

Markiewicz, Tomasz

Five Coptic ostraca from Deir el-Bahri

The Journal of Juristic Papyrology 29, 79-84

1999

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez **Muzeum Historii Polski** w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Tomasz Markiewicz

FIVE COPTIC OSTRACA FROM DEIR EL-BAHRI*

The following Coptic ostraca were found during recent excavation seasons of the Polish Archeological Mission at Deir el-Bahri. They all come from the uppermost terrace of the Hatshepsut Temple, i.e. the place once occupied by the Coptic monastery of St. Phoibammon.¹ One of these ostraca might be attributed to the well-known archive of the bishop Abraham, who resided in the monastery around 600 AD.² The other texts cannot be precisely dated, but their *terminus ante quem* must be the abandonment of the monastery in the end of VIIIth/beginning of the IXth century.³

The following publication owes much to the transcriptions of Prof. Jan Krzysztof Winnicki who was able to study the originals in winter 1999 and made the transcriptions with the intention of helping me with the future publication. For this I would like to express my gratitude to him.

1. LETTER CONCERNING A CERTAIN MINAS

This is the largest text in this small collection. The sherd is a part of an amphora belly. The text is written on its convex side, along the ribs. The bottom left

* I would like to thank for the assistance of Prof. Heinz-Josef THISSEN (Cologne), Prof. Włodzimirz GODLEWSKI (Warsaw) and Dr. Adam ŁAJTAR (Warsaw). This paper was prepared during my stay at the University of Cologne as grantholder of the *Gemeinschaft zur Förderung von Studienaufenthalten Polnischer Studierender*.

¹ For the topography and architecture of the monastery see W. GODLEWSKI, *Le monastère de St. Phoibammon*, Varsovie 1986, 21-50.

² For the general outline of the history of the monastery see W. GODLEWSKI, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 60-78. For the archives of the monastery see *ibidem*, 51-59. For the person of the bishop Abraham see M. KRAUSE, *Apa Abraham von Hermonthis. Ein oberägyptischer Bischoff um 600*, Phil. Diss. Berlin 1956.

³ W. GODLEWSKI, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 77-78.

portion of the ostracon is missing, along with a fragment at the bottom right and a small fragment at the top. The text most probably did not continue beyond the last preserved line (as in the line 11 we have the beginning of the final address formula), so that the missing part constituted probably no more than 25 per cent of the whole letter.

The hand does not seem to be very rapid as the letters are large and somewhat carefully written, but the author was certainly someone educated and well-familiar with the rules of Coptic letter-writing. We may assume that the letter comes from within the *millieu* of Coptic clergy.

before beginning of IXth c.

16 cm x 13,2 cm

Plate I

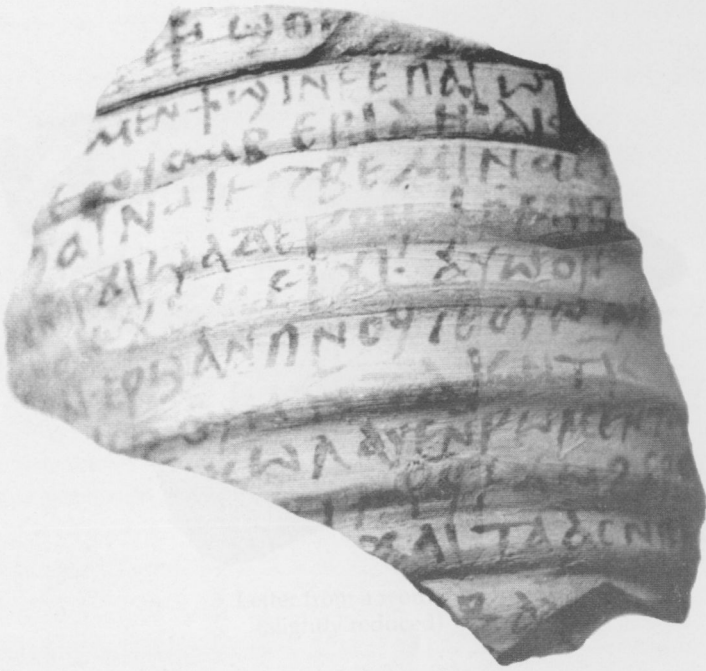
ⲫ ϣⲟⲣ[ⲡ]
 ΜΕΝ ⲧⲱⲒⲚⲈ ⲈⲠⲒⲱⲧ
 ⲈⲐⲐⲰⲘⲘⲘ ⲈⲠⲒⲘⲒ ⲘⲔ-
 4 ϘⲒⲘⲒ ⲒⲘⲒ ⲈⲧⲘⲈ ⲒⲒⲒⲘⲘ
 ϘⲈ ⲒⲠⲠⲠⲒ ϣⲘⲘⲈ (Ⲉ)ⲣⲟϘ ⲧⲠⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒ
 ϣⲈ] ⲒⲘⲔ ϘⲈ ⲒⲈⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒ ⲘⲒⲱ ⲐⲒ
 8 ⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒⲒ ⲒⲠⲒⲘⲔ ⲒⲧⲔ
 ⲒⲔⲱ ⲒⲘⲒⲈ ⲒⲠⲠⲱⲒⲈ ⲒⲧⲘⲔ
 ⲒⲧⲠⲠⲒⲒ ⲈⲘⲱⲒ ⲈⲠⲟϘ
 ⲟϘⲒⲘⲒⲒ ⲧⲘⲘⲘ ⲒⲠⲠⲘ-
 12 ⲒⲘⲘⲘⲒ

Before all [2] I greet my holy [3] father. 'Επειδή: you [4] wrote to me because of Minas: [5] "Do not take (true) a word against him (or: from him)". I witness [6] to you: I did not take! And again [7] [...] if God wishes [8] [...] with you, you [9] [...] any man, who has [10] [...] to touch (?) them [11] [...] Farewell. To give it to [...] [12] [...]

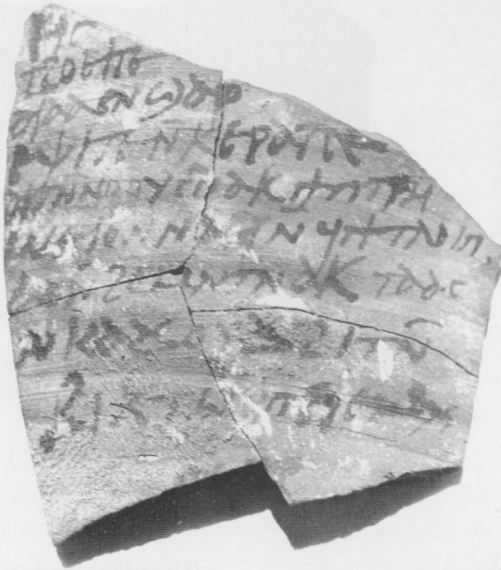
4. At the end of the line some faint traces. Perhaps we should read ΜΙΝΔ Ω ?
11. τⲘⲘⲘ in the adress formula is usually translated as "give it", i.e. an imperative. But Prof. Heinz-Josef Thissen pointed out to me that it should be translated with an infinitive, with accordance to the Coptic form actually used.

Not much can be said about the contents of this letter. It is, however, obviously a reply to a letter from a clergyman (whom the author calls "my holy father" in lines 1-2 and whose name and title(s) were given in the address, but are now lost). The latter either apparently felt obliged to defend a certain Minas against some accusation, or wanted to protest against Minas' accusations (less probable). The interpretation depends on the meaning of the preposition ⲈⲠⲟⲩ. "Against" seems to me to be more likely here. The reply to this request was positive: the author of our letter swears that he never listened to those accusations. What follows is obscured by *lacunae*.

PLATE I

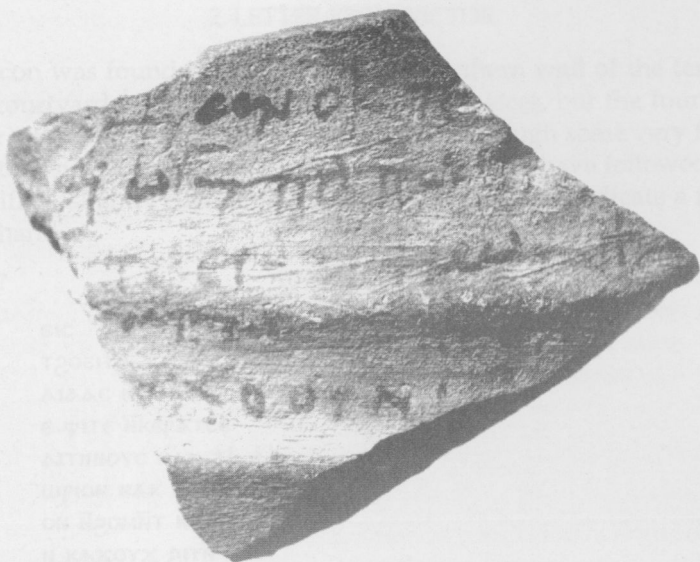


1. Letter concerning a certain Minas (reduced by 80%)



2. Letter from Victor (reduced by 80%)

PLATE II



3. Letter from a woman(?)
(slightly reduced)



4. School exercise(?)
(slightly reduced)



5. Unidentified text
(slightly reduced)

2. LETTER FROM VICTOR.

The ostrakon was found in the filling of the southern wall of the temple's uppermost courtyard.⁴ The sherd was broken into pieces, but the four surviving parts bear a texts that seems to be complete, even though some very faint traces at the bottom suggest that some more information may have followed it.

Simplified, slightly cursive letters and some ligatures indicate a rapid, professional hand.

VIIIth cent.?

10 cm x 10,5 cm

Plate I

εΙC
 ΤΘΕΙΤΕ
 ΔΙΔΑC ΝΨΔΡ
 4 ε ΨΙΤΕ ΝΚΕΡΑΤCΕ
 ΔΙΤΝΝΟΥC ΝΑΚ †[...]
 ΩΡΙΟΝ ΝΑΚ ΝΓ† ΤΛΟΙΠ-
 ΟΝ ΝΘΟΜΝΤ ΝΑΚ ΤΑΔC
 8 Ν ΚΑΧΟΥΧ ΘΙΤΝ
 ΒΙΚΤΩΡ ΠΠ(ΡΕCΒΥΤΕΡΟC) ΕΛΔΧ(ΙCΤΟC)

Here is [2] the garment. [3] I had it made of leather [4] for nine *keratia*. [5] I have sent it to you. I [...] [6] Orion (?) to you, and he gives the rest [7] of money to you. To give it [8] to Καχουχ. From [9] Victor, the humblest priest.

5. At the end of this line I see ΠΡΗ or perhaps ΠΡΗ. Unfortunately, neither of these readings makes any sense. One would expect here an infinitive following the 1st sgl. prefix pronoun †.
6. The reading of the name is by no means certain, but I prefer it against the ΒΑΜΙΟΝ of Winnicki. For the name ΩΡΙΟΝ see G. Heuser, *Die Personennamen der Kopten* (Leipzig 1929) 63.
8. The name ΚΑΧΟΥΧ is not listed by Heuser, *op. cit.*, but does appear in Till's *Datierung und Prosopographie der koptischen Urkunden aus Theben*, Wien 1962, 116. A certain Ape Kačuč approves two tax receipts from Thebes: KOW 69 and ST 413 (in the fourth indiction). Both these texts are dated by Till to the beginning of the VIIIth century.
9. The reading of Victor's title is not at all clear. I see the letter π followed by the abbreviation π̄. This reading was suggested to me by Prof. W. Godlewski.

The identification of the author of this text poses problems. We may deal here with the relatively well-known priest Victor, son of Kyriakos and Saneth who was the disciple (μαθητής) of bishop Abraham and his successor as the abbot of

⁴ Its drawing was published by F. PAWLICKI, "Hatshepsut Temple. Conservation and Preservation Project 1994/95", *Polish Archeology in the Mediterranean* 7 (1996) 70.

St. Phoibammon monastery.⁵ He died after 634, when his will was drawn (RU 77). This Victor appears many times in the archive of Abraham and often bears the title of *presbyteros*. It is quite probable that he is the author of our text. If this is indeed the case, the letter was probably written in the period around 600-620, when Victor dealt with most of the economic and administrative affairs of the monastery in his capacity of Abraham's secretary and future successor. The handwriting shows some similarities to the "hand A", which was identified as Victor's own handwriting by Crum,⁶ but it differs from it in its rather peculiar writing of the letter †.⁷

It is also possible to identify our Victor with Apa Victor II (son of Theodoros?), who supervised the monastery of St. Phoibammon in the period about 700-720.⁸ If we identify the recipient of our letter with Kačuč from KOW 69 and ST 413, than the ostracon should be dated to the last years of the VIIIth century. The name Kačuč was not very popular (only three occurrences in the Theban area known to Till (see above, comm. to l. 8), at least two of them concerning the same person), but it is of course well probable that it is not the same man. This identification is thus based on less solid grounds.

The author of our letter may have also not been identical with either of the Victors mentioned above — the name Victor is popular enough. Thus the question of dating of this ostracon remains open.

3. LETTER FROM A WOMAN?

The sherd is a fragment of an amphora belly, with the text running along the ribs on the convex side. The character of this text can not be determined with certainty due to its poor state of preservation. Substantial parts of the ostracon are missing and the remaining portion of the text is unintelligible to me.

The handwriting seems to be rapid, and belongs probably to a professional scribe, writing for a woman (?).

before beginning of IXth c.

8,8 cm x 7 cm

Plate II

† ΔΝΟΚ ΤΕ []
] Η ΩΓΤΠΑΔΠΑ[]
] ΠΔ ΕΡ[...] ΗΩ . †

⁵ W. TILL, *op. cit.*, 227-229. For the more detailed discussion of Victor's career and activities see M. KRAUSE, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 81-83.

⁶ W. E. CRUM, *Coptic Ostraca from the collections of the Egypt Exploration Fund, the Cairo Museum and others*, London 1902, xiv.

⁷ W. E. CRUM, *op. cit.* (above), pl. I, no. 71.

⁸ He was named as a successor in the office of the abbot in the will of Apa Iakob (KRU 65 — dated 690-698) and he is mentioned in another document (CLT 5) dated 711/712.

4

]ΔΧΟΟΥΝ[

1. ΔΝΟΚ at the beginning of the text is probably part of introductory formula of a letter (cf. A. Biedenkopf-Ziehner, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Briefformular unter Berücksichtigung ägyptischer und griechischer Parallelen*, Würzburg 1983, tab. V, pp. 225-232). τε may be the sgl. f. pronoun serving as a copula in a nominal sentence or beginning of a (female ?) name.
4. This line is faded and hence completely illegible on the photo.

4. SCHOOL EXERCISE?

This limestone flake bears traces of two texts. On the left part meagre remains of an older text of unidentified character can be seen. This text was damaged when the right part of the surface was chipped off. The new writing space thus created bears now remains of a hardly legible text written apparently by a different hand.

9,6 cm x 7,2 cm

Plate II

Older text:

TEK [
 ϷΝ . [
 Ψ[

Between the lines 1 and 2 faint traces of ΝϷΤΟ or ΝϷΕΟ. These letters are much smaller.

Later text:

ΝΩΡ . ΩΠ .
 ΝΩ [.....]
 ΝΩΡϷΩΝ
 4 ΝΩϷ . ΚΚϷ
 ΝΩΕ ΟΥ
] ΕΝ

The later text is probably a school exercise: perhaps a syllabary, as all lines begin with an Ν, which is followed by an Ω. We may deal here with a trilateral syllabary,⁹ consisting of a column of the consonant Ν, a column of the vowel Ω and a column of different consonants. Another trilateral set may have followed, of which only faint traces remain. Another explanation might be a list of words beginning with the same two letters ΝΩ, but this seems to be less likely.

⁹ R. CRIBIORE, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Greco-Roman Egypt*, Atlanta 1996, 40-42.

5. FRAGMENT OF AN UNIDENTIFIED TEXT

This is a small fragment of what seems to have been a much larger ostrakon. The sherd is part of an amphora and the text runs as usual along the ribs on the convex side.

3,6 cm x 5 cm

Plate II

4] . ΝΑΤ [
] ΝΤΑΧΝ [
] . ΤΙΟC . [
] ΕΤΟΥΔΒ [
] . . [

Tomasz Markiewicz

Chair of Egyptology
 Institute of Oriental Studies
 University of Warsaw
 Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
 00-927 Warsaw
 POLAND
 e-mail: tmark@mercury.ci.uw.edu.pl