Three Coptic Potsherds from the Cairo Museum

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Abstract: This paper presents three Coptic potsherds kept in the Cairo Egyptian Museum - as part of a collection of Coptic ostraca bearing the special registration number 18953.

The first ostracon represents a private letter, the sender’s name is missing here suggested to be Joseph and the recipient seems to be a monk his name is Mosses; this letter was sent concerning giving dates to a shepherd called Anaias.

The second and the third ostraca are parts from agreement for repayment a loan and perhaps they represent one text.

In the second potsherd, the names of debtor and creditor are missing in the text, the loan was one (or more) of golden coin called Tremis. The repayment will be in something lost in the text perhaps money or cereals. The repayment will be with interest.

The third potsherd represents the assent formula of an agreement for repayment a loan (perhaps represents the end of the last text), it represents the signature of the debtor who is a deacon and called Pashtosh.

Key Words: Ostraca, potsherd, Coptic, Tremis, shepherd, monk , deacon.

ثلاثة قطع فخار من المتحف المصري

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الملخص: يقدّم هذا البحث نشر ثلاثة أوستراكاً عبارة عن قطع فخارية ذات لون بنو وأحمر مكتوبية بالقبطية.

و مواضيعها كالتالي:

القطعة الأولى: تتمثل خطاب شخصي مرسى إلى راهب (؟) يدعى موسى بشأن استلام المرسل لنشيء ما مفقود في النص (يقترح إنه بلح) تم إعطاؤه أو دفعه إلى راعي الخراف المسنى أدابيآ.

القطعة الثانية: تمتثل جزء من اتفاقية سداد الدين، وأسماء كل من الدائن والمدين مفقودتين ومتبقي اسم والد المدين يسمى باني؛ والدين هذا هو العيلة الذهبية تريمسون ويتبين من النص أن السداد كان سيتم مع دفع قائدة.

القطعة الثالثة: تمتثل نهاية اتفاقية سداد دين بها صيغة موافقة المدين على ما كتب بالاتفاقية. ويظهر توقيعه مع ذكر اسمه ولفظه ويتضح أنها تمثل نسخ النص المكتوب على القطعة الثانية والمدين هذا يسمى باشتوش وهو شماس هنا.

ويقترح تاريخ النصوص من القرن السادس إلى الثامن الميلادي.

الكلمات الدالة: أوستراكا، قطع فخارية، القبطية، تريمسيون، راعي الخراف، راهب، شماس.
Three Coptic Potsherds from the Cairo Museum

This paper presents three unpublished Coptic ostraca written on potsherds kept in the Cairo Egyptian Museum - as part of a collection of Coptic ostraca, lacking any information about its provenance(s) or date(s) and bearing the special registration number 18953.

The first ostracon represents a private letter, while the second and the third ostraca are parts from an agreement for repayment a loan and perhaps they represent one text. It is remarkable that the Copts preferred to write the private and administrative letters on potsherds while they prefer limestone chips in writing the ecclesiastical letters. As for the contracts and agreements, they preferred to write it on potsherds because the pottery absorbs the ink so it became difficult to be erased and falsified.

The 1st Ostracon

*SR no.:* 18953

*Inventory no.:* 98

*Dimensions:* height 6 x 4 width cm.

*Excavator:* Unknown

*Provenance:* Unknown.

*Date:* Unknown, suggested being from the 6th-8th century AD.

*Description:* The text is written in black ink on the outer part, remaining with about 8 lines. The writing is clear. The beginning and the end of the text is both missing.

*Dialect:* Sahidic (indicated by super linear strokes and the trema).

*Content:* A part from a letter, probably a private one. The sender’s name is mostly missing, and the recipient seems to be a monk his name is *Moses*. The letter’s subject concerns giving dates to a shepherd called Anaias.

The text:

**Recto**


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1. سهير أحمد، جوانب من الحياة اليومية للأقباط من النصوص والأثار الفطيشية (القاهرة: 2017), 90.
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5. ἐπιλαμ[ςήπη∩∩-
6. ἰς ἴαὶ λί[ίτούγ]
7. ἰτακταλμ[ν]
8. πηλίς[οού]
9.[χ]ηλας[

Translation:
1. [I Jose-
2. φη[ he writes (and) greets]
3.my[ brother Mo-
4. ses [
5. whereas [he brought the dates?]  
6. to me, I to[okit]
7. until you give/pay it[to]
8. the pastor of [sheep]
9. Anias

Comment:
Line 1:φ: A part from a personal name suggested being ωχιλχ "Joseph".
Line 5:ίς is suggested to be the noun ῶίς "dates" which is written in this form in Sahidic, Akhmimic and Sub-Akhmimic dialects.2
Line 7: ἰτακταλμ: According to the context, it represents ἰτο-clause, whereas ἰτα-means here "to, so as to, until", it is mentioned in many Coptic loan formulas as: † ὅ ἴζετονιο[ν] ἰτακταλμ ἴακ "I am ready to give/pay it to you".3
Line 8:πηλίςε[οού]: Means the pastor of sheep or the shepherd later became ως.4
Line 9: ηλας: A proper name5 from Hebrew, perhaps a short form of ηλας, Ar. حنانا.

2 CD, 40a-b.
3 The example from: OMH, no., 60.
5 Monika Hasitzka, Namen in Koptischen Dokumentarischen Texten, Part I (Wien: Österreichischen National bibliothek Papyrussammlung und Papyrusmuseum, 2006), 10 (PDF-book)
The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Ostracon

\textit{SR no.:} 18953  
\textit{Inventory no.:} 42  
\textit{Dimensions:} height 6 x 5.6 width cm.  
\textit{Excavator:} Unknown  
\textit{Provenance:} Unknown  
\textit{Date:} Unknown, suggested being from the $6^{\text{th}}$-$8^{\text{th}}$ century AD.  
\textit{Description:} Parts from five regular lines written in black ink on the outer side of a red potsherd. The writing is clear, with lacunas on both right and left sides and at the end of the text.  
\textit{Dialect:} seems to be Sahidic with other influences.  
\textit{Content:} A part from a promise for repayment a loan. Names of the debtor and the creditor are missing in the text, only the father's name of the debtor remains. The loan was one or more of a golden coin called \textit{Tremision}. The repayment was to be in something lost in the text, perhaps money or cereals, plus interest.

\textbf{Text:}

\textbf{Recto}

1. [\textit{άνοκ NN}]\textit{ή παμέ εύ[\textit{σαμ NN NN NN]}
2. [\textit{τρεστει ηακ\.}]\textit{τρινςιον [\textit{πνουρ]}
3. [\textit{πνογ} [\textit{πνογτε} \textit{ινογχον [-ππ\.]}
4. [\textit{πρητοι} \textit{ινοι ετ[\textit{ρ]}[\textit{ιδ[\textit{ων}]}
5. [\textit{πακ} \textit{π\textit{ιτ}[-\textit{ιν\textit{σθε}]}]}]
Translation:
1. [INN son of] "Pane" he [writes to NN son of NN]
2. [I owe you (number/one)] tremis [of gold]
3. [by God willing] in the 20th [of (month –name)]
4. [I pre]pare to repay(something)]
5. [to you] with it[s interest]

Comment:
Line 1: Generally, the usual opening formula of the agreements for repayment loans consists of:
The names of both debtor and creditor, as:
\( \Delta \text{επα} \ Τ\text{ελ}/\text{επο}/\text{ε不可思议} \ Σ\text{B} \), sometimes also written are:
The names of their fathers, or the address of both (or of the creditor only), or adding sometimes the date\(^1\).
\( \text{Ν ΠΑΝΕ} \): It is remarkable that \( \text{Ν} \) was not assimilated to \( \text{Ν} \) before \( \text{Ν} \) which may refers to ME dialect and this matter never happened in Thebes\(^2\).
\( \text{ΠΑΝΕ} \) is a proper name\(^3\).
Line 2: \( \text{ΤΡΙΠΗΚΣΙΟΝ} \): A golden coin, its weight is 1.5 gm. And it is 1/3 the \( \text{holkottinos} (=\text{solidus}) \)^4.
Line 3: it represents the date of repayment which is usually written in one of several forms:
1. \( \text{ΝΙ}-(\text{ΙΠΕΡΟΣ}) \) month name.
2. \( \text{ΝΙ}-\text{month name} \)-number.
3. \( \text{ΝΙ}-\text{month name (number)} \)-indiction.
4. \( \text{ΝΙ}-\text{monthname} \)-under NN (son of NN) the \( \text{lashane} \).
5. \( \text{ΝΙ}-\text{COY-number-month name (under NN the lashane)} \).
6. \( \text{ΝΙ}-\text{month name} \)-number (referring to indiction year).\(^5\)

Line 4 and 5: the formula of repayment:
\( [\text{ν ΤΩΛΕΤΟΙ} \text{ΟCC} \text{ΕΤ[R]}\] & [\text{ν something ΗΑΚ} \text{ΠΗΕΩΨΗΗΕΓ}] \)^6

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\(^1\) Kopt.Ostraka I, 42
\(^2\) Bal. I, 99-100
\(^3\) Hasitzka, Monika, Namen, part II, 15.
\(^4\) WB, 820
\(^5\) OMH, no. 50-52, 56,59,60, 61,65
\(^6\) CE: OMH, no. 60.
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ψΗΗΟΕ “usury, interest” from ms “grain received as interest” In Demotic mst means “interest” replaced by οψΗ many times.  

The 3rd Ostracon

SR no.: 18953
Inventory no.: 76
Dimensions: height 4 x7.5 width cm.
Excavator: Unknown
Provenance: Unknown
Date: Unknown, suggested being from the 6th-8th century AD.
Description: The text now comprises parts of two regular lines written in black ink on the inner side of a red potsherd. The script is clear with lacunas on both lift and top sides of the text.
Dialect: Difficult to be determined, the text being too short.
Content: Assent formula of a loan-repayment agreement (representing perhaps part of the last text). It consists of the signature of the debtor who is a deacon called Pashtosh. This formula is usually followed by the signatures of the scribe and witnesses.

The text:

Verso
1. [ΛΗΟΚ ΠΑΙΚΚ, ΠΑΩΤΩ]
2. [ΚΣΤΟΙΧΩΣ ΦΣΩΑΧΘ]

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1 CED, 90.
Translation:
1. [I the] deacon Pashtosh
2. [I assent to] this sherd+

Comment:
Line 1: πλιακη: An abbreviation for πλιακον "the deacon" common in the 7/8th centuries AD.¹
πλιακων: A Coptic personal name common as πλιακων.²
Line 2: βαχε in Sahidic and Akhmimic dialects, it means lit. "Pottery, potsherd"³, here it refers to the agreement. A ligature is between ε and the cross.

Results:
- Using the dates in paying the hires and repayment the loans.
- The debtor in Coptic texts can owe golden coins like solidus and Tremis.
- The repayment of loans can be with or without interest.
- The promise of repayment a loan was closing with the assent formula (as a signature of debtor) then the signature of scribe then the signature of witnesses.

¹ WB, 181-182.
² Hasitzka, Monika, Namen, part 2, 19.
³ CD, 38b
Bibliography:

1- Lexicons:

2- References:
- Hasitzka, Namen in Koptischen Dokumentarischen Texten, Parts I- II (Wien: Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek Papyrussammlung und Papyrasmus, 2006), (PDF-book)