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TWO OSTRACA WITH THE NICENO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED
IN THE ISRAEL MUSEUM

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TWO OSTRACA WITH THE NICENO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED
IN THE ISRAEL MUSEUM¹
(Taf. VIII)

Ostrakon no. 1.
Provenance unknown (Egypt?)

Museum no. 69 74 312
Date : VI -VII ?

In the year 1969 Mr. Walter Herz donated to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem various items of graphic art and archaeological finds. The archaeological items are now in the store-rooms of the Department of Classical Archaeology of the Museum; they include an ostrakon that has the entire Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed written on its two sides. At some stage (most probably before the gift was sent to Jerusalem) the sherd was read by Mr. Skeat of the Department of Greek Mss. of the British Museum, who identified the text and suggested that this was a school-exercise, datable to the 6th or perhaps 7th century.

The ostrakon is of irregular size, roughly pentagonal in shape. It measures ca. 19,5 cm across its upper border and ca. 10,75 cm across the opposite lower rim; the height is ca. 15 cm along the right edge (which slants slightly towards the right as it rises); at the left, the rise is in two parts, the lower measuring ca. 14 cm and the higher ca. 5,1 cm respectively; the angle between these two sections is ca. 135° ("left edge" and "right edge" refer here to the convex side of the ostrakon, i.e. the outer side of the jar - the "recto" of the text). This must have been the original size and shape of the sherd when it was written on, as the lines of the text cover the entire surface on both sides from beginning to end; only at the upper rim and the lower half of the left side has some of the material crumbled off, resulting in the loss of some letters. The sherd was broken vertically into three pieces at some stage - apparently at a rather recent date - and then glued together again very carefully so that no letters were lost at the breaks (s. Taf. VIII). Horizontal lines beneath and in l. 2 and l. 5 of the text on the convex side of the ostrakon are ornamental grooves of the original jar. The letters are written in black ink on the greyish clay of the potsherd. The writing is fluent and gives the impression of a practised hand. The fact that the entire text was fitted onto this very irregularly shaped sherd is another indication that the writer was well versed in writing. The height of the letters is ca. 5 mm between the lines; letters extending above and/or below the lines are larger, of course; these are: Γ, K, Z, Ξ, P and sometimes Δ and T; T has *apices* here and there; O and Ω are sometimes elevated and smaller; O and Θ are generally drop-shaped; there are a few dashes above vowels (long as well as short ones). The writing slants slightly towards the right. The letters are clear, well distinguished (with ligatures after Γ only); they seem to be of the late Byzantine period (6th or early 7th century) and are somewhat similar in shape and general appearance to Coptic writing of this period.²

The text written on the ostrakon under discussion here is that of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed ("C") which is preserved in the minutes (*acta*) of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE).³ "C" is the authoritative creed in East and West alike; it is used in the service of the Mass since the 6th century.⁴ It differs from the Nicene creed in several details in the first and in the second article; but the main difference appears in the expanded third article, which gives predications of the Holy Spirit, confesses belief in the Holy Church, in baptism for the remission of sins, in the resurrection of the dead and in the life of the world to come (ll. 24 - 35 on the verso of our ostrakon; see text below). The ostrakon discussed here has the entire Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed written on its two sides, half of it on the convex side, the other half on the concave one.

¹ I would like to express my thanks to my friend and colleague, Hannah Cotton, for her generous assistance, and to Sylvia Rosenberg, Curator of Classical Archaeology at the Israel Museum, for making it possible for me to publish these ostraca. I am also much indebted to David Wasserstein and to Roger Bagnall for very helpful comments. I alone, of course, am responsible for the mistakes which still remain.

² It is of some interest to note that among the items donated by Mr. Herz in 1969 are some, as yet unpublished, ostraca and pieces of stone with Coptic writing on them (Museum nos. 69 74 373 / 1 - 7); they seem to come from a monastery in upper Egypt; on two of them the letters resemble the letters on the present ostrakon.

³ For the exact wording of the text see: E. Schwartz: "Das Nicaenum und das Constantinopolitanum auf der Synode von Chalkedon", *ZNTW* 25, 1926, p. 49; J.N.D. Kelly: *Early Christian Creeds*, 1979³, p. 297-8. For a full documentation of all the codices etc. where the text can be found see: G.L. Dossetti *Il Simbolo di Nicea e di Costantinopoli*, 1967, 264ff.

⁴ See E. Schwartz (n. 3) p. 51: ".... da C seit dem VI. Jh. als «das Symbol» liturgisch verwandt wurde."

“C” is found also written on both sides of a wooden tablet. The tablet, dating from the 6th century and originating probably from Oxyrhynchus, is located in the collection of the Catholic University of Milan (tab.lignea Med.inv. 71.00 A) and was published in 1975 by O. Montevecchi.⁵ Half of the text is written on the recto, containing the first article (“We believe in one God ...”) and two-thirds of the second article (the Christology) up to “... and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures”. The rest of the text, i.e. the remaining third of the second article, and the whole of the third article, is written on the verso. It is interesting to note that the ostrakon discussed here has practically the same number of lines as this tablet on the recto, and that the break comes after exactly the same word: (κατὰ τὰς γρα-)φὰς on the ostrakon, (κατὰ τὰς) γραφὰς on the tablet. The text on the verso of the ostrakon takes up three lines more than the identical text on the verso of the tablet. The text on the wooden tablet is written in “verses”; in fact we find the same division there as the one that is in use until this day.⁶ The writer of the tablet was free to choose the length of his lines, whereas the writer of the ostrakon had the length of the lines dictated to him by the irregular shape of the sherd. According to Montevecchi, the tablet comes from a church and was intended for liturgical use.

Apart from these two epigraphical examples of the complete text of “C” there are a number of fragmentary remains, one of them on an ostrakon, the others on papyrus, ranging in length from about 20 words to more than half of the text:

1) O.Heid. Inv. 419, published by A. Kolb in *ZPE* 79,1989,253-7⁷ dating from the late sixth, or more probably the seventh century. The sherd has writing on the convex side only, ten fragmentary lines in all, and, according to the author, is an excerpt written as a school exercise.

2) P.Colon. inv. 684 (= van Haelst⁸ 718), published by J. Kramer in *ZPE* 1,1967,131-2, dating from the fifth century and containing remnants of 7 short lines.

3) P.Oxy. XV no.1784 (= van Haelst 719), dating from the fifth century and containing 6 long lines (ca. one third of the whole creed).

4) P.Lit.Lond. 239 (=van Haelst 938), “amulet” dating from the 6th-7th century.

5) P.Lond. Copt. 155 Fr. 2 (= van Haelst 923), published by A. Kolb in *ZPE* 79, 1989, 257-60,⁹ dating from the the late seventh or the eighth century. The tattered papyrus contains remains of 26 lines on the recto and nine more lines on the verso; it breaks off just before the end of the creed and is followed by a liturgical text under a coptic title.

6) P.Cairo Inv. 65738, published by R. Pintaudi in *ZPE* 41, 1981, 283-6,¹⁰ dating from the 6th-7th century, written on the recto only and containing 17 lines. The papyrus was, according to the editor, intended for liturgical and private use.¹¹

Diplomatic Transcript:

r ^o	1	† IC XC
	2	πιςτευομεν εις εινα Θ̄Ν̄ πατερα παντωγρατωρα
	3	ποιητην ουρανου και {η} γης ορατων και παντων {και
	4	παντων} και αορατων και εις ενα Κ̄Ν̄ ῙΝ̄ Χ̄Ν̄ τ̄ω
	5	υιον του Θ̄Ῡ τον μονογενην τον εκ του πατρος και

⁵ “Il Simbolo costantinopolitano in una tavola lignea della collezione dell’Universita Cattolica di Milano”, *Aegyptus* 55, 1975, 58-69.

⁶ See n. 5, p. 65.

⁷ “Das Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum: Zwei neue Zeugnisse”.

⁸ Joseph van Haelst: *Catalogue des Papyrus Littéraires Juifs et Chrétiens*, Paris 1976.

⁹ See n. 7.

¹⁰ “Il Simbolo Niceno-Costantinopolitano in un papiro del Museo Egiziano del Cairo”.

¹¹ See n.10, p. 284-5.

6 νεθεντα προ παντων των αιωνων φας
 7 εκ φωτος ΘΝ̄ αληθηνον εκ ΘῩ αληθηνου γενε
 8 θεντα ου ποιηθεντα ομοουσιον τω πατρι
 9 δι ου τα παντα εγενητω τον δι ημας τῶ
 10 ΑΝΟC και δια την ημετηραν σωτηριαν
 11 κατελθοντα εκ τον ουρανων και καρ
 12 κωθεντα εκ ΠΝΑματος αγιου και Μα
 13 [ρ]ιας της παρθενου και ενανθρωπη
 14 ραντα σταυρουθεντα δε υπερ εμῶ
 15 επι Ποντιου Πιλατου και παθοντα και
 16 ταθεντα και ανασταντα τη τρι
 17 [τ]η ημερα κατα τας γρα
 18 φας
 v^o 19 εις αφεσιν † αμαρτιον
 20 και ανελθοντα εις τους ουρανους
 21 και καθιζομενος εν διξια του πατρος
 22 και παλιν ερχομενον̄^ω μετα δοξης κρι^{ει}ν̄
 23 ζωντας και νεκρους ου της βασιλιας ου
 24 κ εσται τελος και εκ τῶ ΠΝΑ τῶ αγιον
 25 τον ΚΝ̄ και ζωποιον τον εκ του πατρος
 26 εκπορευομενος τῶ συν πατρι και ΥΪΩ̄
 27 συνπροσκυνομενων και συνδοξα
 28 σωμενον · το λαλησαν · δια τῶ
 29 προφητων { . μ̄ιαν } εκ μιαν αγιαν
 30 καθολικην και αποτωλικην εκ
 31 κλησιαν · ομολογουμεν εν βαπ
 32 τιμα εις αφεσιν αμαρτιον
 33 προστωκουμεν αναστασι
 34 νεκρων και ζων τῶ με
 35 λλοντους αιωνος αμην
 36 † εις ΚC̄ μεαν πικ[τ]ιν εν βαπ
 37 τιμ[α]

1 Ἰησοῦς Χριστός 2 ἓνα, παντοκράτορα 3 ὁρατῶν τε πάντων 4 τὸν 5 μονογενῆ 5-6
 γεινηθέντα 7 ἀληθινόν, ἀληθινοῦ 7-8 γεννηθέντα 9 ἐγένετο, τοὺς 10 ἀνθρώπους, ἡμετέ-
 ραν 11 τῶν 12 πνεύματος 14 σταυρωθέντα τε, ἡμῶν 16 ταφέντα 19 εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν;
 these words are out of sequence,¹² see discussion below 21 καθεζόμενον, δεξιᾶ 22 κρίναι 23 (οὔ)
 τῆς βασιλείας 24 εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ 25 τὸ κύριον καὶ ζωοποιὸν τὸ 26 ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ 27
 συμπροσκυνούμενον 27/8 συνδοξαζόμενον 29 εἰς 30 ἀποστολικὴν 32 ἁμαρτιῶν 33 προσ-
 δοκῶμεν 34 τοῦ 34/5 μέλλοντος 36/7 εἰς κύριος μία πίστις ἐν βάπτισμα 19 εἰς ἄφεσιν
 ἁμαρτιῶν

Discussion:

The writer of this ostrakon prefixed the text of the creed (r^o l.1) with a “Christogramm” and the confession “Jesus Christ” and also put a “Christogramm” over the verso of the text (l. 19); he further-

¹² I owe this explanation to Prof. R. Bagnall

more appended the acclamation (v^o ll. 36-37) “One Lord, one faith, one baptism”;¹³ then, as he ran out of space at the end of the sherd, he continued above l. 20 (v^o l.19) “for the remission of sins”.

There are the usual spelling mistakes of the period¹⁴: Iotacism; insensibility to length of vowels (ο-ω-ου; ε-η); exchange of consonants (δ-τ; γ-κ; θ-φ: for this last see l.16; it is probably a scribal error); interchange of sibilants (c-ζ; l. 28). In ll. 25 and 26 there is a – very understandable – error of gender.¹⁵ Final ν and c were not pronounced – this often led to loss of discrimination between nominative and accusative, see ll. 21 and 26; in l. 3 ({η} γηc) the writer apparently, for some reason, inserted the article (in the wrong case) before the noun; in l. 36 μεαν (i.e. μιαν) πιστιν stands for μία πίστις.

There are the usual abbreviations for the *nomina sacra*, besides also for ἄνθρωπος and πνεῦμα - these two have false abbreviations (see ll.10 and 12). There are two dittographies (ll.3-4; 29). On the verso (only) there are a few dots, indicating punctuation or logical pause.¹⁶

Who wrote this text, and for what purpose?

The creed was an integral part of the catechetical system of the church. In preparation for the reception into the church the would-be convert received instruction from the bishop, who recited the creed and commented upon it in the presence of the catechumens gathered around him; they, in their turn, had to learn this by no means short text by heart and then prove their knowledge of it by reciting it in front of the bishop (“give it back to him”: *traditio et redditio symboli*)¹⁷ as part of the preparation for baptism and its promise for the remission of sins. A “rule of secrecy”¹⁸ attached to these procedures in the fourth century; the theory was that the creed was a secret formula which could not be written down but must be memorized by heart. However, from the fifth century onward the creed was put into writing for various puposes, as can be seen, *inter alia*, from the fragments mentioned above (e.g.: “school-exercise” - O.Heid. Inv. 419; “liturgical use” - P.Cairo Inv. 65738; “magical purposes”, as an amulet - P.Lit.Lond. 239). An ostracon such as the one under discussion here with the entire creed written on it would have served as an aid to the converts undergoing instruction, for committing the text to memory. The bishop might have instructed one of the monks (one of his “secretaries”?) to write out the creed and hand “copies” of it to the catechumens to facilitate the memorizing of the text. The lines added to the text on the ostracon discussed here, at the end of the creed (ll. 36-37-19), “One Lord, one faith, one baptism for the remission of sins” may have been intended as a reminder to the convert that he first had to pass the oral examination in front of the bishop; only after he had successfully proved his knowledge of the creed would he be admitted to the rite of baptism with its promise for the remission of sins. Ostraca, as the cheapest writing material and the easiest to come by, were well suited for writing out copies of the text to be learned. The experienced hand of the writer and the eye clearly practised at calculating the space needed for writing out the entire creed in a confined space show that this text was written out over and over again. This seems to support the suggestion given here for the intended use of the ostracon.

¹³ Cf. Ep. Eph. 4:5.

¹⁴ See F.T. Gignac: *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, vol. I (1976); Montevicchi (n. 6) pp. 62-4; Pintaudi (n. 10) pp. 284-5.

¹⁵ The same error occurs in O.Heid. Inv. 419, l. 9.

¹⁶ See n.10, p. 284.

¹⁷ For an account of such a procedure in Jerusalem towards the end of the fourth century, see the vivid description of Egeria - O.Prinz: *Itinerarium Egeriae (Peregrinatio Aetheriae)*, Heidelberg 1960, c. 46 (Geyer 97f.): c.46,1: ... et sedent omnes in giro prope episcopo qui baptidiandi sunt ...; c.46,2: ... similiter et de fide omnia docentur per illos dies; hoc autem cathecisis appellatur; c.46,3: ... tunc accipient simbolium; cuius simboli rationem ... exponet eis (sc. episcopus); c.46,5: ... ponitur cathedra episcopo et ibi unus et unus vadet ... et reddet simbolium episcopo. See also P.Maraval : “Égérie - Journal de Voyage (Itinéraire)”, Paris 1982.

¹⁸ *disciplina arcani* : The mysteries were not supposed to be revealed to the uninitiated; see Reallex. f. Ant. u. Christ. 667-679, s.v. “Arkandisziplin”; see also Kelly (n. 3) p. 168 and 169.

Ostracon no. 2

Museum no. 87.56.560

Provenance unknown.

Date: early 7th cty?

In the year 1987 the Israel Museum received a donation from Mr. Jonathan Rosen of New York; like the Herz gift, this one also consisted of different kinds of items.¹⁹ Among them is a badly broken pottery sherd of roughly triangular shape; it has remnants of writing on both its sides; the length of these remaining lines varies from two to ten letters (s. Taf. VIII). The right edge of the triangle is 10 cm long, the remains of the left edge 5.5 cm, the remains of the base 4.5 cm. The lower left corner (between the left edge and the base) was apparently chipped off at a stage subsequent to the breaks at the other edges (“right” edge and “left” edge refer here, too, as in the case of ostracon no.1, to the convex, or outer, side of the original jar, containing the recto of the text). The letters are written in black ink on the greyish clay; they are fainter on the convex side than on the concave one. The height of the letters is ca. 6 mm; they slant slightly towards the right. The letters are clearly distinguished from one another, the writing is fluent and evidently written by somebody well versed in writing. They seem to point to the early seventh century and show affinities with the Coptic writing of the time. Although the text is very fragmentary, the remains indicate clearly that we have here another example of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (“C”).

Diplomatic transcript :

r ^o	v ^o
1 NH	10 vacat
2 ΦOC	11 vacat (faded)
3 ΘHN	12 ΔIA
4 OYMOOY	13 CMIA
5 EΓHNHTO	14 ΛI vacat (faded)
6 KAIA	15 OΓOYMEN
7 KATEΛΘONTA	16 AΦECINA
8 APKΩΘENTA	17 OKOYM
9 PIACTHC[.]A[.]	18 PΩNKAI

Proposed reconstruction of the text:

r ^o	[τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεν-]
1	νη[θέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων,]
2	φῶς [ἐκ φωτός, Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀλη-]
3	θην[οῦ, γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα,]
4	οὔμοσού[σιον τῷ πατρὶ δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα]
5	ἐγήνητο [τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους]
6	καὶ δι[ιὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σπηρίαν]
7	κατελθόντα [ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ]
8	[c]αρκωθέντα [ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ]
9	[Μα]ρίας τῆς [π]α[ρ]θένου καὶ ἐνανθρω-]
	[πήσαντα σταυρωθέντα τε ...]
v ^o	[τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπο-]
10	[ρευόμενον, τὸ σὺν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ]

¹⁹ The gift included *inter alia* a mosaic floor inscription of the *tabula ansata* type from a Byzantine church dating from the 5th or 6th century, provenance unknown, see my “A Byzantine Mosaic Floor Inscription”, *Israel Museum Journal* XII, 1994, 75-78.

- 11 [συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδο-]
 12 [ξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλήσαν] διὰ
 13 [τῶν προφητῶν. εἰ]ς μία[ν]
 14 [ἀγίαν καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστο]λι[κὴν]
 15 [ἐκκλησίαν. ὁμολ]ογούμεν
 16 [ἐν βάπτισμα εἰς] ἄφεσιν ἄ-
 17 [μαρτιῶν. προσδ]οκοῦμ[εν]
 18 [ἀνάστασιν νεκ]ρῶν καὶ [ζω-]
 [ῆν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος]
 [ἀμήν]

2 φῶς 2-3 ἀληθινοῦ 4 ὁμοούσιον 5 ἐγένετο 17 προσδοκῶμεν

Discussion :

The few remaining lines display the same spelling mistakes as found on ostracon no. 1; iotacism and insensibility to length of vowels are in evidence (see ll. 2, 3, 4, 5, 17). As the original size and shape of the ostracon cannot be known, the length of the missing lines cannot be accurately reconstructed. It seems that there are ca. 6-7 lines missing above the remaining lines on both sides, and ca. 5 lines below l. 9 of the recto; only two lines are missing below the end of the text on the verso.²⁰

Commentary:

- I. 5 ἐγένετο The Nicene creed ("N") continues after ἐγένετο with τὰ τε ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῆ. These words do not occur in "C"; neither is there space for them on the ostracon under discussion here.
- II. 8-9 καρκωθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς ... These words are in accordance with the text of "C". The Nicene creed does not mention "from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary", but has καρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, παθόντα καὶ ἀναστάντα.²¹
- II. 12-18 These lines contain the greater part (ca. two thirds) of the expanded third article as found in "C": the belief in the Holy Church, the confession of one baptism for the remission of sins and the expectation of the resurrection of the dead.

The commentary shows that the remaining lines on this badly broken ostracon can be safely identified as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed. It seems reasonable to assume that the ostracon originally contained the entire creed, just as ostracon no. 1 and the *tabula lignea* published by Montevocchi.

If the interpretation offered here for the inscription of this creed on ostracon no. 1 is appropriate – namely, that such an ostracon served as an aid to converts undergoing instruction, to help them memorize the text – then it may be assumed that the same explanation will equally apply to ostracon no. 2. It may be hoped that further exploration, both in archaeological digs and in the storerooms of museums and similar institutions, will bring more such specimens to light.

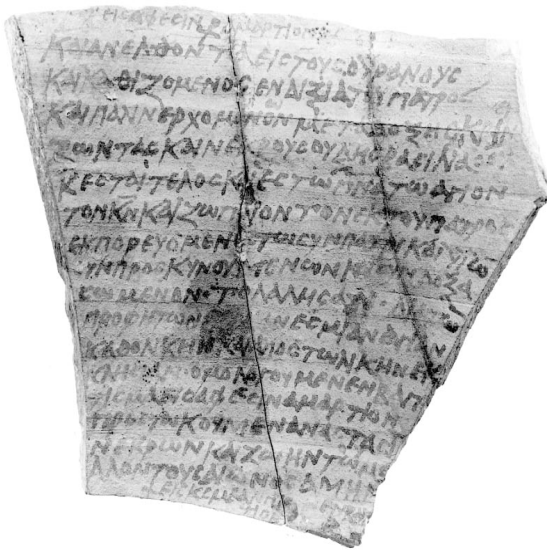
Jerusalem

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²⁰ On this basis one can estimate that the size of the ostracon with the entire text written on it would have been ca. 21 cm x 15 cm.

²¹ For l. 5 and ll. 8-9 see also Kramer, *ZPE* 1, 1967, p. 132.

TAFEL VIII



Ostrakon no. 1 (recto and verso)

Ostrakon no. 2 (recto and verso)