

CHAPTER 12: INSCRIPTIONAL MATERIAL

Janet H. Johnson

The majority of the inscribed materials from Roman loci were ostraca, written in Greek; some were fragments of private letters or accounts (61:g,h). One consisted of the personal name Psenosiris son of Petronius (RN 95, G9a-1, FN 2). There are a few scraps of papyrus, mostly with fragmentary inscriptions in Greek. The rest would seem to have been identificational devices carved on fairly large pots (61:i,j); similar names or monograms are found on the large reconstructed vessels from the large storeroom of the Roman villa (61:n). It is assumed that these were names or monograms indicating the owner of the vessel. Similar monograms are occasionally found on the plaster plugs with which the large amphorae were sealed (61:k). Other plugs contained inscriptions (61:l) or distinctive designs (61:m) stamped into the wet plaster. One amphora top was found with the plaster plug still intact (27:a); the vessel had evidently been opened by cutting off the neck below the level of the plug rather than by removing the plug. Terra sigillata bowls were also occasionally stamped to indicate the maker of the bowl or had a graffito scratched on the base or outside of the bowl, presumably indicating the owner (see chapter 11 on Terra Sigillata stamps).

The graffito which had been carved into the side of one large storage vessel found in the area called villa east, near where the iron-working furnace had been found in 1978, is written in the Tamil-Brāhmī script and in the Tamil language (61:o). Another graffito in this script and language had been found in 1978 in this same area (Whitcomb and Johnson, 1979: pl 27:j) and identified by I. Mahadevan as a masculine proper name datable to the first or second century of our era. A drawing and photograph of this second inscription, from the 1980 season, were sent to Mahadevan who commented as follows:

"The inscription found on a potsherd is in the Tamil-Brāhmī script and in the Tamil language. The occurrence of 𑌕 (\underline{n}) in the script and the pronominal ending $-an$ in the language are conclusive evidence.

"The text consisting of 3 extant letters is incomplete. The first extant character at the left is also fragmentary. It is most probably $cā$. (The only other possibilities are $hā$ or $lā$; but both are extremely unlikely in the present context. Tamil does not have h and Tamil names do not begin with l .) The text may be read as: $Jcā(?) ta \underline{n}$.

"This is a well-attested male personal name in old Tamil. The name ($cātan$, var. $cāttan$) occurs in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions (Mahadevan, 1966: No. 17, 51, 53, 69).

"The literary form is *cāttan*, a very popular name especially among the Tamil mercantile community (e.g., *Puram*, verses 178, 242, 395; also frequently in *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*).

"The inscription can be dated on palaeographical grounds to about the second century of the modern era. The letter *ca* with the open loop (occurring in the bi-lingual Satavahana silver coins of the second century) indicates a later date for the present inscription than for Arikamedu graffiti or the even earlier Tamil-Brahmī cave inscriptions. (For a bi-lingual coin of a Satavahana, see Nagaswami, 1966: 200 and facing plate.)" (pers. comm., 1980)

The Greek ostraca and papyrus fragments will be published in full by Roger Bagnall in the report on all the inscribed material to be included in the final report. During Bagnall's visit to Cairo in March, 1980 (made possible by a grant from the American Philosophical Society, from its Penrose Fund), he was able to work on the originals of several of the written documents from the first season. As a result of this work, he prepared the following notes for inclusion in this preliminary report:

"The letter of Maximus to his brother (J. 93632) makes requests for wine, pease, beans, vinegar, and pepper, among other items. In J. 93633 we get Λευκ (i.e., Leukos Limen), evidently as the destination of the jar on which it was written.

"A mention of hunger occurs in J. 93621. Another Latin fragment has been identified in the ostrakon J. 93662. The papyrus letter J. 93660 begins with the well-known *proskynema* formula (on which, see Geraci, 1971: especially p. 11 for examples in the Wadi Fawakir ostraka) and speaks of 'descending', i.e., travelling to the Nile valley." (pers. comm., 1980)

In the Islamic loci were found numerous fragments of paper, some blank but most bearing inscriptions in Arabic written in black ink. Numerous such fragments were also found during the 1978 season (Whitcomb and Johnson, 1979: 247-48). Occasionally, a complete text has been preserved (e.g., RN 15, E18b-2, a long, thin piece of paper with writing on both sides which had been folded in thirds the long way and then folded into a small packet by folding this strip 11 times). One piece of cloth bearing an inscription in Arabic was also found. Proper study of these documents requires personal inspection of many of the pieces and the full study of the entire corpus must await study of them in Cairo. They will be published, and their contribution to understanding of the Islamic presence at

Quseir al-Qadim will be studied, in conjunction with the final report following the third season of excavations (Winter, 1982). A preliminary notice, based on the documents found in 1978 and including the publication of four of those documents, appears below, chapter 13. A few wooden objects, especially combs, also bore Arabic inscriptions; see chapter 15.

Eighty Roman coins were found during the 1980 excavations; none were part of hoards. Most of them are very badly eroded due to the action of salt on the metal; only 17 were at all identifiable. A preliminary report on the coins was prepared using the limited facilities of the library at Chicago House, in Luxor, by Steven Sidebotham. The comments cited below are from his report, submitted in March, 1980. The identifications are to be considered tentative since many of the basic reference works were unavailable to him. He will prepare a final report on these coins, based on the study of the cleaned coins which were given to Chicago during the division of finds following the 1980 season and the casts made of all the coins in the field. This report will appear in the final report following the third season of excavations.

All but three of the Roman coins were aes (copper alloy); the other three were billon (debased silver) tetradrachmas from the Alexandria mint. Neither silver nor gold coins were found. All the coins which could be identified were minted in Alexandria or in Egyptian nome mints; none had been minted outside of Egypt. This coincides with the regulation that, upon entry to Egypt or Alexandria, imperial issues and coinage from elsewhere in the empire had to be exchanged for issues minted in Egypt (Milne, 1930: 169-70). The identifiable coins date from the first or second century of our era. The only later coin (RN 510) was found not in the Roman section of the site but across the modern road in the Islamic area and may well have been a later, surface deposit, picked up and re-deposited during the Islamic occupation.

The following coins were tentatively identified by Sidebotham (the format consists of registration number; locus; diameter in millimeters; weight in grams; die positions; obverse and reverse descriptions; mint; denomination; identification; and year):

- a) RN 509; E7a-15; 25mm.; 4.8g.; ↑↑; obv: bare head right, legend lost/faint ---NAV---; rev: eagle standing right, wings folded, LA in field to right; Æ 25; first regnal year Tiberius to Nero or Otho (A.D. 14-68)
- b) RN 510; F19a-2; 23mm.; 9.7g.; ↑↑; obv: laureat crowned head right, legend faint; rev: eagle sitting left, head turned right, A in field to right(?); Alexandria mint; billon tetradrachma, last third of the third century

- c) RN 511; E7c-7; 25.5mm.; 8.6g.; ↑↗ ; obv: laureate head right, legend faint; rev: laureate bust of bearded deity right; Æ 25.5; portrait of Julio-Claudian, most probably Claudius (41-54 A.D.)
- d) RN 513; F7a-3; 24mm.; 4.9g.; ↑↑ ; obv: laureate bust right, legend faint; rev: eagle sitting right, legend faint; Æ 24; portrait is Flavian (69-96 A.D.), especially Domitian (81-96)
- e) RN 514; G8a-4; 25.5mm.; 10.4g.; obv: head bare right, legend lost; counter-stamp (x across face; rev: lost; Æ 25.5mm.; Julio-Claudian portrait(?))
- f) RN 515; D6d-7; 25mm.; 7.2g.; ↑↗ ; obv: laureate head right, legend lost; rev: young head right, legend lost; Alexandria mint; billon tetradrachma; third quarter of first century
- g) RN 516; E6c-1; 28mm.; 3.9g.; ↑↑ ; obv: laureate(?) head left, legend faint/lost; rev: personification(?) head right, ETOYC to left; Æ 28; portrait looks Flavian or possibly Tiberius
- h) RN 518; surface; 25mm.; 12.7g.; ↑↘ ; obv: laureate bust right wears poludanentum, AVTKAITPAIAΔPIACEB or AVTKAICTPAIANAΔPIANOCCEB; rev: Nilus reclining left, holds cornucopia or wheat sheath, crocodile beneath right, LIZ above; Alexandria mint; billon tetradrachma; Hadrian (117-38), 17th regnal year=A.D. 133/4
- i) RN 520d; E6b-44; 23mm.; 3.6g.; obv: head, legend faint/lost; rev: figure standing, legend faint/lost; Alexandria mint; billon tetradrachma; late first, early second century of our era

Numerous Islamic coins were also found; they will be published by Michael Bates together with those from the third season in a full study of all the Islamic coins from Quseir al-Qadim to appear in the final report.

Bibliography for Inscriptional Material

- Geraci, G.
1971 "Ricerche sul Proskynema," *Aegyptus* 51: 3-211
- Mahadevan, I.
1966 *Corpus of the Tamil-Brāhmī Inscriptions*
- Milne, J. G.
1930 "The Roman Regulation of Exchange Values in Egypt: A Note," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 16: 169-70
- Nagaswami, R.
1966 *Seminar on Inscriptions, Madras*
- Whitcomb, D. S., and J. H. Johnson
1979 *Quseir al-Qadim 1978: Preliminary Report, Cairo*