

Papyrus Amherst 63 Up Close

Israelite psalms in an Egyptian papyrus?

Karel van der Toorn • [06/01/2018 \(06/01/2018T13:29\)](#)



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Dating to the fourth century B.C.E., the enigmatic Papyrus Amherst 63 was likely created by the descendants of the Aramean and Judean soldiers, who in the fifth century B.C.E. had been stationed at the southern Egyptian border. Recorded in a cursive script derived from Egyptian hieroglyphs, the Aramaic texts of the Amherst papyrus keep challenging what we know about the Aramean religion and the history of the Hebrew Bible. In the article “**Egyptian Papyrus Sheds New Light on Jewish History**” in the July/August 2018 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, author Karel van der Toorn contends that three Israelite psalms appear in Papyrus Amherst 63—although only one is attested in the Bible. Below, read Van der Toorn’s translations of the psalms from Papyrus Amherst 63.—**Ed.**



Papyrus Amherst 63. Photo: The Morgan Library Museum/Art Resource, NY.

In the *FREE eBook Ancient Israel in Egypt and the Exodus*, top scholars discuss the historical Israelites in Egypt and archaeological evidence for and against the historicity of the Exodus.

**Papyrus Amherst 63,
May Yaho Answer Us in Our
Troubles (xii, 11–19),
“Psalm 1”**

May Yaho answer us in our troubles.
May Adonay answer us in our troubles.
Be a bow in heaven, Crescent!
Send your messengers
From all of Rash!
And from Zaphon
May Yaho help us.
May Yaho give to us
Our heart’s desire.
May the Lord give to us
Our heart’s desire.

**Book of Psalms,
Psalm 20**

(author’s translation)

To the leader. A Psalm of David.
May Yahweh answer you in the day of trouble!
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you!
May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.
May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. *Selah*
May he grant you your heart’s desire,
and fulfill all your plans.
May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our banners.

Every wish, may Yaho fulfill.
May Yaho fulfill,
May Adonay not diminish
Any request of our heart.
Some by the bow, some by the spear—
Behold, as for us, my Lord, our God is
Yaho!
May our Bull be with us.
May Bethel answer us tomorrow.
Baal-Shamayin shall bless the Lord:
“By your loyal ones I bless you!”
End.

**Papyrus Amherst 63,
Our Banquet is For You (xiii, 1–10),
“Psalm 2”**

Hear me, our God!
Fine lambs (and) sh[ee]p
We will sacrifice for you among the Gods.
Our banquet is for you
Among the Mighty Ones of the people,
Adonay, for you,
Among the Mighty Ones of the people.
Adonay, the people will bless you.
Your annual offerings we will perform.
From the pitcher, saturate yourself my God!

Let it be announced forever:
The Merciful One exalts the great,
Yaho humiliates the lowly one.

They have mixed the wine in our jar,
In our jar, at our New Moon festival!
Drink, Yaho,
From the bounty of a thousand bowls!
Be satiated, Adonay,
From the bounty of the people!

Singers wait upon the Lord,
The player of the harp, the player of the lyre:
“We will play for you
The song of the Sidonian lyre,
And our flutes resoundingly,
At the banquets of humankind.”
End.

May Yahweh fulfill all your petitions.
Now I know that Yahweh will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.
Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of Yahweh our God.
They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.
Yahweh will give victory to the king;
answer us when we call.

**Papyrus Amherst 63,
The Host of Heaven Proclaims
Your Rule (xiii, 11–17),
“Psalm 3”**

Who among the Gods,
Among humankind, Yaho—
Who among the Gods,
Among king and non-king,
Who is like you, Yaho, among the Gods?
From the very beginning, Adonay, avenge
Your worshippers, the longstanding people.

Take note of our pursuer,
And restore my strength.

Beneath you, Yaho,
Beneath you, Adonay,
The host of heaven is (as plentiful) as sand.
Yaho, the host of heaven
Proclaims to us your rule.

Take note of our pursuer,
And restore my strength.

Let Baal from Zaphon
Bless Yaho.
Arise, Yaho, to our rescue.
Let his ears turn
To the prayer, Lord.
Arise Yaho!
Do protect,
As you have been protecting
Your people since olden times.
End.

Subscribers: Read the article “**Egyptian Papyrus Sheds New Light on Jewish History**” by Karel van der Toorn in the July/August 2018 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*.

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