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A POLL-TAX RECEIPT FROM EL-GEDIDA (DAKHLEH OASIS)

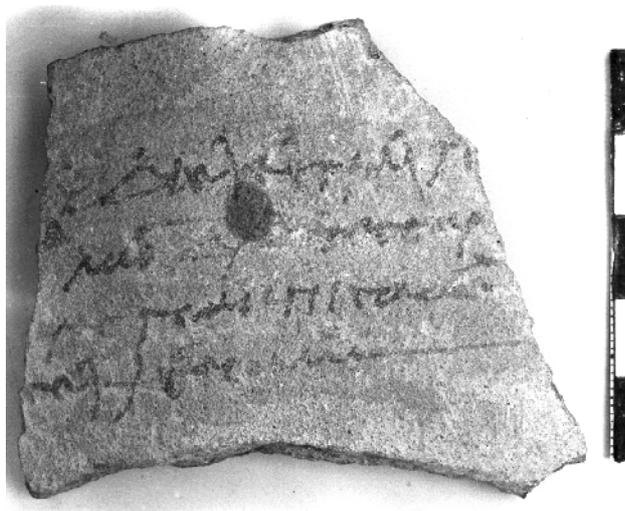
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A POLL-TAX RECEIPT FROM EL-GEDIDA (DAKHLEH OASIS)

Below we publish the text of a Greek ostrakon found on 11. xi. 1979 during excavations by the Dakhleh Oasis Project conducted by A.J. Mills near El-Gedida, a small settlement in the Western part of Dakhleh Oasis situated to the West of the Oasis capital, Mut.¹

The ostrakon's Dakhleh Oasis Project object registration number is '32/390-I6-2/2/3'; it also has a registration number 'E(gyptian) A(ntiquities) O rganisation) # 405'. It was found in the vicinity of El-Gedida in 'Area 2, fill rear South wall'. The dimensions of the ostrakon are: H. 5.2 x W. 6.7 cm. The text was written on the convex side of a pottery sherd.



- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1] ζ· διέ(γραψεν) Εὐτραπ() Π[
 2] λαογ(ραφίας) δραχ(μάς) τέσσαρ[ας?
 3] λας Παᾶπις ἀδελ(φός) [
 4] ζ· ἔ(γραψεν) Ψεναμοῦ(νις). <i>vacat</i></p> | <p>(Year <i>n</i>, Month] the 7th (or [1]7 / [2]7th ?); has
 paid Eutrap() son of P[- for year <i>n</i> - 1
 --] for poll-tax four (?) drachmas [--
 --]-- Paapis brother [--
 --]--. Psenamounis has written (this receipt).</p> |
|--|---|

1 διε) ευτρα) 2 λαογ) δραχ 3 αδελ 4]σε) ψεναμοῦ

Unfortunately the precise date of this receipt for poll-tax cannot be determined. A general dating on palaeographical grounds to the late 1st or 2nd century A.D. seems quite acceptable, the more so as the lack of the name Αὐρήλιος in the text as far as preserved seems to point to a date before the promulgation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (dated traditionally in A.D. 212).

A receipt for poll-tax from the Great Oasis is interesting in itself; this kind of text is not yet attested among the published documents from the Dakhleh Oasis. Among the ostraka found at Ismant al-Kharab (ancient Kellis) one finds a number of similar poll-tax receipts.² From these one learns, i.a., that at Kellis an amount of four drachmas was the standard amount for individuals paying the second instalment of the poll tax (the first instalment is invariably '5 dr., 1 ob. '; to date the Kellis ostraka

¹ I (= KAW) am much indebted to Prof. Mills for his encouragement to publish this text. Moreover, I am grateful to Ms. Roberta Shaw (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto) for providing me with a good photo of this ostrakon and to my colleague Roger S. Bagnall (Columbia University, New York) who read a first transcript of this text and discussed with me some problems in it. Of course, for the final outcome I alone am responsible.

² Their publication in a volume by K.A. Worp is planned for the year 2001.

feature no tax instalments numbered beyond the ‘2nd’). Assuming that one is dealing likewise in the present text probably with a payment of the second instalment of the total poll-tax amount imposed for one year, the numeral in l. 2 can be restored as τέσσαρ[ας, i.e. ‘four’; this ties in with what is known (cf. supra) about the amount paid at Kellis. But an alternative restoration, τεσσαρ[άκοντα (= ‘fourty’) is certainly also possible (especially if one reckons with a tax payment made by one individual on behalf of several tax payers owing an amount of tax money; cf. the situation in the forthcoming O.Kellis 47, a poll-tax payment of 148 dr. made by an Aurelius N.N. ‘and associates’).

The present ostrakon provides us with new evidence from the Dakhleh Oasis concerning the payment of poll-tax in this region. Moreover, the name of the tax payer (if read correctly) is not common; cf. l. 1n.

- 1 The abbreviation διέ(γραψεν) is also found in other ostraka from Kellis and elsewhere. There is a question as to what should be read after ‘διέ(γραψεν) ε-’ and before -τραπ(). In itself it is conceivable that after the ε follows a kind of ‘)’ sign, starting above line level, which can be interpreted as an abbreviation-sign or as a raised π. Because the first option does not produce anything clearly intelligible, one should consider next a reading ‘ἐπ(ι) τράπ(εζαν)’. This, however, raises problems, as there appears to be no parallel for a tax receipt starting with a formula ‘διέγραψεν ἐπὶ τράπεζαν’ to be followed later on in the text by the name of the taxpayer. To be sure, in the Kellis tax receipts on ostraka one always finds the verb διέγραψεν being followed by either the name of the taxpayer in question or the reason of the payment. Secondly, it is just possible that the scribe committed a mistake and wrote διε(ε)ε). In that case one should disregard the second ε) and one could be dealing with a taxpayer whose (abbreviated) name starts with Τραπ(). We do not know of any such personal name in the papyri. On the other hand, one can interpret the ink between ε- and -τραπ() as a slightly clumsy ypsilon (maybe resulting from correction?), producing a name Εὐτραπ-. Searching the *Duke Data Bank on Documentary Papyri* for names starting with Εὐτραπ- one finds only Εὐτράπελος and Εὐτράπιος, both attested to date in the DDBDP only once. The question is, therefore, whether one should supply here Εὐτράπ(ε)λος [cf. P.Oxy. XLIV 3197.12; cf. also the Roman *eques* Publius Volumnius nicknamed ‘Eutrapelus’ occurring in Cicero’s correspondence and orations] or Εὐτράπ(ιος) [cf. P.Prag. I 90.11 and the note ad loc.: Εὐτράπ(ιος) is only a spelling variant of Εὐτρόπιος]? It is conceivable that the father’s name should be restored as that of Παῶπις cf. below, 3n.
- 2 Due to the fact that the horizontal supralinear dash on top of λαιο has a small diagonal attachment to the lower LH side it seems preferable to read λαιογ here rather than only λαιο .
- 3 Due to the mutilated condition of the text it is not self-evident which noun ending in -]λας should be supplied at the start of this line and in what context the words Παῶπις ἀδελ(φός) = ‘Paapis, brother’ occur here. One may be dealing with an individual payment made by the brother of the first tax payer (= ‘Eutrap()’, l. 1). As such errors are common enough, it is possible that Παῶπις (nom.) is an error for Παῶπιος (gen.) and that this is the name of the father of the tax payer mentioned first, Εὐτραπ() and of his brother (in that case -]λας should be the end of the name of that brother). Furthermore, I cannot exclude that in ll. 3-4 one might restore [δραχμᾶς τέσσαρε]; it is, however, an open question as to how exactly these words were distributed over these lines.
4. On the basis of the comparable tax receipts from Kellis it may be assumed that this line should contain the name of a tax-collector / signer of the receipt. It looks slightly more probable to read here Ψεναμο^v with a supralinear ypsilon much extended to the right into the open space of the rest of the line, rather than reading ψεναμου^vνιος written in full (though with a great deal of ‘Verschleifung’). Preceding that, from a palaeographical point of view a reading]ς ε) (= ἔ(γραψε)) seems more attractive than a reading] σε^ση(μείωμαι), but one cannot be absolutely certain.

The Archaeological Context of Ostrakon 32/390-I6-2/2/3

Gedida is a village in the south-west corner of the Dakhleh Oasis. The site currently under consideration is situated some 4 km north-west of Gedida in an area of moving sand dune activity adjacent to cultivation. The site is about 7 km south of Amheida (ancient Trimithis), the large Roman Period settlement of western Dakhleh oasis, and to which the present site is probably somehow related. The site can be identified on the Egyptian Survey Department 1:25,000 series map sheet “Gedida” . On this map, the site is shown as having three buildings exposed above the surface.

The site was indexed by the Dakhleh Oasis Project as 32/390-I6-2/2/3³ in 1979, during the survey of the region. At that time, the site was examined superficially and a small test excavation was made, as was the normal routine examination during the survey. This was done in order to assess the extent of a site, the quality of its preservation, the date, the type of construction, of fill, of floors, and so forth. Such examination was, perforce, superficial, but the information gained was sufficient for a brief description of the ancient remains. Dating, as usual based on the ceramics collected from the surface, was identified as 'Roman'.

The map "Gedida" shows three buildings on the site. However, our examination revealed that two of the buildings, those east of the roadway, are in fact parts of a single large structure. It is this building from which ostrakon 32/390-I6-2/2/3 has come. The building appears to have been domestic. It is built of mud brick and is preserved to a varying height of around 0.50 m. There are some twenty contiguous rooms, together with some ten irregularly-shaped storage areas or bins. The overall dimensions of the building are 29.0 m E/W x 27.50 m N/S. The complex is well built, with straight walls and right-angled corners. Generally, the walls are some 36 cm (= 1½ bricks) thick.

One room was excavated, as a test, in this large structure. This room is situated towards the west side of the building and is 3.75 m N/S x 2.50 m E/W. The walls are some 0.40 m high, and the doorway at the northeast corner was found blocked with bricks. The floor of this room was of packed mud and the fill about this was packed sand and clay. Sherds of water jars and drinking cups were the only occupation debris found. Next to this tested room is another room lying diagonally adjacent to its northeast corner. Here was found a small cache of ostraka. This cache was in the upper 30 cm of the fill, unassociated with any floor, although not too far above the floor of the room. The ostraka in the cache are recorded as principally Demotic. It is uncertain, although probable, that the ostraka belong to the occupation of the site, rather than having been subsequently deposited.

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