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In Their Own Words

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Only in the study of ancient Israel would a 22-letter inscription—and an abecedarly [the letters of the alphabet] at that—generate an entire monograph ... The reason for this is obvious: While the number of inscriptions from the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (especially the latter) dated to the eighth century [B.C.E.] onward is rather significant, the epigraphic evidence for the tenth century (the period of David and Solomon) remains meager. Accordingly, the discovery of an inscribed bowl from Tel Zayit in the Judean [Judahite] Shephelah spurred major interest in 2005 ...

While reading the essays [in this volume] I found myself asking over and over again: Do we really need all this information? Does all this information actually stem from the discovery of this simple inscription? ...

Do we really need all this prose to tell us what we already know—or don't know!? To be honest, one feels like screaming from the mountaintop: "This is only an alphabet!" ... This inscription—limited as it is—offers valuable information concerning the development of writing during the much-debated tenth century. If a lowly outpost in the Judean Shephelah attests to writing (limited or otherwise) during the period of David and Solomon, then one may assume, with all due caution, that the capital city of Jerusalem would have possessed, *qal wa-homer* [all the moreso], scribes and priests linked to the palace and temple capable of producing (significant) literary and administrative texts ...

A second tenth-century inscription was unearthed at Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Judean hills in 2008 ... Taken together, the Tel Zayit abecedarly, the Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription and the Gezer calendar (also from the tenth century [and found early in the 20th century]) demonstrate that writing was well established in tenth-century Israel—certainly sufficiently so for some or many of the works later incorporated into the Hebrew Bible to have been composed at this time.

Gary A. Rendsburg, professor of Jewish studies at Rutgers University, from a review in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 359, p. 89, of Ron E. Tappy and P. Kyle McCarter, eds., *Literate Culture and Tenth-Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedarly in Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008).

Further Reading:

Abecedarly

[Strata: Now I Know My ABCs](#) ([BAR](#) 32:01, Jan/Feb 2006)

Inscriptions