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## Deir El-Naqlun 1992 : Greek Papyri and Inscriptions on Vessels

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## DEIR EI-NAQLUN 1992: GREEK PAPYRI AND INSCRIPTIONS ON VESSELS

**Tomasz Derda**

Excavations in the field season 1992 were concentrated on sites B (dump) and D (late monastic complex). The northern sector of site B yielded considerably less papyri than the other sectors investigated in 1986 and 1988.

Only one papyrus turned out to be almost complete after all the pieces were put together (P. Naqlun inv. 27/92; dimensions of reconstructed sheet: 31.5 x 14.0 cm). The papyrus is in very bad condition, disintegrated and rotting in many places. It is a letter and the part of the address which has been preserved on the verso indicates that it was sent by one Biktor designated as **ἐλάχ(ιστος)** to an *oikonomos* whose name might have been Apollo. The name of the monastery, had it accompanied the function at all, is completely illegible. On the recto the letter's text consists of eight lines, of which only the last three form a continuous whole. The author of the letter (Biktor) advises the addressee not to worry about a certain matter(?) and asks him to pass on greetings to a woman who is not mentioned by name. In the first part of the letter (lines 3-4) there is some talk of payments and delays in their realization, but the details of the case remain unclear. The letter is written in the typical "letter" cursive: proficient, somewhat hasty and a little careless. This type of writing can be dated to the 6th century on palaeographical grounds.

Of about 10 fragments of other papyri found at site B, the piece P. Naqlun inv. 28/92 deserves a closer look. It is the bottom part of a sheet (dimensions of preserved fragment: 23.7 x 7.2 cm) which has the end clause of a contract. In the preserved fragment a penalty is referred to (**πρόστιμον**), presumably for a breach of contract. What is surprising is the sum of this penalty to be paid by either part in case of breach of contract: an exorbitant 12 solidi. Unfortunately, we have no idea what the contract concerned and what was its nature. Following the phrase establishing the sum of the penalty, the witnesses are mentioned (including deacons). The text ends with three crosses. Since the notary is not signed onto this contract, this would indicate that P. Naqlun inv. 28/92 was a rough draft of the contract or perhaps a copy made for one of the parts (although it should be remembered that copies of contracts were also made in the notary's office and so should bear his subscription). P. Naqlun inv. 28/92 is written in an exact and proficient hand with evident features of the chancellery cursive of the 6th century.

In sector B, a clean papyrus card in excellent condition was also found (31.5 x 29.0 cm).

This brief review of the papyri discovered at Naqlun in 1992 should end with P. Naqlun inv. 41/92. It is the first piece of a Greek document found in sector D. The papyrus is considerably damaged and only on one fragment of it (12 x 9.5 cm) it is possible to decipher a few signs and symbols. The document might have been a list of land compiled according to category (**ἀμπ(ε)λικόν**), a vineyard, is mentioned. The papyrus was written in an elegant and proficient "official" hand, with clearly developed features of the minuscule allowing it to be dated to the 7th century.

Some Greek inscriptions were recorded on amphorae and other vessels discovered in sector B. Worthy of mentioning are four inscriptions written in red ink on amphorae of the class Late Roman Amphorae 1 (inv. nos 6, 7, 113 and 114/92). The letters are small, written in a well-trained hand. The inscriptions follow a well known pattern of such texts, e.g., from Kellia (as I was kindly informed by Jean-Luc Fournet who is going to publish them). They consist of 2, 3 or 4 lines; in line 1 there is always a proper name in the genitive (inv. no. 7/92: [Γ]ωάννου,, 114/92: Παύλ(ου)) and in the last line a number appears. The sense of the lines in between (if there are any) remains unclear.

On a fragment of Late Roman Amphora 4, found in sector B as well, there is an inscription of which only a few letters have been preserved: δεσποτη[ (a form of the noun δεσπότης) – The word is written in red ink, the letters are big and well-shaped. This object is interesting because it is commonly believed that amphorae of this type were not inscribed.

The most interesting object from sector B is a globular jug made of beige-grey clay (Fustat?, second half of 7th century) with a long, undoubtedly Greek inscription in two lines, going around the vessel. Unfortunately, some parts of the jug and of the inscription are missing. The text begins with a cross and then there is κυρ/ μεγ[ ] (= κύρ(ε) μέγ[ας]); below this phrase <sup>α</sup> Π (sic!) κυρ/ βοήθει is to be read. The abbreviated word κυρ/ is repeated for the third time in an unclear context) KU p/ K. κυρ/ κ.λ.σ... τῆς μεγάλης. Κυρ/ should of course refer to Christ as it undoubtedly does in the first two cases, but I cannot find the word which would give sense to this phrase (a feminine noun in the genitive should be placed here but I cannot find

any trace of the article which ought to precede it). The inscription is in black ink, the letters are rather big, sometimes linked together. The hand can be dated to the 7th century, which agrees with the date of the jug. The purpose both of the inscription and of the jug itself is not clear, but if we agree that **κρρ**/ repeated three times refers to Christ, we can assume that this vessel could have served liturgical purposes.