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A TYCHAION AT THE MONS CLAUDIANUS

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A Tychaion at the Mons Claudianus

The little letter published below is part of the ostracon collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.¹ The findspot is unknown; Thebes would be a reasonable guess. If I understand the text correctly, though, it was written at the Mons Claudianus and the chief information it provides concerns that place.²

The first two lines are partly effaced, but the most interesting feature is certain: if we correct some minor errors of spelling, the author writes that he is making a προσκύνημα παρὰ τῆ τύχη τοῦ Κλαυδιανοῦ καὶ τοῖς συννάοις θεοῖς (lines 2-5). This is unique in several respects: neither the τύχη τοῦ Κλαυδιανοῦ nor a τύχη with σύνναοι θεοί, nor a προσκύνημα by a τύχη appear to be elsewhere attested.³

In the great majority of papyrological passages τύχη refers to the *genius* of a Roman emperor. That cannot be the case here because there was no emperor named Claudianus.⁴ The likelihood that the τύχη of some otherwise unknown person who had no imperial claims was worshipped in Roman Egypt is virtually nil.⁵

¹ For some other ostraca from the collection see ZPE 80 (1990), 221-238. As before, I owe the opportunity to study this piece and publish it here to the courtesy of Dr. David Gill.

² See above all Michael J. Klein, *Untersuchungen zu den kaiserlichen Steinbrüchen an Mons Porphyrites und Mons Claudianus in der östlichen Wüste Ägyptens* (Diss. Bonn 1988). To the bibliography there add now Adam Bülow-Jacobsen, "Mons Claudianus: Roman Granite-Quarry and Station on the Road to the Red Sea", *Acta Hyperborea* 1 (1988) 159-165; J. Bingen, "Première campagne de fouilles au Mons Claudianus: rapport préliminaire", *BIFAO* 87 (1987) 45-50 with "Annexe" 50-52 by S. Mortensen.

³ None are listed in Giulia Ronchi, *Lexicon Theonymon* (Milan, 1974) s.vv. τύχη and σύνναοι θεοί or by G. Geraci, "Ricerche sul Proskynema", *Aegyptus* 51 (1971) 3-211. I have not found any in later publications.

⁴ It might be objected that the writer could have misunderstood the name of the ruler, or that he could mean some rebel who was temporarily successful in the region in which the text was written, but otherwise unknown to us. Both these possibilities strike me as being extremely improbable on general grounds. There are also some points of detail which speak against them: (a) An emperor whose τύχη is worshipped should still be alive (only one exception, poetic and not altogether certain, P.Giss. I 3.6). The hand of this ostracon is indeed clumsy, but one would most naturally date it from about the end of the 1st to the mid-2nd century, too late for Claudius I and too early for Claudius II (for the chronology of the latter see P.Oxy. XL pp. 15ff.). (b) If the formulae used for oaths can be applied in this context, the word order would be wrong; one would expect τῆ τοῦ δείνου τύχη, see the list in E.Seidl, *Der Eid im römisch-ägyptischen Provinzialrecht I* (*Münch.Beitr.* 17, 1933) 10-17. The name of the ruler does not start to follow the word τύχη till the more complicated oaths of the 4th century (*op. cit.* Bd. II, *MB* 24, 1935, 5-12; K.A. Worp; *ZPE* 45, 1982, 199ff.). Still, cf. O.Str. 776, cited in note 5. (c) No προσκυνήματα to any emperor or to the τύχη of any emperor are known.

⁵ I suppose the possibility that our Claudianus is an unknown parallel to Antinous (by whom there are no προσκυνήματα) can be dismissed out of hand. O.Str. 776 should be mentioned, however: in it a man somehow connected with the Mons Porphyrites acknowledges receipt of a trivial loan and concludes ὀμνύων δὲ τὴν τύχην τοῦ προεστῶτος ἡμῶν Πτολεμίου (10-12). Photographs kindly provided by Professor Schwartz confirm that the transcript (with BL III 207) is sound. The hand probably belongs to the 2nd cent. AD. The drafting of the text itself, though, is faulty: at the very least, the date by which the loan was to be returned has fallen out before τοῦ εισιόντος μηνός in l. 8; and I do not see the point or the grammatical connection of the oath (oaths are not part of other

So far as I can see, the only remaining possibility is that Κλαυδιανοῦ refers not to an individual but to a place. In that case the nominative is Κλαυδιανόν, not Κλαυδιανός, and the τύχη meant is that of the Mons Claudianus. The same Greek form is used in OGIS 678 = IGRR 1255 = *Pan du desert* 42.6.

References to the τύχαι of places are extremely rare in Egypt, but the τύχη τῶν ὄδε (Silsileh) occurs in SB I 4071 and there is a dedication to Isis as Τύχη Κοπτεϊτῶν in SB V 7791. Outside of Egypt they are more common, and the related if not identical *genius* and *fortuna* are also connected with peoples and places.⁶ A *genius montis* in CIL VIII 9180 from Mauretania Caesariensis would seem particularly relevant; but the making of προσκυνήματα was so very Egyptian (cf. Geraci, *op. cit.*) that sources outside the country must be used with caution.

This τύχη had a temple. The προσκύνημα alone does not prove it, as there are also προσκυνήματα at the Sphynx and on cave walls (e.g. *Pan* no. 66); but the τύχη τοῦ Κλαυδιανοῦ had σύνναοι θεοί, and that implies a ναός. There is some chance that this can be identified among the ruins of the site.

Concerning religion at the Mons Claudianus it was previously known that there was a Serapeion on a hill above the camp,⁷ and a much smaller temple within the camp itself.⁸ The larger temple, the Serapeion, was dedicated to Διὶ Ἡλίῳι μεγάλῳι Σεράπιδι καὶ τοῖς σύνναοῖς θεοῖς (*Pan* 42.3). The σύνναοι are unknown. On general grounds one would expect Isis (who was sometimes identified with τύχη), Anubis, Harpocrates. It is perhaps not impossible that our τύχη was among them, either independently or in the guise of Isis. But in that case the writer of the ostrakon would have relegated the chief god of the temple to the status of σύνναος, and that does not seem very likely. The natural implication of the text is rather that τύχη had a separate temple of her own; and if that is correct this can only have been the smaller temple within the camp, or a third building that has not yet been located. New discoveries may decide the matter.⁹

Ironically, since the finds of ostraca at the Mons Claudianus are the largest yet made,¹⁰ this would appear to be the only letter known which is reasonably sure to have been written there.¹¹ The addressee was a Roman soldier (lines 9-10) and the writer may have been one as well.

instruments of loan and are hardly found in private contracts at all, see Seidl I 114ff.). The text has yet to be explained. Could it have been meant humorously? However that may be, a τύχη by which one may swear is still not parallel to one which is worshipped together with σύνναοι θεοί, as in the Fitzwilliam ostrakon.

⁶ See for example Roscher, *Ausf. Lexikon* V 1332-34 (τύχη πόλεως); I (2) 1620.23 (genii); I. Kajanto, ANRW II 17.1 (1981) 514-515 (*fortuna locorum*).

⁷ No. 22, pp. 1793-1797, in R.A. Wild, "Isis-Sarapis Sanctuaries of the Roman Period", ANRW II 17.4 pp. 1739ff. with the bibliography there cited.

⁸ There is a plan of the camp in T. Kraus, J. Röder and W. Müller-Wiener, "Mons Claudianus - Mons Porphyrites. Bericht über die zweite Forschungsreise 1964", *MDAIK* 22 (1967) 114-205 facing p. 114, reproduced in Bülow-Jacobsen p. 162. For the small temple alone *MDAIK* 22 pp. 124-25 with Abb. 4.

⁹ Bülow-Jacobsen writes me that no mention of the τύχη τοῦ Κλαυδιανοῦ has yet appeared in material discovered at the site (letter of 12.10.89).

¹⁰ Bülow-Jacobsen *op. cit.*; cf. also his report at the Papyrological Congress in Cairo.

¹¹ P.Giss. 69 may be another, see J.T. Peña, "*P.Giss.* 69: evidence for the supplying of stone transport operations in Roman Egypt and the production of fifty-foot monolithic column shafts", *Journal of Roman Archeology* 2 (1989) 126-132.

Inv. No. GR. P. 528
Thebes (?)

12.5 x 10 cm

2nd cent. AD (?)
Tafel XIa

1 Λ ἐρ φ τῷ ἀδελ-
2 φῷ πλεῖστα χαίρειν καὶ τοῦ προσ-
3 κύνημά σου πυῶ παρὰ τῆ
4 τύχῃ τοῦ Κλαυδιανοῦ
5 καὶ τοῖς συννάοις θεοῖς.
6 κομίση ἀπὸ Τηκόσης
7 τημάχιν ἄ. ἀσπ(ά)ζω σ'-
8 με τὸς σοστρατιώ-
9 τῆς. γράψον μου
10 περὶ τῆς (σ)ω-
11 τιρείας σου.

«NN to NN, very many greetings. I am placing your name in the presence of the fortune of Mt. Claudian and the associated gods. Receive 1 slice of salt fish from Tekosa. I greet the fellow soldiers. Write me about your health.»

The writer has made so many spelling mistakes that I give here a coherent text of lines 2ff.: τὸ προσκύνημά σου ποιῶ παρὰ τῆ τύχῃ τοῦ Κλαυδιανοῦ καὶ τοῖς συννάοις θεοῖς. κομίση ἀπὸ Τεκουσύης τεμάχιον ἄ. ἀσπάζομαι τοὺς συστρατιώτας. γράψον μοι περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας σου.

1 The dative name does not appear to be Ἀτερίφ.

2-3 τὸ προσκύνημά σου πυῶ: this phrase is usually rendered 'I do obeisance for you' or something of the sort. Geraci has shown that "ἡ προσκύνημα non era l'atto di adorazione ... ma il sostituto epigrafico della presenza adoranti davanti al dio" (*op. cit.* p. 18). If the phrase here can be taken as more than simple politeness one would most readily suppose that the writer scratched his friend's name on a wall of the temple; for other possibilities cf. Geraci 163ff.

6 κομίση: this seems to be an exception to the rule that "the use of the jussive subjunctive is confined to verbs referring to the execution of work" (Mandilaras, *The Verb* § 557); or read κόμισαι.

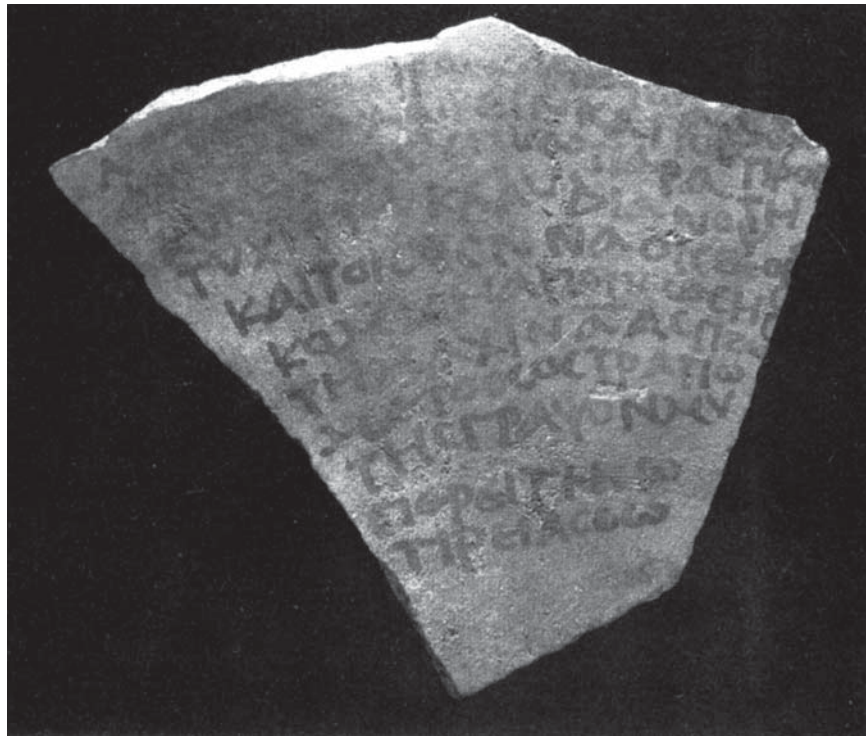
Τηκόσης: not in this spelling in the NB or OnAlt, but cf. Τεκουῦσα, Τεκῶς etc. For ἀπὸ instead of παρὰ before the name of a person cf. e.g. SB VI 9017 no. 12.5,8,14; no. 14.4; O.Florida 4.7; P. Oxy. XLVII 3356.30; XLIX 3506.29; LV 3808.20.

7 τημάχιν ἄ: cf. SB VI 9017 no. 12.4ff: ἐκομισάμην ἀπὸ Μαξίμου τοῦ ἱππέος τεμάχια η. Further SB VI 9165.5 (another ostrakon of the Roman period from the Red Sea region) and 9249.10. SB III 6721.5 = PCZ I 82.10 has τέμαχος. τεμαχίτης in the WB, referring to P.Flor. III 388.26, is a probably false expansion of the text τεμαχ(). A seller of τεμάχη could be mentioned in ÜUG I 24 i 14, see note there.

8-9 τὸς σοστρατιώτης (l. τὸς συστρατιώτας): does this imply that the writer was a soldier, or only that the receiver was one? I have found only one clear instance in which a writer not himself in the army sends greetings to fellow soldiers, a wife to her husband in P.Grenf. I 53 = Ghedini 29 = Naldini 56.6; but she adds σου after the word.

Trier

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a) Privatbrief (O.Fitzwilliam Museum Inv. GR.P. 528)