

Palmyrene Aramaic Inscriptions and the Old Testament, especially Amos 2:8

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I. Palmyrene Aramaic Inscriptions and the Old Testament

The use of extra-biblical materials to explain or illuminate the biblical text is by now commonplace, yet each body of non-canonical texts that we turn to, as biblical scholars, presents individual problems and possibilities. My subject is Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions and the Old Testament, and, though I wish to present in detail a proposal for Amos 2:8, I would like to set this in a larger context, and treat it as representative of some of the issues that arise in using Palmyrene Aramaic texts in interpreting portions of the Hebrew Bible and Hebrew lexicon.

There are two distinct modes in which Old Testament scholars may deal with Palmyrene Aramaic material, as with other extra-biblical texts. The first is this, that ancient non-biblical texts may sometimes be decisive for our understanding of a biblical word or passage. The second, and perhaps more common situation is this, that they may be of interest as illustrative or illuminating.

In a recent article, rich in detail, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Peter T. Daniels treats the story of the decipherment of Palmyrene Aramaic.¹ In the 1750's Swinton and Barthélemy published independent solutions to the problem of the then-unknown Palmyrene script. Hence their achievement stands at the beginning of the series of first readings of ancient Near Eastern writing systems, and merits the name Daniels gives it, "The First Decipherment."

It is disappointing to find that Daniels, in an otherwise praiseworthy attempt to assign due proportion to the intellectual achievement of Barthélemy and Swinton, includes the unfortunate phrase "Palmyrene is not a language of major importance for cultural or linguistic history," explaining in a note "Only a few texts of nonstereotypical content and any length are known, principally the so-called Tariff."² What Daniels calls "Palmyrene" in these dismissive sentences was, of course, the principal language of a rich city that for a brief time aspired to be the center of the Roman empire. To our day Palmyra remains a site of great cultural and art-historical importance. The texts are not as stereotypical as Daniels describes them, and as far as linguistic history is concerned, though no one would, I suppose, think of treating "Palmyrene" in isolation, it is part of Aramaic and as such not devoid of interest even grammatically, while the words of its lexicon might be called, in the phrase of Baudelaire, "... les bijoux perdus de l'antique Palmyre."³

¹ Daniels, "Shewing of Hard Sentences and Dissolving of Doubts': The First Decipherment", *JAOS* 108 (1988) 419-36.

² Daniels, p. 435 and footnote 76.

³ "Bénédiction", *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Old Testament scholarship has maintained a more just estimate of the value of Palmyrene Aramaic texts. Already Gesenius, in his *Thesaurus* (of 1835-58) mentions the decipherment,⁴ though too little had been published by then to permit any extensive citation of the texts. Subsequent Hebrew lexicographers have made full and frequent reference to Palmyrene Aramaic as part of Semitic vocabulary bearing on Hebrew words. A spot check of a recent and invaluable instrument of research, the third edition of the Koehler-Baumgartner *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*,⁵ reveals that the compilers seem to have missed nothing of consequence available to them. Evidently they have profited from the *Dictionnaire* of Jean and Hoftijzer;⁶ moreover, occasionally Palmyrene Aramaic evidence is cited that cannot derive from that source. Also the eminent scholars who have published and studied the Palmyrene Aramaic texts, thus Chabot, Starcky, Ingholt, and many others, have had an eye toward the relevance of their texts for the Bible.⁷

The pitfalls present in using Palmyrene Aramaic for biblical interpretation are obvious. The texts are late, post Old Testament by centuries and even in many cases post New Testament. (Something over 2500 Palmyrene Aramaic texts have been published, the great bulk being from the first three centuries of the common era.) There is evidence of Jewish presence at Palmyra, some in the texts themselves and more in the historical and archaeological context.⁸ Still more evident in the language and social context of Palmyrene Aramaic texts is the strong Hellenistic and even Roman influence.

These factors need to be borne in mind, but from another point of view, we do not, or should not, use any extra-biblical evidence uncritically. Though this is not the kind of thing one can seriously measure, perhaps more grievous interpretive sins have been committed in use of Ugaritic materials, despite their antiquity, than in use of Palmyrene Aramaic evidence.

What is the promise held out by Palmyrene Aramaic texts? They are in a language closely related to biblical Hebrew. Many are dated, and many come from a context that can be known with considerable precision, in several senses. First, all the texts fit within a rather well-known and well-understood society, and second, we often

⁴ *Guilielmi Gesenii Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae hebraeae et chaldaeae veteris Testamenti* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1835-58).

⁵ (Leiden: Brill, 1967-).

⁶ Charles-F. Jean and Jacob Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest* (DISO) (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

⁷ H.L. Ginsberg, for example, assigned major importance to Palmyrene Aramaic evidence in his "Psalms and Inscriptions of Petition and Acknowledgment", in *Louis Ginsberg Jubilee Volume*, I (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945) 159-71. Very recently Palmyrene Aramaic material is used by Mark S. Smith in "The Invocation of Deceased Ancestors in Psalm 49:12c", *JBL* 112 (1993) 105-107; he cites P. Joüon, "Glanes palmyréniennes", *Syr* 19 (1938) 99-103 and Michael O'Connor, "The Grammar of Finding Your Way in Palmyrene Aramaic and the Problem of Diction in Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions", in *Fucus: A Semitic/Afrasian Gathering in Remembrance of Albert Ehrman*, ed. Y.L. Arbeitman (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1988) 353-69.

⁸ See L. Diez Merino, "Influencias judía y cristiana en los signos e inscripciones palmirenas", *Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus* 21 (1971) 76-148.

know exactly where a given text comes from: it is carved at such-and-such a place in a temple or tomb, it accompanies this or that statue or bas-relief, it labels such-and-such an object. The Palmyrene Aramaic texts have the virtue common to much epigraphic material of not coming to us through a complicated history of textual transmission.⁹ Moreover, in this rather extensive corpus, it is usually true that multiple examples of a given type of text occur, permitting knowledge of the range of variation within the genre. The texts are late, compared to other "Ancient Near Eastern Texts," but the vocabulary and phraseology often can be shown to continue ancient usages. We sometimes can point to Ugaritic counterparts of important religious terms at Palmyra, and in legal language, there are abundant parallels to the cuneiform legal tradition, as shown most recently in the work of Eleonora Cussini.¹⁰ To digress slightly, the legal or quasi-legal materials from Palmyra are practically unique,¹¹ for they provide a view of the law regulating the sale of tomb property. This makes a distinct contribution to the general picture of ancient Near Eastern law, and for biblical scholars is not without relevance for understanding the transaction told of in Gen 23.

To turn to the major point stated at the outset, there are two different modes in which Palmyrene Aramaic texts may affect our reading of biblical words and texts. Occasionally, the Aramaic is decisive for determining the sense of an uncertain Hebrew word. This is the case with *ḥammān*, which as definitively demonstrated by Drijvers means "chapel, shrine,"¹² not "sun-pillar."¹³ In something of same way, Palmyrene Aramaic evidence is of decisive importance for understanding the institution – evidently well-known to the prophets – referred to by the rare biblical term *marzē^aḥ*. In this case, a good deal of other ancient evidence plays a role along with the rich body of information found in Palmyrene Aramaic texts. Since these biblical Hebrew terms, whose meaning was lost or obscured over the centuries, are more than lexical curiosities, the importance of Palmyrene Aramaic evidence is plain. In addition, these cases point to the very limited nature of our evidence for the whole of ancient Hebrew vocabulary, and for the meaning of the mere fraction of the once-extant lexicon which is actually attested in the canonical corpus. A

⁹ This statement must be qualified at least as far as the Tariff is concerned, whose origin and composition present complicated problems of analysis in spite of the rather simple situation described in the initial lines.

¹⁰ "The Aramaic Law of Sale and the Cuneiform Legal Tradition", unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1992.

¹¹ Compare also the roughly contemporary materials in Nabataean Aramaic, as studied by Jonas Greenfield, "meḥqārīm b^cmunn^cḥē mišpāt bik^ctōbōt haq-qeber han-nābā'iyōt", *Sēfer Zikkārōn l^c-ḥ^anōk Yālōn* (Henoah Yalon Memorial Volume) (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University, 1974) 64-83.

¹² Han J.W. Drijvers, "Aramaic *ḥmn*² and Hebrew *ḥmn*: Their Meaning and Root", *JSS* 33 (1988) 165-79; note also, for the important Ugaritic cognate, G. del Olmo Lete, "La 'capilla' o 'templeto' (*ḥmn*) del culto ugarítico", *Aula orientalis* 2 (1984) 277-80. It is irrelevant, but amusing and somehow typical of the occasionally tortuous paths of philology, that Palmyrene Aramaic evidence first led Elliger, Ingholt and others to a wrong sense, "incense altar", which has found its way into the lexicons.

¹³ So the lexicon of Brown-Driver-Briggs, giving an interpretation that goes back at least as far as Rashi.

recent careful study, as close to scientific as possible in this area, puts "the reading vocabulary of the average high school graduate" (American) at 80,000 words;¹⁴ This figure permits us to form at least some kind of estimate – a humbling one – of what remains to us of the total ancient Hebrew vocabulary.

In a second kind of situation, Palmyrene Aramaic evidence may be not so much decisive and crucial as interesting, illustrative, illuminating. One might identify as a desideratum for our field an extended separate work, covering the whole biblical Hebrew lexicon, modelled on what was carried out for biblical Aramaic by E. Vogt, in his *Lexicon linguae aramaicae Veteris Testamenti documentis antiquis illustratum*. It is the last phrase that describes Vogt's unusual contribution. He includes not only the rare cases where cruxes are solved by Aramaic evidence, but also interesting and illuminating parallels providing, ready to hand, a broader linguistic context in which a biblical word or phrase may be read. If something of this sort were to be carried through for the biblical Hebrew vocabulary, Palmyrene Aramaic evidence would call for inclusion. This could start at the grammatical, even phonological level, with mention, for example, of the elision of the preposition *b* in a phrase such as **b^cbet*.¹⁵ At the level of syntax, or pronominal usage, Palmyrene Aramaic evidence gives striking parallels to Hebrew *bo^akā* "as one goes, in the direction of".¹⁶ Palmyrene Aramaic could be cited, more fully than is done in existing dictionaries, at points too numerous to be listed in detail, but which may be exemplified in use of the Palmyrene Aramaic cognate of Hebrew *maṣṣēbāh* in the sense "sculpture, bas-relief."¹⁷ It is interesting also to note the use at Palmyra of what is etymologically a divine name *ʔštr* as a common noun "goddess."¹⁸

II. Amos 2:8

Amos 2:8 may serve as a brief concrete example of the dual role Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions may play, either as determining the sense of an Old Testament passage, or as providing an illuminating background for our reading. In

¹⁴ George A. Miller, "How School Children Learn Words", *CSL Report 7 Oct., 1986* (Princeton: Cognitive Science Laboratory) 1-16. Citation from p. 7. According to Miller, all dictionaries under-represent important vocabulary elements: proper nouns, acronyms, and multiword phrases.

¹⁵ For biblical Hebrew, see *bayit* and *petah*, and the grammars and lexicons; for Palmyrene Aramaic, note C. Dunant, *Le sanctuaire de Baalshamin à Palmyre*, Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana (Rome: Institut Suisse de Rom, 1971) text no. 45 lines 11-13, with the Greek translation.

¹⁶ "The Grammar of Finding Your Way ..." (above, note 7).

¹⁷ In spite of the large number of recent studies devoted to *maṣṣēbāh*, it seems that the Palmyrene evidence is not sufficiently taken into account; see, for example, the lengthy study of the term by J. Gamberoni s.v. "*Maṣṣēbāh*", *TWAT*, Vol IV.

¹⁸ Thus *l^cštr[t^ʔ]* *ʔštr^ʔ tbt^ʔ* "to Astar[te], the good goddess" J. Cantineau, "Textes palmyréniens provenant de la fouille du temple de Bêl", *Syr* 12 (1931) text no. 13 line 3; and *b^cltk^ʔ ʔštr^ʔ* "Baaltak, the goddess" *op. cit.*, text no. 12 line 4; this Aramaic usage parallels, and perhaps derives from, Akkadian use of the divine name Ishtar in the sense "goddess"; see S. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, Assyriological Studies 19 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press) p. 60.

this verse, the phrase $w^c y\acute{e}n \text{ } ^c a n\acute{u}š\acute{i}m y\acute{i}št\acute{u} b\acute{e}t \text{ } ^c l\acute{o}h\acute{e}hem$ has not been explained in a way which commands the assent of all. In the light of Palmyrene Aramaic we may, I propose, translate: "... they drink the wine of the treasury in the houses of their gods." Alternately, less word-for-word: "They drink wine at the expense of the treasury", that is "at public expense."

Although the general sense of the larger passage in which this text stands has always been clear, most students of Amos will probably acknowledge the problems of detail that abound in comprehending the exact nature of the sins which the prophet here denounces. As to the phrase $y\acute{e}n \text{ } ^c a n\acute{u}š\acute{i}m$, "the wine of $^c a n\acute{u}š\acute{i}m$," though there is a generally, or at least widely, accepted translation, "the wine of those who are fined," the explanation of the Hebrew phrase is the subject of debate.

According to Shalom Paul, whose commentary at this point is representative and typical,¹⁹ it is best to explain $^c a n\acute{u}š\acute{i}m$ as a passive participle, parallel to $h^a b\acute{u}l\acute{i}m$ in the preceding line, and to translate "the wine of those who are fined," that is, "wine obtained from fines, by extracting fines from the poor". However plausible, this is ad hoc, in that it involves the hypothetical reconstruction of a practice of which we know nothing from other texts.

Paul reports a divergent opinion, found for example in the commentary of Rudolph.²⁰ According to Rudolph, $^c a n\acute{u}š\acute{i}m$ may indeed be a passive participle, but probably is rather a substantive in this case, an abstract noun of the same type as $m^c g\acute{u}r\acute{i}m$ "state of sojourning," or $ne \text{ } ^c \acute{u}r\acute{i}m$ "youth." This grammatical hypothesis is, in my opinion, rendered still more plausible by the comparative evidence to be adduced presently; note however that Rudolph's understanding of the sense of $^c a n\acute{u}š\acute{i}m$ is close to that conventionally held.²¹

Since Amos uses the term $marz\acute{e}^a h$ (6:7) for the luxurious feasting of the rich Israelites, which he condemns, the Palmyrene evidence for the nature of the $marz\acute{e}^a h$, the symposium, far from being slighted, has often been exploited by interpreters of Amos. Indeed, this is sometimes overdone, and an overly lurid and imaginative, picture of the $marz\acute{e}^a h$ institution is painted.²²

¹⁹ *Amos*, Hermencia (Minneapolis: Fortress), 1991.

²⁰ W. Rudolph, *Joel – Amos – Obadja – Jona, Kommentar zum Alten Testament*, Band XIII 2 (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971).

²¹ Rudolph translates: «oder trinken Wein aus Eintreibungen in ihren Gotteshäusern». ["And they drink wine from extortions in the houses of their gods"]. Rudolph finds confirmation of his explanation in the Septuagint's reading *ek sykophantiōn* "aus falscher Anklage" ["from false accusations"] or "aus Erpressungen" ["from extortions"], and in the Targum $h^a mar \text{ } ^c uns\acute{a}$, "Wein von Beschlagnahme" ["wine from confiscation"]. In Rudolph's opinion, the Greek translation and the Targum are correct in that here it is not a matter of taxes or fines according to law, but of extraordinary and unjust extortions. Compare the view of Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, Anchor Bible 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989) p. 321: The root $^c nš$ may mean "punish" in the sense of a legitimate punishment (Deut 22:19); Amos does not make clear one aspect of the problem: whether the act was a sin because this wine was not to be drunk in the sacred place, or whether because the fine was unjust (Prov 17:26).

²² Thus Hans M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos*, VTS 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 33-36. with the " $marz\acute{e}^a h$ Hostess."

It seems not to have been noticed, however, that at Palmyra, where the *marzē^ah* flourished, an Aramaic term cognate to Amos's *ca nūšim* often appears in texts and contexts having to do with the symposium. The term is *ᶜnwšt*²³, which has the sense "treasury" and is used both of the civic treasury²³ and of the treasury of various gods, that is, various temple treasuries, thus: *ᶜnwš[t] ᶜ dy bl* "the treasu[ry] of Bel."²⁴ We have referece to the personnel, or officials, of the treasury, as in CIS 3994 (cited above) and in: *ᶜnwš ᶜnwšt*²⁵ "the personnel of the treasury."²⁵ There is also the related abstract word: "term in office of treasurer": *b ᶜnwšt PN wPN*, found in the text previously cited (CIS 3994 line 3).

An association of "treasury" and the symposium, the sacred drinking party, becomes evident from the evidence of certain tesserae. The Palmyrene tesserae are little tokens, usually of terra-cotta, which served as admission-tickets to the sacred banquets. Not all contain a text but many have a brief inscription. Some refer specifically to measures of wine to which the guest is entitled. That wine was a central part of the banquet may be seen from explicit mention in other, lengthier inscriptions,²⁶ and also from the title for the symposium which occurs on various tesserae as a synonym for *marzē^ah*, that is *ᶜgn*. This word, originally "crater, mixing vessel" (attested in this sense in Palmyrene²⁷ as elsewhere in Semitic) develops the sense "symposium".

Other tesserae mention the institution or person who is sponsoring the feast, thus for a civic banquet (RTP 8): *krk ᶜ / ᶜnwšt ᶜ*, "the city / the treasury". For a temple banquet *ᶜnwš[t] ᶜ dy bl* (RTP 36): "the treasury of (the god) Bel." The sense of these compressed, telegraphic references to the treasury is "at the expense of the treasury," which is completely explicit in the dedicatory inscription on an altar [*ᶜt*]²

²³ Thus in *ᶜbdt mdynt ᶜ lbyrk šmh ᶜ lᶜm ᶜ mn ksp ᶜnwšt ᶜ b ᶜnwšt* (four personal names) "The City made (this) for (the god) Blessed-Be-His-Name-Forever out of public funds, in the terms as treasurer of (personal names)", text CIS 3994 lines 1-7. This inscription occurs in practically identical form on three altars; it is in part a bilingual, having in the Greek the term *argyrotamiōn* "terms as treasurer", corresponding to *ᶜnwšt*.

²⁴ H. Ingholt, H. Seyrig, and J. Starcky, *Recueil des tessères de Palmyre*, Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique. (Paris: Geuthner, 1955) no. 36 (hereafter cited as RTP).

²⁵ J. Cantineau, *Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre*, Publications du Musée de Damas; Fascicules I-IX (Beyrouth: Institut Français d'archéologie de Beyrouth, 1930-36) fasc. 9 text no. 12 line 3.

²⁶ H. Ingholt, "Un nouveau thiase à Palmyre", *Syr* 7 (1926) pp. 128-41; the Palmyrene Aramaic text is: (1) *[by]rh ᶜ šry šnt 5.100+40+10+5* / (2) *brbnwt mızłhwt yrly ᶜgrp ᶜ yrly / (3) ydy ᶜbl ᶜg ᶜ y ᶜt dy šmš ᶜ lhy ᶜ wytb ᶜ l / (4) qsm ᶜ št ᶜ klh w ᶜsq ᶜ hmr ᶜ ᶜtyq ᶜ / (5) lkmry ᶜ št ᶜ klh mn byth w ᶜhmr bzqyn / (6) ᶜ l ᶜ ᶜyᶜy mn m ᶜrb ᶜ dkyryn wbrkyyn / (7) prᶜnks wmlkws ᶜ bnwhy w ᶜgylw ktwb ᶜ zby br ᶜ ᶜd ᶜ dy hw ᶜ ᶜ l bt dwd ᶜ / (8) wyrᶜbwl ᶜ mmzgn ᶜ wmsy ᶜn ᶜ klhwn* (Partial rendering: "In the month Tishri, the year 555 [A.D. 243], in the term as symposiarch of Yarhay Agrippa (son of) Yarhay Yediabol (son of) Oga (son of) Yaut, who served the gods and presided over the allotment (or: divination) for the whole year, and served old wine to the priests, for a whole year, from his own house, and did not bring wine in skins from the west ...".

²⁷ D. Schlumberger, *La Palmyrène du nord-ouest* (Paris: Geuthner, 1951) text 21 a:1 *ᶜgn ᶜ* "... (this) crater" [text damaged, but apparently a dedication, inscribed on a large stone crater].

dh mn ksp ʿnwš[ʿt ʿ] "This altar (was made) at treasury expense."²⁸; compare the inscriptions on three related altars cited above, CIS 3994. Architectural and inscriptional evidence from the site unite in demonstrating another point of contact with the phraseology of Amos 2:8. The symposium at Palmyra, the *marzē^ah* or *ʿgn*, was usually held in the temples, the "house(s) of their gods" (*byt* in Amos).

The *marzē^ah* was not something peculiar to Palmyra or new in the Hellenistic-Roman era, for some form of the institution, with the terminology related to it, goes back as far as the second millennium, as we know from Ugaritic texts. Other later texts, for example Nabataean inscriptions, inform us of the wide diffusion of the institution. With this in mind we may suggest that the phrase of Amos 2:8 as translated here: "they drink wine at treasury expense in the houses of their gods," would have been a completely comprehensible and accurate description of what people did in fact do at Palmyra. This practice is likely to have been what Amos refers to, and denounces, in eight-century Israel.

To digress briefly before summing up, it is interesting to compare an expression in a Hebrew letter from Arad. This is found in text number 1 in Aharoni's Ketobot Arad.²⁹ The text begins "To Eliashib. Now, give wine to the Kittiyim ..." Lines 9-10 say *myn h ʿgnt.tn* "Give of the wine of the *ʿgnt*." Since an *ʿaggān* is a crater, not a storage vessel, Aharoni reasons that *yyn h ʿgnt* refers to a special kind of wine, citing Song of Songs 7:3. The Palmyrene evidence suggests that *ʿgnt* here has the derived sense "festive banquet, symposium." Aharoni seems to be correct in concluding that as the writer of the Arad letter explains the specific kind of flour (*qmḥ*) to be given to the Kittiyim, so here he defines the quality of wine.³⁰ (It is improbable that he is telling Eliashib how to serve the wine.³¹ Palmyrene evidence, and the broad span of evidence for the *marzē^ah*, permits the interpretation: "give them symposium wine," the best wine, not the worst and cheapest.

An extended treatment of connected issues in understanding the phrase from Amos treated here, in its immediate context and within the whole book, would be desirable if this study were intended to be a thorough treatment of Amos 2:8. The detail discussed, however, may by itself suffice to make the principal point announced at the outset, namely, that there are two modes of use of Palmyrene Aramaic evidence. Amos 2:8 may exemplify the first possibility, it may be, as the present writer proposes, a case where Palmyrene Aramaic evidence is decisive for understanding a biblical locution. But failing that, it would show that consultation of Palmyrene evidence retains a value of a different sort. That is, it is illuminating and interesting to read the line in Amos "documentis antiquis illustrata," with Palmyrene Aramaic passages at hand.

Abstract:

Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions have contributed to understanding of the biblical Hebrew vocabulary since the decipherment of the script in the 18th century. Occasionally this corpus of

²⁸ J. Starcky, *MUSJ* 28 (1949-50) 45-58; text is no. 3, p. 56.

²⁹ Y. Aharoni, *K^etōbōt c^arād* (Arad Inscriptions) (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1975), p. 12.

³⁰ Aharoni, *K^etōbōt c^arād*, p. 14.

³¹ Aharoni cites a translation by W.F. Albright, "serve the wine in punch bowls".

epigraphic material, though late and far from central to Old Testament studies, is of decisive importance for determining the sense of a biblical word, as shown by Drijvers for *hammān*, "chapel, shrine." More frequently, Palmyrene texts may provide an illuminating context or background for study of Hebrew words or texts.

In Amos 2:8 the problematic *yēn* ^{ca} *nūšīm*, commonly taken as "wine of those who are fined," seems on the evidence of Palmyrene texts associated with the sacred banquet (*marzē^ah*) to have the sense "wine of the treasury," i.e., the prophet denounces banqueting at the expense of the treasury. The phrase *yyn h²gnt* of the Arad ostraca is to be explained, from the same general Palmyrene context, as "symposium wine", the best wine.

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