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TOPONOMASTIC MAL IN P. NESSANA 22 AND P. PETRA INV. 10 (PAPYRUS PETRA KHALED & SUHA SHOMAN)


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The Papyrology of the Roman and Byzantine Near East has gained a sizable increment in the recently discovered sixth-century Petra papyrus archive. It consists of carbonized Greek documentary texts that were discovered in December 1993 during the excavation of a Byzantine church in Petra conducted by Zbigniew T. Fiema for the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in Amman under the direction of Pierre Bikai.

Conservation and study of the texts has been assigned to two teams of papyrologists, one of them based at the University of Helsinki under the direction of J. Frösén, the other at the University of Michigan under the direction of L. Koenen. The opening of the rolls and the first most important stages of their conservation were carried out by the Finnish team in the course of 1994-95. Now study of the texts, which entails considerable additional conservatorial work, is proceeding. A first volume of edited documents should appear in the next years.

Closest to the Petra papyri in time and place are the sixth / seventh century Nessana papyri. Not surprisingly the new find from Petra is shedding light on obscurities in the published texts from Nessana. The following note presents just one such small example. It may also serve as a preview of an interesting and characteristic detail in Papyrus Petra Khaled & Suha Shoman (Inv. 10), a division of inherited property between three brothers which the Michigan team plans to publish in this journal in the near future.

P. Petra Inv. 10 contains a wealth of Semitic, for the most part Arabic, toponyms and names of houses and parts of houses written in Greek letters. Since Inv. 10, like all other Petra papyri, is of the sixth century, it provides valuable evidence for otherwise poorly-documented pre-Islamic Early Arabic. It is about to occupy a proud place in the history of the Arabic language. Also the Nessana papyri contain some Semitic toponyms, and in this respect the Petra and Nessana texts can shed light on or complement each other.

In P. Nessana 82. 4, a plot of land is named Malalkani. The editor suggested that this be articulated Mal al-Kani, which he explained as ‘the property of al-Kani’. He supplied no support for this, but the suggestion is entirely plausible. Aramaic and Arabic ml means ‘livestock’, ‘money’, ‘possession(s)’, ‘property’, etc. The personal name al-Kani (meaning ‘the short man’ according to the editor) may be based on kn which can denote a person with short or lame legs or arms.

Papyrus Petra Inv. 10, line 150 presented the following, at first very puzzling toponym: tÒ(pou) malamaral!aroua, ‘the place (called) Malamaralsaroua’. Thanks to the parallel from Nessana, it was...
possible to recognize the first element as being māl ‘property’. What follows then ought to be a personal name. Ḡāmār, in any case, presents no problem. It is in all likelihood common Semitic ‘Amr or ‘Amir. But the following ʿal-Cāroa is not so obvious, but an attractive possibility is that al-Sarwa is a nickname meaning ‘the generous one’ or ‘the manly one’. So the phrase should be articulated Mal ʿAmr al-Sarwa ‘the property of Amar al-Sarwa’.

With these two instances of toponyms consisting of māl + personal name, i.e. ‘property of NN’, in mind, it is possible to approach the hitherto unexplained name of a piece of property in P. Nessana 82. 11: Malzhmarxe. If the element māl is regarded as independent, remaining ʿημαρχε ought to be a personal name. However, as opposed to al-Kani and Amar al-Saroua in the two examples discussed above, Ṣημαρχε is not Semitic, but either a Greek name or a name in another European language other than Greek or Latin. Zēmarchus is relatively well attested in the sixth century, as shown by the six notable individuals bearing this name that are listed in Martindale, Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire II 1196; IIIB 1416-17. A less distinguished man of the same name is attested in P. Oxy. XVI 1903, a list of supplies of meat to foreign bucellarii, mentioning in line 9 a distribution to a Zημαρχος Bεςκος. The ethnic Bessus (see Der Kleine Pauly I 872) shows that this Zēmarchos was of Thracian stock, and indeed the name seems to be typically Thracian, whether it reflects a Thracian pronunciation of Greek Δημαρχος or has a specifically Thracian etymology.

The Greek ending of Zημαρχος has been reduced to an undeclined -e in Zημαρχε. This is natural in light of the fact that it has become part of a Semitic name-phrase. In Aramaic, for example, the Greek ending -ος can be transliterated as ʿa or s or rendered as a mere ’ or dropped altogether.

Cologne

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7 G. L. Harding, Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Names and Inscriptions (Toronto - Buffalo 1971) 316 s.n. srw.

8 D. Detschew, Die thrakischen Sprachreste (Vienna 1957) 185-188.


10 For Ἐάνοιγορος, Ἑλευκος and Θεόδωρος transcribed as ‘TNDWR, SLWQ’ and TYDWR’, see Stark, cit. (note 6), 137. For the reduction of -ος to -e and similar phenomena in the Coptic rendering of Greek personal names, see G. Heuser, Die Personennamen der Kopten (Leipzig 1929) 90.