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AN OSIRIS “COOL WATER” INSCRIPTION FROM ALEXANDRIA

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## An Osiris “Cool Water” Inscription from Alexandria

The text to be discussed below was recently found at the excavation site of Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria where the Polish Archaeological Mission had discovered a complex of Roman baths and an auditorium.

The object under discussion came from the room F 5 in the “living quarter” adjacent to the area of the baths.<sup>1</sup> It was found among many marble fragments re-used in the Byzantine period as pavement of the floor of the room. The inscribed object is a small and thin marble slab, which was found broken into several pieces with the lower right portion missing. It is 19,6 cm wide, 25,6 cm high and 2 cm thick.

The text reads as follows:

Εὐψύχει Ἰσίδω-  
ρε ἐτῶν κῆ  
δοῖ σοι ὁ Ὀσ[ει-]  
ρις τὸ [ψυχρόν]  
[ὔδωρ]

1 Εὐψύχει      3 δοῖ for δοίη (cf. LSJ)

«Farewell Isidoros, 28 years old. May Osiris give you cool water.»

The inscription may tentatively be dated to the late II<sup>nd</sup> or early III<sup>rd</sup> century A. D.

The inscription is to be added to the few known parallel texts containing the Osiris “cool water” formula. A list of similar texts is given by Robert A. Wild.<sup>2</sup> As far as both contents and the external form of the funerary monument are concerned, the closest parallel known to the present writer is an object stored in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria. It was published by Botti.<sup>3</sup> The position of the last word in Botti's text explains why [ὔδωρ] in our inscription was situated not at the beginning of line 5 but in the lost portion, below [ψυχρόν].

According to the statement by Wild<sup>4</sup> six of twelve Osiris “Cool Water” inscriptions known to him came from Egypt, and five of the Egyptian texts were found in Alexandria or its environs.

<sup>1</sup> For the description and illustration of the room F 5 see M. Rodziewicz, *Alexandrie III. Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie à la lumière des fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka*, Varsovie 1984, p. 157, fig. 181. According to M. Rodziewicz «la construction des salles F 4 et F 5 doit remonter à la première moitié du V<sup>e</sup> siècle de n. è.».

<sup>2</sup> R. A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis*, Leiden 1981 (EPRO 87), p. 248-249.

<sup>3</sup> G. Botti, *Catalogue des monuments exposés au Musée Gréco-Romain d'Alexandrie*, Alexandrie 1900, no. 84a, p. 274-275.

<sup>4</sup> Wild, *op. cit.*, p. 123 and 248.

A connection between the text and the Sarapis religion is beyond any doubt. Botti called the expression  $\delta\omicron\iota\ \sigma\omicron\iota\ \delta\omicron\ \text{᾽}\text{Οσειρις}\ \tau\omicron\ \psi\upsilon\chi\rho\omicron\nu\ \acute{\upsilon}\delta\omega\rho$  “la formule des Sérapistes”,<sup>5</sup> and a variant  $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}\ \gamma\eta\varsigma\ \delta\omega\kappa\epsilon\nu\ \psi\upsilon\chi\rho\omicron\nu\ \text{᾽}\text{Οσειρις}\ \acute{\upsilon}\delta\omega\rho$  “la deuxième formule des Sérapistes”.<sup>6</sup>

A discussion of the cultic context including chiefly the problem of the Osiris Hydreios statues can be found in Wild's work.<sup>7</sup> The problem of “cool water” in the underworld was also discussed by earlier authors.<sup>8</sup> That the “cool water” formula derives from some ancient Egyptian sources may be taken for granted although Wild knows of no direct parallel to confirm it. Also the influence of the ancient Egyptian concept upon the Greek texts which do not mention any Egyptian deity<sup>9</sup> is very probable.

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<sup>5</sup> Botti, op. cit., no 84 a, p. 274-275.

<sup>6</sup> Botti, op. cit., no 85 a, p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> Wild, op. cit., p. 123-126.

<sup>8</sup> A. Parrot, Le “refrigerium” dans l'au-delà, RHR 115, 1937, pp. 85-86; Martin P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (II), München 1950, p. 225ff. (237-238 in the 2nd edition).

<sup>9</sup> E. g. IG XIV 638 = O. Kern, *Orphicorum fragmenta*, Berlin 1922, no. 32 a, pp. 104-105 = G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata graeca*, Berlin 1878, no. 1037 (the Petelia inscription). The importance of calling the guardians of the source by their names reminds the gist of the Egyptian funerary texts.