

INSTITUT DES CULTURES MÉDITERRANÉENNES ET ORIENTALES
DE L'ACADÉMIE POLONAISE DES SCIENCES

ÉTUDES et TRAVAUX

XXVI

2013

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*Inscriptions on Ceramics
from Tell Atrib (Ancient Athribis) in the Nile Delta*

Archaeological excavations carried out from 1985 to 1995 by the Polish-Egyptian Mission on Kôm Sidi Yusuf in Tell Atrib (ancient Athribis, the capital of the tenth Lower Egyptian nome) brought to light a considerable part of the town dating from the Hellenistic and Roman periods.¹ Within the remains of mud-brick architecture, predominantly of domestic and industrial character, large quantities of artifacts were discovered, among them a rich and interesting collection of terracotta figurines,² and a significant amount of pottery, both locally produced and imported.³ Inscribed finds, excluding stamped amphora handles of the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods,⁴ were rare. Besides hieroglyphic inscriptions on loose stone blocks,⁵ shabtis⁶ and other small objects,⁷ and a Greek graffito on a piece of limestone – perhaps a signature of an artist or a legend to a sculptured monument⁸ – only graffiti and dipinti on ceramic surfaces can be mentioned. This article aims to present these sparse finds.⁹

* The authors wish to thank Professor Karol Myśliwiec, the Director of the Polish-Egyptian Mission at Tell Atrib, for his permission to study and publish this material. We thank Anna Południkiewicz, Agata Ulanowska, Tomasz Górecki, Grzegorz Majcherek, and Henryk Meyza for information on various aspects of the finds, especially the ceramological data. Ms. Południkiewicz also provided us with information about the archaeological contexts and supplied a large part of the illustrations used in this paper. We also thank Dorota Dzierzbicka for correcting our English.

¹ For a summary of the results, see K. MYŚLIWIEC, *Rescue Excavations at Tell Atrib in 1985–1995*, [in:] Z. SZTETYLLO, K. MYŚLIWIEC, *Tell Atrib 1985–1995 I*, *TCAM* 34, Warsaw 2000 [= Rescue Excavations], pp. 9–49; Id., *Contexte archéologique*, [in:] A. KRZYŻANOWSKA, K. MYŚLIWIEC, *Tell Atrib 1985–1995 II*, Varsovie 2009 [= Contexte archéologique], pp. 15–69; see also Id., *L'acquis des fouilles de Tell Atrib pour la connaissance de l'époque ptolémaïque*, [in:] *Classica Orientalia. Essays Presented to Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski on his 75th Birthday*, Warsaw 2011, pp. 387–398. On Athribis in the first millennium BC, largely on the basis of results of archaeological work of the Polish-Egyptian Mission, see F. LECLÈRE, *Les villes de Basse Égypte au I^{er} millénaire av. J.-C. I*, *BdE* 144/1, Cairo 2008, pp. 233–278.

² H. SZYMAŃSKA, *Terres cuites d'Athribis*, *MRE* 12, Turnhout 2005. For a publication of a particularly interesting object, see K. MYŚLIWIEC, *Isis, Hathor ou Cléopâtre? A propos d'une figurine trouvée à Tell Atrib*, *EtudTrav* XIX, 2001, pp. 263–278.

³ A. POŁUDNIKIEWICZ, *Local imitations of Greek pottery found in Tell Atrib*, *CCE* 3, 1992, pp. 95–101; EAD., *"Megarian" Bowls from Tell Atrib*, [in:] *Classica Orientalia. Essays Presented to Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski on his 75th Birthday*, Warsaw 2011, pp. 425–439; P. MIELIWOZKI, *Terra Sigillata from Two Seasons of Excavations at Tell Atrib (1991/1992)*, *EtudTrav* XVII, 1995, pp. 121–132; F. WELC, *Decorated Ptolemaic Faience Bowls from Athribis (Tell Atrib), Nile Delta*, *EtudTrav* XXIV, 2011, pp. 243–270; K. SZCZEPKOWSKA, *A Stamp with a Representation of Eros Riding a Dolphin from Tell Atrib*, *EtudTrav* XVII, 1995, pp. 309–318.

⁴ See Z. SZTETYLLO, *Pottery Stamps*, [in:] EAD., K. MYŚLIWIEC, *Tell Atrib 1985–1995 I*, *TCAM* 34, Warsaw 2000 [= Pottery Stamps], pp. 53–168.

⁵ Cf. K. MYŚLIWIEC, M. BAKR SAID, *Polish-Egyptian Excavations at Tell Atrib in 1994–1995*, *EtudTrav* XVIII, 1999, pp. 191–193, Figs 9–10 (blocks with royal cartouches); MYŚLIWIEC, *Contexte archéologique*, p. 22, Fig. 3 (block with the name of Nectanebo II), p. 24, Fig. 7 (inscribed block).

⁶ D. NIEDZIÓŁKA, *The shabtis discovered by the Polish-Egyptian Mission in Tell Atrib*, *EtudTrav* XVII, 1995, pp. 241–252.

⁷ E. ŁASKOWSKA-KUSZTAŁ, *La stèle de Horus sur les crocodiles d'Athribis*, *EtudTrav* XVII, 1995, pp. 85–94; MYŚLIWIEC, BAKR SAID, *EtudTrav* XVIII, 1999, p. 216, Fig. 27 (seal with an inscription: an epithet of Renenutet); the latter find is reproduced also by K. Myśliwiec (cf. Id., *Contexte archéologique*, p. 24, Fig. 6).

⁸ A. ŁAJTAR, *A Greek Legend to a Sculptured Monument from Tell Atrib, Lower Egypt*, *EtudTrav* XVII, 1995, pp. 118–120.

⁹ A dipinto written on the neck of a bottle discovered in the 1985 season was published by A. ŁUKASZEWICZ, [in:] K. MYŚLIWIEC *et al.*, *Polish excavations at Tell Atrib in 1985*, *ASAE* 72, 1993, pp. 61–62; see also K. MYŚLIWIEC, *Excavations at Tell Atrib in 1985*, *EtudTrav* XVI, 1992, pp. 390–391, and Id., *Contexte archéologique*, p. 23. The text reads: Περωνία ἐπιεὶς ζήσις (= ζήσης).

During the study of the material discussed in this paper we were able to consult the originals only in the case of Nos 4, 13, and 16. For the other items we had to rely on documentation and second-hand information.



1. TA87-A286/A. Found together with four similar objects (registered as TA87-A286/B-E) in the 1987 season, in western part of sector T,¹⁰ 15cm below level of the tops of the walls. Object of Nile silt, in the form of an oval plaque, slightly convex on one side, slightly concave on the other, pierced through the middle. Dimensions: W. 12cm, H. 6.4cm, Th. 1.8cm. Weight: 295g. Inscription incised before firing on the concave side of the object; no dimensions of the inscription are available. Archaeological context suggests a dating to the Hellenistic period. The shape of the letters is consistent with this dating; see especially *kappa* with short oblique strokes.

κερα()

The function of this item and the four similar objects found together with it is disputable. They cannot be weights used as reference masses for a balance scale, as their weight varies considerably.¹¹ Perhaps they were fishing net weights or, still more probably, loom weights.¹² Another possibility is that they served as tools for smoothing the surfaces of vessels during the production process. Smoothing tools of similar oval shape and dimensions, although without the perforation in the middle, are known from Late-Antique African ceramic workshops.¹³ Many of them bear graffiti with textual or figural content. If the object and its parallels were indeed tools for smoothing the surface of pots, they should

¹⁰ For a general plan of the site showing the chronological and spatial progress of fieldwork and the location of the sectors, see MYŚLIWIEC, *Rescue Excavations*, pp. 12 and 14; *Id.*, *Contexte archéologique*, pp. 16 and 18. The space in which the weights were discovered neighboured a third century BC sculptor's workshop on the east; see K. MYŚLIWIEC *et al.*, *Remains of a Ptolemaic Villa at Athribis*, *MDAIK* 44, 1988, pp. 188–189, Pls 34–38a-b.

¹¹ Their exact weight is: A: 295g, B: 318g, C: 235g, D: 240g, E: 195g.

¹² Ancient loom-weights normally weighed from 100 to 300g, as it was pointed out to us by Agata Ulanowska. For the shape and weight of loom-weights, see L. MÄRTENSSON, M.-L. NOSCH, E. ANDERSON STRAND, *Shape of things: Understanding a loom weight*, *OJA* 28/4, 2009, pp. 373–398.

¹³ Information provided by Tomasz Górecki and Henryk Meyza. On African tools for smoothing surfaces of pots, see M. MACKENSEN, *Die spätantiken Sigillata- und Lampentöpfereien von El Mahrine (Nordtunesien). Studien zur nordafrikanischen Feinkeramik des 4. bis 7. Jahrhunderts I*, *Münchener Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte* 50, München 1993, pp. 74–83.

most probably be associated with ceramic workshops that operated in the vicinity in the latter part of the Hellenistic period. Their existence is attested, among others, through the discovery of a large number of unfired vessels, mainly bowls with incurved rims.¹⁴

The inscription is likely a word written in abbreviated form (so above). One is tempted to identify it as a word from the group of terms that start with *κεραμ-* and refer to earth as a material, to earthenwares and their fabrication.¹⁵ This word would have designated the object either as earthenware (e.g. *κεραμικός*, *κεράμειος*) or as property of a potter or a potter's workshop (e.g. *κεραμέος*, *κεραμείου*). The first of these two possibilities has the disadvantage of being uninformative, as one immediately sees that the object is made of clay. If, as seems likely, the inscription indicates ownership, one can also consider the possibility that it is a personal name. Names in *Κερα-* are attested but not common. They are: *Κέραμος*, *Κεράς*, *Κερατᾶς* (these three are found in Egyptian sources), *Κεραΐας*, *Κεράσις*, *Κέραννος*.



2. TA 139p/91. Found in the 1991 season in sector WW, 1.40–1.60m below ground level, in the dismantled wall W-2. Amphora sherd, dimensions: H. 12.3, W. 4.6cm. The inscription is scratched into the outer surface of the sherd and occupies its entire surface. H. of letters

¹⁴ Cf. K. MYŚLIWIEC, A. POLUDNIKIEWICZ, A Center of Ceramic Production in Ptolemaic Athribis, [in:] C.A. Redmount, C.A. Keller (Eds), *Egyptian Pottery. Proceedings of the 1990 Pottery Symposium at the University of California, Berkeley, UCPEA 9, Berkeley 2003*, pp. 133–152; A. POLUDNIKIEWICZ, Unfired pottery from ceramic workshops at Tell Atrib, [in:] H. Meyza, J. Młynarczyk (Eds), *Hellenistic and Roman Pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean. Advances in Scientific Studies. Acts of the II Nieborów Pottery Workshop, Nieborów, 18–20 December 1993, Warsaw 1995*, pp. 299–329.

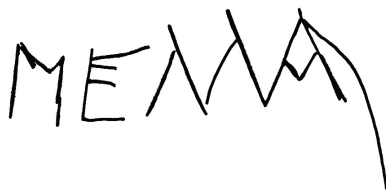
¹⁵ Other words in *κερα-*, of which the most common was *κέρας*, ‘horn’, hardly suit the context.

0.7cm (E, N, O) – 1.1cm (A, M, Σ). The letters are epigraphic majuscules datable to the middle to late Hellenistic period (second half of the second–first century BC). Of note are: *alpha* with a broken bar, *eta* with the right-hand hasta incurved, *mu* with oblique external hastae, *omikron* as big as the other letters, and *sigma* of classical shape with horizontal external bars. The letters have serifs.

The inscription is incomplete on both sides and possibly also at the top and bottom. It is unknown if it was written on a complete amphora or on a sherd that was broken into smaller pieces later on, but the former possibility seems more probable to us.

[- - - M]ενεκ[ρατ - - -]
 [- - - -]μαρ . [- - - - -]
 [- - - -] . ης ^v [- - - -]
 4 [- - - -]ωνος [- - - -]
 [- - - -]ρου [- - - - -]

The text seems to be a list of persons. [- - -] . ης in line 3 looks like the ending of a masculine name in the nominative, whereas [- - -]ωνος in line 4 and [- - -]ρου in line 5 are likely endings of masculine names in the genitive. This suggests that the persons listed in the inscription were designated with their personal names and patronymics. The purpose of the list is impossible to ascertain due to the fragmentary state of preservation of the inscription.

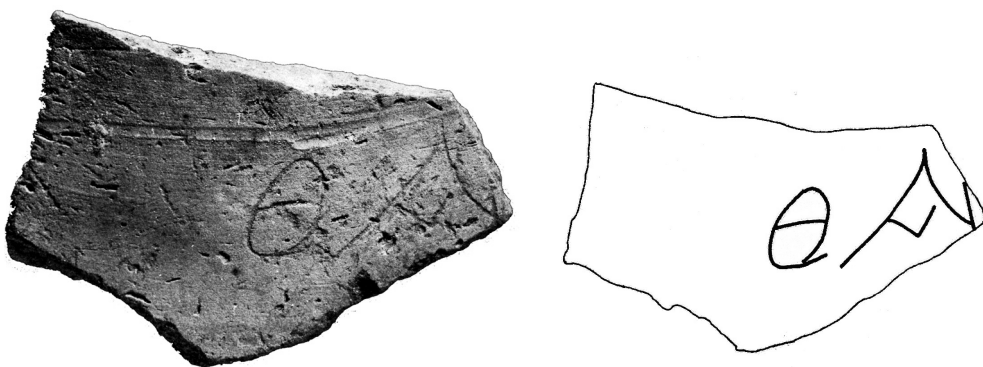


3. TA93/36p. Found in sector MMM, 1.20m below ground level, in the rubble in the western entrance. Fragment of a flat shoulder and body of an amphora or storage jar. Dimensions: H. 10cm, W. 15cm. Inscription scratched in the lower part of the shoulder. Dimensions: H. 2.6cm, W. 9cm. Upright majuscules. *Alpha* has a broken bar, *epsilon* is square, external hastae in *mu* are vertical. Date unknown, perhaps late Hellenistic/early Roman.

μελλα()

The inscription seems to be complete on the left-hand side, therefore one can exclude names of Latin origin like *Gemella* (Γεμέλλα) or *Columella* (Κολουμέλλα). The word *μελλα/mella* is unknown except for two geographical designations: a small river system in

the foothills of the central Alps near Brixia¹⁶ and a town in the Transjordan (more specifically in the Gilead) probably to be equated with the Hebrew Mizpa,¹⁷ but neither suits the context of the find here discussed. With regard to the above objections one has to assume that the word occurring here was written in abbreviated form. According to dictionaries of the Greek language, only two words begin in μελλα-, namely μέλλαξ, 'youth, lad', and μελλάρχων, 'archon-designate'. The first of these words is attested as a proper name in a Latin inscription from Pompeii.¹⁸ No other personal name beginning in Μελλα- has been recorded so far. On the other hand, we are aware of two cities with the name Mellaria located in the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula, one in the Strait of Gibraltar between Traducta and Baelo, the other near modern Fuente Ovejuna.¹⁹ It is difficult to determine which of the possibilities listed above, if any, applies here. A proper name or a derivative of a city name (an ethnic) seem to be the best candidates. Perhaps the best option is the first of the Spanish Mellarias, which was situated in an area of intensive fishing industry, exporting its products also to the Eastern Mediterranean (see below, commentary to 6). Theoretically, one can also assume a scribal mistake in the inscription under scrutiny, e.g. gemination of *lambda*. In that case, a series of derivatives from the root μέλαν-, 'black', can be taken into consideration. The assumption of a scribal mistake, however, is very dangerous in a situation when the meaning of the inscription escapes us.



4. No inventory number. Circumstances of the discovery not known. Sherd from the upper part an amphora, from the place where the shoulder transitions into the neck. Dimensions of the sherd: H. 4.5cm, W. 8.0cm. Inscription scratched on the outer surface of the sherd.

¹⁶ Cf. H. PHILIPP, s.v. Mella, *RE* XV (1932), 556.

¹⁷ Cf. G. HÖLSCHER, s.v. Mizpa (4), *RE* XV (1932), 2243. The name Μελλά occurs only once in the sources at our disposal, namely in Flavius Josephus' description of Judas Maccabeus' campaigns to the Gilead in *Antiquitates* XII 340; cf. D.R. SCHWARTZ, Mizpeh, Alema, Mella, Pella (I Maccabees 5:35): Philology and Historical Geography in Judas Maccabeus Campaign to the Gilead, [in:] Y. Ben-Arich, E. Reiner (Eds), *Studies in the History of Eretz Israel Presented to Yehuda Ben Porat*, Jerusalem 2003, pp. 27–38 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸ *CIL* IV 9111.

¹⁹ Cf. P. BARCELO, s.v. Mellaria, *Der Neue Pauly* 7, 1194.

Preserved dimensions of the inscription: H. 2cm, W. 4cm; H. of letters 1.5cm (Θ) – 2cm (Α). Majuscules slightly inclined to the right. *Alpha* with broken bar. Late Hellenistic/Early Roman but exact date unknown.

θα . [- - -]

The inscription was most probably executed when the amphora was complete, as it is perfectly in line with the tectonics of the vessel. It may have been the name of the owner of the amphora or a reference to its contents. Personal names in Θα- are common enough to refrain from suggesting a supplement. Words in θα- designating products that could have been transported in amphorae are also not rare. The list includes, among others, several derivatives of θάλασσα, ‘sea’, referring to products of the sea or commodities treated with sea water, like θαλασσίτης – ‘wine sunk in the sea to ripen it’ and θαλασσόμελι – ‘drink of brine and honey’.



5. TAX1/19a/85. Found in the 1985 season of excavations, in sector X1, in a layer 40–50cm below ground level. Neck of an amphora with the upper part of the shoulder and handles. H. 22.5cm, width not recorded. A dipinto in red paint is found in the lower part of the neck. Dimensions of the inscription: H. 2.2cm, W. 8.3cm. None of the letters are completely preserved. The origin of the amphora is not certain. Perhaps we are dealing with a product of Apulian workshops that were active in and around Brindisi from the end of the second to the end of the first century BC.²⁰

σαλ()

The reading is not entirely certain. It was established through comparison with the next item. For the meaning of the inscription and the interpretation of the find, see commentary below.

²⁰ Information provided by Grzegorz Majcherek. On the Brindisi amphorae, see P. BALDACCI, Importazioni cislappine e produzione apula, [in:] *Recherches sur les amphores romaines. Colloque sur l'utilisation en histoire économique des données fournies par les amphores romaines*, organisé par l'École française de Rome, Rome, 4 mars 1971, *CEFR* 10, Rome 1972, pp. 7–28; P. PALAZZO, Le anfore di Apani (Brindisi), [in:] *Amphores romaines et histoire économique: dix ans de recherche. Actes du colloque de Sienne, 22–24 mai 1986*, *CEFR* 114, Rome 1989, pp. 548–553.



6. TAX1/19b/85. Found in the 1985 season of excavations, in sector X1, in a layer 40–50cm below ground level. Neck of an amphora with the upper part of the shoulder and handles. H. 18.5cm, W. not recorded. A dipinto in red paint is found in the upper part of the neck. The text runs obliquely from top left to bottom right. Dimensions: H. 5cm, W. 6.5cm. Upright epigraphic majuscules. The amphora type is the same as in the previous item, which suggests a dating between the end of the second and the end of the first century BC.

σαλ()

Brindisi amphorae are well represented, mainly thanks to their stamped handles, in the entire Eastern Mediterranean including Egypt. They occurred in considerable quantities at Tell Atrib,²¹ and are also attested in Alexandria,²² as well as on other Egyptian sites. Brindisi amphorae were essentially containers for oil and occasionally wine. As a rule they do not carry painted inscriptions. This suggests that dipinti on the two Tell Atrib items did not come into existence in Apulia in the second–first century BC in connection with the original content of the amphorae but are later elements connected with the secondary use of the containers.

There are several words beginning in σαλ- that suit the context. Our impression is that we are dealing with a Latin word derived from *sal*, ‘salt’, transcribed into Greek. Two words are especially suitable here: *salsamenta*, ‘salted fish’, and *salgama*, ‘pickles’. It is a well-known fact that salting was an important method of foodstuffs conservation in an age when refrigeration had not yet been invented. In order to make *salsamenta*, fish, either in whole or cut into pieces, were simply salted (one layer of fish, one layer of salt) or preserved in brine.²³ In case of *salgama*, the foodstuff, mainly vegetables and fruits, but apparently also fish, was pickled in brine with vinegar, spices and other ingredients such as milk and honey. *Salsamenta* were produced wherever there was a rich supply of sea fish.

²¹ SZTETYLLO, *Pottery Stamps*, pp. 136–146, Nos 193–241, with commentary on p. 59.

²² Cf. e.g. Z. SZTETYLLO, *Timbres céramiques des fouilles polonaises à Alexandrie (1973–1974)*, *EtudTrav X*, 1978, pp. 308–309, Nos 111 and 115.

²³ Cf. R.I. CURTIS, *Garum and salsamenta: Production and Commerce in Materia Medica*, *Studies in Ancient Medicine*, Leiden 1991; N. DESSE-BERSET, J. DESSE, *Salsamenta, garum et autres préparations de poissons*, *MEFRA* 112, 2000, pp. 73–97.

However, their production was especially well developed around the Strait of Gibraltar (Roman provinces of Baetica and Mauretania Tingitana)²⁴ and on the Black Sea shores.²⁵ *Salgama* could have been manufactured almost everywhere, depending on the local supply of plants. As far as we can see, the word *salsamenta* has not been attested in Greek transcript thus far, be it in literature or documentary sources, including dipinti on amphorae.²⁶ The same holds true for *salgama*; however, it appears as part of the term σαλγαμάριος, ‘seller of pickles’. The latter is found in both literary sources²⁷ and inscriptions, including three epitaphs of σαλγαμάριοι from Corinth²⁸ and one from Phthiotic Thebes in Thessaly,²⁹ all datable to the Late-Antique and Byzantine periods. The above reasoning suggests that the inscription studied here (and also the preceding one) should be read σάλ(γμα) rather than σαλ(σαμέντα), indicating that the amphora on which it is written contained pickles. Σαλ() may also be the beginning of a personal name referring to the owner of the amphorae. Names beginning in Σαλ- are common.

7–10. Four inscriptions on vessels found in 1991 in Room 172, in a pottery deposit datable to the Early Roman period (first–third century AD) that contained, among others, large quantities of storage jars of various kinds.

7. No number of finds inventory; pottery inventory: TA91/A32. A large sherd from an amphora with a portion of the shoulder and body. Dimensions of the sherd not recorded. The amphora seems to represent a sub-Coan type and is possibly of Aegean origin.³⁰ Inscription scratched on the outer surface of the sherd. Dimensions of the inscription: H. 8.0cm (very long I), W. 8.5cm. The first three letters are carved very deeply, the other two – very delicately. The letters are elongated majuscules. Probably second century AD.

οἶνος

²⁴ The bibliography of this subject is immense. One can cite: M. PONSICH, M. TARRADELL, *Garum et industries antiques de salaison dans la Méditerranée occidentale*, Paris 1965; L.G. LAGÓSTENA BARRIOS, *Catariae Gaditanae: La industria pesuero-conservera gaditana en época romana*, *DHA* 27/2, 2001, pp. 91–104; A. ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ, D. BERNEL CASASOLA, *Garum y salazones en el círculo del Estrecho*, Cádiz 2004; articles published in: L. Lagóstena, D. Bernal, A. Arévalo (Eds), *Actas del Congreso Internacional CETARIAE. Salsas y salazones de pescado en Occidente, durante la Antigüedad*, Universidad de Cádiz, Novembre de 2005, Oxford 2007.

²⁵ Cf. T. BEKKER-NIELSEN, *Ancient Fishing and Fish Processing in the Black Sea Region*, Aarhus 2005.

²⁶ The term is even rare in Latin commercial dipinti, as noted by R. EGGER, W. GÖRLICH, *Der Lebensmittelimport aus Italien auf den Magdalensberg*, *Carinthia* 1, 1969, p. 412. The Greek language used a term of its own instead, namely τάρπιος. As far as Egypt is concerned, the transport of salted fishes in amphorae is attested by a find from Tebtynis; cf. N. LITINAS, *Tebtynis III. Vessels' Notations from Tebtynis*, *FIFAO* 55, Cairo 2008, No 255: τάρπι(χος) or τάρπι(χου).

²⁷ *ACO* II 1, 3, p. 52 (in the acts of the ecumenical council in Chalcedon AD 451).

²⁸ *Corinth* VIII.3, 540, and 551. The third epitaph is unpublished; it is quoted by M.B. WALBANK, *Where have all the names gone? The Christian community in Corinth in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Eras*, [in:] S. FRIESEN, D.N. SHOWALTER, J. VALTERS, *Corinth in Context. Comparative Studies on Religion and Society*, Leiden 2010, p. 288, n. 122. On Corinthian σαλγαμάριοι, see also *ibid.*, p. 291.

²⁹ *SEG* XLII, 541.

³⁰ Information provided by Grzegorz Majcherek.



The inscription seems to be complete. The word οἶνος, 'wine', standing alone on an amphora is somewhat puzzling. One would rather expect information about the kind of wine or the place of its origin. Such general information is reasonable only in the context of a large shipment that also included, in addition to wine, containers with other products like oil, fish sauces, marinades, etc.



8. No number of finds inventory; pottery inventory: TA91/A13. The typological appurtenance of the amphora is not certain; morphologically it resembles the Dressel 24 similis type, especially its subtype C, most probably of eastern Aegean origin, distinguished by A. Opaît and A. Tsaravopoulos.³¹ Dimensions not recorded. The amphora carries two

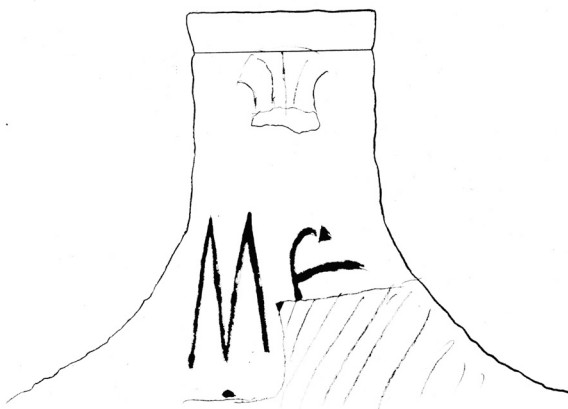
³¹ Information provided by Anna Południkiewicz and Grzegorz Majcherek. Cf. A. OPAÎT, A. TSARAVOPOULOS, Amphorae of Dressel 24 similis type in the Central Aegean Area (Chios-Erythrai-Kyme), *BSA* 106, 2011, pp. 275–323; see also A. OPAÎT, From Dr 24 to LR2?, [in:] M. Bonifay, J.-Chr. Tréglià (Eds), *LRCW 2. Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares and Amphorae in the Mediterranean. Archaeology and Archaeometry, BAR IS 1662 (II)*, Oxford 2007, pp. 627–644. The same type is represented by the next discussed amphora and

inscriptions bearing the same letters executed in red paint. One inscription (a) is written horizontally on the shoulder, the other (b) vertically across the body from the bottom to the top.³² Height of letters *c.* 7.5cm. Upright majuscules. Possibly first–second century AD.

(a) κο()

(b) κο()

The inscription may give the name of the owner of the amphora written in abbreviated form. Less likely it informs about the contents of the vessel.



9. No number of finds inventory; pottery inventory: TA91/A9. Neck of an amphora with a portion of the shoulder and handles, one of which is only partly preserved. The typological appurtenance of the amphora is not certain; it may represent the Dressel 24 similis type, perhaps of eastern Aegean origin (see the previous entry). Dimensions: H. 18.6cm, rim diameter: 8.8cm. Inscription in red paint written horizontally where the neck meets the shoulders, directly below the broken handle. Dimensions of the inscription: H. 6cm, W. 8.4cm. Large upright majuscules. Possibly first–second century AD.

με

The inscription was executed most probably at a time when the handle was already broken. If so, we would have proof that the amphora remained in use despite its incomplete state. However, the damage did not affect the amphora's function as a container, only its use as a transport vessel.

The inscription contains the numeral 45. What this numeral refers to is open to question. The most probable answer is that it indicates the capacity of the amphora in *xestai*. In the Greek language of the Roman Imperial and Late-Antique periods, ξέστης was a term used

by another fragment, almost identical as the one referred to here (pottery inventory TA91/A12), with remains of a red dipinto that is impossible to identify.

³² Note that designations (a) and (b) are purely conventional.

to designate the Roman *sextarius*, a liquid and dry measure amounting to 0.564 liters,³³ which indicates that this amphora had a capacity of *c.* 24 liters. An alternative solution is that it refers to some details of the shipment this amphora was part of, e.g. the container's number within the shipment. This remark holds true also for Nos **15** and **16**.



10. No number of finds inventory; pottery inventory: TA91/A63. Bottom of a vessel of an unknown type. Diameter: 5.20cm. Inscription crudely incised before firing on the outer surface of the bottom. The letters form a monogram 2.8cm high and 3cm wide. Note the A with broken bar. first–second century AD (on the basis of archaeological criteria).

πα()

This is likely the beginning of a name of the vessel's producer. Personal names in Πα- are too numerous to suggest a plausible reading. The way of abbreviating words by writing the last letter under and within the penultimate one is attested from the first century BC onwards according to M. Avi-Yonah.³⁴

11. TA87A/120. Found in the 1987 season of excavations in sector F, in its northeastern corner, near a baked-brick wall, 0.50cm below ground level. Bottom of a vessel made of Nile clay. Dimensions: H. 2.7cm, diameter 4.8cm. Inscription incised before firing on the external side of the bottom. Dimensions of the inscription not recorded. The inscription consists of two parts. Part (a) is written in the middle of the bottom surface, part (b) – around part (a) with mirrored letters. Note the square *sigma*. Date unknown, probably Roman period.

(a) PN

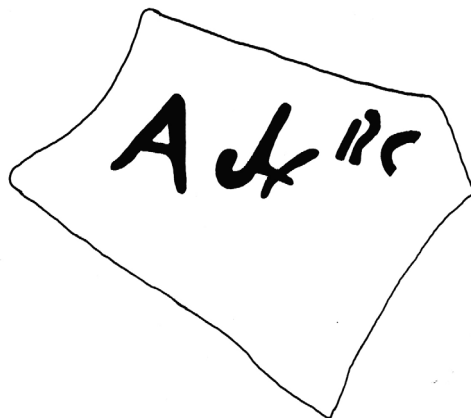
(b) ΑΡΑΣΑΡ

³³ Cf. N. KRUIT, K.A. WÖRZ, *Metrological Notes on Measures and Containers of Liquids in Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Egypt*, *AfP* 45, 1999, pp. 96–127, esp. 111–117 and 120–127.

³⁴ M. AVI-YONAH, *Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions (The Near East, 200 B.C.–A.D. 1100)*, *QDAP-Suppl. to Volume IX*, Jerusalem 1940, p. 31.



We are unable to suggest a plausible reading for this sequence of letters. Even the beginning and the end of the text in part (b) are unknown to us. The purpose of writing with mirrored letters in part (b) also remains unclear. We reproduce this riddle in the hope that someone will be able to solve the problems it poses.



12. No number of finds inventory; pottery inventory: TA92/A21. Findspot unknown. Amphora sherd. Dimensions: H. 7cm, W. 9cm. Inscription in white paint. Dimensions of the inscription: H. 2cm, W. 6cm. The initial A is majuscule, the rest of the text is cursive. Date unknown.

A δ(ι)α Bo[- - -]

It is uncertain whether we are dealing with an inscription on an amphora or with an ostrakon.

What follows δ(ι)α is probably a proper name, hence the capital. The letter A at the beginning may be the number 1.

13. TA81p/90. Found in room 179, 40cm below the top of the walls, in a layer containing a large quantity of amphora sherds. A large sherd from the upper part of the body and the shoulders of an amphora of marl clay, reconstructed out of five smaller pieces.



The amphora type is unknown. It is surely of Eastern Mediterranean origin and may have been produced on Cyprus.³⁵ Dimensions of the sherd not recorded except for the thickness (0.9cm). Inscription painted in red on the outer surface of the sherd. Dimensions of the inscription: 10 x 21.5cm; H. of completely preserved letters: 2.3cm (A in line 2) – 5.3cm (E). Letters are round majuscules inclined to the right, but *beta* at the beginning of line 2 is cursive. Third century AD (see below).

Σεραπει
Βουθλᾶ

1. Σεραπι- is a spelling variant of Σαραπι-, be it in the name of the god or its derivatives, including personal names. The forms have chronological significance. The latter was the only one known in the Hellenistic period, the former spread in the Roman Imperial period.³⁶
2. The name Βουθλᾶς has been attested only in Egypt thus far. It appears in eleven documents (listed topographically from north to south, according to the place of writing): *P.Bub.* I 4 + *SB* XXII 15625, 5 (Boubastos, AD 221); *P.Oxy.* XXXVIII 2876, 24 (the papyrus was written in the Memphites; AD 212–214); *SB* XII 11129, 3 (Karanis, third century AD); *P.Yale* III 137, col. IV 102 (Philadelphieia, AD 216/7); *BGU* VII 1610, 2, 9, 13, 18 (Philadelphieia, AD 259); *SB* I 5124 + *Pap.Congr.* XXIII, Viena 2001, pp. 398–405, col. VIII, 256 (from Tebtynis, AD 193); *CPR* I 131, 2 (Herakleopolites, first half of the third century AD); *P.Oxy.* XII 1526 descr., col. I 8 (the papyrus was written in Psobthis, AD 222/3); *SB* XXVI 16792, 8 (the papyrus written in Hermopolis was found in the Arsinoites, AD 274); *SB* XXIV 16000 = *P.Berl.Borkowski*, col XIII 459 (Panopolis, AD 300–330); *O.Douch* IV 399, 6 (Kysis in Oasis Magna, AD 300–425). It is interesting to observe that all these documents fall into a narrow chronological span, from AD 193 to the beginning of the fourth century, with the latest document *SB* XXIV 16000 = *P.Berl.Borkowski* dated to after AD 298 but before 330. The geographic and chronological spread of the name Βουθλᾶς

³⁵ Information provided by Grzegorz Majcherek.

³⁶ Cf. F.Th. GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods, Testi e documenti per lo studio dell'antichità* 55, I: *Phonology*, Milan 1976, p. 279, with n. 1.

suggests that the inscription on the amphora here discussed was executed in Egypt³⁷ and should be dated to the third century AD. The etymology of the name Βαυθλᾶς and even its language appurtenance are unknown to us. Our impression is that it is of Greek rather than Egyptian origin. One can also not exclude the possibility of its belonging to a language group different than these two. The name is normally declined Βαυθλᾶς, Βαυθλᾶ in the sources at our disposal, but *P.Oxy.* XII 1526 attests the declension Βαυθλᾶς, Βαυθλᾶτος.

The inscription seems to be completely preserved. In spite of this, its reading and interpretation are not certain. If the text is to be read as it stands, the reading should be: Σεράπει. | Βαυθλᾶ – ‘To Serapis. (Belonging) of Bauthlas’. This would probably be interpreted so that a certain Bauthlas offered and amphora (or perhaps several amphorae) with contents to the god, i.e. to his temple, located probably in Athribis.³⁸ We seriously doubt that this reading is correct, however, as it differs from the nature of dipinti on Roman amphorae. We are rather inclined to see it as the name of the owner of the amphora and his patronymic, which, however, entails the assumption that line 1 and perhaps even line 2 contains abbreviations. Interpreted thus, the inscription should be read: Σεραπεῖ(ων) | Βαυθλᾶ, or Σεραπεῖ(ων) | Βαυθλᾶ(τος) – ‘Serapion son of Bauthlas’.

14. TA86/325. Found in the 1986 season in the southeastern part of test trench No. 75. Upper part of an amphora of the Dressel 23 type. This type of amphorae, which are a late variant of Dressel 20, were produced in Baetica and were intended as containers for oil and occasionally preserved olives.³⁹ Dimensions: H. 25cm, W. not recorded. Each of the handles of the amphora is stamped with the same stamp reading PNN, probably to be resolved as *P. N(o)n(ii)*.⁴⁰ Inscription painted red on the shoulder. Dimensions of the inscription: H. 10cm, W. 22cm. Second half of the third century AD, probably around 270–280.

³⁷ This is equally interesting, as the amphora itself is most probably of non-Egyptian origin.

³⁸ The cult of Sarapis is otherwise attested in Athribis through two sculptures of the god. One is a marble head (now in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, inv. 23836), which was confiscated from local thieves in Benha 3 September 1931. For the publication of the object, probably of late-Antonine date, see A. ADRIANI, [in:] *Annuario del Museo Greco-Romano* 1, 1932–1933, pp. 47–48, Pl. XXIV, and see further W. HORNOSTEL, Sarapis. Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte, den Erscheinungsformen und Wandlungen der Gestalt eines Gottes, *EPRO* 32, Leiden 1972, p. 243; G.J.F. KATER-SIBBES, Preliminary Catalogue of Sarapis Monuments, *EPRO* 36, Leiden 1973, p. 9, No. 47; G. CLERC, J. LECLANT, s.v. Sarapis, *LIMC* VII 1, 675, No. 83a. The other is an alabaster statuette of Sarapis enthroned (only torso and head preserved) kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, inv. 86128. For this object, see KATER-SIBBES, *op.cit.*, p. 9, No. 46.

³⁹ Information provided by Grzegorz Majcherek. On the amphorae Dressel 20 and 23, see most recently S. MARTIN-KILCHER, Die römischen Amphoren aus Augst und Kaiseraugst. Ein Beitrag zur römischen Handels- und Kulturgeschichte, 1. Die südspanischen Ölamphoren, Gruppe 1, *Forschungen in Augst* 7, Augst 1987 [= Die römischen Amphoren]. Generally on oil production in Baetica, see J. RAMESAL RODRÍGUEZ, Die Ölwirtschaft in der Provinz Baetica: neue Formen der Analyse, *SaalbJb* 38, 1982, pp. 30–71.

⁴⁰ Published by SZTETYLLO, Pottery Stamps, p. 147, No. 244. Generally on this stamp, see M.H. CALLENDER, Roman Amphorae with an Index of Stamps, *University of Durham Publications*, London 1965, pp. 209–210, No. 1358; MARTIN-KILCHER, Die römischen Amphoren, p. 198; and U. EHMIG, Pinselaufschrift und Stempel auf einer südspanischen Ölamphore aus Mogontiacum – Mainz. Who is who in familia M. Iulii Hermes Frontiniani?, *Pyrenae* 29, 1998, pp. 237–248.



K

We are unable to suggest a reasonable reading based on the traces of letters seen on the drawing. We reproduce it in the hope that specialists in *tituli picti* on Spanish amphorae will be able to make more of it.⁴¹

The inscription may be incomplete on both sides. The presence of K suggests that it may be in Greek instead of Latin.⁴² If so, it could have been executed already in Egypt, in connection with the secondary use of the amphora, and not in Spain. This is confirmed by the fact that the inscription was painted in red, as the commercial *dipinti* on Spanish amphorae are usually black.

It is worth pointing out that the Spanish oil amphorae Dressel 20 and 23, common in the Western Mediterranean, are relatively rare in the East, including Egypt.⁴³ Spanish oil – *σπανέλαιον*, *σπανὸν ἔλαιον*, *ἔλαιον σπανόν* – is mentioned in Greek papyri from Egypt.⁴⁴



⁴¹ On *tituli picti* on Spanish amphorae, see E. RODRÍGUEZ ALMEIDA, *Los Tituli Picti de las ánforas olearias de la Bética I*, Madrid 1989.

⁴² One can consider reading *Κοίντρος* or *Κοίντρον*.

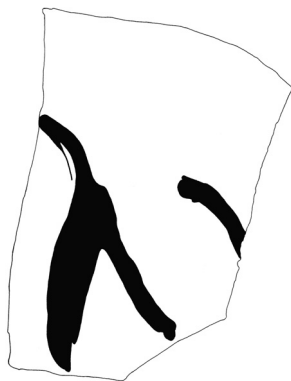
⁴³ Notably, Tell Atrib excavations yielded four more Spanish amphorae, recognized through their stamped handles; see SZTETYLLO, *Pottery Stamps*, pp. 146–147, Nos 242, 243, 245, 246.

⁴⁴ Cf. J. KRAMER, *Die Bedeutung von σπανέλαιον*, *ZPE* 81, 1990, pp. 261–264. The author expresses doubts as to the provenance of the ‘Spanish oil’ from Spain but sees in it an oil of Spanish art. The occurrence of Spanish oil amphorae in Egypt shows that his reservations were unfounded.

15. No number of finds inventory; pottery inventory: TA91/A64. Found in the 1991 season in sectors PP-CC. Neck with a part of the shoulder of an amphora made of marl clay. Amphora type unknown. Dimensions not recorded. Inscription painted red on the neck. Dimensions of the inscription: H. 4cm, W. 8.6cm. Letters carefully written using a relatively thick kalamos or a brush. Date unknown, probably Roman Imperial period.

μς

The inscription undoubtedly gives the number 46. For possible interpretations, see commentary to No. 9.



16. No inventory number. Discovered in the 1990 season in unknown circumstances. Body sherd of an amphora glued of two pieces. H. 17cm, W. 11.5cm. Inscription painted red across the ribbing. H. of the letter *lambda*: 11.8cm. Date unknown, probably Roman Imperial period.

λδ

This is undoubtedly the numeral 34. For a possible interpretation, see commentary to No. 9.

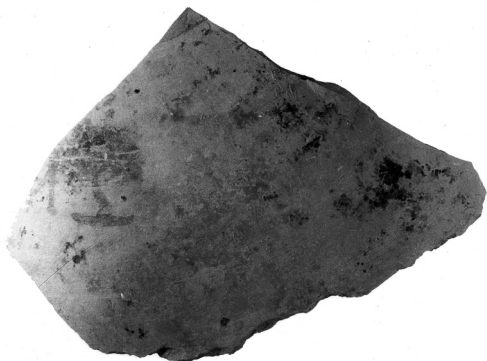
17. TA93/17p. Found in the 1993 season in sector C1C1C1, 1.20cm below the ground level. Fragment of the shoulder of an amphora of an unidentified type, dimensions: H. 16cm, W. 19.5cm. Inscription executed in red paint. Dimensions of the inscription: H. 3.2cm, W. 5.8cm. Upright majuscules. Date unknown, probably Roman Imperial period.

μ•ξ

It is possible that the inscription is incomplete on the left-hand side.

The interpretation of the inscription is difficult. Three possibilities come to mind:

1) We are dealing with two abbreviated words: μ() ξ(). Such an inscription may have referred to the owner of the amphora or to its contents. The problem with this reading is that its informative value would have been negligible and that it would be against Greek

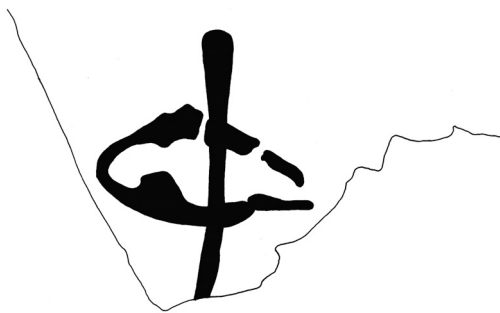


epigraphic practice, which, in contrast to the Latin tradition, rarely made use of acronymic abbreviations.

2) We are dealing with two numerals: μ' , ξ' , i.e. 40, 60. One of these two numbers may have been the capacity of the amphora, the other one its number within a shipment. It is rather improbable that the two numerals represent fractions: i.e. $1/40$, $1/60$, since the use of fractions would be difficult to explain in this context.

3) One letter represents an abbreviated word and the other a numeral. Tentatively one can suggest the reading: μ' ξ (έσται), '40 *xestai*', i.e. c. 19 litres.

The third possibility seems the most plausible to us.



18. No inventory number. Discovered in the 1990 season in unknown circumstances. Sherd of an amphora. No dimensions recorded. Inscription in red paint. H. 7.3cm. Date unknown, most probably Roman Imperial period.

φ

The painted letter φ standing alone is frequently found on amphorae discovered in Tanais on the northern shore of the Black Sea. The catalogue of B. Böttger and D.B. Šelov lists as many as 62 dipinti of this kind, all of them occurring on the neck, both in its

upper and lower parts.⁴⁵ The authors explain this ϕ as representing the number 500. One may ask what this number referred to. For obvious reasons it could not have been an indication of capacity. It could be a transport note, but a shipment consisting of as many as 500 amphorae is also difficult to imagine. The scarcity of dipinti with ρ (= 100), σ (= 200), τ (= 300), υ (= 400) also speaks against interpreting ϕ as a numeral. This inclines us to think that ϕ is an abbreviated word referring to the contents of the amphora or to its owner. This holds true for both the Tanais dipinti and for the inscribed sherd in question.

In addition to the objects published above, the Tell Atrib excavations yielded a number of amphora sherds with traces of red paint that did not produce a certain reading. The amphorae can be dated to the Roman Imperial and Late-Antique period, and include, among others, several examples of Cypro-Cilician LRA1. Taken as whole, this material, even if not very rich, is interesting as it sheds light on commercial contacts of a Lower Egyptian town in the period under consideration with the southern Iberian Peninsula (Baetica), Southern Italy (Apulia), the Aegean region, and the northeastern Mediterranean. It provides information about the kinds of products transported to Athribis from abroad, including wine, olive oil (or olives), salted fish and/or pickles. It testifies to the wealth and significance of this city, which was one of the most important nome capitals in Lower Egypt⁴⁶ situated not very far from Alexandria. We can only regret that external factors have forced archaeologists to abandon this rich and important site.

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⁴⁵ B. BÖTTGER, D.B. ŠELOV, *Amphorendipinti aus Tanais, Pontus Septentrionalis I, Tanais I*, Moscow 1998, p. 95.

⁴⁶ According to Ammianus Marcellinus (XXII 16.6), Athribis was among the most important cities of the Delta in the fourth century AD.