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MEDICAMENT LABEL ON AN OSTRACON FROM NEA PAPHOS, CYPRUS*

The ostracon was unearthed in 1968 by the Polish Archaeological Mission excavating in Nea Paphos the ruins of what most probably was a governor's palace[1]. Interestingly, the discovery demonstrated that ink-inscribed texts could survive in Cyprus, providing the conditions were good enough. In this case, the rapid accumulation of layers most probably contributed to preserving this object against all odds, considering the climate of the coastal Paphos area[2].

The first text of this kind to be found on Cyprus[3], it is somehow disappointing. It reveals nothing about Cyprus itself except the obvious fact that

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* This ostracon was entrusted to Prof. Zbigniew Borkowski for publication by Prof. W. A. Daszewski, Director of the Polish Archaeological Mission to Nea Paphos. Professor Borkowski's sudden death prevented him from completing this task. Among the papers he left there was a manuscript of the ostracon publication including the introduction, presentation of the inscription and paleographical commentary. Adam Łajtar has added an orthographic commentary and has discussed the subject; he is also responsible for the notes and the final form of the article.

Prof. Ewa Wipszycka and Prof. Wiktor A. Daszewski were kind enough to read through the draft of this paper; their comments have been the source of valuable information included in the final version.

1 On Polish excavations in Nea Paphos on Cyprus, see the general presentation by W. A. Daszewski, *Researches at Nea Paphos 1965-1984*, [in:] *Archaeology in Cyprus 1960-1985*, Nicosia 1985, pp. 277-291 with a full list of references until 1984 on pp. 289-291.

2 On the ostraca from Polish excavations in Alexandria, preserved in similar conditions, see Z. Borkowski, "Etudes et Travaux" XIV, 1990, pp. 153-157 and A. Łukaszewicz, *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia*, Napoli 1984, pp. 879-884.

A number of ostraca are known from Cyprus: Golgoi (O. Masson, "Kadmos" 28, 1989, pp. 156-167: syllabic ostraca), Idalion (O. Masson, "Kadmos" 31, 1992, pp. 113-123: alphabetic, syllabic and Phoenician ostraca) and Kition (unpublished Phoenician ostraca, mentioned by O. Masson, "Kadmos" 31, 1992, p. 119).

3 There are other finds of a medical nature from the area of ancient Nea Paphos. In one of the Roman tombs on the eastern necropolis of the city a set of surgical instruments

local pharmacology was the same as elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world. All it consists of is the name of a well-known drug — hypocist, "an inspissated juice from a parasitic plant of the cytinus family" (*Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, London). The ostracon itself is most probably intact. Its two lines are arranged almost symmetricaly and the crowding of the letters towards the end of the first line suggests they were fitted into the available space. Its pentagonal shape would have allowed it to be easily attached to any container and thus it might have served as a medicament label[4].

Dating the writing is difficult. The script is neat and skillful enough, the hand experienced though not cursive in this case (no letter links are present). This is a text written by someone able to write fluent cursive but writing "capitals" on this occasion. The paleography of papyrus documents from Egypt was of little use since a different pattern of elementary school writing has to be admitted here. It seems safe to date the hand to Imperial times, to the 2nd–4th century.

Inv. 14/68 6,7 × 9,2 cm. Nea Paphos
Fig. 1 Cyprus

ὑπ̣ο̣χιστίδος
χυλός

The first three letters of l. 1 are partly washed out but rather certain and secured by the obtained meaning. *Omicron* is open, written exactly like in l. 2, with two semicircular strokes. The downward direction of the strokes of the pen may have been caused by the rough surface of the sherd which made

from the late 2nd or 3rd century A.D.was found along with 4 bronze containers filled with medicines based on mineral components, chiefly metallic salts, cf. D. MICHAELIDES, *A Roman Surgeon's Tomb from Nea Paphos*, RDAC 1985, pp. 315-32; G. V. FORSTER, K. KANADA, D. MICHAELIDES, *A Roman Surgeon's Tomb from Nea Paphos*, Part 2, *Ancient Medicines: By-Products of Copper Mining in Cyprus*, RDAC 1988, pp. 229-234; on pp. 233-234 a list of physicians originating from Cyprus mentioned in ancient sources, compiled by D. MICHAELIDES. Terracotta models of human organs found during excavations under the Dig House in western quarter of Nea Paphos also had something to do with healing, cf. I. NICOLAOU, *Les bouillottes thérapeutique de Paphos et leurs parallèles hors de Chypre*, BCH 113, 1989, pp. 301–318. Generally, on Cypriote medicine in antiquity, see A. PAPAXENOPOULOS, *Antike kyprische Medizin*, Würzburg dissertation 1981.

[4] It could have been simply put into a container (box, basket) with flasks containing hypocist juice as well.

For similar medicine labels written on papyrus, see MPER XIII 9, 11, 15, 16 (= M.-H. MARGANNE, *Inventaire des papyrus grecs de médicine*, Geneve 1981, nr. 190), 17, 18 and P. Köln VII, 292 recto.

this way of leading the pen preferable; it is by no means exceptional, however, see A. BATAILLE, *La dynamique de l'ecriture grecque d'apres les textes papyrologiques*, "Recherches de papyrologie" 2, 1962, p. 12 (le *theta*) and 16 (l'*omicron*), pl. II, 5.

ὑποχιστίδος instead of ὑποκισθίδος here. The form is peculiar and seems not to have been attested yet. It probably is due to the metathesis of aspiration facilitated by an ὑπο-praefix and the frequent loss of breathing in the t-consonant. For similar phonetical pecularities, cf. F. Th. GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* I, pp. 133-138, and the inscription from Lydia (now in the museum in Uşak), dated to the Roman Imperial period, where most probably ἐνκύθροις has taken the place of ἐνχύτροις[5].

The hypocist plant (Greek ὑποκισθίς, Latin *hypocist(h)us*; modern *cytinus hypocisthisL*)[6], the juice of which is mentioned in the ostracon, is a plant from the *Rafflesiacae* (*Cytinacae*) family, found around the Mediterranean, from the Iberian peninsula and France in the west to Syria in the east[7]. The plant is a parasitic one, living on the roots of the rockrose (κίσθος, *cistus*) hence its Greek and Latin name, attested in several minor spelling variants, of which two, ὑποκιστίς (with -τ- instead of -θ-) and ὑποκυσθίς (with -υ- in place of -ι-) should be cited as the most important ones[8]. Two kinds of hypocist were distinguished in antiquity: 1) with white to pink flowers, and 2) with yellow flowers[9], identified correspondingly with the modern *kermasinus* and *orientalis* subspecies.

Hypocist was considered a healing herb by ancient authors. According to Plinius, *Nat. hist.* XXVI 49 and Dioscorides I 97, 2[10] it had the property of drying up and bracing, and was consequently helpful in various bowel illnesses: checking looseness of the bowels, arresting stomach catarrhs, curing dysentery. It also helped in cases of blood loss: spitting blood, excessive menstruation, hemorrhages. Finally, it was considered as medicine for ulcers, especially chronic ones, particularly of the genitals for which the white hypocist was recommended.

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[5] P. HERRMANN, E. VARINLIOĞLU, "Epigraphica Anatolica" 4, 1984, pp. 7-9.

[6] Because hypocist blossoms resemble the flowers of the pomegranate in shape, κύτινος, *cytinus*. Hypocist was also called ὀρόβοθρον in Greek.

[7] See *Flora Europaea* I, Cambridge 1964, p. 75; P. H. DAVIES, *Flora of Turkey and the East Aegean Islands* VII, Edinburgh 1982, p. 549 sq.

[8] For different forms of the plant's name in Greek, see P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* I, Paris 1968, p. 535, s.v. κίσθος, for Latin names, see J. ANDRÉ, *Les noms de plantes dans la Rome antique*, Paris 1985, p. 128, s.v. *hypocist(h)is*.

[9] Plinius, *Nat. hist.* XXVI, 49, calls them *hypocisthis rufa* and *hypocisthis alba*.

[10] Ed. M. WELLMANN, Berlin 1907. See also Paulus Aegineta VII 3, Galen XII 27.

Hypocist could be used in different forms. "Some people dry or moisten it as well as cook it and do everything else similarly as with dyer's buckthorn"[11]. The most valuable and most effective (ἐνεργέστερος), however, is the juice from hypocist berries. Dripped or drank, especially with a dark red wine, it is medicine in itself. ὑποκισθίδος χυλός (*hypocisthidis sucus* or *hypocisthidis cylus*) also constitutes a component of various herbal and mineral-and-herbal mixtures known from ancient and medieval medical treatises[12].

The medicaments are primarily for excessive blood loss, spitting blood etc.; hypocist juice is usually accompanied in these cases by acacia juice and an extract of pomegranate blossoms (*balaustium*), both known to have a similar effect[13]. The second group of medicaments are for stomach and digestive tract ailments, and their make-up is similar to that of the medicaments for blood loss[14]. Hypocist juice is also part of various antidota, including the renowned *antidotum Mithridati*[15] and many pills (*trochiskoi*) with different names and different curing properties[16]. It is also a component of a plaster against rheumatism called the plaster of Hikesios[17], and compositions used to cure female ailments[18].

In contrast to ancient medical and pharmaceutical treatises, preserved in medieval manuscripts and providing a wealth of information about the use of

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11 Dioscorides I 97, 2.

12 For Latin sources see C. Opsomer, *Index de la pharmacopée du I^er^ aux X^e^ siècle*, vol. I, Hildesheim - Zürich - New York 1989, p. 348 sq. Opsomer notes 50 mentions of *hypocisthidis sucus* and 94 mentions of *hypocisthis*, without specifying which of its forms is referred to.

13 These prescriptions are very similar, although not identical, but there is no way to determine whether they refer to the same medicine; see Scribonius Largus LXXXV, LXXXVI (= Marcellus XVII 25); Physica Plinii Bambergensis (ed. A. Önnerfors) II 9 (cf. Paulus Aegineta VII 12, 6); LXI 14; LXI 15 (cf. Paulus Aegineta VII 12, 9), LXI 16; The Second Antidotarium from Bamberg 61 (ed. H. E. Sigerist, *Studien und Texte zur frühmittelalterlichen Rezeptliteratur*, Vaduz 1977, p. 37); Paulus Aegineta VII 12, 6; 12, 10 (= Galen XIII 87).

14 Paulus Aegineta VII 12, 12; VII 12, 17 (= Aetius IX 8); Alexander Trallianus, ed. Th. Puschstein, *Nachträge zur Alexander Trallianus*, Berlin 1887, pp. 56, 68; see also Dioscorides IV 64, 2-3.

15 Paulus Aegineta VII 11, 7 (= Cornelius Celsus V 23, 3, Galen XIV 152, Aetius XIII 98). For other antidota with hypocist juice as a component, see Paulus Aegineta VII 11, 5 (= Galen XIV 308; 259; Aetius XIII 91): ἡ θηριακὴ ἀντιδότου; Paulus Aegineta VII 11, 26 (cf. Aetius XIII 101): ἡ Ἔσδρα πολύχρηστος; Cornelis Celsus V 23, 1.

16 Paulus Aegineta VII 12, 26 (cf. Aetius IX 49): pill called θρόνος Μαρκέλλιος; id. VII 11, 18 (= Galen XIII 43): pill called διὰ κωδύων σύνθετος.

17 Paulus Aegineta VII 17, 45 (= Galen XIII 780; 809; Aetius XV 13): ἡ (scil. ἔμπλαστρος) Ἱκέσιος πρὸς χοιράδας καὶ ἀποστήματα καὶ σπλῆνα καὶ ἄρθρα καὶ ἰσχιαδικούς.

18 Soranus IV 38, 2: περὶ προπτώσεως μήτρας.

hypocist, the papyri and ostraca found in Egypt contain little information in this respect. Hypocist juice is mentioned only once, in P. Lund I 6, col. II 17, dated on paleographic grounds to the 2nd century A.D.[19]. The editor, A. WILFSRAND, believes it to be a fragment of an anonymous pharmaceutical treatise, similar in style to the known fragments of Apollonios Mys. The lacunae in the text make it impossible to determine which medicines the prescriptions are for. In the third prescription in fragment I, ll. 17-20, beside ὑποκυσθείδ[ου χυλοῦ] it is possible to identify the bark of the frankincence tree, *Boswellia Fluckiger* or *Boswellia Carterii* (λιβάνου φλοιοῦ) and water. The combination of these two components here would suggest a medicament for ailments of the digestive tract or a hemorrhage[20].

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19 MARGANNE, *Inventaire*, no. 110 (= Pack^2, 2386).

20 Both plants are components of the following compositions: Paulus Aegineta VII 12, 9: ὁ (scil. τροχίσκος) δι' ἀκάνθης Αἰγυπτίας (wine is the diluent here, however); Galen XIII 87; 290; 291; (= Aetius VIII 63; Alexander Trallianus, p. 56): the so-called kleidion-pill (with water as the diluent); Physica Plinii Bambergensis LXI 16: *trociscos emomptoicis optimus.*