

GREEK AND LATIN PAPYRI
FROM THE EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY EXCAVATIONS
AT QASR IBRIM : A TESTIMONY TO THE ROMAN ARMY
IN UPPER EGYPT AND LOWER NUBIA
IN THE FIRST YEARS OF AUGUSTUS

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In 30 BC, a few months after Egypt had become a province of the Roman state, a revolt broke out in Thebais, reportedly provoked by the new government's severe fiscal policy¹. The revolt was rapidly suppressed by Gaius Cornelius Gallus, the first Roman prefect of Egypt². After restoring order in Thebes and its surroundings, the prefect gained control of the situation at the southern border of Egypt, as he reports in his trilingual, hieroglyphic-Latin-Greek triumphal stele erected on the island of Philae³. He received homage from the local Meroitic dynasts from Lower Nubia and made Triakontaschoinos, the « Land of Thirty Schoinoi [measures] » extending to the south of the first cataract, a buffer zone between the Roman state and the Meroitic Kingdom. Eight years later, in 24/23 BC, one of Gallus' successors, Publius Petronius, in reaction to a Meroitic raid on Upper Egypt, brought Triakontaschoinos under direct Roman control and established a Roman garrison in Primis (modern Qasr Ibrim), an important settlement situated at the southern boundary of this land⁴. The garrison was withdrawn after only approximately one year, in accordance with the Samos peace treaty between the Romans and the Meroites that established the southern frontier of the Roman state at Hiera Sykaminos (modern Maharraqa), at the southern border of the so-called Dodekaschoinos, the « Land of Twelve Schoinoi ».

The short-lived presence of Roman soldiers at Qasr Ibrim left rather scanty traces in the archaeological record unearthed by the mission of the Egypt Exploration Society, which excavated the site between 1963 and 2008. If the Romans had managed to build solid structures on their own, they were completely erased by later inhabitants of the site or remained undetected by archaeologists, hidden under buildings of late Roman and medieval date. The most important find connected with the Roman occupation of Qasr Ibrim is a lot of Greek and Latin papyri discovered in the course of three consecutive seasons of work : in 1976, 1978 and 1980. The papyri were found, together with enormous quantities of sherds and textile fragments, in a loose layer of accumulated debris in an area enclosed between the east face of the so-called southern bastion (strange structure of unknown date, but surely older than the third century BC) and the early Meroitic girdle wall. Now they are largely kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo where they were partly documented for the International Photographic Archive of Papyri in the 1980s.

Only a small part of the Qasr Ibrim Greek and Latin papyri has been published so far. Among those one should mention, first and foremost, fragments of elegiacs in Latin attributed to Cornelius Gallus, the same man who established Roman control over Nubia⁵. Also published are three literary papyri in Greek (*Iliad* 8, 273–276 ; various fragments of the *Odyssey*, books 2 and 5), and 36 documentary texts in Greek and Latin, most of them

¹ On the revolt, see especially Veïsse (2004) 74–76.

² About Cornelius Gallus, a military commander and a poet, friend of Augustus, see Boucher (1966).

³ See Hoffmann / Minas-Nerpel / Pfeiffer (2009) ; further Burstein (1988) ; Stickler (2002).

⁴ On Petronius' Nubian expedition, see Hoffmann (1977) ; on Roman occupation of Qasr Ibrim, see especially Adams (1983). Located on a high rocky outcrop dominating the Nile valley on the east, the site of Qasr Ibrim was inhabited between the second half of the second millennium BC and the 1820s AD.

⁵ *Editio princeps* : Anderson / Parsons / Nisbet (1979). The papyrus attracted much interest from the scholarly world. Of a vast bibliography, one can cite : Crowther (1983) ; Petersmann (1983) ; Fairweather (1984) ; Capasso (2003).

very fragmentarily preserved⁶. Recently the present authors were granted permission by the Egypt Exploration Society to publish the remaining, still unpublished part of the material. Our publication project received a grant funded by the Ministry of Higher Education of the Republic of Poland. The project is still in its initial phase. We collected the contextual and metrical data of the papyri using the Qasr Ibrim Archive kept in the British Museum, and partly transcribed the texts working on photos that were given to us by Pamela Rose, the former director of the Qasr Ibrim mission, and by Julie Anderson, the keeper of the Qasr Ibrim archive. We have not yet examined the originals, but we intend to do this in 2011. The result of our work will be published in book form as one of the supplements to the *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*.

The material we have at our disposal consists of over 300 items. Only a few of them are complete papyri. Some dozens preserve bigger or smaller portions of text, but the majority are just scraps with single words or even letters. Bringing order to these scraps by arranging them into larger pieces or ascribing them to more complete papyri will be one of our main tasks. The papyri are frequently in lamentable condition. Some of them are not yet unfolded, some are dirty. Their provisional conservation will be necessary before we move to the final transcription of the texts and to preparing their final photographic documentation.

The majority of the papyri are written in Greek, and a minority in Latin (note that the Latin papyri from Qasr Ibrim are the earliest known Latin papyri and perhaps the earliest examples of Latin handwriting). The texts are predominantly documentary in character, but literary ones can also be distinguished thanks to their book hands (the texts themselves have not yet been identified). Among the documentary papyri, private letters in Greek prevail. Because of the finding place, one has to consider them letters to the soldiers of the Qasr Ibrim garrison. In fact one of them has in the address : Λικίνιος Καίσιω βουκινάτωρι εἰ(ς) Πρῆμα « Licinius to Caesius, trumpeter, to Prima ». The letters, as a rule, start with an elaborate greeting formula that contains, in addition to standard expressions, also the remembrance before the gods that are in Koptos, which suggests that their authors actually resided there.

One can suppose that the Qasr Ibrim garrison was formed as a detachment of a larger unit stationed in Koptos. In one case, the remembrance is made before the gods in Alexandria, thus indicating that the letter was drafted in the capital of the province. As a rule, the subject of the letters is purely private and rather banal : information about the author's health and queries about the health of the addressee, excuses for not writing for a long time, and so on. One letter concerns a financial issue and interest is mentioned, but the heart of the matter is difficult to grasp. In another letter the addressee is requested to pass on one hundred drachmas to another soldier. In yet another one the author speaks about sending a man, perhaps a servant or a slave, and some pieces of garment to the addressee⁷.

The letters frequently end with a date. The earliest encountered date falls in Pachon of the eighth year of Augustus (June, 22 BC) and the latest in Phamenoth of the next year (March, 21 BC). This nine-month span must coincide more or less with the period of existence of the Roman garrison in Qasr Ibrim. The dates actually fall after the Samos peace of 22 BC following which the southern border of the Roman state was moved from Primis to Hiera Sykaminos. Apparently it took the Romans about a year to withdraw the garrison from one place and to establish it in the other.

Besides letters (and literary fragments), the only other category of texts is lists. Three kinds of lists can be distinguished : lists of men, lists of supplies, and lists of words.

The first category is represented by the papyrus reg. 80.2.6/51 (= inv. 80/11 = GI 69). The completely preserved text gives the names of nine men, most probably soldiers,

⁶ Weinstein / Turner (1976).

⁷ This papyrus is presented with more details in Derda / Łajtar (forthcoming).

though certainty cannot be attained, as there is no heading. Among the names, five are Latin *gentilia* (Cερουείλιος, Κλώδιος, Τουρράνις [= Τουρράνιος], Καικίλιος, Ἄλφιος) appearing alone, without other elements of the Roman nomenclature; three are Greek proper names (Δημήτριος, Ἰλαρος, Ἀντᾶς), and one is Thracian (Cεύθης). If the men listed in this papyrus were indeed soldiers, the bearers of proper names of non-Latin origin must have been auxiliaries without Roman citizenship. Given the circumstances, the men with Roman *gentilia* should probably also be regarded as soldiers of an auxiliary troop, who were given or chose for themselves a Roman name upon entering the army. However, a letter addressed to Papias, a *salpistes* (trumpeter) of the *centuria* of Hortensius, betrays the presence of legionaries in Qasr Ibrim. Another papyrus written in Latin lists men bearing complete Roman names, including filiation and *tribus*, who were most probably legionaries too. It seems that the Roman garrison of Qasr Ibrim consisted of legionaries as well as auxiliaries, a phenomenon not unusual in the early Imperial period⁸.

The best example of the second category is the papyrus reg. 80.2.5/7 (= inv. 80/11 = GI 63). In the left-hand column it lists names of men; in the right-hand column, one finds amounts of a commodity, perhaps wheat, in *artabai*. As the amounts are rather considerable, ranging from 15 to 42.5 and adding up to at least 185 *artabai*, one is tempted to see here a list of supplies for the entire Qasr Ibrim garrison. The suppliers all bear Egyptian and Greek names (Ἰναρῶς, Ψενοβάστις, Κολλούθης, Ὠρος Παφάθιος [the father's name is new], Ἐρμογένης, Καβεῖνος, Ἀπολλώνιος, Ἀθίμις [for Ἀθῦμις], Ψύλλος, and Παῦσις). As the Nile valley around Qasr Ibrim must have been inhabited by a Meroitic-speaking population at the turn of the eras, one has to assume that all men mentioned in the list were inhabitants of Egypt and, consequently, that the Roman garrison at Qasr Ibrim was supplied from Egypt, from a distance of ca. 200 kilometres. The men mentioned in the papyrus may actually have been owners of small boats transporting the wheat a long way upstream.

Of the third category, we have a papyrus reg. 80.2.7/5 (= inv. 80/11 = GI 72) that lists, without any apparent order, some ten words repeated several times each. The words, either in the nominative or accusative, largely belong to the military sphere. Thus we have: μάχαιρα « short sword »; πάριμα « light shield, buckler » (Lat. *parma*); καίτρα (Lat. *caerta*; cf. Hesychius, *s. v.* καίτραι · ὄπλα Ἰβερικά · οἱ δὲ κυρτίαι); κακίδα (acc.) « helmet » (cf. Lat. *cassis*); βολλωτόν « possessing knobs » (from Lat. *bullā*); πίνακες « boards, planks, tablets »; κιτῶνα (acc.) for χιτῶνα « tunic »⁹; Ἀλεξανδρείαν, acc. for Ἀλεξανδρείαν, meaning unknown, probably an element of military equipment named after Alexander the Great; Γαλάτης « Galatian, Celtic », meaning unknown. The purpose of this list is unclear. One is tempted to classify it as a school exercise, but the hand is well trained, definitely not of a pupil. Perhaps it is a product of a bored military scribe who wrote down on a piece of papyrus words that he was familiar with.

To sum up: the Qasr Ibrim papyri are interesting in more than one respect. From a broader perspective, they contribute to the history of the Roman army in Upper Egypt in the first years of Roman rule on the Nile. In the narrow sense, they illustrate the life of a Roman military post on the most remote border of the Roman Empire, showing its organization, its ethnic composition, its supply, the non-military concerns of soldiers, and also their cultural interests. The papyri are also an important testimony to vernacular Greek at the turn of the eras, especially to the influence exerted on it by Latin, and to the Latin military terminology.

⁸ A good illustration of this is a Latin inscription from Koptos, CIL III 6627 (= ILS 2483, mid-first cent. AD): legionaries and auxiliaries built several forts with cisterns (*lacci*) and a camp (*castra*) in the Eastern Desert.

⁹ On χιτῶν often pronounced κιτῶν or κιθῶν, see Gignac (1976) I 93–94.

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