

Mas1o Papyrus Paleo Fragment ("Mount Gerizim")

E. Jan Wilson,
David K. Geilman

Description and Background

Mas1o is the only scroll fragment in the Masada exhibit that is written on papyrus. It is distinctive also because it is written in the paleo-Hebrew script by two scribes. One scribe wrote on the "front" side of the fragment, the other on the "back" side. In his preliminary report of the excavation, Professor Yigael Yadin noted that the script of this fragment is similar to that of the coins found in the same location as the fragment.¹

Of the fragment's few discernible words, the phrase *joyful singing* occurs in three consecutive lines. These lines are followed by a line containing the place-name *Mount Gerizim*. This fragment has been identified as a Samaritan document because of the unique way *Mount Gerizim* is written. Because Mount Gerizim is a sacred site for Samaritans (the site of their temple), they adopted the practice of writing these two separate words as one word. However, Hebrew texts of non-Samaritan origin keep the two words separate. Thus the fragment can confidently be identified as Samaritan in origin. Scholars have tentatively identified it as a liturgical document because of the references to joyful singing.

The fragment was found in a casemate dwelling situated three rooms south of the synagogue at Masada. This was where the Psalms scroll, also a part of the Masada exhibit, was found. According to Yadin, "the most important discoveries from the period of the Revolt [of the Sicarii] were made, including several scrolls,"² in this location.

Translation

The following is a preliminary and tentative translation. Because of the fragmentary nature of the text, the translation is rather incomplete. The translation has been divided into side A and side B to correspond to Professor Talmon's transcriptions of both sides of the fragment.³ The numbers on the left are line numbers. The dashes represent unreadable letters, the bracketed words are Talmon's restorations, and the italicized letters are Hebrew letters that do not translate into English. The character • is used to indicate a hole in the actual fragment. A single closing bracket indicates that missing or illegible text precedes the bracket. This translation serves only to give the reader a general idea of the fragment's content. The words that are fairly certain appear in boldface.

Side A

- 1.
2.] *mt****h***
3.]- byh • –
4. Ya]hw***eh*** • *kmkm*
5.]*mh* • they are great •
6.]*w*
- 7.

Side B

- 1.
2.]-*hm* • **to give a ringing cry**
3. **to give a ringing cry** • – – *w*
4. **to give a ringing cry** • *l-* *rh* *h*
5. **Mount Geri**[z]**i**[m]
6. *m-l* • –
7. *l- - - -*

It should be noted that the phrase *to give a ringing cry* in lines 2 to 4 of side B is a more literal rendering of the same phrase that, as mentioned earlier, can also be translated as "joyful singing." We look forward to more of Professor Talmon's work on this fragment.

Commentary

The presence of this scroll at Masada has led some to hypothesize that Samaritans were also among those Zealots who resisted the Romans and who finally took their own lives. Once again this is one of those tantalizing finds that make us wish we had more of the manuscript to which this fragment belongs.

Notes

1. See Yigael Yadin, "The Excavation at Masada—1963/64 Preliminary Report," *Israel Exploration Journal* 15/1-2 (1965): 109.
2. *Ibid.*, 79.
3. See Shemaryahu Talmon, "Fragments of Scrolls from Masada" (in Hebrew), *Eretz-Israel* 20 (1989): 283.