

49. O.BM EA 20300: In Search of the Latest Dated Demotic Ostrakon

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O.BM EA 20300

6.5 x 7.8 cm

I-II

Theban area (?)

The Demotic ostrakon British Museum EA 20300 was acquired by Reverend Greville John Chester in 1887.¹ As Dr Richard Parkinson kindly informed me, “the [BM] registers reveal no more information, although two other terracotta ostraca acquired in the same batch from Chester do have a provenance noted: 20061 (Demotic) is said to be from “Medinet Abu” as is 20165 (Coptic). This might suggest that the majority of ostraca were purchased at Luxor, but one cannot really say much beyond that.”² In fact, the provenance of O.BM EA 20300 from the Theban area, generally a likely option for ostraca acquired during the 19th and early 20th centuries, is supported by the text itself. Its onomasticon provides names more or less typical for that region, such as *Pa-Mnt* Pamonthês and *Pa-Dm^c* Pasêmis, the latter being an almost exclusively Theban choice especially pointing to Medinet Habu.

Concluding from palaeographic features, I believe that O.BM EA 20300 is a relatively late Demotic text, this is to say, dating to the first or even second century CE. Its late Demotic traits include the shapes of the sign *šr* “son” (ll. 1 and 5), of the “man/person” determinative (ll. 2, 4, 6, 8), and of the determinative of the word *sh* “to write” (l. 9), as well as the use of the “foreign land” determinative to classify foreign personal names (ll. 4 and 8, cf. below).

O.BM EA 20300 contains two acknowledgements of indebtedness stipulated by two different debtors, *Pš-šr-Mn* son of *Hnsw-Dhwt* (lines 1–5) and *Pš-šr-ich* son of *Pa-Dm^c* (lines 5–8), in favor of the same creditor *Pa-Mnt* son of *Pš-mjy* (ll. 1/2 and 5/6). Both of them start with the introductory formula of legal documents in epistolary form,³ *A pš nti dd n B* “It is *A* who says to *B*” (ll. 1 and 5), and continue with exactly the same wording. The debts acknowledged by the issuing parties are probably not of merely private nature, but seem to be related to the public realm: The term *šmw*, in Upper Egyptian Demotic designating the “harvest tax,”⁴ occurs both times (ll. 3 and 7), and in both cases a third person, the notorious *Flgys* who will be dealt with below, is somehow involved (ll. 4 and 8).

Unfortunately, I cannot find exact formulaic parallels to O.BM EA 20300,⁵ and some details of its reading and meaning remain elusive, or escape me entirely. Consequently, the edition of the text as given here cannot claim much authority, and is recommended to the wit and the erudition of demotists.

My decision to present it nevertheless, and to do so in honor of such an eminent scholar has to do with a particular detail of the text which has been interpreted, even though wrongly as I aim to demonstrate, in terms of chronology, an issue to which (as to so many others) Roger Bagnall has contributed

¹ Reverend G. J. Chester, being on leave from his church for his delicate health’s sake, spent his spare time on extensively travelling through the Near East. As an amateur archaeologist and collector of antiquities he provided a number of British museums with objects of amazing diversity. Cf. W. R. Dawson, E. P. Uphill, and M. L. Bierbrier, *Who Was Who in Egyptology?*³ (London 1995) 96–97.

² E-mail from 12 August 2002. I am most grateful to Dr Parkinson for granting me the permission to publish O.BM EA 20300 and for his steady support via correspondence as well as in the British Museum in the fall of 2002 when I had the opportunity to collate O.BM EA 20300. I gratefully received further valuable comments and suggestions by Ursula Kaplony-Heckel, Jan Moje, Robert Ritner, Alexander Schütze, Günter Vittmann, and Sven Vleeming.

³ For this formula used in the internal address of Demotic letters cf. M. Depauw, *The Demotic Letter. A Study of Epistolographic Scribal Traditions Against Their Intra- and Intercultural Background* (Dem. Stud. 14) (Sommerhausen 2006) 144–147; its even more frequently attested use as address formula of Demotic legal documents is discussed *ibid.* 317–320.

⁴ Erichsen, *Glossar*, s.v.; H. Felber, *Demotische Ackerpachtverträge der Ptolemäerzeit* (Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 58) (Wiesbaden 1997) 151, n. 267.

⁵ Loans are generally far from a typical type of text on Demotic ostraca, rare examples being e.g. *O.Theb.Dem.* 22 and *O.Mattha* 235. The two ostraca *O.Medin.HabuDem.* 131 and 132, called loans in the edition, are technically leases.

substantially. Although Roger himself occasionally mentioned the unpublished state of O.BM EA 20300 with regret,⁶ it seemed to me appropriate not to focus on single words of an otherwise unpublished text, but to give the reader as good an idea of the entire text as I can.

Text

- 1 *P3-šr-Mn s3 Hnsu-Dhwṭ¹ p3 nti¹ dd n Pa-Mnt*
- 2 *s3 P3-m3y wn mtw=k p3^{1/3} ... r-ḥr=y*
- 3 *n ḥ3.t-sp 12.t r st3 (n) b3 ʕm.(t) (n) p3 šmw nti-iw=w r-di.t (s)*
- 4 *r-tw=k s n ḥ3.t-sp 12.t n Flgys*
- 5 *p3 rmt-šn P3-šr-i³ḥ s3¹ Pa¹-Dm^c p3 nti dd n Pa-Mnt*
- 6 *s3 P3-m3y wn mtw=k p3^{1/3} ... r-ḥr=y*
- 7 *n ḥ3.t-sp 12.t r st3 (n) b3 ʕm.(t) (n) p3 šmw nti-iw=w r-di.t (s)*
- 8 *r-tw=k s n ḥ3.t-sp 12.t n Flgys*
- 9 *sh P3-[di-] Wsir s3 P3-msh r-ḥrw=[w]*

Notes

- 1 *Pa-Mnt s3 P3-m3y*. There is a name-sake attested in *O.Medin.HabuDem.* 150.2; however, as both components of the name seem to be rather common onomastic choices the coincidence might not be conclusive for identification.
- 2 *p3^{1/3} ...*: The phrase here and in line 6 expressing the debt value is not clear to me; particularly the two signs after ^{1/3} (I doubtfully consider the reading *ḥt* for *ḥtr* “tax,” an anonymous referee suggested *ḥtr* “horse, team of horses”). Instead of the article *p3* also *ḥd* “silver” could be read.
r-ḥr=y. The same signs could be read *r-w3ḥ=y* “which I have put”; however, the reading as construct state of the preposition *r-* with suffix 1st sg. seems to fit better with the formulaic conventions of loans. For the indebtedness formula *wn mtw=k* etc. cf. K. Sethe, *Demotische Urkunden zum ägyptischen Bürgschaftsrechte vorzüglich der Ptolemäerzeit* (Leipzig 1920) 23f. and 211f. The use of the preposition *r-* therein is a lexical innovation pointing to the Coptic usage of ΟΥΝΤΑϞ ... ΕΡΟϞ, *r-* replacing earlier *r-ir-n* or *r-ʕ.wi*.
- 3 *r st3 (n) b3 ʕm.(t)*. I follow the suggestion of an anonymous referee to read *ʕm.(t)* “clay” (Erichsen, *Glossar* 60), a type of arable land which, according to its occurrences in Late Egyptian, Demotic and Coptic documents, was peculiar to the Theban landscape and/or terminology.⁷ Accordingly I read the signs after *r* that could otherwise be read *p3^{1/2}* etc. as *st3* “aroura” and the feminine article.
nti-iw=w r-di.t (s). There seems to be no alternative reading to the relative clause which implies the following word to be the predicate. The non-identity of its antecedent (*p3 šmw* 3rd sg. m.) and its subject (3rd pl.) would require the presence of a resumptive pronoun. Therefore I consider interpreting the following sign which looks like *n=k* or *wš*, as the preposition *r-* plus the abbreviated form of the infinitive *di.t* “to give” and (haplographically written) object pronoun *s*. *nti iw=w r-di.t (s)* “which will be given.”

⁶ R. S. Bagnall, “Notes on ostraka,” *Enchoria* 8.1 (1978), 148, n. 22.

⁷ On Late Egyptian *ʕm(m)t*, cf. e.g. A. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* (Oxford 1947) vol. I, pp. 10*–12*, and A. Gasse, *Données nouvelles administratives et sacerdotales sur l’organisation du domaine d’Amon, XX^e–XXI^e dynasties, à la lumière des papyrus Prachov, Reinhardt et Grundbuch* (Bibliothèque d’études 106) (Le Caire 1988) 55; on demotic *ʕm.(t)* cf. P. W. Pestman, *The Archive of the Theban Choachytes (Second Century B.C.). A Survey of Greek Papyri Contained in the Archive* (Stud. Demotica 2) (Leuven 1993) 396, and Pestman in P.L.Bat. 19, 201, n. 4; for some Coptic instances cf. Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 254.

- 4 *r-tw=k s*: the grapheme *r-* representing circumstantial *iw-* here and in line 9. Another possible reading would be *n=y* instead of *s* (in which case *r-tw=k* would stand for the regular relative form: “which you have given me”). However the position of the small stroke at the right side of the sign seems to indicate the dependent pronoun 3rd sg. *-s* rather than the construct state of preposition *n* plus suffix 1st sg.
Flgys: If this word is a proper name as will be suggested below, the following word *pʃ rmt-šn* might be a title referring back to that person rather than to the following debtor *Pʃ-šr-iḫ* son of *Pa-Dmḥ*.
- 5 *pʃ rmt (nti) šn*: “inspector” ἐπιστάτης (cf. T.Bodl. 1460.6; *O.Hess.* 3.4 [ed. Kaplony-Heckel, MIO 13, 1967]; P.Heid. 721+745a, 4; *P.Oxf.Griffith* 44.4) rather than *pʃ rmt-* plus a toponym “Inhabitant of ...” (but cf. the observation of K.-Th. Zauzich, “Einige unerkannte Ortsnamen,” *Enchoria* 15 [1987], 169–179, that toponyms with prefixed *rmt-* often lack the “place” determinative).
Pʃ-šr-iḫ: Rare Theban instances of this name e.g. in *O.Leid.Dem.* 247 and 253. Or should one read *Pʃ-šr-wr* as a variety of P *Pʃ-šr-pʃ-wr*? It is surely not *Ms-wr* since an initial *pʃ* is pretty clear.
- 6 The connection between the sign *n* (after the sign read $\frac{1}{3}$) and the following vertical stroke as recognizable on the photograph is not of ink but a shadow from an uneven spot in the surface of the potsherd.
- 9 *r-ḫrw=[w]*: The traces of signs at the end of the line seem to fit with this phrase better than with a further dating formula.

Translation

It is Psemminis son of Chensthôtês who says to Pamônthês son of Pemaïs:

I owe you the $\frac{1}{3}$ (of) ... of regnal year 12 concerning an aroua (of) the clay, (as) the harvest tax which is to be given, while you have given it in regnal year 12 to *Flgys* the inspector(?).

It is *Pʃ-šr-iḫ* son of Pasêmis who says to Pamônthês son of Pmaïs:

I owe you the $\frac{1}{3}$ of ... of regnal year 12 concerning the clay, (as) the harvest tax which is to be given, while you have given it in regnal year 12 to *Flgys*.

Petosiris son of Pemsais has written at [their] bidding.

Is O.BM EA 20300 the Latest Dated Demotic Ostrakon?

In Pieter Willem Pestman's *Chronologie égyptienne d'après les textes démotiques*, O.BM EA 20300 is recorded for regnal year 12 of Severus Alexander (232/3).⁸ The preceding entry, *O.Theb.Dem.* 221, occurs 30 years earlier under regnal year 11 of Septimius Severus (201/2).⁹ Since there is no *later* ostrakon registered, O.BM EA 20300 has been considered to be the latest dated Demotic ostrakon so far.

⁸ Pestman, *Chronologie égyptienne* (P.L.Bat 15) (Leiden 1967) 106f.; cf. TM 52198.

⁹ *O.Theb.Dem.* 221, recently reedited by U. Kaplony-Heckel, “Rund um die thebanischen Tempel (Demotische Ostraka zur Pfründen-Wirtschaft),” in F. Hoffmann and H.-J. Thissen (eds.), *Res severa verum gaudium. Festschrift für Karl-Theodor Zauzich zum 8. Juni 2004* (Stud. Demotica 6) (Leuven 2004) 316, was called by G. Mattha “the latest [Demotic] ostrakon I know” (*O.Mattha*, p. 2). Its dating depends on the assumption that the plural *pr-ḫ.w nti ḫw* “the pharaohs who are venerable (Augusti)” refers to Septimius Severus and Caracalla as “the only joint emperors to whom such a date [year 11] can apply” (H. Thompson, *O.Theb.*, p. 55). It should be mentioned that also the Augusti Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, the latter posthumously, have their regnal year 11 attested in Egypt, cf. P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca et les inscriptions d'Égypte (30 a.C.–284 p.C.)* (Pap. Brux. 2) (Bruxelles 1964) 81; even year 12 is attested once (Demotic graffito, *Philae 185: ḫntnyns irm wrs*), cf. J.-Cl. Grenier, *Les titulatures des empereurs romains dans les documents en langue égyptienne* (Pap. Brux. 22) (Bruxelles 1989) 66. However, the bare title σεβαστοί on which *pr-ḫ.w nti ḫwi* is probably based seems indeed to be attested for Septimius Severus and Caracalla exclusively, cf. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales*, 98, and Grenier, *Les titulatures des empereurs*, 75.

It was this assumption that once drew my attention to the text, when I tried to trace the connections between Demotic and Coptic legal documents.¹⁰ As was pointed out by Karl-Theodor Zauzich already in 1978,¹¹ and later elaborated on by scholars such as Naphtali Lewis,¹² Willy Clarysse,¹³ Roger Bagnall,¹⁴ Mark Depauw,¹⁵ Brian Muhs,¹⁶ and the present author,¹⁷ the relevance of Demotic as a written language of day-to-day use was shrinking rapidly during the two first centuries CE. The many late Demotic documents published during the last decades confirm this conclusion in so far as there are very few among them dating after the first century CE.¹⁸

The dating of O.BM EA 20300 has first been discussed by Jean-Jacques Hess in a miscellany that runs as follows:¹⁹ “Das Ostrakon 20300 des Britischen Museums hat Z. 4 und Z. 8 das Datum ... *rompe.t XII n Flgis*, was nichts anderes sein kann als *anno XII Felicis*. Felix ist bekanntlich der Beiname des Commodus, den dieser im Jahre 185 erhielt.”²⁰ Indeed, Commodus was the first in a long succession of Roman emperors bearing the *Felix* title. However when it comes to the question to whom the regnal year of O.BM EA 20300 refers, Commodus can easily be ruled out: he added his own regnal years to those of his father Marcus Aurelius. The beginning of his autocratic rule in 179/80 fell in his regnal year 20. The year 185 when he took the title *Felix* corresponds to his regnal year 25 in Egypt.²¹ It may be this reflection that brought Pestman to re-date O.BM EA 20300. As Septimius Severus did not bear the title *Felix*, and only one of his successors up to Gallienus, Severus Alexander, enjoyed his twelfth regnal year, Pestman assigned the ostrakon to Severus Alexander. The crucial point however—the identification of *flgis* as an emperor’s title as suggested by Hess, was accepted by Pestman. In fact it is this suggestion that seems doubtful to me for a number of reasons.

The title *Felix*, taken the first time by Commodus, was borne by almost all of his followers during the third and fourth centuries.²² Usually it follows the proper name of the emperor, mostly within the sequence *Pius Felix*. However, in the first position of a titulary, or even as its only element, this title

¹⁰ Vgl. T. S. Richter, *Rechtssemantik und forensische Rhetorik. Untersuchungen zu Wortschatz, Grammatik und Stil der Sprache koptischer Rechtsurkunden* (Kanobos 3) (Leipzig 2002) (2nd revised edition, with a preface by the honorand, Philippika 20 [Wiesbaden 2008]) 11–57.

¹¹ K.-Th. Zauzich, “Demotische Texte römischer Zeit,” in *Das Römisch-Byzantinische Ägypten. Akten des internationalen Symposions 26. – 30. September 1978 in Trier* (Aegypt. Trev. 2) (Mainz 1983) 77–80.

¹² N. Lewis, “The Demise of the Demotic Document: When and Why,” *JEA* 79 (1993) 276–281.

¹³ W. Clarysse, “Egyptian Scribes writing Greek,” *CdÉ* 68 (1993) 186–201.

¹⁴ The interest in sociolinguistic interrelations between Egyptian and Greek in Graeco-Roman Egypt and the issue of language change from Demotic to Coptic was, and still is a foremost topic within the amazingly wide range of the honorand’s research interests, cf. R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 235–240; R. S. Bagnall, *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East* (Sather Classical Lectures 69) (Berkeley 2011) 75–94, and, most recently, R. S. Bagnall, “Zones of Interaction Between Greek and Egyptian in Roman Egypt,” in P. Dils, E. Grossman, T. S. Richter, and W. Schenkelet (eds.), *Language Contact and Bilingualism in Antiquity: What Linguistic Borrowing into Coptic Can Tell Us About. Papers Read on the DDGLC Inaugural Conference, Leipzig, Saxonian Academy of Sciences, April 2010* (Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften) (to appear).

¹⁵ M. Depauw, “Autograph confirmation in Demotic private contracts,” *CdÉ* 78 (2003) 66–111.

¹⁶ B. Muhs, “The grapheion and the disappearance of Demotic contracts in early Roman Tebtynis and Soknopaiou Nesos,” in S. Lippert and M. Schentuleit (eds.), *Tebtynis und Soknopaiou Nesos – Leben im römischen Fayum* (Wiesbaden 2005) 93–104.

¹⁷ T. S. Richter, “Greek, Coptic, and the ‘Language of the Hijra’. Rise and Decline of the Coptic Language in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt,” in H. Cotton, R. Hoyland, J. Price, and D. J. Wasserstein (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge 2009) 401–446.

¹⁸ An obvious exception being the Narmouthis ostraca from the mid- to late-2nd c. CE.

¹⁹ J.-J. Hess, “Der Kaiser Commodus in einem demotischen Texte,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 39 (1901) 144.

²⁰ G. Goyau, *Chronologie de l’empire Romain* (Paris 1891) 233.

²¹ Thompson’s reading of *O.Theb.Dem.* 31, line 8: “*hsp 12(?) n Kꜣmyt*” “year 12(?) of Commodus” has been corrected by Pestman, *Chronologie égyptienne*, 130, n. 60, into “l’an 30.”

²² Cf. D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle. Grundzüge einer römischen Kaiserchronologie*² (Darmstadt 1996).

seems not to be attested elsewhere, and one would hardly expect it to function thus.

In general, titles of Roman emperors are represented in Greek and Demotic by two different strategies: translation and transcription. A well-known example of a *conceptual* representation by means of *translation* is the title *Augustus*, in Greek Σεβαστός, and in Demotic *ntj hw* (besides transcriptions such as *sbstjs*). The untranslatable title *Caesar*, on the other hand, is a likewise well-known example of *phonetic* representation by means of *transcription*, as the Greek Καῖσαρ and the Demotic *gysrs* (and many spelling variations). The sequence *Pius Felix* never appears in transcription but always translated in Greek titularies, Εὐσεβὴς Εὐτυχής. This translation, rather than the original Latin *Grundform*, would, one should expect, have been the point of departure of a Demotic transcription. It actually was the point of departure in the case of *Pius* / Εὐσεβής in Demotic spellings not of the *title*, but of Antoninus Pius' *name*, which is phonetically transcribed *iwsbs*.²³ A hapax instance of a Demotic representation of the title *Felix* however follows the other strategy, the *translated* form, when the *Felices* Philippus and Philippus junior are called *nj m(t).w* "the lucky ones."²⁴

The determination of the word *flgys* in O.BM EA 20300, lines 4 and 8, consists of the "foreign land" and the "person" determinative: a combination otherwise found in non-Egyptian personal names. In many cases, foreign names are classified graphically by the "foreign land" determinative only. According to the evidence provided by the *Demotisches Namenbuch*, one may well consider this classification on etymological grounds (interesting in itself!) to be a late Demotic phenomenon.²⁵ Also the combination of both, "foreign land" and "person" determinative, as in the case of *flgys*, seems to be restricted to late Demotic writings of *personal names*. On the contrary, the determination of *Roman emperors'* names and titles, as far as I know, usually consist of a "foreign land," or of a "god," or of both "foreign land" plus "god" determinative. To the best of my knowledge, an emperor's name or title classified by a common "person" determinative is not attested so far. Since Felix is a well-attested personal name in Roman Egypt,²⁶ *flgys* in O.BM EA 20300 is most likely to be considered as a non-royal proper name (the entire phrase thus to be understood as "year 12 for, or to, Felix" instead of "year 12 of the *Felix*").

To sum up: Common patterns of Latin, Greek and Demotic titularies of Roman emperors as well as Demotic orthographic conventions and palaeography speak strongly against the interpretation of *flgys* as any emperor's title or name. The regnal year 12 mentioned four times in ostrakon BM EA 20300 might be anonymous, as is often the case in short Demotic business and legal texts.²⁷ Given the late Demotic palaeographic features of the text, it may actually refer to one of the adoptive emperors of the second century.

In conclusion, O.BM EA 20300 may well belong to the later or even latest Demotic ostraca; certainly however it cannot be claimed to be *the latest dated* Demotic ostrakon. This title is now to be awarded to *O.Zürich 54* that can be dated to regnal year 3 of Severus Alexander, i.e. year 223/224, as Roger Bagnall has demonstrated.²⁸

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²³ Grenier, *Les titulatures des empereurs*, 62 (D-Type 2) & 64 (G-Type I and I-Type 2).

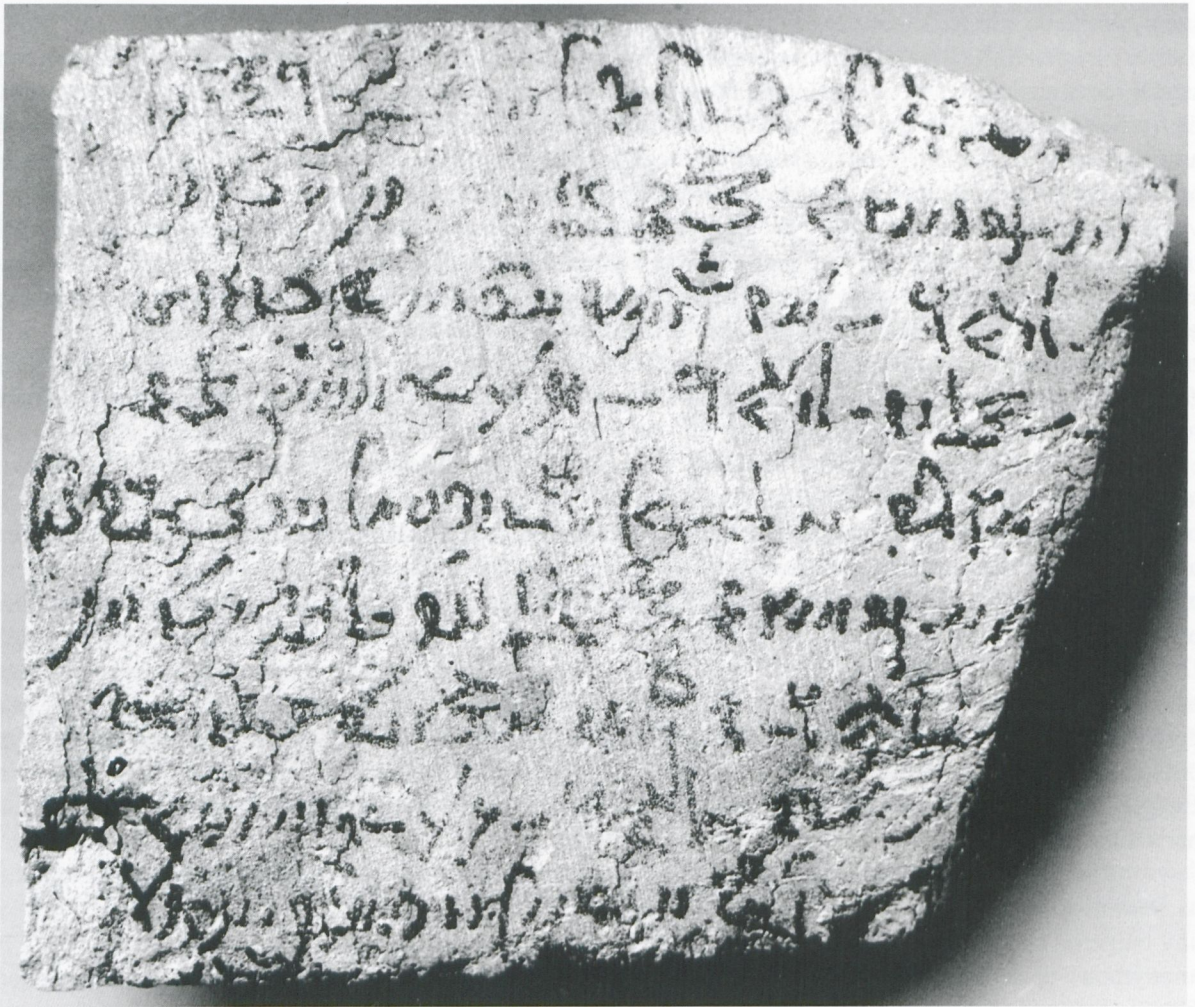
²⁴ Grenier, *Les titulatures des empereurs*, 80 with reference to the unpublished P.Leconte 7 (TM 109234).

²⁵ Variant spellings of the name *pwlnyts* Ἀπολλωνίδης for instance show a limitation of the "foreign land" determinative to late (Roman) Demotic instances, in contrast to middle (Ptolemaic) Demotic spellings bearing the "person" determinative, cf. *Demotisches Namenbuch*, 14.

²⁶ Φῆλιξ (Preisigke, *Namenbuch*, 459); alternative vocalization patterns of the Demotic spelling, such as Flaccus / Φλάκκος (Preisigke, *Namenbuch*, 465) or Φιλοξᾶς (Preisigke, *Namenbuch*, 464), may also be taken into consideration, however the occurrence of *y* actually seems to fit best with Felix.

²⁷ Cf. Depauw, *The Demotic letter*, 318: "The other main type of document ... is far less formal. The scribe is as a rule no notary, although there are a few exceptions. The parties are generally identified by A *pj nty dd n* B 'It is A who says to B', and the date usually follows at the end without mentioning the name of the ruling pharaoh."

²⁸ R. S. Bagnall, "Notes on Ostraka," *Enchoria* 8.1 (1978) 147–149, the emperor being mentioned here by name: *flgsntsr ... ntj hwj*.



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