

Tomasz Górecki, Adam Łajtar

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Tomasz Górecki
Adam Łajtar

AN OSTRACON FROM THE CHRISTIAN HERMITAGE IN MMA 1152*

FRAGMENTS OF THE OSTRACON (figs 2 & 3) bearing the Greek and Coptic texts¹ published below were found in a mud-brick tower built in front of the entrance to a Middle Kingdom tomb adapted for use as a hermitage (MMA 1152).² The tower was erected by monks for industrial and

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¹ Less than 1% of the ostraca found in MMA 1152 are in Greek, while the rest are in Coptic. With the exception of the two examples of Coptic cryptography on side B (nos. 4 and 5), the texts inscribed on the ostracon here discussed are in Greek.

² For the plan of the hermitage, see T. GÓRECKI, 'Sheikh Abd el-Gurna (Hermitage in Tomb 1152). Preliminary Report, 2005', *PAM* 17 (2007), p. 264, fig. 1 (plan of the excavations), and Ewa WIPSZYČKA, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IV^e–VIII^e siècles)* [= *JfurP Supplement* 11], Warsaw 2009, p. 193, fig. 48. For a view of the tower from the north before exploration, see T. GÓRECKI, 'Sheikh Abd el-Gurna, Coptic Hermitage. First Interim Report', *PAM* 15 (2004), p. 177, fig. 4.

defensive purposes. Its bottom floor was an open storeroom entered from the level of the courtyard; the upper level, accessed only with the help of a ladder propped up against the wall outside, had a similar function.

The fragments of the ostracon were discovered below the occupational level of the tower, that is, under its mud floor.³ The tower was most likely built around the mid-7th century and it was erected on top of a rubbish dump, which contained a plethora of finds datable to an earlier period (including the fragments of our ostracon). The uneven surface of the dump enclosed within the walls of the tower was levelled primarily using stone rubble and subsequently sealed with a mud floor. All of the ostracon fragments were found in the immediate vicinity of the entrance to the tower, on its southern side. As for their archaeological context, the fragments were deposited in the latest layer of the dump, which had accumulated over the course of ten-odd years or several decades in front of the hermitage before the tower was built, or were part of the material that constituted the levelling layer on which the tower's mud floor was laid.

The ostracon C.O. 029+077+078 was written on a sherd of a large Late Roman plate (fig 1). Ostraca that had text written on fragments of tableware are rare.⁴ Statistically, *ca.* 86% of the ostraca found in the hermitage

³ The discovery of the ostracon was reported by Iwona ANTONIAK, 'Preliminary remarks on the Coptic Ostraca from seasons 2003 and 2004', *PAM* 16 (2005), p. 245 with fig. 3 on p. 246 (photo of the ostracon without fragments found in the following season). The find consisted of 14 fragments, 11 of which joined together to form a large sherd: h. 14.6 cm, w. 27 cm, preserved length of the rim 13 cm. On the basis of the dimensions of the sherd and the analogies, the complete plate may be reconstructed as measuring *ca.* 47–48 cm in diameter and *ca.* 7–8 cm in height (cf. fig. 1).

⁴ The choice of writing material in the sense of its quality or 'elegance' had nothing to do with the choice of language of the text meant to be written on the sherd. The language was chosen depending on the character and purpose of the text, as well as the skills, knowledge and linguistic background of the writer, while the choice of writing material (type of potsherd) seems rather haphazard. However, in some cases the editors of ostraca have formulated various comments on the existence of a relationship between certain kinds of texts and pottery types; cf. *O. Vind. Copt.* p. 21, where W. TILL wrote: '[z]u Beginn des 8. Jahrhunderts schrieb man in Tscheme ... die Steuerquittungen auf Ostraka ... einer ganz bestimmten Art: ein harter, glatter, gelb oder rot glasierten, gegen Bruch ziemlich widerstandsfähiger Scherben' (i.e. Late Roman Pottery sherds). Only a cursory assessment of the material published by TILL was enough to prove this statement to be unfounded. For more

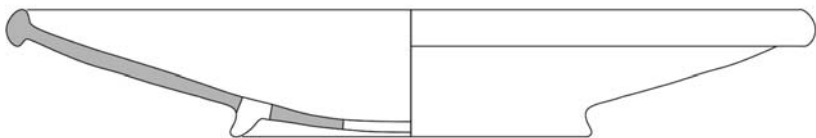


Fig. 1. Reconstruction of the plate
based on the preserved fragments (marked in grey)
drawing by Julia GÓRECKA

on this subject, cf. *O. Theb.* p. 189, n. 9, where H. THOMPSON attributes one category of texts (tax receipts) to one type of pottery, writing: 'tax receipts (...) are mostly written on pieces of pottery covered with a white or yellowish slip and glazed'. The author probably meant plates from the Aswan region, covered in 'white', or yellow, beige or ochre-coloured slip that is dense, smooth and somewhat glossy. A different overall image can be gleaned by analysing illustrations (27 ostraca, most of them of Theban origin) published in: F. HINTZE, 'Koptische Steuerquittungsostraka der Berliner Papyrus-Sammlung' [in:] *Festschrift zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Berliner Ägyptischen Museums*, Berlin 1974, pp. 271–281. One can see that ostraca (tax receipts) are exclusively sherds of plain wares (chiefly amphorae). The same author published 13 ostraca from Elephantine, all of them loan receipts (F. HINTZE, 'Berliner koptische Ostraka aus Elephantine', *ZÄS* 104/2 [1977], pp. 97–112), ten of which were written on sherds of Late Roman plates of Egyptian manufacture, and three on amphora sherds, which may lead the reader to believe that plate fragments were the preferred/most common writing material for this type of texts. However, the assemblage he publishes is small and therefore not representative. Given such diverse opinions, it is clear that without in-depth analyses of large assemblages (containing the largest possible number of statistical units) from various museum collections and archaeological sites it is impossible to determine the trends that governed the choice of a specific vessel for writing a specific type of text.

Drawing conclusions concerning the choice of this or that sherd based on publications is often hindered by the fact that the description of the vessel type the inscribed sherd belongs to is not specific enough or non-technical, general and rather misleading from the viewpoint of a modern ceramologist (the phrasing used by the authors is cited in parentheses), e.g.: *O. Crum* 456 (round plate), *O. Crum* 466 (part of a flat dish), *O. Brit. Mus. Copt.* 1 27718, p. 48, pl. 38 ('part of a moulded red-faced imitation Arretine ware bowl'), *O. Brit. Mus. Copt.* 1 21350, p. 83, pl. 61 ('fragment of a patera of imitation Arretine ware'), *O. Brit. Mus. Copt.* 1 14173, p. 128, pl. 88 ('imitation Arretine ware patera'); *O. Vind. Copt.* 103 ('Rand einer grossen, flachen Schüssel'). One can only guess that authors of the above designations had in mind tableware of the so-called Late Roman type. Many old publications lack ceramological descriptions, which the authors considered superfluous. A hallmark example of a publication of ostraca with diagnostic traits permitting to determine the form of the vessel whose fragment served as writing material (based on a typical pottery documentation drawing) is: Anne BOUD'HORS & CH. HEURTEL, *Les ostraca coptes de la TT 29. Autour du moine Frangé*. 1. Textes; 11. Index – Planches, Bruxelles 2010.

are inscribed on sherds of amphorae, primarily the LRA7. Used much less commonly as writing material were fragments of plain wares (i.a. pans, *saqqiya* pots) and table wares (plates, cups, bowls) found in the dump.⁵ Texts written on fragments of large plates, like our specimen (see Fig. 1), or large surfaces, are not common. Plates (Egyptian imitations) type Hayes 105.17 (generally dated to the 6th–mid-7th century) can be found on virtually every Coptic archaeological site, especially in Upper Egypt, but in Hermitage MMA 1152 it is only one of a few sherds of this type.⁶ It may have come from the area of the hermitage and it may have been brought from a different place (as attractive writing material). Its appeal lay in the large, flat, very even and smooth inner and outer surface. The writing surface (the slip covering the walls of this plate) is not stained, it lacks mechanical damage resulting, e.g., from wear. The reddish-orange colour of the slip contrasts better with the text in black ink than the brown colour typical for the surfaces of most ostraca on sherds of LR7 amphorae.

It generally seems that the choice of writing material was chiefly dictated by practical needs, above all the easy acquisition of this type of material, which is clearly confirmed by statistical data on types of vessels (or rather their fragments) chosen for writing purposes.⁷ The most commonly used were, to be sure, sherds present in abundance in dumps near

⁵ In the assemblage of 304 ostraca on potsherds found in the hermitage in MMA 1152, 86% are texts inscribed on fragments of amphorae (almost exclusively of Egyptian production), 13% are on sherds of other types of vessels, and only 1% are on sherds of table wares. Similar proportions are to be observed among ostraca on pottery discovered in the hermitage that occupied TT 29 (cf. BOUD'HORS & HEURTEL, *Les ostraca coptes* [cit. n. 4]): sherds of Egyptian amphorae – ca. 90%, sherds of other vessels – ca. 8%, sherds of table wares – ca. 2% (the percentages have been calculated on the base of L. BAVAY's description of the sherds). The collection of 261 Hellenistic and Roman ostraca from Edfu kept in the National Museum in Warsaw consists of sherds of amphorae in more than 97%, sherds of domestic vessels in 2%, and sherds of table wares in less than 1%.

⁶ Dating after: J. HAYES, *Late Roman Pottery*, London 1972 (Form 105); R. D. GEMPELER, *Elephantine x. Die Keramik römischer bis frühbarabischer Zeit* [= *Archäologische Veröffentlichungen* 43], Mainz 1992 (Form T 252 or T 253); M. BONIFAY, *Études sur la céramique romaine tardive d'Afrique* [= *BAR International Series* 1301], Oxford 2004, pp. 183–185 (sigillé type 57).

⁷ Cf. note 5.

settlements: houses, workshops, hermitages or monasteries. They were usually utilitarian vessels, among which sherds of LRA7 containers were dominant. Sometimes, however, as in our case, it was tableware.

It is difficult to determine if the text on the ostracon here discussed was for single or multiple use. Most ostraca (especially letters, but also documents) were rather intended for short-term use, like casual correspondence (letters), and having served their purpose they were discarded (as were exercises) or, more rarely, kept for reference (accounts, contracts, *etc.*).⁸

The text on side A begins on the edge of a clean break that ran from the rim of the plate towards the centre. On side B, the diagram presenting the rules of Coptic cryptography (no. 4) reaches the edge of the break. It is practically certain that the text was inscribed on a large sherd of the vessel and is not a part of a larger whole written on an intact plate.⁹ Although fine ware in Egypt was relatively inexpensive, for practical rea-

⁸ As far as the Christian hermitage in MMA 1152 is concerned, *ca.* 95% of ostraca were found in a rubbish dump in front of the hermitage. Intentionally collected (possibly as an archive) were five ostraca wrapped in a piece of textile and tied with rope; cf. T. GÓRECKI, 'Archaeological Research in the Hermitage in Tomb 1152 in Sheikh Abd el-Gurna (West Thebes)', *PAM* 20 (2011), p. 226, fig. 2.

⁹ Generally speaking, complete vessels (bowls and plates) as vehicles for inscriptions are rather rare except for Sassanian 'incantation bowls' with inscriptions in Aramaic. On these objects, see J. NAVEH & S. SHAKED, *Amulets and Magic Bowls. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem 1985; R. McCORMICK ADAMS, *Tell Abū Sarīfa. A Sassanian Islamic Ceramic Sequence from South Central Iraq* [= *Ars Orientalis* 8 (1970)], pp. 87-119 (bowls with text encircling the inside of the vessel and covering its entire surface). Similar bowls are also known from Nubia; cf. T. HÄGG, 'Magic Bowls Inscribed with an Apostle-and-Disciple Catalogue from the Christian Settlement of Hambukol (Upper Nubia)', *Orientalia* 62 (1993), pp. 376-399 (three bowls discovered in foundation deposits of a building inscribed with the Apostle-and-Disciple catalogue, each with the inscriptions divided into four quarters); on these objects, see also B. ŻURAWSKI, 'Magica et ceramica: magic and ceramics in Christian Nubia', *Archaeologia Polona* 30 (1992), pp. 94 ff., figs. 5-7. The only Egyptian parallels that can be quoted here are *O. Crum* 145, *O. Mon. Epiph.* 24 and *O. Brit. Mus. Copt.* 1 27718. The first is a plate inscribed with four texts listing landed property and real estate in Jeme, each of them covering *ca.* ¼ of the internal side of the vessel. The second is part of a plate with four texts in Greek and Coptic written on the convex side: fragments of the alphabet, Isaiah, Genesis, and a liturgical text. The third is inscribed on both sides with texts of religious content.

sons (size, weight and ease of writing) the size of the sherds depended on the length of the text. Considering the length and number of lines (16–17 lines in text no. 1) we can assume that the texts were written on a sherd smaller than half the plate (*ca.* 35–45% of a complete plate).

The ostrakon contained at least six texts:¹⁰ one long text in Greek on the internal side A (no. 1) and five shorter texts on the external side B, including two Greek texts on the left-hand side (nos. 2 and 3), a diagram explaining how Coptic cryptography works, plus a short text in Coptic cryptographic writing on the right-hand side (nos. 4 and 5), and, in the lower right-hand corner, an inscription of uncertain character consisting of four signs arranged in two columns (no. 6). All these texts are probably the work of one hand and they were inscribed at more or less the same time. The sequence in which the texts came into existence cannot be established with certainty. One gets the impression that the first one was text no. 1, which apparently fit the shape of the sherd and filled its entire internal surface. Further on, the scribe continued with two short Greek texts on the external side (nos. 2 and 3), probably of the same character as text no. 1, to pass over to the Coptic cryptography (texts nos. 4 and 5). Written at the end was text no. 6, which is of a different nature than the rest of the collection.

All texts were executed in black ink, using a medium-width *kalamos*. As it was already stated above, all of them are most probably the work of one hand that can be described as trained and skilful but not particularly elegant. The script can be classified as round majuscules inclined to the right. Letters are loosely spaced out and rather irregular, and their height varies considerably. The ends of vertical strokes in the letters are often curved, especially at the bottom. They are best seen in crosses and the letters κ and ρ . The scribe uses *nomina sacra* inconsistently: the regular $\overline{\theta\varsigma}$ in lines 6 and 8, $\overline{\kappa\tau}$ in line 9, and $\overline{\pi\nu\alpha}$ in line 10 stand in contrast to $\overline{\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\alpha}$ in line 3 and $\overline{\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma}$ in line 11. He makes frequent use of supra-linear signs, which assume various forms: from dots, through short oblique or horizontal strokes, incurved strokes, to elongated lines. The

¹⁰ Six is the number of texts identifiable on the ostrakon in its present, fragmentary state.

function of these supralinear signs varies. The ones occurring over vowels in either initial or accentuated position may mark breathings and accents; for supralinear signs in the initial position see: *ἀυτων* in line 4, *ἐλεησον* in line 6, *ὀθ̄* in line 6 and 8, *ὀκ̄* in line 9, *ὀκυριος* in line 11, perhaps also *ὀπεριπ̄ατων* in line 2; for supralinear signs in the accentuated position see: *αν̄η̄μ[ων]* in line 2, perhaps also *χ̄αρι* in line 8. Other ones apparently mark the beginning and end of a word, especially if the word in question occurs at the end of a sentence; for a dot or a stroke over an initial letter, see *τ̄ων* in line 7, *χ̄αιρέ* in line 9, *χ̄αιρε* in line 10; for a dot or a stroke over the final letter, see *δικαιού* in line 2, *πν̄ε̄υματά* in line 3, *αιωνας'* in line 4, *ῡμ̄π̄νιτέ* in line 5, *ἐλεησον* and *τον̄* in line 6, *αιωνας'* in line 7, *ῡμ̄ων̄* in line 8, *χ̄αιρέ* and *μαριᾱ* in line 9. In several cases, however, the function of supralinear signs is unknown; cf. *ὀπεριπ̄ατων* in line 2,¹¹ *ῡμ̄π̄νιτέ* in line 5, *ιερεῡ* in line 7,¹² *ῡμ̄ων̄* in line 8, *κᾱιχᾱριδομενοι* in line 9. Perhaps their appearance should be explained through the interference of Coptic scribal practices. *Trema* occurs over *iota* twice in the word *κᾱι* (lines 3 and 5) and once over *upsilon* in the word *ῡμων̄* (line 8, for *ἡμων̄*).

The language of the Greek texts is very corrupted. There are numerous phonetic notations rooted in the pronunciation of contemporary Greek (loss of distinction in vowel length, iotacism, appearance of non-etymological /n/ and /s/ in final position, change of voiced and voiceless stops): *αν̄η̄μ[ων]* for *ἀνέμων*, *δικαιον* for *δικαίων*, *των* for *τὸν*, *αυτων* for *αὐτὸν* (two times), *ῡμ̄π̄νιτε* for *ὑμνεῖτε*, *επερεψουται* for *ὑπερυψοῦτε*, *τον* for *τὸ*, *τωναιωνας* for *τὸν αἰῶνα*, *υμων* for *ἡμῶν*, *εταμ[εν]* for *οἴδαμεν*, *κᾱιχᾱριδομενοι* for *κεχαριτωμένη*, *εστεφ[αν]ουσας* for *ἔστεφάνωσας*, *χαθησ[τη]σας* for *κατέστησας*.¹³ In addition to them, one observes a fre-

¹¹ Perhaps the second of the two strokes marks the accent, but if so, the accent would have been placed incorrectly from the point of view of Greek accentuation.

¹² Unless one assumes that the stroke marks the accent. Another possibility is that the scribe, who probably did not completely understand what he was writing, mistook *ῡ* for a *nomen sacrum*.

¹³ Apparently we are dealing with the metathesis of aspiration; for the loss and, conversely, the development of aspiration, see F. Th. GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* [= *Testi e documenti per lo studio dell'antichità* 55], 1. *Phonology*, Milan 1976, pp. 98–101.

quent change of graphemes representing /i/ (ι, η, υ, ει, οι) with those representing /e/ (ε, αι): *τεν* for *τήν*, *εταμ*[εν for οἶδαμεν, *μοι* for *με*,¹⁴ *παρθενοι* for *παρθένε*, *χαθησ[τησας* for *κατέστησας*, *επερευθουται* (for *ὑπερυψοῦτε*). The relative frequency of this phenomenon can astonish, as it is rare in the language of Egyptian papyri.¹⁵ In addition to these ‘mistakes’ rooted in contemporary phonetics, there are true mistakes made either by the writer of the texts or by one of his predecessors in the process of textual transmission: *οσοιε* for *ὄσοιοι*, *υ]μ̄π̄νιτε* for *ὑμνεῖτε*. It looks as if the scribe did not completely understand the Greek texts he was copying.

The hand using inclined majuscules resembling Coptic script and the particularities of language, especially the substitution of /i/ for /e/ and inversely, find close parallels in *P. Mon. Epiph.* 578 = *P. Lond. Lit.* 205.¹⁶ It is a papyrus codex consisting of 32 folios, found already in 1840s in the ruins of the Monastery of Epiphanius in Western Thebes, now kept in the British Library. Its dating was a subject of controversy among scholars of the past¹⁷ and it has been assigned to the second half of the 6th/7th century in present-day scholarship. The codex contains *Ps.* 10.2 – 18.6 and 20.14 – 34.6. Rahlfs demonstrated, mainly on the basis of the language phenomena and some palaeographic traits, that the copyist of the manuscript was a Copt.¹⁸ The close affinity of our ostrakon to *P. Mon. Epiph.* 578 in chronological, palaeographic and linguistic aspects and a certain

¹⁴ It is possible that we are dealing with a syntactical phenomenon (change of dative for accusative) rather than a phonetic issue.

¹⁵ GIGNAC, *Grammar* 1 (cit. n. 13), pp. 242–262.

¹⁶ Cf. K. ALAND, *Repertorium der griechischen christlichen Papyri. Biblische Papyri, Altes Testament, Neues Testament, Varia, Apokryphen* [= *Patristische Texte und Studien* 18], Berlin – New York 1976, no. AT 50. J. VAN HÆLST, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* [= *Université de Paris IV Paris-Sorbonne, Série <Papyrologie>* 1], Paris 1976, no. 108. LDAB ID 3371. It is used as ‘U’ in the editions of the Greek psalter.

¹⁷ Beginning of the 4th century: U. WILCKEN [in:] G. HENRICI, *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Erklärung des Neuen Testaments: Die Leipziger Papyrusfragmente der Psalmen*, Leipzig 1903, p. 7; 7th century: V. GARDTHAUSEN, *Griechische Paläographie*, 1. *Das Buchwesen im Altertum und im byzantinischen Mittelalter* (2 ed.), Leipzig 1911, p. 157.

¹⁸ A. RAHLFS, *Der Text des Septuaginta-Psalters. Nebst einem Anhang: Griechische Psalterfragmente aus Oberägypten nach Abschriften von W. E. Crum* [= *Septuaginta-Studien* 11], Göttingen 1907 (reprint: Göttingen 1965), pp. 5 and 147–152.

Reading text

- † ὁ καθήμενος . [- - - - -] . [- - -]
 † ὁ περιπατῶν ἐ[πὶ πτερύγων] ν ἀνήμ[ων - - -]
 † πνεύματα καὶ ψυ[χαί] δικαίων τῶν κ[(ύριον) ὑμνεῖτε καὶ ὑπερυψοῦ]-
 4 τε αὐτῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας † ὁσ(ι)οι(ε) καὶ τα[πεινοὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ τὸν κ(ύριον) ὑ]-
 μ{π}νίτε καὶ ἐπερριφούται αὐτῶν εἰς τοῦ[ς αἰῶνας].
 † ἐλέησον μοι, ὁ θε(ός), κατὰ τὸν μέγα ἔλεός σου [- - -].
 † σ(ὺ εἶ) ἱερεὺς{ς} ἐς τῶν αἰῶνας κατὰ τὸν τάξιν Μ[ελχισεδεκ].
 8 † σεχαρι ὁ θε(ός) ὑμῶν ἐκτὸς <σ>ο<υ> ἄλλον ο<ὕ>κ ἔταμ[εν].
 † χαῖρε Μαρία καιχαριδομένοι ὁ κ(ύριος) μετὰ σοῦ [- - -]
 καὶ τὸ πν(εύμ)α τὸ ἅγιον † χαῖρε παρθένοι
 με . υ[ca. 2-3 Ἐμ]μανουήλ ὁ κύριος μετὰ σο[ῦ]
 12 κ . [ca. 8] . ον. † *blank*
 [- - - - -] . νουμ[- - - - -]

2. ἀνέμων || 3. δικαίων τὸν || 4. αὐτὸν || 4-5. ὑμνεῖτε || 5. ὑπερυψοῦτε αὐτὸν ||
 6. με | τὸ || 7. εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα | τὴν || 8. ἡμῶν | οὐδαμην || 9. κεχαριτωμένη ||
 10. παρθένη

Translation

1. You sit [- - -] (l. 1).
2. You ride on the wings of the wind [- - -] (l. 2).
3. Spirits and souls of the righteous ones (bless) the Lord, praise and exalt Him above all forever (ll. 3-4).
4. Holy and humble men of heart (bless) the Lord, praise and exalt Him above all forever (ll. 4-5).
5. Have mercy on Me, O God, in Your great compassion [- - -] (l. 6).
6. You are a priest forever following the order of Melchizedek (l. 7).
7. [- - -] our God, we know no other besides You (l. 8).
8. Hail Mary, the blessed one, the Lord is with you [- - -] and the Holy Spirit (ll. 9-10).
9. Hail virgin [- - -] Emmanuel the Lord is with you [- - -] (ll. 10-12).
10. [- - -] (l. 13).

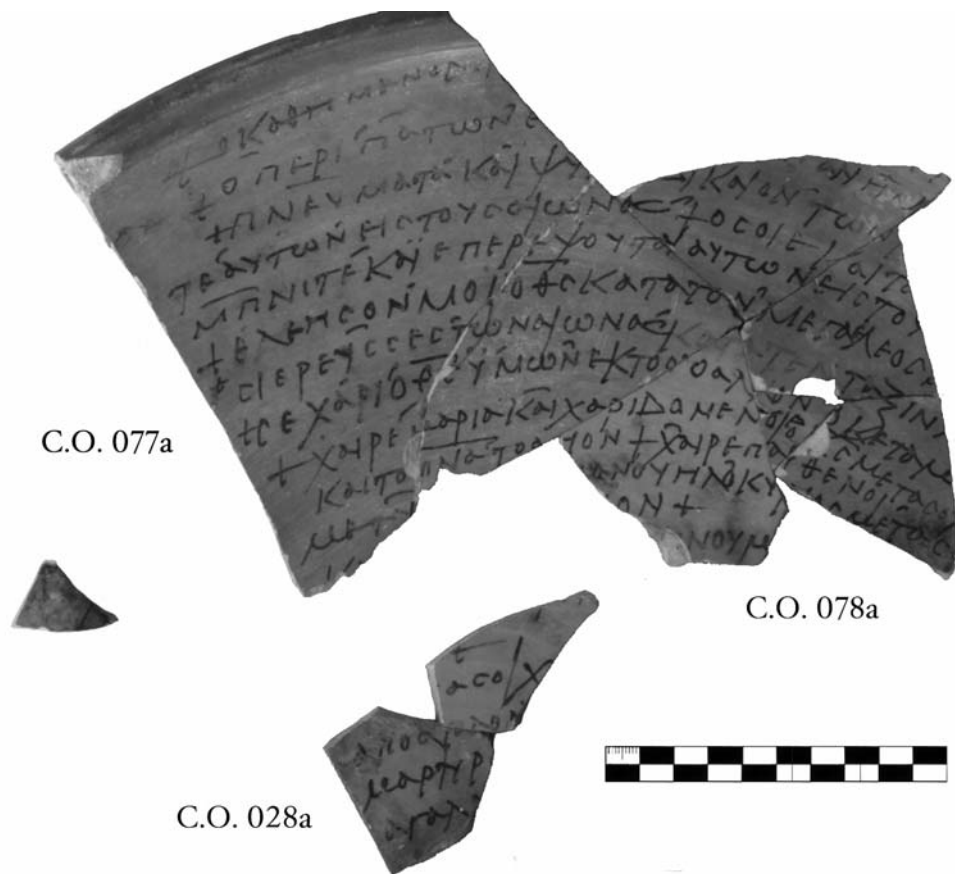


Fig. 2. Ostracon C.O. 029 + 077 + 078: internal side

Commentary

The scribe forgot the initial ϵ in $\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ and added it later by squeezing it in between α and λ . Also δ in $\delta\ \kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ (l. 11) may be a later addition.

7. The cross at the beginning of the line is small and aligned with the tops of the letters. Perhaps the scribe forgot it and added it later in the space that was available to him between the edge of the sherd and the first letter.

$\varsigma\iota\epsilon\rho\epsilon\nu\bar{\varsigma}$ for $\sigma\upsilon\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \iota\epsilon\rho\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$ is a haplography with the substitution of ι both for υ and $\epsilon\iota$: $\varsigma\nu\epsilon\iota\epsilon\rho\epsilon\nu\varsigma \Rightarrow \varsigma\iota\iota\epsilon\rho\epsilon\nu\varsigma \Rightarrow \varsigma\iota\epsilon\rho\nu\epsilon\varsigma$. $\iota\epsilon\rho\epsilon\nu\bar{\varsigma}$ is a dittography.

9. It is possible that the line had nothing after $\sigma\omicron\upsilon$.

11. The third letter of the line may be a slightly irregular, obliquely written τ . We are unable to make any reasonable text out of $\mu\epsilon\tau\bar{\upsilon}$].

We are dealing with a series of quotations, either direct or modified, coming mostly from the Bible but also from other sources. In the present state there are ten quotations; whether there were more quotations it is difficult to determine. Each quotation is preceded by a cross. Therefore, one has to assume that no. 3, which is a quotation from *Od.* 8.86, and no. 4 with a quotation from *Od.* 8.87, are two separate entries and not a single one. Entries 1–7 refer to God and are quotations from the Old Testament. This is not entirely certain in the case of 1, but it is probable given the context. Entries 8–9 deal with Mary. The first is based on the Lukan narrative of the annunciation, the source of the second is unknown, but it surely was not the New Testament. Entry no. 10 is too damaged to say anything certain about its contents and consequently its source.

One wonders what was the purpose of this collection of quotations. Is it a singular creation made for the purpose of inscribing on the ostrakon under discussion or a more widespread composition repeated by the scribe after a source? It seems that the first possibility is more likely but future finds may allow to verify it in favour of the second one.

1 (l. 1). ὁ καθήμενος occurs in numerous Biblical places with reference to God. The list includes: 2 Reg. 19.15: κύριε ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβιν; Ps. 79.2: ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβιν; Ps. 98.1: ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβιν; Od. 14.23: ὁ καθήμενος ἐν δεξιά τοῦ πατρός; Is. 37.16: κύριε σαβαωθ ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβιν. In Patristic literature, ὁ καθήμενος is used with reference to Jesus Christ who is sitting to the right of the Father (ἐν δεξιά τοῦ πατρός). It is impossible to state who is meant, God of the Bible or Jesus Christ, and what passage, Biblical or Patristic, was quoted here. As the text draws extensively, at least at the beginning, on the Old Testament, the first possibility seems more probable to us.

2 (l. 2). This is a quotation from Ps. 103.3: ὁ περιπατῶν ἐπὶ περὺγων ἀνέμων. Psalm 103 (104) describes God's ongoing act of creation in parallel with Genesis 1 and 2. Its main liturgical usage is at the beginning of vespers and the all-night vigil. It is customarily read or chanted by a reader after the opening prayers of the service. The beginning of Psalm 103 in Greek and Coptic, albeit without its verse 3, is found on an ostracon from the Monastery of Saint Phoibamon in Deir el-Bahari.¹⁹

3 (ll. 3-4). We are dealing with a quotation from Od. 8.86 (= Dan. 3:86) (the song of the three youths in the fiery furnace): εὐλογεῖτε, πνεύματα καὶ ψυχὰι δικαίων, τὸν κύριον ὑμνεῖτε καὶ ὑπερψοῦτε αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Note that the next verse quotes the next colon of the same ode. Both quotes are corrupted in an identical way: they omit the initial εὐλογεῖτε depriving the first part of the quote of its predicate. One can speculate that the editor of the text had a corrupted version of Ode VIII at his disposal, lacking a portion of the text near the left-hand margin with the words εὐλογεῖτε.

4 (ll. 4-5). Here the text quotes from Od. 8.87 (= Dan. 3.87): εὐλογεῖτε, ὄσιοι καὶ ταπεινοὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, τὸν κύριον ὑμνεῖτε καὶ ὑπερψοῦτε αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. For a commentary, see preceding paragraph.

5 (l. 6). We are dealing with a quotation from Ps. 50.3: ἐλέησόν με, ὁ θεός, κατὰ τὸ μέγα ἔλεός σου. This verse is definitely one of the most prolific Psalm quotes in the Christian tradition. Because of its penitential

¹⁹ O. Crum 513; cf. VAN HAELST, *Catalogue des papyrus* (cit. n. 16), no. 212.

tenor it is typically included in Christian prayers for repentance. The entire *Psalm* 50 is recited in the Coptic Liturgy of the Hours as a prayer of confession of sins and request for repentance.

6 (l. 7). This is a quotation from *Ps.* 109.4: *σὺ εἶ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδεκ*. It is quoted in *Heb.* 5.6, and, in an abbreviated form, in *Heb.* 7.20.²⁰ In the Christian tradition, the Psalm quote was interpreted as referring to Jesus Christ, whose priesthood is destined to go beyond the lives of individuals.²¹

7 (l. 8). The verse is based on the acclamation *κύριε ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, κτηῖσαι ἡμᾶς· κύριε, ἔκτος σου ἄλλον οὐκ οἶδαμεν, τό ὄνομά σου ὀνομάζομεν*, which is found in *Od.* 5.13 (= *Is.* 26.13) (the prayer of Isaiah). What stands at the beginning of the verse, before *ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν*, is mysterious. Perhaps one should read: *σ(ὺ) ε(ἶ) <κ(ύ)ρι(ος) ὁ θ(ε)ὸς ὑμῶν (= ἡμῶν), κτλ.*, ‘You are the Lord our God, we know no other besides You’. Another possibility is: *σὲ χα(ί)ρ(ω)μεν ὁ θ(ε)ὸς ὑμῶν (= ἡμῶν), κτλ.*, ‘We praise You, our God, we know no other besides You’. Both possibilities assume fatal mistakes on the part of the scribe of the text.

8 (ll. 9–10). The sentence begins with the words Archangel Gabriel said to Mary during annunciation as given in *Lk.* 1.28: *καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν, χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σου*. After Luke the *chairetismos* is quoted frequently by authors of the Patristic age, and also in liturgical texts of the early Church. Thus, it is found in a Syriac ritual attributed to Severus, Patriarch of Antioch (*ca.* 513), and in the ‘Liber Antiphonarius’ of St. Gregory the Great as the offertory of Mass for the

²⁰ *Psalm* 110 gained considerable popularity among the authors of the books of the New Testament and served as a source of quotations. On this subject, see H. W. BATEMAN IV, ‘Psalm 110 and the New Testament’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992), pp. 438–53; R. E. CLEMENTS, ‘The use of the Old Testament in Hebrews’, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 28 (1985), pp. 36–45; D. M. HAY, *Glory at the Right Hand. Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* [= *Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series* 18], Nashville – New York 1973; W. B. WALLIS, ‘The use of Psalms 8 and 110 in 1 Corinthians 15:25–27 and Hebrews 1 and 2’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1972), pp. 25–29.

²¹ For the Christian interpretation of this quotation, see F. L. HORTON JR., *The Melchizedek Tradition* [= *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series* 30], Cambridge 1976; M. J. PAUL, ‘The order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3),’ *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987), pp. 195–211.

fourth Sunday of Advent. But such examples hardly warrant the conclusion that the Hail Mary was at that early period used in the Church as a separate formula of devotion,²² which suggests that the scribe of the ostracon quoted directly from Luke. *Lk.* 1.28 is connected with *Ps.* 117.27-26 on a Greek ostracon from Deir el-Bahari.²³ Another Greek ostracon from Deir el-Bahari combines *Lk.* 1.42 with *Lk.* 1.28.²⁴ The expression *καὶ τὸ πν(εῦμ)α τὸ ἅγιον* is added to the Hail Mary also in a Greek ostracon from Deir el-Bahari containing *troparia* for a feast of Mary.²⁵

9 (ll. 10-11). *χαίρε παρθένε* surely is addressed to Mary. It is not found in the New Testament. The source of borrowing must be Patristic literature in this case, perhaps a hymn in honour of the Virgin. At the end one possibly has *κα[ὶ τὸ πν(εῦμ)α τὸ ἅγ]ιον* as in the entry no. 8.

10 (l. 13). A reconstruction of the entry is impossible. *νοῦμ* suggests a verb form, either the first person plural of the present active of a verb like *αἰνῶω*, *ὑμνῶω* or the middle participle of the same verb.

1B. A fragment composed of two smaller pieces that do not join with the rest. The external side is empty.

Diplomatic transcript

] ... [
] † *vac.* [
] . *ακοιχ* [
 4] . *αποστολογ* [
] *μαρτυρ.* [
] *αγαλλ* [
]

²² Cf. A. BAUMSTARK, 'Chairetismos', *RAC* 2 (1954), pp. 993-1006.

²³ *O. Crum* 514; cf. VAN HÆLST, *Catalogue des papyrus* (cit. n. 16), no. 223.

²⁴ *O. Crum* 515; cf. VAN HÆLST, *Catalogue des papyrus* (cit. n. 16), no. 402.

²⁵ *O. Crum* 518; cf. Th. SCHERMANN, *Aegyptische Abendmahlsliturgien* [= *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums* 6/12], Paderborn 1912, pp. 217218; VAN HÆLST, *Catalogue des papyrus* (cit. n. 16), no. 748.

Reading text

[- - - - -] ... [- - -]
 [- - - - -] † *vac.* [- - -]
 [- - - - -] . *ακοιχ*[- - -]
 4 [- - -] . *ἀπόστολον* [- - - - -]
 [- - - -] *μαρτυρ*. [- - - - -]
 [- - - - -] *ἀγαλλ*[*ια* - - - - -]

4. The reading *ἀποστόλον* (for *ἀποστόλων*) is possible as well, if not preferable.

5. After the second *ρ*, before the break, there is a trace of a round letter like *ο* or *ω*.

External side

2. Left-hand side of the ostrakon, at the top.

Diplomatic transcript

]. [
]*βενσαι*[
]*τασιψυχασημ*. [
 4].

Reading text

[- - - - -]. [- - - - -]
 [- - - *πρεσ*] *βενσαι* [- - - - -]
 [- - - - -] *τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶ*[*ν* - - -]
 4 [- - -].



Fig. 3. Ostracon C.O. 029 + 077 + 078: external side

continued further on, perhaps as far as the next logical stop, i.e. τῶν χειρῶν σου. If so, the inscription can be reconstructed as follows:

[ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχὺ τι παρ' ἀγγέλους, δόξῃ κα]ὶ τιμῇ
 ἔστεφ[άν]ουσας αὐτῶν καὶ χαθήσ-
 [τησας αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου ca. 10-12] . εἰς
 βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν.

The second part of the text speaks about the entrance into the Kingdom of Heavens, most probably as a reward for a pious and righteous life. As far as we see, the expression εἰς (τὴν) βασιλείαν (τῶν) οὐρανῶν does not appear in the Septuagint. It is found four times in the Gospel according to Matthew,²⁶ but there it never assumes the form occurring in our text. Either the redactor of the text quoted a New Testament passage incorrectly or he drew from another source.²⁷ No supplement of this part of the text is possible. Note that only 10-13 letters are lacking before εἰς βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν, assuming that the reconstruction of the entire text presented above is correct.

²⁶ Mt. 5.20; 7.21; 18.3; 19.23;

²⁷ The expression εἰς βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν is found, among others, in Athanasius, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, PG xxvii, p. 573; Cyrillus Hierosolymitanus, *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 15, 23, ed. by W. C. REISCHL & J. RUPP, *Cyrrilli Hierosolymorum archiepiscopi opera quae supersunt omnia* II, Munich 1860; Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Commentarius in XII prophetas minores*, ed. P. E. PUSEY, *Sancti patris nostri Cyrrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in XII prophetas*, Oxford 1868; vol. I, p. 145; *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 486; Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Commentarii in Joannem*, ed. by P. E. PUSEY, *Sancti patris nostri Cyrrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Joannis evangelium*, Oxford 1872, vol. I, p. 170; Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Glephyra in Pentateuchum*, PG LXIX, p. 532; Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Commentarius in Isaiam Prophetam*, PG LXX, p. 1080; Ephraem Syrus, *Paraenesis ad ascetas (ordine alphabetico)*, ed. by K. G. PHRANTZOLES, *Ἄσίου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα* III, Thessalonica 1990, p. 354; Joannes Chrysostomus, *De fugienda simulata specie*, PG XLVII, p. 1074; and many more. Generally on the expression 'Kingdom of Heavens', see A. FREIH. VON GALL, *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Studie zur vor-kirchlichen Eschatologie [= Religionswissenschaftliche Bibliothek 7]*, Heidelberg 1926.

4. On the right-hand side, at the top, to the right of (3).

α	β	γ	Δ	ε	ζ	η	θ	ι	κ	λ	μ	ν	ξ	ο	π	ρ
θ	η	ζ	ϛ	≡	Γ	Β	α	ϙ	Π	Ο	Ξ	≡	Μ	Λ	Κ	β
ω	ϣ	χ	φ	Υ	Τ	С	Ϡ	ϊ	Δ	Ϛ	α					
с	τ	γ	φ	χ	ψ	ω	ω	ϙ	ϛ	Ϛ						

This is a diagram explaining how Coptic cryptography works. Subsequent letters of the Coptic alphabet are listed in lines 1 and 4. Line 2 gives cryptographic counterparts of the letters of line 1, and line 3 cryptograms for line 4. The cryptograms are placed exactly below and above the corresponding letters so as to form pairs. In simplified form, the scheme can be presented as follows:

α	→	θ		λ	→	ο		φ	→	φ
β	→	η		μ	→	ξ		χ	→	Υ
γ	→	ζ		ν	→	≡		ψ	→	Τ
Δ	→	ϛ		ξ	→	μ		ω	→	с
ε	→	≡		ο	→	λ		ω	→	Ϡ
ζ	→	Γ		π	→	κ		ϙ	→	ϊ
η	→	Β		ρ	→	β		ϛ	→	Δ
θ	→	α		с	→	ω		Ϛ	→	Ϛ
ι	→	ϙ		τ	→	ψ		α	→	α
κ	→	Π		Υ	→	χ				

The cryptograms for individual letters were established according to a system well known from Greek and Coptic sources.²⁸ It is based on the

²⁸ On Greek and Coptic cryptography as represented by the inscription here discussed, see A. GARDTHAUSEN, *Griechische Paläographie*, II. *Die Schrift, Unterschriften und Chronologie im Altertum und im byzantinischen Mittelalte*, Leipzig 1911 (2 ed.), pp. 298–319, especially pp. 311–314; J. DORESSE, 'Cryptographie copte et cryptographie grecque', *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 33 (1950/1951), pp. 215–228; IDEM, 'Cryptography' [in:] *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 1, pp. 65–69; F. WISSE, 'Language mysticism in the Nag Hammadi Texts and in Early Coptic Monasticism, I. Cryptography', *Enchoria* 9 (1979), pp. 101–120.

fact that letters of the alphabet (both in Greek and in Coptic) were also used to record numbers, in other words, that letters have numerical value. The system works in the following way: The cryptogram of a letter is the letter that represents the difference between it and the next digit. For instance, the cryptogram for λ (= 1) is θ (= 9), i.e., the letter that represents the difference between 1 and 10. The cryptogram for κ (= 20) is π (= 80), i.e., the letter that represents the difference between 20 and 100. The cryptogram for τ (= 300) is \dagger (= 700), i.e., the letter that represents the difference between 300 and 1000. One notes some inconsistencies or rather peculiarities of the system as presented in the inscription here discussed. They are mostly due to the fact that the system, originally designed for the Greek alphabet, was applied to the Coptic alphabet in this case. The author of the diagram had particular difficulty with the three archaic letters – *digamma*, *koppa*, and *sampi* – that were no longer in use after the Classical period except for recording numerals and, as a result, they were not included in the Coptic alphabet. Another problem that the author of the diagram had to face was how to produce counterparts for the additional Coptic letters not occurring in the Greek alphabet. Below is the list of the problems and the solutions that were adopted for them.

$\lambda \rightarrow \delta$. The cryptogram for λ (= 4) should read ς (= 6). Here δ was used instead of ς , no doubt because ς (*digamma*), as an archaic Greek letter, was unfamiliar to the Coptic users of the system. Note that δ does not occur among the additional letters towards the end of the alphabet. There, one finds ρ , of which the cryptographic counterpart is λ . Perhaps the writer of the ostracón substituted δ for ρ or inversely. Even if so, the adopted solution violates the numerical key.

$\epsilon \rightarrow \equiv$. The cryptogram for ϵ (= 5) is \equiv , which assumes a stylized form of three superimposed horizontal strokes.

$\iota \rightarrow \rho$. The cryptogram for ι (= 10) should be *koppa* (= 90), which has the form of an inverted and open ρ at the time when our ostracón came into existence.²⁹ In the Coptic scribal tradition it was frequently replaced by ρ , as it is the case here. It should be observed that further in the diagram

²⁹ See, e.g., GARDTHAUSEN, *Paläographie* (cit. n. 28), p. 368.

ϣ occurs in its alphabetical position, between ω and ς, and not the numerical one, between π (= 80) and ρ (= 100) (see below).

η → ιι. The cryptogram for η (= 50) is η, which assumes a stylized form of a group of three vertical strokes.

ρ → β. The cryptogram for ρ (= 100) should be *sampi*, which records the number 900. Here we have a sign that looks like a ρ with a loop on top. The cryptogram for ρ apparently assumes the same or similar form in the longer of the two cryptographic graffiti from the so-called ‘small’ Monastery of Saint Phoibamon.³⁰ One wonders if the sign under consideration was used only in cryptographic texts as a code for ρ or was also applied to record the number 900, in other words, if it is a form of *sampi*. The latter assumes different forms in sources available to us.³¹

ϣ → ϣ. The cryptographic counterpart of ϣ is a strange sign resembling a cursive ϣ. It has no parallels in other known testimonials for Coptic cryptography. ϣ as an additional letter of the Coptic alphabet, not involved in recording numbers, was normally left unencrypted in cryptographic writing.

ϣ → ι. The cryptogram for ϣ is ι, which is in agreement with the general rule of the system under the assumption that ϣ records 90 (see above). One should observe, however, that the position of ϣ is alphabetical and not numerical here. In other words, the numerical key is violated in this case.

ϥ → Δ. The cryptogram for ϥ is Δ in spite of the fact that the cryptogram for Δ was not ϥ but δ. Perhaps the writer of the inscription (or, less probably, the author of the system) mistook ϥ for δ or inversely. One should observe that the numerical system does not work here, as neither ϥ nor δ have numerical value. Both of them could have been left unencrypted like σ and χ (see below).

σ → σ, χ → χ. The two additional Coptic letters σ and χ do not have cryptographic counterparts.

The list of cryptograms ends with a sign resembling a cursive Δ. The reason for writing this sign here is unclear.

³⁰ See below, no. 6 in the list of Theban testimonies of Coptic cryptographic writing. It should be observed that the publication of the graffito contains neither a photo nor a copy of it, but only its transcript that shows a vertical arrow with a loop at the top.

³¹ See, e.g., GARDTHAUSEN, *Paläographie* (cit. n. 28), pp. 368–369.

Jesus has not been attested in Christian Egypt so far, most probably because it was considered too sacred to be borne by mortals. It is also possible that οὔκογι, ‘a small one’ is not a person (a man) but something else. It should be observed that ‘εἰς οὐγ+substantive λφει’ is a common formula of Coptic receipts.

Cryptography as presented in the diagram no. 4 and applied in the text no. 5 is well attested in the Theban region through finds dating from the Late Antique period. One can enumerate the following testimonies:

1. Graffito in cell B of the Monastery of Epiphanius in Deir el-Bahari with a Greek prayer in the name of a certain Menas.³³

2. Graffito in cell B of the Monastery of Epiphanius in Deir el-Bahari with a Greek prayer in the name of a certain Ioannes.³⁴

3. Inscription on a wooden tablet recovered, among other objects, from the so-called ‘cell of priest Elias’, a small monastic structure situated on the desert edge between Medinet Habu and Armant. It contains a line listing all letters of the Greek alphabet (also known through *Anthologia Palatina* IX 538) and the Greek alphabet in cryptographic form, paralleled by that on the Deir el-Bachit ostrakon and the ostrakon from TT 95 (see below).³⁵

4. Ostrakon found during the 2002 season of excavations carried out at the Deir el-Bachit monastery in Dra Abu el-Naga by a joint mission of the German Institute of Archaeology in Cairo (DAI) and the University of Munich.³⁶ The text of the ostrakon contains five school exercises in 13

³³ *P. Mon. Epiph.* 701; *SB* IV 7513; WISSE, *Enchoria* 9 (1979), p. 106, no. 2; DORESSE [in:] *The Coptic Encyclopedia* II, p. 66, no. 2.

³⁴ *P. Mon. Epiph.* 702; WISSE, *Enchoria* 9 (1979), pp. 106–107, no. 3.

³⁵ *P. Mon. Epiph.* 616; cf. Pač² 1597; G. ZALATEO, ‘Papirosi scolastici’, *Aegyptus* 41 (1961), p. 178, no. 98; Rafaella CRIBIORE, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* [= *American Studies in Papyrology* 36], Atlanta 1996, pp. 188–189, no. 66. The object is kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, inv. 14.1.219.

³⁶ The discovery was reported by G. BURKARD [in:] G. BURKARD, M. MACKENZEN & D. POLZ, ‘Die spätantike Klosteranlage Deir el-Bachit in Dra’ Abu el-Naga (Oberägypten): Erster Vorbericht’, *MDAIK* 59 (2003), pp. 63–64. On the basis of this report, the text of the ostrakon was analyzed by K. Th. ZAUZICH, ‘Unbekannte Alphabetübungen im

lines: four are devoted to writing letters of the Greek alphabet in various sequences, and the fifth contains the Greek alphabet in cryptographic form paralleled by that on the wooden tablet from the 'cell of priest Elias' (see above) and the ostracon from TT 95.

5. Ostracon found during the works carried out by a joint mission of the German Institute of Archaeology in Cairo (DAI) and the Egyptological Seminar of the University of Basel in the tomb of Meri and Hunai (TT 95) in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna.³⁷ The tomb under consideration, like many other Theban tombs from the Middle Kingdom through the Late Period, was turned into a Christian hermitage in Late Antiquity. The ostracon inscribed with red ink gives the Greek alphabet in cryptographic form similar to that occurring on the wooden tablet from the 'cell of priest Elias' and the ostracon from Deir el-Bachit (see above).

6. Two Coptic graffiti on the rocks of a *wadi* midway between Medinet Habu and Armant, housing the so-called 'small' Monastery of Saint Phoibamon.³⁸ Both of them were probably the work of the same man, a certain Philotheos, a deacon. The first commemorates Philotheos

Ostrakon Bachit 21', *Enchoria* 28 (2003/4), pp. 177-179, who did not recognize the cryptographic part of it, however. This was achieved by J. DIELEMAN, 'Cryptography at the Monastery of Deir el-Bachit' [in:] H. KNUF, Chr. LEITZ & D. VON RECKLINGHAUSEN (eds.), *Honi soit qui mal y pense. Studien zum pharaonischen, griechisch-römischen und spätantiken Ägypten zu Ehren von Heinz-Josef Thissen* [= *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 194], Leuven - Paris - Walpole, MA 2010, pp. 511-517.

³⁷ Unpublished. Presented by Matthew UNDERWOOD and Heike BEHLMER at the Congress of Coptic Studies in Rome in September 2012.

³⁸ Y. ABD AL-MASIH, W. C. TILL & O. H. E. BURMESTER, 'Coptic graffiti and inscriptions from the Monastery of Phoebammon' [in:] C. BACHATLY *et alii*, *Le monastère de Phoebammon dans la Thèbaïde* 11, Cairo 1965, pp. 45-46, no. 30 and pp. 53-54, no. 57; WISSE, *Enchoria* 9 (1979), pp. 108-109, no. 6; DORESSE [in:] *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 11, pp. 66-67, no. 5. On the monastery, which the graffiti is connected with, and its relation to the 'greater' monastery of St. Phoibamon, the residence of Abraham, Bishop of Hermonthis, situated in Deir el-Bahari, see M. KRAUSE, 'Zwei Phoibammon-Klöster in Theben-West', *MDAIK* 37 (1981), pp. 261-266; IDEM, 'Die Beziehung zwischen den beiden Phoibammon-Klöster auf dem thebanischen Westufer', *BSAC* 27 (1985), pp. 31-47; IDEM, 'Coptic texts from Western Thebes. Recovery and publication from the late nineteenth century to the present' [in:] G. GABRA & H. TAKLA (eds.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*, 11. *Nag Hammadi - Esna*, Cairo 2010, pp. 73-74.

and adds a prayer for his protection, the second gives only his name and the epithet ‘the humblest one’.

7. Two ostraca from the Monastery of Saint Phoibamon in Deir el-Bahari. The first, longer and better preserved, contains the beginning of a letter formula in Coptic,³⁹ the second has only single words.⁴⁰

8. Five visitors’ graffiti in Coptic found on the rocks of Gebel Tjauti on Alamat-Tal road, behind Ezbet Ababda.⁴¹ The first one mentions a certain Pamin, two refer to the same Pamin along with his brother Ioannes, the fourth evokes a man with the name Pale, and the fifth contains only the personal pronoun ἀνο[κ].

To these testimonies from the Late Antique period one can add another of a much earlier date. It is a 2nd cent. AD Greek inscription on the Memnon colossus with the *proskynema* of a certain Lucius (Λούκιος) left in the name of his wife Apollonarian.⁴² The list of testimonies compiled above can possibly be supplemented with a Greek magical papyrus in London dated to the turn of the third and fourth centuries AD on palaeographic grounds.⁴³ The provenance of the papyrus is unknown, but its character and dating suggest that it could have been part of the famous ‘Theban Magical Library’ found around 1828 near Luxor and now scattered over several collections throughout Europe and mainly housed in London and Leiden.⁴⁴ At the bottom of column 28 of the papyrus, a recipe for a love potion is given in cryptographic and stenographic writing.

³⁹ *O. Crum* 488 a–b. Note that the same ostrakon (*O. Crum* 488 c–d) carries another epistolary formula in cryptographic writing, namely ‘wherein the letters stand alternately for those alphabetically next before and after them’ (*Crum*).

⁴⁰ *O. Crum* 489.

⁴¹ D. DARNELL, J.C. DARNELL, *Theban Desert Road Survey in the Egyptian Western Desert*, vol. 1: *Gebel Tjauti Rock Inscriptions 1–45 and Wadi el-Hol Rock Inscriptions 1–45* [= *Oriental Institute Publications* 119], p. 82, no. 36; pp. 82–83, no. 37; p. 83, no. 38, p. 84, no. 40; p. 85, no. 41.

⁴² *I. Memnon* 102. The cryptographic character of the inscription was first recognized by A. BATAILLE, ‘Thèbes gréco-romaine’, *CdÉ* 26 (1951), p. 349, n. 4.

⁴³ *P.Lond.* I 121 (p. 83) = *PGM* VII.

⁴⁴ On this ‘Theban Magical Library’ see most recently J. DIELEMAN, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual, 100–300 CE* [= *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 153], Leiden – Boston 2005.

6. Under (4), to the right of (5). At the bottom of the inscription, two (?) lines of text are blurred or worn out. An incurved line to the right of the large ι is probably a remnant of the first line of this obliterated text. Two more letters (ov) are visible at the end of line 2. v to the left of the big π (?) probably belongs to the blurred/worn out undertext of inscription no. 5.

\cdot A
 \cdot I
[[[- - - - -] . [- - -]]]
[[[- - - - - - - - -] ov]]

The inscription consists of four characters (letters) arranged in two columns with two characters each. The lower letters of the columns are considerably bigger than the upper ones. Only the letters in the right-hand column can be identified without doubts. The left-hand column has a triangular letter in the upper case and a large curved stroke resembling a lower-case π . The meaning of the inscription – if it has any – is unknown to us.

The question arises, what was the purpose and the destination of this heterogeneous collection of texts inscribed on a fragment of tableware. The question is difficult to answer because of a lack of clear premises of reasoning. Perhaps one such premise is the frequent use of diacritical signs in text no. 1 including, among others, long oblique strokes marking the end of words and sentences, and short strokes or dots over the initial letters of words. Similar signs occur in several texts of literary character written on papyrus and wooden tablets dating predominantly from the Late Roman period. Among these texts is a wooden board of unknown provenance now in the British Library, inv. Add.Ms. 33293 (3rd cent. AD), containing on one side *Iliad* Γ 273–277, and on the other Γ 278–285,⁴⁵ and

⁴⁵ *Descriptum*: F. G. KENYON, *JHS* 29 (1909), p. 39. Cf. PACE² 694; ZALATEO, *Aegyptus* 41 (1961), p. 179, no. 115; J. DEBOUT, 'Les documents scolaires', *ZPE* 63 (1986), p. 260, no. 159; CRIBIORE, *Writing, Teachers, and Students* (cit. n. 35), p. 243, no. 292, with photo pl. xxxv.

a wooden tablet, also of unknown provenance, now in Berlin, inv. ÄM 13839 (3rd–4th cent. AD) with *Iliad* B 132–146 on one side and B 147–162 on the other.⁴⁶ According to a commonly accepted opinion, the signs under consideration were devices that helped students in their reading practice.⁴⁷ This allows to classify the texts containing these marks as school exercises and this can be the function of the ostracon from MMA 1152 as well. That the ostracon under scrutiny was connected with education can be deduced also from the presence of the diagram demonstrating the rules of Coptic cryptography. Let us remember that in the ostracon from Deir el-Bachit the cryptographic alphabet occurs among other alphabetical exercises of an obvious scholastic nature. The wooden tablet from the ‘cell of the priest Elias’ with its alphabet in cryptographic writing and the alphabetical verse must have been connected with the scholastic milieu as well. Cell B of the Monastery of Epiphanius, in which the two cryptographic graffiti occurred, yielded numerous textual finds, including lists of words and various excerpts from Homer’s *Iliad*, that testify to the fact that an educational process took place there.⁴⁸ Similarly, the ‘small’ Monastery of Saint Phoibamon, which yielded two cryptographic graffiti, abounds in school exercises written on the walls of the building, the neighbouring rocks and on ostraca.⁴⁹ If the ostracon from MMA 1152 was

⁴⁶ *Descriptum*: BKT v I.6 + W. SCHUBART, *Einführung in die Papyruskunde*, Berlin 1918, p. 508, with pl. III (side B). Cf. ZALATEO, *Aegyptus* 41 (1961), p. 179, no. 117, and p. 180, no. 120; DEBOUT, *ZPE* 63 (1986), p. 260, no. 158 and p. 263, no. 239; CRIBIORE, *Writing, Teachers, and Students* (cit. n. 35), pp. 244–245, no. 296, with photo pl. xxxvi (side A); see also Rafaella CRIBIORE, *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Princeton 2001, p. 134, with photo 16 on p. 135 showing side A.

⁴⁷ See commentary by CRIBIORE, *Writing, Teachers, and Students* (cit. n. 35), pp. 80–88. Such lectional signs were very welcome, considering that ancient texts were written in *scriptio continua*.

⁴⁸ S. BUCKING, ‘Scribes and schoolmasters? On contextualizing Coptic and Greek ostraca excavated at the Monastery of Epiphanius’, *Journal of Coptic Studies* 9 (2007), pp. 21–47, especially pp. 36–44.

⁴⁹ ABD AL-MASIH, TILL, & BURMESTER, ‘Coptic graffiti’ (cit. n. 38), pp. 13–14, no. 16 (multiplication table); pp. 33–34, no. 2 = *MPER* xviii 263 (Greek-Coptic vocabulary); p. 35, no. 5 = *MPER* xviii 313 (multiplication table); p. 35, no. 6 = *MPER* xviii 305 (numerals); pp. 40–41, no. 19 (Greek-Coptic vocabulary); pp. 41–42, no. 21 (Greek-Coptic vocabulary);

truly connected with education, it should probably be regarded as a model prepared by a teacher in order to be used in didactic activity. The Greek texts, especially the long text no. 1, provided with a complicated system of diacritical signs, could have served for teaching to read, with the signs indicating to the students where one word ends and another begins, how the accents and breathings are placed, etc. The teacher must have been an individual who used Coptic on a daily basis and wrote in a Coptic hand, but apparently also had very good command of Greek. He taught Greek because it was vital for administrative and probably ecclesiastical purposes. He did not rely on Homer, but on Biblical texts, achieving an additional goal: the students not only learned to read, but also memorised particularly important and popular passages from the Bible. The diagram with the Coptic cryptography was intended for memorizing the code, and the short cryptographic text demonstrated how cryptography works in practice.

Unless the ostracon here discussed had been brought from somewhere else, it indicates that learning to read and write took place in the hermitage established in MMA 1152. The students may have been illiterate monks, most likely (though not necessarily) young, and their teacher was a monk well-versed in letters. It is taken for granted that didactic activity took place in monasteries. Testimony to this is the substantial number of school texts coming from monasteries, including Theban monasteries like that of Epiphanius,⁵⁰ 'greater' and 'smaller' Phoibamon,⁵¹ or Deir el-

pp. 81–82, no. 153 = *MPER* XVIII 314 (multiplication table); p. 126, no. 40 = CRIBIORE, *Writing, Teachers, and Students* (cit. n. 35), p. 187, no. 61 (limestone split with a verse containing all letters of the Greek alphabet); see further ostraca nos. 33, 34 (= *MPER* XVIII 45), 72 (= *MPER* XVIII 50), 73 (= *MPER* XVIII 102), 74 (= *MPER* XVIII 255), 75 (= *MPER* XVIII 47), 77 (= *MPER* XVIII 49), 85, which are probably writing exercises.

⁵⁰ See the discussion in BUCKING, 'Scribes and schoolmasters?' (cit. n. 48).

⁵¹ Cf. A. BATAILLE, *Les inscriptions grecques du temple de Hatshepsout à Deir el-Babari* [= *Publications de la Société Fouad I de Papyrologie*], Cairo 1951, nos. 185 (Greek alphabet written in four columns), 187–188 (inscriptions with the alphabetical verse ἀβροχίτων δ' ὁ φύλαξ θηροζυγοκαμψιμέτωπος); H. R. HALL, *Coptic and Greek Texts of the Christian Period from Ostraka, Stelae, etc. in the British Museum*, London 1905, pl. 25, nos. 33135, 33158, 33149 (practice ostraca), p. 26, nos. 33177, 33166 (practice ostraca), pl. 27, nos. 33140, 33133, 33142, 33252 (practice ostraca), pl. 34, nos 33187 (ostracon with the name of Agamemnon);

Bachit.⁵² Also the hermitage in MMA 1152 yielded school texts on potsherds and limestone chips, including exercises containing the entire Coptic alphabet,⁵³ exercises in writing individual letters, as well as syllables and words. In addition, over a dozen *kalamoi* representing two types and one inkwell have been found. While the writing exercises mentioned above document basic training, the ostrakon published in this paper served as a didactic aid for advanced students.

Tomasz Górecki

Eastern Christian Art Collection
The National Museum in Warsaw
Al. Jerozolimskie 3
00-495 Warsaw
POLAND
e-mail: *gurna1152@yahoo.pl*

Adam Łajtar

Department of Papyrology
Institute of Archaeology
University of Warsaw
00-927 Warsaw 64
POLAND
e-mail: *a.lajtar@uw.edu.pl*

W. GODLEWSKI, *Le monastère de St Phoibamon* [= *Deir el Babari* v], Warsaw 1986, p. 108, no. 10 = *MPER* XVIII, no. 176, pp. 135-136, no. 3 = *MPER* XVIII, no. 177, pp. 136-137, no. 103 = *MPER* XVIII, no. 103 (school exercises on limestone splits); *O. Crum* 512 (Ps. 1.10 and 24.20 followed by a list of Greek words, each beginning with φ).

⁵² See above, note 36.

⁵³ ANTONIAK, 'Preliminary Remarks' (cit. n. 3), p. 245 with fig. 2: an ostrakon with the Coptic alphabet written over the Greek alphabet, and single letters.