer 44:30); Nebuchadnezzar II (Jer 21:2, etc.) and Evil-merodach (Jer 52:31), kings of Babylonia; and Jehoiachin, king of Judah (Jer 24:1) (online endnotes to Mykytiuk 2014a).

Abbreviations

ID	identification
LSS	Large Stone Structure

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