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## Three Coptic ostraca from Warsaw private collections

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Tomasz Markiewicz

### THREE COPTIC OSTRACA FROM WARSAW PRIVATE COLLECTIONS\*

The ostraca presented in this paper belong to private collections and are kept in the Department of Papyrology of the Warsaw University as a deposit. Although they were not found during excavations, fortunately their provenance is fairly well known.

#### 1. NUMBERS FROM 1 TO 50

This ostrakon was reportedly found in ancient quarries next to road from el-Tarif to the Valley of the Kings (in the vicinity of the Carter House).

The sherd is a fragment of a amphora belly. The clay is lightly porous, homogenous, oxydising, of the type *Tongemisch II B*.<sup>1</sup> The shape of the sherd is almost rectangular.

The texts runs along the amphora ribbing. The hand does not seem to be very proficient, but it is not of a complete beginner, either. It can be classified as "the evolving hand".<sup>2</sup> The ostrakon is difficult to date, as the sample of script is very small, but may belong to the period IVth-VIth cent.<sup>3</sup>

\* I would like to thank Mrs. Teodozja RZEUSKA for her ceramological assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Typology according to R. D. GEMPELER, *Die Keramik römischer bis früh-arabischer Zeit*, Mainz am Rhein 1992, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> R. CRIBIÖRE, *Writing, teachers, and students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Atlanta 1996, pp. 33, 112.

<sup>3</sup> W. STEGEMANN, *Koptische Paläographie*, Heidelberg 1936, plates 6, 7.

Fig. 1	5.5 cm x 5.5 cm	IVth-VIth cent.
	ϣ ⲁ [β]	1 [2]
	Ⲑ Ⲏ ⲓ ⲥ ⲉ Ⲓ	9 8 7 6 5 3
	Ⲏ Ⲙ ⲗ ⲕ [1]	50 40 30 20 [10]

The text is a sequence of letters from *alpha* to *nu*, with omission of *delta*. The *stigma* indicates that it is not part of the alphabet, but numbers exercise.<sup>4</sup> The interesting feature of this text is that it takes the form of *bustrophedon* in the first two lines. In the third line, however, the student kept writing the numbers from right to left. Another possible explanation is that also the letters in the first line were written from right to left, but it is less likely as the *staurogram* beginning the inscription is clearly visible on the left and traces of the first letter suit *alpha* rather than *beta*. Omission of the *delta* must be a student's mistake.

## 2. CONSIGNMENT NOTE

The ostrakon was found next to the Monastery of St. Simeon (known also as Deir Anba Hadra) in Aswan, near its southern gate.

The sherd is a fragment of a bowl, a table utensil of relatively good quality. The dish was levigated and covered with red slip. It was most probably of the type T219 or T220B of Gempeler's classification.<sup>5</sup> This type of dish was in widespread use in Egypt in Vth and VIth century. The clay is dense, homogeneous, oxydising and of the type *Tongemisch I B*.<sup>6</sup>

The text was written immediately below the brim. The hand is experienced and vigorous. The script is probably that of the IXth century.<sup>7</sup>

Fig. 2	8.5 cm x 6.5 cm	IXth cent.
	[ϣ] ⲓⲧⲏ	From
	ϣⲓⲗⲐⲐ(ⲉⲐⲐ)	Philotheos
	ⲑⲉⲙⲙⲉ	shipment.

<sup>4</sup> Parallels can be found in M. HASITZKA, *Neue Texte und Dokumentation zum Koptisch-Unterricht*, Wien 1990, nos. 294-303.

<sup>5</sup> R. D. GEMPELER, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70, plates 13.3 and 14.3 respectively.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> STEGEMANN, *Koptische Paläographie*, plate 16.

2. φιλο<sup>θ</sup>. Onomastica record two names beginning with Φιλοθ-: Φιλόθεος and Φιλότερος; the latter is, however, to be excluded because it was used in the Ptolemaic period.

This ostrakon was probably sent with some goods as a note identifying their sender. The recipient of the shipment (and the note) might have lived in the monastery, but this of course cannot be determined. The name Philotheos is too popular and widespread to be a criterion for either dating or provenance of the ostrakon.

### 3. UNIDENTIFIED TEXT

This ostrakon was found together with the previous one in the vicinity of St. Simeon Monastery in Aswan.

The sherd is a fragment of rather crude amphora. It is about 1.5 cm thick and was part a lower part of the belly of the vessel. The clay is dense, homogeneous, of the type *Tongemisch I A*.<sup>8</sup>

Part of the ostrakon bearing the text may have been slightly smoothed to create convenient writing space. The text is now most faded and hardly legible, the first line (lines?) completely faded away, as well as the beginning of remaining lines. The hand seems to be experienced and rapid. The letters are small and cursive, which adds to the difficulty of reading the text. Visible letters allow dating of the text to the VIIth or VIIIth century.<sup>9</sup>

Fig. 3

14 cm x 9 cm

VIIth – VIIIth cent.

4	]ϣϩ ϣϣΔΝ Μ ]ΝΔϣ ΚΟΤΙΝΟΣ ]ΝΝΩϩ ΝΔϣ Μ ]ϫ [Ν]ΣΟΜ ΝΔϣ ϣ	... if he --- ... for him --- ... ropes (?) for him --- ... find power (?) for him 200 (?)
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- 1 ϣΔΝ is perhaps here the conditional particle, but a number of other interpretations is also possible.
2. The first legible letter in this line could also be Μ, thus giving the word ΜΔϣ- "thirty" (cf. P. KAHLE, *Coptic Texts from Deir el-Bala'izah in Upper Egypt*, London

<sup>8</sup> STEGEMANN, *Koptische Paläographie*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> STEGEMANN, *Koptische Paläographie*, plates 9, 11, 12, 13.

1954, p. 343,1). The reading (and meaning) of the next word is difficult to establish. The Greek word κότινος – “wild olive tree” or “olive-garland” is known from literary sources (eg. Aristophanes *Plutos* 943), but does not appear in papyri from Egypt. Dr. Siegfried RICHTER suggested to me reading ζετιμος – “ready” instead, a word which frequently appears in warranties, but I was unable to see the ζ.

Neither is it likely to be an abbreviation for ολοκοτινος, as this word, to my knowledge, is never shortened in this way

3. Just before σ – the first clearly visible letter in this line – there are faint traces that look like upper part of another σ. There is enough space between these letters to insert a small η, so that reconstruction of the compound verb σῆσθον – “find power”, “be able” – is possible, though by no means sure.

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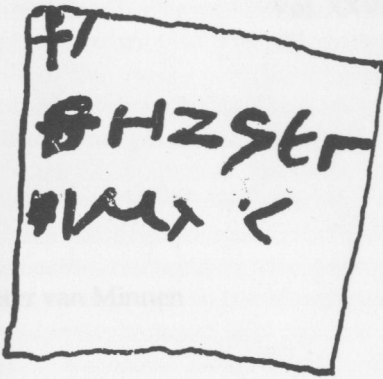


Fig. 1. Numbers from 1 to 50

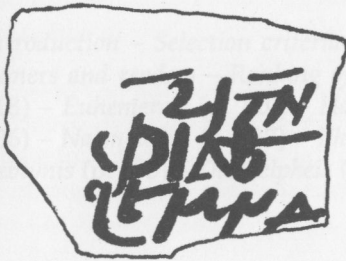


Fig. 2. Consignment note

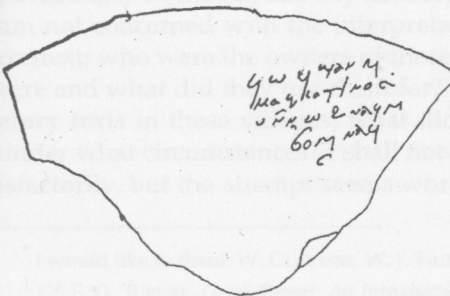


Fig. 3. Unidentified text